

# AN EXCITING FUTURE FOR COMMUNITY PLANS

A REPORT BY BDOR LIMITED FOR  
MCTA AND SWAN

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Market and Coastal  
Towns Association



South West ACRE  
Network of Rural  
Community Councils

WITH FUNDING AND ASSISTANCE FROM



# **CONTENTS**

<b>Section Number</b>	<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
ES	Executive Summary	1
1	Introduction	8
2	Project Process	10
3	Changing Context	11
4	Key Findings on the Integration of Community and Spatial Plans	14
5	A Wider Vision for Community Plans	25
6	Key Recommendations for Improving Integration	30
7	Actions to Enable the Vision	35
8	Conclusions	38
A1	Appendix 1: Initially Agreed Process	40
A2	Appendix 2: The Work as Completed	41
A3	Appendix 3: Sources of the Emerging Results	43
A4	Appendix 4: Notes on Examples Studied	48
A5	Appendix 5: Implementation of Necessary Actions	54
A6	Appendix 6: Document List	56
A7	Appendix 7: Summary of 'Local Issues in Rural England'	59
A8	Appendix 8: Summary of 'Assessing the Impact of Parish Plans'	62

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Please Note:

1. Where the term 'Community Plan' is used in this report it includes Parish Plans and (as it is termed in the South West) Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTI) Strategic Plans.
2. As the study was being undertaken, one of the key central government departments linked to Community Plans was the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). This has now changed to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The latter term is now used throughout (except in references, Appendix 6).

## **ES.1 Introduction**

- The aim of the study reported here, focused on the South West of England, was "To analyse the regional position with regards to the current relationships between the statutory planning services and initiatives such as parish planning and MCTA planning, and explore where authorities have adopted these initiatives into the new planning system, focusing where possible on the new Local Development Frameworks."
- The appointed team suggested a need to widen out beyond just the statutory planning context to include, for example, evolving policy and practice around Sustainable Community Strategies. The team also suggested a need to move beyond analysis and description and onto prescriptions for better future processes.
- The core project work involved desk study (of guidance, example Community Plans, local policies etc.), telephone contact with key actors (at national, regional, local and community level) and a number of short case studies (undertaken through telephone interviews).
- This core work was supplemented by some more in-depth case studies funded separately by Defra (3 case studies) and the Commission for Rural Communities (2 case studies).
- The team was appointed in part because of their long and diverse experience in the area of Community Plans. That experience has also informed the final conclusions.
- The early parts of this Summary focus – as in the brief - on links between Community Plans and the statutory planning system. However, the results suggest that this link is less important than others which might be made (and are already made in many cases by community groups). The broader approach – termed a 'Future Vision' - is introduced in ES.4 below.

## **ES.2 Changing Context**

ES.2.1 In relation to the planning system, the key changes to which study conclusions were linked include:

- the introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS);
- the introduction of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs);
- the shift from a land use focus to a spatial planning focus;
- the far greater importance attached to community involvement;
- in particular the use of Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs);
- the shift from Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD);
- the generally greater rigour involved in the SPD process and especially the requirement to introduce Sustainability Appraisal (SA); and
- forthcoming changes to the system of planning obligations (generally termed Section 106 or S106).

ES2.2 In the wider context the team also drew attention to the potential and implications of:

- the shift from Community Strategies to Sustainable Community Strategies;
- the implications of this in terms of more comprehensive and consistent topic coverage, taking a longer term view and avoiding narrow parochialism in strategy development;
- planned changes to the system of Local Strategic Partnerships;
- piloting of Local Area Agreements; and
- the emerging government approach to neighbourhood devolution.

### ***ES.3 Integration of Community and Spatial Plans***

#### ***ES.3.1 Parish Plans under the Previous Planning Regime***

- Parish Plan groups often seemed to 'miss' planning in early plan development stages, even if they had a development interest, and national guidance at the time did not highlight the importance of making such links.
- Although most plans were based on some form of thorough, quantitative survey, other more innovative approaches to community involvement were also used on occasion (and usually in addition to a survey).
- Too often there seemed to be a straight leap from survey results into plan recommendations without careful consideration of feasibility, funding and the ways to link plan recommendations into the planning system (or other systems, see later).
- Planning department practice in relation to Parish Plan varied enormously from highly resistant to positively encouraging and supporting.
- Beyond the highly motivated exceptions, few planners were aware of the general approaches to Parish Plans or the guidance to support local practice.
- As a result of this, and the frequent failure by local groups to engage at an early stage with planners, it was no surprise when many plans were described by planners as no more than 'wish lists'.
- Authorities providing more positive support generally saw the key to be very early dialogue, backed up with good regular liaison and support from others beyond the planning department (eg. community development).
- RCC support to plan groups was always positive (if often resource limited) but less effective in specific relation to planning issues.
- There appears to be a widespread assumption within communities that it is really only through some form of 'adoption' of a Parish Plan into the planning system as SPG that real 'clout' could be achieved.
- This was probably influenced by several factors, notably published guidance (eg. encouragement in the Rural White Paper 2000), perhaps general Parish level experience of planning and experience from Village Design Statements.
- This was just as likely to apply even when plans had little in them of direct planning system relevance.
- As a result, a failure to achieve adoption (if sought) was seen as the end of the line, whereas success with adoption was then seen as suggesting a handover of responsibility for plan delivery to the planners.
- The outcome of this was a general lack of attention to the implementation stages following production of a plan.

### *ES.3.2 Parish Plans under the Current Planning Regime*

- More recent national guidance encourages Parish groups to contact their planners early in the plan process, but this is not a requirement within the current grant aid system managed by Defra and delivered through RCCs.
- For several reasons, the general pattern of contact or non contact between local groups and planners seems to have changed little.
- The complexities and uncertainties of the new system are clearly putting off many groups from even starting a Parish Plan.
- There appear to be high and often therefore frustrated expectations about greater community involvement, and the more holistic 'spatial' principles are as yet very poorly understood – by both communities and planners.
- Some Local Development Schemes mention Parish Plans, yet some authorities have withdrawn from promoting such approaches because a) they consider they lack the necessary resources and b) the system is seen as discouragingly complex.
- The link between Parish Plan 'policies' and development control practice continues to be poorly understood and managed (even if a Parish Plan has been adopted).
- RCCs continue to offer a good level of general support (if still resource limited) and some have initiated significant training and support programmes.
- Although there continues to be an assumption about the importance of securing adoption (now as SPD), that is fading fast as communities understand its implications, and it is also leading planners to be cautious because of a) the technical and resource demands of SPD processes and b) the remaining uncertainties about the legality of any adoption.
- Sustainability Appraisal (SA) procedures in particular are having a debilitating effect on Parish Plan work and that alone is leading some to either stop work or to cease to even consider potential adoption.
- Parish communities feel further disenfranchised by what they take to be the top-down determinism flowing from Regional Spatial Strategies – especially what are perceived to be policies against village growth.
- The very diverse practice noted during the previous regime appears to still be the case – and is both a strength and a weakness.
- There are however some examples of good practice, including where Parish Plans have in fact secured formal adoption as SPD and therefore passed through an SA process.

