



**Background:** Having had a history of Community Planning in the town since 1999, MCAP was set-up to fulfil the new Unitary Authority's remit of proving local community engagement. The CAP was created by a thorough process which involved a series of public meetings to a) inform the community of the developments taking place, b) create a wide network of residents and organisations to ensure best representation and inclusivity and c) to have a democratic process where by all could put themselves forward and/or help choose the people to sit on the core group that would lead the work.

The whole process was supported by WfCAP, Wiltshire Council, their Community Area Manager for Melksham and a consultant brought in by the Council specifically to help ensure the CAP were created in time for the start of the Unitary Council as it was seen to be essential to the new structure. The CAP would be a key player and would be a partner in community planning and development; tasked with informing, assisting and challenging the Area Board.

**The CAP:** In the four years since being established MCAP have maintained a core group of between 12 and 20 members. Within this number approx. 50% have continued throughout which gives the CAP consistency, maintains local knowledge, ensures relationships are kept and built on, provides a recognisable 'face' to the group in the community and passes on expertise to new members. But of equal importance the rest of the group has rotated, providing fresh blood and therefore new ideas, new challenges and an increased skill base as well as ensuring the group are open to all; upholding the ethos that anyone from the community can get involved in steering the CAP forward.

The group is headed up by a Chair Chris Holden and Vice Chair Colin Goodhind who, through all personnel changes within the core group, have been re-nominated and elected by their co-workers each year to continue leading the CAP. Both are well respected, thoroughly involved members of their community and previously local councillors. They live in the area, are in touch with local issues and are familiar faces to the community. They both have a variety of interests and passions which they get involved in through the CAP's working groups and partners and as professionals they have a vast skill base they bring to the CAP.

The Melksham coordinator has recently created a comprehensive skills audit to try to analyse any gaps the partnership may have to help target recruitment of new volunteers. The audit is also useful in realising the potential of the members they already have. Often people join groups or organisations for a specific reason or role and have hidden talents necessary for their professional life or their hobbies that the group is unaware of and which they may not necessarily consider of benefit until it's raised in this way. WfCAP are looking at how they can use this template to help other CAPs.

**Consultation:** Over the last four years MCAP's consultation programme has set a real standard. As a new CAP there wasn't a current Community Plan in existence when they formed and so they had to begin from scratch. Over an 18 month period the CAP built up a vast network of contacts, linked with existing groups and attended meetings that covered the main themes of community planning. Where there were gaps, they started up theme groups. Through a series of public meetings plus holding stalls at village fetes, in the town centre and at events like the carnival, the CAP gained publicity and the respect of the



community. This face-to-face consultation helped raise many of the local issues and also gained further insight into some of the known and perceived problems - opening up local knowledge which supported or sometimes conflicted or explained the statistical evidence for the area.

As well as these more generic events the CAP toured the various organisations and clubs within the town and parishes to talk on more specific issues and again inform local data. With all this evidence collated the CAP then produced a full consultation survey which was delivered to every address in the community area, giving all residents the opportunity to respond, prioritise and add to the issues previously raised. A follow up survey, rating the issues and needs, took place and the results became the new Community Plan. In addition to this the CAP were asked by concerned members of the community to carry out an in-depth consultation into the proposed community campus. The area board approved this and the results were fundamental in the decision on location.

**Community Planning:** The Community Plan was published in the Autumn of 2011 which coincided perfectly with the new community area level JSA document release. Melksham CAP were ahead of the game and so their coordinator, along with the Area Board's Community Manager organised the first of the county's JSA events, a full two months before any other area. The format of the evening was used by the JSA event steering group to produce a template as best practice guide for the other areas to all follow in Melksham's footsteps.

The event was attended by over 100 people, from local residents to experts from various public and voluntary sector organisations. Following this event the CAP then reviewed the plan against the JSA document and the new feedback and republished an updated version. From this, a comprehensive Action Plan was produced with SMART objectives and specific people/groups tasked with leading on each item. This plan is a living document and the CAP continuously review and update it as they and their partners address the issues. A review of the action plan is a standard agenda item.

Essential to the success of MCAP's community planning is the fact that they continuously feed back to their community. By keeping an on-going two-way dialogue, they are informing of progress on all issues and projects so that the community feel they're not just being listened to but also having their issues addressed. This is fundamental in consultation and the CAP has nurtured that relationship. This has resulted in gaining the trust of the local community therefore making the process going forward more efficient and robust.

**Communication:** Melksham CAP's communication strategy has ensured the success of the consultation. Along with the face-to-face meetings and events plus the surveys they sent out, Melksham also used their website to attract another audience that were more likely to contribute online. MCAP make use of social media to promote the consultations and lead people to their website or inform of meetings/events. Again, the Twitter and Facebook accounts help to bring in a new audience that wouldn't necessarily interact through meetings or written surveys. MCAP also produce regular mailshots that come through the website to inform their whole contact list of new updates or events.



