

Parish & Community Led Plans in Gloucestershire

Forest of Dean District Report

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



This is one of a suite of reports produced by GRCC to provide information on the status of actions arising from parish and community led plans in Gloucestershire. 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. This report explores actions from parish and community led plans developed in the Forest of Dean District. Thank you to all communities who contributed.



An eye catching sign at a consultation event at Newnham.

What is a Parish & 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. See the 'our work' section of the GRCC



Aylburton customised a vehicle to publicise the plan at a local event.

Involving communities

Parish and community led plans contain a wealth of information about community needs and priorities which can be useful to those who have a statutory duty to engage and involve people in defining local services and priorities (as set out in the July 2008 statutory guidance, Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities). Many local authorities nationwide, including those in Gloucestershire, 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.



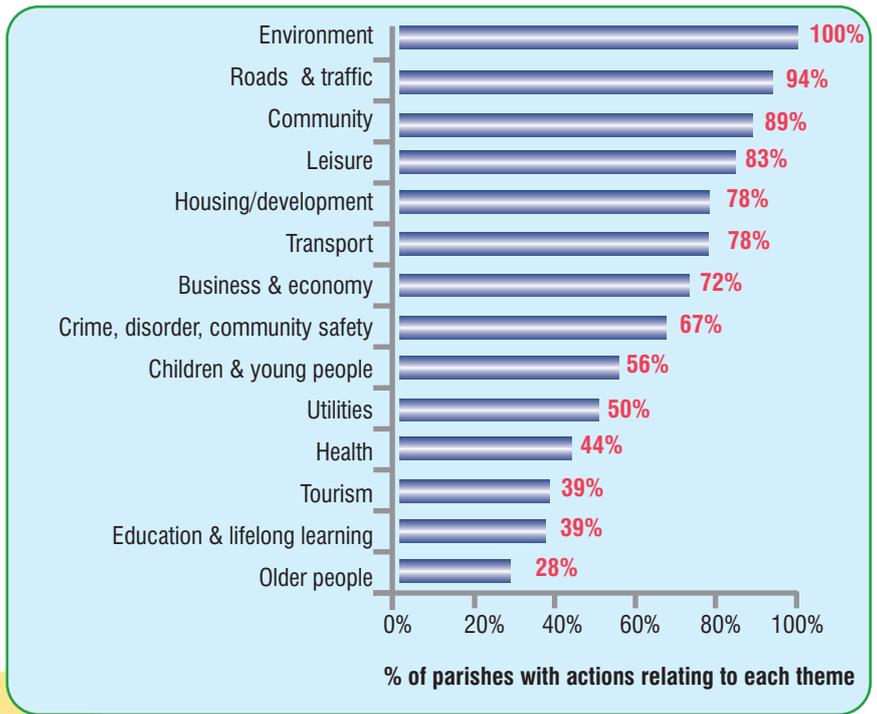
Aylburton considered its past to encourage thoughts about the future.

website www.grcc.org.uk for more information or contact GRCC on **01452 528491**.

In the Forest of Dean, typically 70% of the community will have an input to the plan's development. The rigorous consultation process, reaching a high percentage of the community, provides a mandate to identify and drive forward actions. Parish councils adopt the plans with this in mind, thereby endorsing the services they provide.

Issues and actions raised by Forest of Dean 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. The following data applies to the 18 FOD District plans on the GRCC countywide database of parish and community led plans.



All 18 plans have actions relating to the **environment**. Examples include:

- **Parish cleanliness** such as issues of litter and dog fouling.
- **Visual improvements** such as Dymock’s action to ‘plant wild daffodils throughout parish’.
- Newland’s plan contained an action to ‘**conserve and preserve** historic buildings and sites and map listed buildings alongside those recognised by community as heritage assets’.

72% of communities have actions relating to the production of local newsletters, websites, events and guides, e.g. Woolaston now publishes local planning applications on its village website.

Actions to address **crime and disorder** can be found in 67% of the plans and half of these contain reference to developing or strengthening **Neighbourhood Watch schemes**. 39% of the parishes have actions relating to strengthening **policing** and 33% on improving communications – from informing people about how to stay safe to providing clear statistics for the locality in order to reduce fear of crime. Rudford & Highleadon worked with the police to encourage the parish to use the mobile police unit to share information.

Roads and traffic actions have been developed by 17 communities (94%) and 14 have actions specifically relating to **road safety and speeding**. **Controlling and improving parking and access** is also raised by 7 parishes and 8 have actions relating to the **maintenance of roads**,

pavements and verges e.g. Huntley’s action led to the development of an ongoing repair schedule for pavements and roads in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council.