### *ES.3.3 The MCTI under the Previous Planning Regime*

- It is essential to note that the principles, procedures, even grant aid qualification requirements of MCTI projects made it almost impossible to avoid a working relationship between an MCTI project group from the local community and 'somebody' in the relevant local authorities.
- Indeed some MCTI projects were prompted or significantly influenced by the principal local authority; (which may have affected initial feelings of local 'ownership' and control).
- This did however introduce a level of rigour and professionalism into MCTI project work, and many groups used some of their grant aid to appoint outside professionals to run parts of their development work. This was further reinforced by the work of the MCTI Facilitators attached to each initiative.
- At the same time, it was rare that the key contact within any local authority was with the planners; (more commonly it was with economic development or regeneration staff). On some occasions the planners were minimally involved, involved late or not involved.
- Not surprisingly therefore, there was nothing like the same pressure within MCTI projects to secure adoption of end results into the planning system; (even if, on occasion, this might have been appropriate).
- To balance this, MCTI groups, with their greater focus on implementation and funding, were more aware of and proactive in securing links with development control practice.

- The general process was similar to, but much more thorough and consistent than, that for Parish Plans, ie. an initial survey (a 'Healthcheck') followed by a process of generating a plan (an 'Action Plan' or 'Community Strategic Plan').
- Many are documents of the highest quality and (as expressed by a Regional Office planner) at least as good as those one sees from some planning teams!

#### *ES.3.4 The MCTI under the Current Planning Regime*

- Though the general format of MCTI projects ensures better general preparation for community groups about the public sector policy context, there was little sign that this proved to be the case in terms of adjustments to the changed planning system.
- Contacts with planners by communities often tended to still be an afterthought, and there were no indications of planners being noticeably more proactive in making the links.
- In general MCTI groups are however beginning to see their work more in the context of their area's Community Strategy and they are developing links to their Local Strategic Partnership.
- The MCTA Manual, though generally excellent, does not make explicit mention of contacting planners.
- Local groups still find contacts with local government difficult because of the perceived complexity of the system and lack of help in negotiating it.
- Although development control planners often find it difficult to respond to aspirations in MCTI Plans because they cannot make a direct link to 'material considerations', partnership work with policy planners on specific sites, Area Action Plans etc. is becoming more common.
- Despite the often very high standard of 'evidence' from MCTI projects, there still appear to be problems for planners in using such evidence in LDF work.
- MCTI groups feel as concerned as Parish Plan groups about the effects of the RSS.

#### *ES.3.5 General Comments on Integration*

- There are clearly different approaches, attitudes, even cultures operating between planners and community groups.
- Planners tend, in ways reinforced by the statutory system, to think top-down and strategically, placing great emphasis on long term plans and feeling heavily constrained by law and precedent.
- Community groups always start with the specific and local, are more often project-led and short term and tend to resist the constraints of formal procedures.
- Putting this aside in conversation with people in both 'camps', there is agreement about the need for and potential of better integration, that this will help to deliver spatial planning, that it can lead to more sustainable development and that local information can contribute significantly to LDF evidence base work.
- At the same time, all parties agree that integration should not result in more bureaucracy, nor stifle the blue-sky thinking that characterises much good community planning activity.
- Finally, in the context of the soon to be adopted RSS and changes in the planning system, better approaches to integration need to be developed as a matter of urgency.

#### ***ES.4 A Wider Future Vision for Community Plans***

- All the above points focus on the team's specific brief about integration between Community Plans and the planning system.
- However, the study located opportunities and generated ideas that – in the team's view – **offer a considerably better context for the next wave of Community Plans than would be possible or appropriate even with better integration.**

- Indeed, the approach outlined below would lessen significantly what might even be considered an unreasonable set of demands on planning, and enable the planning system to better fulfil its role.
- The opportunities appear to be the next generation of Local Strategic Partnerships (more holistic, long term and less parochial), a shift to Sustainable Community Strategies (also more holistic and hence linking better to spatial planning), the introduction of Local Area Agreements (to ensure a more coherent targeting of funding based on local priorities) and some form of 'double devolution' (down to community level).

#### ES.4.1      *A Possible Future Model*

- *(Much of what follows draws from the 'Community Planning Model' as developed by North Dorset District Council. It is also expressed retrospectively as if it has already happened.)*
- Community Plans are now seen as Local Sustainable Community Strategies, although this is being promoted sensitively to not just allow but encourage communities to take their own distinctive, locally determined approach.
- Community Plan groups are encouraged to be more outward-looking and collaborative; to work and share with other communities and build the added value that can come from (appropriately) consistent approaches and common evidence.
- As a result, although Community Plans and MCTI Strategies as before still continue, more hybrids and variations begin to appear – notably where a group of communities have come together to create what is almost a 'Rural Area Action Plan'.
- More variation also now occurs in the relationship with statutory processes. Instead of the all-or-nothing of either opting in (going for formal adoption) or opting out (having a plan with no external validation), it is now possible to place many different elements of a plan, as appropriate, into many different contexts – the LDF Core Strategy, planning obligations 'pooling', housing plans, the Local Transport Plan etc.
- The new breed of LSPs have, as suggested in 2005, become the champions of Community Plans and the main format through which they are developed and secure their own appropriate ratification and then funding support.
- In exchange for this external support, funding for Community Plans is dependent on the local groups following an agreed procedure, negotiated with the help of an independent enabler and with input from local voluntary sector groups (notably the RCCs, who still administrate grants).
- The local enablers also play more roles across the life of Community Plan projects, proactively helping and pressing to ensure good links between communities and public agencies. In order to do this, they also work closely with the new generation of more senior and influential LSP Coordinators.
- As above, formal adoption of a whole Community Plan into the LDF as SPD is now the exception. In general, the evidence collected in Community Plans is now far more robust and used directly by local planners such that the old and narrow route of formal adoption is no longer the prime way forward.
- Community Plans have also developed a far sharper approach to their Action Plan stage such that they are more firmly linked into public sector funding decisions, especially through the Local Area Agreement.
- Action Plans also define far more carefully how the local community expects (demands?) to be involved in developments of any sort in its area by others, notably the private sector.

