

# ***The Devon Towns Forum***

## **Conference**

### **‘Involving Communities in Planning’**

This major conference was attended by around ninety delegates consisting of Planners, Members of Community Groups, Planning Partnerships, Elected Members and Officers ensuring a lively and challenging debate of the issues.

The Conference was opened by Mark Goodman Regional Facilitator on behalf of James Hassett Executive Director of the Market and Coastal Towns Association setting the agenda for a thorough exploration of the issues. The MCTA stress the importance of community involvement and engagement in the Planning Processes and the part MCTi and Parish Planning Partnerships have to play in offering access to the Community Voice and evidenced based decision making.

Jeff Bishop Lead Planning Consultant of BDOR Ltd gave a lively and spirited exhortation for early engagement of Planners in the Community Planning Process and for the Community to rise to the challenge and use every opportunity, like those offered by the Devon Towns Forum, to become Planning Literate.

David Brown Chairman of the High Bickington CPT (Community Property Trust) gave an excellent case study of a community driven project for village improvements and recounted the pit falls and opportunities from the Communities Point of View.

This was followed by Barry Pearce Senior Planning Advisor with Planning Aid South west presenting a session from the Planners Point of view, taking no prisoners the tensions and perceptions were laid bare with a reminder to all that partnership and engagement was not optional and the sooner methods to facilitate this were established the better planning decisions and the quality of Community input would become.

The afternoon session began with a resume of the role and potential of LSP's From Caroline Rae (Devon County Council) highlighting the potential role of LSP's as facilitators for Community engagement in the Planning and Community Planning Process as support to the statutory measures. This was followed by examples of this potential and actual LSP role by Lynn McElheron from Teignbridge LSP

Two afternoon Workshop sessions were held for groups representing Planners and the Community to tease out some of the ‘wicked issues’ and come up with some key points to be taken to the final session of the day where Jeff Bishop sought to combine the resulting issues into a summary of Conclusions and Actions.

Notes of the workshops and the resulting Conclusions and Actions have been incorporated in the feedback information posted on the Devon Towns Forum Website together with copies of all presentations and an analysis of the delegate's feedback sheets.

As you will see the day produced lively and challenging debate and was successful in drawing out some clear conclusions and actions that will now be used to inform a Regional Research project looking at these issues that in turn will be used to inform the ODPM. The contribution of all those attending and participating in the Devon Towns Forum Conference is very much appreciated and valued.

Tom Langdon Davies said ‘the outcome of this conference is infinitely greater than the sum of its parts and the collective benefit of airing these issues will have greatly assisted the development of a better understanding of the need for mechanisms for constructive engagement’

The Devon Towns Forum will be back with a One Day Seminar looking at Project Development and Funding in June date to be announced.

**The Devon Towns Forum gratefully acknowledge the support of the MCTA and Devon County Council**

# The Community Perspective Workshop



**The main points arising from the Communities Perspective Workshop Session were:**

## **Comments about Planning and Planners:**

- Planning to become more 'User Friendly'
- Planners need to use 'User Friendly Language.'
- Training in Communication could be beneficial
- Planners could attend community discussion groups
- Planners need to listen to the community and talk to representatives of community groups

## **Comments about LSP's and their potential role:**

- LSP's could act as Interface (between Community/ Community Groups and Planning)
- LSP's need to contact and involve the parishes
- LSP's need to include Community Group Representatives

## **The role and potential for Community Groups:**

- Community groups can be useful to let the public know what is going on
- Community Groups pass information on to Communities,
- Community Groups should have representation on LSP's
- Community involvement could speed up Planning Process
- Community Groups talk to their neighbourhoods
- Larger town communities should be defined as functional groups rather than geographical.