56% of plans in the FOD raise issues specifically related to **children & young people** and most of these aim to provide **facilities and activities** e.g. Tibberton’s action to ‘provide play equipment for playing fields.’ Where communities feel it is unrealistic to bring facilities to young people, their actions concentrate on transport solutions to enable them to access activities elsewhere e.g. Woolaston investigated the provision of a ‘liberty bus’ for young people as well as looking at setting up a community transport group.

Actions for **older people** are usually included within wider areas but 8 plans refer specifically to provision of events and general support for older people e.g. Redmarley’s action to improve home help for the elderly’.

Within **business and economy**, 7 parishes have actions relating to maintaining or developing basic **shop, post office and banking services** in the locality.

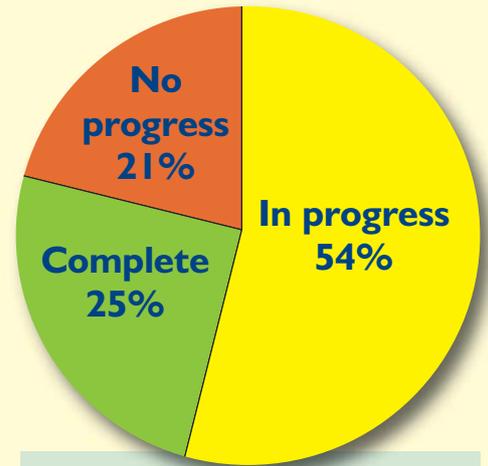
Under the theme of **Housing and Development**, 44% of parishes have actions relating to the provision of **affordable housing**. Other actions under this theme relate to **planning**, e.g. Pauntley’s action to ‘ensure that buildings of distinctive character are preserved and that new development fits in with existing styles. Work in partnership with FODDC to continue to influence planning decisions with informed comments and arguments.

Status of Parish & Community Led Plan actions in the Forest of Dean District

There are more than 700 actions from Forest of Dean parish and community led plans in the database and the number of actions within each plan ranges from 9 to 115. Recent analysis by GRCC of the status of these actions in the FOD shows that 79% of those whose status is known have either been completed or are in progress. This is testament to the energy, enthusiasm and determination of community members and the support received from partners.

Some actions can be completed quickly and have attracted 'Quick Wins' funding, whereas other actions need greater investment of time and/or resources and therefore take longer to come to fruition – e.g. a £500,000 community building project is more complex than producing a newsletter.

In some cases, complex actions are broken down into smaller projects to make them more achievable and each of these may require input from a



FOD District status of actions.

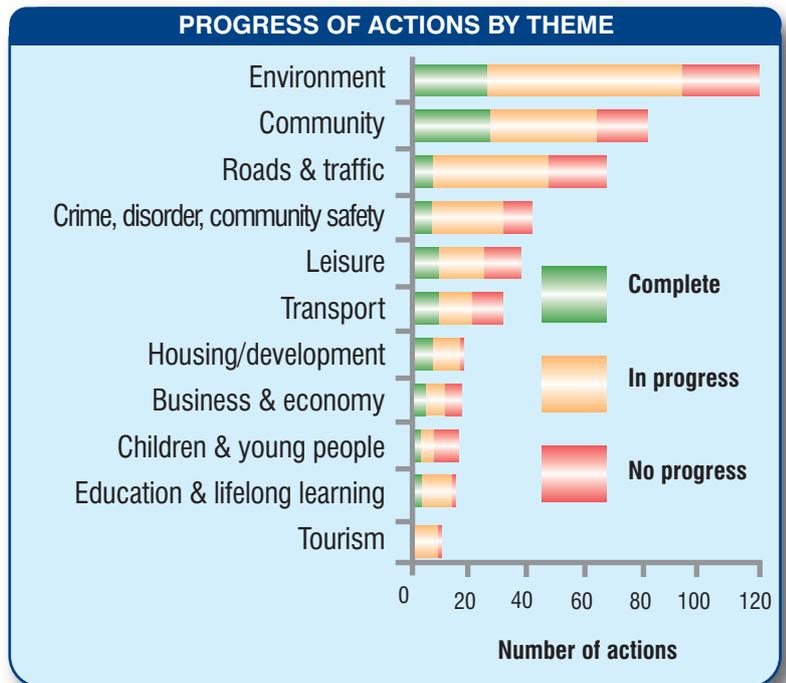
number of different partners in order to progress.

Barriers to progress of actions for Forest of Dean communities

An analysis of the information provided by communities to GRCC gives an insight into reasons for lack of progress of some actions. In the Forest of Dean, in 19% of cases where actions have not progressed, the reason given is that they are lower on the community's priority list and will be addressed in due course. Often circumstances have changed since the plan was written and an action will have been abandoned or an alternative solution found e.g. the provision of an internet café in Pauntley in partnership with the school has been halted due to the school rebuilding programme currently underway.