**Connections:** Without reiterating the full-report of Melksham's work, links and projects important just to mention how thoroughly the CAP have connected with the whole community. They have offered administration to the new YAG and have always been closely linked with various youth groups in the area, supporting them with projects and gaining their views on all issues. There is a strong over-55's forum run by a CAP member and helped by CAP support and occasional funding. Many of the parishes are engaged through the local councils and local residents sit on the CAP steering group or attend the public meetings. Attendance at villages' events and 'cake & chat' visits have helped ensure the villages are not sidelined and the CPA do not become town-centric. The CAP has also worked closely with the local schools through the campus consultation and on various initiatives.

**Innovation:** Melksham's website was created through IT grant funding from the old Development Trust. It has been developed and designed to a high standard to ensure usability and to work as an interactive tool rather than just an information site. Melksham are also now using a revolutionary new piece of software to develop online participation in consultation. MCAP were chosen as the pilot for this scheme which is being run in just two places in the UK. MCAP also brought the innovative identification scheme Touch 2ID to Wiltshire, piloting in local retailers and pubs. These initiatives have been able to be shared across other CAPs – Touch 2ID has been taken up in other areas and CAP's have been very interested in the website and online surveying. Melksham CAP have taken every opportunity to help share their experiences and ideas with the other CAPs and are always involved in WfCAP meeting, events and shared learning sessions – contributing and taking back suggestions to forward their own work.

**Coordinator:** MCAP, like all the Community Partnerships have a part-time paid coordinator. Taking on a person in this role was encouraged by the Council to the extent that they added it as a guideline within the CAPA document. Over the 4 years of Unitary Council and CAP's having the increased role and workload, all of them have recruited someone to coordinate and manage the work. It has been evident during this time that there is a direct correlation between productivity and the CAP having a coordinator. Now that all CAPs have someone in place there is a clear step up in activity since 2009.

The CAPs rely on the good will, hard work and enthusiasm of hundreds of amazing volunteers but all of these people will have times when their commitment is restricted due to their own employment and other issues – they are of course assisting the CAP in their spare time. Having the coordinator ensures consistency. The consistency means regular communication is kept up, there's a dedicated person to be the main contact for all enquiries and they become (if not already) a well-known face in their community.

Melksham have been lucky in that, over 4 years they have had 2 coordinators (the first being recruited to the Town Council who recognised the excellent work put in with the CAP) and both have been a real credit to the partnership and vital in the CAP's ability to achieve to the standard it does. Phil McMullen who has been in post for just over a year has continued the excellent work of his predecessor whilst making the job his own. He has lived in Melksham years and so familiar with the place, people and its make-up. Alongside the CAP role he is also founder and curator of the Melksham Museum, a music events coordinator – (bringing a new festival to the local economy this summer), secretary of the Trans-Wilts

Community Rail Partnership, Chamber of Commerce and local cricket clubs amongst other local voluntary roles. This shows the connections and community engagement already



captured through this role. It illustrates that by having someone like this – local, with heavy involvement and knowledge of the locality – as well as being organised, efficient and skilled at their job, and having established relationships across the area, the CAP is already halfway there when needing to go out to the community for consultation or information. And it of course means that kick-starting local action and projects is far easier and more effective.

And as with many of the coordinators across the county, by spending a small amount on a part-time worker the CAPs are generally securing both paid work and an additional volunteer. Basically, the majority of these people working with the CAPs are natural enthusiasts and 'do-ers' and have taken the job because of the role and the community. Phil is one of these and puts in hours far exceeding those he is paid for so on a value for money basis the CAP gets an invaluable resource that really does operate as the hub and catalyst for all the local action with just the outlay of the core-funding grant. Having this coordinator role also means it's easier for WfCAP to engage with a key member, and the same member, on a consistent basis and bring them together to share best practice county wide.

**Wiltshire:** WfCAP has put an emphasis on sharing knowledge and achievements between the CAPs over the last couple years. Often initiated by one of the partnerships we've convened meetings on theme subjects to help CAPs work closer together, learn from each other, share skills and resources and ultimately be more efficient, productive and successful. Melksham CAP have been highly involved in transport planning through the Trans-Wilts group and over the last 18 months have really put a focus on public transport issues – both rail and buses. They've helped the successes of timetable changes in bus routes to & from Bath, increased bus services to Bristol airport and secured reviews of new train and better road links. MCAP requested WfCAP help link them to other CAPs working on similar projects and so ongoing information sharing and joint-working takes place amongst CAPs. This is just one of many examples where MCAP have worked with other CAPs to increase output. Along with the Corsham CAP, Melksham have given time and information to the other partnerships to aid in the campus consultation process and ensure that as the other projects are rolled out the COBs can learn directly from what worked and what didn't in the areas that have gone through the process already. All of this joint working helps to increase activity Wiltshire wide through encouragement, resources and sharing of experiences.