

# THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY LED PLANS IN THE SOUTH WEST

## **TOWARDS A CONCORDAT A WORKSHOP: 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>TH</sup> October 2006 Swan Hotel, Wells REPORT**



The South West ACRE Network of Rural Community Councils



**WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE SOUTH WEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY AND  
THE  
GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR THE SOUTH WEST TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY PLANNING**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*This report was compiled by Rowena Harris of the BDOR Network who facilitated the event. It is based on the notes made by the facilitators at the workshop. Rowena's explanatory notes are in italic text.*

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE EVENT

- 2.1 *Our aim was to discuss the idea of a Concordat (or a set of protocols) that should create a climate in which community-led planning can flourish for the benefit of the communities of our rural areas in the South West. James Hassett, Chief Executive, MCTA, welcomed everyone and re-iterated that this event was just the first step on this journey. We still don't know exactly what this Concordat will be yet – it is to be further developed drawing from discussions during the workshop.*
- 2.2 *We also wanted to raise awareness of a report 'An Exciting Future for Community Planning', a recent research study commissioned by the MCTA and SWAN (with funding from SWRDA, the GOSW and DEFRA.) The full report and summary is on [www.swan-network.org.uk](http://www.swan-network.org.uk). Jeff Bishop of BDOR Ltd, one of the authors of the report, gave a presentation at the start of the workshop. At the heart of the report is a desire to blend the very local community planning, promoted and supported by MCTA, SWAN and the Rural Community Councils, in the form of Parish Plans and Town Plans, with the **statutory** processes. This includes both the new spatial planning system, the associated Community Strategies and the emerging Local Area Agreements. This is from where the Concordat idea has sprung.*
- 2.3 *Participants were invited as a reflector, bridger or receptor. These roles are described below. Lists of attendees are available from Jane Nichols at SWAN ([jane.swan@devonrcc.org.uk](mailto:jane.swan@devonrcc.org.uk)).*

<b>REFLECTORS</b>	<b>BRIDGERS</b>	<b>RECEPTORS</b>
<i>You were practitioners, 'hand picked' to be able to reflect good practice based on experience, your function was to influence, inform &amp; enthuse the bridgers.</i>	<i>Your function was to advise upon, develop, sign up to &amp; be involved in implementing a 'concordat'. Your role was to work in more detail on the proposal for a Concordat and present it to the receptors on day 2, along with other issues concerning the future of community led plans in the South West.</i>	<i>Hopefully you are able to sanction the way forward from a high level, you were invited to receive and respond to the proposals worked up by the 'Bridgers', advising on the way forward.</i>

## 3. SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR DISCUSSION

### 3.1 What factors are impacting community – led planning?

*Everyone was asked to write on separate post-its any significant factors that they felt are impacting on community planning in the South West. These were grouped with similar comments and the following themes emerged. (A few typical post-its are included under each theme heading.)*

### **1. Where top down meets bottom up:**

- Three tiers of local government need to recognize where they have common objectives
- what's the agenda we are working to? Who's agenda is it e.g. RSS, urban/rural
- Amend planning controls as urban rules do not work in a rural setting
- Need to build in issues arising from community plans into strategic plans

### **2. Lack of commitment to community plans by local authorities**

- Mixed messages regarding the status of a Parish Plans etc.
- Councils not appreciating the value of Community Plans to their inclusion and engagement requirements (LSP, SCI, LDF)
- Too much silo working/ thinking; failure to see CPs as a 'material consideration' in planning applications
- Plans for local enablers would make a real difference
- Get LSP co-ordinators to recognize the value of community plans

### **3. Protocols**

- Protocols should be a two-way approach: accessible to Parishes, not only driven by an authority
- Many partnerships are too reliant on LA officers for their sustainability
- capacity development has not been included in the process - if redressed partnerships could be more positive
- Justify the need for a protocol

### **4. Double Devolution**

- 'Devolution to the doorstep' but rural
- Local government White Paper will have a great impact – we're holding our breath but will it really help more community-led plans to go forward?

### **5. Resource & capacity issues**

- Lack of sustainable funding
- Smaller parishes perceive that they do not have the resources to do a plan
- Will need to help parishes review plans and keep them up to date
- Parish Plans are dependent on volunteers – too much guidance/red tape can deter them
- Existing MCTi towns will need to include any new data from parish plans in their hinterland. Are they willing to take on more work?
- Community-led plans need to stand up to scrutiny
- Need for Local Authorities to be aware of the need and demand for funding requirements earlier in the process to help guide prioritization & collaboration with others

### **7. LSP,s, LAA,s**

- Essential to align the community plan with all the relevant LAA outcomes, indicators and targets
- Local community plans need to link not only to their local council but other agencies via the LSP

### **8. Rural sustainability**

- Community led plans are impacted by issues around schools, transport, housing, health, employment, tourism.

