Rurality and empowerment

The benefits of community led planning for local authorities and local strategic partnerships and developing a consistent approach across the region

A REPORT ON THE APPROACH AND CASE STUDIES

Prepared by West Midlands Rural Community Action Network

March 2010
The National Empowerment Programme: Context and overview

The National Empowerment Programme (NEP) is a programme committed to supporting and improving empowerment activities across England. It gathers evidence of effective community empowerment activities and promotes the powerful benefits of involving communities in decisions that affect them. The focus is to provide a structure for empowerment activities and to steer and lead the empowerment agenda. In particular, it supports local authorities and community organisations to increase the number of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.

The NEP is managed by the Community Development Foundation and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Empowerment Partnerships

The practical work of the NEP is carried out by organisations working together in empowerment partnerships. There are nine empowerment partnerships across England and each one brings together a range of statutory agencies, voluntary and community organisations, networks and people who are running community empowerment activities. The partnerships use their collective expertise to support local authorities, statutory agencies and community organisations to work together. This helps to give more power to communities and local people to make decisions about what happens in the areas where they live.

RAWM was granted the contract to deliver one of the nine empowerment programmes in 2008. The West Midlands Empowerment Partnership is called Every Voice Counts (EVC) and its work is directed by the EVC Partnership Board. This Board has members from GOWM, IEWM, BIG Lottery, as well as two local authority NI4 representatives, and a range of voluntary sector organisations.

RAWM: Already engaged in a Big Society agenda

RAWM is a body that exists to support the voluntary and community sector in using their voice and their influence to engage with both government and the local agenda. All of RAWM’s projects originate from the need to provide an effective voluntary and community sector response to a changing environment. This quite often requires RAWM to not only manage the change environment, but to also provide strong leadership and, where appropriate and necessary, challenge behaviour and practice in a constructive manner.

RAWM’s role in the empowerment agenda in the West Midlands has been to promote empowerment, encourage partnership working, provide opportunities for communities and citizens to engage with local authority NI4 leads, link to voluntary and community organisations in their communities, and take part in activities to develop their voice and influencing. RAWM also highlights the huge variety of resources and opportunities that exist to enhance community engagement and participation and bring these resources together to be accessed to support the growth of the Big Society.

RAWM delivers the NEP alongside a number of other programmes, including the Target Support for Empowerment and Participation Improvement Fund (TSEPI) which is a two year programme complementing the work of the EVC, delivered through Local Authorities commissioning Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to feed into and improve priority needs in their local areas. RAWM also delivers projects around Sustaining Influence and Change (BIG Lottery), 2012 Sports Volunteering Project (Sport England and AWM), Regional Voices (DoH), Third Sector Economic Engagement Programme (AWM) and various infrastructure programmes funded by Capacity Builders.
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1. Introduction

The West Midlands Rural Community Action Network (WMRCAN) draws together the four Rural Community Councils (RCCs) operating in the region:

- Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- The Community Council of Shropshire
- The Community Council of Staffordshire
- Warwickshire Rural Community Council.

Each RCC member is an independent charitable organisation with its own broad range of membership organisations including parish councils, voluntary and community organisations and village halls. This means that WMRCAN has access through newsletters and mailings to over four thousand groups and individuals throughout the region.

The RCCs within WMRCAN have the common aims of promoting voluntary action and improving rural life. WMRCAN aims to ensure that rural need and issues are represented to regional bodies and agencies in an informed and co-ordinated way.

The development of WMRCAN is an ongoing process. It exists to:

- Assist RCCs in combating disadvantage and enhancing service delivery to local communities
- Reflect the interests of rural communities to regional partners
- Facilitate the engagement of local communities in the regional strategic agenda
- Share expertise and good practice among the four RCCs
- Build the capacity of the four RCCs to deliver services with equity across the region.

WMRCAN has been involved in the empowerment agenda since 2001 with the launch of the Parish Plan process. At both a local and regional level, the development of the Community Led Planning (CLP) process has been spearheaded by the RCCs.

