

**Questions, Conversations, and
Actions: an evaluation of the impact
of community engagement in
achieving sustainable development in
England**

A report for DEFRA
by
Community Environment Associates

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1. Background

We have been asked to “*identify examples of community engagement in achieving sustainable development at the local level and to evaluate its impacts*” by examining examples of best practice in three areas :

- Parish and neighbourhood plans, and community strategies that contribute to sustainable development
- Community consultation and sustainable development
- Community initiatives and sustainable development

The last few years have seen a rapid growth in local action on environmental and sustainable development issues. One recent report¹ suggests a trebling of activity in this field in the decade 1992 – 2002.

One result is that the ‘Implementation’ sector of the sustainable development sector is now considerably larger than the ‘Policy’ sector that has been the traditional focus for NGO activity, but this sector has rarely been surveyed in any detail.

In parallel to this has been a steady growth in interest in consultation and participation activity, with most funding programmes now expecting funded projects to make real efforts to involve all stakeholders, and with representative local democracy under pressure to recognise the value of ‘participative democracy’.

All this work leads to three important questions:

- Does local action really make a difference to environmental quality and sustainable development?
- Does public and community participation really improve the quality of local work?
- How can we best evaluate this work?

These questions are not always easy to answer, due in part to the lack of clear agreed evaluation mechanisms. There is also a body of opinion that still maintains change is best led from above by legislation and by mandatory duties and targets.

This debate has also become more complicated by the increasing focus on the sustainable development agenda, with the intention of integrating environmental, social, and economic goals. There are indeed questions to be asked as to how far local action is achieving this integration and what difference it makes as a result. That is the focus of this report.

¹ *The Quiet Revolution*, Shell Better Britain Campaign, 2002

2. In search of 'best practice'

This report is seeking to consider 'best practice'. This has long been seen as an important way to promote better working but it is not without its problems. Best practice projects may work well in their own circumstances and may inspire others. However they often rely on some specific circumstances, including the availability of special funding, the presence of one or two community champions and simply being in the right place at the right time. As such they are often not easily replicated.

Best practice in Sustainable Development also poses problems. Very few (if any) projects can claim to fully integrate all environmental, social and economic issues. Good practice studies tend to look for those that are clearly seeking to make progress in that direction, and that are strong on certain issues and having at least some impact on others. Thus a range of issues need to be assessed and each project will have its' own profile reflecting its' core and secondary aims and impacts.

There is also the question about what is meant by the 'best'. This best practice can be hard to pin down, especially when there is a strong participative element. In the past some quoted best practice has been found to be deeply unpopular with the people it was designed to affect. It is also the case that this is a field where practice is continually developing: what is 'good' or 'best' at one point will hopefully not be particularly good five years down the line. This point is made strongly in the current Sustainability Statement for the London Olympics Bid².

The quality of any particular form of practice may be measured in a range of ways, such as:

- by the outputs of the practice (which may vary over time)
- by the value added to inputs by the practice
- by the ability of the practice to provide outputs that are additional to existing practice
- by an assessment of the outcomes, and the extent to which these longer-term goals have been achieved or exceeded

A further assessment of how good practice is might be in terms of exiting national goals and targets. For instance, any major project aimed at energy saving and CO₂ reduction should have targets that are at least in line with Kyoto targets if it is to be seen as even simply good, and should aim to exceed these if it is to be seen as leading edge or 'best'.

The situation is made complex when working in a sustainable development context where social, economic and environmental effects must be balanced.

² 'Sustainability Statement: context document for the Lower Lea Valley Olympics Application', LDA, 2004

3. The basis for evaluation

3.1 Methodology

Given the time available for this project and the need for clear outcomes we developed the following approach:

The work was done in three phases:

- Agreeing the criteria
- Selecting the cases
- Assessing the cases

Agreeing the criteria

The core criteria adopted were those referred to in our tender submission, the evaluation areas used by the Community Development foundation report on local action³ for sustainable development funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2002. These are discussed in 3.5 below.

Selecting the cases

Cases were collected from a wide range of sources. These included:

- A call for projects circulated as widely as possible given the time constraints
- Cases known to us: these included cases previously selected as good practice by other publications and programmes
- Analysis of existing web sites that include relevant case studies

A 'long list' of cases was developed: from this a short and ultimately final list emerged. This was guided by:

- The format set out in the tender
- A desire to have a good mix of projects
- A desire to ensure that well-known projects were matched with some less obvious ones
- The availability of write-ups and data, bearing in mind the length of the project.

In a few cases possible projects could not be used because of recent developments, lack of current data, absence of key people etc. However the richness of the materials available means that this is not a problem: we are confident that this represents very good practice.

Where appropriate we have obtained additional information to support that found in the case study including:

- Supplementary case studies,

³ *'Thinking Locally, Acting Nationally – lessons for national policy from work on local sustainability'* Church & Elster, CDF & Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002

- Telephone interviews with those involved in or connected to the project
- Additional documents (reports, plans etc)

We were concerned to include a range of different types of project and those of different ages. We did not seek unduly to ensure a balanced distribution of projects between regions.

3.2 The Sustainable Development Agenda

There are many ways to define sustainable development – one organisation has recorded over 40 ‘official’ definitions. At the core it is widely recognised that this is a matter of integrating (and not merely balancing) environmental, economic and social justice impacts and benefits, subject to the underlying recognition of global environmental and social priorities (which were the reason for the UN 1992 and 2002 Summits which have set the global sustainable development agenda).

In terms of the global agenda, the issues usually seen as priorities for UK work are to reduce our global footprint, to minimise CO2 emissions with the ultimate aim of carbon neutrality, and increasingly to minimise inequalities both globally and in the UK.

The core criteria used for this part of the assessment are those listed in 3.5 below; these are based on the CDF / JRF criteria referred to above in 3.1. We have also undertaken a brief parallel assessment using criteria developed by the recent Egan Committee report (see 3.4 below).

3.3. Evaluating Engagement

This project is seeking to highlight identify examples of **community engagement** in achieving sustainable development. Specifically, we have been directed to examine community consultation, community initiatives, and parish, neighbourhood and community planning.

According to research commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister:

“Engagement is also often used as a catch-all term, and can be used to cover even the loosest connection, entanglement or perhaps difficulty with a particular individual or group.”⁴

We have interpreted engagement to mean an active and constructive relationship with an area-based community. This relationship may range from consultation to full participation in planning and decision-making.

⁴ Community engagement in LSPs University of Warwick: Warwick Liverpool John Moores University: Liverpool, University of the West of England: Bristol Office for Public Management: 2004 HMSO for ODPM available at www.odpm.gov.uk

It has become increasingly common to see community consultation or involvement as a 'good thing' in itself. The value of good involvement has been repeatedly highlighted. Research done for the Department of the Environment in 1994⁵ suggests that,

“at its best, community involvement can enable:

- processes to be speeded up
- resources to be used more effectively
- product quality and feelings of local ownership to improve
- added value to emerge
- confidence and skills to increase for all
- conflicts to be more readily resolved”

Participation has also been seen as central to sustainable development. Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration⁶ (signed up to by 178 nations at the UN Earth Summit) stated that *“Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level..... States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation.... “*

However there has been a lack of clear evaluation methods to back up qualitative and anecdotal assessment. It is rare to find an objective evaluation. Some writers have said that it is difficult to define 'good' public participation because of the tremendous variation in circumstances, stakeholders and processes.

There have also been concerns raised about the value of participative working. One example comes from Elephant and Castle in London, where community participation in the regeneration partnership foundered and ended in serious disputes, notably over money and resources. This has led some to suggest that the value of participation is over-estimated, and that the extra time and money spent on participation is not a good use of resources.

However there is a substantial if dispersed body of work that suggests otherwise and there has been a growing amount of work in recent years that seeks to provide such an assessment framework. This is addressed in more detail in the paper from CAG Consultants which will accompany this report.

One key report is *'Active Partners'* produced by Yorkshire Forward⁷, which sets out a set of 'benchmarks' which relate to the four dimensions of community. We have used these in this report to assess the projects.

The benchmarks are:

- **Influence:** ensuring that community participation leads to real influence over (regeneration) strategy and activity

⁵ *'Community Planning in Planning and Development Processes'*, HMSO for DoE 1994

⁶ 'Report Of The United Nations Conference On Environment And Development. Annexe 1. The Rio Declaration' United Nations, 1992; A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I)

⁷ *'Active Partners – benchmarking community participation in regeneration'* Yorkshire Forward, 2002, available on-line at www.yorkshire-on.net

- **Inclusivity:** valuing diversity and addressing inequality, to ensure inclusive and equal participation
- **Communication:** implementing clear information processes, transparent and accessible policies and procedures
- **Capacity:** developing the understanding, skills and knowledge of all partners, and the organisational capacity of communities and public agencies

Each of the projects (see section 4.3) has been assessed broadly on these using available data and given a rating from 1 – 3 (three being the highest). This work is described in section 9.

3.4 Towards Sustainable Communities

Over the last two years the Government, and notably, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, have promoted the idea of ‘Sustainable Communities’ through the national Communities Plan⁸. This work has developed various sets of targets and criteria. We felt that it would be useful to include some assessment of these projects in this context.

Accordingly we have used seven criteria that were developed by the Egan Committee report. These are

- Social and Cultural – Vibrant, harmonious and inclusive communities
- Governance - Effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership
- Environmental - Providing places for people to live in an environmentally-friendly way
- Housing and the Built Environment - A quality built and natural environment
- Transport and Connectivity - Good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services
- Economy - A flourishing and diverse local economy
- Services - A full range of appropriate, accessible public, private, community and voluntary services

This analysis is developed in Section 8.

3.5 Is this work making a difference?

The cases were initially assessed using the CDF / JRF criteria, which attempted to cover all aspects of work broadly pertaining to local sustainability. These were slightly amended for this purpose and the final criteria are:

- **Economic Issues**
 - Training
 - Economic impacts and job creation
 - New / improved services / resources / facilities
 - Community consultation /engagement / involvement
 - Promoting / awareness of community development

⁸ Sustainable Communities: Building for the future Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003; available at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>

- **Environmental issues**

- Habitats / wildlife
- Reclaiming / re-using derelict land
- Living environment improvements
- Waste
- Travel
- Energy use
- Environmentally friendly housing / buildings
- Pollution

- **Health**

- Actions for health improvement

- **Environmental awareness / education for sustainable development**

- Environmental education and information
- Environmental promotion / awareness raising
- Engaging and involving with environmental / SD - community
- Engaging / gaining support / changing attitudes around environment and SD – policy level and business
- Inputting into wider policy and planning
- Developing and promoting environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods / Influencing and inspiring others

- **Participation and community**

The CDF / JRF programme used several criteria in this respect: we have replaced these with the Yorkshire Forward assessment benchmarks as above – see Section 8

For the purpose of analysis these were grouped as above in five main categories. Each project was then assessed against all criteria and the particular points of strength – the reasons why it is such good practice – are identified. This can be seen in the grid in Appendix 1.