## **3.2 Overcoming the barriers to making links with the new Community Strategies, the spatial planning system and the emerging Local Area Agreements?**

Groups were asked to identify barriers and share examples of ways they had been overcome. I have tried to draw out the main points rather than include the notes from every table. Barriers in bold, solutions follow.

- a) **Complexity: linkage between parish/town/district/county, cross border working, duplication etc**
- Put in a community plan co-ordinator/enabler in each district – they enable better connection/learning between Parishes, Towns and the District LSP & Council, avoid duplication, inform other officers, signposting for communities and generally helping to ease communication.
  - Establish a district data base
  - keep it simple and positive – small parishes handle local issues, bigger towns can deal with more complicated stuff, district & county pick out strategic issues.
  - Try to produce simple diagrams showing the links.
  - In Cornwall they are developing a ‘united’ information pack to help volunteers understand where they fit.
  - Build on partnerships & forge partnerships where parishes & towns do not collaborate – use e.g’s from else where.
  - MCTi’s can be a channel but will need funding for a co-ordinating officer.
  - The Getting Connected group in Cornwall share best practice, are part of the LAA process, joint initiatives & hopefully influence their Council.
  - Works well when Parish Plans feed into MCT Community Plans & each Community Plan partnership has a seat on the District LSP.
  - Somerset Rural Renaissance are discussing the provision of funding to strengthen links between Towns & Parishes.
  - Market Town Forums can provide examples of good practice on working with parishes
  - Engage planners whilst developing the LSP
  - Rolling programme of training and networking for all partners at all levels
  - Use community radio & newsletters
- b) **Lack of clear leadership:**
- need for Central Government to join up it’s thinking (DCLG & DEFRA)
  - each region, county & district LSP & Council to state clearly how they can respond to community-led plans.
  - develop more consistency in Plans but allow for local differences, not too prescriptive
  - no clear role yet for LSP’s
  - get the leader of the Council and/or chair of the LSP to tell their officers to do it properly!
  - Glos Market Towns Forum found strength in numbers in Town Councils meant that officers at County level & other bodies realized they had to listen.
  - Promote good practice (e.g. West Wiltshire LSP)
  - Sponsor a programme to develop leadership skills
- c) **Political & democratic suspicions: ‘People: politicians, planners, personalities!’**
- SELL IT!
  - keep on talking & committing resources,
  - go for some quick wins,
  - create & use local champions (local people with expertise),
  - promote the concept in Members Bulletin (as in North Somerset)
  - make sure politicians can see how community-led plans re-invigorate & empower local governance, can help rather than hinder them to meet targets
  - get the head of Planning onto the LSP to link into the Sustainable Community Strategy

- keep trying to embed the commitment to community plans in the culture of the Council, go for corporate buy in,
  - Get elected members involved from first meeting,
  - Involve all in setting targets,
  - Promote cultural change from within: Regeneration officers get together with Planners etc
  - Independently facilitated awareness raising & training events, visits to successful projects
  - Getting involved in a community-led plan can be excellent PR for local councilors (seen to be listening & responding)
  - Include Councillor's Surgeries in the evidence base of consultation
  - Community plans provide a mandate & evidence for funding applications
- d) Reliance on voluntary in-put:**
- Make sure people can see a community plan as a way to fund community-led projects,
  - be clear up front about the long term nature of the process,
  - help to build relationships, need people to play their part,
  - create effective support networks and resources independent of statutory authorities,
  - celebrate successes along the way, then people will be more willing to get involved,
  - avoid disappointment by clear management of expectations & provision of good support.
  - strengthen local governance: improve Parish Councils
  - demands on volunteers will increase if want more connection to LSP so pay volunteers to attend meetings of LSP & wider forums?
- e) Regional Spatial Strategy: top down approach to the future of market towns**
- train Planners (at University & afterwards) to understand & appreciate community-led planning
  - improve communication both ways by organizing interactive workshops
  - get a dialogue going but manage expectations and understand what is up for grabs & what is not
- f) Lack of funding:**
- varied approach to take account of local structure
  - LAA's direct funding
  - Audit who is providing what
  - Precept at local level
  - Seed corn funding to enable at local level
- g) Lack of inclusiveness:**
- Ensure a robust consultation process which helps the local Council to understand the diversity in the community
  - Use plain English, jargon busters, add lists of acronyms to documents
  - Promote projects where they are most needed.
  - Think of how to include migrant workers

