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The role of community-led planning in empowering communities and influencing strategic thinking

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 1 – the purpose and nature of the study

- This study examines the role of community-led planning in empowering communities and in influencing strategic thinking (Section 1.1).
- There are both communities of place and of interest. All communities have things in common but also there are differences between communities (Section 1.2).
- Community-led planning is inclusive action driven by local communities that can embrace a wide range of issues. It seeks to identify local priorities and local solutions through things such as village appraisals, parish plans, village design statements and market and coastal town initiative plans. (Section 1.3).
- It is a legal requirement, from April 2009 to involve communities in a wide range of plans, under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007.

Section 2 - community-led planning: problems and potentials

- Much reporting on community led planning is methodologically unclear and offers only rhetorical results (Section 2.1).
- Conflicts and tensions in community-led planning from national reports relate to procedures, structural arrangements and quality (Section 2.2).
- In the South West region, there are issues relating to the way in which community-led planning relates to local authority planning; the extent to which community-led plans fully represent community views, and the number of plans and stakeholders (Section 2.3).
- Good practice, from the literature, develops around enhancing community skills, using and enhancing community assets, developing robust plans and paying attention to both people and processes (Section 2.4).

Section 3 – developing best practice: principles and policy proposals.

- From a series of advice and advocacy documentation, good practice involves developing good structural relationships between all stakeholders, the development of good processes and techniques and the production of robust plans (Section 3.1).
- Good practice principles include: identifying appropriate resources; innovative communication; valuing community views; the maintenance of statutory rights; clarity about the potential of community plans and an appropriate evidence base (Section 3.2).
- There is a wide range of government practice about effective community-led planning (Section 3.3).
- References to good practice are legion, but they tend to focus on processes rather than outcomes. There is no single 'best' approach to community-led planning (Section 3.4).

Section 4 – the views of authorities within the South West

- From the letter to authorities, good practice coheres around good frameworks, good actions and knowing the community. Problems with community-led planning are to be found both upstream of authorities and downstream as well as within authorities (Section 4.1).
- From the telephone interviews, *community-led* planning is most fully developed in the area of spatial planning because it has a long heritage in this area. Many other portfolios of local authority responsibility are experiencing *community involvement* in planning which is maturing towards community-led planning (Section 4.2)

- In respect of governance, most authorities have accorded community-led planning a clear priority with an emphasis on how processes and organisational structures fit in with those existing within the authority (Section 4.3).
- The main conflicts and tensions in relation to community-led planning, from the local authority point of view are: plan alignment; unbalanced community participation; maintaining neutrality, and slowness of progress (Section 4.4)
- The main benefits of community-led planning for communities concern involvement, empowerment, cohesion and creating a sense of place. For authorities it leads to greater public understanding of their work and passes some responsibilities on to communities. Good practice relates to organisation, communications and achieving breadth (Section 4.5).

Section 5 – conclusions and recommendations about best practice and conflicts and tensions.

Section five draws all of these strands together in making recommendations about good practice in *community-led* planning and enduring conflicts and tensions.

In respect of good practice, from all of the evidence taken together, the importance of *the involvement of all parties from the inception* of any community-led planning initiative provides a first key to successful community-led planning. This will require good will from all stakeholders. In this context, *local authorities* should be encouraged to:

- communicate with communities using a range of different means;
- facilitate regular meetings, knowledge transfer and feedback;
- involve councillors fully;
- nominate community engagement leaders from within the authority;
- provide adequate resources to allow community-led planning to flourish, including the development of toolkits;
- build consensus, minimise conflict, gain local knowledge and understand local culture, circumstances and feelings through dialogue with communities;
- integrate community participation with other planning and community processes within the authority (SCIs, SDSs, LDFs, LAAs etc);
- adopt as far as possible the recommendations of community-led plans and get them adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents, to give communities confidence.

In this context too, *communities* should be encouraged to:

- understand that they have a voice in the planning process but also a responsibility to act with propriety;
- form structured community planning groups;
- develop community assets (including the development of skills) fully;
- involve the local authority from inception;
- develop as full an understanding as possible of planning processes and produce great plans.

Local authorities and communities *working together* should be encouraged to:

- align community-led planning processes with local authority processes;
- acknowledge the importance of, and use, informal processes;
- share experiences, information and knowledge fully and regularly;
- develop fundraising strategies;

- pay attention to good outcomes as well as good processes;
- make use of toolkits and consultation techniques to facilitate learning through the mutual agreement of all stakeholders.

The problems are developed more fully in section five, but in summary these are:

Problems originating from the local authority and the public sector:

- community-led planning is often at variance with top down plans;
- community-led planning is expensive;
- communities can become disenchanted by local authority decisions.

Problems that have their origins within the community:

- community involvement in planning does not involve everyone;
- local authority planning and provision structures are difficult for lay people to understand;
- community involvement will not necessarily deliver what the authority wants.

These results were triangulated by asking three stakeholders in community-led planning outside of the local authority sector to comment on them. The Gloucestershire Rural Community Council felt that the requirements for good practice were couched in slightly negative terms and that in their experience, most of the problems noted can be anticipated and managed successfully. The Government Office for the South West broadly concurred with the good practice proposals, noting that they will take some time to realise. The Devon Town Forum felt that a key problem for all Community Plans is the lack of dissemination and mainstreaming and the ineffectiveness of local authorities, at all levels, to coherently sustain community capacity and involvement. CLP needs more support from government agencies and needs to be seen as an on-going rather than a one off process.

Finally in Section 5, in reflecting on the potential of community led planning, we make recommendations in relation to the heterogeneous nature of community-led plans, how communities might most effectively be empowered by such plans, and how action at the community level can be used to influence strategic thinking.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THE STUDY

1.1 The study objectives

This study is concerned to examine the role of community-led planning in empowering communities and also in influencing strategic thinking. In doing so it addresses three main objectives

- Review relevant statutory and voluntary *structures and activity* in unitary and two-tier authorities in the South West region.
- Identify key similarities and differences, and common themes; considering particularly support which these authorities have given to community-led planning, and how they might support and build capacity for this.
- Consider how this activity may contribute to success in meeting National Indicators (particularly in PSA 21) and CAA

In pursuing these three main objectives, principles underlying successful practice in this area are suggested and areas of conflict and tension are articulated. A set of recommendations for good practice also is offered.

1.2 The Nature of 'community'

It is useful at the outset of this study to identify what, for our purposes, is meant by 'community'. The use of the term in its current meaning is actually rural in origin (Smith, 2001), developed at the beginning of the 20th century to describe a range of different economic functions surrounding villages. Hogget (1997) suggests that our initial conceptions of community have been characterised as the development of close bonds and mutual support often in an agrarian context. The image, of itself however, is no evidence that such a sense of community was ever that widespread.

From this time, definitions of community have burgeoned, but three broad types are commonly deployed as a classification (for example, Smith, 2001, Willmott, 1986, Crow and Allen, 1995).

Communities of place are where people in close geographical proximity share commonalities. Much of the notion of locality is about observing this geographical understanding of community, but it can extend beyond the locale. Shaeheli (1999) notes the renaissance of *regional* identity borne of people's increased desire for a sense of 'home' in a globalising world and Agnew (2001) suggests that the region is a scale at which ethnic identity is at its strongest. A sense of regional community particularly pertinent to rural areas is borne of *peripherality* to the nation state as in Cornwall and parts of North Devon (Tomaney, 2002).

Communities of interest are where people share a common interest but not necessarily geographically coincident (for example those involved in hunting, conservation, buildings preservation, wild bird protection, the stopping of the development of wind farms and the like). These are often to do with *identities* – people's interests and orientations. These are what Hoggett (1997) has termed 'intentional' communities and they are becoming more important in modern life, particularly through the development of virtual communities on the internet. Communities of interest are mentioned a lot in the telephone interviews as being a source of 'expert' knowledge in their field of identity.

Smith (2001) also identifies a third type of community – *communion* – which he considers to be a sense of *attachment* to a place of an interest: a *spirit* of community. Willmott (1989) suggests that this third is important because the other two types of community do not necessarily have a sense of shared commitment.

Bounded communities: all three types of community noted above have at least two characteristics that define their boundaries. The first is that people within them have something *in common*. The second thing is that one community can be distinguished from another by *difference*. These boundaries can be hard to identify, particularly in respect of communities of interest and in respect of communion.

The 'membership' of communities can be linked to these boundaries. This membership can be connected to 'rituals' (having to undergo some kind of initiation ceremony, for example) or 'symbols' of membership (the cross for Christianity, for example). Because communities have boundaries and require some form of membership, they also can be exclusionary. This exclusion can extend to 'intimidation' or other covert methods: you may not belong to self styled 'gangs' because you have not been invited or made to feel welcome. These characteristics are all more common in communities of interest, but communities of place have clear memberships – you are in them by virtue of where you live.

1.3 The Nature of community-led planning

It also is important at the outset to consider the scope of community-led planning. In the UK, as in many other European countries, there has been a burgeoning but uncoordinated growth of community-led planning in urban, but principally rural areas, in the past two or three decades: village appraisals, 'village action plans', parish maps, Local Agenda 21, 'Planning for Real®', the LEADER programme, Village Design Statements (Moseley, 2002; Parker 2009), Parish Plans (Owen, 2002) and Market and Coastal Town Initiative Plans (Caffyn, 2004). The full scope of community-led plans can be much broader than this, however, as we report in Section 2 below. Discussing the stimulus for these initiatives, Moseley (2002) identifies the increasing emphasis placed by central and local governments on the active involvement of local communities in planning and delivering action to improve their social, economic and environmental conditions; this is an international phenomenon encompassing the UK, the European Union, the United States and more widely the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. He cites three particular driving forces for this devolution:

- growth in popular concern at the perceived neglect of local communities by a variety of public agencies;
- a wish by governments to release the social capital that comes from working with communities¹
- growing recognition that promoting sustainability requires attention to be paid to community development and empowerment.

Engaging communities and stimulating citizenship are key features of the UK Government's local government modernisation agenda (Parker, 2002; NVCO, 2006). David Milliband, when UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, claimed that:

"modern society will only reach its potential when citizens individually and collectively are able to use their knowledge and capacity to shape their lives and their communities".²

¹ Bishop (2007) reports that on average a Parish Plan generates approximately £72,000 in voluntary effort (2007 prices).

In this regard the Carnegie UK Trust (2007) suggests that the transformation to sustainable rural communities will depend on the effectiveness of three enabling factors:

- growing the capacity of local people, agencies and professionals;
- enhancing community assets through building capital;
- increasing the scope and quality of *community-led* planning.

Specifically for the South West Region, Community-led planning has been defined by SWAN (2009) as follows.

"Community-led planning for this purpose means any structured activity that is undertaken by people in the local community and with those people and is recognised as such by an appropriate agency or local authority. Community-led planning may or may not encompass the development of Parish or market town plans, a health check, a village design statement, housing or transport needs surveys or similar. The crucial factor is that although ideally facilitated by an agency of an authority, the process is a community driven and demonstrably inclusive process as, for example, defined by the SW Community-led planning Framework now widely adopted as the required quality standard for community plans arising from community-led planning activity across the south west."

The Carnegie Trust Rural Programme (2009) buttresses this definition (first quote, page 24 and, second quote, page 22):

"Community-led planning is a structured process that engages local people in debate about their local area. It encourages them to identify local priorities, to develop local solutions and have real influence with local decision-makers. The process takes place over time, involving all sections of the community and covers all matters that affect quality of life in a local area, particularly those that need most support"

"Statutory Community planning is a process by which a local authority plans for the provision of services in their area. A number of public sector organisations including health, fire, police, enterprise agency and transport providers are usually partners in Community Planning. In addition to the statutory partners, Community Planning Partnerships typically involve other public, voluntary/community and private sector partners".

At the forefront of specific plans that constitute community-led planning, BDOR (2006a) suggest that Parish Plans and Market and Coastal Town Initiative (MCTi) Strategic Plans have had the greatest influence on the community-led plan movement. It also suggests that Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) and Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) should be included within the definition of community-led plans even though they are produced by local authorities rather than communities themselves. These thus embrace the Carnegie Trust Rural Programme's (2009) notion of statutory community planning.

Moseley (2009), too, considers parish plans and market and coastal town action plans to be the two principal forms of community-led plans. They have two common characteristics: they have to be 'bottom up' or firmly based on community consultation and involvement, and they also have to be 'evidence-based' - founded not on preconceptions but on a careful and recent distillation of local issues and concerns. He

² Despite this rhetorical Government commitment, Bishop (2007) observes that the White Paper 'Planning for a Sustainable Future' (DCLG, 2007) does not even directly mention plans produced at the local community level.

estimated in 2009 that there were over 2,000 parish plans and over 250 market town plans in England.

The *scope* of community led planning can be seen from the priority issues contained within them. Nationally, Moseley (2006) found, with little geographical variation, the priority order of issues for concern in Parish Plans was : traffic; housing; too few facilities for the young; law and order; public transport; environmental nuisance; inadequate village services; environmental protection; village hall matters.

In Moseley's (2006) survey of market town plans, the emphasis of issues was more squarely on the local economy, possibly due to the fact that 'key local actors' (town councils, chambers of commerce) spearheaded the plan rather than households through surveys. Aside from local economy issues the most important concerns in these plans were as follows, but many were still couched in terms of the impact of these issues on the local economy: road traffic; deficiencies of the town environment; public transport; a lack of facilities for young people; local leisure and recreation; limited range and quality of local shops; neglect of the towns' tourism potential; facilities and support for business; 'poor quality of employment'; affordable housing; health-related issues.

In the region, Somerset Market Towns Forum (2009) note their major successes arising from community-led plans to be traffic calming schemes, community offices, cycle trails, affordable housing, developing markets and shops and the introduction of youth workers.

All of these subject areas then, give a flavour of the breadth of community-led planning beyond just the spatial planning context.

Village Appraisals

The most common community-led planning initiatives in rural UK have been holistic in scope: Village Appraisals and Parish Plans. Some 3,000 Village Appraisals have been prepared, involving local communities taking stock of their village characteristics, opportunities and concerns by means of a household survey and communal discussion led by an informal and often self-appointed community action group (Moseley, 1997; Owen, 2002; Owen & Moseley, 2003). The scope of these appraisals has varied considerably from place to place but typically they embrace the provision of local services, concerns about land-use planning, the need for community facilities, the local economy, environmental conservation, etc. Many have been weak on implementation, especially when 'higher up' support has been needed, as with, for example, the provision of affordable housing or the wish for traffic calming. But village appraisals may be fairly credited with a host of relatively modest 'do-it-yourself' initiatives across rural England, for example the establishment of playgroups or community transport schemes, and also with the nurturing of human and social capital.

However, these appraisals have often been weak on actually 'planning' things, as distinct from the listing of action points following a survey. Government policy, at least since the Rural White Paper of 2000 (DETR and MAFF, 2000), has sought to put right both of those deficiencies while enhancing the role of very local communities in decision-making and service delivery. The White Paper stated that: 'we want to enable rural communities to improve their quality of life and opportunity. We want to give them a bigger say in managing their own affairs and the chance to give everyone in the community a say in how it develops' (DETR and MAFF, 2000: 146). And while village appraisals have demonstrated some benefits in terms of wide community participation, they have dropped away as Parish Plans have become more significant as an approach to community led planning.

Parish Plans

The 2000 Rural White Paper, notably independent of planning policy and legislation, proposed that all parish councils should be encouraged to prepare Parish Plans (DETR and MAFF, 2000) and in the interim over 2,000 have been prepared. Parish Plans were to set out a vision for how the local community wanted to develop, and to identify the action needed to achieve it (Countryside Agency, 2003). Their stated purpose was to identify problems that needed to be addressed, to explore the key facilities and services that a parish needed, and to show how the distinctive character of villages might be preserved. They were to encourage communities to engage actively with matters of concern to them as a way of developing the community itself, influencing decisions and preparing for action. A Parish Plan was to be holistic in scope – integrating social, economic and environmental issues and embracing all those matters that the local community considered to be important.

There was no prescriptive list of topics but a plan might embrace, for example, affordable housing, retail services, health and personal care, traffic, crime and tourism. Parish Plans should address the needs and interests of the whole community and should give everyone the chance to express their views. They should include an action plan for those matters that could be addressed directly by the community such as re-opening a closed village shop, providing community transport and carrying out environmental improvements. They should also articulate feasible proposals for implementation by, or in association with, other institutions and agencies.

Gallent *et al* (2009) claim that the extent to which community-led plans can and should be aligned with statutory frameworks is *the* critical debate in community planning in England at present. However, there are particular difficulties in the relationship between Parish Plans and the statutory land use or spatial planning system. Parish Plans seem to have had only modest success in integrating with the spatial planning system and influencing the Core Strategies of Local Development Frameworks. While community-led parish planning *can* play an important role in rural spatial planning, one key way to make this meaningful is if their production becomes the *norm* rather than the exception (Gallent *et al*, 2009). As information comes out of parishes in an *ad hoc*, unsystematic fashion, this makes it difficult for mainstream agencies to use it in a consistent and meaningful way (SQW Consulting, 2007; Parker, 2009).

Village Design Statements

Compared with most other community-led planning initiatives that attempt to cover a wide range of social, economic and environmental matters, VDSs, with their specific focus on design, stand as an outlier. Unlike these other initiatives, VDSs were deliberately developed within a clear and narrow frame of reference (the design of new development) in order to ensure a close 'fit' with the statutory spatial planning system and hence maximise their effectiveness.

Village Design Statements were first proposed by the Countryside Commission in 1993 using the research and development work of BDOR Limited. Again, these proposals were outwith spatial planning policy and legislation. They were intended to help reverse the widespread erosion of distinctiveness in English villages, particularly with regard to the design and setting of new buildings. They were proposed initially as a planning tool to supplement local plans, based on the principle that involving local communities in assessing the character of their localities would best lead to designs that would be appropriate for locally distinctive new development (Countryside Commission, 1993). The concept and the early testing and implementation of VDSs have been well-

documented (Countryside Commission, 1993; 1994; 1996; Bishop, 1994; Owen, 1998; 1999).

VDSs were meant to be a way of protecting, celebrating and enhancing what a local community believes to be the distinctive features that make their particular village unique. It was intended that a VDS should use those valued features to outline planning and design guidelines that could be used in early discussions with developers and designers, but they were required to focus on *how* rather than *whether* or *where* development might best happen.

Some 600 or so VDSs have been prepared. Over the past decade, several evaluations of, or commentaries on, VDSs have been conducted (Atkins, 1998; Owen, 1998; 1999; 2002; Countryside Agency, 2002; Hughes, 2006; Gallent *et al*, 2009) and most report that there is now widespread acceptance of VDSs as valuable contributors to the planning system. The more recent evaluations suggest that some local authorities use VDSs systematically in development control and that VDSs are influencing the outcomes of planning decisions, mainly the determination of planning applications but also planning appeals. Often, through pre-application discussions, they have prevented inappropriate development and improved the quality of development that has been permitted. In some cases they are helping to shape the review of policies in Local Plans and, subsequently, Local Development Frameworks.

Specifically, Hughes (2006) records that in Kent Downs AONB, 14% of villages have produced VDSs and that *all* have been adopted as SPG. She argues that VDSs are becoming increasingly embedded and used in the planning system in Kent. They are taken seriously when planning applications are being determined and may be accepted as a material consideration during planning committee deliberations. They are more compatible with strategic planning frameworks than many other community-led initiatives and are more 'achievable' than less well-framed Parish Plans (Gallent *et al*, 2009).

In many instances VDSs have helped to improve relationships between planning officers and local communities, and everywhere they appear to have contributed to community development. Specifically they have enhanced design awareness amongst all communities involved in their preparation. They can, however, be dominated by a small number of people and there remains the danger that parish councils – and through them the wider community – sometimes feel excluded from the VDS process.

Notwithstanding their valuable community development role, VDSs are seen principally as a *spatial planning tool*; they are intended to influence the design of new development and their adoption as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), originally Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), is regarded by many as crucial. Hughes (2006), though, identifies some recent problems with getting VDSs adopted as SPD, particularly in the light of the need to go through an exhaustive Sustainability Appraisal process during VDS preparation. In 2006 some local planning authorities were recommending suspension of work on VDSs until this matter had been resolved, but Hughes reports that the situation is beginning to ease and community-led initiatives have now been adopted in Surrey, Cornwall and Hampshire. (The requirement for Sustainability Appraisal for SPD has not been removed.)

Reflecting on the progress of VDSs in England between 1993 and 2008, CCRI and BDOR Ltd (2008) observe that most local planning authorities have taken a highly supportive approach even though a few have refused to support any VDSs. Most VDSs have been adopted formally as SPG/D, and where they have been used at appeals they have almost always been successful. Of course it was not all plain sailing; there was suspicion,

sometimes hostility, from some planning officers; there were problems with the adoption of VDS as SPG in some areas, and there was an early tendency of some local communities to try to use VDSs as a way of preventing development. But in the main, VDSs have been effective since their inception.

Market and Coastal Town Initiative plans

The Market and Coastal Towns initiative (MCTi) was devised by the South West RDA and set up with other key partners in 2000 to encourage economic, social, environmental and cultural regeneration of communities across the region through the production of a long-term Community Strategic Plan (CSP) covering the town and the surrounding rural areas (South West RDA, 2009).

In respect of the management of the MCTi programme, the South West RDA facilitated the Programme until the formation of the South West Market and Coastal Towns Association in 2003. The SWMCTA was in place until 2008 when support for Market Towns across the South West transferred to the SW Market and Coastal Towns Network currently embodying each of the County-level Market Town For. These now represent and help support their constituency of Market Town level Community Partnerships. Current SW RDA funding for the Network and each of the County level Fora is due to cease in 2011. Continuation arrangements are not known at the time of writing, placing uncertainties in the development of the programme.