## **ES.5        *Recommendations for Improving Integration***

- The full report elaborates a number of things that could be put in place (and should be as a matter of urgency) to improve integration between Community Plans, LDFs and development control practice. These include the following.
- Clarification of Planning Procedures and Requirements – notably on the potential for fine-tuning the RSS to local circumstances, the potential role of Community Plans within Core Strategies, the ways in which Community Plan work can contribute evidence to plan-makers, the scope for communities to work together to cover larger areas, the ways in which Community Plans can (only if appropriate and not necessarily in full) secure SPD status and the status of Community Plan proposals as material considerations.
- Developing an approach to Sustainability Appraisal that can be done collaboratively between communities and planning teams in a way that can contribute both to the LDF and a Community Plan.
- Highlighting, or developing afresh if necessary, creative approaches to community involvement in Community Plans that transcend the ‘survey and public meeting’ approach.
- Promotion of and support for some form of local ‘enabler’ (appropriately independent of the local authority) to act as an intermediary between community groups and planning teams. In particular to ensure appropriate links and appropriate approaches at the very early stage of Community Plan development.
- Production of guidance materials. This is too often imagined to be ‘the answer’ but it will always be needed even within the context of the newly developed set of working relationships resulting from the other changes suggested. It is also too often assumed that this can be one document; that has never worked, and different formats, styles and coverage will be needed for different audiences.
- Awareness raising will also be essential, with a medley of different groups and organisations.
- The team for this project still find it astonishing that there are (to the best of their knowledge) so few planning schools in the country that teach anything about community involvement or community plans, let alone the skills to assist with these activities. This is an appalling gap and needs to be filled extremely urgently.
- One way to shift practice forward at local level (a county or district) would be to establish some form of ‘Concordat’ and perhaps more detailed ‘Protocols’ signed by the local authority, local association of town and parish councils and voluntary sector agencies, agreeing to commit to promoting and supporting an agreed set of principles for and approaches to Community Plans.

## **ES.6 *Actions to Enable the Future Vision***

- As with the topic of integration, the full report elaborates some things that need to be moved forward if this exciting and potentially liberating Future Vision were to be adopted.
- The project team has clearly not ‘invented’ this new approach. It is based (as stated) on work already underway, it is likely that similar ideas are being developed beyond the South West and others have, no doubt, already considered at least aspects of it.
- The whole idea needs far wider and proactive promotion not least to refine it and take it further into detail than has been possible within this study.
- In particular, the Community Plans approach needs to be seen to be valued by those in central government, notably DCLG where responsibility for LSPs and planning lies – especially as many currently believe it is not properly valued there.
- Even more so than with planning integration, the role of the independent or neutral mediator or ‘enabler’ becomes important for this more diverse, challenging and inevitably demanding role for Community Plans within the changed policy context. This needs to be

piloted and developed (perhaps first in the South West), then consolidated and promoted nationally.

- The role of the Community Plans enabler needs to be balanced with the development of the new role for LSP Coordinators. Until recently Coordinators have too often been little more than administrators but the new challenges of LSPs demand a far more senior and interventionist and certainly proactive role.
- As with integration issues, the above will inevitably require the production of some guidance material, awareness raising and changes within initial and continuing education and training (and not just for planners).
- If more formats for Community Plans are to develop, the separate funding of Parish Plans and MCTI projects will need to cease and a single model, probably linked to LSPs and even LAAs will be needed. By working within the LAA structure, more and different (and pooled) approaches may be possible. Requiring the hypothecation of some of the Planning Delivery Grant would also help.
- As with integration – perhaps even more so because other signatories can be considered – there is a key role for locally determined and agreed Concordats and Protocols for delivering Community Plans.

## **ES.7 Conclusions**

- Practice across the South West around Community Plans is extremely varied. Much is extremely good, reflecting the enormous amount of effort and skill put into the process by local people, most of it in their spare time.
- There does not appear to be a reciprocal amount of effort – nor even appropriate skill – put into supporting Community Plans by local government generally. There are however some notable exceptions, both authorities as a whole and, more commonly, specific, motivated individuals.
- In the past, much of the effort on Parish Plans was placed on integration of the results, especially the final plans, into the formal planning system through ‘adoption’ as SPG. This was always based partly on published guidance or exhortation (for example the Rural White Paper 2000) and on an assumption that this was the best approach. This may have resulted in losses of impact and effectiveness for some Parish Plans.
- By virtue of their scale, funding procedures, external support system (and often the use of outside professionals) MCTI projects were less affected by the idea of formal links to planning.
  
- Despite the original intentions of those drafting the Act, the changes to the planning system have, if anything, had a negative effect on Parish Plans – to date at least.
- The complexity of the system, the demands for a robust evidence base and especially the shift from SPG to SPD (and the associated Sustainability Appraisal) have all confused both local people and planners.
- The changes have had less effect on MCTI work, for similar reasons as those quoted above, but again the potential of the new system does not yet seem to have been grasped or realised.
  
- It is the team’s view that, rather than focus solely on fine-tuning just the links between Community Plans and statutory planning, there are other significant changes underway that could create a far better context to act as the prime base for the next generation of Community Plans.
- By shifting the locus of Community Plans, this would also take the pressure off the planning link and enable everybody to be far sharper and more effective in defining exactly where and how planning links can help Community Plans. (At the same time, the role of Parish Councils within the planning system remains important.)
- The change of locus is about linking Community Plans to the new approaches to LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and ‘Double Devolution’ (and, of course, LDFs).
- This new approach:
  - tackles head-on the old conflict between top-down and bottom-up by showing that this need not be an either/or choice;
  - engages communities with others like them at a local level;
  - picks up on the type of holistic approach that community groups have always argued that they operate (and the public sector does not); and
  - integrates this through the practical delivery of targeted support and funding to coherent programmes of community level action.
- It is also the team’s view that all of this can be achieved with no changes to policy, general procedures or funding regimes. It requires a range of practical measures (training, guidance etc.) but nothing more fundamental.
- Delivering what the team considers to be an immensely exciting new period for Community Plans is about will, commitment, openness to fresh thinking, creativity and putting ‘flesh on the bones’ of the very principles that are already espoused in government and local policy.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. The study to which this report relates was commissioned in late 2005 by a consortium of South West based organisations:

- South West ACRE Network (SWAN)
- Market and Coastal Towns Association (MCTA)
- Government Office South West (GOSW)
- South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)
- South West Regional Assembly (SWRA)

1.2 A representative of the Royal Town Planning Institute South West Region was involved in the formative stages of the study but did not then join the Steering Group made up of those in 1.1 above.

1.3 Concern had been expressed about the extent to which Community Plans\* were sufficiently well integrated with Spatial Plans and whether those involved in Community Plans had responded, or been able to respond, to the increased status of community involvement in the reformed spatial planning system and to the growing support for voluntary community planning generally. (\* 'Community Plans' is the generic term used commonly throughout this report to encompass Parish Plans and Market and Coastal Town Strategic Plans.)