### 3.3 What were the most significant barriers?

- Lack of upper level buy-in
- Making local residents understand what a Parish Plan group is trying to achieve
- Personalities – key blockers
- To get LAA's to support local enablers
- Silo working practices, especially among some planning depts.
- Decline in official support (e.g. DCLG, GOSW) for using statutory spatial plans as instruments of community planning (e.g. SPDs)
- Confusion (jargon, different types of plans, new statutory systems etc)

### 3.4 Which barriers are most easy to overcome?

- Communication
- Linking & learning between parishes
- Groups needing to know what information/strategies they should know about before they start
- Using contacts/networking to encourage Agency/local participation (e.g. Getting Connected Partnership in Cornwall, Wilt's partnership, South Glos LAA/LSP)
- The exchange of information to get a common understanding between County & LA.

#### **4.1 WHAT IS A CONCORDAT ... OR PROTOCOL ... OR COMPACT?**

- *In general these terms are almost interchangeable.*
- *All are about key parties agreeing to ways of working on issues or projects that involve all of them, and doing so in advance of and ready for any specific case.*
- *They set general good practice standards and avoid the redefinition of good working methods on the hoof on each initiative.*
- *If there is any better definition it is that:*
  - *a **Concordat** is often very broad and simply secures high level backing,*
  - *a **Protocol** often goes into enough detail to begin to bind specific actions by actual actors, and*
  - *a **Compact** covers lots of aspects in quite a lot of detail.*

#### **4.2 KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

*Groups were asked to work through the key questions below. On each table there were copies of the draft Protocol for Somerset on Community Plans (based on one from Shropshire). Other examples were also available: the "Leicestershire Rural Partnership Parish Plan Protocol", The "Compact between Nottingham City Council and the Voluntary Sector of the City of Nottingham", (urban, but a standard format for many areas) and the "South West Public Engagement Protocol and Guidance on Wind Energy".*

1. What might be in it, how broad, how detailed?
  - ☞ Is it right for the South West or areas within?
2. What status can it have?
3. Who might be key signatories?
4. How will we know it's been successful?
5. What might make it fail?
6. Who makes it happen/gets it produced?
7. How is it progressed, even 'enforced'?
  - ☞ What good is it on its own? What else is needed?

*Discussions took place at each table. Bridgers took their own notes and key messages were summarized below*

#### **4.3 KEY MESSAGES FOR THE BRIDGERS:**

***This Concordat idea will achieve nothing if you don't .....***

- .....resource it!
- .....create the linkage from all regional partners down to the very local communities who must be fully bought in
- .....form a major umbrella with a regional concordat which should promote local responsibility amongst LA's & LSP's to actively respond within a stated time frame. Consider both County & District level agreements as well as a regional one (a cascading approach)
- Don't do it if you can't guarantee commitment
- Take it seriously and ensure it makes a difference

- Make sure it feeds to all levels of the agencies who sign up (CXs but also officers) and involves all relevant depts. (e.g. including the planning dept.)
- It won't work if the receptors don't trust the process
- It needs dedicated officers to act as champion at LA level
- Ensure it is launched at the highest level with a bang! (by a Minister of State) to ensure influence and clout. Only powerful enablers can ensure funding/resourcing.
- It should be monitored and reviewed to check it is delivering
- It should reflect a shift in culture, recognizing all contributions and with LA's acknowledging the partners who help them deliver (including volunteers). There has to be a new collaborative way of working to which we all aspire.
- All parties need to see a benefit to themselves and wider
- Each organization needs to have it's own transparent procedure to address community plans which can be reflected in the Concordat
- Needs to be useful, non-confrontational and flexible. Will need to adapt as local government changes in the future.
- Signatories will need to be actively engaged the development of a concordat and missing receptors need to be included
- Tactical thinking should include knowledge of budget setting and other timetables
- **Ask DO WE REALLY WANT/NEED A REGIONAL CONCORDAT – would County level Concordats be better. Perhaps the Regional level should be thinking about a Regional Template for County Concordats?**
- Ask the receptors what they feel would actually work for them.
- We need an agreed way of producing a community-led plan which will have some influence.
- Use and share what already exists – there are some good working processes in the region – build on & strengthen existing mechanisms.
- Learn lessons from the voluntary sector compacts