The MCTi strategic plans under this programme were designed to be broader than the portfolio of the spatial planning system and therefore more closely aligned to Parish Plans than Village Design statements. They were to be rigorous and professional and actively engage community groups. They were designed to cover market and coastal towns and their hinterlands, which made them more complex to produce than Parish Plans.

Most respondents in the BDOR (2006a) study suggested that MCTi plans were principally seen as a means of accessing MCT funding for already favoured projects – a kind of post-rationalisation. Commonly, according to the BDOR (2006a) study there were few spatial planning implications in MCTi plans because no development was involved. This is not universally the case, however as a number of such plans have addressed issues such as housing, the need for workspace, employment land, transport and buildings. MCTi plans also have occasionally included town design statements

1.4 Legislative and policy context.

The policy context for community participation.

Community participation has a longer history than policy for it. Its English origins can be traced back to the social reform era of the late 19th Century with the formation of amenity groups such as the National Trust in 1885 and 'welfare groups' such as the Women's Institute (1897). Many community groups developed in the interwar years (for example most of the Rural Community Councils) and a more widespread involvement of 'lay' communities grew after the Second World War in the spirit of post-war reconstruction, with bodies such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers being formed in 1959.

Gittins (1993) suggests that the first orchestrated *policy* developments for community participation were rural in nature – the Integrated Development Experiments set up by the Countryside Commission in England, and the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes set up by the European Union – both in the late 1970s (Midmore, 1998). The later has

developed through a series of LEADER programmes in to the most distinctive policy for rural community development – currently manifest in the prevailing Rural Development Programme for England.

From the late 1970s, policies for community participation burgeoned through both a disaffection with (and spiralling cost of) welfarist governments and their intendant bureaucracies (Fung and Wright, 2003) and the development of citizenship. Strong Whitehall *government* gave way to *governance* (Rhodes, 1997) which itself was characterised as a mix of all kinds of governing efforts, at all levels, by all manner of socio-political actors, where the state becomes a co-ordinator and partner rather than just an intervener (Kooiman, 2003). Political structures here become interactive and diverse and the causes of their coming into being are often not fully known. Governance came to be considered as any set of shared responsibilities between the state, the private sector (the market) and the third (voluntary) sector. Interactions, and the structures in which they take place, are critical to the operation of governance.

Citizenship provided the policy context for this shift. Much has been written in the English context about the development of the 'active citizen' of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative administration between 1979 and 1992 (Parker, 2002) and the 'consumer citizen' and Citizen's Charter of John Major's Conservative administration between 1992 and 1997 (Faulks 1998). The 'New Labour' administration's 'third way' agenda from 1997, too, would confer rights on citizens only in exchange for certain responsibilities. The state would, it has been argued (Giddens, 1998), act in an enabling role and people, as citizens, would make an active contribution to civil society in an autonomous way, including greater involvement in decisions about their future.

For rural areas these agendas were manifest in a 1995 Conservative Rural White Paper (DoE, 1995), which suggested that rural decision-making should be more responsive to local circumstances because local people and local initiative were the key to the quality of rural life. The state would help communities to help themselves because rural communities had strong traditions of independence and self-help (Lowe, 1996). This would serve the citizenship agenda whilst reducing Exchequer cost.

The 'New Labour' Rural White Paper of 2000 (DETR, 2000) contained the same messages. It provided specific funding streams to empower local rural communities to be actively involved in decision-making for their own development. The 2000 White Paper contained specific recommendations for both Parish Planning and the Market Town Initiative. The latter in particular should be the focus for regeneration and services and serve as a hub for their rural hinterlands.

Indeed in the same year the Local Government Act, 2000, gave local authorities a *duty* to prepare Community Development Plans and Community Strategies as part of their social inclusion obligations. By July 2008, the English Communities White Paper (DCLG, 2008) was offering further empowerment to parish and other local councils and encouraging more of them to be formed as part of a process of strengthening local decision-making.

The current statutory duty

One trigger for this report has been the institution of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in England which, under Section 138, introduces a legal obligation: a statutory 'duty to involve' the community on the part of local authorities. It came into force in April 2009 and embraces citizen involvement in all local decision making and service provision within the purview of the local authority and not just spatial planning. Authorities are required to take steps to co-ordinate activities and to

inform, consult and involve local people and organisations so that these activities take place in an integrated way through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The purpose of the Duty is to: 'embed a culture of engagement and empowerment' in local communities. (DCLG, 2008a).

This Statutory Duty is buttressed by a number of other community empowerment measures within this panoply, in England. A series of National Indicators (NI) is designed to provide metrics for *evaluating* local authority performance. NI 4 thus measures:

"the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality" (DCLG, 2008b, page 32).

But also, NI 3 is concerned to measure civic participation in the local area; NI 5, the overall general satisfaction with a locality, and NI 6, the number of people volunteering within the locality. These all support the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA 21) to build more comprehensive, empowered and active communities (HM Government, October 2007)

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a further evaluation measure, which assesses how well local public bodies work with each other, the private and third sectors, town and parish councils, and their local communities (Audit Commission, 2009). The Place Survey (PS), too, provides information on people's perceptions of their local area and the local services they receive, and offers a baseline for measuring community involvement. Finally in this suite of measures, the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations (STSO) was commissioned in 2008 so that all local authorities could be judged on their performance in creating an environment for a thriving third sector (Braybrook, 2009).

Whilst the current Statutory Duty requires only an *involvement* of the community, our survey authorities noted that that community involvement in planning and community-led planning are interconnected. More than one authority in our survey suggested that whilst community-led planning was the most active form of involvement it had, in their experience, actually developed out of community involved planning. An involvement in local issues had led to an understanding of community planning processes which, in turn, had led to an interest in community-led planning. From there, involvement had become part of a 'virtuous circle'.

1.5 Report structure and methods used

A brief literature and report review of both the conflicts and tensions in the development community-led planning and of good practice is presented in section 2 of this report. A review of general principles for the development of best practice, drawn largely from government and international guidance is reported in Section 3.

Section 4 then reports on the empirical part of the project. For this empirical assessment, all 43 local planning authorities in the region (appendix 1) were contacted by letter (appendix 2) on 13 October 2009, to determine a number of facts and opinions about community involvement and the Statutory Duty in their authority. They were also asked if they would be willing to take part in a telephone interview to explore issues that were the subject of the letter, in more detail. After one reminder letter, fifteen authorities had responded to the questionnaire (a 35% response rate) and it was agreed with the steering group for the project that this would provide a reasonable basis for developing the telephone interview.

The telephone interviews were conducted during November - December 2009, with identified named interviewees. It was initially agreed that appropriate representatives from 18 authorities would be interviewed, but it was difficult to identify all 18 with some certainty as the response rate to the initial letter had yielded fewer responses than this. After a number of follow up emails and enquires, sixteen of these authorities eventually agreed to, and completed, interviews with members of the research team. The authorities interviewed are at appendix 3, together with the schedule of questions to be asked. None of these authorities is identified individually in the report of these interviews as anonymity was assured to allow a more frank discussion of issues. The research team is content that these sixteen interviews have uncovered sufficient information to allow the study to be robustly conclusive. A summary of the responses to the questions asked, structured by question, is presented in appendix 4.

Section 4 summarises the salient results of both the letter to authorities and the telephone interviews and in respect of both good practice and the main conflicts and tensions encountered in the development of community -led planning.

Section 5 provides a synthesis of good practice in community-led planning and enduring problems in all aspects of community involvement, drawing from all aspects of the report - review, policy and empirical work. It then reports on a brief triangulation of these results: stakeholders outside of the local authority sector offer their perspectives on our findings. Finally, we offer some wider reflections as a research team on the 'generalisability' of community-led planning within the planning process as a whole.

We note at the outset that one of the hallmarks of all forms of community-led planning is that it is essentially *local*. This means that attempting to offer examples of good practice within this report that are *ubiquitous* or universal can be antithetic to the notion of local distinctiveness. Whilst in Section 5 of this report we offer some principles upon which to develop good practice, it is critical to note that these will be more or less relevant in different circumstances and more or less effective in different places.

Problems and constraints on community involvement are exactly the same. From our interviews and correspondence with a range of different local authorities in the region, problems encountered in one place are not necessarily seen as problems, or do not have any importance, in another. Thus in articulating a range of problems in Section 5.2 of the report it is important to note that these, too, are not universal.

2. COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING: PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS

2.1. Recent reports on contemporary community-led planning in the context of the Statutory Duty: a note on their approach

Having outlined the nature of community-led planning, this section and the following one outline salient results of other recent studies into community-led planning in different parts of England. This allows us to gain an understanding of the interpretation of good practice and enduring problems at least as seen by these studies.

It has been felt necessary to consider these studies in two parts, because a number of them exhibit characteristics of approach that, in research terms, may be considered questionable. We felt it necessary to outline these as a cautionary note as such approaches can have an impact on the reliability of the results. Issues relating to these approaches are summarised in this section, before the main findings of the reports in respect of community-led good practice and enduring problems, are summarised in section 2.4.

There is a large number of these reports, but the findings are largely concordant. In these reports, community-led planning invariably is broadly conceived:

“Community-led planning is a structured process to create a vision for the community or the neighbourhood. It is not just concerned with land use planning, but also with social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects”.

National Empowerment Partnership (undated a, but post 2008, page 1)

The reports have a range of different objectives (and some no stated objectives at all) relating to a range of National Indicators as well as the Statutory Duty (unknown author, undated), and are invariably concerned with community-led planning rather than the broader requirements of the Duty in respect of public involvement in the development and implementation of local authority plans, and the requirements in respect of providing information and consulting.

The nature of reporting

Many of the reports have an uncertain value in terms of informing the nature of community-led planning because they exhibit a number of procedural flaws in reporting. The most common of these are as follows.

- The authorship is commonly not clear.
- They are not dated.
- The methodologies are not stated (from whom the information was obtained, what the sample sizes and structures are).
- There is an evident non-neutrality in the language of some reports (either pro community involvement or, in cases, the opposite).
- Many of the findings are conditional (community-led planning is a good vehicle for community empowerment *if*) or ambiguous (community-led planning *can* work),
- Generalisations are attempted from specific information, which have no apparent justification.

The use of rhetoric

Many of the reports use rhetorical statements to describe community-led planning. This has limitations, in respect of recommendations in particular, as it is commonly not clear how rhetorical recommendations might be acted upon. From the national review conducted by the National Empowerment Partnership (undated a, but post 2008), some examples of these are as follows.

Analysis

- Community-led planning develops community capacity and cohesion.
- Officials see some types of engagement as particularly effective.
- There is good local engagement and networking.
- Processes need to be robust.
- Gaining background information is useful.
- Partnerships are important.

Recommendations

- Continue to build the effectiveness of the neighbourhood development team.
- A clear vision needs to be set.

- Develop a community friendly approach to Sustainability Appraisals.
- Ensure planning schools teach about community involvement.
- Community initiatives need to be properly funded.
- Young people need to be more fully involved.
- Awareness needs to be raised.
- There need to be better communications.

Interpretation

A number of reports present findings in a certain light without stating the possible implications or consequences of these statements. For example National Empowerment Partnership (undated a but post 2008) reports from West Berkshire that:

"Community-led plans can empower communities, give them what they want and offer the potential to liaise with councils". (page 7), without discussing the failure of councils, as elected public bodies, to "give communities what they want" as part of their statutory duties.

And on page 9:

"If Community-led plans are to be of value to local authorities, they must be of high quality, robust and accurate".

This is a particularly complex issue as it means that certain (more articulate) communities will be able to execute community-led planning more successfully than less able communities, and that they will cost time and effort to achieve: issues which are not discussed in the context of the statement. In the context of these cautionary notes, the salient findings of these studies are reported below.

2.2 Community Led Planning: Conflicts and Tensions drawing from national surveys

The National Empowerment Partnership (undated a, but post 2008) reviews community-led planning initiatives in a national context, in the North West, Oxford City, West Berkshire, Broadland, south east market towns, north Dorset and Somerset. National Empowerment Partnership (undated b but post 2008) also reviews community-led planning in the East of England. These documents have been used as the spine of the summary set out below, with other reports cited individually as appropriate.

Extent

The key finding in most reports is that the extent of community-led planning is very variable, both spatially and socially. In the West Midlands, for example, (unknown author, undated) it was noted that community-led plans were invariably initiated by 'a small group of community activists' and that local authority staff reported that community-led plans tended to be produced for the most affluent areas whilst the main challenges were in poorer areas. Some community groups voiced this concern too. Some local authority staff felt that this was a limitation for their transfer into urban areas (from the rural precedent of parish plans), where the biggest challenges were in deprived neighbourhoods.

Problems

There is no collective indication of the *relative importance* of the problems associated with community-led planning, but some are *more commonly mentioned* than others. The

most frequently cited are a lack of funding and a lack of acknowledgement of community-led plans by local authorities (National Empowerment Partnership, 2009). These problems have been grouped into three broad categories.

Problems relating to procedures.

- community-led planning is designed to empower local communities, but resultant plans do not necessarily get adopted or even acknowledged by local authorities. The most problematic aspect of implementing the parish planning process in the West Midlands, for example, has been to get them adopted in statutory plans or to have them generally acknowledge by local authorities.
- The most common problems articulated in community-led planning are not necessarily seen by local authorities as being the most important ones.
- In the West Midlands community-led plans were not uncommonly developed to oppose state action (the opposition to housing where it was proposed and the introduction of local needs housing, where none was proposed, were cited). These plans depend on the identification of local problems, but there is not always a consensus as to what local problems are. The 'standardisation' of procedures can also work against local distinctiveness.
- Organisational issues are also often cited: elected member involvement is very variable, local authority organisation can limit community engagement; there is uncertainty about how community engagement can be put into practice.
- Community-led plans can either be implemented through voluntary effort or by the active influence of statutory authorities – the former is more successful. Both are considered more 'active' than merely consulting on pre-existing plans.

Problems relating to structural arrangements.

- It is not clear where future funding will come from for community-led planning (for example to support the co-ordinating work of the rural community councils). It seems most likely to be from the local authority sector but they, according to these review reports, seem to have the least enthusiasm for the process.
- community-led planning can contribute to the achievement of NI 4, but little evidence has been produced to record this. Some local planning officers see the act of producing community-led planning, of itself, as contributing to NI 4, irrespective of any action that might result.
- Community participants often get frustrated with a lack of action on the part of local authorities.
- LA boundaries and what are perceived to be community boundaries often do not coincide.
- Many community-led planning initiatives suffer from volunteering fatigue.

Problems relating to quality

- Professionals often find it difficult to respond effectively to community plans because they do not fully understand them.
- The community evidence base is often poor: there is commonly a dearth of statistical or even factual evidence.
- Many local authority officers claimed they would prefer 'hard data' from communities rather than 'intelligence' and opinion.
- Community skills are variable and community results can be poor where these skills are not evident.
- Monitoring and evaluation of community led planning is infrequent.

2.3 Conflicts and Tensions Drawing from South West Regional Evidence

In this section we narrow our review to issues that relate – at least in large part – to the South West region.

To what extent is community-led planning an instrument of the state?

Edwards *et al* (2001) suggest that the MCTi initiative, being the responsibility of South West regional government but concerned with implementation at the community level, has a tendency to 'miss out' the local authority tiers in between. BDOR (2006a), reporting on work in the South West, has also suggested that the local authority level of government commonly has not been aware of the development of MCTi plans. Edwards *et al* (2001) report that where the local authority has been involved they have been seen by the MCTi group as a 'barrier' between themselves and the Region.

More fundamentally, the Carnegie UK Rural Foundation (2009, page 23) suggests that local authorities often see community-led planning as serving their own ends rather than those of the community:

"Worryingly, Community Planning is often interpreted as an exercise in joining up the policies and decisions of different government departments and agencies (horizontal coordination) rather than linking and engaging with local communities (vertical integration)"

In this context, Carnegie's (2009) case study of the Devon Heartlands initiative clearly indicates a keenness for community plans to be more than this, through the development of their own forums.

"Planners and other professionals have to acquire entirely new skills to equip them to work effectively with communities and to respond to their needs. However, as our action research partners in Devon reveal, there is a real willingness to learn.

'We found that the Devon Heartlands Forum meetings helped us to see and hear from those who are working to represent us. We probably wouldn't go to a formal Council meeting, but feel welcome and encouraged to take part here and think the forum is very good for local communication. We proposed the idea of a 'Community Question Time Event' so that people had an opportunity to ask the candidates of different political parties about their policies ahead of the European Elections in June 2009'.

Local residents and Forum regulars Dave and Valerie Cushing

'Creating an environment in which people feel they can influence decisions about where they live is central to empowerment. Community Forums such as that led by Devon Heartlands Community Partnership, which enable community groups, local authorities, and agencies to work together, are vital for connecting people to the complex power structures.'

John Skrine, Coordinator of Empowering Communities, the Regional Empowerment Partnership

A local Community Forum, as demonstrated by Devon Heartlands (www.devonheartlands.co.uk), addresses the perennial issue of how to sustain a community's interest and involvement in the bigger issues beyond the life of a specific programme or project. To date the almost total absence of mainstreaming, planning for

continued engagement and adequate resourcing is one of the major deficiencies of all community engagement programmes.

A welcome development at the culmination of our action research is a decision by Devon County Council to include our findings, particularly in terms of the Devon Heartlands Local Community Forum concept, within a series of demonstration pilot studies across Devon that will explore different models of Community Engagement. This next phase of work is due to begin in the summer of 2009 and it is to be hoped that this model of grassroots engagement will prove to be of value to other communities in Devon and elsewhere.

We are delighted that Devon County Council has adopted ideas from the enlightened approach to community engagement adopted by Devon Heartlands and Carnegie UK Trust would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with Devon County Council in sharing this learning widely with Local Government Association members."

Carnegie UK Rural Foundation (2009), Page 23 - 24

To what extent are community-led plans community-led?

Here, BDOR (2006a) note particular tensions in the development of some MCTI plans in the South West, between professionals and the community because they were to be more prescriptive (rigorous on the part of the professionals) than Parish Plans. Thus MCTi plans didn't always respond to community needs but Parish Plans were vulnerable to community enthusiasm. MCTI plans usually employed 'consultants' with external funding (because of the 'professionalism' requirement) and commonly had only loose connections with a local authority department.

Many MCTi groups were more frustrated with the South West Regional Spatial Strategy than even Parish Plan activists because expectations for change were commonly higher in MCTIs than PPs. Some MCTi activists in the BDOR (2006a) survey had concerns that they were just doing the local authority's work for them.

Edwards *et al* (2001) also suggest that the *larger the size* of the community the more difficult it is to produce a consensual plan. Thus Parish Plans represent a reasonable consensus particularly if accompanied by a household survey, but market town plans (in the case of Edwards *et al* (2001) in Wales) often were seen as being less consensual because there was a larger population with whom a consensus had to be reached.

Also Edwards *et al* (2001) suggest that Market and Coastal Town Plans are less consensual because their initial drive is that of economic development and this is a domain that is naturally more competitive. They also note that there was an early lack of consensus in many of the plans as to what should be included as the potential seemed limitless

ECOTEC (undated) notes that the MCTi planning process in the South West would be made more effective with the introduction of clearer notes for guidance. They also note however, that this could be seen as somewhat of a paradox given that the initiatives are supposed to be 'bottom up' community-led plans and not driven by 'top down' instructions.

MCTi plans: community-led planning by-passing the state?

Whist Parish Plans interface directly with local authorities (commonly, spatial planning departments), BDOR's (2006a) study in the South West concluded that MCTi plans stood

outside the local authority processes altogether. They claim that some local authorities were not aware that they were being produced, and certainly there was no consideration of them to be used in supplementary planning documents within authorities. If there was any contact with the local authority in their development, it was usually with economic development departments, rather than planning departments. BDOR (2006a) suggest that MCTi plans offer *potential* to provide evidence for LDFs, but this potential has been rarely realised and standards of evidence remain variable.

Many members of MCTi plan development teams suggested in the BDOR (2006a) study too, that they were sufficiently confused by local authority organisational structures not to know where their point of contact in the production of these plans should be. The more 'joined up' a local authority was in integrating its processes the harder it seemed for an 'outsider' to understand who has responsibility for what.

Occasionally MCTi plans have been used in support of Section 106 agreements. One of the consequences of this independence, suggest BDOR (2006a), was that they were rarely aligned with authority strategies, particularly their SCS's and SCIs.

A profusion of plans?

But BDOR (2006b) note that in the natural development of community-led plans they should contain more variations, adaptations and hybrids and have more points of connection with an increasing range of plans within the local authority sector. These latter include SCSs and SCIs, but also Local Development Framework 'Core Strategies', local transport plans, waste plans and the like. The Statutory Duty, too under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which came into force in April 2009, requires community involvement in a range of other local authority and Health Authority plans, which are typified by economic development strategies, food visions, community safety plans, biodiversity action plans and so on.

This exhortation for increased growth has caused problems of both understanding and of prioritisation, both reported in the empirical surveys below.

Within the South West region, in terms of related surveys, however, research for the Government Office for the South West carried out in 2007 (Curry, 2010) identified, just within the county of Gloucestershire, at least 24 extant plans that pertained to the county that have been produced at the regional level (R). At the county level (C) itself there are a further 28 plans. At the district level (D) within the county, for example, the Cotswold District, there were a further 5 plans, all of which have a relevance to local communities.

