

PROGRESS OF PARISH AND COMMUNITY LED PLAN ACTIONS IN THE COTSWOLD DISTRICT

Report produced by GRCC through analysis of the GRCC managed countywide database of parish and community led plan actions: December 2009



This is one of a suite of reports produced by GRCC for the county of Gloucestershire to provide information on the status of actions arising from parish and community led plans. It will be of interest to statutory authorities with a duty to engage and involve, to organisations who deliver services in rural communities and to the communities themselves. Actions from parish and community led plans developed in the Cotswold District developed since 2003 are explored in this report.



A sign in the centre of Poole Keynes making sure people didn't miss their chance to contribute to their parish plan

WHAT IS A PARISH AND COMMUNITY LED PLAN?

A parish and community led plan is a working document produced by communities. It sets out a community's vision for the future and creates an action plan covering issues or aspects it wishes to develop, retain or strengthen. These issues are identified and prioritised through wide and varied consultation and relate to social, economic and environmental aspects of life within that community. For further information on the process of developing a plan, see the 'our work' section of the GRCC website www.grcc.org.uk or contact GRCC on 01452 528491.



A packed village hall at North Cerney's Parish Plan consultation event

In the Cotswold district, an average of 75% of the community will have an input to the plan's development. **Down Ampney** and **Poole Keynes** currently hold the highest response rates countywide (both achieved over 90%). The rigorous consultation process, reaching a high percentage of the community provides a mandate for communities to identify and drive forward actions.

Parish councils adopt Parish Plans with this in mind, thereby endorsing the services they provide.

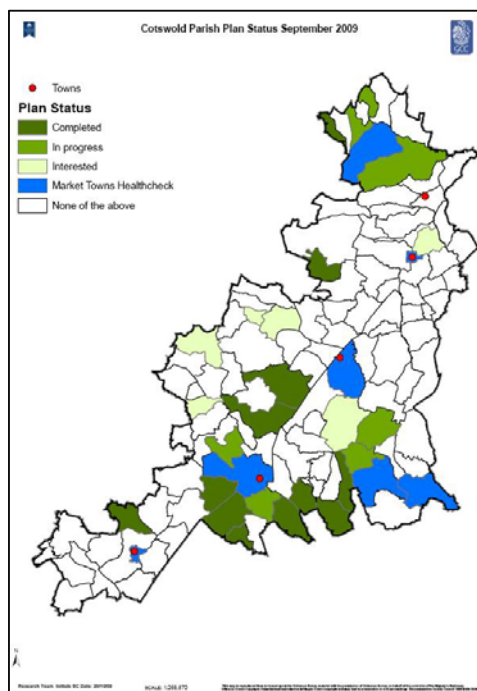
DUTY TO ENGAGE AND INVOLVE

The July 2008 government white paper, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities* placed a duty on statutory authorities to engage and involve the community in decision making about local services. Parish and community led plans contain a wealth of information about community needs and priorities which can be useful to those who bear this duty and many local authorities nationwide have adopted parish and community led plans within their engagement strategy in order to increase opportunities to respond positively to local challenges and to deliver better services.

GRCC DATABASE OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE PARISH & COMMUNITY LED PLAN ACTIONS

Following a pilot in the Forest of Dean District, GRCC has drawn together actions from parish and community led plans in Gloucestershire into one document so that they are accessible to communities and potential partners. The database is in the form of a searchable excel spreadsheet where each action is categorised under a topic heading and is linked to both Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) themes. 'Traffic light' codes are used to give information on the status of actions, and communities regularly provide these updates to GRCC.

The Parish Plan database can be viewed on the GRCC website http://www.grcc.org.uk/our_work/parish_plan_database



SUPPORT FOR COTSWOLD COMMUNITIES IN DEVELOPING AND MOVING FORWARD PARISH AND COMMUNITY LED PLANS

12 parish and community led plans have been completed in the Cotswold district and 11 of these have actions in the GRCC database. Although coverage is not as wide as in other Gloucestershire districts, the rate of interest in undertaking a plan in the Cotswold district is rising. 3 plans are expected to be completed in early 2010 and a further 2 parishes are ready to embark on the process. GRCC provides advice and support to parishes through the entire parish plan process to enable them to develop their plans.