*Finally a simple message from one group seemed to sum it all up:*

**A concordat?**  
 Mean it  
 Believe in it  
 Communicate it  
 Resource powerful enablers  
 Reflect a shift in culture  
 Embed it  
 Don't do it if you can't guarantee commitment

## **DAY TWO: THE RECEPTORS ARRIVE!**

*The first half of the morning was spent preparing for round table discussions with the receptors. It was agreed to look at 3 different aspects of community – led planning in the region:*

- 1. The Concordat idea**
- 2. Promoting best practice**
- 3. What community–led planning can contribute to the policy makers in the South West**

*Notes made by voluntary facilitators during the round table discussions follow.*

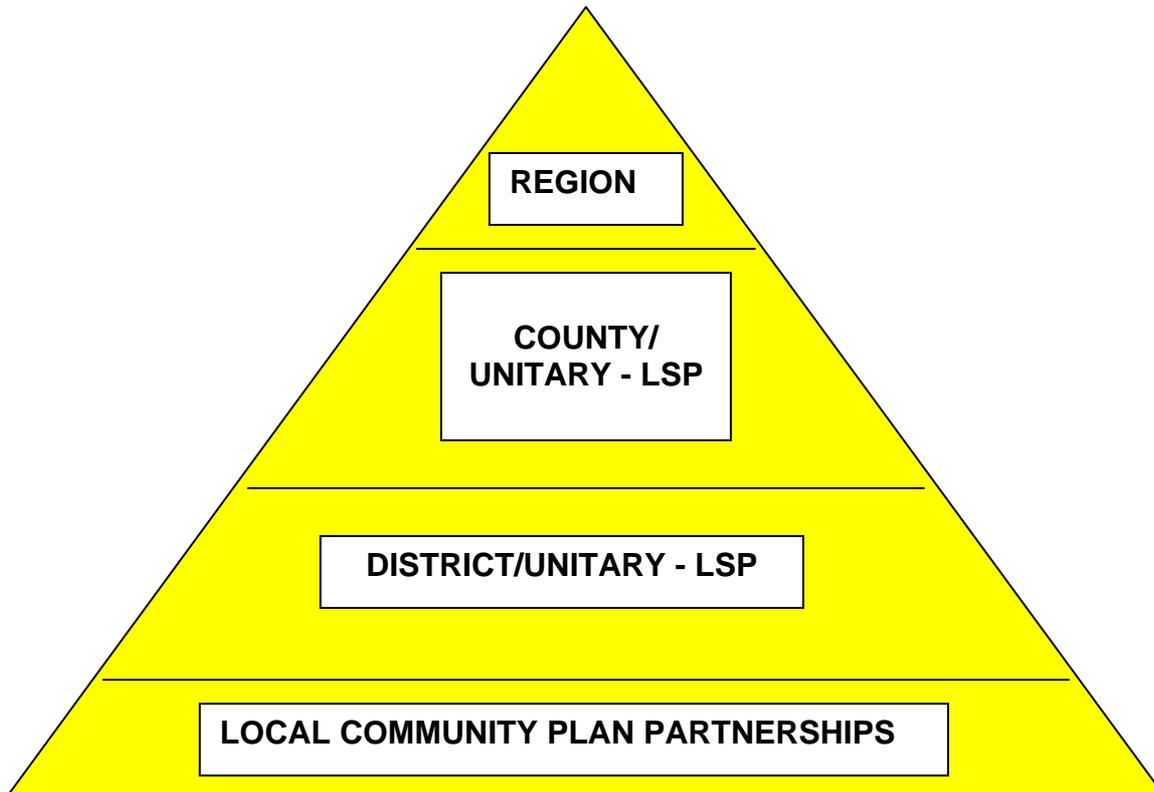
### **1. The Concordat Idea**

#### **1.1 AIM:**

“Building a regional framework for “local protocols” to facilitate, recognise, endorse and respond to local community-led plans”

Note: the groups felt that ‘protocols’ gave the right level of detail. These protocols should primarily be owned by the LSP level, but regional involvement was essential, both to provide a framework / template, and to ensure regional buy-in and support.

## 1.2 WHO IS INVOLVED IN A PROTOCOL?



It is essential that at the regional level, partners ENDORSE the Framework which will then be SIGNED UP TO at the Principal Authority level by LSPs and at the Parish/Community level in a set of agreed PROTOCOLS.

It is quite clearly seen and stated that in order to really work, a protocol must be fully ‘owned by’ the Local Strategic Partnership and ALL its partners. The key signatories are all members of the LSP, so the LSP is the key partner / champion for local parish plan groups.