Thus for any part of the rural Cotswold district there were, in 2007, at least 57 plans that pertained simultaneously that were produced by public authorities of some sort, that the Statutory Duty is relevant to. These are presented in figure 1 below.

These 'relevant' plans in which the community might legitimately become involved do not include all of the national policies and plans that pertain to local places in general. Nor do they include the increasing number of plans and proposals created by community-led planning itself such as participative rural appraisals, rapid rural appraisals, action planning, future search, planning for real, parish plans, market town plans, village appraisals, village design statements, housing need surveys, transport needs surveys, health checks and the like.

Figure 1 – plans and strategies in force in one rural district in Gloucestershire, England, pertaining in 2007

- R1. SW Integrated Strategy ('Just Connect')
- R2. Regional Spatial Strategy
- R3. Regional Economic Strategy
- R4. Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming ('Making a Difference')
- R5. Rural Delivery Framework
- R6. Regional Environment Strategy ('Our Environment Our Future')
- R7. Regional Sustainable Development Framework ('A Sustainable Future for the South West')
- R8. Regional Biodiversity Implementation Plan
- R9. Protected Landscapes Prospectus
- R10. Communities Plan for the South West ('The Way Ahead')
- R11. Regional Renewable Energy Strategy
- R12. Regional Waste Strategy ('From Rubbish to Resource')
- R13. Regional Tourism Strategy ('Towards 2015')
- R14. Regional Cultural Strategy ('In Search of Chunky Dunsters')
- R15. Regional Housing Strategy
- R16. Regional Historic Environment Strategy
- R17. Regional International Trade Strategy
- R18. Regional ICT Strategy
- R19. Regional Skills Action Plan
- R20. Regional Water Resources for the Future
- R21. Regional Plan for Sport
- R22. Regional Innovation Strategy
- R23. Regional Transport Strategy
- R24. Strategy for Architecture and the Built Environment

- C1. Gloucestershire Structure Plan
- C2. County level Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- C3. Hedgerow biodiversity action plan
- C4. Local Transport Plan
- C5. School Travel Plan
- C6. Children and Young People's Plan
- C7. Community Safety Action Plan 2005-06: Fire and Rescue Service
- C8. Minerals Core Strategy
- C9. Waste Core Strategy.
- C10. Flood response strategy
- C11. Community Strategic Plan for Gloucestershire
- C12. Telecare strategy
- C13. Gloucestershire Policing Plan
- C14. Gloucestershire First (Development Agency) Operating Plan
- C15. Gloucestershire First (Development Agency) Economic Strategy
- C16. Gloucestershire Energy Strategy 2007 - 2017
- C17. Gloucestershire Urban Economic Strategy 2007 - 2015
- C18. An Agricultural Strategy for Gloucestershire 2000 - 2005
- C19. Gloucestershire Food Vision Policy
- C20. Gloucestershire Workspace Policy Framework
- C21. Rural Economic Strategy for Gloucestershire 2003 - 2010
- C22. Rural Economic Strategy for Gloucestershire 2007 - 2015
- C23. Her majesty's Courts Service Gloucestershire Area Business Plan.
- C24. Gloucestershire NHS Partnership. A strategy for promoting mental well-being in Gloucestershire.
- C25. Gloucestershire Airport Development Plan
- C26. Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic health Authority, Local Delivery Plan
- C27. Gloucestershire Cotswolds Geodiversity Audit and Local Geodiversity Action Plan (LGAP)
- C28. Cotswolds AONB management plan
- C29. Wye Valley AONB management plan
- C30. Malvern Hills AONB management plan
- C31. Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan

- D1. Cotswold District Local Plan 2001-2011 (Adopted April 2006)
- D2. Cotswold Local Development Framework
- D3. Cotswold Statement of Community Involvement
- D4. Cotswold affordable housing supplementary planning document
- D5. Cotswold Cultural Strategy

A profusion of stakeholders?

Specifically for the South West Region of England too, a study by the Countryside and Community Research Unit (2005) noted that *partnerships* involved in community-led development themselves found that they were useful but had a tendency to proliferate. They also were not necessarily representative of anyone and lacked any strategic synthesis: there was duplication and a lack of integration. In studying South West *network* stakeholders, Roger Tym and Partners (2005) concluded that they were recent, had no powers or budgets to enforce anything and occluded the ultimate responsibility for decision-making. Many groups had an input into each other and the time commitment simply involved in attending meetings was considerable. In addition, the array of groups was confusing:

"Added to this is the question of knowing the extent of regional groups, particularly where there appear to be several groups concerned with the same topic or where there are subgroups feeding into a regional group. It can be difficult to understand the different remits of these groups and subgroups or consider the potential for any further coordination or rationalisation of regional working."

(Roger Tym and Partners, 2005, page 20, paragraph 3.19)

The proliferation of community stakeholder groups in the late 2000s in England has not escaped the attention of government. The Haskins Review (2003) sought to rationalise both the basis of rural delivery and of rural funding and specific proposals to this end were contained in the subsequent Department of the Environment and Rural Affairs' (Defra) Rural Strategy of 2004 (Defra, 2004), which set out the Government's general rural policy priorities. For rural decision-making, Regional Rural Priority Boards, chaired by the English Government Offices for the Regions (GORs), would co-ordinate the delivery of rural policies and services and stakeholders would have an 'empowering' voice through Regional Rural Affairs Forums (Donaldson *et al*, 2006).

But a number of other features of the 2004 English Rural Strategy have ensured the continuing growth of community stakeholders and other decision-makers. Local Area Agreements have encouraged additional local partnerships and networks. Social enterprises are to be encouraged, to develop community capacity, and a healthy civic society is to have the development of the voluntary, community and parish sectors at its core. The emergent Rural Social and Community Programme, a new funding stream in England for capacity building in the voluntary sector, has enhanced this community involvement. The net effect of the Rural Strategy has been to increase the number of people involved in rural decision-making and the complexity of rural administration.

In the survey of Gloucestershire (Curry 2009) reported above over 175 rural stakeholders were identified as taking an active part in plan making of one sort or another and plans and strategies were actually *produced* by 14 different regional level organisations and 16 county level organisations as in figure 2 below.. All of these stakeholders, in principle, may require an interface for community involvement under the Statutory Duty.

Without this involvement however, plans may not reflect local needs:

"Where there is a lack of a grassroots community interface such as an accepted partnership or forum, it means that policy decisions made regionally or nationally effectively deny the community a meaningful opportunity to influence or challenge. An example of this is the Regional Spatial Strategy decreeing the number of new houses to be built, forcing Local Authorities to follow, causing much local opposition and concern

with little or no opportunity for the community to challenge. 10 Source: Devon Heartlands Carnegie Rural Action Research report 2009”

Carnegie Trust Rural Programme (2009), page 23.

Figure 2 – bodies producing plans at the regional and county levels in Gloucestershire, England, pertaining in 2007 (number of plans produced, in brackets)

<i>Regional level plan producers</i>	<i>County level plan producers</i>
South West of England Regional Devel Agency (6)	Gloucestershire Devel Agency (Glos 1st) (9)
South West Regional Assembly (4)	Gloucestershire County Council (6)
Government Office for the South West (3)	AONB Partnerships (3)
South West Regional Environment Network	Gloucestershire Biodiversity Partnership (2)
South West Regional Biodiversity Partnership	Glos County Council Fire and Rescue Service
South West Protected Landscapes Forum	Environment Agency
South West Housing	Commission for Social Care Inspection
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Gloucestershire Police Authority
Culture South West	Gloucestershire Rural Issues Task Force
English Heritage	Her Majesty’s Courts Service
Learning and Skills Council	NHS Trust
Environment Agency South West Region	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic
Sport England	Health Authority
Public Art South West	Gloucestershire Geology Trust
	Severn Estuary Coastal Group
	Not stated

In order to control the nature and means of involvement of communities in these plans (and indeed in the production of their own) BDOR (2006b) suggest Local Strategic Partnerships should be charged with the co-ordination of all planning process in the locality.

Integration with other organisations

Caffyn (2004) reports considerable problems in the relationship between national and regional agencies and local authorities on the one hand and MCTs on the other, in particular in the implementation of the MCTi (and the plan and health check processes), as the agencies in her study attempted to roll out a top down programme that was intended to be community driven. She reports an opaqueness in decision-making; delays in the development of health checks; too many layers of government so there was a lack of clarity for where responsibility lay. It was also considered that RDAs initially placed an over-emphasis on economic development, because they were in charge of their implementation.

ECOTEC (undated) maintains that MCTI plans in the region are viewed by the RSS in the South West an essential part of support for the regional economy, yet community-led planning groups find one of the principal problems to having plans ‘accepted’ is that they are at variance with the RSS

Caffyn (2004) also notes difficulties with ‘horizontal’ arrangements: the integration of plans across sectors was problematic, particularly as they were to acknowledge the economic value of different sectors. Engaging rural hinterlands also was found to be problematic in her survey because many market towns considered that they did not really have a hinterland. She also found that neighbouring market towns often found it difficult to orchestrate their plans because they were commonly wanting to compete against each other, particularly in economic terms.

2.4 Principles underlying successful practice

The Carnegie Trust Rural Programme (2009) sees three principal enabling factors in the development of community-led plans.

Skilful people: the increased capacity of local people, agencies and professionals to build strong social networks founded on high levels of volunteering and skilled support. Carnegie suggests the development of self directed learning – communities learning through mutual support and with the development of ‘Community Learning Accounts’.

Using and enhancing community assets through the development of mutual support using ‘Communities of Practice’ and other associations for community development. Community assets are considered to include financial, built, social, human, natural, cultural and political assets. These need to be backed up by technical expertise and the formation of associations such as community land trusts, community finance solutions and community development trusts. There also needs to be a full understanding about where finance is available to exploit local assets fully.

Great plans: effective community-led planning and stronger local governance. Here, community plans need to be both local and strategic. From the community’s point of view, good practice includes:

- Involve as many people as possible;
- Connect the plans to the statutory planning and local authority planning frameworks;
- Integrate spatial issues with social and environmental issues;

Many ‘good practice’ proposals are also offered in the community-led planning reports cited in section 2.2 above and the frequency with which they are mentioned varies. The most commonly cited element of good practice across the range of reports reviewed, however, is the importance of the involvement of all parties from the inception of any community initiative. Other commonly cited elements of good practice include the following.

The interaction of people

- Facilitation is important
- Involvement of councillors is critical
- Community planning groups (community, parish or town council and local authorities working together) are more successful than in situations where there are none.
- Local authorities need nominated community engagement leaders

The nature of processes

- Community-led planning processes must be aligned to LA processes if they are to have any impact and influence: work with the system rather than against it.
- Informal processes are important.
- A lot of successes that are reported are about successful processes rather than successful outcomes
- A range of different ‘toolkits’ can be helpful.
- A range of consultation techniques should be used to ensure good responses
- Shared experiences are valuable learning tools
- Some form of funding is essential.

- A full understanding of the planning system and procedures on the part of the community is important.

It is important to note here that whilst the 'principle' of the interaction of people is an important aspect of good practice, operationally this is commonly limited by a dependence on 'good will' for things to operate effectively, despite the Statutory Duty for communities to be actively involved in the planning process.

3. DEVELOPING BEST PRACTICE: PRINCIPLES AND POLICY PROPOSALS

This section reports on principles and policies, drawing largely from national-level studies and policy documents, that have been promulgated in an attempt to define good practice more generally in community involvement in planning. Two things should be noted in respect of this section. The first is that we deliberately take a broader perspective on *community involvement* here, rather than just *community-led* planning as many of the more general principles and national policy exhortations are common to all forms of community involvement. Secondly, in this section we make no attempt to relate these statements to the findings reported in section 2.4 or other findings in Section 4 of the report. The final section of this report, Section 5, provides the synthesis of all of our review work and empirical study as well as making recommendations.

3.1 The scope of good practice in community participation in planning

There are different dimensions of the scope of good practice in the field of community involvement in planning, as the following alternatives illustrate. Good practice could fall into any one or more of the following categories.

- In terms of the *structural relationship between the first tier of local government* (parish and town councils) *and the principal authorities*, which are the local planning authorities. This inevitably raises discussion of the tension, sometimes conflict, between representative and participative democracy, which has its own extensive literature (see, for example, Hirst, 2002; Saurugger, 2004). Within the representative model, various attempts have been made to strengthen the role of parish councils in planning as representatives of local communities in, for example, Telford & Wrekin Unitary Authority and Taunton Deane District (see CCRU, 2002), but there are many examples of tension between elected parish councils and self-appointed activists who drive forward community concerns with more vigour.
- In terms of the role of *local community-led planning initiatives* such as Parish Plans and Village Design Statements, prepared by communities themselves, in helping to shape planning policies and decisions (which is nominally the focus of the present project). Here there is a varied history of success in linking the proposals in community-led plans through to development plan policies. Broadly, the proposals in Village Design Statements have been assimilated more successfully than those in Parish Plans into Local Plans (Gallent et al, 2009; Hughes, 2006), although the proposals in Parish Plans seem to be more readily absorbed into Sustainable Community Strategies. This is mainly because the scope of Parish Plans extends well beyond the confines of statutory town and country planning, corresponding much more closely with that of Sustainable Community Strategies, while Village Design Statements have a much narrower focus and sharper concern with the built environment that lends itself to adoption as supplementary planning documents. More recently, proposals have been made for the preparation of local Sustainable Community Strategies, again prepared by

local communities themselves, to feed into authority-wide Sustainable Community Strategies (BDOR, 2006)³;

- in terms of *generic processes and techniques* for community involvement in planning. This in turn raises the issue that generic techniques are just as relevant to other forms of planning as statutory town and country planning, particularly the preparation of Sustainable Community Strategies under the *aegis* of Local Strategic Partnerships. There is a massive literature on techniques of engagement and, specifically, much work has been undertaken on means of enhancing community involvement in Sustainable Community Strategies. Given the requirement for a closer relationship between Local Development Frameworks and Sustainable Community Strategies – with, in essence, the former implementing the spatial objectives of the latter- then the same processes and techniques might well be deployed in both forms of planning.

Added to these different dimensions of good practice in community involvement is the overarching question of whether practice embraces principally the *outcomes* of community involvement or whether the *process* of community involvement itself is seen as a good in its own right.

Within this complex field of almost infinite possibilities of identifying good practice we concentrate here on presenting examples of *generic structures, processes and techniques*, whether deployed specifically in spatial planning or more broadly in 'corporate community' planning, but always with reference to their relevance to improving the effectiveness of community involvement in the statutory planning system.

It must be emphasised that the review of good practice below is based on just a small selection from an almost endless literature. The focus is on reviews that have been conducted recently mainly by or on behalf of national government.

3.2 Some general principles of good practice

APaNGO⁴, an international consortium of NGOs, addressed the issue of community involvement in planning (interpreted more broadly than statutory planning), setting out six recommendations that may be interpreted as principles for more effective practice (APaNGO, 2007).

Recommendation 1

Both voluntary sector bodies and government should recognise a responsibility to provide independent resources for community participation in planning in all major development areas.

Appropriate support requires investment in capacity-building by NGOs, working with communities, to enable local people to better understand planning and political systems and to participate more effectively. Capacity-building is also needed within public authorities so that they can better understand the principles, processes and value of community participation in planning – both in terms of improved quality of plans, developments and programmes and in terms of strengthening democratic systems through greater public involvement.

³ Related to this, the notion of mini-local strategic partnerships has been piloted in Great Yarmouth (Pitchford, Archer with Ramsden, 2009)

⁴ APaNGO was a project with 70 members largely from the third sector. English examples of such bodies include the Community Development Foundation and the Civic Trust.

Recommendation 2

There should be wider take-up of the use of community media, branding techniques and street-based and cultural activities where communities judge these appropriate or helpful.

As with all participatory techniques, the main success factor is to use a technique that is appropriate both to the purpose and to the context of the participatory process. This obviously requires clarity about the objectives of the participatory process, what it is trying to achieve and the context and history within which it will operate. The demographic make-up of community and its previous experience of participating in the planning process will be important factors in making this judgement. Techniques are merely tools to achieve a particular outcome and should never be the first decision in designing any participatory process.

A key problem currently lies in the interface between participatory processes and decision-making structures. In practice, the problem is largely about lack of understanding and recognition of the value of participatory 'products', whether they are ideas from communities, video films, alternative proposals, contributions to visioning events or comments on draft plans and strategies. Current representative democratic structures are not designed to recognise or integrate community input in the variety of forms in which it may be presented. They are more commonly-used to dealing with input from elected representatives or in the form of analysis and recommendations from professionals and academics. A key condition for successful participation in planning is a cultural change so that a community's input is supported through enabling participation in planning and its views are welcomed and valued as highly, and taken as much account of, as professional guidance from officers and academic research.

Recommendation 3

Public authorities appreciate the value of community views which are generated in various ways through the participation services it supports. As a result government bodies should better integrate community input in its different forms in the decision-making process.

Agreements reached between communities and authorities as a result of participatory processes need to be formally recognised so that they cannot be ignored if they become inconvenient later. There should always be the potential for re-negotiation but that should be done on the basis that there is an agreement that needs to be renegotiated. Statutory rights in any planning process are a fundamental part of building trust in development decisions. This approach allows communities to trust agreements when they are made, and move on to more positive activities rather than simply watching to check if previous agreements are being ignored.

Recommendation 4

Statutory rights in planning for those most affected should be maintained and that agreements on development with communities should be legally recognised wherever possible

Participatory processes need to be clear, open, transparent, and fair to those involved and the rest of the (possibly uninvolved) population. Ideally, processes need to be able to challenge both the explicit proposition being considered and the underlying assumptions about the benefits of the final outcomes, although not all processes should

or could always cover every related issue. The key condition for success here is the need for clarity about the boundaries of the participation, and what it is (and it is not) possible to change as a result of the participation. Much of the frustration among participants in planning processes from communities and NGOs is about lack of clarity, and a sense that they have been misled about what the participation is supposed to achieve and what the limits of their role are.

There is no point having a participatory process if nothing is going to change and nothing is going to happen. Action may require communities themselves to do something, or it may be that public authorities or private developers are going to carry out development. The main motivation among participants in any participatory process is that they will be able to influence or change these outcomes for the better.

Recommendation 5

Responsible authorities in charge of community participation set out as a priority what can and cannot be changed as a result of the dialogue of participation or involvement.

Community groups, NGOs, business groups and other specific lobby groups rarely represent whole communities; nor is that usually their role. They can take part in a process that aims to be representative of all local interests, but that process is the responsibility of those running it. A political decision then has to be made in the interests of the whole community (whether at local, regional or national level). Representative processes that value the interests of minority groups are key for effective participation in planning as whole communities are affected by planning decisions. It is a key role for planners and for local government decision-makers and it can be achieved with appropriate techniques and clear responsibility for the balance of interests represented at different points in the process.

Recommendation 6

All those engaged in participation in planning and development should recognise that decision-makers must consider evidence which represents best the variety of interests of current and future communities, including taking into account representations from specific interest groups with particular knowledge.

3.3. UK Government guidance for 'effective' practice

In 2008, DCLG published the results of research into *participation and policy integration in spatial plans* (DCLG, 2008a). With reference to community engagement in spatial planning they found that:

- increasing value is being placed on local views, neighbourhood issues, parish plans and better links with local communities
- those that have used 'deliberative' methods such as workshops and focus groups at the issues-gathering stage for the core strategy reported that they were valuable in providing information and views about the nature of the issues and acceptability of options
- 'traditional' forms of consultation continue to be used but there is growing interest in using 'innovative' techniques. Deliberative methods of participation in core strategies are the exception rather than the norm, but there are several examples in relation to site-specific plans, where the techniques seem to be more effective
- for the LDF core strategy, following 'deliberative' techniques in the early stages of LDF preparation, there has been successful use of questionnaires as a means of

- securing the opinion of a cross section of the community about the acceptability of the preferred strategy (e.g. using Citizens' Panels)
- despite the increase in the number of participation events offered, and the increasing use of informal, interactive and targeted methods of engagement, for core strategies, the level of interest and attendance is low, although it is higher where there is a perceived threat of new development
 - there are some 'innovative' means of reaching out to, and gaining responses from, hard-to-reach groups (e.g. by employing a dedicated community participation officer and working with local charities)
 - for core strategies, there are generally low (sometimes very low) turnouts at staffed exhibitions and low response rates to written consultation exercises
 - despite widespread use of the Internet as an information and feedback mechanism, the case studies did not provide any examples of its successful use in more interactive ways
 - engaging the public in strategic planning policy appears much more challenging than for site-specific planning documents with evidence that stakeholders are often failing to see the significance of (and thus not engaging with) strategic principles
 - the extent to which community involvement is helping to build consensus and legitimacy with respect to core strategies is difficult to assess, mainly because the numbers of people involved have been very low.

In the same year the Department for Communities and Local Government published the results of a review of *stakeholder involvement* in Local Development Frameworks (DCLG, 2008b). The key lessons and recommendations made in that review may be interpreted as overall guidance to local planning authorities for effective stakeholder engagement in planning. They were:

- place sufficient emphasis on stakeholder and community involvement in the LDF process. Although there appears to be widespread acceptance of its importance in principle, and local authorities have embraced new procedural requirements such as the preparation of Statements of Community Involvement, there needs to be more of a realisation by local authorities that this aspect of the LDF process is still not being fully delivered in the ways envisaged by the planning reforms
- utilise Statements of Community Involvement as accessible documents that communicate intentions to stakeholders and the public
- develop an appropriate strategy for participation that considers using different participatory approaches at different stages of involvement, and for different types of development plan document
- ensure that the strategy is supported by an appropriate budget and is developed and assessed against value for money criteria
- monitor the success of community engagement in the annual monitoring report, analysing whether particular groups or communities, such as hard-to-reach groups and the local business community, are being engaged and, if not, consider whether there are alternative ways that this might be better achieved
- partner other organisations engaged in community involvement such as the local strategic partnerships and parish councils, in order to draw on a wider range of skills and expertise in facilitating community and stakeholder involvement, avoid participation fatigue and duplication, and produce a more informative response
- clarify their understanding of hard-to-reach groups in their locality, and devise strategies and techniques that address their concerns
- ensure that business/developer interests are properly recognised and special arrangements made to engage them in consideration of opportunities and deliverability

- recognise that the LDF teams are not likely to possess all the required skills and do not have to act alone. Instead they should look to draw on experience elsewhere in the authority and utilise organisations like Planning Aid and other community-based organisations and charities that are well qualified to provide advice and support for stakeholder engagement
- consider ways of building greater capacity for communities to engage and what purpose this might serve. Almost certainly this will include training and skills development of both local authority officers and stakeholders.

