



## **DEVIZES COMMUNITY AREA PARTNERSHIP**

### **MID-YEAR REPORT TO SUPPORT CLAIM FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> TRANCHE OF FUNDING FROM AREA BOARD**

#### **Public Consultation for new Community Area Plan**

A questionnaire was distributed to nearly 11,500 homes in the Devizes Community Area in the spring of 2011. To keep costs down the majority of these were delivered by hand, with help from several individuals and some Parish Councils. The logistics of organising such a large scale distribution were challenging, without any designated office space. This is something to be taken into consideration when planning future consultations of this size. The questionnaire was also available via the DCAP website.

With inspiration from the questions set for a similar survey in Salisbury, each thematic group prepared a page of questions. Space was provided at the end of the questionnaire for further comments on the survey and on the draft Community Area Plan, which was available to view online, or (on request) by post.

Nearly 3000 responses were received, indicating the level of interest shown by local people in having their say on priorities for the future. Several individuals were paid to input the data from paper responses into the online survey to facilitate analysis. DCAP is grateful to Andrew Jack for the enormous amount of support received in setting up the online questionnaire and in collating the data obtained from the responses.

Given the extraordinary level of feedback from the public, it was felt that organising discussions in focus groups during the summer would not significantly add to the picture which had already emerged. Also, several groups which had been invited to act as focus groups, did not take up the opportunity. (An exception to this was the opportunity for a Steering Group member to speak at the Devizes Partnership of Churches AGM, encouraging participation in the consultation). Overall, it was decided that focus groups might play a more significant role once a new draft of a Plan was ready.

A separate questionnaire was devised for children and completed by youngsters in school, facilitated by Stephanie Davis, the Extended Schools Co-ordinator. This questionnaire was based on a model used in Marlborough, simply asking pupils to describe what they liked and disliked most about their neighbourhood, and what they would like to see changed. Due to the time taken to engage with each school in the Community Area, identifying an appropriate time for the questionnaires to be completed, this part of the consultation is taking longer to complete. Most of the schools have now taken part, but due to the nature of the individually written answers (rather than tick boxes) full analysis is taking longer than expected. However, prominent themes are already emerging from those responses already received, and are helping to confirm issues and priorities for the new Community Area Plan.

The thematic groups of DCAP (incorporating a wide cross-section of public and voluntary bodies) have been studying the data from the replies to the household questionnaire (individual written comments have yet to be analysed fully), and have been drawing out the key themes and priorities for the future. These priorities were presented in summary form to the DCAP meeting on December 5<sup>th</sup>. Partners asked useful questions which helped to clarify and crystallise the thinking of the groups. DCAP now intends to consult local groups about these proposed priorities before adding the necessary detailed strategy to finalise the Plan. DCAP will particularly be consulting groups of people whose voices were under-represented in the initial survey replies (e.g. young adults).

DCAP intends to produce a newsletter in this financial year, but is delaying it so as to maximise the quality of the feedback on the consultation. The intention is to produce it at the beginning of February for distribution later that month. As well as including the results of the household questionnaire and schools' questionnaire, prominence will be given to the proposed priorities for the new Plan. DCAP is considering whether to produce a separate newsletter for the schools or include a special insert in the main newsletter.

### **Wiltshire Core Strategy**

DCAP's AGM in June provided an opportunity to hear about Wiltshire Council's draft Core Strategy from Carolyn Gibson. A key issue for the Devizes Area is the impact of the current and future increase in housing on the local infrastructure. DCAP's thematic groups are asking searching questions about how to reduce traffic congestion, and limit the associated air pollution which is potentially damaging to health.

Four of DCAP's thematic groups (Housing, Health & Social Care, Transport and Culture & Leisure) prepared responses to the draft Core Strategy. The predominant concern was the plan for further housing development before issues of infra-structure, congestion and pollution had been addressed. The Housing & Built Environment Group submitted an addendum to its initial comments on the draft Wiltshire Core Strategy, focused specifically on new areas of development which had emerged since the draft Core Strategy was produced.

### **Thematic Groups**

**The following paragraphs describe the areas in which groups have been working (aside from the Area Plan consultation and the Wiltshire Core Strategy)**

#### **Devizes Community Area Safety Committee**

The Devizes Community Area Safety Committee has met quarterly through the year, with some meetings being open to the public. At each meeting new policing priorities have been shared. Other key themes and actions include:

- Hearing about the reshaping of Wiltshire Police as a result of funding cuts
- Receiving information about the new non-emergency 101 number
- Inviting local businesses to contribute financially to the provision of CCTV in Devizes following the withdrawal Wiltshire Council's half of the funding
- Receiving reports from Pubwatch
- Touch2id
- Safer Schools Partnership

#### **Culture and Leisure**

Key themes and actions through the year:

- Studying and responding to Wiltshire Council's 13-19 year old strategy
- Concerns about provision of tourist information following the closure of the Visitor Centre
- Acknowledging the need for greater communication of the wide variety of cultural and leisure activities currently available for young people
- The need for transport links from rural areas to leisure venues.
- Dialogue with the Area Board and Wiltshire about responsibility for signage.
- Concerns about the allocation of Section 106 money
- Complexities of funding, particular burdensome forms
- Possibilities of linking with the Marlborough Art Trail

## **Transport**

Key themes and actions through the year:

