

BRADFORD ON AVON AREA BOARD

**WILTSHIRE COUNCIL
20 SEPTEMBER 2009**

AGENDA ITEM 5

BRADFORD ON AVON COMMUNITY AREA PARTNERSHIP: SUMMARY REPORT FOR AREA BOARD

BACKGROUND:

The Community Area Partnership last produced a Community Plan in 2005. The members felt that the Partnership had suffered from a loss of focus and momentum and that the creation of a Unitary Authority with its concomitant Area Boards had prompted a rethink about the effective purpose of the Partnership. As Jim Lynch had been previously involved in an assessment of Community Area Partnerships across Wiltshire on behalf of WFCAP, he was a very welcome applicant for the post of Partnership Officer. His appointment will particularly enable him to assist the Partnership in resolving this situation.

He subsequently made a number of recommendations to the Partnership:

1. That the structure/constitution of the Partnership, i.e. a 16 member steering group, was unwieldy and operationally difficult to sustain and should be replaced by a Core Management Group liaising with and reporting to a more flexible network/alliance of organisations, represented by 'Thematic Champions' across the Community Area.
2. That the current membership had become an 'ad hoc' grouping based on historical accident rather than current activity/priority and should, in effect, be disbanded and start afresh.
3. That the traditional concept of an overarching Community Area Plan, involving significant input/authorship by the Partnership needed to be revised. The community area has a much higher organisational capability in many directions (e.g. the environment, economic development and transport, as well as specific issues in individual parishes, etc.) than was the case when the Partnership was originally founded. In these key areas, the role of the Partnership as a producer of community priorities had been effectively superseded. It should concentrate, instead, more on liaison and collation of existing action plans and community priorities, and the coherent publication and dissemination of such material.
4. This shift in operational priority further emphasised the need for a change in structure. Instead of a 'steady state' fixed membership with large-scale set meetings, generalised agendas and so forth, there was a need for a more dynamic, flexible network which would alter according to current activity, project and purpose. This needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency if the Partnership was to justify its existence (and funding).

At a meeting of the CAP Steering Group on 10th June, the above issues were discussed and generally agreed. Accordingly, the Steering Group agreed to a temporary suspension and gave its backing to a Core Management Group to address these issues, explore potential solutions, and report back when sufficient progress had been made to enable, hopefully, a fresh approach which will allow the Community Area Partnership to be more fit for purpose in the current context.

PROGRESS TO DATE:

Within the limited time available to Jim (approx. a day per week) and the traditional difficulties of holding meetings during the summer months, we have begun to forge a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm. This is however, to speak plainly, quite a tricky process! Some meetings have been with groups whose view of the Partnership as previously constituted is somewhat jaundiced. Other meetings are with those who have had little or no historical affiliation with the Partnership, have no interest in it's past, and simply wish to understand if a Partnership might benefit them in the future.

He has, therefore, been keen to establish a contemporary relevance which might act as a bridge between these different perspectives and enable us to quickly establish a sense of common purpose. What is uppermost in everybody's mind, understandably, across all areas, is the potential impact on their activities of the forthcoming 'Age of Austerity'. It seems inevitable, whether via County-based cutbacks or national budgetary reviews, that the capability of services, projects, facilities and funding will be severely tested during the coming years.

He has discussed these issues with a number of key groups and individuals and there is an emerging consensus that the Community Area Partnership could perform a valuable service by coordinating an assessment, over time, of the impact of these changes on the community as a whole. It could also, in due course, provide an impartial platform for a positive coordinated response. He has, as it were, 'road-tested' this with, amongst others, Churches Together, the Senior Citizens Forum and the Tourism Association. All three bodies have responded enthusiastically and are very keen to be involved. The proposed project has also attracted support from the Wiltshire Forum of Community Area Partnerships (WFCAP), which is currently discussing this with Partnerships across the County and working on a shared template for the collation and dissemination of such material.

As well as being practically relevant, such an activity could well provide the Bradford on Avon Partnership with a readymade platform for renewal. A number of potential 'Theme Champions' have already indicated their willingness to become personally involved. If there is a general willingness to proceed in this direction, we are confident, based on feedback so far, that we will emerge with a format which combines the material for a traditional Community Area Plan with a shared template for assessing and responding to the challenges ahead.

To assist the core group, Michael Collins has been appointed on a part-time 6-month contract as an expert in tracking, guiding and communicating activities in this type of enterprise. We would hope to be in a position to report positive progress, as indicated, to the November meeting of the Bradford on Avon Community Area Board.