## **The Role of Parishes**

- Parishes need to develop better contact with LSP and Planners
- Parishes need to become better informed on Planning Issues

# The Planners Perspective Workshop



**The Planners Perspective Workshop considered the advantages and obstacles of 'Fitting' the required processes to meet demand and community expectation and identified the following key points:**

## **Obstacles to 'Fitting' are:**

- Planners workload high
- Lack of resource time for planners to advise Community Planning groups
- Lack of fit of timescales of Community Plans and the statutory planning process.
- LDF process is very complicated
- The formal process doesn't encourage early and continuous dialogue
- Difficulties in planning for the future
- The MCTi process excludes the planners

## **Advantages of 'Fitting' are:**

- Delivering what the community want
- Integrated master planning
- Coming together of different perspectives
- Putting Community Plans in Context
- Avoiding duplication
- Sifting out the rubbish
- Recognising the 'Have to' items! (legislation)
- Sharing of resources
- Learning on both sides
- Building better relationships to make it easier next time
- Community ownership

## **The Cultures:**

- Junior planners are given the engagement role, senior planners avoid contact
- Perception that Planners don't understand how communities work
- Use of 'Planner Speak' make it too complex to understand
- Perceptions that Planners don't believe in partnership 'Us vs Them'
- Feeling that GOSW make it very difficult - disinterested

# Conclusions and Actions Session



**Presented by Jeff Bishop Lead Planning Consultant BDOR Ltd**

**Following the workshop sessions examining the issues from the 'Planners' and Communities' perspective a Conclusions and Actions Session drew the findings of the workshops together to present a summary of conclusions and suggested actions as follows:**

## **Actions for Planners**

- A Community Forward Planner should be dedicated to work with Community Groups.
- Involve Community Groups Throughout the development of Community Plans and development of the Planning Process
- Planners need to use plain English

## **Actions for Community Groups**

e.g. Community Planning Groups undertaking Parish Plans, Market Town Plans and Design Statements

- District Councillors need to be more involved in the Community Planning Process
- Funding needs to be available for Training on Planning/ LDF's etc for Community Planning Groups
- Develop mechanisms for sharing thinking and learning from other Community Planning experiences and make better use of available forums and networks e.g. Devon Towns Forum
- Encourage participation of hard to reach groups
- Develop clear communication routes into Local Authority/ Planning Authority to reach all departments e.g. use LSP as conduit and communications channel

## **Actions for Everyone**

- Identify and separate out for action the legal requirement for 'representation' and Community Involvement and insure this happens
- LSP's should be developed to 'Broker and Process information between Community Planning Groups and Planning Authority'
- Ensure 'Planning Literacy' for all parties e.g. Elected Representatives, LSP Members, Officers and Community Representatives
- Develop Protocols for LSP's that do not exclude Community Planning Groups
- The ODPM should monitor and evaluate their own guidance to assess its application and effect
- MCTi, Parish Planning and other Community Planning Groups should be encouraged to engage with Planners as early as possible

## Actions for LSP's

- LSP's need to ensure a more focused representation
- LSP's need to:
- Support effective communication to help define roles;
- Identify necessary actions
- Act as an Information hub
- Address and harmonise areas of conflict between elected and non elected representatives
- Develop a Profile of brokering support and facilitation



## Glossary:

**LDF** Local Development Framework (New Planning System)

**LSP** Local Strategic Partnership ( District and County forums for Community, Voluntary, Business and Statutory Agency and Elected representatives to meet and ensure joined up working and to decide local priorities)

**ODPM** The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Government Office with responsibility for Planning)

# Devon Towns Forum Conference 21<sup>st</sup> March 06

## 'Involving Communities in Planning'

### Analysis of Feedback Sheets

- Note: 59 out of 80 people attending conference completed Feedback sheets.
- Totals should be assessed as out of 59
- Numerical anomalies arise as not all questions answered and some people have dual roles