4. The cases

The cases selected were as below. A short summary of each appears in the relevant section and a longer description in the final part of the report.

4.1. – Community Planning and Sustainable Development

We have identified eight best practice examples of Parish Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and Community Strategies which help achieve sustainable development.

1. Thorpe Arch Parish Plan
2. Long Marston Parish Plan
3. Danby Parish Plan
4. Redbridge Community Agenda 21
5. Sunderland Sustainable Development Strategy work (post-Local Agenda 21)
6. Herefordshire Community Strategy
7. Croydon Community Strategy
8. Barnsley Neighbourhood Pride programme

4.2. – Community consultation and sustainable development

We have identified five best practice examples of local authority consultation which featured sustainable development.

1. Bristol Local Transport Plan
2. Ryedale sustainability consultation
3. Mendip Community Strategy
4. WestDEN
5. Wiltshire LA21

4.3. – Community initiatives and sustainable development

We have identified five best practice examples of community run local initiatives (at neighbourhood, village or district level) which contribute to sustainable development.

1. Friends of St. Nicholas Fields, York
2. Heeley City Farm, Sheffield
3. WyeCycle waste programme, Kent
4. Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action group
5. Be Fikr energy programme, Hazrat Sultan Bahu Trust, Birmingham

Following the detailed analysis of the impacts, we examined the data for trends and outliers and developed theories to explain the presence of these within the data. These theories and their implications are explored in the discussion.

4.3 Summary of case studies and reasons for inclusion

A. Best practice in plans contributing to sustainable development

A.1 Thorpe Arch: Parish Plan and VDS (recent)

A Parish Plan and separate Village Design Statement only just published. A community on the edge of Leeds in Yorkshire and the Humber. Supported by the Countryside Agency Vital Villages scheme, with Rural Community Council and Local Authority involvement. Work based on questionnaires supported by public meetings and meetings with local organisations.

Reason for inclusion:

The community separated the Village Design Statement and Action Plan, effectively providing one document for the local planning authority to work with and a separate document for the community to work with but within a common vision. The community were apparently motivated by concern to protect the community.

A.2 Long Marston: Parish Plan (established)

A Parish Plan produced by a community in Warwickshire, West Midlands supported the local authority. The plan was based on public meetings and a questionnaire and led directly to the opening of a community-owned shop and the formation of a local group to map the flood plain in the village.

Reason for inclusion:

The project has sufficient history that implementation can be observed and it is the implementation that clearly contributes to sustainable development (especially the development of a community shop) rather than the plan itself.

A.3 Danby Parish Plan (recent)

A Parish Plan produced by a large: group parish council. The parish council was working with the North York Moors National Park on a Land Management Initiative and saw the Parish Plan process as a way to help the community recover from foot and mouth disease

Reason for inclusion:

The community were apparently motivated by concern to take action following foot and mouth. Provides an interesting contrast to Thorpe Arch. The plan is exceptionally focussed and the effects on implementation can be seen.

A.4 Redbridge: Community Agenda 21 (ongoing)

A standardised process to facilitate the development of *Community Action Plans* in small parts of the borough. Though initiated and facilitated by the Local Agenda 21 team of the borough council, the action plans are community owned and are not obliged to be concerned with pre-defined 'sustainability' issues.

Reason for inclusion:

This project has now run for six years and has developed community action plans for four areas. Older ones have been reviewed and updated and progress is tracked. New independent community environment groups have been set up as a legacy of this work in each of the first three neighbourhoods; two of these groups play an active part in the LSP Environment partnership and the chair of the first is on the core body of the LSP.

A.5 Sunderland: sustainable development strategy (established)

Sunderland City Council engaged over 10,000 people in developing its sustainable development strategy using participative appraisal. They trained twenty five 'community facilitators' and these facilitators worked across the city to engage people – many of whom were from hard to reach communities – in discussing a vision for Sunderland's future.

Reason for inclusion

Innovative and successful approach to consultation, which balances the need to be open with the reality that it comes from a sustainable development agenda. The sustainable development strategy itself provides an interesting contrast to the community plans examined above.

A.6 Herefordshire: Community Plan (established)

Herefordshire was a pathfinder authority for community planning. The partnership conducted a consultation exercise jointly with Herefordshire Agenda 21 in 1999. The process was based around participative public meetings across the county. The partnership has subsequently integrated a range of community development tools into the process.

Reason for inclusion:

The Herefordshire Partnership integrated sustainable development principles from the beginning: the flagship consultation was conducted jointly with Herefordshire Agenda 21 and the partnership worked with Forum for the Future on mainstreaming sustainability. The partnership recognised the importance of community development not just to the good of the county but to the effective implementation of the plan.

A.7 Croydon: Community Strategy (recent)

A community strategy for this outer London Borough that mainstreams sustainable development. A recent survey for the Government Office for London by CEA identified this as one of the best examples of a Community Strategy in London from a sustainability viewpoint.

Reason for inclusion:

The plan itself is good practice, and builds on a good track record and high level of community involvement. Croydon appear to be able to balance work on 'street level' issues with national and global concerns. The mechanism by which sustainable development principles were embedded in the plan contrasts with the Mendip and Herefordshire case studies.

Reason for inclusion:

The high quality of the sustainable development approach is based in part on an innovative and successful consultation process known as *'the great cake of life'* which was carried out in advance of the Community Strategy process.

B.4 West Devon Environment Network (West DEN)

A very long established Local Agenda 21 process set up a charity to work in partnership with the local district council and the community. West DEN provides services to local people and to community organisations in the area, consults local people and community organisations and represents views to local policy makers.

Reason for inclusion:

Highly successful and probably unique process. The long history means the effects of implementation can be seen. This provides a different approach to Ryedale or Wiltshire.

B.5 Wiltshire Agenda 21

This is a county-wide Local Agenda 21 process involving a range of local district authorities and managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This approach helped overcome the lack of co-ordination in this process between districts in many other counties.

Reason for inclusion:

The partnership has moved on from planning to deliver a range of projects, concerned with both practice action and awareness raising while also enabling communities to develop visions for their own futures. The central co-ordination unit has been able to respond to needs and to set up new initiatives.

C. Best practice community initiatives contributing to sustainable development**C.1 The Friends of St Nicholas Fields**

A long-running community project that began by creating a nature park on a filled landfill site and continued to provide community facilities that minimise their impact on the environment.

Reason for inclusion:

Demonstrates long term commitment to sustainable development agenda within local community. Positive impacts on wide range of social, environmental and economic goals. Not part of any national network (in contrast to Heeley City farm),

C.2 Heeley City Farm

A long running community project that began by creating a city farm on an area of derelict land. It has grown into a major force for sustainable regeneration in south Yorkshire and has 'spun off' a range of other community initiatives.

Reason for inclusion:

This is widely agreed to be one of the best city farms in the UK. They are well rooted in the local community, which is in a poorer part of Sheffield and have successfully balanced awareness raising work with developing a range of accredited training programmes with launching spin-off enterprises.

C.3 Wyecycle

A community enterprise providing kerbside recycling collection of compostable and recyclable material in a small area in Kent. They are proud to claim to be Britain's least wasteful community.

Reason for inclusion:

This is a highly successful, well regarded community project achieving clear and measurable outcomes over an extended period. The social entrepreneurial approach focused on one core work area provides a contrast to Heeley City Farm and Friends of St Nicholas Fields.

C.4 Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group (HHEAG)

A community group working on health and environment issues through a range of projects in a very large estate on the edge of Bristol. They employ a participatory, self-help approach. They have successfully linked health and environment issues as their core approach to community work. Their development (from an initial needs survey) is well recorded.

Reason for inclusion:

This group have consistently shown that it is possible to include all sections of the community in environmental work and in improving their own health. Their work on food growing has inspired many other projects and they have spun off a major mental health initiative.

C.5 Be Fikr

Translating to 'Warm and Cosy', Be Fikr is a project run by Hazrat Sultan Bahu Trust around a local mosque in the Balsall Heath area of Birmingham. It promotes home improvement and energy efficiency to local people especially Muslim women, many of whom speak little or no English and may be in purdah.

Reason for inclusion:

This group started with a Lottery-funded energy project but have developed it to respond to and meet the needs of and empower women who are frequently ignored and left out by such projects.

Section 2.

Analysis

5. Parish Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and Community Strategies

5.1

The cases

We were asked to identify eight case studies within this section that “*contribute to sustainable development*”. It should be noted that none of the Parish Plans use the term sustainable development nor does the Barnsley project. The inclusion of three Parish Plans does reflect the large number of case study submissions that cited Parish Planning. By its nature, Parish Planning is a rural concern but the process is directly transferable to urban and suburban neighbourhoods.

The Barnsley case study is the most unusual in this section because it concerns a new service plan in contrast to the area plans described by the other case studies. On balance, we felt its inclusion would highlight issues that might not be revealed if it were excluded.

5.2

sustainable development

Analysis: Community planning and

5.2.1

development

Participation and community

Given the prevalent culture and guidance surrounding the relationship between local government and local communities, it would be expected that best practice case studies would score well on this section. Many of the case studies in this section could have been used equally for the section on community consultation.

There is obviously a distinction between parish and neighbourhood planning, which is effectively a community development tool and can lead to the community itself delivering significant outcomes (such as in Long Marston), and community planning which is primarily a tool for effective public administration. It is perfectly possible for the community’s aspirations to be at odds with local authority or government policy (as in Thorpe Arch where the Parish Plan believes more housing would be unsuitable for the village but the local authority has zoned areas for housing within the village). It is possible for the local authority to ignore the aspirations of the community, though this has not been found in these case studies.

Herefordshire has attempted to bridge this divide. In Herefordshire, the Local Strategic Partnership has explicitly built community development into the process of delivering on the plan. The plan ties community development to participation in decision making. The partnership employs a community development co-ordinator and, reasonably recently, a voluntary sector assembly was set up.

Croydon similarly wants enable people to take a better part in their community and intends to develop community action plans and neighbourhood plans to improve access to public services. The plan also aims to increase consultation with sections of the community and to build capacity generally.