The Rurality and Empowerment project built upon the work that had previously been undertaken by WMRCAN through the Every Voice Counts programme. This consisted of two previous reports:

Parish Plans, Community Empowerment and Engagement (April 2008)
How Community Led Planning can support the delivery of NI4* (April 2009)

The key recommendations from these reports included:

- Explore options for collaborative working across the region and explore and developing a common approach to development support across the region
- Explore how Community Led Plans can effectively feed into community strategies
- Consider a regional approach to strategic liaison with Local Authorities (LAs) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and develop a consistent approach across the region.

The findings from two evaluations undertaken by Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire were also taken into account when designing the project:

Parish Plan Review Herefordshire (2007)
An Evaluation of the Parish Plan process in Worcestershire (2007)

The key message coming from these evaluations was that people involved in the development of Parish Plans said that the biggest barrier to achieving empowerment was that LAs and LSPs did not effectively engage with Community Led Plans.

This project, therefore, aimed to find a way that LAs and LSPs could effectively engage and replicate engagement across the region in order to get maximum ‘buy in’ and support of the CLP process from LSPs and LAs. This, in turn, would lead to greater citizen empowerment as a result of being able to contribute to the process.

It had also emerged, from work undertaken by Hindle and McLean in 2009 which involved discussions with CLP workers in the region, that there were very different practises within CLP delivery across the region and areas of good practise that could be replicated.

* NI4 relates to the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
2. About the project

Aims

The Rurality and Empowerment project had two main aims:

1. Develop a briefing paper aimed at Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Authorities (LAs) to demonstrate the value of CLP through strategic engagement in the process. The briefing paper can be found at Appendix A to this report.

2. Develop a consistent approach across the region to engage with the statutory sector and LSPs and develop and support strategic engagement with CLP. A Guidance document has been produced to accompany this report and is available separately.

The briefing paper sets out to demonstrate how CLP can be used to support delivery against NI4 and how CLP can and will empower people, communities and service deliverers by:

• Offering people the chance to build their skills and confidence
• Giving people a chance to work together to improve their local environment
• Helping all sections of a community to understand each other better
• Generating collaborative activity and volunteering
• Attracting investment of time and money as a result of collective effort
• Bringing together communities and the individuals that represent them
• Bringing together service users and the people responsible for delivering services
• Creating the basis for an ongoing dialogue and relationship between individual communities and the public sector.

With regard to developing a consistent approach, specifically the project set out to:

• Develop CLP guidance
• Develop protocols for engagement with LSPs and LAs

• Explore current best practice with CLP workers in the region, in all the outlined areas of the process of engagement with CLPs by LSPs and LAs and in order to replicate effectively across the region
• Develop other areas identified through discussions with CLP as part of this project.

Methodology

The methodology for undertaking this work is outlined below. The two areas of work described in the aims of the project were separate and discrete projects and each are described below separately. However, both activities built upon and developed the work that had been undertaken in the previous two years of the EVC programme.

Developing a Briefing Paper for LAs and LSPs

The aim of this work was to build and develop the case to embed CLP into the work of LAs and LSPs and put CLP on to the mainstream agenda by developing an external paper aimed at LAs and LSPs. This was undertaken as a joint project with the County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) in the region, providing an evidence base and case studies to support the claims that CLP makes as to how it can support the empowerment and engagement agenda of LAs and LSPs.

Two face to face meetings took place, with each of the Chief Officers from the CALCs and the Chief Officers from WMRCAN and the WMRCAN Regional Co-ordinator. At these meetings, the scope of the project was discussed and it was agreed that each RCC and each CALC would produce a case study to demonstrate the claims made on the impact that CLP could have in supporting the delivery of NI4 and the areas this could influence for LAs and LSPs. The case studies were then included in a briefing paper (see Appendix A) which will serve as a tool for LAs and LSPs to better understand how CLP and engagement with this process can help support the delivery of NI4 and support more empowered communities.

Developing and Embedding a Consistent Approach to CLP Across the RCCs in the Region

Community Led Planning Development Workers from each of the RCCs were involved in this work. In addition to the five CLP workers and the WMRCAN Regional Co-ordinator, the
Community Engagement Officer for Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Phillip Vincent, also attended the meetings. Three face to face meetings were held.

