

Area North Committee – 19th December 2007

11. Supporting Parish Plans in Area North

Head of Service: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North)
Lead Officer: Les Collett, Community Development Officer
Contact Details: Leslie.collett@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01458) 257427

Purpose of the Report

To provide members with an overview of community-led planning activity in the rural parishes in Area North supported by the production of parish plans and to recommend future support for the process.

This report's focus is specifically on Parish Plans produced through the Countryside Agency's Parish Plans scheme, in the rural parishes in Area North. Community Plans produced in Somerton, Martock, Langport & Huish Episcopi and South Petherton are reported on separately.

Recommendation

Members are **recommended** to:

- 1) Endorse on-going support from the Area Development Service to the parish planning process.
- 2) Request reports which seek endorsement of recently completed plans including Fivehead, Pitney and Lopen.
- 3) Request further guidance on the role of Parish Plans in the Local Development Framework from the Head of Planning Policy, Economic Development and Transport.

Background

SSDC has made a long-term commitment to supporting local action and in turn addressing local needs through tailoring service delivery and targeting resources. This is embodied by our 'Enable-Partner-Deliver' ethos. The Area North Development Plans includes the priority to support the production and delivery of Parish Plans and other community-led planning activities.

Community-led planning is the term used to describe activities led by local communities to identify and address local needs, through a process of consultation and involvement, setting priorities, influencing support and delivering projects. In turn the results of community-led planning activity can provide a high quality evidence base to agencies and other organisations, whether for service planning, decision making or policy development.

The Parish Plan initiative, (part of the 'Vital Villages' programme developed by the Countryside Agency), offered grants to Parish and Town Councils, to support an intensive community-led planning process, resulting in a published 'Parish (or Town) Plan'. In addition advice and guidance was provided by the Rural Community Councils, funded by DEFRA.

Supporting local planning initiatives, such as Parish Plans, can also develop wider public involvement in strategic community planning, which is now a statutory requirement, including for land-use and spatial planning. South Somerset has a national reputation for the support

AN

offered to communities, as well as its ambition to secure local well-being as a community based council.

This report has been compiled by the Area North Development Team, with support from Katy Calvert, of the Community Council for Somerset. Reference has also made to the newly published ACRE toolkit for Parish Planning.

What is a Parish Plan?

A Parish Plan is a published document, approved by the Parish Council, which sets out an analysis of local needs and aspirations and priorities for the coming years, both short and longer term. It is a document which records how local people – of all ages, from all sections of the community – were involved in setting the priorities, and how residents, businesses and other local organisations can work together to achieve the aims and ambitions for the area it covers.

How are the results used?

Good quality Parish Plans help rural communities to develop their own solutions to local problems, and can encourage wider involvement and support, including increased volunteering.

Parish Plans can also generate influence on service providers to respond to local priority needs as well as on the strategic policies of Local Authorities and others.

Parish plans have provided a very useful resource during the process to prepare the Area Development Plan, revise the South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy, and to feed in to the SSDC service planning process.

In addition the evidence supplied by Parish Plans has been used to support grant applications to SSDC and other funders and partners.

How do Parish Plans relate to the land use planning system?

Despite early expectations, largely promoted by the Countryside Agency, experience has shown that Parish Plans are not likely to make suitable documents for adoption within the Local Development Framework. However, providing the evidence has been clearly set out they can, and do, act as a material consideration in the planning system.

The relationship to land use planning has caused confusion in the past and the District Council is currently preparing a protocol which will be available in the spring as part of the Local Development Framework.

How is a Parish Plan Created?

Staff from the Community Council for Somerset (CCS) and SSDC work together to support the production of parish plans by providing a toolkit to aid and guide the parishes through the process, providing funding to produce the plans and offering officer time to support and advise throughout.