Although Cotswold District Council does not provide direct funding for parish and community led plans, their significance and usefulness is recognised. Plan steering groups are encouraged to engage with the local authority at an early stage so that they may help move forward actions at a later stage. Also the results of any consultations and the final plan documents are used to assist CDC in the creation

of local strategies such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and also to feed into the Local Development Framework. Communities who have found a need for play development/challenge can apply for funding through the Community Projects Fund at CDC. This fund is also available to community buildings where improvement is needed to make them more sustainable. Through Parish Plans, evidence is gathered which can address the guidelines given in the application. These consultations are fundamental to show need and demand, whatever the funding application.

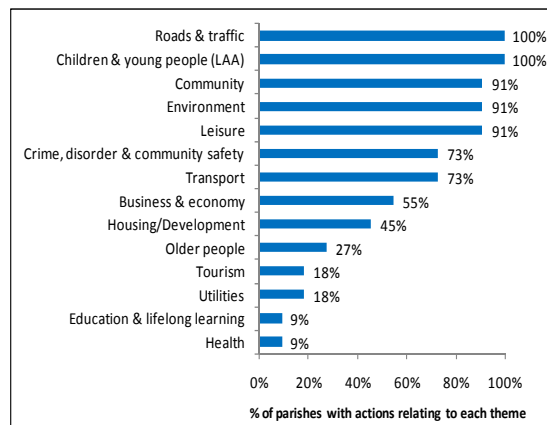
The Cotswold Parish Plan Forum, organised by GRCC, has brought together communities, CDC and County Council officers, members and other interested organisations such as the police and Gloucestershire Highways, to raise awareness of the process of parish and community led planning and how to progress actions.

ISSUES AND ACTIONS RAISED BY COTSWOLD COMMUNITIES

The process of developing a parish and community led plan enables issues to be raised and an action plan formulated to address those issues. Although each community's action plan is unique, common areas are raised.

All 11 Cotswold communities which have completed a plan (and whose actions appear on the database) have actions relating to **roads and traffic** and the types of actions include:

- **Road safety and speed reduction** actions – included in 82% of the 11 plans, such as **Avening's** action to "Investigate 20mph speed limit by village hall and school"
- **Roads, pavements and verges** e.g. "Extend parts of the pavement along the main road" – in **North Cerney**. 6 out of the 11 completed plans have actions in this category
- **Parking** – 55% of the 11 plans have actions relating to parking e.g. **Kemble's** action to "...consider residents-only parking scheme".



Actions relating to **community** feature in 91% of all completed Cotswold plans featured on the database. Almost half of these actions relate specifically to **village and community halls**. A common theme across the district is communities looking to make facilities more viable e.g. in the **Coates** parish plan one of the actions reads "Explore possibilities for more community wide activities using the village hall".

91% of the 11 plans have included specific actions relating to **leisure**, and 70% of these parishes have actions which relate to the provision of **Sports and Leisure facilities or activities** e.g. the action from **South Cerney's plan** to "Create more play/sporting opportunities."

All 11 plans have actions specifically about **children and young people** and all have activities relating to the provision or planning of **leisure facilities/activities** or **village clubs/groups** for these children and young people – from skateparks, youth shelters and play areas to setting up a youth club, e.g. in **Driffield** 'Consider land options for playground', or **Meysey Hampton's** action to 'start up toddler group in the village hall'. Some actions refer to setting up youth councils or consulting further with young people to fully establish their needs as in **Avening's** action to 'discuss with young people the recreation facilities needed in the village'.

There are fewer actions in the plans relating specifically to **older people** as they are often included in general requirements under the themes of leisure, health or community.