**Meeting 1**
The initial meeting involved a ‘brainstorming’ exploratory session in which the issues of Community Led Planning were discussed in detail. The outcome of this first meeting was to develop a framework to explore regional consistency in more detail. The initial plan had been to develop and embed areas of good practice from around the region to develop a consistent approach to CLP across the region. However, through the initial discussion, it became clear that the external climate for delivering CLP in each of the five counties is very different. Instead, it was agreed that what would be useful on a regional level, in terms of a consistent approach would be to outline areas of good practice and produce a report in the form of best practise guidance, which could be used across the region as a tool for community development workers. A pro forma of key areas identified was produced and the CLP workers outlined the key issues in these areas for their own county. Areas of good practise that were identified through this project would be included in a report that CLP development workers could use to inform their work, and embed good practise into their work as appropriate.

**Meetings 2 and 3**
These meetings explored the issues identified at the first meeting in more detail and each RCC reported back, area by area on their current practises and the strengths and weaknesses of the approach as outlined in the pro forma. These discussions are reflected in the report and the supporting documents are included to demonstrate best practise in the areas highlighted.

Partners engaged in this project:

- **Local authorities** in: Staffordshire; Warwickshire; Herefordshire and Worcestershire; Shropshire; and district Councils in Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.
- **Local Strategic Partnerships** including: Herefordshire Partnership; Worcestershire Partnership; Staffordshire LSP; Warwickshire LSP; Shropshire LSP; and LSPs in Telford and Wrekin and Solihull.

These organisations will be sent copies of the briefing papers produced through this project and WMRCAN is seeking further funding to do some targeted work to embed the CLP work in these areas.
3. Achievements

The project produced two papers:

**Briefing paper**
*Community Led Planning: The benefits for local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships* (see Appendix).

**Guidance document**
*Community Led Planning: Developing a consistent approach across the region* (available as a separate document to accompany this report).

4. Recommendations

**Briefing paper – Community Led Planning:**
The benefits for local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships

This will be used by the RCCs as a tool to encourage LAs and LSPs to fully engage with the CLP process as a way of delivering against NI4 and to engage and empower local communities.

This programme of activity will support the delivery of NI4 by improving the quality of engagement and citizen empowerment activity by:

- Engaging LAs and LSPs in the CLP process
- Embedding a consistent regional approach to CLP based on the identification of best practice.

The briefing paper produced will be used to continually demonstrate the impact CLP can achieve and how engagement in this process can benefit LSPs and LAs in supporting the delivery of NI4 and empowering citizens.

The legacy of this project will be that these processes and tools are available to current and future CLP workers in the region. The legacy of the project for LSPs and LAs is that a more robust and effective way of engaging with the CLP process is established.

**Community Led Planning: Developing a consistent approach across the region**

After the life of the project, CLP workers in the region will have the tools, regional guidance and best practice approaches developed through the project to embed and carry forward in the future in order to ensure that CLP has the maximum impact on the ground in terms of empowering citizens.

Specific action is recommended as follows:

1. One year from the completion of this project, the outcomes are reviewed to see what changes have been made in the approaches to CLP in the region by CLP workers, LSPs and LAs and the difference this has made to local community groups in terms of empowerment.

Changes may be evident as follows:

» LSPs and LAs being more supportive of CLPs
» LSPs and LAs using evidence from CLPs to support the Sustainable Community Strategies
» Established processes being in place to receive and take actions on CLPs
» Communities receiving better support in the development and implementation of the CLPs
» Local volunteers feeling more supported and empowered.

2. In terms of developing regional consistency, it is recommended that regular regional meetings with CLP workers in the region are held to discuss:
   » Current issues
   » Best practise, countywide initiatives that can be replicated
   » National influence.
It is also recommended that the national organisation ACRE is present at these meetings along with the WMRCAN Regional Co-ordinator, to discuss the regional and national policy context and feedback regional issues that impact on CLP.

3. It is recommended that this guidance is used and embedded in the work of CLP across the region.

4. It is recommended that this guidance is fed into national development on CLP through ACRE to support the work undertaken on a national level.

WMRCAN is seeking resources to support the above recommendations and embed this work through the LAs and LSPs in the region.

