

Report to WB&C Area Board  
Community Planning Project

Julia Stacey

Background

Decision made at the WB&C Area Board meeting 24<sup>th</sup> March 2010

“A separate workshop be convened to design the new structure and the event to take place within 30 days of the Area Board meeting. The options to be circulated to all town and parish councils before the workshop”.

The following work has been carried out since the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March

A preliminary meeting was held at Marsh Farm Hotel on 27<sup>th</sup> April. The Area Board, town councils and the community area partnership met with Steve Milton Head of Community Governance, Wiltshire Council. It was agreed at that meeting that the project should go ahead to develop new community planning arrangements and be carried out by part-time CPO (Julia Stacey).

Project Objectives

- To bring together representatives from towns and parishes and community groups across the community area to explore the options for new community planning arrangements.
- To identify and develop a community planning model with ‘by-in’ from as many of the aforementioned as possible, which will work for the community area.
- To identify resources and possible processes required for the implementation of the developed model.
- To communicate with, and seek engagement and support from, the aforementioned groups during the project.
- To ensure that there is an agreed and sustainable delivery plan for the new arrangements in place, and that an exit strategy is agreed at the end of the project.

A workshop event for parish and town councils and community groups to explore options for revised community planning arrangements, was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June.

Attendees explored the way that the community area and its individual communities worked and communicated successfully. Different aspects and functions of the community planning process were explored, and how the could work more effectively in the community area.

The main outcomes from the workshop were as follows:

Throughout the community area there exist a variety of successful local organisations and clubs, which effectively engage people with shared interests.

The requirement was acknowledged for a robust and relevant community plan which was representative of the wider community. It was agreed that in order

to achieve this, there should be an organised and co-ordinated approach, which could best be achieved by a dedicated project worker.

It was agreed that joint working between the Area Board, town and parish councils, and other groups, should be driven by specific projects or issues. There was a need for a flexible model enabling stakeholders to come together as issues arise.

It was agreed that a variety of mechanisms should be utilised to achieve effective communications throughout the community area. It was suggested that there should be an investment of time and resources into engagement through social media, so that this could function alongside more traditional communication methods.

Following the workshop and meetings between CPO and other interested parties a menu of options was developed for consultation. Town and parish councils and community groups were invited to meet with CPO to consider and discuss these options.

Feedback has been received from the following:

Broad Town Parish Council, Cricklade Town Council, Lydiard Millicent Parish Council, Lydiard Tregoz Parish Council, NCAP, Purton Parish Council, Wootton Bassett Town Council.

#### Outline proposals

In the current economic climate, funding levels in the future are not guaranteed, therefore any model should be sustainable.

#### Option 1 (preferred)

- Appointment of a paid part-time community planning support officer to plan, co-ordinate and facilitate activities across the area (initially until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011)

The officer would be commissioned to work independently of the Area Board, in line with community planning principles, but to adhere to a work-plan with expected outcomes as agreed by the board. Updates to be presented at each area board meeting.

- Recruitment of local volunteers, each to be a key contact for specific activities and themes in the community planning process. Those themes would include

Engaging and informing parish councils, (parish councillor)

Young people's issues (Young people's champion?)

Older peoples issues (Age UK Older Peoples Champion?)

Environmental issues

On-line presence (development of website, social media, ideally school project)

Funding & fundraising

These volunteers should already be active and involved in the community, and ideally engaged with local groups.

The activities and the volunteers should also reflect the current priorities and projects as identified in the community plan.

- Development of a more concise, robust and accessible web-based community area plan template. This to include main projects & themes for the whole community area, local projects for each town or village, including parish & town plans, and an evidence base, with links to relevant documents.

This option does not require a formally constituted CAP but emphasises a more flexible approach, where the project-worker & local volunteers come together with the appropriate agencies and stakeholders to form working

Groups, as required, and in response to actions deriving from the community plan, and projects identified.

The officer would be responsible for co-ordinating and maintaining the community plan, and working groups as required.

If this model is adopted, it is recommended that NCAP be disbanded and individual members of the steering group to be invited to become key volunteers as outlined above.

Funding requirement for option 1 relates to a paid part-time project-worker. This worker initially funded from available CAP funds, but potentially funding from other sources could be sought.

#### Option 1 Feed back

To date this option has only had negative feedback. Reasons given as follows:

If volunteers were not forthcoming then it would be waste of resource and funds.

The model depends upon the successful recruitment of volunteers, and in the light of previous efforts this was considered to be a difficult task.

The engagement of a project officer would be costly on a sustainable basis, particularly in present times of financial restraint.