More specifically, DCLG's review of participation in spatial planning set out further recommendations for local authorities concerning community engagement in spatial planning (DCLG, 2008a). Local authorities should *inter alia*:

- use targeted techniques to elicit a response from those that do not normally get involved in planning (e.g. ethnic minorities, gypsies and travellers)
- acknowledge the different purposes of engagement for different Development Plan Documents. For the core strategy, relationships with stakeholders are most likely to be categorised as 'informing', 'harmonising' and at best, 'coordinating', whereas for site-specific policy and development, 'collaboration' is perhaps more appropriate.
- recognise that the different participation stages will have different purposes, and techniques should be tailored to the types of input sought from participants. Engaging people in core strategies is proving to be challenging; sustaining interest in strategic issues is difficult, and feedback on preferred options has been low.
- address the low levels of community engagement by facilitating involvement, making choices about the types of methods, the timing, location and venue of participation events that will attract more people and enable them to engage in more effective ways. People and organisations will most readily respond if they are interested in the topic and/or understand how the outcomes might affect their lives. Therefore, the local authority should publicise the opportunities for involvement, using headlines that will grab peoples' attention and show how the LDF is relevant to them
- take advantage of there being more interest in site-specific planning documents, particularly from the community, in order to secure better planned developments. In preparing site specific plans, local authorities should make particular use of 'deliberative' methods which when done well appear to show very good results in addressing community concerns and expectations.

These recommendations should be set out in a comprehensive 'community engagement strategy' covering all aspects of the authority's remit. The local authority and LDF team must have an open mind and enter the process of collaborative working and stakeholder involvement with the attitude that it is a genuine search for a diversity of views and potentially new, alternative approaches to spatial policy-making rather than narrowly sticking to the status quo and/or local political constraints. Engagement must be seen as a critical part of preparing a legitimate and effective spatial plan, rather than just a process to go through.

The processes of collaboration and engagement require adequate resources in time, effort, staffing and other costs, and these resources need to be co-ordinated and led by an effective engagement strategy. Some of the more successful examples of participation have been where the local authorities have supplemented their normal financial and staff resources to improve the way they engage with the stakeholders, such as employing a consultation officer in the LDF team or in an authority-wide role, thus

enhancing the skills available to advise and assist the LDF team, or by providing extra capacity to undertake participation exercises.

Local authorities should not only invest in their own staff development in terms of facilitating community and stakeholder involvement and collaborative practices, but they should also consider investing time and effort in the training and education of community representatives who are more likely to make time available subsequently to engage. If general stakeholder events are organised, it is necessary to make sure that key community groups and representatives are individually invited rather than just rely on self-selection.

Local authority planners should realise that they do not have a monopoly on engagement skills and techniques. Joint working with other partners, drawing on their skills and often extensive and long-standing experience, can often be more effective at drawing out community views. Where appropriate, joint involvement exercises should be used such as running events for the LDF and community strategy together.

A number of examples of how these characteristics play out is offered at appendix 4.

3.4. Some Reflections on 'best practice'

There is already a great richness and diversity of forms of community engagement in both statutory planning and broader 'corporate' planning. There is no shortage of examples of seemingly good practice.

National government is, at least rhetorically, fully committed to community engagement across a broad front, including statutory planning, but this does not yet seem to have filtered through comprehensively to the local planning authority level.

"Three quarters of respondents also feel that LDFs have failed to secure any more meaningful public involvement in plan-making" (Town & Country Planning Association and Cushman & Wakefield review of the LDF system).

References to good practice are legion, but the claimants of good practice are rarely explicit about the criteria by which judgments of that 'goodness' have been made.

The focus of claimed good practice is almost always on the *process* of community engagement rather than its *outcomes*; there seems to be an assumption that if the process is good, the outcomes will also be good.

The vast majority of citations of good practice are about techniques of engaging the community rather than the absorption of the findings of those techniques into planning policies or decisions.

It is widely acknowledged that it is more difficult to engage communities with the strategic scope of the Core Strategies of Local Development Frameworks than with the immediate concerns of site-specific plans, but this is an observation that has been a truism since the introduction of Structure Plans, Local Plans and Action Area Plans 40 years ago.

There is no single best approach; processes and techniques should be adopted that are appropriate to (a) different sectors of the community, (b) different localities and (c) different scales and purposes of planning.

The South West Region already has one the most frequently cited local planning authorities in terms of its processes of engaging communities in statutory planning – South Hams District Council.

The issue for the future is to embed existing examples of seemingly good practice so that it becomes part of 'normal' statutory planning practice.

Providing adequate resources for community engagement is a *sine qua non* of success, but the looming cuts in public expenditure into the foreseeable future will make community engagement in statutory planning more difficult.

4. THE VIEWS OF AUTHORITIES FROM WITHIN THE SOUTH WEST.

This section of the report describes the empirical findings of the research, the methods for which are outlined in section 1.5. It is divided into two parts, the report on the letter to all authorities and, secondly, the telephone interviews. The reporting of the telephone interviews is undertaken in two main ways. Firstly, a summary of the salient responses to the questions asked (these are reproduced in appendix 3) in the order that they were asked is presented in appendix 4. Secondly, the headline issues that were considered specifically in the context of community-led planning have been distilled in sections 4.2 – 4.5 below to reflect the issues raised in the objectives to the study as a whole. As with Section 3 we do not attempt to *integrate* these findings with the review material in Sections 2 and 3 as this is the purpose of Section 5.

4.1 The letter to authorities

This letter (appendix 2) was responded to by the 'most appropriate person' to deal with community involvement in planning generally. These were self-selected by authorities and approximately three quarters of them were town and country planning officers with the other quarter being community partnership co-coordinators of some sort.

Good practice

Most of the good practice cited related to *processes* and can be grouped into three areas as below. The 'good frameworks' were the most commonly cited and of these, the 'events' were the most frequently mentioned.

Good frameworks

- A variety of roadshow events – 'planning together'; 'planning your community'. staffed public exhibitions, stakeholder workshops, leaflet production, newspaper adverts and press releases, questionnaires and document consultation, annual parish council planning conference, stakeholders forum for planning.
- Produce clear Statements of Community Involvement and Sustainable Community Strategies

Good actions

- Work with specific interest groups
- Get community-led plans adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents where this is relevant to the issues being considered.
- Early engagement with the community in all initiatives.

Know the community

- Get to know local circumstances, feelings and conditions
- Go in to the local community and don't expect it to come to the authority
- Keep in regular contact with the community

A smaller number of authorities, however, noted the key importance for them of community-led planning in mobilising communities but also in giving communities a core interest in planning that then could be used in different contexts. As one authority noted:

"The core of our good practice is support for village design statements and parish plans, but particularly, taking seriously the community aspirations and priorities that they reveal. The take-up of design statements is much more limited than that of parish plans. These views are actively used as input to the planning authority's plans. But where they are impossible to accommodate the reasons are explained to the communities themselves"

Three *other issues* were raised in the responses from the local authority letter. These were, firstly, that community groups such as rural community councils, neighbourhood planning networks and Planning Aid had often been instrumental in bringing community-led planning about. Secondly, bespoke tools such as the Sustainable Communities Toolkit had been considered particularly helpful in enthusing communities. Finally, two authorities noted that community-led planning had had the most 'buy in' from communities, relative to broader, but more passive, notions of community involvement.

Main problems

The main problems in implementing community-led planning can be divided into three broad groups. The most commonly cited problems were *upstream of the authority* and concerned relationships with government and other agencies. The most common of these (5 citations) were problems with the Regional Spatial Strategy being at variance with community views. This was frustrating for communities as they felt that they were impotent to influence this 'top down' approach and had no voice in its implementation. Four instances of problems also cohered around a lack of clarity over procedural requirements from central government and a lack of 'expert advice', when requested, from government agencies.

A second set of problems were *downstream of the authority* and related to the authorities' interface with the communities that were to be involved. Most commonly here was a difficulty encountered in getting to the community to become active in the development of community-led plans. Instances were reported of communities simply not believing that they would be listened to. Distinct from this, but nevertheless related, was one citation that suggested the public simply was not, in the main, interested and one citation that noted in their local authority, there was a distinct 'involvement overload'.

The final set of problems articulated related to *the authorities themselves*. Resource and cost constraints were cited twice and staff overload once. But rather more authorities suggested that they were having trouble formulating the appropriate policies and policy documents as a framework for community-led planning. . One authority even noted that it had had its core community strategy rejected as being 'unsound'.

4.2 Salient findings of the telephone interviews

A summary of the responses the questions asked (set out in appendix 3) is provided in appendix four. This section draws out the main *themes* from the telephone surveys that respond to the objectives of the study. Many of the respondents to the telephone survey discussed issues of community-led planning in its broadest sense and in this context, four salient themes emerged.

- In areas of planning outside of spatial planning (all things falling within the remit of Local Strategic Partnership and Statements of Community Involvement) the development of participatory approaches *from the point of view of the local authority respondents* invariably was less mature than in spatial planning because the history of available mechanisms for community-led planning was a more recent one. In many authorities it was characterised as an emerging, developing or maturing process that had not yet reached an optimum performance.
- Because of this, community participation in *local authority* planning in these areas was commonly limited to *community involvement* in planning. This mainly comprised processes of developing understanding and conveying knowledge. Most discussion about community participation in broader planning issues prompted the language of *involvement* rather than *leading*. Two authorities mentioned this transition as including a middle point of 'engagement'; they were aspiring to move from community consultation to active community engagement to, eventually, community-led development.
- Also because of the first point, spatial planning was seen by a number of authorities as an exemplar for the *mechanisms* of community involvement (even though the performance might not always be).
- The only articulated area where *community-led* planning was developed outside of spatial planning was in the area of parish and town plans (including market town plans), which concerned non-spatial planning issues as well as spatial planning ones. Some authorities had attempted to develop protocols for parish and town plans so that they could be made more commensurate and therefore more aligned. In one authority the Parish Protocol developed directly as a result of the Statutory Duty.

4.3 Telephone surveys: governance structures

Plans

Community-led planning was a clear priority for most authorities. The key to contemporary prioritisation has been the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the production of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). In turn, the requirement for a Local Development Framework (LDF) and its own stipulation that a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) should be produced has reinforced the community-led priority. In several authorities it was stated that the SCI was significant in that it was to cover all aspects of the community's work and not just spatial planning. The new Statutory duty has made little difference to this commitment, certainly relative to the introduction of the SCI. Indeed a number of interviewees claimed not to be familiar with it. Overarching all of these is the authority's Core Strategy (CS) which itself is actively consulted upon. Two authorities, however, suggested that the range of people actually commenting on this range of plans was quite small.

Processes

Processes of community-led planning were well established in most authorities in the telephone survey, although the extent of the *achievement* of these processes was very variable.

Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) commonly are presented to local authority cabinet groups with a view to their adoption in the authority's Core Strategy, and/or Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). The community is actively involved in this process in two main ways. Commonly this is achieved through the active involvement of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and in most authorities an active process of community consultation is undertaken too. Consultation was most commonly stated as being through public meetings of some sort.

Organisational structures

One authority had developed a series of 20 Community Networks, each with a manager, whose role is to co-ordinate and link the council and community. Three authorities suggested that market towns provided the strongest focus for people's sense of belonging within their authority area.

One authority has a Community Strategy Team which is responsible for the SCI, the SCS, the LSP and the LAA. Other examples of structures are to be found in the good practice section below.

4.4 Telephone surveys: conflicts and tensions

Most commonly cited problems *from the local authority perspective* with this broader process of community-led planning fell into four broad groups.

Plan alignment

- Some authorities reported a problem in the alignment of plans and strategies, because of subjects, time frames and statutory requirements. Most commonly, alignment of Core Strategies, SCIs, SCSs and LDFs were reported as being problematic. Other plans with a community input – for the police, the health services and the like, also had to be integrated as much as possible.
- Plan alignment was made more difficult by the considerable increases in time that were articulated as being necessary to embrace the processes of community involvement.
- A number of authorities reported in this process that getting their LDFs and Core Strategies approved by government had not proved straightforward. One core strategy was found to be 'unsound' and an LDF has not been approved. Some interviewees suggested that it was commonly difficult to take on board the wishes of the community whilst at the same time being able to produce generic planning documents that were consonant with government policy and therefore acceptable to government.
- One authority (TI10) encouraged the development of an independent community plan, produced outside of the auspices of the authority. It certainly brought the community together (including action groups and the lay public) but as a consequence it created a 'them and us' relationship and a number of council members became suspicious of the partnership.
- There is a problem in integrating a range of different strategies for different subjects.

- There are problems in reaching agreement about, and understanding, what geographical boundaries constitute 'communities'.
- There is an additional problem of integrating strategies not just due to the differences in timescales and the broad and complex nature of the subject matter but where there are several tiers of local authorities, integrating the strategies of authorities over the same geographical area can be problematic.

Unbalanced community participation

- One issue raised by six authorities was that the LSP was populated by 'establishment' organisations (police, church, health, fire and educational representatives were mentioned), statutory consultees (environment agency, Natural England) and the private sector (water companies, other utilities, chambers of commerce) to the extent that more 'lay' community voices were often in danger of not being heard.
- Where community consultation had taken place, attendance was reported as being variable.
- People's broader involvement in community-led planning varies according to how the issues under consideration directly affect them. Many people were active in commenting on 'immediate' issues. Many fewer were interested in commenting on principles and strategies, particularly those contained in the core strategies.
- Most of the generic problems associated with community-led spatial planning also pertain to more generic forms of community-led planning. A number of authorities mentioned the reluctance of the community to become involved in strategic planning of all types because it largely required conceptual thinking and did not necessarily lead to any change on the ground.
- Three authorities articulated problems with consultation fatigue.
- The potential disillusionment of communities remains a potential problem in broader-based community planning. As TI9 expressed it:

"I think we tend to oversell the community planning process. We tell locals that they will be able to plan their own communities to try and get people interested. However, once they are on board we have to tell them that this strictly isn't the case because we have to conform to a range of different top down policies which is a problem – not genuine community led planning"

Taking sides

- The press, in reported cases, have been active in taking the side of the community often against the authority.
- In general three authorities claimed that 'lay' people found it much easier to get involved in 'complaining' or 'opposing' than taking responsibility for issues and this shift had to be part of the transitional process from community involvement to community-led planning.
- Concerns were expressed by two authorities that prejudice and fear were as strong a set of motivations for becoming involved in community planning as more altruistic motives.
- Some community members seek to gain power through this process to use for their own ends.

Lack of progress

- About half of the authorities who mentioned this broader community consultation process suggested that it had yet to take place. This was most problematic in authorities that recently undergone a change in structure (for example had

become a unitary authority) and so they were having to reorganise their planning frameworks (LDFs, SCIs and SCS's in particular).

4.5 Telephone surveys: principles underlying successful practice

Main benefits

The main benefits of broader-based community-led planning reported in the telephone survey of local authorities were reported as follows

Benefits to communities

- Building community consensus
- Building cohesive communities that are therefore more resilient.
- Having a more informed public
- Genuinely to empower the public
- To give communities the opportunity to be involved (and not to be if they so wish).
- Creating a sense of place in which people live.
- To influence the council

Benefits to local authorities

- Changing the minds of the public
- Community buy-in gives public authorities a mandate
- To get communities to take more responsibility for their own services.

Benefits to both.

- Improving community knowledge and skills.
- A means of securing conflict resolution.

Good practice

Most authorities in the telephone survey were able to articulate what they felt to be good practice in more generic community-led planning, but in nearly all cases this was characterised as being work in progress and continually evolving. As a result most good practice examples contained within them caveats of things that might still be improved. The following list reflects this. Because anonymity was assured in the telephone interviews to ensure more candid responses, these examples of good practice are generic ones rather than named case studies, although two anonymised case studies are presented at the end of this section. Three broad areas of good practice were articulated.

Organisational Structures

- A number of authorities have set up 'Local Policy' forums and, 'Planning Community' (Partners in the Community) forums and the like as informal mechanisms to allow communities to become more proactive. These have been deemed to be most successful where they have been able to set agendas rather than just comment on authority agendas.
- In one unitary authority (TI 15) some 20 Community Networks had been set up to 'localise' community-led planning so that very local voices could still be represented in a larger spatial area.
- A most authorities have employed dedicated Community Development Officers/Community Engagement Officer to work on actively engaging

communities in all aspects of community-led planning. These have been responsible for quite small localities. Some, however, have found it difficult to recruit to these posts or have found the job turnover quite high. One authority mentioned that they had had one such officer who reinterpreted the role in representing the community in a much more adversarial (rather than catalytic) way than had been intended.

- Community Area Boards also have been set up in some unitary authorities to act as local area support for the local strategic partnership. Some people feel a little displaced by these (parishes) and others feel left out from them (statutory consultees). Some authorities, rather than setting up 'area' boards', set up boards for different groups of stakeholders (architects, parish chairs, older people (the Senior Council for Devon) and the like).
- Local Community Partnerships were set up in one authority (TI9) using market towns as hubs. These are co-ordinated through a Strategic Partnership Executive Board which encourages the development of generic town and parish planning. These Partnerships are supported by community development works employed outside of the local authority. Whilst these partnerships work well on their own terms, they tend to develop rather parochial thinking and discourage people from thinking strategically.
- In one authority (TI8) they have integrated all community regeneration (including spatial planning) into a single team so that all types of community planning are dealt with by the same people, built around the SCI and the SCS and driven by the LSP. This allows a full integration of all wider community planning initiatives and plans.
- A number of *strategic partnerships* for specific local authority duties have been established in a number of authorities, for example in housing and health.
- Town and parish plans are a good way of embracing the community more widely in areas than just spatial planning. There are problems in the authority acknowledging them, however, as some parts (spatial planning for example) require formal adoption and others (relating for example, to health) do not.
- In two authorities, formal training is provided for parish councils in all aspects of community planning. Others provide more generic training for all members of the community. In some of these, the community itself is encouraged to set the agenda.

Communications

- A number of authorities have comprehensive documents about community participation and the importance of localism.
- Another unitary authority (TI16) has a large number of orchestrated meetings developed for discussing development frameworks throughout all parts of the urban community. This included a full programme of capacity building workshops around the authority's Core Strategy. This did much to help all documentation to be written in a manner that was easy to understand by the lay community. They have no powers to coerce people in to attending, however.

Achieving breadth

- Parish Plans have been considered by a number of authorities to be effective mechanisms for community-led planning in areas much broader than just spatial planning.
- Town councils of market towns provide good experience in more integrated community planning.
- Because parish plans embrace non-planning issues, embracing all of their concerns tends to bring different parts of the local authority together in a more integrative way.

- Smaller authorities are more easily able to integrate a range of functions (community safety, neighbourhood regeneration) with spatial planning than possibly larger authorities are able to do.

Case Study I

The majority of the generic aspects of good practice noted above can be seen in the following two case studies, both of which involve the community actively beyond just consultation. Whilst they stop short of being examples of the community producing a plan entirely on its own, they each show an active input in the development of a plan.

Case study, from TI 9.

"Ambridge (name changed) is a small town, with less than 4000 people. The town used to centre around a livestock market and a creamery with dairy farming being very important to the town. However both these sites were closed down leaving empty sites in the town. Ambridge has a strategic document outlining the vision for the town. It was important that the community planned its own future and we wanted the community to take a real lead on regenerating these sites to put the heart back into the town. The result has been that the site of the livestock market is now a community building called the exchange which includes a theatre, an indoor market, a new doctor's surgery, a co-op and office space. This was moved forward with money from the RDA, they prepared a brief for the Station Rd area and the creamery site, which has now been developed into a care home, the creamery building has been converted into a shop and all housing is affordable. This was not a statutory brief but we were able to say we take a cross-community planning very seriously and want to adhere to it, otherwise the developers won't get planning permission, so we can help deliver what the community wants."

Case study from TI8

One particular project of ours has won a national housing award in Ambridge (name changed). I think one of the major reasons for this award was how we conducted the public consultation. We have a large site in the centre of town which is owned by the council, we proposed a series of components for this site as the council had a number of aspirations for the land a main component was building a high level of affordable housing and the overall development shouldn't reduce the car parking area for the town centre. We also wanted an element of commercial use, so the site would be of mixed use. When we started we submitted a planning application for consultation. However it was evident from the consultation that the public were opposed to this proposal, so we withdrew the plan and embarked on a discussion for a local group which was generated as a result of this application called 'Save Our Space'. This local group had used local architects to voice their concerns and represent the community. So we commissioned the same local firm to draw up plans on how the site should be developed. This local group subsequently evolved into a source of collecting local information to input into the master planning process and even took on a vacant shop in town as a point of contact with the community. We worked closely with this group and the master plan they produced informed the final application which was submitted and was approved. The extent of public consultation was the main reason for the plan reaching a consensus and being approved.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT BEST PRACTICE AND CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS

This final Section of the report has four parts. Firstly, in Section 5.1, we draw together all of the elements of good practice from other community involvement evaluations (reported in Section 2.4), guidance on the development of good practice (Section 3) and the empirical surveys conducted for this report (Section 4) to provide a synopsis of action for *community-led* planning. Secondly, in Section 5.2, we use results from other community involvement evaluations (Sections 2.2 and 2.3) and our surveys (Section 4) to articulate and structure the principal conflicts and tensions that are considered to endure for community-led planning. In the third part of the Section (Section 5.3) we offer the results of our triangulation: views about these good practices and 'problems' from our three 'stakeholders' from outside of the local authority sector – the Government Office, a rural community council and a community forum.