### 1.3 The “ENDORSEERS” at the regional level are seen as:

- The South West RDA
- The South West Regional Assembly
- The Government Office South West
- The regional branch of the RTPi
- South West local Government Association
- [Commission for Rural Communities – no regional structure but still important]
- SWAN – the South West ACRE Network of RCCs
- Market and Coastal Towns Association
- South West Conference of CALCs
- Natural England

#### 1.4 The SIGNATORIES at the County /Sub Regional Level (Unitary)

- The Local Authority
- The Local Strategic Partnership
- The Local Area Agreement Board
- The RCC
- The County Associations of Local Councils
- The Change-Up Consortia

#### 1.5 And at the District/Unitary level:

- The Local authority
- The Local strategic Partnership
- The “third sector”
- The individual Parish and Town Councils

#### 1.6 WHY HAVE A PROTOCOL?

- To fulfil the statutory obligation for community engagement
- To create the linkage from Community to Region and from Region to Community
- To MAKE IT HAPPEN
- To provide Leadership to enable local LEADERSHIP
- To clarify and endorse the process – expectations of parish planners for action by higher tiers and service providers
- To endorse TWO WAY commitment i.e. parish planners provide a quality plan based on real consultation, and the LSP will respond meaningfully to it
- To connect the LOCAL to the STRATEGIC

#### 1.7 COMMENTARY - TABLE 1

##### **First Group:**

- This could easily be a transferable ‘commodity’ to other regions. However, is there a tension around ‘representing community’? Elected members feel that they have the democratic obligation!
- A real test of sustainability will be within the context of housing numbers, and whether growth will be allowed.
- It will be far more effective if embedded in the local psyche
- There needs to be a balance between social and economic growth – this needs integration
- Above all, it must be seen to be changing behaviour.

##### **1.8 Second Group:**

- Too many levels – too top down...do we need the region anyway?
- Weak commitment to strategic partnerships (vertical silos)
- Is the LAA the umbrella, or, the LSP?
- Is the gap between Local and Region too big? i.e. we need strategic planning at the local level and to recognise it as such
- Is the power of the LSP sufficient to give it this role?
- How do you actually make it happen?

##### **1.9 Third Group:**

- Requires flexibility

- Unsure of the benefits
- Certainly sees the strengths in the system at the community level
- Must embrace the Local Development Framework

## **COMMENTARY - TABLE 2**

### **1.10 Flexibility**

- There is a need to balance a flexible regional framework that responds to local circumstances (flexible in relation to fairly rigid requirements coming from central government) with the importance of developing something strong.
- 'Framework' or 'guidance' are the right words implying this flexibility – it's not a prison.

### **1.11 Levels**

- LSPs are the right level for responsibility. Parish plans could be launched by LSPs, and LSPs' Sustainable Community Strategies should all include an audit of parish plans. People don't know much about LSPs - protocols need to make LSPs interesting to communities.
- The district level should engage with other service providers.
- LAAs should sign up as well as LSPs.
- Discussions at local level need to inform this debate.
- Although LSP level is crucial, expected actions and commitment at regional level should also be included. The framework should set out potential regional-level constraints and links from regional to local level, e.g. to Regional Strategies.
- 'Success' is when evidence and priorities from parish plans are reflected in LSP members' policies and strategies, especially the Sustainable Community Strategy.

### **1.12 Linkages**

- There are a variety of other protocol-type documents out there (VCS compacts, parish charters, likely future neighbourhood charters). Some are used but too many sit in drawers, and the key people either don't know they exist or ignore them. Parish plan protocols should learn from this experience and be linked to other charters, for mutual benefit.
- There are internal links within local authorities and LSPs that need strengthening to ensure coordinated, effective responses to parish plans. It would be good if the regional framework could encourage this too.

### **1.13 Content**

- Protocols should use clear language to clarify the roles and responsibilities of community level and higher level signatories.
- The Leicestershire and Rutland protocol is about the right length and clear content.
- In terms of the two way commitment, a protocol should clarify that LSP level will be able to harness local activity and high-quality evidence in exchange for delivering on the expected outcomes and feeding this information into appropriate plans and strategies.
- By showing when and how there will be opportunities for parish plan groups to get responses from higher tiers and partners, protocols would manage expectations.
- A regional framework would provide a possible template and inform contractual arrangements. It would highlight the incentive for all parties to engage.
- Protocols could set out how parish plans can improve the prioritisation of resources / expenditure at community level by LSPs.