#### Option 2

- The NCAP group to be re-formed with a new name, which would represent Cricklade and surrounding parishes.
- A second CAP to be formed, which would represent Wootton Bassett and surrounding parishes.

- Responsibilities and geographic coverage of these two CAP's to be agreed, and parishes align themselves to one of the two new partnerships. An appropriate CAP work-plan to be delivered by each CAP.
- Revision of community plan template to be agreed and both CAP's to contribute to its content and its development.
- Both CAPs to ensure that their active membership was fully representative of their assigned parishes.

This model does not reflect the desire, unanimously expressed by the participants of the c p workshop, to appoint a paid worker to co-ordinate activities.

However the newly formed CAPs may agree to fund a worker who would co-ordinate activities across the whole community area.

This model does require levels of bureaucracy, which may be difficult to sustain.

Funding for option 2 relates to administration and running costs for the 2 CAPs.

#### Option 2 Feedback

The view was expressed that this model would be difficult both to co-ordinate, and to reconcile the two town councils' differing views. Forming two CAPs would mean recruiting more volunteers (which has proved difficult for the existing partnership, in the past.)

Concern was expressed over who would be responsible for reconciling any differing views or requirements, from the 2 partnerships.

The view was expressed that this model would probably perpetuate problems experienced in the past.

#### Option 3

- The existing CAP (NCAP) to continue
- NCAP to expand its active steering group membership to be fully representative of the community area
- NCAP to agree its work-plan and outcomes with the area board

This model duplicates what has been tried in the past without success and therefore has little merit as a revised model.

#### Option 3 Feedback

Although this option was preferred by some parish councils, they felt it to be unworkable and unlikely to achieve success.

#### Option 4

- A part-time project worker (as option 1)
- A new group to be formed with structure made up of representatives from each of the parishes. This group to meet 6/12, facilitated by the project worker
- Area board to acknowledge the group as 'official' voice of the community, and to invite representation and updates at AB meetings
- Project worker to facilitate upkeep of community plan with input from all the parishes and towns.

This model replicates parish alliance, or parish cluster groups. A concept which was explored, and thought to be inappropriate, by those attending the Community Planning workshop held in June.

However it does propose a single body to represent all the parishes, this would then give weight and credibility to any negotiations with the area board and statutory bodies, and encourage local ownership of the community plan.

#### Option 4 Feedback

This model has been well received by some parish councils. They have recognised that a single voice in shared issues will be beneficial and give more strength to the rural parishes. It does not rely upon recruiting new volunteers but builds upon the established work and existing strengths of the parish and town councils and their officers. It would encourage the sharing of experience and knowledge between the participating councils and could eliminate duplication.

It could also provide a platform for outside agencies and service providers to meet with the participating councils as a body, outside of normal council or Area Board meetings.

It was thought that the group would give continuity and personal interaction, which was vital to keep volunteers motivated. Regular meetings, if productive, would not become onerous.

One parish council considered it vital that a project worker be appointed. Two councils expressed the view that this model was not financially sustainable.

#### Further Feedback

The majority of councils have supported a further option.

This would take away the centralised community area planning approach thereby potentially cutting costs. This would negate the need for a Community Area Partnership and draw on town and parish community led plans. These could also feed in to the strategic planning of Wiltshire

Council and other agencies. It was considered this was more in line with the localism agenda and new Big Society approach. It could make more funding available to the Area Board for use as grants or other investment into the wider community.

Some councils agreed that NCAP be disbanded and that the funding allocation be made available for distribution directly to projects within the area. It was suggested that towns and parishes should be encouraged to submit their plans/wishes directly to the Area Board for consideration, and to seek Area Board advice and support for any additional funding requirements.

It was pointed out that there was a lack of cohesion and synergy between communities in such a large geographical area; but that there was scope for the towns and parishes to work together on common issues of concern, negating the need for a separate body to act on their behalf.

### Recommendations

In the light of responses to the proposals offered and after careful consideration the following recommendations are made:

- That the Community Area Partnership (NCAP) be disbanded and the Area Board reserve allocated core funding to support community planning activities in the area.
- That the Area Board support the engagement of a project worker to support community planning activities and the development of a more robust community plan for the community area.
- That a schedule of meetings be drawn up for representatives of all the parish and town councils to identify common areas of interest, and to work towards an updated and robust community plan, in accordance with recommendations from Wiltshire Council.
- That the Area Board actively support and encourage the development of individual parish and town community plans, and that these plans are integrated into the overall Community Plan for the area.
- That the Area Board continue its focus on working groups and task groups, e.g. NW Rural Buffer Task Group, Future of RAF Lyneham, Local Traffic & Highways Working Group, and the proposed parish & town group.
- That the formation of a new CAP for the area should not be undertaken at this time.

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