The nine step process in creating a plan is detailed in the toolkit but the outline process is:

- Getting started.
- Establishing the Steering Group

- Developing a Project Plan
- Community Consultation
- Prioritising and Action Planning
- Drafting the Plan
- Finalising the Plan, Publication and Launch
- Implementing the Plan
- Monitor and Review

It should be noted that this is the current recommended process: some earlier plans followed a different process.

Subsequent research carried out by DEFRA has emphasised the role of Local Authorities in the process.

Once a plan is completed, the community then has a blueprint to work from, enabling it to implement items from the plan and to involve other community groups to work together to take on particular themes or projects. Some gains can be made very quickly and at little expense (the “quick win” element of the plan), e.g. communicating with the parish through newsletters and noticeboards, encouraging the reporting of crime to the police. Others are longer term and may require decisions or support from agencies and other organisations, e.g. refurbishment of village halls, traffic calming.

How is the Parish Plan process funded?

The costs of producing a Parish Plan, have varied according to the type of activities carried out during the consultation process, and the quality and quantity of the final printed plan. Costs include hall hire for open days and steering group meetings, hospitality, printing for newsletters and questionnaires, and the final publication.

There is no longer funding available from the original DEFRA programme, with no decision having been made for the next financial year (2008/09). Examples of grants awarded in 2006/2007 by CCS are in the table below.

Parish	Amount awarded
Lopen	£2,350
Fivehead	£2,500
Pitney	£1,727
Long Sutton	£1,500

In future, local authority grants (including parish precepts) and officer time could be used to support the process of producing parish plans, and recently small grants have been made from Frontline Councillor funds.

It is considered that if print and design costs were kept to a minimum, and use made of electronic DVDs, the final costs could be kept to a reasonable amount.

The regional network of South West Rural Community Councils are currently lobbying Government to continue financial support.

Area North Parish Plans

In Area North, eleven Parish Plans have been completed, printed and issued which vary in format and content reflecting the different communities they represent. (See table).

AN

Ward	Parish	Parish Plan Position November 2007
Isle Moor	Isle Abbots	Completed in 2005
Isle Moor	Beercrocombe and Curry Mallet	Completed in 2006
Isle Moor	Hambridge & Westport	Completed in 2006
Isle Moor	Ilton	Completed in 2006
Isle Moor	Fivehead	Completed in 2007
South Petherton	Shepton Beauchamp	Completed in 2005
South Petherton	The Seavingtons	Completed in 2005
South Petherton	Lopen	Completed in 2007
Hamdon	Stoke-sub-Hamdon	Completed in 2005
St Michael's	Chilthorne Domer	Completed in 2005
Turn Hill	Pitney	Completed in 2007

Long Sutton has started to develop a plan, Montacute is about to begin the process and Norton sub Hamdon, Long Load and Tintinhull are interested in the idea.

Key Themes Identified in Parish Plans in Area North

According to a DEFRA report published in 2004, the top issues emerging **nationally** in descending order were:

- Road traffic
- Housing
- Inadequacy of facilities for young people
- Law and order / policing
- Inadequacy of public transport
- Minor environmental concerns
- Inadequacy of specific village services
- Car parking issues
- Environmental protection
- Village hall matters

Looking at the completed parish plans in **Area North**, very similar issues emerged – see table below.

Most published parish plans are included on the SSDC Community pages on the SSDC website.

Frequency	Issue	Examples of Responses
10	Law and order / community safety	Publicise the work of PCSOs Introduce or rekindle Neighbourhood watch scheme Extra street lighting Address antisocial behaviour Encourage the reporting of crime
10	Environmental protection	Encourage recycling Battle against fly tipping Planting of trees Development of derelict land to nature reserves or conservation sites
9	Road traffic	Speed watch schemes introduced HGV weight limit / Traffic calming / Speed limits