### **1.14 Concerns / constraints**

- While agreeing that there's a need for a framework and protocols, it's uncertain how this would have the teeth and capacity to deliver, to ensure it actually works.
- Some enforcement would be ideal but difficult – at a minimum there should be effective monitoring and feedback.
- Mustn't complicate matters - local government and planning is already unintelligible to most – we want protocols that make things as simple as possible for local people.
- Building relationships needs PEOPLE (as well as protocols)

- Partner agencies will ask “Is it statutory?” and if not it may not work.
- All LSPs are not equal in approach or set-up.
- Needs to be realistic about the ability to address / function with these constraints.

## 2. MAKING GOOD PRACTICE MAINSTREAM

2.1 *The prompt provided for the two groups to discuss was a flip chart sheet with some main headings of aspects to (possibly) address. This covered:*

- ❖ Enthuse: engage: commitment – key partners
- ❖ Awareness: education: training
- ❖ Enhanced community involvement
- ❖ Links to planning (statutory)
- ❖ Single funding mechanism: preparation and projects
- ❖ Information sharing: analysis, monitoring, data
- ❖ Shared, best practice exchange

*Each of the two groups was asked to react to the list and start to elaborate points, remove some, suggest priorities etc. In so doing, if they covered an item on the more detailed set of post-its produced in advance this was highlighted to them.*

*The two groups worked quite differently and produced different types of notes. They could not really be combined so are reported here separately.*

### 2.2 Group with Jeff

*As each item came up it was ticked on the prepared sheet of post-its and further discussion followed. Further suggestions were also made.*

*In the notes below, bold text shows where the point was raised and generally supported. Those added during discussion (and therefore supported) are underlined. Discussion points are in italics. Items in plain text were not discussed, not necessarily unsupported.*

### 2.3 Engage Central Government

#### And procedures, targets

Engage LSP level

Engage communities

*The point about procedures was that these should all be made far clearer by central government and the point about targets was simple – remove them!*

### 2.4 Awareness

#### Citizenship

Awareness – joint capacity building – especially Parish Councils

*‘Joint citizenship’ was seen as a key theme to emphasise the need for all to work together.*

#### **Media: celebration**

**Awareness – joint - continuing training – update techniques – best practice**

#### Internal – awareness, etc.

Awareness – joint – initial professional training by key technical staff (degrees, etc.)

*There were varied views about the value of ‘training’ as a distinct activity from awareness raising. Cautions were expressed by some because of the demands on people’s voluntary time and the wish not to overload and potentially put them off. Countering that was the point that there **is** a lot to understand and people may be more cross latter if not given a chance to grasp it at the start. This also came down to the quality of any training – making it ‘action learning’, fully engaging etc. can be a major help. (And don’t call it training.)*

### 2.5 Accountability / responsibility

#### Members

*Members were added because people felt that it is absolutely critical to get them 'onside', in part because Community Plans work is seen by some as a threat to their traditional position and as creating uncertainty about accountability.*

## **2.6 Funding – delivery of plans**

### **Clear budget > 1 year**

Targets / commitments

Funding

Preparation of plans

Awareness – joint guidance

Link into service delivery

*There was a strong feeling for the need to have in place funding mechanisms and procedures that went well beyond 1 year – a degree of certainty over 3 years was seen as the minimum to be useful to communities*

National guide (on its way)

## **2.7 Planning - Statement of Community Involvement**

### **Planning – Sustainability Appraisals? Community Appraisals**

Planning – clarify Community Plan input to statutory process –

2-way: strategic to local

*Links to planning were not important for this group but they did feel that the planning system should give more value to properly conducted community appraisals and surveys.*

Bring all partners into room together

## **2.8 Involvement – more innovation**

Involvement – inclusion

### **Involvement – role of enablers**

*There was agreement that much community involvement is boring and unengaging and hence does not access key groups.*

Information sharing – monitoring

Information sharing – rules of engagement

Information sharing – exchange 2-way - LOCAL!

Information sharing – best practice

**Information sharing – consistency**

**Consistent database (community profile)**

*This was the point again about building in consistency and being able to use community-generated information.*

## **Making Good Practice Mainstream: Group with Scott/Gerard**

*Notes here were taken under each heading. Points not covered are in brackets.*

## **2.9 Enthuse, engage and commitment of key partners**

- Ensure 'buy in' at all levels
- Engage Central Government, ensure all centrally based organisations are involved. Concern was expressed about having a single funding mechanism
- Joint guidance is required, with examples of what can be achieved by all who engage – what can communities expect from each partner?
- Engage with Local Government, including partners at this level – Police, PCT, Housing providers etc
- Expectation management of communities needs to be carefully handled.
- The level and commitment of partners: it is vitally important that this is defined at the beginning.