- Cycling Strategy – urgency in light of the imminent move of St. Peter's School to a new site at Quakers Walk. The Group's Chair gave a presentation of the group's proposed routes within Devizes at the January Area Board meeting. The cycling strategy is seen as a phased project. The longer term desire is to see the development of cycle links to and between the villages. Funding appears to be a hindrance. Extra cycle racks in the centre of town are also being requested.
- Serious concerns about air pollution caused by traffic congestion, with searching questions being asked at high levels about the impact on health, and the apparent lack of enforcement of legislation in regard to emissions.
- The need for schools and large employers to set up their green travel plans, with the hope of establishing a dialogue and working together to find long-term solutions
- Discussions about the benefit of car sharing schemes.
- Information from Kennet Passengers about the production of 'spider maps' for bus shelters and also pocket guides
- Information from Kennet Passengers about sources of travel information following the closure of the Devizes Visitor Centre
- The importance of the new traffic model being robust and able to forecast the impact of any proposed new developments.

## **Health and Social Care**

The Health & Social Care Forum met twice in October after a break of several months. It was beneficial to have Maggie Rae, Director of Public Health for Wiltshire in attendance for part of the first meeting. Representatives from NHS Wiltshire and Wiltshire Council have been supportive, and the presence of new members from different organisations has given the group new vigour and resolve. Maggie Rae was keen to support initiatives in which the community felt empowered to be part of the solution to local challenges. There was also discussion about preparation for the handover from the PCT to Clinical Commissioning Groups in 2013. A 'legacy document' would ensure continuity of priorities. The group reflected on the data received from the DCAP consultation and that already in circulation in the JSA document, noting priorities for the future. Key concerns are the need for additional GP facilities to match population increase, and the desire to see the NHS land at Green Lane ringfenced in the legacy document for medical facilities.

## **Housing and the built environment**

Cllr Rick Rowland took on the chairmanship of this group during the year.

Key themes and actions through the year:

- The need for affordable, sustainable housing
- The link between employment opportunities and the type of housing available, to reduce the impact of commuting.
- The need to challenge developers to provide infrastructure before increasing the population
- The need for green spaces within developments

Emphasis has been put on supporting issues and actions with statistical evidence wherever possible. The DCAP survey has made an important contribution.

## **Countryside & Land-based**

Key themes and actions through the year:

- Work was undertaken with British Waterways and other partners seeking to develop tourism opportunities at the Caen Hill locks.
- The information gathered from the survey about the way the community use the countryside and its view of the condition of rights of way has already proved useful in determining the group's priorities.

## **Economy**

The Economy group has been in abeyance since Mitch Roberts' contract as Town Centre Manager came to an end. Thanks are due to Mitch for his work for DCAP and DDP. In November 2011 Tony Sedgwick temporarily facilitated this group with help from other Steering Group members in order to draw out priorities for the new Community Area Plan. DCAP is pleased to welcome Simon Jacobs as the new Chairman of this group from December 2011 and looks forward to the experience he brings from the business world. It has been noted that this group would now benefit from the insights of those with expertise and experience in the field of promoting the use of high-speed broadband in business, and promoting tourism.

Rapid progress has been made and the Group has presented its preliminary plans at the December DCAP Meeting. This envisages a three-fold approach to safeguarding and improving the economy of the area.

- The creation of a range of new high value jobs within the Area so that future expansion can be genuinely employment led.
- An increase in tourism which currently has a value to the Area of circa £30M p.a.
- The retention of existing jobs in the retail and service industries despite the inevitable reduction in the number of public sector jobs.

The Group is now evaluating its ideas in each of these areas by discussing them with various businessmen and prominent citizens.

## **Parish Council Forum**

The Parish Council Forum has met five times during the year. At the end of its pilot year (May) it was agreed that the Forum should continue and Terms of Reference were agreed. Cllr Paula Winchcombe was elected as Chairman and Cllr Mervyn Woods as Vice-Chairman. It was agreed that up to six PCF members would be elected to speak for the PCF at DCAP meetings.

During the year there have been presentations about tourism possibilities, part-night lighting, Emergency Planning, and Wiltshire Compact.

There have been discussions about Localism, Neighbourhood Plans, the Core Strategy, funding for Jubilee events, expectations of Parish Stewards (this item to be followed up with a presentation at the January 2012 meeting).

The Parish Council Forum is currently offering to facilitate an information sharing event for Parish Clerks.

## **Miscellaneous**

Members of the steering group planned to attend a Wharf stakeholder meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

DCAP welcomed Peter Baxter to its September meeting and took the opportunity to understand more about the draft Wiltshire Compact as a working agreement between the public and voluntary sectors. Partners were encouraged to offer their comments about the draft document before the consultation deadline.

## **Relationship with Area Board**

Throughout the year DCAP has been seeking to strengthen its working relationship with the Area Board. Chris Williams gave a useful presentation at a DCAP meeting, highlighting the priorities needed in that relationship. Area Board members now take part in DCAP's thematic groups.

Unfortunately despite numerous meetings and requests DCAP is still not invited to attend or participate in the Area Board planning meetings. It is hoped that this situation will change in the future and that Area Board will in future work more closely with DCAP.

The involvement of officials from Wiltshire Council has with some notable exceptions been less forthcoming than we would have hoped for.