Several actions stall due to lack of momentum or enthusiasm to carry them through. GRCC now encourages communities to complete their plans well within one year (as opposed to up to three years for some early plans) in order to maintain momentum and keep actions relevant. Some actions require substantial resources and lack of funding is raised as a barrier which has been compounded by the current economic situation.

Although, as already illustrated in this report, there are several examples of partnership work driving forward actions. Another reason for non progress is lack of support from, or being turned down by agencies. GRCC encourages communities to involve potential partners when developing actions so that practical solutions can be found at an early stage.



MOST COMMON REASONS FOR LACK OF PROGRESS	NO. OF ACTIONS
Longer term/lower priority	19
Lack of interest/demand from community	12
Cost/lack of funding	6
Dependent on completion of other actions	6
Lack of support from agencies/parties	6
Awaiting response/action from agencies/ parties	5
Change of circumstances/change of plan	4
Lack of volunteers to move forward	3
Further research needed	3

Forest of Dean communities driving actions forward

Some actions contained in parish and community led plans are independently completed by the community and creative solutions have been found to address issues raised. Examples of grassroots activity following the production of a plan include:

- In Newnham, an **Amenities Group** has been set up to monitor and co-ordinate fundraising in the parish which helps to ensure that it is targeted according to need.
- Staunton (Coleford) has seen an increase in **village hall activities** and the first village pantomime was staged in 2008.
- Several parishes, including English Bicknor, have developed **village websites** which provide links to local businesses.
- The post office restructure programme forced St Briavels to find an alternative to its action to retain the post office and village shop. In response, a regular **Farmers' Market** was set up in the village hall which goes some way to bringing basic services to the community and also encourages people from further afield to visit the village, thus increasing income for the hall and other businesses.

Partnership working is often crucial to the completion of actions and GRCC helps to forge links. Examples of successful partnerships include:

Substantial funding can be levered in by communities to support parish and community led plan actions e.g. Awre has levered in £180k, which equates to £150 per head.



Corse and Staunton worked together for the first time to put together a joint parish plan. Subsequently they have worked together on more projects and in 2009 became the first communities to put in a joint application to the Village of the Year competition.



Pauntley residents celebrate receiving a £940 village green grant from O2.

- Newland approached partners such as Age Concern and GRCC's In Touch project to help them set up a monthly **lunch club** and visited a number of lunch clubs elsewhere.
- Gorsley and Kilmot's **footpath group** worked with landowners to monitor footpaths, as well as funding and developing a walks guide.
- Blaisdon has established a dialogue with the district council to report incidents of **fly tipping**.

- Awre identified actions relating to **fear of crime**, especially vandalism, and worked in partnership with the police to address them. Improved police coverage, installation of cameras and regular visits by the Community Safety Officer followed. This, together with improved play and youth facilities resulted in a reduction in the fear of crime, and in youth crime incidents.
- English Bicknor's parish plan contained an action to increase the number of volunteers and services provided for older people. They linked with the PCT and Lydcare and made a case for improving **village hall** facilities, which resulted in successful funding applications totalling £125k.



English Bicknor Village Hall.

Benefits of Parish and Community Led Planning

'Parish & Community Led Planning enables local people to create stronger, more vibrant and more resilient communities, better able to respond to local challenges and opportunities. It represents genuine value for money, as communities across the country take on responsibility for making things happen, rather than waiting for others to do it for them.'

Commission for Rural Communities 2008

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. People relate strongly to the village or parish in which they live and are more likely to be engaged and involved at a very local level. The information from parish and community led plans in Gloucestershire can be used to help identify local priorities for safer and stronger communities and hence feed into Neighbourhood Management clusters.



Dymock identified where to enforce speed limits as part of its plan.



Awre secured £8,000 for new bus shelters.

Other areas covered in this suite of reports about parish and community led planning include:
Gloucestershire County
Cotswold District
Stroud District
Tewkesbury Borough

Parish and community led plans are valuable documents which enable community groups to provide evidence of need to support funding applications.

Carolyn Mitchell, Funding Officer, FODDC

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 parish council can play a key role in the development of the plan and carrying through actions. The process used by parishes, supported by GRCC, has become increasingly robust and inclusive, resulting in plans of good quality. The firm evidence of need also gives strength to funding applications.

Many communities in the Forest of Dean review progress of their plan's actions during parish council meetings. The next step will be for communities to refresh those 9 plans which have been in existence for more than three years and this refresh process will provide the opportunity to celebrate achievements and to update the action plan for the future. Awre has already refreshed its original parish plan and 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. GRCC staff will be happy to talk to organisations/ networks about how the database can be interrogated and used. Contact details are below.

**Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
Community House, 15 College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LZ**

Tel: 01452 528491 • Fax: 01452 528493 • Email: glosrcc@grcc.org.uk • Web: www.grcc.org.uk