- Difficult to engage with 'stubborn' partners

#### **2.10 Awareness, education, training**

- Who determines what is defined as best practice?
- How do we know when we have delivered best practice – evaluate - by whom?
- Note the opportunity to engage with the Centre of Excellence.
- Moving Parish Projects Forward, there is a resource issue which needs to be addressed to ensure capacity building can still be delivered.
- (Citizenship, continuous training, updated techniques, best practice, initial professional training.)

#### **2.11 Enhanced community involvement**

- Fully understand and define the role of enablers
- Parishes and Towns need to recognise the routes and partners to help them achieve their aims.
- (Inclusion and innovation.)

#### **2.12 Links to statutory planning**

- Statements of Community Involvement: we should encourage/highlight their role and relevance in the local community planning process
- Clarifying community plan inputs to the statutory process: what can be done with existing plans to ensure they are recognised by planners as the aspirations of each community?
- Planners **are not outside of the community planning system!** They are not above or below any part of the process, they are an integral part of it!
- Mechanisms required to engage with the LAAs and LSPs.
- (Community-friendly Sustainability Appraisal.)

#### **2.13 Single funding mechanisms – preparation and projects**

- Shortage of funds influences the actions that can be delivered from the identified lists in community plans
- Caution about single funding, prefer to consolidate funds to deliver actions
- (Preparation of plans)

#### **2.14 Information sharing – analysis and monitoring**

- LSPs considered to be a good mechanism to receive and collate community plans
- Who is going to ensure the plans are collated? There is a need for a responsible partner to take responsibility for this.
- Key actions and common themes from plans needs to be retrievable electronically.
- Important to have someone who is responsible to have plans produced to a high standard, then take to the LSP and other partners.
- (Best practice, consistency, exchange, rules of engagement)

### **3. Potential benefits of supporting community planning**

#### **3.1 Initial “bridgers” ideas of what was needed to communicate to the “receptors”**

Common understanding of the term “Community Planning” as:

- Community lead (Parish / Market Town / neighbourhood plans)
- Holistic
- Inclusive, wide consultation

- Leading to **community action** not just demands for agency action
- Link to statutory responsibilities:

- (Sustainable) Community Strategy
- Area profile
- Local development framework
- Sustainable development
- Individual service plans –depending on issues covered, could contribute to everything from e.g. Early Years strategy to Crime and Disorder strategy
- Local Government white paper

### **3.2 Benefits as Bridgers saw them**

- Local evidence gathering that is inaccessible to statutory agencies. 60%+ response rate
- Worth £72,000 in volunteer time – low cost to local authority – value for money. Doesn't cost more in resources, just needs reordering of priorities.
- Useful “early warning” of emerging themes if the same issue starts appearing in a number of community-led plans
- Improves understanding of local democracy and can improve local governance. The improved communication leads to more realism of expectations and better satisfaction with local authority.
- Builds community capacity / involvement / activity.
- External funding leverage

### **3.3 Issues that may be raised by receptors as resistance**

Information the community wants to collect, but with potential to be irrelevant to agency needs. **Response – include some standard areas of enquiry that relate to agency requirements although still with scope for individual questions to be tailored at local level. (ACRE had an example of a possible outline framework)**

Consultation overload **Response - Rationalise demands and focus activity**

Poor quality of some plans **Response - Improve communication and develop internal systems**

**Develop communication with agencies at an early stage**

**Grant funding linked to basic quality standard**

Can be undertaken by few people and not truly representative of the community

**Response – robust inclusivity process and needs early contact and resourcing.**

*What follows is a table showing the responses of each group in turn during the discussion with the receptors.*