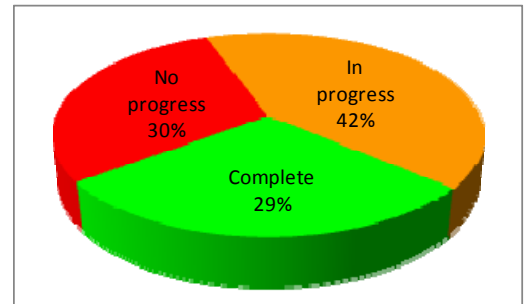
Environment actions are included in 10 of the 11 plans. 9 plans include actions focussed on '**Parish cleanliness/maintenance**'. Actions can vary from arranging litter picks, maintaining village scenic routes and an action that appears in almost every parish and community led plan across the county, best demonstrated by the wording included in **Driffield's** final plan document "Reduce dog fouling in the parish by PC reminding owners of obligations". 60% of those communities that have included environmental actions have actions specifically relating to **Conservation and heritage**. These actions can range from dry stone wall maintenance to appointing an archivist to record local history or as demonstrated in **Down Ampney's** final plan "Set up a conservation programme in the village".

8 out of the 11 plans include **crime, disorder & community safety** actions and 7 of these have specific actions relating to either the promotion or reintroduction of **neighbourhood watch schemes**. Examples of other actions relating to 'crime and disorder' might include:

- “Investigate increasing the level of **local policing**” – taken from **Down Ampney’s** plan
- “Reduce graffiti and vandalism at station and play area. Encourage regular police patrols and continue building on relationships with PCSOs. Consider appointing a warden” in **Kemble**
- “Continue to work with police on **crime/antisocial behaviour**” in **Willersey**

STATUS OF PARISH AND COMMUNITY LED PLAN ACTIONS IN THE COTSWOLD DISTRICT

There are 281 actions from Cotswold District parish and community led plans in the database and the number of actions within each plan ranges from 13 in **Poole Keynes** to 57 in **Chedworth**. Recent analysis by GRCC of the status of these actions in shows that over 70% of the actions whose status is known have either been 'completed' or are 'in progress'. Of the 157 actions that fit the categories 'complete' or 'in progress,' the greatest amount of activity (by number of actions) has been around 'environment' based actions with 72% of parish actions on this theme already achieved or showing some activity.



Some actions can be completed quickly and can be achieved using relatively small amounts of funding or resource, whereas other actions need greater investment of time and/or resources and therefore take longer to come to fruition – e.g. in **Poole Keynes’** final plan there was an action to “Develop, revamp and redecorate the Village Hall” which required £60k of funding, this type of action is more complex than producing a newsletter. In some cases, complex actions are broken down into smaller projects to make them more achievable. Each of these may require input from a number of different partners in order to progress.

COTSWOLD COMMUNITIES DRIVING FORWARD ACTIONS

Communities of varying sizes usually have the ability and capacity to independently complete a number of actions set out in their plan documents. Examples of local level activity moving forward actions is demonstrated in **Kemble** where the community wished to **re-install allotment** facilities as set out in their 2006 plan. Their 2009 update to GRCC stated that “**Kemble Community Garden allotments** now running for one year, using land at Station Road, and including wilderness area”. Other examples of grassroots activity following the production of a plan document can be seen in:

- **Chedworth**, where a **business club** has been set up to promote mutual support and networking opportunities for the 100 small businesses in the parish
- **South Cerney**, where £17k (£12k from the Landfill Trust and £5k from Big Lottery) was raised for installation of a new **Youth Shelter and Multi Use Games Area**



Photo 'Washing line of desire' – A consultation technique used in Northleach

However it is not always the case that the community will be able to complete every action independently and it is important to form partnerships to progress actions. GRCC facilitates partnership working and in many cases will signpost a community to an appropriate partner. Examples of partnership working:

- In **Avening**, where 3 new **dog mess bins** were installed in the parish with support from Cotswold District Council
- **Car parking** was improved at the **Kemble** railway station, with the community forming a partnership with Great Western Railways

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS OF ACTIONS IN THE COTSWOLD DISTRICT

The information provided by communities to GRCC gives an insight into reasons for lack of progress of actions. In the Cotswold District, 23% of all actions included on the database, whose status is known are recorded as having made 'no progress'. The most common reasons for this are "lack of capacity" and "support turned down" – each cited as a reason in 9% of 'no progress' actions.