5. Acknowledgements

WMRCAN would like to acknowledge the support given through the development of this project. In particular to:

- Regional Action West Midlands: Pauline Dutton
- Community First: Richard Quallington, Karen Humphries, Sophie Pryce
- Community Council of Staffordshire: Chris Welch, Andy Halden
- Warwickshire Rural Community Council: Kay Wilson, Steve Patalong
- Shropshire Rural Community Council: Julia Baron, Jessica Grudgings
- Herefordshire Partnership: Chris Gooding
- Alison McLean and Rob Hindle
- ACRE: Phillip Vincent
- Herefordshire Association for Local Councils: Lynda Wilcox
- County Association of Local Councils in Warwickshire: Alison Hodge
- County Association of Local Councils in Worcestershire: Richard Levett
- County Association of Local Councils in Staffordshire: Viv Evans
- County Association of Local Councils in Shropshire: Karen Roper
- EVC for supporting this initiative.
Appendix:
Briefing paper – Community Led Planning: The benefits for local authorities and local strategic partnerships

Community Led Planning
The benefits for Local Authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships

What is Community Led Planning?
Community led planning is a process where all sections of a community work together, to develop and then implement a set of actions designed to improve their shared space and the opportunities it provides.

What makes Community Led Planning distinctive is that, done well, it involves building the relationship between service providers and local communities as part of the plan development itself. Because it is made up of actions to be taken on by local volunteers, community groups, local government and other service providers, it produces more impressive results than can be achieved through a top-down approach to consultation by local government to feed their own strategic plans. A community led plan challenges local people to say what part they can play in improving their own local neighbourhood and builds the capacity of local community groups to respond. Additional benefits are that the proposed actions and solutions have already been tested out and are more likely to be realistic and achievable by all partners working together.

What benefits does Community Led Planning generate?
Encouraging and helping your communities to engage in community led planning will deliver direct and positive benefits, not only for the communities involved but for the territory as a whole.

Your communities will become stronger and more self-reliant. Community led planning helps build strong, resilient and self-sufficient communities. You will get help from local communities in the delivery of your services, and over time communities will take on more responsibility for managing their own facilities and looking after their own spaces. The process itself has proved to be a catalyst for strengthening relationships within the community, leading to an increase in local action and collective effort. Experience has shown that in general, approximately 50% of the actions identified in a community led plan can be undertaken by the community themselves with minimal support from external bodies.

www.communityledplanning.com
Welshampton, Lyneal and Colemere Parish Plan 2008 – Shropshire

This community focused strongly on using the parish planning process to compile a very action-focused document that would encourage community activism as well as informing service planning.

**Aim**
To engage members of the community in developing a shared vision for the future; to identify realisable goals and actions that could be achieved in order to preserve and improve the parish for the benefit of the community.

**Who was involved?**
- A Steering Group drawn from the local community, including members of the Parish Council.
- Community Council of Shropshire.

**The key outcomes and benefits**
On completion of the plan the Parish Council has driven the implementation of the action plan, with many actions being accomplished with minimal support from external agencies. Where community-led activities have been developed, the group has been successful in securing support and engagement from both the statutory and voluntary sectors. A ‘Community Green Day’ took place, and although this involved multi-agency participation, the activity remains firmly community-led.

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Barford Parish Plan & Community Shop – Warwickshire

**Aim**
The establishment of a community owned store resulted from a direct consequence of action identified in the Parish Plan. The loss of the shop was viewed as significantly undermining the cohesiveness of the community.

**Who was involved**
- Warwickshire RCC
- CALC in Warwickshire
- Local Authority: Economic Development
- Officers, Planning, Conservation
- The Plunkett Foundation

**Outcomes and benefits**
The owners of the existing shop were about to retire and the shop was on the market. There were no takers and the shop eventually closed. It is presumed that the imminent opening of a by-pass would take away significant passing trade.

In the mean time the community had consulted and determined that they would like to take control of the shop and run it as a social enterprise. Due to the prohibitive purchase price of the property, the community developed a plan to build an extension to the village hall in order to house the village shop. One consideration was that, if the shop should eventually fail, the extension could be incorporated into the village hall proper. Difficulties arose due to the site being on a conservation area, and issues with the landowner, but these were eventually resolved. The decision was taken to establish the project as a CIC (Community Interest Company), thus allowing the issue of shares which could attract dividend payments in the event of a profit. Through this and other fundraising activity the community raised significant funds.