<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
<b>Benefits of Community Planning</b>		
Joining up funding / pooling Linking to LAA	Doing things (not just identifying what needs to be done) ++	Saved money & released capital not available to the local authority
Ongoing commitment of the community = extra human resource	Community voice	Makes decision making easier
Gives councillors a focus	Translating local to strategic +	Encouraging innovation
Community engagement & ownership	Accountability – makes members respond	Useful single point of contact at local level
Sign up of councillors to support	Brings out diversity	Added value through additional levered funds
Encourages partnership	Non elected on LSP made accountable	Feeds information into LSP
Service delivery can be made appropriate to need	Reduces need to consult	Allowed things to happen that wouldn't otherwise
Builds capacity	Value for money	Better outcomes
Targeting and influencing services	Prioritisation of need Good evidence of need	Can link to Parish Council and thus funding through precept
Avoids the expense of getting services wrong	Bridges understanding – community's understanding how/what can be achieved	Potential to cluster plans to address area issues
Translating strategic into local		
<b>Issues</b>		
Expectations once plan is completed +	Potential disconnect between community and elected membership	Value of LSP is so complex. Needs coherent decision making process
Expected speed local authority able to deliver	Jealousy that parish plan group can access funding	Bridging the gap between local and strategic is hard to deliver in practice
District / county partnership can be tricky	Fear of alternative to parish council	Conflicting drivers at different levels.
Relating issues to themes	Beginning to impose statutory demands on Parish plan process	CP timescale may not fit with service planning cycles.
Benefits need to tangible to residents	Fear that a plan may force rise in precept	"It's a big piece of work to ask of volunteers"

Risk of apathy	Needs validation that process was representational	Worries about quality of process – coverage, questions, analysis etc
Responding to proposals and ideas – sometimes this will mean saying no	Communities and agencies need the capacity to take things forward	
<b>Future of Community Plans</b>		
Better links to LSP	Cornerstone of community strategy	Standard format for parish plans
“Joining up” - dovetailing of organisations and programmes, - emerging trends - clustering of plans	Funding for communities to do things for themselves	Developing community capacity Possibly leading to <u>local</u> delivery of services
A simpler process for communities to engage with agencies.... And vice versa!!	The SW as an exemplar region on links from local to strategic – rural and urban	New CPs to be set up on the basis of what we know works – e.g. levels of resources, support systems

### 3.4 Benefits of community planning:

- Identifies grassroots issues LSPs/ LDFs need to work on/ provides information about community needs/ concerns; joins top down with bottom up
- Helps lever external funding for the community
- Activates and mobilizes the community; levers community based resources to help provide/ deliver better local/ community services
- Reduces no. of disaffected local people (which is bad for everyone) and increases community commitment/ buy-in to statutory plans; creates a greater sense of realism among local people about what is possible
- Helps develop a more comprehensive/ holistic/ strategic viewpoint among local groups
- Helps provide an evidence base for statutory plans (e.g. LTPs)

### 3.5 And possible challenges it needs to face (to be more accepted):

- Possibility of abuse of volunteers; weak capacity of volunteers; apathy of community volunteers (and limits to their commitment, especially on the more strategic issues); resource constraints on volunteers. Need for more external/ support resources
- Must move away from parochial thinking to more holistic/ strategic thinking
- Needs to ensure expectations are not raised to unrealistic levels
- Must join-in/ integrate with statutory processes (and especially LDFs/ planning)
- Many CPs now outdated; need to improve legitimacy of CPs by improving quality/ consistency/ usefulness of evidence base
- Problems of synchronizing the timetable of CP with that for statutory planning

## **FINAL DISCUSSION ON DAY TWO:**

- ⇒ We need to communicate these messages to people with influence & clout – it is critical to get the CEO’s & other LSP partners on board (Police, PCT’s)
- ⇒ Stephen Cane should have been here
- ⇒ Include urban areas as well
- ⇒ Remove CPA, targets etc – allow real local discretion, this applies to PCT’s etc OR make community – led planning a target!

- ⇒ Set local budgets to find resources
- ⇒ There are some targets for engagement but too much emphasis on process, not delivery
- ⇒ Link community plans into LAA decision making: (work developing this idea in South Glos)
- ⇒ If community plans are to influence at a strategic level this means that they will have to be in a form that can be used at that level
- ⇒ Need to know scope/flexibility from the statutory agencies in advance
- ⇒ BUT don't lose local focus (grass roots, parish, neighbourhood) – must be community-led NOT imposed by the local authority
- ⇒ Acknowledge the challenge for volunteers
- ⇒ Keep supporting & learning from each other - what resources can be shared?
- ⇒ Good community-led planning & projects can deliver national priorities more effectively if built on a shared understanding of policy & necessary constraints. WORK TOGETHER!
- ⇒ Swan & MCTA will continue to develop ways of improving practice and the status (influence) of community-led plans across the region
- ⇒ More events like this planned for March, in the mean time contact Stephen Wright at SWAN ([stephen.swan@devonrcc.org.uk](mailto:stephen.swan@devonrcc.org.uk)) if you would like to be included in taking forward the idea of a Concordat.
- ⇒ Stephen thanked everyone for their contribution to the discussions over the 2 days.