9	Housing	Housing needs survey Village design statement
9	Inadequacy of facilities for young people / provision for youth	Youth Parish Council Starting of youth club
9	Leisure facilities	Installation of MUGA
9	Health, social needs and access to services	Form "Help the Elderly" Group Institute system to assist prescription collection Promote Good Neighbour Scheme Lobby health authority to reinstate health visitor access Identify and contact highways dept with uneven or access problems with pavements or crossings Improve disabled access to village hall
8	Public transport	Publish timetables in parish magazines Lobby local council and bus companies
6	Education and lifelong skills	Provide better access to information about existing learning provision
6	Minor environmental concerns	Improve access and maintain footpath network including installing kissing gates Produce a footpath guide Dog fouling issues and using the dog warden Promote awareness of the growing issue of litter in the countryside
6	Communications	Encourage subscription to parish magazine New noticeboard
5	Inadequacy of village services	Introduction of community shop Dial-a-ride scheme Village lunch clubs Use of mobile shops
3	Village hall matters	Rebuild village hall Refurbish village hall Increase use of the village hall Coffee morning / lunch club Home for village shop / post office
1	Car parking issues	Mainly linked with road safety
1	Employment	Investigate suitability of sites for small business units

Maintenance and Monitoring of Parish Plans

A Parish Plan is the basis for the future but is not set in stone and should be monitored on a regular basis and items added as needed.

An audit of completed Parish Plans within Area North is currently being compiled and the information fed into a working database. This will be used to provide evidence of need for service planning, policy development and to target support towards the successful completion of projects. The database will be updated by Area North Support Staff as projects are completed or issues addressed.

The Community Council for Somerset Fieldworker, Katy Calvert, will be visiting those parishes with completed plans between January and March 2008 and recording her findings in such a way that they can be audited at a county level.

Work is taking place nationally, which SSDC is part of, to develop and enhance the ways in which local authorities analyse and respond to parish plans.

It is planned to arrange further local workshops in 2008 aimed at:

- Parishes currently producing plans in order to encourage them to share ideas and experiences
- Parishes who are considering producing one to explain the procedure before they commit and possibly introduce them to those who are already in the process – or have finished
- Parishes with published plans, who are interested in refreshing and updating their plan

The respective officers from SSDC and the CCS will continue to work closely together in order to ensure a smooth, efficient service to parishes.

Learning from prior work – principles for future support

Assuming no further government funding, a significant issue will be financial which will need to be self-generated. Possible funding sources are via the parish precept, local sponsorship or district grants. CCS and SSDC officer time will continue to be needed.

Research by DEFRA, the CCS and local groups across the country has highlighted some of the things that have gone well, but also what has not proved so successful.

At a local level, information is being gathered in the on-going audit, but some feedback already garnered includes the following observations:

- A change of council membership can lead to a change in attitude – from enthusiasm to apathy and vice versa.
- No matter how much support is received from outside agencies, each parish needs a champion within the parish council to enable the plan to work locally, however single issue campaigns are unlikely to sustain a successful process.
- The plan provides an umbrella under which all grant requests are sought which maintains continuity within the parish, however this emphasise the need for plans to be prepared considering all aspects of community life, and involving as many residents, groups and businesses as possible, in a constructive and positive manner.
- The parish plan process often confirmed what the Parish Council or other community groups were already planning to do, however this also generated wider involvement, and gave a good basis for project development and funding.
- Expectations could be raised that plans would have more status than they do at present. Clear and available advice and support can help, as well as increasing wider public understanding of the role and value of parish plans.

Financial Implications

Support for community-led planning including the publication of parish plans can be made from within existing budgets, including community grants and officer time.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Supporting Parish Plans address the following Corporate Priorities:

- To identify and address the particular issues affecting rural areas.
- To increase to 65% by 2010 the people who feel engaged in and can influence decisions that affect their communities.
- To maintain above 80% the people satisfied with their communities as a place to live.

Other Implications

Supporting parish planning will have wider benefits, including addressing local needs identified in the Area North Development Plan, and Area North Community Safety Action Plan.

Background Papers: *Area North Development Plan 2007/2008.*
Parish and Community Planning Toolkit published by ACRE.
Integration of parish plans into the wider systems of local government, report commissioned by DEFRA, July 2007