The Redbridge Community programme looked to hand responsibility over to the communities involved. There are now new community groups (e.g. Barkingside 21, Seven Kings Action Group) in the areas where the CA21 projects were running. These groups are also represented on the Environment Partnership within the LSP.

The Sunderland project worked with existing community organisations and encouraged people inspired by the appraisal process to form groups and work together to change their communities. They employed participatory appraisal effectively and managed to engage 10,000 people through this mechanism. There is evidence that this approach led to community development impacts (such as a break down in divisions between neighbourhoods). In common with other LA21 processes, the Sunderland strategy assumes on-going participation by the community in delivery and future planning.

The Barnsley project is different because the emphasis on Neighbourhood Pride is on service delivery by the local authority (working with Groundwork Dearne Valley).

Participation in the project can be found at several stages:

- the need to focus on local environmental quality was identified in the community plan consultation
- the teams are accountable to Area Forums (council meetings held in public at which the public may ask questions)
- the public can request specific actions via a widely publicised telephone hotline

At first sight, this scheme would not seem to have much to offer in terms of community development but the experience of the project is that communities in some areas have undertaken clean-ups and other very local environmental quality projects with the support of neighbourhood pride staff.

5.2.2

Economic issues

Direct economic impact

The process of developing a plan is likely to have limited economic impact though it can have some, especially at the local level. Almost all of the projects rely on work being undertaken by local people- usually in a voluntary capacity and this is particular significant in the Parish Planning and Redbridge projects. The Herefordshire Community Plan consultation relied on the efforts of a large number of volunteers. Volunteers becoming involved in the planning process are likely to develop a range of skills that may be transferable. The volunteers involved in the Long Marston project had to learn how to manage meetings, analyse data, and write and present reports.

Staff within local authorities and other support organisations may need additional training to be able to facilitate these processes.

A range of organisations may benefit commercially from the planning process. In Herefordshire a network of facilitators across the county developed for this process went on to extend their work more widely. All of the projects required design and print services as a part of the plan production, distribution or promotion. In Herefordshire and Redbridge, independent facilitators were engaged to assist with the process.

In Sunderland, some economic benefits accrue from the skills development and capacity building inherent in the process.

Indirect economic impact

The economic impact as a result of the implementation of the plans can be highly significant. In Barnsley, the scheme employed 73 people, 20 of whom were waged trainees. The economic impact on trade from cleaner streets and a more conducive environment was not explored in the case study but we would not anticipate that it would have negative impacts. The Parish Plans all identify economic issues. In the case of Long Marston, the most obvious of these was the village shop, which has now been set up with grant support, co-operation from the post office and a share issue through an Industrial and Provident Society. In Danby promoting local products locally was seen as a priority and a local products event has taken place. The Redbridge project has not identified many directly economic priorities for communities,

Both of the community plans have sections on business and employment which might conventionally be taken to include the economic impact (they cover the sort of areas usually found within an economic development strategy).

The Sunderland sustainable development strategy, in common with the community plans has the potential to impact on a vast range of economic areas if the action plans are implemented as described in the document.

The economic impacts of community plans are much more significant than the issues raised in the parish and neighbourhood planning projects. There is virtually no item in either of the community plans here which does not clearly and directly impact on employment, skills, training, access to markets or the supply of goods. The challenge for every local strategic partnership must be to balance the government's and the communities' aspiration for high and stable levels of economic growth and employment against the environmental consequences of much economic development. The Herefordshire Partnership has recently worked with the (locally based) Bulmer Foundation to explore what the implications are to properly integrate sustainable development into the heart of the economic development strategy of the county. This work is ongoing.

Community strategies are intended to shape the spending of large amounts of public money, to integrate the regulation of the economy (through the land use and transport planning systems for example) and to encourage and stimulate economic activity within the private and voluntary sectors.

More detailed analysis of this area is beyond this study.

5.2.3

Environmental issues

Direct impacts

The process of developing the plans is likely to have limited environmental impacts. It is not clear from any of the case studies, the degree to which the environmental impacts of the process were considered (consideration might have been given to, venue selection to minimise travel and the use of environmentally sensitive methods of printing final documents).

Indirect impacts

With the notable exception of Danby (discussed below), the local plans prioritised issues surrounding local environmental quality and local social need which often have an impact on wider environmental concerns. Long Marston has set up a team of volunteers to map the flood plain and to work on simple issues such as encouraging farmers to keep field drains clear as well as lobbying county and district councils for flood prevention measures. Arguably, the community shop reduces travel and consequent pollution. The Thorpe Arch plan highlights footpaths, protection of the local environment and traffic flow through the village and the communities identified in the Redbridge project tended to identify cycle ways, bus routes and letter as major environmental concerns.

In contrast, the Danby Parish Plan identified recycling, upland stocking patterns and renewable energy as priorities for action. This is almost the reverse of the other local planning projects. It is not clear why Danby differs to such an extent but two factors may be relevant:

- through the national park, the local environmental concerns of the parish may be effectively addressed, allowing the community the opportunity to move on to wider concerns
- the local borough council has apparently been promoting renewable energy (particularly heat pumps) in recent years

As a direct result of this prioritisation, the parish is to be included in the work of an incoming Community Renewables Officer working for the Park Authority. Had renewables been seen as a lower priority in the plan, the parish would probably not have been included in this programme.

The Barnsley project is concerned only with local environmental issues but this reflects the concerns of Barnsley residents.

Both of the Community Strategies place sustainable development (or a sustainable future etc) at the core the documentation and have a distinct environment strand. In Herefordshire, the environment strand has targets concerned with biodiversity, waste management and the development of brownfield land. Other strands are concerned with recreational open space including country parks (cultural group), transport including cycle paths (the transport group) and public transport (the transport and social exclusion groups)

Croydon has:

- an environment strand concerned with a wide range of issues. These issues are broken out into lengthy sections
- streets and open spaces: including waste issues, streetscape, biodiversity, access to nature and protection of Greenfield land from development
- an environmental sustainability strand concerned with energy and waste issues. Notably this strand is concerned additionally with encouraging community action on these issues
- a sustainable transport strand concerned with promotion and development of public transport and other non car options and the cleaning of certain car fleet emissions

5.2.4

Health improvement

Both the community strategies contain a strand on health issues, often these concern public health issues. Herefordshire's health strand is (amongst other things) concerned with reducing health inequality and tackling smoking and heart disease. The social exclusion strand is concerned with (amongst other things) increasing access to doctors across the County. The Croydon health strand addresses health inequalities, access to health and public health issues.

The Barnsley project has only a marginal impact on health issues: reduction of litter, dog faeces and so on would be expected to have no negative impact and potentially a positive impact.

Health was not identified as an explicit issue in the Parish Plans though it is implicit in the concerns of Thorpe Arch over traffic flows in the village and in the desire in all the plans for access to outdoor recreational opportunities. Similarly health issues appear to be implicit in some of the environmental concerns raised by groups in the Redbridge project

5.2.5

sustainable development

Environmental awareness education for

All three of the community strategies intend to promote awareness in fields such as transport and health. Croydon has a specific aim of promoting education for sustainable development. Herefordshire are looking for ways to develop and promote environmentally friendly tourism, food production and other forms of economic activity.

Herefordshire developed its community strategy with the clear intention of integrating sustainable development from the first. This is not the case with all community strategies but it is not possible on the information available to perceive why this happened here. In the case of Croydon, it was clearly the work of the council's Local Agenda 21 team within the partnership that ensured the environment strand appeared and that sustainability was integrated into the LSP.

The Redbridge project worked to identify the agenda and priorities of the local community but as it explicitly came from an environmental agenda, this was reflected in some of its work. The concerns first identified by the community are usually local

environmental quality or local social issues. Wider environmental issues are brought to the community either through the questions asked by the facilitators or suggestions made in response to issues raised by the community.

The Sunderland project is clearly concerned with sustainable development. The strategy is designed to demonstrate how the city can meet the needs of its citizens without compromising the ability of others to meet their needs. It is specifically concerned with awareness raising and education and aims to change policy and behaviour.

The Parish Plans and the Barnsley project have a limited role in raising wider environmental awareness. They are all responding to locally perceived need which is, in these cases, concerned with local environmental quality (except in Long Marston where a group is working with landowners on education for flood defence).

6. Community Consultation and sustainable development

6.1 The Cases

The brief calls for separate examination of community consultation as compared to plans that contribute to sustainable development. The case studies examined in the previous sections as best practice plans could have been included in this section. Wide and open consultation is a prerequisite for developing plans that will address need in the long term.

This section features diverse approaches to consultation. The plans that derive from the consultation will contribute to sustainable development and are clearly related to the style and practice of the consultation undertaken. Two specific Local Agenda 21 processes are included in this section. Local Agenda 21 is conventionally seen as a consultation process but as these case studies show good practice in Local Agenda 21 has an intent and result well beyond what would normally be described as consultation.

6.2 Analysis

6.2.1 Participation and community development

All of these case studies have been selected as examples of best practice in consultation. In this section we are concerned with the impacts above and beyond consultation.

There is a clear distinction between the Bristol, Mendip and Ryedale projects which were designed to consult the public so that a plan for public administration could be developed and Wiltshire and West DEN where consultation is intrinsic and on going.

One of the distinguishing features of Local Agenda 21 (both West DEN and Wiltshire are Local Agenda 21 processes) is the degree to which project delivery, awareness raising and consultation are inextricably bound together. Conventionally consultation might be seen as asking a question (*What should be the priorities for spending on transport?* for example) receiving an answer and then working away on a plan based on the answer. In comparison, good Local Agenda 21 processes are like on-going conversations in which both parties expect to be listened to and expect the other to take some responsibility.

This makes analysis of the impacts of the consultation phase alone of Local Agenda 21 processes difficult.

The approach of West DEN has always been to encourage participation rather than merely consultation and there is clear evidence of community development benefits accruing as a result of this work. The project was included here as an example of long-term committed work. There is considerable evidence of a significant impact against all of the components within this section. One of the unique factors of the partnership is that where a community identifies a need and a local group wishes to take it forward,

this can be supported, larger scale projects can be promoted by either the charity of the council, increasing the range of funding available and the cultural approaches available.

In Wiltshire the LA21 process has been concerned with raising awareness and drawing up a long-term plan of action that can inform action by all organisations in Wiltshire. In this way it reflects the way Local Agenda 21 was implemented across much of England and in common with much of LA21 it demonstrates a combined, community development, awareness raising approach. The LA21 partnership explicitly worked with the community sector and provided a mechanism to raise aspirations within communities across the county. In this way it impacted positively against the full range of issues identified in this section

In Bristol, in addition to the general consultation, the Council undertook a series of what it termed “Focused Participation” exercises on particular issues within the draft plan (such as the potential development of home zones). These appear to have gone towards participation in decisions over delivery. There was not much impact on community development and capacity building but a small number of community initiatives can be said to have been facilitated by the plan: most notably the Best Car Club in Knowle.

