



Gloucestershire Parish & Community-Led Plan Case Study Highnam, completed 2007

What is a Parish and Community-led plan?

A Parish & Community-Led Plan is a document which sets out a vision for a community's future based on sound local research, looking at social, environmental and economic life.

It celebrates positive features and activities, highlights community needs and contains a detailed action plan to help the community meet those needs. Parish & Community-Led Plans are produced by and for communities, based on a detailed survey and consultation process which involves the whole community, prompts action and influences others.

Good Parish & Community-Led Plans use the Parish & Community-Led Planning Toolkit framework, are supported by external facilitators and can demonstrate a robust evaluation process that ensures their quality.



Above: Highnam's 3 community halls: Gambier Parry Hall, Parish Rooms, Old School

Introduction

The parish of Highnam is in Tewkesbury Borough. With a population of just over 2000, it is definitely rural, surrounded by farmland and woods but adjacent to the City of Gloucester. The Parish includes Over, Lassington and Linton and has a strong heritage as well as local employment opportunities, although many residents work in the town.



Church of the Holy Innocents, Highnam

On one side, Highnam Woods is an important remnant of ancient woodland where the RSPB are working to maintain its character and attractiveness to birds such as lesser spotted woodpecker and nightingales. Highnam Court was built in 1658 after the original house was seriously damaged in the Civil War, one of few built at the time. In 1838 it was bought by Thomas Gambier Parry, an accomplished artist, musician and art collector, who built the Church of Holy Innocents, and painted its frescoes. The gardens have been restored by the present owner, and are opened for specific events. Much of the village was built in the last half of the twentieth century, fitting into the landscape between Highnam Court, the woods, Lassington and the A40.

Highnam village has a school, shop, church, nursery and GP surgery as well as three well-used halls in its community centre. Nearby is the Business Park, and then at Over the pub, farm shop, and restaurant by the canal, with restored lock gates.

The Process

Highnam Parish Council introduced the parish plan concept in 2006 and an initial group was set up to investigate the potential. With the help of a local resident who had experience in market research, the interest was confirmed and the Plan started. Organisations and clubs in the village were approached, and many people offered their help in different ways from becoming part of the representative steering group to designing leaflets to publicise meetings. From the issues raised by the community, a questionnaire was delivered to every household. Another questionnaire was designed for young people, and for businesses. Residents delivered and collected the questionnaires, and gained 71% response rate from 778 households. Interestingly, as collectors were working round, and talking to people, it became clear that some people in Over did not realise their Parish was Highnam, and the Plan meant they started to become more involved.

Tewkesbury Borough Council and the Parish Council awarded some funding to help with the process. The steering group monitored the budget as well as leading the strong volunteer network to get the work done and keep people informed through "The Link". The results of the questionnaire were analysed, and formed the basis for the action plan. The steering group brought all the findings together into the full Parish Plan. A summary was delivered to all households. A celebration launch in May 2007 at the Gambier Parry Hall was enjoyed by all, and volunteers came forward for the 6 Action Groups to work on the projects.

Our achievements

Community benefits

The Parish website works well – it won an award in 2008 for the best new website.(see JR)

Some benefits were achieved in the short term, like the FunDay, but some took longer. The new Play Area was launched in May 2010, and younger children love it. The Action Group there used the Plan as evidence to gain £75,000 funding.

We started with 34 projects, 14 are complete, 17 are continuing and 4 were abandoned for definite reasons. People in the community were focal to achieving all this

- Worked with the PCSOs to identify and address instances of vandalism. Improved communications within the community with PCSOs.
- Promoted and support Neighbourhood Watch
- Worked with others to preserve open spaces.
- Provided allotments for community. Plot size allows for more people to rent, and encourages people to share expertise and community spirit. Now have a waiting list!
- Volunteers have adopted a footpath, and help to keep it tidy
- Worked with Tewkesbury Borough Council who now collect plastics and cardboard for recycling
- New visual and hearing equipment installed in Gambier Parry Hall to improve facilities for local people, and for hire.
- Youth café developed further and operating successfully
- Website set up by volunteer, used by local people for information and to contact Parish Council who host and update it.
- Installed new Play Area for younger children. Launched May 2010.
- Committees set up to work in all 6 Acton Groups
- Welcome pack produced for all people moving into the Parish. Distribution system set up.
- Churches and community integrating more
- Installed more dog bins
- Working with Sustrans to provide safer cycle route into Gloucester and next Parish
- Community Centre is improving its carbon footprint by.....
- Parish Council leading on speed and weight limits with County Highways
- Football Club have obtained planning consent for changing rooms, but still need to find funding.
- Pub in the village not feasible, but Golf Club admits non- members
- Links with local businesses/amenities have been strengthened and will continue
- Tree planting and conservation is ongoing



Daffodils at Maidenhall

“There is such a reservoir of goodwill and skills in the community if only you tap into it and get people interested. People will volunteer to help on something specific – you need to get the project clear in the first place.”

Working with partners

The District Council and Parish Council were involved right from the start of the process. Tewkesbury Borough helped with funding and the way forward. The Parish Council continue to monitor the Plan regularly, and lead on many projects. The Action Groups have enabled funding to be applied for, and allow volunteers to get involved in the way they want to. It's important to keep in contact with partners, like GRCC: they often know who else can help.

Key advice for others

“Do one easy thing quickly. We’ve shown by a few high profile achievements that this is not just another PR exercise.”



“The evidence was so useful, to prove the need for funding, and to show partners that was what the community really wanted.”

“We’ve achieved so much from this Parish Plan already, that we are now embarking on a “Review and Refresh” to ask if there are different needs 3 years on, which we can address.

Future projects

- The second phase of the Play Area, to provide activities for older children
- The use of a “planning for real” style exercise to help Review and Refresh the Parish Plan. That way we will find out what current priorities are.

With thanks to Highnam Parish Council members and clerk for their contributions to this case study

GRCC is the lead provider of support for **parish and community-led plans** in Gloucestershire and can offer support to communities dependent on the location of the parish. If you would like further information please contact GRCC



Gloucestershire Rural
Community Council
15 College Green
Gloucester
GL1 2LZ
Tel: 01452 528491
Fax: 01452 528493
glosrcc@grcc.org.uk