1.4 Flowing from the above concerns, the aim of this project, as stated in the brief, was:

*“To analyse the regional position with regards to the current relationships between the statutory planning services and initiatives such as parish planning and MCTA planning, and explore where authorities have adopted these initiatives into the new planning system focusing where possible on the new Local Development Frameworks.”*

1.5 Following a tendering process a team was appointed, led by Jeff Bishop of BDOR Limited and including Rowena Harris (an independent facilitator and associate to BDOR) and Barry Pearce (of South West Planning Aid). As explained later, Felicity Sylvester (also an independent consultant) joined the team once work was underway.

1.6 The appointed team highlighted in their tender their view that focusing too narrowly on the planning system could miss out on more important and exciting opportunities emerging in the wider context of initiatives such as Sustainable Community Strategies. They therefore stressed a need to place the planning issues in that wider context and rebalance the study appropriately. The client group agreed with this approach.

1.7 The full brief also made a point that the clients wished to move beyond research and analysis into prescriptions for better future processes. This too was a key concern for the appointed team so this aspect also gained greater importance as the study proceeded.

1.8 One reason for the appointment of this particular team was the depth and breadth of previous experience of Community Plans that they could bring to the work. Although the results draw primarily from the outcomes of the work described shortly, they have also been informed by the team's general experience.

1.9 The work started in early 2006 and was substantially complete by the end of April 2006. Early in the project additional funding was offered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Commission for Rural Communities to undertake further work in the form of in-depth case studies.

1.10 The majority of the work in the original project (ie. other than the above case studies) was undertaken through desk work – accessing and evaluating existing material, analysis of information on authority/agency websites, team discussions and telephone interviews. The case studies involved field work and site interviews. There were also two informal discussion sessions with the client group.

1.11 The important changes that occurred in the project from the original brief stage through to completion are reflected in the nature and structure of this report. There is a focus on moving forward and beginning – as a matter of some urgency – to share the results to inform ‘the system’.

1.12 Following this Introduction, the structure is as follows:

- **Project Process:** A description of the work actually undertaken (different from that in the brief or submitted tender). This is supported by fuller information in Appendices 1 and 2.
- **Changing Context:** A description of the changed context (in planning in particular) and the likely changing context (Sustainable Community Strategies etc.) that suggest major challenges and opportunities for the next generation of Community Plans.
- **Key Findings on Integration into Spatial Planning:** This section draws out aspects of current practice on Community Plans in relation to the planning system in particular (ie. without taking into account other major contextual changes).
- **A Wider Future Vision for Community Plans:** In this section the project team draws on some of the main results to outline a possible model for future Community Plans in what may well be a significantly changed context.
- **Recommendations for Improving Integration:** Flowing directly from the above, this section highlights actions that could be taken to improve integration between community planning and statutory spatial planning.
- **Actions to Enable the Vision:** This section suggests what may need to be done to sharpen the emerging vision and to help move it towards positive realisation.
- **Conclusions:** A short final section highlighting key points.

Appendices include material referenced in the main text.

## 2. PROJECT PROCESS

2.1 Although the submitted tender outlined a possible process, this was amended for three main reasons as the project proceeded; first, in the light of a discussion between the team and the client group at an opening Steering Group meeting; secondly, once support had been offered for five more substantial case studies; and thirdly, when it became clear that the focus should move on from the integration between community and spatial planning to a broader and future-oriented context in which community and spatial planning would play a different role.

2.2 The main tasks undertaken by the team remained broadly the same but the emphasis within each task, and the balance of time committed to each task, varied from that initially agreed by the **Steering Group**. What follows is a short description of work undertaken; a fuller description is in the Appendices.

2.3 More time was spent on **networking for contacts and examples** than originally planned because (a) more material was available than had been anticipated and (b) it became important to look carefully at the changing national context. As part of this, two team members attended (and one contributed to) the national **Parish Plans Conference** in February 2006. Two team members also attended and contributed to the **Devon Towns Forum Conference**. Both conferences proved useful in informing the project.

2.4 The core of the project was to have been **telephone and email contacts** with those involved in specific Community Plan initiatives across the South West. Following the introduction of the fuller case studies and the shift of emphasis to the changing context, less time was spent on this than originally planned. 9 specific **community planning examples**, spread across the region and including Parish Plan and MCTI projects, were identified for the short case studies and these were completed. (Appendix 4 includes short descriptions of each area/example.)

2.5 **Five additional case studies** were commissioned separately but managed by the same team and within the setting of the project as a whole. Three were commissioned by Defra and two by the Commission for Rural Communities. Results from these are included in this report but material on the case studies is also to be published separately by their commissioning agencies. (The introduction of these case studies also led to the inclusion of Felicity Sylvester in the project team. These examples are also described in Appendix 4.)

2.6 A further **Steering Group** meeting was held to discuss the draft report and agree how to bring the project to completion.

2.7 As well as elaborating the project process more fully, Appendix 3 contains details of the key sources derived from this work that have contributed to the results that follow and notes on the examples used.

2.8 The results that follow shortly draw from all of the above information (and the team's general experience), not just from the specific examples studied. The comments made are therefore general results.

## **3. CHANGING CONTEXT**

### **3.1 The Planning System**

3.1.1 The main study was commissioned to examine the integration of community and spatial planning and a wish to generate some actions that could maximise the potential link between Community Plans and aspects of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).

3.1.2 There are a number of features of the new system that it was felt could be having an impact on Community Plans. The intention to shift the system from a narrow focus on land use to a broader 'spatial' approach is particularly important because it holds out the potential of engaging with the more holistic way in which local people think about themselves, their area, their community and what is needed to sustain and improve these.

3.1.3 In many people's minds this is inseparable from the greater commitment to community involvement in the new planning system because that is seen as the key mechanism through which to locate and draw on local circumstances, needs and aspirations and reflect these in 'plans'. One particular expression of this greater commitment is the requirement for local planning authorities (LPAs) to produce – in collaboration with local people – 'Statements of Community Involvement' (SCIs) that set policy and auditable approaches for community involvement. SCIs outline how involvement is to be handled on both local development documents and planning applications.

3.1.4 In relation to Community Plans in particular it is important to note that Parish Plans were one of the few specific methodologies to be mentioned in the original Green Paper on the planning reforms (along with Village Design Statements). It was intended (if not described in any detail) at that stage that the new system should provide a way of valuing Community Plans through some form of 'adoption' process, and this is one of the possibilities of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) – a replacement for, and intended as a more robust version of, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). It was assumed that many Parish Plans could and should achieve SPD status.