We end, in section 5.4 with some reflections on the potential for the development of community-led planning better to serve the needs of both planning processes and, importantly, planning outcomes.

5.1 Good practice in community-led planning

From all of the evidence taken together, the importance of *the involvement of all parties from the inception* of any community-led planning initiative provides a first key to successful community-led planning. This will require good will from all stakeholders. In this context, *local authorities* should:

- communicate with communities using a range of different means;
- facilitate regular meetings, knowledge transfer and feedback;
- involve councillors fully;
- nominate community engagement leaders from within the authority;
- provide adequate resources to allow community-led planning to flourish, including the development of toolkits;
- build consensus, minimise conflict, gain local knowledge and understand local culture, circumstances and feelings through dialogue with communities;
- integrate community participation with other planning and community processes within the authority (SCIs, SDSs, LDFs, LAAs etc);
- adopt as far as possible the recommendations of community-led plans and get them adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents, to give communities confidence.

In this context too, *communities* should:

- understand that they have a voice in the planning process but also a responsibility to act with propriety;
- form structured community planning groups;
- develop community assets (including the development of skills) fully;
- involve the local authority from inception;
- develop as full an understanding as possible of planning processes and produce great plans.

Local authorities and communities *working together* should:

- align community-led planning processes with local authority processes;
- acknowledge the importance of, and use, informal processes;
- share experiences, information and knowledge fully and regularly;

- develop fundraising strategies;
- pay attention to good outcomes as well as good processes;
- make use of toolkits and consultation techniques to facilitate learning through the mutual agreement of all stakeholders.

5.2 Enduring problems relating to community action in planning

From all of our reviews and surveys, problems can be grouped according to those that emanate from the way in which the public sector is organised or behaves and, secondly, the way the community itself becomes involved in community action. One problem considered common to both local authorities and communities alike, however, was that of *information and understanding*. Both the interviews and the reviews uncovered many instances where community action was thwarted by a lack of information and understanding on the part of each party. Thus, the review reported that professional planners often found it difficult to respond effectively to community plans because they do not fully understand them. But also, the community evidence base was often poor. A dearth of statistical or even factual evidence was commonly reported. Many planning officers claimed they would prefer 'hard data' from communities rather than 'intelligence' and opinion.

Not all of the issues summarised below are seen as being equally problematic by communities and local authorities.

Problems originating from the local authority and the public sector

Problem 1: community-led planning is often at variance with top down plans

Because community-led planning has a strong element of locality and local differentiation it tends to be at variance with, and at the extreme, contradict, top down plans and planning guidance. Most common here are where localities seek to do things at variance with PPSs (the Torridge Sustainable Communities toolkit, for example, has precepts directly at variance with PPSs 1, 3, 7 and 12 and yet has been commended for its effectiveness). Community-led planning is often *unwittingly* at variance with PPSs. In our surveys, a number of authorities also noted the problems with trying to conform to a standardised Regional Spatial Strategy. The lack of ability of national policies and regional plans to embrace local variation extended to the measurement of national indicators, some of which were appropriate to some geographical areas but not others. In general, in both the reviews and interviews, the 'standardisation' of top down initiatives of various types tended to work against local distinctiveness.

Some survey respondents also noted a lack of clarity over *procedural* requirements for community involvement from central government and a lack of 'expert advice', when requested, from government agencies. The profusion of plans and stakeholders also was seen to be problematic.

Problem 2: community-led planning is expensive

This is particularly so in remoter rural areas. Here, resourcing comes from time and effort, rather than money, on the part of the local authority and communities alike. Ironically, some authorities in the survey felt that the more successful community involvement became (for example through community-led planning) the more vulnerable it was to being cut because it was a high consumer of resources. At the other extreme, some authorities in our survey felt that they did not have the resources even to get community participation started. Monitoring community involvement, too, for a number of different reasons (improving and judging were the two most commonly stated

reasons) was felt to be expensive. The most commonly cited problem in our case studies review was a lack of resources from the public purse to meet these costs of participation.

Problem 3: communities can become disenchanted by local authority decisions

Several instances were reported in the telephone survey where community views actively were sought and then seemingly ignored (often because they were not admissible, nothing to do with planning or even illegal) or not embraced fully. In this respect it was noted that *community-led* planning was more successful than a *community involvement* in planning because the former was an iterative process that allowed problems to be negotiated and resolved whereas the latter tended to be more of a 'one point' input where that moment can pass without a resolution to any differences. Even here, though, the review material reported a reluctance in some authorities (not in the South West) to adopt parish plans or otherwise acknowledge them in the planning process. The disenchantment can be considerable because of the work that has gone into producing a parish plan. In all of these cases, communities need to be communicated with fully. In addition, some community-led plans were seen to develop either despite the state or in the absence of state support. Sometimes they were also seen as being there to serve state ends.

Problems that have their origins within the community

Problem 4: Community involvement in planning does not involve everyone

Three types of planning were identified in the surveys, each of which involves a different type of person from the community. Involvement in development planning involves educated, middle class conceptual, thinkers whilst involvement in development control is driven by self interest and involves a much wider spectrum of the population. Community-led planning can involve a wide spectrum of the population where it does take place, but it tends to take place predominantly where there already are motivated and able community leaders to initiate it. Some people in communities have no ability to get involved and some have no wish to. Some communities remained quite deferential to local 'lords of the manor'. *Single interest groups* tend to be more geographically dispersed (communities of interest rather than place), expert about one area but ignorant about others and tend to be formed to 'oppose'. The larger the community, the harder it becomes to make community-led plans fully consensual.

Problem 5: Local authority planning and provision structures are difficult for lay people to understand.

There is commonly a panoply of plans (LAAs, LSPs, SCIs, town and parish plans) the relationships between which the community at large finds difficult to understand. Some authorities in the surveys noted that the more that was put in place to help communities get involved the more, after a point, it put them off. Volunteering fatigue could set in, in these circumstances. Most 'complaints' from the community (and indeed failures to take community views on board) relating to planning were considered to emanate from a lack of understanding of complex systems. From the reviews, this lack of understanding extended to what might be expected of local councillors in the community participation context. Certainly their commitment is very variable. There was some confusion too about the nature of geographical boundaries, where those of the community and the authority do not coincide.

Problem 6: community involvement will not necessarily deliver what the authority wants.

A number of cases in the telephone interviews were noted, where communities had 'mobilised' themselves to oppose local authority, or other public authority, intentions, such as development proposals or plan proposals. Community groups were commonly anti-development. Here even publicly elected representatives on councils were seen to claim to have 'their hands tied' by community views, leading to increasing instances of members voting against officer recommendations. This 'resistance' motivation also was noted in the reviews, particularly in relation to the opposition to housing where it was proposed and the introduction of local needs housing, where none was proposed.

5.3 Results of the survey: the views of stakeholders

Views on the salient findings of the surveys from **Gloucestershire Rural Community Council** are as follows

Comments on good practice

Overall, the requirements for good practice seem to be couched in slightly negative terms. It is commonly the case that local authorities begin by being quite tentative about bottom-up community empowerment initiatives in general because for them there is a perception of both ceding power and making things more complicated and therefore harder to manage both at the same time. For many authorities too, there is a fear of the unknown and an apprehension about raising expectations that then cannot be fulfilled. It is nevertheless a statutory duty on the part of local authorities and in our experience 'letting go' and seeing what happens can be an exciting and positive experience for communities and local authorities alike.

Once this first step has been taken it is usually found to be the beginning of an improving relationship between the community and the authority, often with some co-ordination from catalysts such as the RCCs. And RCCs are not just concerned to help community groups. They offer advice to local authorities too about how best to approach communities, and this is doing a lot to reduce apprehensions.

In respect of the role of elected councillors, they have a duty to represent the views of their wards and commonly therefore support individuals in planning applications, even against the recommendations of local authority officers. In *community-led* planning, however, a good councillor will act as a link between the authority and the community.

Comments on Enduring Problems

Generally, most of these problems can be anticipated and managed successfully. This often works best with the use of a third party intermediary such as the RCC.

Problem 1 - Community-led planning is often at variance with top down plans

This is completely true in respect of national and regional plans. The RSS is a big problem in this respect. For county and district level plans, however, the relationship between them and community plans can be accommodated. Communities can be, and are, asked to harmonise their plans with other local authority planning documents. The most difficult community plans to harmonise are village design statements because they are unique to individual places and by definition do not readily fit with generalisations at a more aggregated spatial scale.

Problem 2 – Community-led planning is expensive

There are costs involved but some local authorities offer no money at all for community empowerment initiatives, despite it being a Statutory Duty. At the very least they should be providing a community liaison officer. But again, this issue can be managed. We have examples in the county of parish plans being produced for under £200 in cash, but backed by a lot of community time and effort. Communities invariably feel that this is good value for money however, because the outcome is a valuable document for them and can be seen to materially improve people's lives.

There are also considerable costs for community support organisations such as RCCs who, of course, are dealing with many community-led plans at the same time. The infrastructure for this (leaflets, seminars and the like) is expensive as well as advice on individual community plans. The time spent raising this money is time spent not providing advice.

Problem 3 - Communities can become disenchanted by local authority decisions

This had been a problem at the beginning of community-led planning as an exercise where, in many cases, communities were just producing rather unrealistic 'wish lists'. With the maturation of community-led planning this has now largely been overcome. Communities are encouraged to develop their plans within local planning frameworks and to be realistic about what outcomes might be expected.

Problem 4 - Community involvement in planning does not involve everyone

Whilst again, the very early attempts at community-led planning ran the risk of being the province of only a determined few, the process has matured into one of the most inclusive ones observable across all community initiatives. This is largely because the issue of inclusion is addressed head on in most plans: plans actually state what steps they have taken to be inclusive. Most communities are getting phenomenally high response rates to their consultation exercises – many in the 90% and some as high as 98%, which are much higher than in any other representative processes such as local and national elections: it is the best form of inclusion that you can get. Much of this success in inclusion can be attributed to *localness*: knowing your community means you also are more likely to know those who are in danger of being excluded, and give them special attention.

Steering groups for community-led plans are increasingly being asked overtly to account for how the whole community is included. In this context, one way to consider inclusion (or the lack of it) is as a risk to be managed.

A final contribution to ensuring impartiality in community documents is to have an independent analysis of surveys conducted within communities. The GRCC offers a consultancy service for this purpose.

Problem 5 - Local authority planning and provision structures are difficult for lay people to understand.

This is true. In our experience they are commonly difficult for local authorities to understand in any detail too! Processes have developed incrementally and now that they are also becoming more integrated there is a huge range of plans and policies to be accommodated all at once. This definitely inhibits the prospect of community-led plans being consonant with all local authority strategies

Problem 6 - Community involvement will not necessarily deliver what the authority wants.

This problem has two sides to it. There is always a possibility that individuals in communities will attempt to use community-led plans for their own ends, but being aware of this problem, of itself, is the first step to minimising it. The processes described under problem four above go a long way to ensuring that no one 'clique' in a community can develop a plan that they can claim to be representative, when it is not.

The second 'side' of this issue is that, if a community plan is properly and inclusively produced and provides a consensus view of the community, why should it *not* challenge local authority proposals? At the very least in this context, officers should be required to defend and justify their position.

We have come across cases where local authorities have asked communities to produce plans, for example, where the authority can see the possibility of developing a Section 106 Agreement to provide income or resources for the community and needs that community to determine its priorities. Communities will often be suspicious of such approaches, feeling that by even considering the 'what if' consultation, they will give tacit support to the development.

Views on the salient findings of the surveys from ***the Government Office for the South West*** are as follows

Comments on good practice

The proposals offered are a comprehensive set which we are able to endorse. They are likely to be viewed with some consensus amongst local authorities and communities alike. They are certainly ambitious ones which, if achieved, will see an effective process in operation and will reduce misunderstandings across all stakeholders. The big challenge remains to bring them about and this is likely to be an incremental process over some period of time.

Comments on Enduring Problems

Problem 1 - Community-led planning is often at variance with top down plans

This is true. There are enduring issues surrounding the complete abandonment of 'top down' policies and guidance, however, since one of their founding purposes is to seek to ensure a degree of commensurability and certainly justice, across different authority areas. General guidance seeks to ameliorate widening gaps or differences in a whole range of issues, from one place to another.

There is a bit of a disconnect between this principle and that of encouraging local difference or distinctiveness. Flexibility is probably the best approach here with bodies such as ours seeking to encourage greater individualism in LAAs and more locally, whilst trying to ensure commensurability of opportunity across the board. Without some overarching comparability, tensions could build up between different geographical areas.

Problem 2 - Community-led planning is expensive

This is also true, but time rather than money *per se* is a particularly valuable asset in the development of community-led planning. Communities who wish to have an effective voice in local decisions should be prepared to commit this time because of the potential benefits that will accrue. The cost to local authorities and other stakeholders is more

about prioritising activities and learning to use 'smarter ways' of operation. Difficult choices always have to be made, particularly in a recession.

What is particularly important however is that, because community-led planning is entirely voluntary and born of good will, it should never become an *expectation* of the state. The state cannot require it of communities, whether it funds it or not.

Problem 3 - Communities can become disenchanted by local authority decisions

This also can be true, but it is incumbent upon authorities to ensure that the community understands the potentials and limitations of community-led planning: what it can or cannot do. This is invariably helped by early dialogue in the initiation of a community plan. Some communities are very knowledgeable about planning and they work well in plan production as a result. Local authorities, however, also need to understand the perspectives of communities, their values, cultures and aspirations as well as communities understanding local authority regulations. Eventually however, because communities are becoming empowered, they will need to take responsibility for understanding the rules.

Problem 4 - Community involvement in planning does not involve everyone

Communities, in our experience, learn quite early on that there are clear advantages in involving key stakeholders and the wider community in the production of plans. It makes them more effective and in the end, more persuasive. Because of this there is every incentive to make community-led planning as inclusive as possible. Some people will not wish to be involved at all, however, and this must be respected too. At the end of the day, however, there is always a possibility that some community 'actives' will seek to develop a plan for their own ends and also, some people seem to like to oppose things for oppositions sake. We must be alive to these possibilities and treat them subtly.

Problem 5 - Local authority planning and provision structures are difficult for lay people to understand.

This is true and even extends to some professionals! In the South West too we still have a local authority structure that is particularly complex, with different tiers of local government in different places. We know that this is difficult for the lay public to get to grips with and this is even before we consider the panoply of plans that the public can become involved with and that impact upon them. Ultimately, why should the public understand all of these structures? But there is too a slight danger that seeking to simplify process to any considerable degree can build in inaccuracies and inequities and we have to guard against this.

Problem 6 - Community involvement will not necessarily deliver what the authority wants.

This does happen sometimes. I suppose that in cases the community can do this deliberately as an 'anti-establishment' assertion, but more commonly it is just that the wishes of the community are different from those of the local authority. These differences can extend to the parish level: community groups can be formed either to sidestep a (sometimes moribund) parish or at the extreme to oppose it directly.

Views on the salient findings of the surveys from the **Devon Towns Forum** are as follows.

A key problem for all Community Plans is the lack of dissemination, mainstreaming and the ineffectiveness of local authorities and the agencies to deal with the information and involvement generated by CLP processes. Also, the role that Local Strategic Partnerships could play in the facilitation or identification of support and guidance at the commencement or throughout a CLP process is underused. Where LSP's are involved they often fail to do so effectively due to a lack of understanding of the different CLP processes, inclusiveness or resources. How many LSP's, for example, have direct community CLP representation?

CLP also needs to be recognised by the strategic agencies as an open ended process and systems developed that support it; the luxury of CLP having been funded by external agencies e.g. DEFRA & RDA's etc has allowed a 'not invented here' culture to develop within Local Authorities with little or no forward planning to integrate or regard CLP capacity within the generally better understood and funded Voluntary and Community Sector. Many of the problems have arisen because the CLP process is seen as 'project specific' or time limited, when the aim should be continued engagement.

There are also problems with LSP membership structures, in particular there is seldom any direct connection between the LSP membership and the Local Authority Planners, thus opportunities for all parties to connect and share information at the same time are frustrated or happen haphazardly.

The DTF would challenge the view that CLP is expensive, as this is open to a too simplistic interpretation, either in terms of its cost over any potential return, or in volunteer or paid officer time and commitment expended. Either way CLP should be recognised as an ongoing requirement for all parties and resourced and supported accordingly. CLP should be recognised as an efficient mechanism for delivering inclusive localised decision making for services and priorities along side its ability for communities to develop projects or address short term aspirations. CLP processes are fundamental to helping LA's and public bodies meet CAA targets and central government indicators notably NI 4 & 7 (CLP actually hits almost all indicators). In economic terms MCTi programme for Devon demonstrated a cash return in excess of 30/1 over the life of the programme and a legacy of community engagement and projects that will be delivered long after the initial CLP programme has ended.

Capturing the benefits of CLP and support the development of LSP's to have genuine mechanisms for continued community engagement is now a pressing need as local mechanisms to support it for example the cost of supported community networks, project groups or better still, Local Community Engagement Forums is modest when considering the positive impact the use of this capacity will have on LDF's LAA's RSS's etc. There are of course many examples of good practice, notable exceptions and variation of processes and levels of commitment, but a persuasive argument needs to be made to put the benefits of Community led Planning into its proper context.

5.4 Reflections on the potential of community-led planning

In this final section, we offer some wider generalisations specifically about community-led planning and its relationship to the local authority planning process. This draws on all of the results so far and also a body of contextual literature: Countryside & Community Research Unit (2002); Owen, S. and Moseley, M. J. (2003); Countryside Agency (2003; 2004); BDOR Ltd (2006); Hughes, 2006; SQW Consulting (2007); Owen, S., Moseley, M. J. and Courtney, P. (2007); Countryside & Community Research Institute and BDOR Ltd (2008); Gallent, N., Morphet, J. and Tewdyr-Jones, M. (2009) and Parker (2009).

The heterogeneity of community led plans

Four important distinctions are usefully made in relation to community-led plans:

- the distinction between two different forms of local community-led planning: (a) *holistic plans* such as Parish Plans and MCTi plans and (b) *specific plans* such as Village Design Statements – because each has very different implications for empowering communities and for influencing strategic thinking;
- related to this, the distinction between two different forms of planning more generally: (a) *broad community planning* represented at the strategic scale by Sustainable Community Strategies and at the local scale by holistic community-led planning and (b) *statutory land use (or spatial) planning* represented at the strategic scale by the Core Strategies of Local Development Frameworks and at the local scale by Supplementary Planning Documents ⁵, as well as other place-specific planning guidance and development control - we shall refer to this as 'spatial planning' for the rest of this report;
- the distinction between empowering communities to influence what happens (a) *within their own locality* and what happens (b) *beyond that locality*;
- the distinction between (a) the *direct influence* of community-led planning over strategic thinking and (b) its *indirect or cumulative influence* over that thinking.⁶

With those four distinctions in mind we address the role of community-led planning in, first, *empowering communities* and, second, *influencing strategic thinking* in wider planning processes: both central parts of the title of this research report. For the following discussion we shall use Parish Plans as exemplars of holistic community-led plans and Village Design Statements as exemplars of specific community-led plans, as in each case they are the most common and familiar form of plan. We have acknowledged the existence of other plans in each of these categories elsewhere in this report.

Empowering communities

Naturally, both Parish Plans and Village Design Statements are more effective in empowering communities to influence the implementation of their own aspirations and proposals what happens *within their own locality* than they are in influencing decisions or actions that affect localities more widely.

Parish Plans

Parish Plans are potentially effective in providing local communities with a clear framework and detailed action points for dealing with a broad range of matters, social, economic, environmental and cultural, within the locality, particularly where those action points can be implemented by the community itself, for example, establishing

⁵ For a very clear explanation of Local Development Frameworks and Supplementary Planning Documents, visit <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/ldf/ldfguide.html>

⁶ In relation to these latter two points, Owen, Moseley and Courtney (2007) identify three ways in which local community-led planning can influence decision making at different levels:

- specific actions that parish planning and MCTi teams can undertake for themselves;
- specific actions that require practical help from particular service providers in membership of the Local Strategic Partnership;
- strategic challenges that have policy implications for service providers and are best dealt with in a subsequent review of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

community transport schemes or re-opening village shops. More widely there is some evidence that the concerns expressed and proposals made in Parish Plans are fed into Sustainable Community Strategies, but this tends to be partial and sporadic (Parker, 2009). Parish Plans can provide Sustainable Community Strategies with a firmer local information base, a better picture of local priorities and enhanced legitimacy from a wide-reaching programme of consultation (Owen, Moseley and Courtney, 2007).

In turn, Sustainable Community Strategies are seen as appropriate vehicles for taking forward the concerns and proposed actions emerging from Parish Plans (Owen and Moseley, 2003). As the preparation of Parish Plans becomes more widespread and, hopefully, a normal part of local development policy, it is likely that, as we shall see below, their collective concerns will exert greater influence over Sustainable Community Strategies, but this will rely on the continuing development of 'bridges' between the different levels.