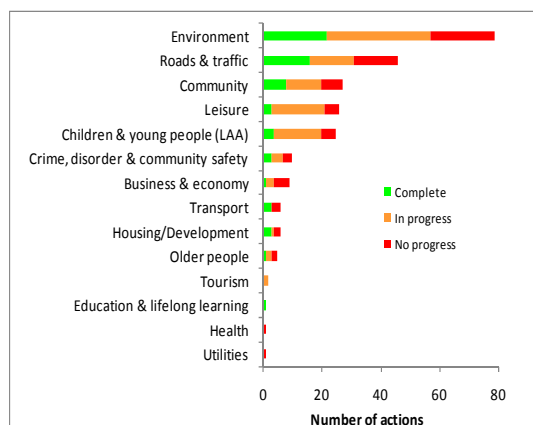
At times low priority actions often do not progress because community energy is concentrated on higher priority actions.

In some instances no further action is required because circumstances have changed e.g. In **Meysey Hampton's** plan there was an action to 'form co-ordination group for Best Kept Village' this action was cancelled at a later date however because interest had decreased and no volunteers wanted to lead on this.

Some actions require substantial resources and lack of funding is raised as a barrier in 6% of non progressed actions in the Cotswold District. Problems in securing funding have become more apparent during the current economic situation. Some actions require further research to update currently collected data or collect completely new data which may, in itself, require funding to be sourced.

Although, as already illustrated in this report, there are examples of partnership work driving forward actions, a significant reason for non progress in the Cotswold District (affecting 4 out of the 11 communities in the database) is lack of support or being turned down by agencies e.g. in **Meysey Hampton** for example, one of the action points in their plan was to "Install a traffic island at the entrance to Greenacres" was turned down.

Partnership working is vital to parish and community led planning and with the profile of parish planning being raised through training for local authority officers it is hoped that fewer actions will be recorded as 'no progress' because of a lack of support in the future.



TOP 10 REASONS FOR LACK OF PROGRESS	No. of actions
Lack of capacity	6
Turned down	6
Dependent on completion of other actions	5
Cost/lack of funding	4
Lack of interest/demand from community	4
Long term/lower priority	4
Not needed/Not needed at the moment	4
Guidance needed	3
Impractical/Unrealistic/Not possible	3
Withdrawn	3

CONCLUSIONS

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment for local authorities assesses how well local authorities are seeking to understand and meet local needs, set priorities, improve the area and people's lives and it supports the engagement and empowerment of citizens. This report illustrates the impact of parish and community led plans and their ability to successfully identify and drive forward actions. Use of this structured approach, which involves the whole community, can provide clear evidence of need which is essential for local prioritisation and for funding applications. This 'bottom up', community driven and managed process empowers and galvanises communities, increasing people's feeling that they can affect decisions in their locality and increasing the community's resilience. Parish and community led planning can also raise awareness of citizenship and increase capacity and volunteering within communities. The process used by parishes, supported by GRCC, has become increasingly robust and inclusive, resulting in plans of good quality.

Many communities in the Cotswold district review progress of their plan's actions during parish council meetings and in the case of **South Cerney**, a large copy of the action plan is on permanent display in the village hall to enable the local community to keep up to date with developments. The next step will be for communities to decide whether to refresh their plans and this refresh process will provide the opportunity to celebrate what has happened before and update the action plan for the future. At the time of this report, 2 communities in the Cotswold District are about to embark upon this refresh process. It is essential that parishes have support to tackle this refresh process and to move forward further actions.

The GRCC countywide database of parish plans can give partners an overview of actions relating to their service area and GRCC staff will be happy to come and talk to organisations/networks about how the database can be interrogated and used. Contact details are provided below.

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