The new build has incorporated all best practice and the shop has exceeded expectations. The shop is in profit and has appointed a full time paid manager. If the shop continues to make progress at the same rate as the first fifteen months of trading, then it will bear comparison with successful commercial outlets and will be an exemplar community/social enterprise.

The shop exists to support members of the community who do not have easy access to local towns; it supports the social housing and local low cost homes recently provided (another action identified in the parish plan), and contributes to the social wellbeing of the whole community. It is also presumed that it reduces the carbon footprint of the community.
Your service delivery will be more locally responsive and so more efficient. Community led planning has an excellent track record in engaging the majority of the residents. Questionnaire return rates of over 80% are not unusual. Community led planning has proved to be an effective way of engaging groups of people not normally involved in local discussion and debate. So community led planning provides valuable information about the needs and aspirations of particular places, leading to more appropriately designed and targeted service delivery.

**Ripple – Worcestershire**

Ripple parish comprises six separate settlements oriented north to south at the southern end of Worcestershire. Its community plan was developed by a working group chaired by the local neighbourhood watch co-ordinator, and drew in membership and support from a wide range of community groups, service providers, local businesses and individuals. Questionnaires were distributed to all households, 73% of which responded. The results show that respondents had links to many more groups and organisations.

The parish council has adopted the plan, and used it as the basis of its two year strategic plan. The parish council has aligned the desires of the community with the six themes identified as the priorities of the Worcestershire Partnership and the Local Strategic Partnerships. It has set up working groups for each of them, and the parish council member of each group reports to each parish council meeting.

Residents can trace the link from their expressed priorities to the community plan, the parish council’s strategic plan, outcomes reported to the parish council and the priorities adopted by the partnership bodies in the county.

**Featherstone Pride – Staffordshire**

This community has been identified by the LAA and the LSP as being a high priority for local action. The village has been developed around the site of a former pit and the older properties and residents are made up from a very traditional mining community. Following the disappearance of the pit, newer housing was built in the 1960’s and 70’s, which brought with it a newer younger population. The community suffered from a number of issues including:

- young people disengaged with community
- divide between the ‘new and old’ communities
- indications of low educational attainment in statistics
- high levels of teenage pregnancy

Whilst identified by agencies as a community in need of support it was quite clear that Featherstone community spirit was at a low ebb and that a reliance upon the community taking action on its’ own would be fraught with difficulties. It was quickly decided that there was a need for agencies, through the LSP, to take action to support the community to the point where they could tackle issues for themselves. At a very early stage of the process the co-ordination of and engagement of the community was seen as a key action and this led to the appointment of the Village Agent (VA). The VA soon became a key member of the community as well as an important conduit to the LSP and the various agencies operating in the community. The VA is recognised by both the community and the agencies as the vehicle through which the community can take action to tackle issues.

**Who was involved?**
The Community Council of Staffordshire as the employer and support for the local Village Agent; Rural Access to Services Officer; charities advice; funding advice. The Parish Council was a part funder of the project. A wide range of agencies were involved in the Featherstone Pride Project, including:

- housing association
- district council departments
- County Council
- Community and Learning Partnership;
- Connexions
- PCT
- Youth Service,
- and the police with whom the VA was closely connected.
Chaddesley Corbett Parish Plan – Worcestershire

The Parish Plan was written in 2003. It was championed by the Parish Council who wanted to use it as the basis for the maintenance and development of the Parish; a picturesque village in a rural area of Wyre Forest.

Aims

The main aim of the plan was to help the Parish Council make decisions about its work in Chaddesley Corbett which were supported by the local community.

The issue of development, in particular for affordable housing and for a planned new school, had recently been especially contentious and it was felt that the community needed to have a means to discuss possible change as well as to think in a positive way about the future. It was also hoped that the plan could be used to influence the policies, decisions and actions of other bodies.

Who was involved

All households were informed and encouraged to take part in meetings, events and surveys to gather information and opinions about life in Chaddesley Corbett. Support was provided by Community First, by the local authority and various bodies and individuals. It was however, very much the work of the local community.

The key outcomes and benefits

The Parish Plan Action Plan has formed the basis for much of the Community action in the Parish and guides the work of the parish Council. It is used as a ‘checklist’ at the Parish meetings and is about to be updated.