Parish Plans are less effective in empowering communities with regard to spatial planning decisions, even those directly affecting the specific locality covered by the plan. It is important to emphasise here that the process of land use allocation and related development control is a *statutory* process that must comply with set procedures involving many other interests in addition to the local community, including statutory consultees. Parish Plans *per se* cannot make land use allocation proposals and must be in conformity with an extant Local Development Framework or Local Plan where a Local Development Framework has not been completed.

This is important as reports from Cornwall Council (email communication to the research team of 15 December) suggest that responses on the part of local authorities to parish plans is hugely variable, from verbatim acceptance to complete disregard. They suggest that the approach of local authorities to parish plans varies as much as the content of the plans themselves and that there should be scope for standardisation.

That being noted however, the existence of a Parish Plan that includes matters related to spatial planning such as, for example, the identification and quantification of the need for affordable homes or employment, or the identification green spaces that should be protected has the potential to influence (a) particular planning policies in the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework, (b) place-specific proposals in Supplementary Planning Documents or 'optional' Development Documents such as Area Action Plans and (c) development control decisions through parish council representations (CCRU, 2002). Further, Parish Plans, being founded on systematic community consultation, offer local planning authorities one means of fulfilling some of their responsibilities in compiling a Statement of Community Involvement as part of the Local Development Framework.

However, to influence spatial planning policies and decisions, particularly if any of their proposals are to be adopted as part of Supplementary Documents, Parish Plans must be prepared through a disciplined and rigorous approach that mirrors the statutory planning process (Countryside Agency, 2003). That rigour is not always evident in Parish Plans prepared to date; there are some doubts about real inclusivity (Parker, 2009) and there are great variations in quality, with serious deficiencies with regard to evidence (Gallent *et al*, 2009). Notwithstanding these reservations, there is some, albeit limited, support amongst local authority planners for the adoption of the spatial parts of Parish Plans as Supplementary Planning Documents, but the early engagement of planners in the process is essential if Parish Plans are to be aligned with Local Development Frameworks (SQW Consulting, 2007).

Village Design Statements

Village Design Statements exercise very little influence over the broader range of planning issues beyond the scope of spatial planning even at the level of the specific locality. They were proposed and developed as a spatial planning tool and were never intended to have that broader scope. Nevertheless, their declared purpose of fostering local distinctiveness can encompass the celebration of some matters beyond the confines of spatial planning such as historical associations, particular events and local food.

In the realm of spatial planning, Village Design Statements clearly empower local communities. Over the past 20 years or so they have been used increasingly in spatial planning, mainly through their adoption initially as Supplementary Planning Guidance and latterly as Supplementary Planning Documents. Because of their focused scope they seem to be more easily digested than Parish Plans by local planning authorities. This is a well-established process that seems to work increasingly well (Hughes, 2006; CCRI & BDOR, 2008). It provides Village Design Statements some statutory force within the spatial planning system, particularly in negotiations with developers. Where Village Design Statements have been prepared, local authority planners tend to appreciate their value and take them seriously into account in determining planning applications (Gallent *et al*, 2009).

There are also many examples where they have been taken into account in determining planning appeals. Reciprocally, by being involved in the preparation of Village Design Statements, often alongside local authority planners, local communities become more aware of the range of factors that needs to be taken into account in formulating spatial planning policies and in making planning decisions. The existing process seems to be satisfactory, but the preparation of Village Design Statements, as with Parish Plans, needs to be more widespread and to be embedded as a normal part of local planning processes if they are to become a more effective tool of community empowerment.

Finally, it is important to note that if either Parish Plans or Village Design Statements are to continue to influence planning policies beyond their initial preparation, then they must be subject to periodic *review* as are the planning policies themselves, otherwise there is the danger that their proposals will become outdated in relation to the updated version of the Local Development Framework.

Influencing Strategic Thinking

We turn now to the related issue of the extent to which community-led planning can influence the broader strategic thinking that underpins Sustainable Community Strategies and the Core Strategies of Local Development Frameworks.

Parish Plans

There is some evidence that Parish Plans already influence the preparation of Sustainable Community Strategies. This is made feasible partly as a result of the close correspondence between their respective breadth and content. Indeed, it has been proposed that Parish Plans should be reconceptualised as 'Local Sustainable Community Strategies', the building blocks for Sustainable Community Strategies (BDOR, 2006). Some good practice in 'bridging' between Parish Plans and Sustainable Community Strategies has been identified (Owen, Moseley and Courtney, 2007) and locally-fashioned guides for articulating the linkages between them have been proposed (Countryside Agency, 2004).

If complete coverage of Parish Plans were to be achieved, and if the preparation of Parish Plans became normal practice, there could be a very productive relationship between these two levels of holistic planning. Concerns and action points arising from all of the Parish Plans prepared within a local authority could be fed collectively into the preparation of Sustainable Community Strategies. At present, however, there is no obligation on any parish council to prepare a Parish Plan and no obligation on 'higher level' authorities to take notice of the proposals set out in those plans and SQW Consulting (2007) point to limited modifications of mainstream service agendas in response to Parish Plans.

It has proven difficult in practice for communities or individuals to engage with the Core Strategies of Local Development Frameworks and there is little evidence that Parish Plans influence the strategic thinking behind those Core Strategies. Bishop claims that the relationship between Parish Plans and Local Development Frameworks is becoming more tenuous by the day (cited in Gallent *et al*, 2009). Core Strategies are influenced by a wide range of compelling factors - not least the development growth forecasts and proposals contained in Regional Spatial Strategies and major infrastructure proposals. It is unlikely that Parish Plans, even collectively, will have more than a partial influence on strategic thinking in spatial planning.

However, Parish Plans *can* play an important role in helping spatial strategies to reflect the goals and aspirations of local communities but, as indicated above, this is only realistic if the preparation of Parish Plans becomes the norm rather than the exception – and a significant amount of capacity building amongst local communities will be required if this is to happen. Perhaps the key here is to strengthen the relationship between Sustainable Community Strategies and the Core Strategies of Local Development Frameworks so that by an admittedly indirect process some of the proposals emanating from several Parish Plans within a local authority area might cumulatively influence the development of spatial planning strategy.

Village Design Statements

Village Design Statements have no noticeable influence over the strategic thinking that underpins the preparation of Sustainable Development Strategies, nor are they likely to have any such influence in the foreseeable future. Village Design Statements were never intended for this purpose and it would be fruitless to attempt to make the connection.

While Village Design Statements are most effective at the scale of the individual locality / community within the spatial planning system, it is possible that, cumulatively, several Village Design Statements prepared in one geographical part of a local authority could, together, influence growth policies and design policies contained in the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. There is some evidence that review of local planning policies in the light of Village Design Statements is already taking place (Owen and Moseley, 2003); it is clear that in practice they are more easily reconciled than Parish Plans with the strategic objectives of local planning authorities (Gallent *et al*, 2009).

The relationships, or channels of influence, between different forms of community-led planning and different forms of wider planning process explored in the above discussion can be mapped onto the diagram in Figure 3 but, as with all diagrams, we should beware of oversimplification of the issues and relationships involved.

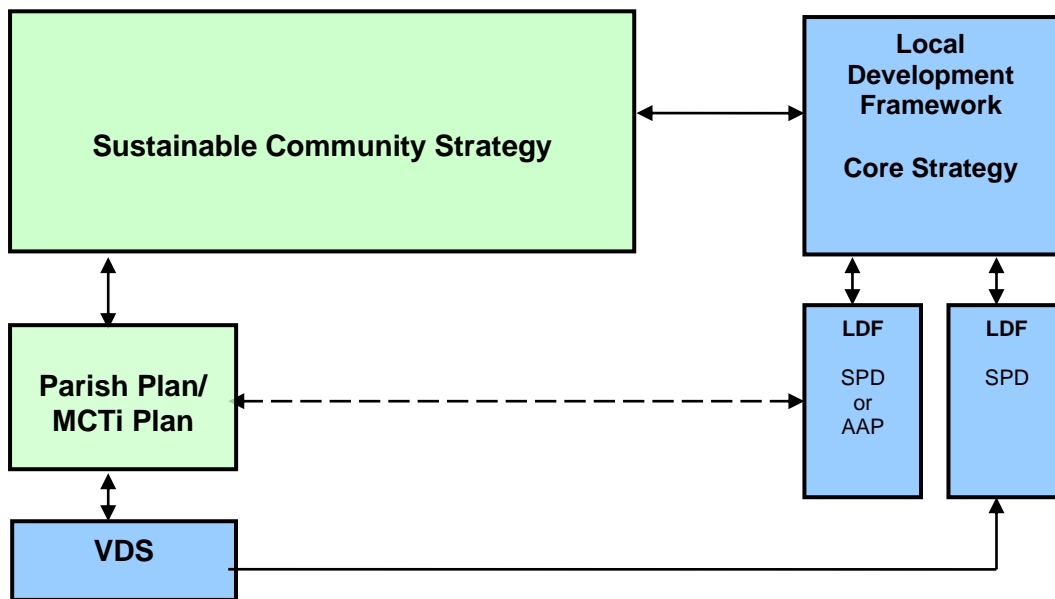


Figure 3: Channels of influence between community-led plans and wider planning processes

The development of community-led planning in the urban context

We are aware that much of this assessment of community-led planning is based around the rural context, particularly in relation to village design statements and parish plans. Much of the feedback that we received from *urban* authorities in the telephone interviews centred on an assessment of community involvement, rather than community-led planning, largely because of the lack of an effective vehicle through which community-led planning can operate.

In this respect, we advocate the continued development of the 'parishing' of urban areas as the most effective means of developing community-led planning in the urban context. We recognise, however, that this is likely to introduce new challenges in respect of boundary definition and democratic mandates and is likely to require an infrastructure for the development of parish competencies in urban areas, similar to the way in which RCCs operate in rural areas.

Key issues for consideration

From the foregoing discussion it is possible to identify those 'channels of influence' between community-led plans and wider planning processes that need to be considered further if community-led planning is to have greater effectiveness in empowering communities and influencing the strategic thinking in wider planning processes.

- Encourage *all* communities to produce *and* review both holistic plans (Parish and MCTi Plans) and specific plans (for example, Village Design Statements) - or to produce and review Village Design Statements *within* Parish and MCTi Plans - to the point at which this becomes embedded as normal practice in local governance.
- Encourage stronger two-way strategic links between the planning policies and proposals contained in Sustainable Community Strategies and those of the Core

Strategies of Local Development Frameworks, with the former providing a broad template for the latter (BDOR, 2006). Through these linkages, Parish Plans would exert collective, albeit indirect, influence over the policies in Sustainable Community Strategies.

- Encourage the absorption of appropriate spatial parts of Parish Plans into Supplementary Planning Documents, or even Area Action Plans, as part of Local Development Frameworks where they have been subject to the rigorous processes required to sanction this.
- Maintain and support the adoption of Village Design Statements as Supplementary Planning Documents within Local Development Frameworks as a normal feature of spatial planning processes.

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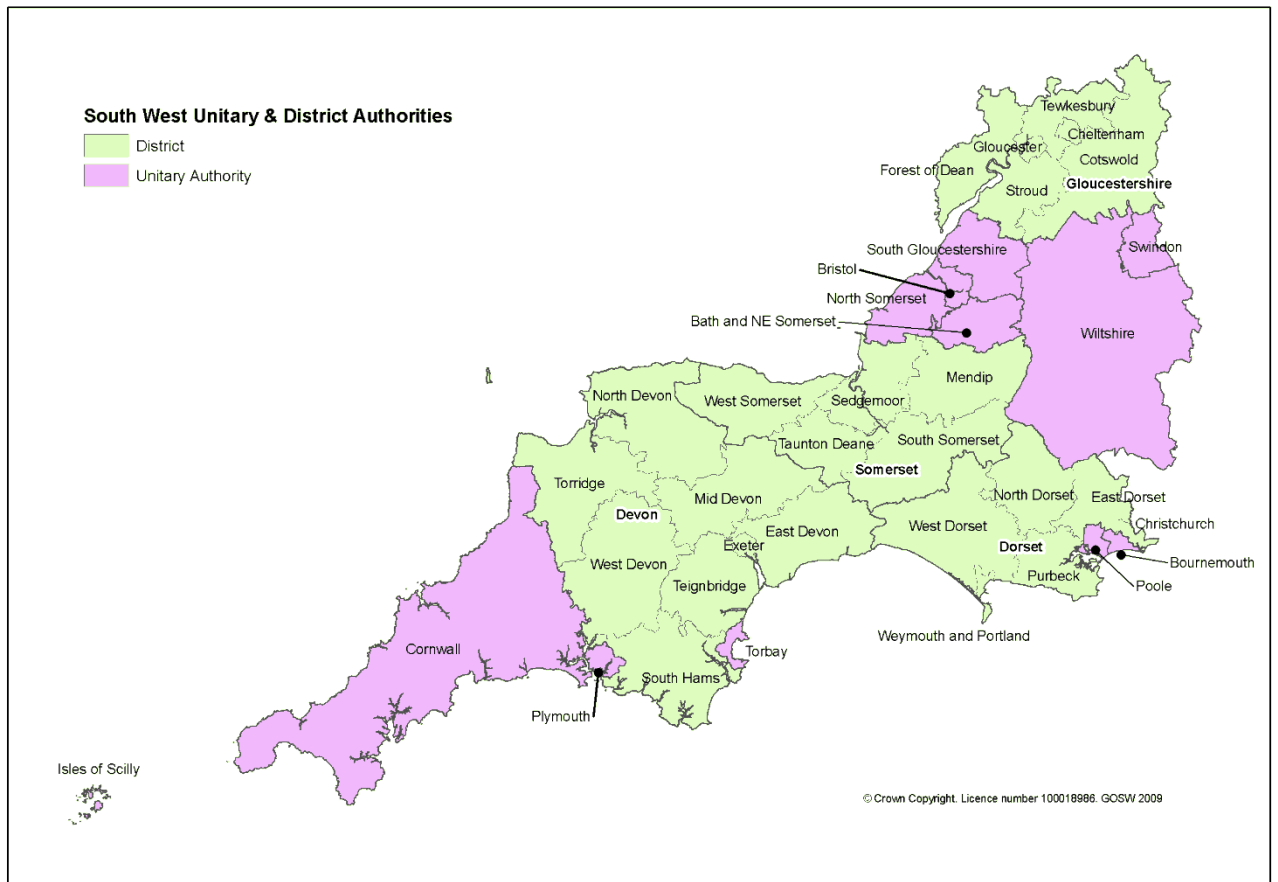
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Appendix 1 – Profile of South West Local Authorities, post April 2009

SW local authority	Type of LA	Urban or rural - Defra 2005 classification	Political control
Bath and North East Somerset Council	Unitary	Rural (4)	NOC
Borough of Poole	Unitary	Urban (2)	Conservative
Bournemouth Borough Council	Unitary	Urban (2)	Conservative
Bristol City Council	Unitary	Urban (2)	Lib Dem
Cheltenham Borough Council	District	Urban (3)	NOC
Christchurch Borough Council	District	Urban (2)	Conservative
Cornwall Council	New unitary	Rural (6)	NOC
Cotswold District Council	District	Rural (6)	Conservative
Dartmoor National Park	National Park	Rural	NOC
Devon County Council	County	Rural	Conservative
Dorset County Council	County	Rural	Conservative
East Devon District Council	District	Rural (5)	Conservative
East Dorset District Council	District	Rural (5)	Conservative
Exeter City Council	District	Urban (3)	NOC
Exmoor National Park	National Park	Rural	NOC
Forest of Dean District Council	District	Rural (6)	Conservative
Gloucester City Council	District	Urban (3)	NOC
Gloucestershire Couty Council	County	Rural	Conservative
Isle of Scilly Council	Unitary	Rural (6)	Independent
Mendip District Council	District	Rural (6)	Conservative
Mid Devon District Council	District	Rural (6)	NOC
North Devon District Council	District	Rural (5)	Conservative
North Dorset District Council	District	Rural (6)	Conservative
North Somerset District Council	District	Rural (5)	Conservative
Plymouth City Council	Unitary	Urban (3)	Conservative
Purbeck District Council	District	Rural (6)	NOC
Sedgemoor District Council	District	Rural (5)	Conservative
Somerset County Council	County	Rural	Conservative
South Gloucestershire Council	Unitary	Urban (2)	NOC
South Hams District Council	District	Rural (6)	Conservative
South Somerset District Council	District	Rural (5)	Lib Dem
Stroud District Council	District	Rural (5)	Conservative
Swindon Borough Council	Unitary	Urban (3)	Conservative
Taunton Deane District Council	District	Rural (4)	NOC
Teignbridge District Council	District	Rural (6)	NOC
Tewkesbury Borough Council	District	Rural (5)	NOC
Torbay Council	Unitary	Urban (3)	Conservative
Torrige District Council	District	Rural (6)	NOC
West Devon Borough Council	District	Rural (6)	NOC
West Dorset District Council	District	Rural (6)	Conservative
West Somerset District Council	District	Rural (6)	Independent
Weymouth and Portland Borough Council	District	Urban (3)	NOC
Wiltshire Council	New unitary	Rural	Conservative



counties – Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Gloucestershire – individually named

Appendix 2 – Copy of letter to local authorities

On headed notepaper

Insert address here

Dear Sir/Madam

The Statutory Duty to involve local communities in the planning process: research into good practice.

The development of the active involvement of local communities in the planning process became a Statutory Duty for local authorities from April 2009, under Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. We have been commissioned by the National Empowerment Partnership to undertake a study of how best practice is developing in all local authorities in the South West region. To this end, I wonder if I could ask you for the following information, please?

- The most appropriate person to make contact with in respect of this issue within your authority (it would be helpful if you would pass this letter on to that person).
- The main problems that you are experiencing in implementing this Statutory Duty.
- Any examples of good practice in community led planning in your local authority area.
- Any other information that you can provide concerning the implementation of this duty, including members of the community sector in your area who would be useful to talk to.

I do apologise for troubling you with this request, but we do feel that the development and subsequent sharing of good practice in respect of this function will be of benefit to all authorities in the region.

I thank you in anticipation of your assistance with this matter.

Yours faithfully

Professor Nigel Curry,
Director,
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Appendix 3 - Local authorities interviewed in the telephone interviews.

Unitary authorities

1. Cornwall Council:
2. Wiltshire Unitary:
3. South Gloucestershire Council:
4. Bristol City:
5. Plymouth City Council:
6. Swindon Borough:

District authorities

1. South Somerset District Council:
2. North Somerset District Council:
3. North Dorset District Council:
4. West Devon District:
5. Gloucester City Council:
6. South Hams District:
7. Christchurch Borough:
8. North Devon District Council:

National park authority

1. Dartmoor NPA:

County authority

1. Devon County Council

Questionnaire schedule

Factual information

- a. What is the nature and extent of community-involvement in planning within the authority and what structures are in place and how do they operate?
- b. How has this community involvement in planning developed and over what period?
- c. To what extent has the Statutory Duty from April 2009 influenced the priority given to community involvement planning?
- d. Who are the principal 'partners' in community involvement in planning, and what are their mandates?
- e. How does community involvement in planning fit in with the wider community strategies of the authority?
- f. What support is provided (by the authority and others), to allow the development of community involvement in planning?
- g. How is evidence collected about the nature of community involvement in planning in the authority?

Opinions

h. What is your opinion about the purpose of community involvement in planning?

i. What is your opinion of the support given to foster community involvement in planning in their area and what have been the principal successes and limitations of this support?

j. What is your opinion about how community capacity might be enhanced for the purposes of contributing to community involvement in planning?

k. What do you consider to be the main conflicts, tensions and barriers to co-operation in both the processes and outcomes (and between communities and authorities and across authorities) relating to community empowerment? These might include fear of loss of identity, conflicts of interest and pressure on Councillor or Officer time?

l. What do you consider are the main costs and benefits of community involvement in planning?

m. What do you feel are the motivations that lead to lay people within the community wanting to get involved in planning decisions?

n. In your experience of active community participants, how would you consider them in respect of the following:

- *Well educated*
- *Confident*
- *Representative of the people within their communities*
- *Sharing the same values as you*
- *Trustworthy*
- *Knowledgeable*
- *Capable of adding perspectives, knowledge and information not generally represented in making planning policies and decisions?*

Appendix 4 - Salient results from the telephone interviews

The conduct of these interviews is explained in section 1.5. We provide below a synthesis of the findings of the interviews, structured according to the questions asked, which are set out in appendix 3.

A. What is the nature and structure of community involvement in planning?

The framework for community involvement

The Local Development Framework under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 represented a step change in community involvement specifically in planning, because of the requirement for a Statutory Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which had to set out a system where authorities would involve the community. Nearly all authorities discussed this SCI as being pivotal to community involvement as an input to both their Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) and their development control decision-making.

Some authorities considered that the adoption of SCIs has led to increased tensions with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) because locally generated 'bottom up' values in the SCI and 'one size fits all' 'top down' strategies in the RSS are often incompatible. These contradictions somehow have to be reconciled in the LDF

The nature of community involvement

Within this framework the *nature* of community involvement was discussed. Such involvement was felt in practice to be quite different across development planning (more conceptual thinking – a certain type of 'public' interest on the part of the public but some attempt at 'plan bargaining') and development control (a wider spectrum of the population with a clearer self-interest, mainly in resisting development they do not like). Village planning, thirdly, has a separate constituency again. This is possibly the closest one gets to the notion of 'community' involvement as the other two have quite a large component of self-interest. The first two are best described as a 'community involvement' in planning and the third as 'community led' planning.