There is little evidence of the Ryedale or Mendip consultations in and of themselves having contributed to community development. However, the process has led to the creation of a community plan which might be expected to bring many of these benefits through implementation.

Both Ryedale and Mendip did provide clear and understandable mechanisms through which the community could participate in shaping a plan for their futures. They also demonstrated the local authority and other partners wish to have community participation in the process.

6.2.2

Economic issues

Direct impacts

Again there is a clear division between the conventional consultation projects and the Local Agenda 21 projects.

The direct economic impacts of the Ryedale and Bristol case studies are of necessity limited. Both the projects required the design and printing documents and there was a small amount of skills development in Ryedale.

In West DEN and Wiltshire, the unusual nature of the LA21 process means that economic impacts accrue from processes that are inextricably linked to the consultation.

Indirect impacts

The economic impacts of the Local Transport Plan are highly significant. It is worth noting that Bristol quotes extensively from its LA21 strategy at the beginning the vision

section of the document. The economic impacts of community plans (Ryedale and Mendip) are primarily indirect.

In West DEN and Wiltshire, highly significant economic impacts can be seen at a local level. These include training and skills development amongst a wide range of volunteers, paid employment within West DEN and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, funding streams made available to local groups, and paid and volunteering opportunities within local groups.

West DEN especially has been involved in facilitating or managing a range of projects based on issues raised through the LA21 process and providing economic benefits. These include a rural transport youth project (enabling young people to access employment opportunities) and a Good Food project, promoting local and organic food.

The projects facilitated by Wiltshire Agenda 21 are more concerned with information provision and awareness raising than they are with direct service delivery.

6.2.3

Environmental issues

Direct impacts

The Ryedale, Mendip and Bristol projects are limited in their direct environmental impacts. It is possible to argue, bearing in mind the rather unusual nature of the process that Wiltshire Agenda 21 has had direct impacts on environmental issues. The project began by raising issues surrounding fair trade but has developed other projects partly as a result of the issues identified by the community and partly because of developments in public policy. The group now works on waste minimisation, energy efficiency, biodiversity, green gardening and fair trade.

Indirect impacts

The Bristol plan is obviously primarily concerned with travel and its consequent energy use and pollution. The plan aims to promote economic growth while reducing exclusion from transport opportunities and promoting environmental sustainability. The actions undertaken as the plan is implemented will have far reaching implications for the other environmental issues identified in this section. There is of course a dialectical relationship between the transport plan and other local authority plans (such as the unitary development plan); this is why the LTP process was devised, and is intended to be facilitated by the community planning process.

WEST Den is also wrestling with economic impacts but on a much smaller scale. The concerns of people in West Devon relate to all aspects of environmental issues but many of the social issues cut across these environmental concerns. This can be seen in the projects delivered by the charity (as a result of the LA21 process). . The project providing transport alternatives for young people to access employment looks at public transport options first but since these are frequently inadequate for the purpose, other, potentially polluting, options have to be considered (electric cycles and scooters).

The areas addressed by West DEN as a result of its Local Agenda 21 process are less obviously environmental than those addressed by Wiltshire A21 as a result of its Local Agenda 21 process.

Implementation of the Ryedale Community Plan will have similar impacts on the environment to the community plans listed in section one. The Mendip plan is perhaps more overtly concerned with environmental impacts which may reflect the way the consultations were conducted. Mendip was clearly concerned that the community strategy should contribute to sustainable development and so asked questions in the Great Cake of Life that would encourage people to think globally and intergenerationally. Ryedale were concerned that the local people should be free to develop a vision without being guided by professionals.

Mendip (which has a Community Strategy in a late draft) has

- an environment strand concerned with biodiversity and landscape (including built landscape)
- a waste and energy strand concerned with ensuring energy efficiency in new and existing development, reducing transport energy consumption, maximising the business opportunities presented by energy efficiency, waste reduction and recycling, sustainable production and renewable energy markets
- a food strand which is concerned with (amongst other things) reducing food miles and ensuring agricultural practice maintains the landscape
- a transport / travel strand which is concerned with encouraging the use of public and other non-car forms of transport

6.2.4

Health improvement

The process of consultation does not appear to have significant impact on health. Health is an important theme within the Bristol, Ryedale plans and implementation promises to deliver major improvements. The West DEN and Wiltshire projects have surprisingly little to say about health issues though it does feature on the edge of issues such as organic and local food production. The health strand in Mendip's community strategy is concerned with (amongst other things) alcohol and drug use, sexual health, healthy eating and physical activity. The latter two items providing a very obvious synergy with the food and transport strands within the document.

6.2.5 Environmental awareness education for sustainable development

The Wiltshire and West DEN projects do contain an overt awareness raising agenda. There is a tension between this and the desire to be community led and thus not to force an agenda on communities which is common to all Agenda 21 processes. Most commonly – and in the case of these three projects, the consultation strand of the project works with communities to listen to their concerns and aspirations openly but then suggests sustainable solutions or sustainable directions that the community might wish to follow.

The Ryedale project was designed to carry no prior agenda and so did not impact significantly on any of the items listed in this section. Mendip's consultation was open but the questions were designed to encourage people to consider wider sustainability issues and so could be said to have had an awareness raising or educational slant.

The Bristol LTP consultation was multi-faceted, combining completely open questionnaire responses with the highly detailed Transport Commission hearings. Though it would have been contrary to the consultation process to promote any particular agenda through the consultation: the sustainable development agenda was embedded in the planning phase from the first and the plan does want to achieve 'modal shift': that is to encourage people to use public transport, walking or cycling in favour of the car. Therefore the implementation of the plan leads will lead to significant impacts in environmental awareness or education and may even involve some level of coercion (road pricing, congestion charging or controlled parking) to encourage behavioural change.

7. Community initiatives and sustainable development

7.1 The cases

There are an extremely large number of community initiatives working to contribute to sustainable development, perhaps as many as 50,000 across the UK⁹. In selecting these five, we have, as in the rest of the report, attempted to provide a range of type, history and intent in the projects. These projects do not define the community-based sustainable development sector or even describe its boundaries but they do hint at its diversity and complexity.

7.2 Analysis

7.2.1 Participation and community development

The projects in this section are community initiatives and so it would be expected that they would exhibit a high degree of participation and community development. This is broadly speaking the case though the level and type of participation vary. All of the projects except Wyecycle are under the management of volunteers. The relationship between the projects and government is difficult to discern from the documentation available but there is an impression (that with the exception of Wyecycle) the relationship is largely concerned with the projects receiving financial and other forms of support. Wyecycle does seem to have a relationship based on trying to effect policy change within at least the district council and there is clear overlap between the services delivered by the council and by the group

Friends of St Nicholas and Heeley City Farm draw on a long history of working in a small area and can legitimately claim to be grounded in the community. They provide facilities that are used by local people and so the number of people within the local community who might legitimately feel themselves to be part of the initiative is very large. They manage projects that contribute to community development and capacity building (such as a basic skills course in Friends of St Nicholas Fields or the adult education courses provided by Heeley City Farm).

Wyecycle has a similar connection with its customer base. It seems likely that many of the households who have their recyclable waste collected by Wyecycle will feel connected to their aspirations. They work closely with the borough council which has been able to reduce its weekly conventional waste collection to fortnightly.

HHEAG is a community development project working through health and environment. It responds to community need and work to empower and develop the skills of people in the area. In choosing the areas of health and the environment it is responding to a community need first identified in 1990.

The Be Fikr project is part of a wider process of community consultation and development. However it is targeted at people who are often ignored by such processes – women with little or no English language skills. Working in their languages, for which

⁹ 'The Quiet Revolution, Shell Better Britain Campaign, 2002

in some cases no written materials were initially available, it gives them new skills and brings them together and so contributes to community development in its own right.

7.2.2 Economic impacts

Economic impacts of these projects range from the very small scale to the small scale. They all employ at least some staff, provide training opportunities and rely on the support of volunteers. They all also bring finance into their local communities. These impacts suffice for the Friends of St Nicholas Fields but the other projects provide additional small scale economic impacts:

Be Fikr for example provides small financial gains to those it trains (in the reduction on their fuel bills) but also is increasing the skills of a range of individuals in the community. Once trained, the homeowners need to purchase materials which may benefit local shops.

HHEAG provides training in a range of skills and has brought forward gardening developments on previously derelict land. Its projects are not, in general, overtly concerned with finance and trade. The exceptions being the food co-op and fair trade work

Heeley City farm is perhaps the exception. It is a reasonably sized employer with over 30 paid staff and over 100 regular volunteers. They are now recognised as a major training body, providing a range of vocational training (including NVQ's in horticulture) and have facilitated the development of new community enterprises in the area.

Wyecycle provides a service not otherwise available at the level that it provides it. It keeps money circulating within the local economy to a certain extent and provide vocational training opportunities. In addition to the kerbside collections, re-use schemes such as Re>Paint keep maximise the use of resources by the community, reducing financial waste.

7.2.3 Environmental issues

All of these groups are concerned with environmental impacts. None of them addresses every environmental issue and all of them are addressing environmental issues on a small scale and locally. In particular transport and travel issues seem to be difficult for community initiatives to take action on effectively.

Friends of St Nicholas Fields and Heeley City Farm have reclaimed derelict land and increased its importance for biodiversity. They have both also created community buildings powered by renewable energy. They both have projects working to address waste issues to some degree. Friends of St Nicholas manage a community recycling collection scheme and Heeley City farm have community recycling and composting schemes based there. Heeley City Farm manages the land on an organic system and runs a community café selling organic and vegetarian food.

Wyecycle is focussed on waste reduction but does address other issues. The group is involved with the local farmers market as well as exploring the implications of producing biodiesel from chip shop waste.

The Be Fikr project is focussed on home energy efficiency and does not – from the documentation available- appear to be making links to other environmental impacts. It should be noted that it is a much more recent project than any of the others identified here.

HHEAG undertakes a lot of work on food issues. This is an obvious area where environment and health meet. The projects have led community groups to become more interested in the sourcing of their food, to buy it locally, to grow it and to become interested in organic food issues. The group manages a recycling collection scheme and undertakes practical local environmental quality work around the area.