<b>From Community Partnership</b>	<b>31 out of 59</b>
Agency or L A Officer	15
Elected member	16
Planning Officer or member	6
Heard about via e-mail	37
Word of mouth	22
Website	2
<b>Jeff Bishop am session</b>	
Informative	<b>55 out of 59</b>
Well Presented	57
Sufficiently Detailed	52
Met your Needs	48
<b>David Brown 'Community'</b>	
Informative	<b>55 out of 59</b>
Well Presented	56
Sufficiently Detailed	53
Met your Needs	48
<b>Barry Pearce 'Planners'</b>	
Informative	<b>55 out of 59</b>
Well Presented	51
Sufficiently Detailed	51
Met your Needs	51
<b>PM Session LSP's</b>	
<b>Carline Rae/ Lynn Elheron</b>	
Informative	<b>48 out of 59</b>
Well Presented	47
Sufficiently Detailed	41
Met your Needs	39
<b>Workshops and final Helpful</b>	
YES	<b>41 out of 59</b>
NO	5
<b>Rate Venue</b>	
Poor	
Fair	<b>8 out of 59</b>
Good	36
Excellent	14
<b>Rate Food</b>	
Poor	
Fair	<b>3 out of 59</b>
Good	29
Excellent	26
<b>Suggested Topics</b>	19
<b>Other Comments</b>	19

## Respondent's comments:

- Very interesting and useful day, more please to follow this up.
- A resume of outcomes from today work please circulate to delegates
- Workshops didn't mention Hidden Agendas and behind closed doors decisions
- Keep these conferences going they're great!
- Workshop sessions too short and not very well focalised
- Excellent day and speakers- thank you!
- Good to put two sides together and challenge perceptions, but might have been a bit weighted against planners and not recognised 'top-down' attitudes from some MCTi groups
- More accountability from elected representatives for decisions
- Thanks for day, will help me to feedback some potential key messages and interpret nuggets of information
- LSP presentation may have misjudged knowledge of group
- Workshop not as good as it could have been
- Planners Perspective very negative towards Planners and could have been more constructive
- Loop system for hard of hearing please
- Pace of some presentations a bit overwhelming
- Event biased against planners, always seen as obstructive rather than a body which could help enable; communities need to understand how the Planning Process works.
- Informative, well structured day with interesting, motivated speakers.
- Negative towards Planning Officers, not helpful as creates a them and us feeling, there is a lot of good work going on, communication seems to be the main problem
- Feedback from the day please
- Interesting day, it taught me how much I didn't know
- Venue has car parking problem for large events
- Community MCTi representation on LSP's
- Planners in Local Authorities work in the public interest and should be seen as being on the same side as the community and not the Dark Force. Who will save the day when the developers arrive!
- Excellent seminar, very helpful, glad to repeat topic in a year
- Not room for networking
- Amazed how few people had a clue what an LSP is about
- Car share next time to save parking problems but not sure how?
- Well done!
- Not sufficient time for Questions and answers
- More time for Questions and Answers
- Role of Planners not made fully clear, Fear you may have raised expectations that those attending can get planners and LSP's more involved/LA resources, it will be a long process of change
- Useful to have a large number attending, however it was a shame that more planning professionals didn't attend to enable a balanced debate and useful advice
- Excellent event, well done!

## **Respondent's suggestions for future events or training:**

- Building Community Capacity, employing field workers to work in community
- Organisational skills, fundraising skills
- Facilitation and how to engage with groups
- Funding and Meeting styles
- Funding and Project Management
- More on latest PPS
- How to run LSP's
- How to build trust between Planners and Community groups
- Planning Legislation
- More help to get started and enable delivery
- A brief handbook on the Planning Process
- Training on Planning Matters
- The role of Parish Councillors in any LSP etc
- Identifying community assets, auditing them
- Community Planning/ Communication/Sustainability/ Community Empowerment
- Impacts of Global warming
- Preparing for Unitary Authorities
- Planning and Funding
- More training similar to today
- Overview of Planning Legislation
- Closer links with Planners
- Funding, Volunteer Management, Planning
- Fundraising and Planning issues
- Follow up on governance issues, guidance on project brokering, best practice on consultation and presentation of Plans etc
- Further ICT Training, facilitating
- Project Development, accessing funding
- Better understanding of new planning i.e. RSS and LDF
- Address climate change
- Presenting
- Project Funding