3.1.5 An important parallel process within the new planning system relates to the government's commitment to sustainable development. They have therefore put in place a rigorous process of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for all main documents, including SPD. This requires an extremely thorough baseline survey, the development and examination of options against sustainability criteria and a report that shows how the SA Report and consultees' opinions were taken into account in preparing the final plan. Though Parish Plans and Village Design Statements were nearly always done in the old system by communities themselves, it is unclear how SA might be done, and who would do it, for such initiatives in the new system.

3.1.6 Finally, changes are underway (not yet finalised) for reforming the planning obligations process, best known as Section 106 (or just S106). This holds out the hope of more flexibility and creativity in managing obligations (to support the broader spatial approach in particular) and especially the possibility of 'pooling' monies – something of potentially real significance to smaller communities where, otherwise, only very small sums flow from each small development.

3.1.7 If the above are the changes that relate most directly and potentially positively to Community Plans, it is also essential to mention the current round of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). Though not seeming to relate all the way down to Community Plans, there is undoubtedly a common view within local communities (and even in many local authorities) that the outcome of the RSS for the South West will impose an entirely top-down agenda on local areas.

## **3.2 The Wider Context**

3.2.1 Despite the shifting emphasis of the study, the team was not able to spend as much time on the wider context issues as they would have wished – purely in retrospect. It is also the case that the broader changes are not as yet operational in several key cases. This section is therefore shorter and more speculative.

3.2.2 There are three important changes underway or being piloted and one being developed. All are closely linked, have significant implications for Community Plans already and promise even more implications in the relatively near future. The first two are very closely linked. There are already close ties between the current arrangements for Local Strategic Partnerships and for their key ‘plans’ – Community Strategies. Both are developing into ‘second generation’ versions.

3.2.3 Community Strategies are to become Sustainable Community Strategies. This is largely a result of government evaluations which suggest that early strategies were (a) partial rather than comprehensive, ie. certain aspects were often missing, (b) overly ‘parochial’, ie. they focused too strongly on their own area rather than seeing it in a wider setting and (c) too short term; ie. looking perhaps only 5 years ahead. Sustainable Community Strategies will be required to be more comprehensive (using a national agenda for sustainable development), to be developed collaboratively with adjacent areas/communities so that inter-linked issues (eg. transport) can be properly addressed, and to look around 20 years ahead. This should enable better links with what is now happening within the planning system.

3.2.4 In order to best achieve such ambitious area strategies, and for other reasons, the government is also reconsidering the role, format and working methods of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The same criticisms have inevitably been made of LSPs as of the early Community Strategies. Research has linked this to narrow constructs of ‘membership’ of LSPs, poor (mainly highly internalised) management and a consequent failure to engage fully, widely and openly, and a failure to successfully integrate or break the stranglehold of separate organisational budgets and funding regimes. A Consultation Paper published late in 2005 (see Appendix 6) highlighted these issues and proposed a number of changes. In so doing the paper made explicit mention of Community Plans and the need to use LSPs to bring together what are commonly called the ‘top-down and bottom-up’ agendas.

3.2.5 Although the consultation period is now over it has not been possible to establish what its outcomes will be. However, by all accounts, the key issues to have emerged include:

- the potential role of the LSP in linking the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and LDF and in developing and driving (coordinating) delivery of both the Local Area Agreement and LDF (see below);
- the need to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of SCS and LDF integration;
- weak accountability and governance of LSPs (and need for a firmer expression of the community leadership and scrutiny role, and ultimate accountability, of the local authority and especially its democratically elected leadership);
- the excessively top-down requirement for national outcomes; and
- the need to develop the skills of the LSP to perform the delivery and coordination role.

3.2.6 Another initiative currently being piloted is Local Area Agreements. This is, at its simplest, an inter-agency approach to the pooling of public sector funding to maximise benefit to all forms of service delivery. It is still early days and the current pilot projects are focusing on topics that do not relate well to the planning aspects that feature commonly in

Community Plans. However, the implications of possible pooling again hold out the potential of bringing public sector approaches more in line with the holistic view that most local communities take to their own needs and ideas.

3.2.7 All of the above could also be considered as 'ingredients' for a broader 'recipe' currently being developed and usually described as 'double devolution'. This will be the subject of a major set of proposals from the government, now expected in autumn 2006. Those proposals will outline a radical agenda not just for the restructuring of local government but also for the power balances within it. Most importantly, it is anticipated that the plans will require a rebalancing of power, control and budgets to shift more towards smaller communities – as in the earlier 'Why Neighbourhoods Matter' paper (see Appendix 6). Though aimed mainly – to date at least – at urban areas and urban communities, this approach is likely also to have significant implications for rural communities.

3.2.8 It should be pointed out however that, as of now, there is no intention by the government to introduce any significant devolution of planning powers.

## **4. KEY FINDINGS ON THE INTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY AND SPATIAL PLANNING**

4.1 This section divides the results on integration in two ways. First, between Parish Plans and MCTI projects. This is important because the two procedures have operated quite differently in some ways, especially in relation to the planning system. Secondly, between what happened a few years ago under the previous planning regime (when many Community Plans started) and what is happening now under the revised regime. Looking back to the previous regime is important because (a) it colours what many are doing under the new system (even if they have only just started) and (b) many projects which started under the previous regime have not yet reached fruition.

4.2 The results below need to be interpreted in light of the general finding that there is great variety in the level and practice of integration of community and spatial plans. In particular, some groups undertaking Community Plans chose to focus very little if at all on issues linked to the planning system. What is covered here relates principally to those plans where some type of link to planning was attempted or seen to be relevant (though the team also made a point of studying instances where this was not the case).

4.3 It is also important to be aware of why there is apparently more in the following text about Parish Plans than MCTI initiatives. This is the case for two reasons. First, (for reasons not elaborated here) the general literature, public debate, mentions in the journals etc. are all dominated almost 100% by material on Parish Plans. Secondly, market and coastal towns work has not had quite the sort of focus on integration into planning that has (whether rightly or wrongly) been the case with Parish Plans since they started.

### **4.4 Parish Plans under the Previous Planning Regime**

#### ***The Community Perspective***

4.4.1 Left to their own devices (ie. with no special programme or officer around to help) parish groups seemed to quite often 'miss' planning during the development stages, even if they had a specific development interest. The original guidance from the Countryside Agency (which most seemed to use) did not make clear the need to contact planning departments early, or make clear the scope of what planning can and cannot achieve in the Parish Plan context.

4.4.2 Many Plans emerged from some form of local 'survey' undertaken through a questionnaire. Some questionnaires contained, from a planning perspective, worrying and inappropriate questions with the result that emerging material from such surveys proved difficult for planners to value. (This is in part a result of the loss of access to the earlier and much more carefully managed 'Parish Appraisal' process and methodology developed at Cheltenham and Gloucester College.) Though there was some evidence of over-reliance on the traditional survey/questionnaire approach, this is probably partly based on assumptions about the type of strictly quantitative information that groups imagined would be of most value to planners.