7.2.4 Health improvement

Be Fikr and HHEAG are explicitly concerned with health issues. In the case of Be Fikr, it is the health problems associated with poorly heated properties, while HHEAG has a much more holistic view of health issues. In addition to the food projects mentioned in the Environmental Impacts section, HHEAG undertakes projects designed to encourage or enable people to take more exercise, notably older people who are very actively involved and well catered for. These projects include cycling proficiency, community walks, line dancing and community swims.

The other three projects address health issues marginally, although Heeley's focus on food-growing and open-air work is likely to have long-term health benefits for those involved.

7.2.5 Environmental awareness / education for sustainable development

All of the projects have some role to a greater or lesser degree in environmental awareness or education for sustainable development. Perhaps the most marginal is Be Fikr which is concerned very much with home energy efficiency and so is not concerned with raising awareness about wider environmental issues. It does, at a local level, develop the market for a range of energy efficient products.

HHEAG focus on the environmental issues that concern the residents of Hartcliffe. These issues continue to be local environmental quality issues and in accordance with good community development practice, they start from where the people are. Food again provides an excellent mechanism for making the link between local issues and wider issues. Organic food production and fair trade issues link the wider countryside and the globe to people's plate. The work of HHEAG falls very heavily on the side of awareness raising rather than promotion or changing attitudes.

This is in marked contrast to Wyecycle which campaigns vociferously for zero waste, not just in its own right but through national organisations such as the Community composting Network and the Community Recycling Network. Wyecycle explicitly

believes it is leading by example and is looking for others in Ashford District, Kent and across the UK to follow its lead. It looks for environmentally friendly options for all of its activities and is constantly looking to improve.

Friends of St Nicholas Fields and Heeley City Farm sit somewhere between Wycycle and HHEAG. Both organisations do promote sustainable development and lead by example. Both sites have a wind turbine which is a very public display of intent towards the environment. Both projects are deeply grounded in the sustainable development principle of meeting the needs. The Friends of St Nicholas Fields group does not appear to engage in any significant form of lobbying. Heeley City farm might not characterise its work as lobbying but it plays an important role in the national Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens which does lobby at a national level. They also form the hub for the Community Composting Network and their recently-developed sustainable transport programme is opening up new areas of engagement with local people.

8. The Sustainable Communities perspective

As outlined in 3.4 above, we agreed with other partners that it would be useful to further assess these projects from a 'Sustainable Communities' viewpoint. This involves assessment against the seven criteria identified in the Egan Review¹⁰:

As with several of the criteria used for the overall assessment, it is the case that these criteria are mostly relevant to projects and programmes rather than plans and consultation processes. An initial assessment of the case studies form the first two sections suggest that almost all these plans have the potential, if implemented, to bring about positive changes in almost all of the categories. As such a detailed assessment of these two groups is of limited value. There are some points of note:

- The smaller-scale plans, notably the Parish Plans, may have less influence on issues where local power is weakest, such as transport matters
- The more issue-specific plans such as Bristol and Barnsley may indeed be specific but they are likely to lead to improvements in their target service areas which will also bring about overall improvements in the environmental and governance areas
- The small and issue-based plans do have a role to play in better governance, and the high degree of local interest suggests that these can be productive ways of developing strategies, since people readily understand what they are about. To ensure their value, better integration with community strategies is needed in order to maximise their impacts

The projects

The third group of cases was assessed using these criteria. Each was assessed and given a score of 1 – 5, where five is the highest. The scores represent:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | no clear impact |
| 2. | small local impact |
| 3. | valuable local impact |
| 4. | major local impact and some regional / national impact |
| 5. | major local impact and significant / major regional / national impact |

We have taken the 'impact' to include both direct and indirect impacts. The 'local' refers to the target communities for the project.

¹⁰ Skills for Sustainable Communities: The Egan Review: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004

| | Social & Cultural | Governance | Environmental | Housing & Built Environment | Transport | Economy | Services |
|--|-------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| F r i e n d s o f S T · N · | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| H e e l e y F a r m | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| W y c y c l e | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| B e F i k r | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| H H E A G | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 |

Here the wide range of impacts of these projects can be seen clearly. They are all having some social and economic impacts. In the case of two larger projects the dissemination and promotion of their work is clearly influencing work well beyond their locality. Transport is an area where these particular projects make little impact, with the exception of Heeley, where their Lottery-funded 'sustainable transport' project is making a local impact.

9. An overview of Participation

The success of participation is not always easily measured. As outlined in section 3.3 above we have used the criteria developed for Yorkshire Forward¹¹:

- **Influence:** ensuring that community participation leads to real influence over (regeneration) strategy and activity
- **Inclusivity:** valuing diversity and addressing inequality, to ensure inclusive and equal participation
- **Communication:** implementing clear information processes, transparent and accessible policies and procedures
- **Capacity:** developing the understanding, skills and knowledge of all partners, and the organisational capacity of communities and public agencies

Each of the projects has been assessed broadly on these using available data and given a rating from 1 – 5 (5 being the highest). In all sections the analysis has been done in terms of the situation of the local project. If a project (as with Be Fikr) is reaching its' target audience, which may otherwise not be involved in such work, then that is seen as success.

Plans and Strategies

In this section it is perhaps inevitable that larger plans such as Community Strategies are seen as more influential. However it is also clear that generally speaking the smaller plans are more effective at building capacity.

| | Influence: | Inclusivity: | Communication: | Capacity: |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|
| Herefordshire Community Strategy. | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 |

¹¹ 'Active Partners – benchmarking community participation in regeneration' Yorkshire Forward, 2002, available on-line at www.yorkshire-on.net

| | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Cro ydo n Co mm unit y . Str ate gy | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Me ndi p Co mm unit y . Str ate gy | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Lon g Mar sto n Pari sh Pla n | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Tho rpe Arc h Pari sh Pla n | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Red brid ge Co mm unit y Acti on 21 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Bar nsl ey Neig hbo urho od Pri de. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 |

| | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Dan by Pari sh. Pla n | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|

It would seem to be the case that clear linkages between the larger and smaller plans would bring more influence to the smaller ones and more capacity-building to the larger ones. This bears out some of the lessons of the recent Countryside Agency ‘Bridges’ project¹².

The consultation programmes

| | Influence: | Inclusivity: | Communication: | Capacity: |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Brist ol Local Transp ort Plan | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Ryed ale Plan | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Sund erlan d Sustai nable Devel opme nt Strate gy | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| West DEN | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

¹² ‘The ‘Bridges’ research report – Parish and Town Plans, Market town Action Plans – links to Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategies’ Moseley et al for the Countryside Agency, 2004

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wilts hire Local Agenda 21 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

The projects

These projects were carefully selected to meet sustainability criteria, of which key aspects from our perspective are participation and capacity building. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that these score highly. The smaller projects are perhaps less influential (although their long-term impact resulting from national recognition may result in indirect influence).

| | Influence: | Inclusivity: | Communication: | Capacity: |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Friends of St.Nicholas Fields. | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Heeley City Farm | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| WyeCycle | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Be Fikr | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| HEAG | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

Section 3: Conclusions

10. Is this work making a difference? - The impact of community engagement in achieving sustainable development

Eighteen examples of best, or at least very good, practice have been examined for this project. This places very clear limits on the conclusions that can be drawn. The data cannot tell us what the situation is across England, but they can indicate the potential. The data do not allow us to comment on the impact of poor community engagement.

It is clear that, given the right conditions, communities can be engaged successfully in processes that contribute to sustainable development. It is also clear that, again given the right conditions, communities will participate actively, not only in the planning and shaping of projects that will but in the practical delivery of projects that contribute to sustainable development.

This study suggests that well-run local action can deliver:

- Practical local improvements that meet local needs
- More individuals and communities taking action to change their lifestyles
- The achievement of local targets that complement national ones
- Support for national policy changes leading to sustainable development

It is the case that the direct impacts of most local projects are limited and are mostly restricted to improvements in their own localities. However the collective impact of such projects on national targets may be significant. Their numbers are growing, and with support could grow more. The socio-economic impacts of such projects are frequently more immediately apparent and quantifiable. These include job creation, training, community development and capacity building. A further positive impact is the building awareness of, and engagement with environmental issues, and supporting individual and collective environmental action.

Communities can be consulted about complex issues and the results of those consultations can be used by public bodies to develop meaningful plans. The context in which the consultation is conducted will affect the outcome. There is a clear suggestion from these case studies that when consultations are conducted in a sustainable development context (with participants encouraged to think globally and inter-generationally), this does alter the nature of the response.

Local planning processes (such as Parish Planning) are able to assist a community in articulating views about its future and to stimulate action at a local level. Communities are clearly concerned with local environmental, social and economic issues and may consider global environmental issues though it is not clear what encourages this wider consideration. The relationship between these processes and wider planning processes (such as community planning) is obviously important and the analysis begins to indicate that there may be opportunities for more effective integration between these levels.

Community Strategies clearly have the potential to bring the wider community into the planning and implementation of local services. They also seem to be capable of mainstreaming sustainable development. Perhaps surprisingly, even these 'best practice' processes do not appear to be directly replacing Local Agenda 21 processes. The analysis begins to suggest that they may be a role for an updated Local Agenda 21 process to sit below the community planning process, maintaining the 'ongoing conversation' characterised in section 6.2.1

The analysis hints tantalisingly at a possible model allowing community action and local public services to complement each other. Neighbourhood Pride in Barnsley shows that (admittedly in a highly specific service area) local services can be delivered in a manner that encourages and supports small-scale local action. Communities can take control of small areas of work without cutting across the service plan and without causing the managers of the service concern about the long-term viability of the group. It is only a hint but one that we suggest merits further development.

11. Sustainable Development and Sustainable Communities.

These programmes and projects were selected as examples of good contributions to sustainable development. We also carried out an assessment using the Egan Report criteria.

The lessons from this are that although few of these projects use either phrase in their work, they are helping take forward these agendas. The selected local sustainability project and programmes are without doubt contributing to meeting sustainable communities targets, although this contribution may not be immediately clear to those responsible such as regeneration managers.

It might also be instructive to do a similar piece of work with the opposite perspective – to consider how far projects developed under the sustainable communities heading are in fact assisting in the delivery of sustainable development.

12. Beyond the research

It is in the nature of a project such as this that it raises more questions than it answers. In this section we explore some of these questions. In doing so we are drawing not only on the research described above but on other projects and our experience working in the local sustainable development sector.