A sub-group went on to produce a Village Design Statement and the Parish Council is better prepared to respond to development issues. An environment group was set up and it has reported widely in our parish magazines and at Annual Parish meetings. The community is better informed and more active in the local environment.

The community is better prepared to deal with environmental emergencies – the area was badly affected by flooding – due to the work of the lengthsman who has worked to reduce flooding locally and has also identified vulnerable local people as part of an ‘emergencies plan’ for the parish.

The District Council did refer to this Parish Plan when developing their Local Development Framework.

In addition to the above which relate to special planning, the following has also been achieved by the community involved.

Local people have received skills training. Some very successful computer courses were run – everyone who wanted to get computer training has, and courses are still continuing by the school with the help of Kidderminster College.

It will be easier for your to develop innovative local approaches Community led planning builds local capacity. This will help you undertake innovative approaches to involving your community in local decision making, including participatory budgeting, devolution of service delivery and transfer of assets.
RURALLY AND EMPOWERMENT

Arley - Warwickshire

It was a commonly held belief that Arley was the least likely of all Parishes in Warwickshire that would be able to produce a parish plan. The village of New Arley (about 65% of the population of the parish) was a coal mining pit village. In the first half of the twentieth century most of the livelihoods of the Parish were connected to the mine. The mine closed in 1968, and since that time there has been a decline in the wealth and well being of the community.

The monoculture of the mining industry has tended to produce a dependency on that part of the population for more than simply employment, even to the extent that social welfare was largely provided by the mine owners. This carried over with nationalisation, and with the mine closure (and subsequent privatisation) continued to be provided by CISWO (Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation).

The principal delivery mechanism for CISWO was the Miner's Welfare Hall. It was destroyed by fire in April 2003. The hall was not the only a meeting place, but significantly fulfilled the function of a village hall. There is thus a dependent and discouraged community. A community that suffers marked levels of deprivation, and one that suffers from significant anti social behaviour and criminality. It would be facile to claim that a Parish Plan (Community led plan) could resolve all problems. However it could start the process of the community reclaiming its ability to act on its own behalf.

Aims

The Arley Parish Plan will:

- identify the issues that are important to our community
- highlight the needs and aspirations of our community
- pinpoint the opportunities that exist for improvement
- enable future projects to be planned with the knowledge that our community will support them
- work towards a common goal and bring groups and individuals in our community together

Who was involved?

- Warwickshire Rural Community Council employed two community development officers both with roles to support this community.
- “Action for New Arley” group. This was a group of professionals and elected councillors active in the parish.
- Workers from Local Authorities (both WCC and NWBC),
- Various voluntary organisations and a number of Parish Councillors.

It was through the formation of this group, supported by the community development workers that supported the community action in this community and led to the significant outcomes outlined below, that could not have been developed without this intervention, commitment and development support.

The key outcomes and benefits

The next page contains an extract from the final Parish Plan defining progress to date.
Local Facilities and Services.

Community Centre
Having received a lottery grant earlier in the year the remainder of the funding is now in place to construct a village hall adjoining St Michael’s church at New Arley. Building is scheduled to commence in December 2008. Opening date October 2009.

Allotments
The allotments having been unused for many years have been bought back into use. A committee was formed with the help of NWBC to oversee the project and manage the day to day running of the allotments. Having secured a grant from Big Lottery to create a “Breathing Space” a wildlife garden and pond is currently under construction.

Transport, Roads & Road Safety
A focused ‘Traffic Issues’ survey has been conducted by the County Council. The results of this survey will be available shortly.

Policing Crime and Disorder
Speeding - New Arley by North Warwickshire South Team
Priority: Speeding vehicles on Gun Hill, particularly at the start and end of the school day.
Action: Regular evidence gathering speed checks to be carried out at various times of day by PCSOs. Police Officers to also carry out checks and stop/issue fixed penalty notices to offending drivers.

Affordable and New Housing
Subsequent to the results of the Parish Plan Questionnaire the WRCC has conducted a further survey on this subject on behalf of the Parish Council. This survey concluded that there is a need for 3 new homes in Arley for local people. The overriding benefit to the community is however, is the confidence and capacity the community itself has found and built upon. Community members involved in this process are now giving talks to other similar groups to encourage them on the same path.