4.4.3 At the same time, some parish groups followed the Countryside Agency guidance and used or developed exciting and innovative methods of community involvement, through road shows, fairs and active events. Some of this, especially that emerging from the long tradition of community action, is well ahead of general practice by many local planners. Practice in terms of accessing so-called 'hard to reach' groups seemed to vary considerably. The most commonly targeted of such groups was young people.

4.4.4 Some Parish Plans appeared to be little more than the results of the parish appraisal turned into an action plan. Little work seemed to have been put in to test feasibility, set priorities, seek possible funding etc. for the proposed actions. Overall there was often a feeling that, having produced the Parish Plan, that was the end. It appeared to surprise many groups when they had to look ahead to implementation or when others (including their own Parish Council) did not take on the task of delivering the action plan.

4.4.5 There appeared to be a widespread lack of understanding among Parish Plan groups of the relationships between implementation of their plans and the planning system – for example in relation to planning applications and the use of S106 monies. Monitoring of progress with action plans was not always taken forward. This was surprising given the long tradition of Parish Council involvement in development control issues.

### ***The Planning Perspective and Support to Communities***

4.4.6 The general attitude of planning departments (rather than individual planners) to Community Plans was highly variable. Though it is unlikely that any teams would say so publicly, some were clearly quite resistant to parishes even doing plans, some offered grudging support but would never even consider any form of adoption or use of plan results, and some simply ignored what was going on. Others were more reactive but positive and a few made special and very positive efforts to encourage Parish Plans.

4.4.7 Community planning was generally poorly recognised and under-valued by many senior planning officers and some elected members. This appeared to be because it was seen to cut across or erode their professional or democratic positions, sometimes because of assumed financial implications. For some senior officers and members, there had also been a history of conflicts created (inevitably, as they saw it) by opening up to more community input into what were seen as technical or political processes.

4.4.8 The picture was more encouraging in terms of individual planners or small teams, especially at middle or more junior levels. Some were highly motivated and community-oriented and were enabling some excellent work. Even within generally unsupportive authorities, motivated individuals were either managing to achieve some local action or were trying to do so.

4.4.9 Beyond those actively engaged on a regular basis with parish plan work, few planners appeared to know of, to have seen or read either the Countryside Agency guidance or that specifically on integration with planning. It therefore seems almost inevitable that, without receiving guidance to contact planners, many plans simply arrived on the planner's desk when complete. It is probably then inevitable that such plans were often seen by planners as no more than 'wish lists'. This is not so much a reflection on aspirational plans as such (which may well be a good thing or a key stage to go through) as on the perceived limited ability of planning to deal with the non land use issues addressed.

4.4.10 Those authorities providing good support usually saw the key to be the establishment of early dialogue. Supportive LPAs helped with surveys and with moving from survey results to appropriate (and appropriately aspirational) action plans. They also helped with links to other relevant departments, and a few authorities (not necessarily the LPA) provided financial support. Such supportive authorities also worked well with their local RCC. RCC staff support was good in terms of community development but less good in relation to the demands of planning. Despite all of this, many parish groups seemed to take a 'go it alone' approach, not learning from others who've been through it – even their adjacent parishes.

4.4.11 One other key link that often seemed poorly explored and developed was with highways authorities, despite the fact that traffic and transport issues were often (as other studies have shown - see Appendix 7) the most important for communities. The team is

generally aware of very few examples of good (sometimes any) community engagement in Transport Strategies and Local Transport Plans, although Cornwall introduced some relevant good practice by linking their LTP work into local level action and projects via community representatives. This is clearly an important missed opportunity both for the relevant professionals and for local communities, especially Parish Plan groups.

4.4.12 In some instances, a past record of tension between District and Parish Councils (eg. because the Parish did not feel supported by District decisions) did not help the development of good working relationships.

### ***'Adoption' into the Formal Planning System***

4.4.13 Parish Plan work initiated via a development issue was more likely to have links with planning and the group more likely to consider some type of formal 'adoption' of their Plan into the planning system. This was not always the case; the exceptions seeming to be where a particular local group member was either knowledgeable or enthusiastic about planning. This was the same where groups emerged from or were linked closely to the Parish Council, because of their planning related role. The 'development issue' could be strategic (eg. concerns about the level of development pressure locally) or more localised (eg. a wish to see a particular development built; for example a community building).

4.4.14 Many groups, especially those with a strong planning interest, clearly believed that it was only through formal adoption as SPG that their Plan could gain any real influence and status – perhaps as a result of long term parish level experience of planning issues. It is not, however, entirely clear where this belief came from, although it is mentioned specifically in the Rural White Paper 2000 and could be said to be implicit in the Countryside Agency guidance. It appears that many groups made links between their Parish Plan and a Village Design Statement, and VDSs have a long-standing and positive record of formal adoption as SPG.

4.4.15 The idea of adoption into planning probably also reflects a feeling that no other obvious (and robust) route was available; ('adoption' into a Community Strategy is currently meaningless). At the same time, local groups often seemed to have little knowledge of what 'adoption' might mean. The fact that this was not necessarily improved after contacting planners is quite worrying!

4.4.16 If a group produced a Parish Plan and it was not then formally adopted or incorporated into the planning system in any way, there was sometimes a tendency to believe that that was the end and there was nothing they could do with their Plan. Equally, if a Plan was adopted (or used by planning in some other way) the group then often seemed to think that all they needed to do was to sit back and wait for the planners (or whoever) to act on it.

4.4.17 As a result of the pattern above, and when there were no discussions with planners etc., the general pitch of Parish Plans tended to reflect a conflict-based approach, with local people reacting against what they saw as top-down imposition. (This was of course almost self-fulfilling.)

## ***4.5 Parish Plans under the Current Planning Regime***

4.5.1 In many ways, what is happening since the planning changes is little different to what is described above. This section therefore focuses mainly on those aspects that have changed, or have not but perhaps should have done.

## ***The Community Perspective***

4.5.2 From the community perspective, many groups appear to have gone on as before. The revised guidance from the Countryside Agency did encourage planner contact and where this was known about and used there was more likely to be positive contact with LPAs. However, the message tends to have got lost in the welter of detail. In some instances community groups decided not to initiate contact with planning departments for fear of being too marshalled and shaped by the planners' views. It was never clear to the team how, if at all, the grant aid conditions either required or suggested certain key actions or tasks to parish planning work – for example contacting the planners.

4.5.3 As things were changing within planning so were they in relation to the management of support for Parish Plans. As changes were being planned for the Countryside Agency, management shifted to Defra which, for many people, was positively received.