12.1 Evaluation systems

So far the contribution of much of this work to sustainable development has gone unrecognised. This is due in part to weaknesses in evaluation systems., notably with regard to:

- Evaluating participation and community involvement;
- Measuring the impact of local projects;
- Assessing the long-term impacts of local plans.

While indicators have been developed for sustainable development they have tended to be large scale or at best area-based, and not designed to assess individual programmes.

This may change: the increased focus in the Audit Commission on the local may bring benefits, and recent work by CDF for the Home Office¹³ has set out ways to measure community activity.

12.2 The nature of 'local'

A wide range of partners and issues are likely to be involved in achieving sustainable development at a local level. For a start the term local depends on the perspective of the observer. For a policy maker in Whitehall, local may mean local authority scale. Community strategies are clearly important in achieving sustainable development at this level and the strategies in this report demonstrate how communities may be involved in developing such plans.

For elected members in local authorities, local may mean ward or neighbourhood level. Parish Planning and approaches such as Redbridge's Community Action 21 are clearly effective at helping local communities take ownership of issues within their own neighbourhoods.

For individuals, ward or even parish boundaries (especially group parishes such as Danby) may be wider than they would consider local. Many community initiatives are focussed on these local areas and often have no ambitions to move beyond these narrow boundaries. Wyecycle is a case in point. It is a social business that believes its experience is replicable in other communities but does not intend to expand its own operations. This potentially creates a challenge for those working to deliver services across an entire local authority area. The Barnsley experience provides interesting lessons: the way Neighbourhood Pride is delivered means that communities can organise litter picks in one street or take over the management of very small pieces of land without disrupting the service plan and with an appropriate level of support from the local authority.

12.3. The legacy of LA 21

Local Agenda 21 has been poorly understood and under-analysed, which is unfortunate because it is becoming clear that some remarkable work has emerged from it, based

¹³ 'Measures of Community' Chanan, CDF, 2004

often around a few champions who have had the support and resources to turn some complex ideas into good work on the ground. What started out as a consultation exercise developed, as described in 6.2.1 above, into 'an ongoing conversation', and one conducted between a range of groups, many of them hard at work even as they debate.

Other research suggests that there are still many LA21 processes still operational, despite a lack of national interest and support from local government. If DEFRA is seeking locally-based allies to help manage the delivery of the new Strategy, then a short survey to identify where this work is ongoing and why might yield some useful dividends.

13. In search of the 'secret of success'

There is no doubt from this work that there is some very good practice across England on local sustainability and community consultation. In some cases, such as those we have listed here, these are working well together.

The value of this good, or even best, practice is that it not only shows what is possible, but that it can inspire others. If such practice is to be replicated it is important to understand the success factors that have led a particular project to do more than simply carry out what it set out to do.

Despite wide variations some common factors emerge. Most can be both problems or success factors. None of these are startlingly new. Indeed many of them concern long-standing issues, but if we are to move to turn individual examples of good work into common practice then these long-standing issues need to be tackled. Among the issues are:

Resources and funding

These good projects are generally well-funded, whether by an external funder such as the lottery, or by national funding through regeneration programmes, or directly by a local authority where there is political commitment. Yet in general local sustainability projects remain poorly funded. One question still concerns the extent to which projects which work across disciplines (that are characteristic of good sustainability practice) find support in either.

DEFRA have funded work through the Environment Action Fund, which has moved towards sustainability: now might be the time to review such funding to actively encourage genuinely integrated working.

Organisational support

Several of the projects discussed have benefited from outside support, whether from voluntary organisations, national NGOs or facilitators. This type of resourcing can be

critical for the success of local programmes, whether they are consultation programmes of practical projects.

Technical Aid centres (that could provide such support) have existed in some major cities over the last two decades, but funding for these has been intermittent and limited. It would be worth considering how far the delivery of a national sustainable development strategy might be facilitated by the creation of a small but well-trained network of advisors at regional level.

Information

Information is the life-blood for much local work, whether it be about funding streams, good practice or participation techniques. Much of this can be circulated through regional networks but there is a need for a way in which voluntary or specialist networks can get up-to-date and focused information on emerging issues that may be of interest and relevance.

Key staff / people

Many good projects have relied on local champions at key stages. It is arguable that really good projects tend to pass beyond such limitations and that the mark of a true community champion is that they can pass on both skills and inspiration. It may not be possible to train up community champions from scratch, but it is certainly possible to train or enable those who show promise and interest. Given the lack of understanding of sustainable development such a training programme might be very helpful.

14. The Policy Dimension

There remains a question as to how far good local work is affecting national, regional or local policy, and indeed whether it can or should influence it.

Sustainable development has tended to be seen as a complex intellectual challenge, but the reality is that many groups are hard at work delivering it. Indeed it is also most certainly the case that there are now many more people involved in implementing work on these issues than there are in developing policy, despite the fact that most interest focuses on the activities of policy-centred NGOs.

This leads to two important points:

- Further discussion is needed on how the lessons of successful practice can be fed back in to the policy debate. This will be especially important in urban areas where the dialogue between sustainable development and 'sustainable communities' is likely to be central to this work in the year ahead.

- Policy development work does not always consider the ‘workability’ of new initiatives nor how their introduction can be supported. Thus there needs to be a two-way dialogue between practitioners and policy-makers: these practitioners would need to be drawn not just from local government but from the national support networks and key local projects that they work with.

In conclusion

Integration of work on environmental and socio-economic issues happens in many different ways, and the sustainable development and sustainable communities approaches will both depend on this for long-term success. The amount and quality of local action appears to be increasing, and this can be a cost-effective way of dealing with local problems and reaching local communities. However local projects still face problems and obstacles. If the role of local action is to increase, then these obstacles need to be tackled through:

- Developing more supportive policy frameworks
- Changes to funding mechanisms and support structures
- Greater recognition of the value of community-focused local action.

Appendix 1. The Evaluation Grid

This grid summarises the key good points of the cases, and links to the analysis in

A. The Plans and Strategies

| | Economic issues | Environmental issues | Health improvement | Environmental awareness / education for sustainable development |
|---|---|--|---------------------------|--|
| Herefordshire Community Strategy | Economic impacts and job creation | Likely to impact on all environmental criteria | Health improvement | Environmental promotion / awareness raising Inputting into wider policy and planning |
| Croydon Community Strategy | Economic impacts and job creation | Likely to impact on all environmental criteria n | Health improvement | Environmental promotion / awareness raising Inputting into wider policy and planning |
| Mendip Community Strategy | Economic impacts and job creation | Likely to impact on all environmental criteria | Health improvement | Developing and promoting environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods Inputting into wider policy and planning |
| Long Marston Parish plan | Economic impacts and job creation New / improved services / resources / facilities | Travel Pollution | | |
| Thorpe Arch Parish plan | | Travel Pollution Living environment improvements | | Inputting into wider policy and planning |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Red bridge Com munit yAc tion 21 | | Living environment improvements | | Environmental promotion Engaging / gaining support / Changing attitudes Inputting into wider policy and planning |
| Bar nsl ey Nei ghb our hoo d Pri de. | Training New / improved services / resources / facilities | Living environment improvements | | Environmental promotion / awareness raising |
| Dan by Pari sh. Pla n | Economic impacts and job creation | Travel Energy use | | Inputting into wider policy and planning Developing and promoting environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods |

B. The consultation programmes

| | Economic issues | Environmental issues | Health improvement | Environmental awareness / education for sustainable development |
|---|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Bri stol Loc al Tra nsp ort Plan | Economic impacts and job creation New / improved services / resources / facilities | Travel Pollution | Health improvement (potential) | Environmental promotion Inputting into wider policy and planning |
| Rye dal e Pla n | | | | Inputting into wider policy and planning |

| | | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Sunderland Sustainable Development Strategy | Training | | | Environmental education /info Environmental promotion Engaging / gaining support / changing attitudes Inputting into wider policy and planning Environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods |
| West DE N | Training Economic impacts and job creation New / improved services / resources / facilities | Waste Travel Energy use | | Environmental promotion Engaging / gaining support / changing attitudes Environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods |
| Wiltshire Local Agenda 21 | | | | Environmental education and information Environmental promotion Engaging / gaining support / changing attitudes Environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods |

The projects

| | Economic issues | Environmental issues | Health improvement | Environmental awareness / education for sustainable development |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------|---|
| Friends of St. Nicholas Fields | Training New / improved services / resources / facilities | Habitats / wildlife Reclaiming / re-using derelict land Waste Energy use Environmentally friendly housing / buildings | | Environmental promotion / awareness raising |
| Heeley City Farm | Training Economic impacts and job creation New / improved services / resources / facilities | Habitats / wildlife Reclaiming / re-using derelict land Energy use Environmentally friendly housing / buildings | | Environmental promotion / awareness raising Engaging / gaining support / changing attitudes |
| WyeCycle | Training Economic impacts and job creation New / improved services / resources / facilities | Waste Travel Energy use | | Engaging / gaining support / changing attitudes Developing and promoting environmentally friendly ways of working or providing goods |
| Be Fikr | Training | Living environment improvements Energy use Environmentally friendly housing / buildings | | Environmental education and information |
| Hartcliffe HE AG | Training | Living environment improvements Reclaiming / re-using derelict land | Health improvement | Environmental education and information Environmental promotion / awareness raising |

Appendix 2: The case studies and reasons for inclusion

A. Best practice in plans contributing to sustainable development

A.1 Thorpe Arch: Parish Plan and VDS (recent)

A Parish Plan and separate Village Design Statement only just published. A community on the edge of Leeds in Yorkshire and the Humber. Supported by the Countryside Agency Vital Villages scheme, with Rural Community Council and Local Authority involvement. Work based on questionnaires supported by public meetings and meetings with local organisations.

The Thorpe Arch Parish Plan is based largely on a questionnaire and a follow up series of parish meetings. The parish has taken the unusual step of producing two linked documents: a Village Design Statement which will form supplementary planning guidance and a Parish Plan. Both documents reflect a vision for the parish but the Village Design Statement is concerned with helping the planning system achieve the vision where as the Parish Plan is concerned with practical actions that can be taken locally to achieve the vision.

Both documents are concerned to balance economic and social development with environmental protection. Proposed actions include providing alternative vehicle access to the industrial estate (to reduce traffic flow through the village), improve cycling facilities and develop the range of community facilities available at the village school.

The plan has only just been published and so it is too early to measure how effective it will be at stimulating action on the ground.

A.2 Long Marston: Parish Plan (established)

A Parish Plan produced by a community in Warwickshire, West Midlands supported the local authority. The plan was based on public meetings and a questionnaire and led directly to the opening of a community-owned shop and the formation of a local group to map the flood plain in the village.