The nature and extent of community involvement is also considered to be quite partial. It is very active in some areas (often communities of interest rather than place) and completely absent in others (particularly certain communities of place).

Broader structures

All authorities reported also having a range of 'formal' structures in place to accommodate community involvement in a wider context than just spatial planning. Most have elected members on these structures – authority and parish councillors - but they do vary in their duties. Some have delivery responsibilities and others are just advisory. Most authorities also consider the operation of the Local Strategic Partnership to be part of their community involvement work (and some authorities have a Community Engagement Strategy to support this) and this embraces a much broader set of issues than just spatial planning. Here, some authorities feel that planning provides a lead in community involvement that other local authority services are now following. Such involvement can be interpreted quite differently in different areas of service provision, however.

Vehicles for community involvement

A wide range of vehicles for community involvement was articulated by the responding authorities: public consultations; planning open days (on all aspect of planning); exhibitions; shopping centre stalls; attendance at community meetings. Some authorities noted that these vehicles were often more successful of led by members rather than officer. Others pointed out that developing this range of vehicles can be very expensive.

Community-led planning

Some authorities singled out the importance of moving from consultation on planning issues (community involvement) to getting communities actively to produce plans (community led planning). For some authorities part of this encouragement involves a commitment on the part of the authority to 'adopt' the parish plan once compete, as long as its development has taken place in full, iterative, consultation with the authority. Parish Plans are then treated as *key material evidence* in determining planning applications.

B. How has community involvement in planning developed over time?

A long heritage

All planning authorities were keen to stress the long heritage of community involvement in planning dating back to the 1940s despite different legislative 'changes in direction' since that time, for example the 2004 Act noted above, and its requirement for SCIs. Some suggested that such involvement had developed from rather formalised processes of consultation to much more dynamic process now, of active involvement. Others suggested it had gone, as a result of the 2004 Act, from an *ex post* process – consultation once a plan had been developed, to an *ex ante* one – active involvement at the beginning of plan-making. This was something that the public was taking a while to adjust to. Two authorities suggested that the development of a more *pro-active* involvement predated the 2004 Act. Parish plans, 'community development systems' and 'planning for real' exercises dated this shift towards greater proactivity to the early 1990s. These had mixed successes and were huge consumers of time for professional planning staff (and communities) alike.

One interviewee suggested that the 'duty to involve', in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which came into force in April 2009, was not really addressing the spatial planning function at all but was, rather, to get other types of local authority service provision to embrace community involvement in the way that the planning system already had.

Another noted that any general exhortation for community involvement in planning will have to find its way into amendments to the Town and Country Planning General Development Procedures Order, 1995 for it to become fully mainstreamed.

Current activity

In respect of current activity, the Local Strategic Partnership was considered an impetus for the further development of community involvement and this embraced much more than just planning in respect of local authority functions.

C. To what extent has the Statutory Duty from April 2009 influenced the priority given to community involvement in planning?

Most authorities suggested that because of the longer-term involvement of communities in the planning process, the Statutory Duty has had little impact on the way in which they approach community involvement. They are fulfilling its requirements already. The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act has been much more significant in respect of a change in behaviour, as noted in section B above. One authority noted that they were so well developed in implementing the precepts of the duty that most of the planning staff “might not have noticed the Duty to Involve” (TI 2). One authority, however, did note that the Duty might well have led them to take more notice of community involvement and has led to a series of parish protocols.

The Duty thus has served more as a reinforcement of what planning authorities are doing than a prompt for change. Two authorities did note, however, that because it pertains to *all* local authority functions, it has made community involvement a higher *corporate* priority and this has made their job easier. The Duty had broadened the base of community involvement

D. Who are the principal ‘partners’ in community involvement in planning, and what are their mandates?

Partners

A wide variety of these partners was named by the responding authorities. Chief amongst these was the Local Strategic Partnership but others included:

- other departments of the local authority (including police);
- contiguous local authorities;
- the health authority;
- developers and employers;
- Government agencies (Environment Agency, Highways Agency, Natural England);
- the voluntary and community sector;
- parish and town councils;
- the general public;
- a range of specifically named community groups (appendices in the SCI were cited here).

The principal partners will vary, it was suggested, according to the type and scale of involvement. Local community groups, for example, often find it more difficult to contribute to discussions about higher level strategic plans (and planning principles) than to local site issues. A number of authorities also noted that they made a social effort to develop ‘partnerships’ with hard to reach groups such as BMEs.

One authority noted however, that many ‘partnerships’ tended to be seen as “balanced, moderate and neutral” (TS1) and some, particularly single interest groups, wished to adopt a more radical stance than this. Area-based ‘anti’ or ‘opposition’ groups tend to want to deal with the planning authority on a more bilateral basis, where their views are not so readily moderated or softened – they like to ‘oppose’ rather than compromise.

Mandates

In terms of mandates, a number of the authorities noted that the ubiquity of the Statutory Duty under the 2007 Act (covering all local authority services) has the intention of achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness through a range of services

working together on community involvement. In some ways, the duty is a 'cost-saving' exercise.

A second mandate considered was that a large and disparate range of community organisations were considered to require a 'voice' in decision-making and that with local authority help, these voices could be mobilised. Some authorities suggested that this should be channelled through elected members.

One authority suggested that local knowledge was itself a mandate.

E. How does community involvement in planning fit in with the wider community strategies of the authority?

This can be complex, particularly where there are tiered local authorities in an area, where action must be orchestrated. LAAs, LSPs and town and parish plans all must dovetail. Some authorities noted that these relationships were made more complex because of a burgeoning range of policy statements and plans for the same area (including the Sustainable Community Strategy, community engagement strategies and NHS plans) all of which had to be harmonised in some way. The LSP is considered to help in this wider orchestration because it is authority-wide, rather than service specific.

One authority noted that even with his panoply of plans and strategies active community involvement could not be ensured. In this case, there was a sense of volunteering fatigue. Communities (and indeed individuals) did not seem to want to be particularly proactive in this area.

F What support is available to develop a community involvement in planning?

Communication and advice

A commonly-mentioned form of support was that of providing information and advice to communities. Some of this was responsive and some was proactive (a 'you said, we did' campaign was cited as well as the Devon Rural Sustainability Toolkit). Several authorities mentioned Planning Aid specifically as a portal for advice that was commonly passed on to communities, although it was recognised that this service had a principal workload concerned with development control rather than broader aspects of plan-making. Authorities also mentioned here their types of communication, which have been outlined in section A under *vehicles of community involvement*, above.

One authority also mentioned that they actively encouraged developers to talk to local communities, put on exhibitions and the like, were they are proposing any significant development at all. This can have dubious outcomes, however, as developers in the main 'sell' rather than 'explain' their ideas and tend to take advantage of the lack of understanding on the part of most of the lay public, about the planning system. Developers' agents can be less than even-handed and often influence community views, exploiting community ignorance.

Resourcing support

Most authorities suggested that the main 'resourcing' support comes in time and effort rather than money. This can be considerable in sparsely populated rural districts where the time to get to meetings can be considerable. Working with the Primary Care Trust, the Police, Highways and the like is considered to give economies of scale in the costs of community involvement and it also means that strategies are more integrated. Two authorities noted that the Statutory Duty did not trigger any additional resources.

Many authorities, too, noted the huge resource that was provided 'free' by the community itself.

Other specific forms of support that were mentioned included a parish plans officer, a post that was discontinued as a result of cost savings. This discontinuation had had the effect of alienating some communities who were just starting out on the parish planning process. Some irony was expressed about the fact that this post was cut because 'community-led' planning was not a 'legal responsibility' on the part of the authority (where some other aspects of community involvement were) and yet it was considered the most creative and successful aspect of community involvement. Some authorities did earmark funding specifically for the development of parish plans, but this usually had to be matched by the parish.

G. How is evidence collected about the nature of community involvement?

Collecting data for the requirements of the Place Survey, National Indicators and the Local Development Framework were the principal stated means by which evidence on community involvement was recorded. Some kept data on community consultations as a measure of 'penetration' and a means of being able to say how much public opinion was taken into account. Some authorities, however, were not clear on what evidence was collected, or how.

Some authorities noted, however, that 'softer' more anecdotal evidence was often more valuable to them in *improving* (helping) community involvement, where 'hard' and more formulaic data more commonly had the purpose of *measuring* (judging) involvement.

The nature of community 'feedback' (for example through open access web sites) also was considered under the issue of collecting evidence and here, two main points were noted. Firstly, community feedback was invariably triggered only when something was 'wrong' and was therefore dominantly negative. Secondly, a lot of 'complaints' derived from members if the public not understanding the issue properly. Some local authorities spoke of the value of an officer specifically dedicated to involving the community in planning but in the current economic climate either replacing previous posts or creating new posts for such officers was thought to be unlikely.

H. As a professional, what do you think the purpose of community involvement in planning should be?

Giving the community a voice

Most commonly here, authorities felt that the purpose of community involvement was to allow communities to have more influence over their area and therefore potentially to be more resilient. It gave communities a 'voice'. It empowered communities. Some went on to say that this nevertheless was at variance with other (particularly national and regional) policies (the Regional Spatial Strategy was cited) which did not accommodate community views and this led to disenchantment when decisions were made *locally* with full community involvement.

Some suggested that community involvement in planning is one of the basic tenets of the planning system because of its principal purposes is to make people's lives better in some way. And this can't be done without involving them.

Making communities more responsible

Some authorities noted the significance of *responsible participation* – communities having to take more responsibilities for themselves: “the public sector spending cuts will mean that the community will need to do more to help themselves and community involvement is part of the way to achieve this” (TI 7)

Purposes that serve the needs of the authority

Whilst ‘giving the community a voice’ and ‘responsibilisation’ are both about community purposes, there are ‘purposes’ in involving communities that serve the needs of the authority. The first of these is about *building consensus* and minimising conflict. One authority noted that the 2004 Act saw community involvement as the principal means of consensus building. Although this will never be achieved comprehensively it doesn’t detract from the purpose and in this context, planners increasingly take on the role of mediators. Three authorities considered a second ‘purpose for the authority’ was to gain *access to local knowledge* that would not otherwise be accessible to them. A fourth authority extended this to a consideration of local cultures and traditions too, in that it was important to take these into account in planning decisions in a responsive way.

A third authority purpose was gain *validation* for things that it did. This is closely related to ‘responsibilisation’ in that validation passes the responsibility for the decision to the community – they effectively buy into it and in so doing share responsibility for it.

I. How successful has support been in your area for community empowerment?

Successes

Success hinges on local energy and enthusiasm and a common purpose between the community and the authority. Several authorities considered community-led planning (parish plans in particular) to be the most successful form of community involvement as it led to tangible outcomes that were ‘owned’ by the community. These were particularly valuable if they became implemented.

Failures

Failures usually derive from exactly the opposite of success: a lack of interest on the part of the community and opposition between the authority and the community. Here, community involvement doesn’t necessarily lead to better decisions. A number of authorities noted the lack of success of individual ‘vehicles for community involvement’ noted in section A above: some meetings had been poorly attended, leaflets had had limited impact, and so on. Exhibitions in shopping centres were considered to be commonly successful here in at least providing information to the public who might not normally get involved, however, very few members of the public ever followed them up. Meetings within the relevant community were also considered by some to be successful: professionals going to meet the community on their own ground.

Two authorities also considered ‘failure’ to arise where communities had made an active contribution, but it had been subsequently ignored.

One authority also raised a more contentious issue in that some people might not really have the ability to take part, or certainly, the confidence. There was a measurable number of people in the authority, for example, who could not read or write, and this makes it hard for them to follow things through in active involvement.

One person's failure is another's success.

It can also be the case that failures from the authority's point of view occur where there is a keen interest on the part of communities but where this is marshalled in *opposition* to the authority. Some authorities provided information on community campaigns that proved to be very successful in their own terms, but were levelled against the authority.

One authority also suggested that it had been very successful at developing community involvement but it had been taken up in the main by the articulate middle classes who needed it least. Those who currently do not have a voice commonly do not want to make a contribution and hard to reach groups often remain silent. Others noted considerable geographical variation on the development of community activity and also variation in the 'issues' covered, particularly by single interest groups.

J. How can community capacity for planning be enhanced?

Most of the rural authorities felt that working with parishes was the most productive vehicle for doing this. Even urban authorities felt that it was important to identify discrete geographical boundaries in which to work. *Enhancing* community capacity also means involving communities at an early stage before they feel isolated, and keeping in touch on a regular basis.

K. Tensions, conflicts and barriers in the development of community involvement in planning

Six dominant themes emerged in response to this issue.

Conflict

The principal source of conflict across the surveyed authorities cohered around community groups broadly being anti-development. A number of instances were reported where groups banded together, or enlisted support from the local community, to resist developments that were clearly part of planning policy. The second conflict theme concerned the inappropriateness of aspects of the Regional Spatial Strategy in serving both authority and community wishes. It was noted, thirdly, that community involvement can be quite 'crowded' and conflicts between various 'players' can develop as a result. Here tensions between 'elected' representatives (particularly parish and town councillors) and non-elected groups, was noted. So too was inter-authority relationships, particularly where authorities were 'tiered'.

Interpretations of community

The meaning of community was considered by many to be both complex and elusive. Many people are part of several 'communities' and communities can be in conflict with each other. Communities might be spatially based or they might be 'single' interest group bodies. They might be self-interested groups operating under a community banner. Community involvement also gives those who always have been interested the opportunity to express their views more forcibly.

One authority noted that in remoter rural areas, understandings of community are still quite feudal. There are certainly parishes where powerful local individuals – lords of the manner types – are seen as the 'voice' of local people. This is not through any particular coercion on their part, but rather through tradition. Significant numbers of the local population defer to these people because that is the way it has always been. It is not the 'place' of these locals to be 'involved'.

Elected representation

Related to the complexity of notions of 'community' a number of authorities specifically discussed the changing role of elected members in the 'empowerment' context. Two (almost opposite) views dominated here. The first was that, despite training, many counsellors had failed to embrace wider community involvement, preferring to 'do things as they had always done' often along party political lines. Ultimately, they could not be 'forced' into a new role. The second view was that councillors had embraced community views so fully that they claimed their 'hands were tied' by these views. One authority claimed that committee decisions were increasingly going against officer recommendations because the members were simply representing the views of their community, and this was not open for negotiation at committee.

Managing expectations

Managing expectations was commonly cited as a problem because of a lack of understanding on the part of the community (and some councillors) about what was admissible in planning terms. Councillors vote against officer recommendations using community views, and then appeals are lodged and won. This both alienates the community and is expensive for the authority. Other authorities noted that they spent much time engaging the community in various ways, listening to their views and then finding themselves having to make decisions against community views because the community views are inadmissible in planning terms, or even illegal. Explaining this to community groups can be difficult: "If you give the community a voice, it expects to be heard" (TI 4). Local media invariably side with the community.

From the community side, one authority noted that parish plans had been funded by the authority only to find that the plans largely opposed agreed authority planning policy. In addition, there was a lot in these plans that was not within the confines of spatial planning (even though the community that produced the plan thought it was) and a lot that opposed national planning guidelines (which the community thought was acceptable to do). These characteristics led to frustrations as the plans could then not be used as material considerations in planning decisions, and the community felt betrayed as a result.

Trust

A lack of understanding (and knowledge) of planning procedures is one of the tensions that can lead to a loss of trust between the professional and the community. This lack of trust can lead to a downward spiral. Some authorities try to build trust with communities through developing knowledge and skills. Others have noted that there is a tension between 'professional' knowledge (a technical understanding of the planning system – held by professionals) and local knowledge (an intimate understanding of place held by the community) where the latter invariably dominates over the former. Nationally PPSs tend to devalue local knowledge.

Performance Measurement

Top of the concerns here was the requirement to 'measure' everything and what was commonly considered to be an over simplistic way, particularly in relation to National Indicators and the Place Survey. Performance 'indicators' were commonly considered to be poor measures of a much more subtle development of community capacity. Much of the direct questioning of the public in relation to NIs crucially depends on their understanding and interpretation of the questions. Some authorities confessed to not

being aware of all of the NIs fully and three also noted that compiling these simplistic measures of performance into league tables was unhelpful as it meant that authority priorities were determined by this performance rather than any more subtle needs of the community. League tables also fail to take into account the vastly differing circumstances in each authority.

L. The main costs and benefits of community involvement in planning

A narrow range of costs and benefits was reported in the telephone interviews. Whilst all authorities reported costs as part of community involvement, not all were able to articulate benefits so clearly: “the benefits are difficult to see at present” (TI 6). Others suggested that there was such a diversity of community views about the core strategy in their authority, that community involvement inevitably increased frictions.

Costs: resource use

Resource use (time, money, opportunity costs) was the almost universal expression of the cost of community involvement. Two authorities suggested that this cost could be significantly reduced by sharing information, procedures, and ‘good practice’. But others felt that the costs were disproportionately high relative to the results achieved. Several authorities noted that this ‘resource’ cost was not necessarily visible in budgets. It was more about the energy, enthusiasm, patience and ‘out of hours’ time contributed by planning officers.

Costs: raising expectations

A second commonly-expressed cost was that of raising expectations that could not then be fulfilled. In this respect it was noted that *community-led* planning was more successful than *community involvement* in planning because the former was an iterative process that allowed problems to be negotiated and resolved whereas the latter tended to be more of a ‘one point’ input where that moment can pass without a resolution to any differences.

Benefits: cohesion

The principal benefit expressed by most authorities, was that of community cohesion. This led to more ‘informed’ decisions about local public expenditure; for many these were ‘better’ decisions. Some considered that it gave elected members a renewed democratic mandate and others felt that it made decisions easier; communities would take responsibility for decisions that they had influenced. Clearly this worked only for those decisions consonant with community wishes.

Benefits: improved planning

A majority of authorities interviewed felt that community involvement materially improved the planning process – made it more robust. Some authorities also suggested that plans tended to be accepted more because they were consensual, one even noted that plans were improved by the input of ‘local knowledge’ that the authority was not aware of. There was a higher level of knowledge of the planning system amongst lay people as a result of community involvement. One authority noted that early community involvement actually developed into community-led planning. As a result of discussions over the LAA, the community was invited to, and did, produce a set of parish plans.

M. Why do lay people want to get involved in planning decisions?

Self-interest

The most common view of professional staff here is that involvement in planning decisions is essentially self interested on the part of both individuals and community groups. This means that such involvement is most evident in objections to planning applications and in plan bargaining. Even some degree of altruism was perceived by one authority as 'extended self interest' - what benefits the community also benefits me. Such self-interest is largely driven by the desire to protect residential amenity or to preserve and enhance the value of private property. It is therefore more usually about stopping things from happening rather than making things happen. Some interviewees characterised this as NIMBYism and others as entirely rational. There was also a view that 'middle class' people were motivated through the development of a local power base and through having an influence over the local environment.

From self-interest to altruism

At one extreme, one authority simply considered that "the general public like to stuff things up" (TI 5) and another, that involvement was driven by "a desire to tell planners to keep their hand off" (TI 6). More commonly, however a significant number of authorities noted that whilst most community involvement started off as self interest, once people had become familiar with the planning system they took a genuine interest in the community benefits that the system could bring. Two authorities considered successful community-led parish plans to have had a genesis in self-interested objections to planning applications that has spawned a much more 'creative' interest in the development process leading to the formation of a parish plan group.

N. the characteristics of active community participants

Finally, we probed local authority professionals about who community activists in respect of planning involvement actually were. All of the authorities noted that there was a diverse range of people who had an interest in becoming involved in planning issues, but 'leadership' (one respondent rather emotively used the term 'ring leaders') tended to be driven by better-off well-educated people with some time to spare. Whilst such leaders in many cases sought to involve wider sections of the community, persistent absentees in involvement were considered to be BME groups, migrant workers and travellers

and the young. Although a couple of local authorities commented on how the hardest to reach group of people are in fact average working people; "the most difficult group to engage with is your standard white middle age man, working 9-5 (TI 14)." "Always tricky to reach everyone and I think that the hardest to reach group are just the average working people who do not have time to be involved." (TI 12). Some authorities also acknowledge the right of people *not* to get involved if they so chose to. A number of general attributes of 'actives' were characterised as follows in the telephone interviews.

Education

One authority articulated a gradation of 'skills' for participation in different parts of the planning process. Articulate and well educated people dominated the plan-making arena (for example, commenting on statutory plans and developing things like village plans, but also plan bargaining) because this requires a degree of organisation and conceptual thought. Involvement in development control decisions is quite different. If people feel that their livelihood is under threat or that development is threatening their amenity, they will 'have a go' irrespective of their 'education' because they feel threatened. This

latter situation often has little to do with 'community' in the spirit of the legislation. At a less fine grain, other authorities reflected this differentiation. The more involved a person is with planning, the more educated they tend to be.

Confidence

This was considered to be similar to the 'well educated;' profile. People involved in discussing development control decisions often do not have much confidence, but are driven by the importance of the issue to them. Other aspects of involvement, and particularly community-led planning and leadership, require high levels of confidence. One authority did suggest that amongst community leaders, confidence was a stronger characteristic than 'well-educated': their determination was a stronger driver to participation than, necessarily, their knowledge.

It was suggested that many people more generally cannot understand enough about planning to make a confident contribution. They often cannot read plans, so they often do not know what is going on. Many cannot understand the difference between what is admissible and what is not (even when it is explained) in planning law and policy terms. A significant minority of the population in (very rural) areas cannot even read or write.

Representative of the people within their communities

Most authorities suggested that many 'activists' were not necessarily representative in any elected sense but the majority did genuinely try to represent the interests of the community in which they were active, particularly in respect of community-led planning (compared with development control decision-making). Some noted that such attempts at being representative, however, were not always successful. Again, much 'representation' was designed to stop things happening.