4.5.4 There are few if any signs that new groups just starting are being better prepared for the new system. Parish Plan groups on the whole, given their dependence on volunteers, face big capacity constraints. In addition, even where they are more prepared and are trying to engage with planning, they find it hard to synchronise their Parish Plan work with the timescale required for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks.

4.5.5 The additional possibilities of a more community-friendly, holistic approach offered by a more 'spatial' system do not seem to have got across to parish groups (or some RCCs). Where this was beginning to be understood it was sometimes a source of considerable frustration to community plan groups who see the LPA as unsupportive of many of the broader policies and actions they wish to promote (eg. on the protection of community cohesion, local property values and amenities).

4.5.6 There is still a considerable lack of attention paid by community plan groups to the relationships between implementation of their plans and the planning system. In particular, there is generally a poor appreciation of the limitations on the planning system to deliver affordable housing without permitting more market housing and to engineer social conditions. In addition, there is poor appreciation of how the planning system can enable community projects via S106 planning obligations.

4.5.7 The community involvement commitments of the new system have led many community plan groups to believe that Parish Plans ought to be even more likely than before to gain planner support, perhaps more likely to be adopted. At the same time, there is now a greater concern than before about top-down imposition – notably because of the RSS. These two points appear to local people to be contradictory – ie. apparently more control over things that matter less and less.

4.5.8 The role of Parish Councils remains uncertain. It is often the Parish Council members – as in the Countryside Agency guidance - who press 'others' to develop Parish Plans and yet it is the Parish Council that has most direct input to the planning system and should be having even more under the current regime. The balance between an 'independent' process happening away from the Parish Council and linking to it to ensure formal support is a challenge for all, and no clear pattern emerged.

4.5.9 Only a few groups mentioned having input to their LPA's Statement of Community Involvement. The fact that this was not common may have been because such input was not usefully encouraged. To balance this, some SCIs mentioned Parish Plans, even though there had perhaps not been any explicit consultation with local groups. This shows a worrying failure to link things up, mainly by planners, because the introduction of Community Plan issues into an SCI could strengthen both the SCI and Community Plans.

4.5.10 The issue of how Community Plans might link to, indeed how they might have any value at all in the context of, Regional Spatial Strategies also kept reappearing in discussions of response to the new system. The point about Community Plans having no value is argued particularly strongly in relation to housing numbers and broad allocation locations, notably towards the larger cities and towns. Many in rural communities see this as doubly challenging and worrying; it limits the ability of small towns and villages to provide the appropriate balance of local (especially affordable), housing, employment and facilities and, in so doing, affects the continued survival of those towns and villages as vital, active and self-sufficient communities. Those involved in RSS work would question this assumption but it is very widespread so, if not the case, that needs to be explained.

4.5.11 All of the above has to be balanced against the fact that there is an enormous amount of very positive and entirely valid variation in practice between parish planning groups in terms of their level of ambition, their subject focus, the range of issues being addressed, their time horizons, their work with adjacent communities (or not), their links to planning and their emphasis on plan and actions. In many cases this seems to be highly appropriate. However, in other situations it appears that the approaches taken have been the result of poorly thought-through decisions or knee-jerk reactions to issues of the moment or the agendas of particular people.

### ***The Planning Perspective and Support to Communities***

4.5.12 Parish Plans – and support for them in general – are mentioned in a number of Local Development Schemes (LDS). However, the pattern seems to reflect those planning departments which were supportive previously. It may nonetheless be the case that, even though an LDS does not mention Parish Plans, the local authority – and the planners – may support this and there may be quite a lot actually happening; (though the team did not hear of such examples directly).

4.5.13 Although community development or regeneration staff appear to still be encouraging specific communities to do Parish Plans, the team heard of only one example of an LPA doing this; (though some still promote Village Design Statements to specific communities because of obvious links to development issues).

4.5.14 The required shift to a spatial approach does not seem to have got through to many planners in terms of the link to Community Plans, the necessary changes in policy development, the link to wider engagement or the production of material robust enough to influence development control decisions. In general, planning departments – especially those in development control - still feel under considerable pressure to stick with tried and tested approaches to the ‘material considerations’ that they can apply to development issues in Parish Plans, and the weight that they argue must be given to national planning policy. They still fear legal challenge if they go beyond traditional land use/built environment matters and nationally imposed planning concerns. They believe that the Planning Inspectorate and the Courts would be unlikely to support them if they moved too far, with the possibility (even probability) of significant financial risks to the local authority if they adopt what they see as a radical approach.

4.5.15 As a result, some planning authorities are withdrawing or reducing their support for Community Plans because of resource pressures on them and because of a concern about what they judge to be the onerous and as yet unclear demands of the new system. Several planners stated quite simply that their main current focus is the RSS and other things must wait. Others made it clear that their withdrawal from such active support was not a result of a lack of commitment but came because they did not wish to raise expectations to which they could not reasonably respond.

4.5.16 Within this general picture it appears that some planners use the inevitably considerable variation of approach between parish plan groups as a reason not to engage or to reject outcomes, even if better supported through community involvement than many of their own policies and practices.

4.5.17 Support still seems to be available, if on a very ad hoc basis, via local authority officers based in departments other than planning. These are typically those involved in rural regeneration. In some authorities restructuring has placed such people in a single department with the policy planners and support for community planning appears to be stronger in such situations (if with a possible new gap created between planning policy and development control).

4.5.18 The role of County Councils currently seems uncertain. They have lost almost all planning powers but have significant involvement with core planning issues through their remit for transportation, minerals and waste. They also remain key service providers, for example in education. They are also often important because of the existence of County LSPs, likely to be given an increased role as the new generation of LSPs advances. At the same time, little emerged in the study that suggests a pattern to how County Councils are playing, or might play, their role in relation to community planning.

4.5.19 RCCs continue to be a key part of the support system for communities wishing to undertake Parish Plans, but the changes in the planning system have created an even larger gulf between what advice RCC staff can give and what is actually needed. Other support is however available and there has been, across the South West, a number of very valuable training and awareness raising events for parish groups and planners (separately and together) – for example, one specifically on “From Wish Lists to Action Plan” as part of a broader programme entitled “Moving Parish Projects Forward”, particularly developed in South Somerset and Cornwall, supported by the Countryside Agency.

### ***‘Adoption’ into the Formal Planning System***

4.5.20 For those aware of or considering the planning link, there remains a general feeling ‘out there’ that Parish Plans not only can be adopted in some way within the new system but also that they ought to be – ie. that this is what Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) status and greater community involvement are supposed to be about. That is also the feeling for a number of planners but they are only too aware of the mismatch between such aspirations and the demands of the SPD and Development Plan Document processes.