Long Marston has a population of 280 people. In 1999, a new development in the village demolished the village store and post office. In accordance with the planning permission a replacement shop was built but there was no interest in running the facility.

The District Council employed a parish appraisal officer who suggested to the parish council that they undertake such a process. They provided a grant of £3,000. The Parish Council invited a independent group to take forward the process.

The group organised a series of public meetings, providing refreshments and crèche facilities in which villagers were encouraged to talk openly about their priorities. The shop was clearly a major issue.

An appraisal questionnaire was prepared but specific questions concerning the shop were included. This enabled the group to rapidly develop a business plan and a

community owned shop was set up. The set-up costs were financed by a share issue (the shop is an Industrial and Provident Society), grant funding, the opening of a post office counter and the donation of time by volunteer staff.

Two other major issues were identified in the appraisal:

- The lack of public open space which the group hope to address in partnership with the district council through Section 106 agreements
- The incidence of flooding which the group hope to address by mapping the flood plain (a group of volunteers has undertaken this work), encouraging landowners to clean land drains and lobbying the district and county councils for flood defence measures.

A.3 Danby Parish Plan

A Parish Plan produced by a large, group parish council. The parish council was working with the North York Moors National Park on a Land Management Initiative and saw the Parish Plan process as a way to help the community recover from foot and mouth disease.

There had been little interest in the Parish Planning process in Danby until the period following the Foot and Mouth outbreak when the Land Management Initiative perceived a desire to 'do something' in response. Parish Planning was suggested and accepted.

An independent steering group co-ordinated the work of a number of smaller organisations investigating specific areas of concern in the area. The plan does not mention sustainable development but staff from the National Park Authority argue that sustainable development principles were implicit in the way the steering group linked social, economic and environmental issues.

The plan itself is extremely tightly focussed with a series of clear actions identified and clear measures for success.

The main form of consultation was by questionnaires distributed to households. The Parish Planning group published the results of the questionnaire with an interpretation of the results. This interpretation indicates that environmental, social and economic consequences were being considered closely by the group.

Initial outcomes have included, the inclusion of the parish in the work of a new community renewable development officer and the first local products event in the parish, marketing local products to local people.

A.4 Redbridge: Community Agenda 21

A standardised process to facilitate the development of Community Action Plans in small parts of the borough. Though initiated and facilitated by the Local Agenda 21 team of the borough council, the action plans are community owned and are not obliged to be concerned with pre-defined 'sustainability' issues.

Redbridge set up its' Local Agenda 21 in a broadly similar way to many other councils.

Over the last six years it has developed into something quite different by taking work down to community level and producing action plans for four areas, each corresponding roughly to two wards (the variation come because some community people from other wards saw the 'natural community' as including them).

The 'Community Agenda 21' plans have been developed through a similar process: open meetings to identify priorities, issue-focused meetings to develop actions linked to these priorities (increasingly often attended by senior council staff), drafting of a plan and further consultation, leading to a formal launch. Resources are made available for locally-identified projects. Older plans have been reviewed and updated and progress is tracked. New independent community environment groups have been set up as a legacy of this work in each of the first three neighbourhoods; two of these groups play an active part in the LSP Environment partnership and the chair of the first is on the core body of the LSP. These projects have also been involved in Borough-wide issues such as a 'Communities and Climate Change' conference.

A.5 Sunderland sustainable development strategy

Sunderland City Council engaged over 10,000 people in developing its sustainable development strategy using participative appraisal. They trained twenty five 'community facilitators' and these facilitators worked across the city to engage people – many of whom were from hard to reach communities – in discussing a vision for Sunderland's future.

Participatory appraisal involves training local people in a range of techniques including interviewing, appraisal, project design etc. While the training in PA is open to all, the real intention is to engage members of a community who have not previously been involved in community action. This is in order to spread the net of involvement as widely as possible, to minimise the over-influence of existing agendas, and to break down barriers between community activists and their communities.

Using a core group of 20 to 25 people known as community facilitators, 10,000 local people across six regeneration areas including: businesses, health services as well as people on the street who have been consulted about their views and ideas for their neighbourhoods. This, followed by a conference attended by 170 local people and organisations, fed into Sunderland's sustainable development strategy.

The Sunderland sustainable development strategy is a wide ranging document. It predates the community plan (and has subsequently been adopted as a document underpinning the community plan) but anticipates it in layout and aspiration. It is delivery focussed with targets and action plans covering education, culture, business, health, transport and wildlife amongst other areas.

In common with other sustainability documents it emphasises the role that all parts of Sunderland society have to play in delivery and shows how participation in the process will be ongoing.

A.6 Herefordshire Community Plan (established)

Herefordshire was a pathfinder authority for community planning. The partnership conducted a consultation exercise jointly with Herefordshire Agenda 21 in 1999. The process was based around participative public meetings across the county. The partnership has subsequently integrated a range of community development tools into the process.

The Herefordshire Plan was intended to be the plan for Herefordshire. It is the community strategy, LA 21 plan and regeneration strategy. The plan has an overall vision for the county (derived in part by the open consultation process) backed up by ten *ambitions*. The ambitions have three *golden threads* running through them, which influence action across the plan (they are geographic communities, communities of interest and providing the tools necessary to achieve action).

Ambition groups (partnerships) work to achieve the ambitions set out in the plan.

The role of the voluntary and community sectors is emphasised throughout the plan and significant steps have been taken to ensure the sector has sufficient capacity to participate effectively in the process. In addition, the importance of other types of community is recognised throughout the plan and through implementation.

The development of the plan was always intended to integrate sustainable development. The vision for Herefordshire is recognisable as seeking social, economic and environmental outcomes and the role of LA21 has been emphasised from the outset.

A.7 Croydon: Community Strategy

A community strategy for this outer London Borough that mainstreams sustainable development. A recent survey for the Government Office for London by CEA identified this as one of the best examples of a Community Strategy in London from a sustainability viewpoint.

Croydon is a large south London borough and a major economic player in its own right, although it is also the 88th most deprived borough in the country. It developed a popular LA21 plan and set up a range of initiatives to take this forward. Some four years ago a focus within this project on the 'street-level' environment fore-shadowed the 'sustainable communities' approach.

'Croydon's Community Strategy – For Improving Quality of Life' was launched in May 2003 to cover the period 2003 to 2006. Its aims are to 'improve the quality of life for residents by making Croydon safer, healthier, more prosperous and sustainable. In short, a desirable place where people choose to live, work, visit and socialise.' The Strategy's six key themes are:

- Improving the Environment;
- Education and Life-Long Learning;
- Regenerating the Borough;

- Reducing Crime and Disorder;
- Improving Health and Social Care, and
- Providing Better and Fairer Access.

The Strategy was one of the first in London to highlight the idea of sustainable development, and as we as having a good environmental section includes a range of priorities and cross-cutting themes including poverty, health inequalities, community cohesion, and neighbourhood renewal , with 177 actions for progressing during the period 2003-2004. A review process to keep the Strategy up to date by regular updates to the Action Plan is seen as a priority for ensuring relevance. Residents' views were gathered through customer surveys, and there were two Community Conferences, as well as bringing in Neighbourhood Partnerships and government and local agency priorities.

A.8 Barnsley: Neighbourhood Pride

A range of public-realm staff (street cleaners, grounds maintenance and so on) have been re-organised into area-based multi-disciplinary teams. Team supervisors have considerable local autonomy in the programming of their work but are expected to be accountable to the Council's Area Forums and responsive to local residents (via a telephone hotline).

Consultation exercises undertaken in Barnsley (such as the community planning process) have consistently highlighted the importance citizens attach to the quality and cleanliness of the local environment.

In response to this clearly identified local priority, a number of frontline services have been integrated into 'Neighbourhood Pride'. The ten, area-based Neighbourhood Pride task forces have responsibility for grass cutting, shrub bed maintenance, weed control, street sweeping, litter collection, hedge cutting and graffiti removal.

They are directed to provide a fast and responsive service to problems that arise on public or private property. They are also directed to promote and encourage responsible citizenship and to involve and engage the community.

They work closely with neighbourhood forums (which bring together tenants groups, community partnerships, neighbourhood watch groups etc) and are responsive to direct the general public through a widely publicised telephone line.

Local communities undertaking litter picks or other environmental work in their locality are supported by the task forces who can provide tailored services as appropriate.

B. Best practice in consultation

B.1 Bristol Local Transport Plan

Highway authorities in England are required to produce a local transport plan showing how they will spend money provided by central government. Bristol City Council (in the

South West) aspired to have its local transport plan represent the vision of all of the people of the city and undertook its largest ever transport consultation. The wide consultation culminated in a series of hearings before a 'Bristol Transport Commission'

The Council set out to engage as wide a range of the people of Bristol as possible in shaping the local transport plan. It produced a document summarising the issues and presenting the context for the consultation and allowed a four month timeframe for the consultation exercise.

Public meetings were held in a range of venues across the city. They were widely advertised in a range of media and were conducted in a focussed work-group process. Subsequent meetings with special interest groups (such as health or environmental interest groups and professionals were held).

A questionnaire was distributed widely through local news media and with the summary document. The 2000 members of the citizens panel were asked to respond and their responses were tracked alongside the responses from the general public. The Council also took the results of other consultation exercises (such as an independent survey of estate agents in the city) into account.

Organisations and individuals were invited to comment by letter and these responses were examined and summarised.

A twelve member 'Bristol Transport Commission' sat and interviewed a range of experts from across the city. It heard from attendees at the public meetings and made a series of recommendations for inclusion into the plan.

The plan itself is clearly intended to contribute to sustainable development for the city.

B.2 Ryedale

Ryedale DC developed its community plan by working with the New Economics Foundation on a project called 'Imagine'. They worked to identify Ryedale's citizen's priorities for creating and maintaining a sustainable community.

In September 2002, the New Economics Foundation (on behalf of the Council) began working with citizens from across Ryedale. A core group of local activists were trained in using the Imagine technique. Two, one-day workshops were required to develop a protocol of appreciative questions (described as similar to a semi-structured interview).

This core group then took responsibility with Ryedale DC for gathering the results of the process.

The process itself relied upon a series of recorded 'conversations' during which people (at a large public meeting or sitting round a small table) were encouraged to tell stories about their personal experiences that identified what was most important to people in terms of the aspirations and hopes for the future.

The core group then sorted through the conversations drawing out recurring themes into 'provocative propositions' (which might also be termed vision statements). In the end there were six of these propositions. The propositions were fed back to stakeholder groups who were invited to rate them for desirability, feasibility and whether they were happening already.