One authority noted that the dominant cohort of activists were 'older people' both because they had more time to be involved and because they had a greater longevity in, and sense of belonging to, particular places. Another authority noted that they did not have the resources to engage 'harder to reach' groups, and even though they held exhibitions and meetings in very different places socio-economically, it was still the same groups of people – 'older professional males' – who turned up. Another authority noted a particular absence of younger people in the participating cohorts: particularly disappointing as it was their heritage that was being planned.

The values of community actives relative to professionals

There were mixed views amongst respondents here. The community was considered to share the values of those officers working in the broader 'community planning' sphere more than those working in the narrower spatial planning sphere. One authority noted that it was often difficult to understand 'community' values as opposed to the values of individuals who may or may not purport to represent the community. The views of the parish council probably most closely represent the views of the authority. Some noted that officers of the authority didn't necessarily share all of the values of the authority itself, some of which are 'imposed' by dominant government policies.

Trustworthiness

All authorities felt that community participants were either completely trustworthy or trustworthy in the main. Most community (or individual) action was considered trustworthy because the processes require that it is transparent, and transparent means that most agendas are difficult to hide. This does not mean that the authority would

agree with the views that are nevertheless trusted (instrumental trust) from either a policy or an ethical perspective. It also does not mean that views or people that are trusted are considered to be representative of anyone.

Levels of Knowledge

Authorities in the main found participants to be knowledgeable, certainly in terms of local knowledge but maybe less so in respect of 'expert' or professional knowledge. The majority of expert knowledge lies in 'single issue' interest groups where communities of interest develop an expertise. These are as likely to be 'pressure' groups as 'community' groups. What is pretty universal, however, is that expert knowledge is almost always partial. Much is known about some things but it is rarely contextualised into the other knowledge that is required to make holistic decisions. A profound knowledge about natural ecosystems, for example, is commonly coupled with a relative ignorance of planning processes.

Capable of adding perspectives, knowledge and information not generally represented in making planning policies and decisions?

This led to the most extreme divergence of views with approximately half of the authorities feeling that community representatives were capable of adding these things and approximately half that they were not. Both sets were equally emphatic.

Appendix 5 - Some examples of seemingly good practice in community involvement in planning

Some recent examples are set out below that are claimed to be good practice in community engagement in planning. Five main sources have been used: the Community Development Foundation (2009), IDeA (undated), Planning Advisory Service (2007), DCLG's review of stakeholder engagement (2008a) and DCLG's review of participation in spatial planning (2008b).

A4.1 Good practice cited by Community Development Foundation

Perhaps the most comprehensive advice on generic processes and techniques of community engagement that can be used effectively in helping local authorities to fulfil their 2009 statutory responsibilities under the 'duty to involve' comes from the Community Development Foundation (Pitcher, Archer with Ramsden, 2009). The Foundation identifies five types of community involvement that local authorities and communities should consider:

- influence or directly participate in decision-making
- provide feedback on decisions, services and policies
- co-design / work with the authority in designing policies and services
- co-produce / carry out some aspects of services for themselves
- work with the authority in assessing services.

The Foundation presents case studies of good practice in the broader context of 'corporate community planning' that are equally relevant to statutory planning. Two of these are set out below.

East Riding of Yorkshire (cited as good practice by the Community Development Foundation) www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=110236

Scope of initiative

Focus on the neighbourhood level to find solutions to issues raised by residents of Bridlington

Structures involved

Neighbourhood management team worked closely with the Local Strategic Partnership.

Community involvement techniques deployed

Locally-based community engagement officer worked closely with local people to identify and address their problems – including training for local residents and community workers in participatory appraisal and Planning for Real.

Community conferences enabled local residents to look at quality of life indicators and make plans for action

Community team funded development of positive role model project as a route into exploring young people's issues

Door-to-door surveys, informal street surgeries with council officers and partners, town crier, community board

Outcomes achieved

Satisfaction levels have risen significantly – people are happier where they live and feel part of the community

Multi-agency empty dwelling group formed to deal with empty property, resulting in issues being addressed far more rapidly and additional resources being put in

Engagement team increasingly being asked to support other council departments

Community development approach seen as part of an effective way to raise standards and improve services
 Bridlington model rolled out to another deprived area
 Five new social enterprises operating in the area

Westminster City Council (cited as good practice by the Community Development Foundation) www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=110236

Scope of initiative

Ward level targeting of issues not picked up by city-level planning

Structures involved

Ward-level budgeting
Neighbourhood forums

Community involvement techniques deployed

Ward level budgets of £100,000 from total neighbourhood budget of £2,000,000 (i.e. 5%).

Local councillors made spending decisions on mix of public consultation, council's annual survey of public opinion, local service performance data and own local knowledge
Portion of funds used to gather evidence and involve local people in projects
Neighbourhood forums provided with detailed ward profiles highlighting key local issues; neighbourhood officers provided administrative support

Outcomes achieved

35 projects identified in less than one year; implementation began in 12 of these
Number of Westminster residents attending neighbourhood forums doubled
Members able to commission street wardens directly into area
Local authority service budgets re-profiled on basis of new ward-level knowledge

A4.2 Good practice cited by Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), in consultation with the Planning Advisory Service, set out similar examples, one with more specific relevance to statutory planning www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=110236.

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough (cited as good practice by IDeA)
www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=110236

Scope of initiative

Focus on developing the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework, but explicitly as spatial implications of Sustainable Community Strategy – the process of consultation informed both; it also influenced area action plans and other planning documents

Structures involved

The community involvement process was undertaken jointly between planning policy and corporate policy staff. Partners in Local Strategic Partnership were also brought into process

Community involvement techniques deployed

Open invitation to groups and individuals to get involved in planning
'Big Tent' consultation events
Consultation on how people would like to be consulted and on existing knowledge of planning system

Public exhibitions held throughout the borough to make as inclusive as possible
Initial local development scheme summarised in four-page leaflet presented as a board game
Extensive use of questionnaires at preferred options stage – without needing to read the whole document
All residents and businesses in areas affected sent letters about plans
Use of planning aid to engage communities – advisors available at key consultation events and ran events for schools

Outcomes achieved

None specified, except that the Core Strategy was adopted in 2007!

A4.3 Good practice cited by Planning Advisory Service

The Planning Advisory Service (2007) set out seven requirements for effective community engagement in the statutory planning system and provides case study examples of good practice under each of the following headings:

1. develop an integrated approach
2. engage early
3. build up communities to participate
4. provide independent advice and mediation where appropriate
5. invest in broad community engagement
6. provide feedback
7. evaluate engagement.

The discussion below selects just one example claimed by PAS to be good practice under each of these headings.

1. Develop an integrated approach

Ryedale District Council conducted a review of consultation across the council, including planning, to better understand what it already did well and what it needed to improve. This included workshops with community representatives to find out how they wanted to be engaged, what has worked well in the past and what could work better. The council then prepared a core policy on engagement that has been adopted by the planning team for its SCI, the local strategic partnership for its work on the community strategy and the council.

2. Engage early

Swindon Borough Council appointed a community planner to help it work with communities affected by development proposals in the area, including a large urban extension. Although the post is funded by and located within the council, somebody with the right mix of listening skills, planning expertise and strength of personality can ensure that communities are willing to trust that an appointment like this is a genuine attempt by a council to improve how it engages.

3. Build up communities to participate

In **Bristol**, Planning Aid has been working with communities to develop neighbourhood planning groups. People living in rural areas can contribute to local planning through parish plan making; Bristol's emerging groups are conduits for a similar process to take place in cities. They can be regular meetings of a community-led group interested in planning issues. So far, there are four groups in Bristol. Planning Aid is conscious that

they could fail to represent the wider community; Bristol has also employed two officers to work with communities on planning issues. The roles of one of these officers include helping the group to identify the right people in the council to talk to, and to understand the planning structure and process so they can contribute in more constructive ways. One of the benefits of the group is that 'the community now understands planning policies although they don't always agree with them.'

Provide independent advice and mediation where appropriate

Carrick and Caradon District Councils have joined forces to fund a temporary community planner who will be employed by Planning Aid South West. The purpose of the job is to help communities translate parish plans, which have a strong planning dimension, into core planning policies or supplementary planning documents (SPDs). The purpose of the Planning Aid appointment is to make the position explicitly at 'arm's length' from the councils involved, including developing a protocol for how the councils will work with community groups in the future.

Invest in broad community engagement

Leeds City Council, Yorkshire Planning Aid and the **Leeds Youth Council** have collaborated on a project to seek the views of young people as part of consultation on an area action plan in the city centre. The youth council distributed a questionnaire about the city centre to schools; more than 250 students responded. It also organised a workshop as part of one of its regular meetings where Yorkshire Planning Aid and Leeds Council both made presentations before youth council members were given a chance to share their views on the future plan.

Provide feedback

Planning Aid North produced a video of the consultation undertaken for the Heart of Walker engagement (in Newcastle upon Tyne) and showed it at a resident feedback event. One of the managers of the regeneration agency spoke and explained how community suggestions had been taken into account in the preferred options for the SPG.

Evaluate engagement.

The **Black Country authorities** which are jointly preparing a core strategy have monitored the background of participants in their initial workshops to help them identify who they were hearing from and which communities were being excluded. This has resulted in a more focused approach to target specific groups at subsequent consultations. The councils have used a community organisation – Walsall Community Empowerment Network – to help in this monitoring.

A4.4 Good practice cited by DCLG (A)

In response to their scrutiny of Statements of Community Involvement (DCLG, 2008b) DCLG identified good practice in stakeholder engagement. Below we provide examples relating to two aspects of stakeholder engagement relating specifically to local community involvement: (a) innovative methods of involvement and hard-to-reach groups, and (b) resource management issues for stakeholder involvement.

Innovative methods of involvement and hard-to-reach groups

Traditional approaches to consultation tend to encourage community members and stakeholders to “come to us” and view plans and proposals at local authority specified locations. This approach does not engage the hard-to-reach groups. More innovative approaches take the opposite stance by actually ‘going to’ people and localities and engaging in face-to-face activities such as meetings and workshops. Focus groups can be targeted at particular sections of local communities to receive responses from those not normally motivated to get involved. Sustainable Community Assessments, Area Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and Parish Plans all provide an opportunity for people to get involved in the planning system. Road shows and display stalls are good examples of involvement methods adopted (**Hounslow, Plymouth, West Berkshire**) but more importantly, they are prime examples of ‘going to’ communities and stakeholders and potentially engaging hard-to-reach groups.

Bringing people together is important. Forums and representative groups (**Reading, Plymouth**) allow for good cross sections of views. Workshops such as *Planning for Real* (**Reading, Bristol**) and *Enquiry by Design* (**Reading, West Berkshire, Northampton**) allow communities and stakeholders to engage in the details of site specific areas and area based policy. **Bristol City Council** has set up a website, Askbristol.com, which contains a range of consultations that include surveys, discussion groups as well as live question and answer sessions. This has the potential to be a useful new means of involvement, as online live question and answer sessions are highly accessible and more likely to attract young people than formal public meetings. A further method of making meetings and events more accommodating is by providing childcare or paying carers allowance to participants (e.g. **Broadland District**).

Walsall Borough Council proposes to use new communication techniques such as mobile texting and community information plasma screens which are to be developed across the Borough by the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership, while **Broadland District Council** proposes to provide induction loop systems for those who are hard of hearing and interpreters at events.

Resource management for stakeholder involvement

A lack of resources is often cited as a reason why local planning authorities do not engage communities effectively in planning. Some local planning authorities have developed innovative methods of resource management, which release funding for new approaches to stakeholder involvement.

Examples of joint consultation that double up involvement activities with local strategic partnerships have been found (**Chelmsford, Northampton, Reading**). **West Berkshire Council** has implemented an arrangement in which council departments pool their resources in an attempt to extend their LDF budget. The Council has also appointed a Partnerships Officer to coordinate consultations across sectors. There is further evidence of joint working at **Plymouth City Council** who co-ordinate their LDF staff with other sectors; this allows them to focus on targeting hard-to-reach groups.

Partnership working can facilitate the identification of hard-to-reach groups. **Bristol City Council** intends to establish links with the Equalities Action Group to identify groups that have not traditionally been involved in the planning system. The Council further proposes to use the Council for Voluntary Services for Bristol, which represents over 600 community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprise organisations, to ensure that a comprehensive range of groups is involved in the LDF.

Forest Heath District Council has planned its budget for consultation into the LDF preparation. The SCI states that planning resources from the years 2004/05 and

2005/06 take into account the need to fund community and stakeholder involvement; this should allow them to put more funding into developing innovative methods.

Planning Aid is commonly-used among local planning authorities. It offers a valuable way for local planning authorities with limited resources to gain expert guidance, thereby improving their performance and increasing communities' ability to engage. The East Midlands Planning Aid, for example, is in the process of developing a Community Planning Service alongside **Northampton Borough Council** and the Northampton Local Strategic Partnership, which will help build capacity among communities.

A4.5 Good practice cited by DCLG (B)

DCLG (2008a) in its review of participation and policy integration in spatial planning based on case studies throughout England identified examples of what it claimed to be good practice of community engagement in statutory planning. These were set out under the headings:

- community involvement in Core Strategies,
- community involvement in site-specific documents, and
- tailoring techniques to engage with hard-to-reach groups.

Selected examples of each are presented below.

1. Community Involvement in Core Strategies

Education and dissemination of information – 'innovative' methods

When **Plymouth City Council** launched its LDF it produced a DVD for the public which explained how to get involved in the LDF. The DVD was made available with the issues and options documents.

Information feedback – 'traditional'

Horsham District Council ran a series of staffed exhibitions as part of the preparation of the core strategy. As part of this approach participatory techniques were used to encourage those attending to share thoughts and ideas with the local planning authority. For instance, visitors were encouraged to post comments on the wall, or place coloured dots on maps to indicate preferred locations for development. In addition, tables and chairs were available at the venue so that individuals could sit down on a one-to-one basis and discuss proposals and exchange views with officers. The local planning authority feels that interactive participation techniques are of particular value in engaging local people, as opposed to static displays. They are more interesting and allow people who are unfamiliar with planning processes to become more involved.

Information feedback – using questionnaires

South Hams District Council commissioned marketing consultants to conduct a survey of local residents to find out their opinions about the issues and options that were emerging in the core strategy. The main focus of the survey was the Citizens' Panel 'Sounding Board', but the surveys were also made available in local libraries and at the council offices for residents to complete. A booster of about 80 face-to-face in-home interviews amongst hard-to-reach younger residents aged under 35 was also conducted. In total, 655 survey forms were completed by the Citizens' Panel along with 560 additional surveys that were completed by the wider community. The survey was divided into four sections. The first section covered key strategic planning issues including housing, employment and skills, access to services and

environmental assets. This section was answered by everyone. The survey continued with a map of the South Hams area, split into three areas; Totnes and Dartmouth, Ivybridge and Modbury, Kingsbridge and Salcombe. Respondents answered the appropriate section of the survey depending on where they lived. The questionnaire included maps showing broad location for development so respondents could give an informed opinion. The results were written up as a report and formed part of the evidence base for the core strategy.

'Innovative' consultation – workshops and focus groups

South Hams District Council issues and options core strategy was put out for consultation at the same time as the town and village AAPs/site specific allocations issues and options document. The AAPs/site specific allocations document included maps showing options for the broad locations of development. The district was divided into four areas based on the four towns and surrounding areas and in each of these four locations the Council held 'extended parish cluster meetings'. Sessions began with a presentation from the Council introducing the LDF, followed by a discussion, firstly of core strategy issues at a district level, and then later, discussion of the issues at the town / hinterland level. In addition, the local planning authority ran 'participation days' including:

(i) an all day event on the core strategy, comprising five small group discussions on the issues of housing, social, economy, environment and the SCI.

(ii) two three hour events on area-specific issues relating to housing, the economy, environment, social issues and the SCI. The district was split in half, with an event taking place in each sub-area.

The LDF team convened the participation days. They identified possible participants from their consultation database and invited people. However, the events were run by non-planning officers to ensure that facilitators did not use planning jargon that might put off participants, and also to ensure the debate was not constrained by a narrow view of planning issues. An economic development officer led the economy workshop group, a landscape and leisure officer ran the environment group, and the housing manager led the housing group, etc. While not running the events, the LDF team were there to listen to comments. To ensure officers had the skills to run the workshops, the Council commissioned facilitation training for those officers involved. Workshop groups were small (8-10 people) and a set of questions was used as the focus for the discussions. The facilitators steered the discussions. At the end of the breakout sessions, the small groups came back together for a large group feedback session.

2. Community involvement in site-specific documents

Many of the case study authorities reported that it is much easier to engage people in site-specific plans as the public are more motivated to engage in proposals that directly affect them. The case studies also show there to be greater scope for more 'deliberative' methods (see above) in preparing AAPs, SPD masterplans or site allocation documents, such as 'Planning for Real' exercises and community liaison groups that meet on a regular basis.

Involving the community in AAPs

South Hams District Council

The Devon Structure Plan determined that a new community of 4,500 homes would be built in the South Hams part of the Plymouth PUA, at the preferred location of Sherford. This is being taken forward through the LDF process as the Sherford Area Action Plan. The AAP has been prepared in partnership with the developer team.

There has been extensive community and stakeholder involvement in preparing the AAP – a significant part of which was through *Enquiry by Design* (EbD), facilitated by the Prince's Foundation. The first session took the format of a general public meeting on the first day where individuals had their say, technical briefings and a presentation of the vision on days two and three, followed by a technical workshop. Those who attended the first EbD event were asked to gather more information to present at the technical workshop. Most of this information was collected by the District Council or other agencies, while the community was asked to bring back information on community facilities. A second EbD event was held over a three day period comprising several design sessions. The EbD concluded that the Sherford development would act as an extension to Plymouth. It identified clear principles for a sustainable community which included high density compact mixed use and a sense of place where people could fulfil their daily needs within a walkable distance. The Council felt that EbD had got them to a consensus position and had secured a high level of 'buy in' from the community. During the process of considering how the Sherford development should be designed, the local community were invited to take pictures of designs they liked to inform the developer's design strategy. This was all part of establishing what the local community thought quality design looked like.

In obtaining further evidence and opinions from the community, a community steering group was set up following the EbD sessions. Chaired by the local MP, this group comprises parish councillors, residents and civic groups, and has met quarterly since 2004. The developer team consider that it has been a very effective forum in generating ideas for the development, but also as a means of sharing information about the development scheme with the community and listening and responding to concerns. There was considerable local opposition at first and a protest group, SHARD, was established to oppose the development. However, as the group came to realise that the development would go ahead they have focused their efforts on ensuring that its quality is as high as possible. Concerns about community representation have been overcome, through their involvement in the community steering group.

Involving the community in Supplementary Planning Documents

Horsham District Council

The West of Horsham SPD is now nearing adoption and the community has been involved throughout the process of preparing the SPD. Workshops with key technical bodies were held in March 2006, followed by informal public consultation in May 2006. The May 2006 event comprised a collaborative design workshop. Around 60 people were involved, including a range of community-based organisations such as local churches, youth organisations and conservation groups. This workshop began to establish the design principles and informed the development of the broad options. Taking forward the key issues identified in the March workshop, groups spent the day identifying key development and design principles and planning the type of land uses for the site. A further public consultation event was held in November 2006 to discuss the draft masterplan. Here the Council ran a workshop to discuss issues and hear ideas on the proposals. A wide variety of local stakeholders attended including Parish and Neighbourhood Councils and local amenity groups such as local environmental groups, faith and youth groups. Local residents feel that their views have been taken on board and they have had a direct influence on the emerging proposals for the West of Horsham. For instance, during the November workshops local residents wanted to retain the network of hedgerows on part of the site because they were considered to be important to the essential character of the area. As a direct result, the LDF team amended the proposed highway network, realigning the access road and retaining important hedgerow lined lanes, utilising them as pedestrian and cycle routes.

3. Tailoring techniques to engage with hard-to-reach groups

Engaging with hard-to-reach groups

Plymouth City Council recognised the need to involve hard-to-reach groups in its Local Development Framework (LDF) and Local Transport Planning (LTP) consultation process. Independent consultants were commissioned to facilitate workshops/discussion groups with young people, older people, disabled people and black and minority ethnic groups. The four workshops were semi-structured and followed similar formats with information delivered by DVD, PowerPoint presentation and verbally. Interaction was encouraged to obtain feedback from the participants. While limited numbers attended the events, the quality of involvement was judged to be good. The groups were questioned about housing, access to services, the town centre and the environment, as well as community involvement in planning. At the end participants were asked what they wanted Plymouth to be like in 10 years time. A number of common themes emerged from the workshops and this has been written up as a report. In addition, as part of preparing AAPs, officers went to pubs, libraries, the Barbican area and the Plymouth Argyle football ground to raise the profile of the LDF amongst the community. Talking to people in informal social settings was thought to be advantageous. Pubs tend to have a specific demographic and social profile, and officers used their local knowledge to select pubs that would enable them to target hard to reach groups. Officers sought to enter into a discussion with people and recorded comments, but they also encouraged people to think about their responses and submit them subsequently.

Engaging with young people

Hambleton District Council employed an external consultant as part of the Regulation 25 consultation stage to engage with hard-to-reach groups and individuals in face-to-face meetings. Some of these included organised stakeholders such as the PCT and the Chamber of Commerce, but also the wider community, particularly young people and some local activists. In engaging with young people, the consultant worked with a local sixth form college as part of their citizenship education. Also, the Thirsk Clock Charity arranged a session with a group of young unemployed people and those that had been excluded from school.