It will be easier for your to develop innovative local approaches. Community led planning builds local capacity. This will help you undertake innovative approaches to involving your community in local decision making, including participatory budgeting, devolution of service delivery and transfer of assets.
Dormington and Mordiford – Herefordshire

The CLP was completed in April 2007, and covered the 2 small parishes of Dormington and Mordiford, some 5 miles east of Hereford City. There are 317 households in the 2 parishes of which 178 completed the CLP questionnaire.

**Aims**

To find out what the local residents thought about the place where they lived – their likes, dislikes and what they wanted for the future. The purpose was to obtain a mandate for a plan of action to maintain or improve services and facilities, and also to improve the democratic and social fabric of the communities.

**Who was involved**

The local parish council took a strong lead in this enterprise but drafted in a number of non-PC members to assist in forming the CLP steering group. The group also benefited from the active support of a ward councillor who also sat on the steering group. Various services providers were consulted at every stage of the process to ensure that the final action plan was realistic and achievable.

**The key outcomes and benefits**

A number of initiatives have resulted from the CLP including a major traffic survey leading to a range of road safety initiatives including new traffic calming measures outside the primary school; a new lengthsmans scheme; new computer courses; new notice boards; improvements to local footpaths and the publication of a local walks guide; improvements to green areas including new seating in an old quarry and a new picnic site; plus a major initiative to get new affordable housing built on an identified site.

Also, a new youth club has been established in a refurbished hall, with its own youth committee – this initiative won this year’s Community Group category in the Pride of Herefordshire Awards.

The CLP has reinvigorated the community with many of the improvements being owned by local volunteers – for example an old dilapidated hall was completely refurbished by local volunteers and converted into a youth club. The ward councillor and one of the parish council members are now helping other parishes in the ward to develop their own CLPs.

Relationships between local people and those that represent them (parish, district or county councillors) are strengthened through the community led planning process. The dialogue that is generated at a local level by the process can be key to ensuring that the work of parish councils and area committees are focussed on the needs of the communities they serve.
Hampton Bishop - Participatory Budgeting - Herefordshire

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a method of enabling local residents to engage in the decision making process of another body, usually a principal authority. HALC wanted to prove that the principles of PB could be followed by a parish or town council, through their usual annual programme of business. Arising out of the Parish Plan process, the following project was piloted.

Hampton Bishop Parish Council in Herefordshire set aside £500 from its annual Precept of £6,500 for the financial year 2008/9.

It launched a PB scheme at its Annual Parish Meeting in May and explained that £500 had been set aside for local residents to choose their favoured item for expenditure.

The only criteria were that it must benefit the local area and be feasible and legal. Following a project identification and voting process involving information and voting slips being delivered to each household, the favoured expenditure item was the installation of a Speed Indicator Device (SID).

The parish council is liaising with the relevant authorities to action the residents’ choice.

Who can help?

Members of the Rural Community Action Network are experts in Community Led Planning. They have extensive experience of enabling and supporting local groups. Together the four RCAN members in the West Midlands have helped communities produce over 250 plans in the last five years. They work together to share good practice and have developed a set of quality standards to ensure that plans represent the views and interests of all sections of each community.

Contact: Lorna Pearcey
West Midlands Rural Community Action Network (WMRCAN) Co-ordinator
Email: lornap@comfirst.org.uk
Tel: 01432 267820

Outcomes
Pilot has led to funding from the national Participatory Budgeting unit. Recognition of unique rural process for PB, but other CALCs across the country. CRC support for project based around annual programme for a parish council.

County-wide scheme by HALC to encourage 20 more parishes to adopt PB process. Some doubting parish councillors now convinced of merits of PB process. Greater numbers of local residents attending parish council meetings. Speed Indicator Device (SID) to be sited in parish. Other identified projects being discussed for implementation by parish council. A parish to promote the PB concept to other parish councils, by example. Parish councillors convinced of PB. Future precepting to be guided by principles of PB working. Local residents involved in local decision making. Second year of PB funding allocated by Hampton Bishop parish council for 2010/11. Feel-good factor around the parish.

Community led planning strengthens local democracy and the effectiveness of parish councils and other neighbourhood/area committee structures.