The Council argues that though the words sustainable development were not used, the principles derived from the process reflect those of sustainable development. The six themes form the vision that Ryedale's partnership agrees to work towards through the community plan.

B.3 Mendip Community Strategy consultation

A Community Strategy for a rural District Council, this document focuses heavily on sustainable development, and is based in part on an innovative consultation process known as 'the great cake of life' carried out in advance of the Community Strategy process.

A project team with staff from various partners and an independent consultant was formed. The project team, with the help of an independent consultant, designed the process, which used a mixture of techniques to ensure that rich data was gathered under twelve broad headings and themes: A place to live, a job to do, things to do, getting around, feeling safe, ways to learn, staying well, food, environment, energy and waste, sense of community, and anything else.

The title 'The Great Cake of Life Challenge' was chosen for the programme of events as it was felt that all the components that make up communities and quality of life could be likened to the ingredients of cake. To carry the theme through, locally produced cake was provided for participants.

The final product was an event consisting of a number of activities at five 'stations' around the venue hall. Participants were met and greeted at the venue entrance and were informed about the purpose of the events. They passed around five stations providing information through a range of mechanisms (including writing on post it notes and applying pieces of string to specially designed boards).

Over 1000 Mendip residents took part and a comprehensive report was written of the findings and fed-back to the people of Mendip. The report was used by the partnership to help to shape the community plan and by the partners individually for action planning within their own service areas.

B.4 West DEN

A very long established Local Agenda 21 process involving a charity working in partnership with the local district council and the community. West DEN provides services to local people and to community organisations in the area, consults local people and community organisations and represents views to local policy makers.

A working group at West Devon Borough Council invited community members to consider ways of supporting environmental issues across the Borough. This led to the setting up of West DEN as an independent community organisation in 1994.

After wide consultation with the community, West DEN was given the go ahead to facilitate and co-ordinate the LA21 process for the district with a strategy, indicators and a series of reactive and proactive practical projects.

Elements of this process, particularly the community-led sustainability indicators, have been used as best practice examples and led to many awards. West DEN has been able to use experience of work at a local level when invited to contribute to regional, national and international processes and strategies on sustainable development.

B.5 Wiltshire Agenda 21

A county-wide Local Agenda 21 process involving a range of local authorities and managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The partnership delivers a number of projects, largely concerned with awareness raising and information provision as well as enabling communities to develop visions for their own futures.

In their report 'Wiltshire Agenda 21; 1999- 2001' they state their aims for 1999 – 2001 as:

- Step 1: Raise awareness
- Step 2: Provide practical examples of change
- Step 3: Draw up a long term plan of action

The project began soon after the 1992 UN Rio conference. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust wrote to all of the local authorities in Wiltshire asking them to a meeting with the WT and English Nature. Some of the local authorities had started thinking about their LA21, while others hadn't even heard of it. The County Council's Environmental Services Director agreed some support to help all of the local authorities in Wiltshire get to 'first base'. Because it was a time of local government re-organisation, there was a lack of co-operation between some and an independent broker was needed to do this work. WWT received the funding to do this work.

While the various councils held consultation etc. The Wilts LA21 team were able to provide support and increasingly run projects to help turn the talk into action. They now run a wide range of local activities such as the awareness raising 'Fairtrade fortnight' and their innovative 'Junk Swap' days. Energy efficiency and biodiversity remain important core themes while new projects under development include development of a new village hall 'eco-centre', a renewable energy project, and an electrical goods recycling project

Community Sustainable Development projects

C.1 The Friends of St Nicholas Fields

A long-running community project that began by creating a nature park on a filled landfill site and continued to provide community facilities that minimise their impact on the environment.

From its origins as a clay quarry, the site was used for municipal landfill between the 1960s and 1974. Once landfill activity ceased, the site gradually became a green space used unofficially by local residents for amenity purposes. In 1988, when the local authority examined the feasibility of expanding a neighbouring industrial estate local opposition was significant. In 1992 the site was designated as an urban nature park and management responsibility was handed over to the local community (in the form of the Friends of St Nicholas Fields).

The site was capped in 1994 and practical habitat creation and site management work commenced. The group began raising funds for a community centre. The Community Centre opened in 2000 and the group claimed it was the first community building to be built using sustainability principles. The design has the following characteristics:

- On-grid renewable energy production (wind turbine and photo-voltaic panels) and supplementary heating from a wood burning stove
- Grassed roof (where the PV panels are absent)
- Rainwater collection and filtration
- Composting toilets

The group generates income by leasing part of the centre to a cycle courier company which promotes sustainability principles. It is developing community composting and community recycling facilities, manages children's play areas (including a BMX track developed in response to a petition from local young people) and developed a basic-skills programme linked to community recycling.

C.2 Heeley City Farm

A long running community project that began by creating a city farm on an area of derelict land. It has grown into a major force for sustainable regeneration in south Yorkshire and has 'spun off' a range of other community initiatives. They say that: *'Heeley City Farm identifies, confronts and addresses the problems of poverty, inequality, prejudice and lack of opportunity in our inner city community by supporting and promoting community regeneration and self-help within environmentally friendly and self-sustaining systems, using the background of a mini farm, community gardens and related resources'.*

The farm started in 1980 when an area of poor quality housing was demolished to make way for a proposed by-pass. The Heeley Residents and Tenants Association successfully campaigned against the road and went on to think about how they could improve their area using land no longer needed for the bypass. They linked employment, environment and education, and thought that it would be nice to have a 'green oasis' in the middle of the city. The local authority let them have the land for £25/ year and they began to develop the Farm.

They soon won funding to employ workers to deliver a Government training programme, and e started running youth work in the area, building links with local schools and working with truant young people. The farm is registered as an official 'external institution' – a training provider able to access education funding. They provide New Deal placements and vocational training is now their 'biggest cash earner'.

The farm has trebled in size, in terms of employees and activities, from 11 employees in 1995, to 34 in 2001. It has also helped develop the Sheffield Development Trust. The farm continues to look for ways of increasing its' impact on the area. They have recently been working on

- expanding their composting enterprise
- finding more land to grow organic produce
- a Lottery-funded sustainable transport project
- providing support for other groups in Sheffield and beyond.

C.3 Wyecycle

A community enterprise providing kerbside recycling collection of compostable and recyclable material in a small area in Kent. They are proud to claim to be Britain's least wasteful community.

WyeCycle operates a kerbside collection service in Wye and the neighbouring village of Brook, accepting a wide range of recyclable items from paper and cans to paint and cookers. Through WyeCycle's work, households in the two villages produce around 250kg of rubbish per year, compared to the UK average of 1000kg. This means that Ashford Council, the local waste collection authority, only has to make fortnightly collections.

WyeCycle also takes organic waste, kitchen scraps and garden matter, though it does charge for this service. The waste is then composted nearby and sold back to the community.

Other initiatives undertaken by WyeCycle in the field of waste management include monthly swap days, where people can help themselves to each other's unwanted items, and a scheme offering new parents £28 to buy re-usable nappies. WyeCycle has also teamed up with local hardware store Leppers to offer a container refill service.

As well as being active in waste management, WyeCycle also promotes the benefits to the environment and the local economy of buying local food, direct from its producers. To this end, WyeCycle co-ordinates a fortnightly farmers market in Wye. Here you will find a wide range of organic and GM-free products all from within 30 miles of the village.

C.4 Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group (HHEAG)

HHEAG is a community led charity working on health and environmental issues in the Hartcliffe area of Bristol, through a variety of projects and activities, using a participatory, self-help approach. Hartcliffe is a large estate (population 24,000) built in the 1950s: it is right on the edge of the city, has some serious social problems and is an SRB 5 area.

HHEAG aim to 'work on health and environmental issues locally by:

- bringing local people and workers together to help change things
- setting up self-help and support groups to meet local health and environmental needs
- working together on issues which affect people's lives
- giving members of the local community the opportunity to speak with and influence people who make decisions about the area'

This combination of health, environment, local needs and empowerment forms a good basis for local sustainability.

The project has been running since 1990. At the start they concentrated on small, 'quick win' projects, such as clean ups, and working with external decision-makers relevant to Hartcliffe. Now the group works on a wide range of activities including community swims, walks and line dancing, through practical environmental work and many healthy eating activities to information days and training and support work to contribute to better employment opportunities for local people.

They have also given rise to projects that are now independent, for example a mental health forum, and a partnership project with local farmers formed to help protect the rural hill adjacent to Hartcliffe. They currently have three part-time staff and receive funding from health, regeneration and environmental sources.

C.5 Be Fikr

Translating to Warm and Cosy, Be Fikr is a project run by Hazrat Sultan Bahu Trust around a local mosque in the Balsall heath area of Birmingham. It promotes home improvement and energy efficiency to local people especially Muslim women, many of whom speak little or no English and may be in purdah.

The Hazrat Sultan Bahu Trust is a registered charity operating in the UK since 1982. Its head office is in Balsall Heath, with a further five centres around the UK. The organisation has its roots in Pakistan and has a centuries' old tradition of providing social welfare. On site facilities include a college, a workshop and training facility, a mosque and a small independent boys school.

Balsall Heath is an area of Birmingham an area of intense deprivation and with one of the highest levels of unemployment in the country. It contains a lot of privately-owned (by members of the Asian communities) terraced houses in relatively poor and dilapidated conditions, which are not eligible for any available public funding for repairs and maintenance . Awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency is generally lower in Asian communities.

The project's stated aims and objectives are:

- What is being taught relates to the trainees and is therefore real and beneficial to their lives
- To improve the quality of life by creating a safe and secure home environment

- Partnership creation with Warm Front and Primary Care teams to engage all sectors of the community

The Be Fikr project addresses cultural and faith issues which are often overlooked. The need for gender separation requires dedicated training space, same sex tutors etc. The project aims to give all women equal opportunity – including women following the tradition of Purdah which because of its specific requirements usually results in exclusion from most types of education and training as soon as girls reach puberty. Acquiring knowledge and basic training in energy-saving and simple DIY skills is a valuable part of community empowerment and is an area where others, particularly individuals with English as a first language, might take for granted.

The Project started in late 2002. To maximise the impact of the project the Trust has found it necessary to select potential beneficiaries with a certain level of literacy and writing skills, so that these people can also pass on what they've learnt to others. There is high demand - one out of twenty applicants gains a place. The training courses are open to all within the local community, not just those following the Islamic faith. Community languages used in the teaching include Urdu, Mirpuri (an oral, not a written language), Punjabi and English.