4.5.21 As a result, when good contact happens between a local planning authority (LPA) and a Parish Plan group, it appears that ‘adoption’ in the form of SPD as a key route is being played down by the planners. In one authority most groups are being steered towards producing only a VDS. This is because of the general demands of the SPD process – timescale, evidence requirements, the degree of comprehensiveness needed etc.

4.5.22 Most importantly, however, it is because SPD has to go through specific community involvement and a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process. The demands of the latter process in particular are annoying many (both community plan groups and planners) and actually putting some off or pressing them to stop – especially if they were well on their way and now have to backtrack (as they see it). SA in particular is a challenge and source of confusion for many planners, so they too feel cautious about opening up on this issue to others.

4.5.23 This applies to the technical aspects but also to the requirements for community involvement from which there is much to learn of benefit to planners. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is still uncertainty about the degree of rigour needed to produce an SA that can properly support an SPD. There is not seen yet to be clarity of advice from Government Offices and there is some highly varied practice across the region. (In a recent article by

Catherine Hughes – see Appendix 8 - she states that “*Across the South East many communities are currently being advised that community-produced guidance will not be eligible for SPD status, given the processes that such documents have to go through to be adopted*”.)

## **4.6 Good Practice**

4.6.1 There are, across the South West, a number of LPA areas where practice, either generally or in some specific cases, has managed to transcend the issues raised above. This is also in the context, as stated before, of a remarkable variety of approaches adopted by local groups and some distinctive ways of tackling community engagement. Good practice across an area in terms of securing effective integration appears, unsurprisingly, to be closely linked to the existence of a key local authority officer who acts as the link between the Parish Plan group and the rest of the planning department (and other departments) within the local authority, especially if that officer is a planner or is based within a planning department.

4.6.2 That was the case with Caradon District when Felicity Sylvester was based there on a Countryside Agency pilot project. Rather worryingly, that apparent authority commitment appears to have drifted since her pilot period ceased and she left, although the nearby North Cornwall District now operates a highly supportive set of procedures built in part on the earlier Caradon approach (and others may also do so). In both Caradon and now North Cornwall, Parish Plans have been and are being adopted as SPD and have been through a limited form of Sustainability Appraisal.

4.6.3 Stroud District Council used to operate a very valuable Forum for Parish Plan groups but that too is almost in abeyance while things settle in the new system. The approach taken by North Dorset District Council is continuing to operate well and is picked up in a later section because it is part of a broader community planning model. In Taunton Deane there is a valuable “Spatial Planning Working Group” that is tasked with joining up the Community Strategy and Local Development Framework approaches and involves Parish Plan representatives.

4.6.4 Beyond that, ad hoc good practice on specific examples appears to be linked to the existence of either someone in a local community who understands the new planning system or someone in the local authority, not always a planner, providing a personal push to support particular Parish Plans.

## **4.7 The MCTI under the Previous Planning Regime**

4.7.1 A key point to make at the start of this section is that it cannot be divided, as above, into a ‘Community’ then a ‘Planning’ perspective. Although, as will be seen, the links to planning have not been as important in MCTI work as in Parish Plan work, market town planning has been more recent and the imperative was to ensure a high level of rigour and (appropriate) professionalism, and there was pressure to ensure that local groups proactively engaged with outside groups and agencies from the very start. The ‘passing in the night’ that happens between Parish Plans groups and outside agencies was almost not possible in MCTI work (though exceptions were found), although the relationship between community aspirations and agency requirements remains a challenging issue.

4.7.2 The demands of the up-front qualifying process and follow-on requirements usually set things up for a more ‘professional’ approach from day one than with Parish Plans. However, as with Parish Plans the level of progress achieved (including with respect to the level of integration with planning) was very dependent on having a solid group of volunteers, with a dynamic chairperson and supportive ‘officers’.

4.7.3 Almost all MCTI projects seem to have involved paying some of the grant aid to outside professionals to support their planning processes (though the degree to which this had a spatial or even land use dimension differed). This apparently had varying success, and did not necessarily ensure links to key local authority departments. Where it took place, contact with local authority people seemed most usually to be with community or economic development staff (and beyond the local authority to groups such as the PCT), and not necessarily with planning departments, at least early on.

4.7.4 Some groups (perhaps most) simply saw the MCTI process as a way of accessing extra resources for favoured local community projects. Sometimes this was for providing extra funding for existing projects already in place and for which there were few planning implications (because no 'development' was involved), so again no contact with planning seemed necessary. Some groups only came into the process because they were attracted by the notion of the 'Brokering Table' and its apparent offer of drawing in additional and new resources. There was clear disappointment when this approach failed to deliver.

4.7.5 The MCTI 'Facilitators' played a crucial role. Processes were more effective if there was a single MCTI support officer throughout. However, knowledge and appreciation of the planning system and of planning issues seems to vary from staff member to staff member.

4.7.6 The emphasis on a thorough survey (the Healthcheck) and on a rigorous Action Plan (which must be developed with outside input) were key factors in ensuring a realistic and practically achievable set of outputs from MCTI projects. However, some MCTI projects chose not to take this route.

4.7.7 There was little or no pressure on MCTI groups, from Facilitators or others, or from planning departments (if they even knew about the projects), to seek adoption into the planning system of the 'Community Strategic Plans' produced in the early stages of MCTI projects. Links for MCTI projects were judged to be more important, if anything, to the LSP and the Community Strategy. In addition, some MCTI groups saw that work with planning departments was the responsibility of individual members or community groups rather than the steering group as a whole (eg. if particular groups were being supported for an individual project that would require planning permission).

4.7.8 Though not seeking blunt adoption of 'Plans' in the form of SPG, a number of MCTI projects seemed to have a reasonable track record of linking into planning in three other ways; to policy development, to the management of development applications and to the use of S106 monies. They also seemed to have a good track record of generating action on their priority projects. However, there were some big gaps.

## **4.8 *The MCTI under the Current Planning Regime***

4.8.1 In general, MCTI projects are set up to deal with both a market/coastal town and its catchment area or hinterland. This means working in association with surrounding parishes (and their Parish Councils). This is not always effective but ought to strengthen the role and legitimacy of MCTI projects in the formal planning context. That is not always achieved, however.

4.8.2 MCTI projects/groups seem to be - and certainly ought to be - generally better prepared for the new system than Parish Plan groups in terms of knowledge, links, networks, robustness and realism, though there are exceptions. However, too often (as with Parish Plan groups) they still appear to leave the dialogue with planners to a late stage, and planners have often not been particularly good at encouraging that dialogue.

4.8.3 On the whole there is still a big variation in the level of knowledge among Community Plan groups of the limitations of and opportunities provided by the planning system (eg. on

the boundaries of planning controls, the importance of development being plan-led, the role played by national policy, and the potential for use of S106 to help fund community projects). Moreover, even where they are more prepared, they find it hard to synchronise their Community Plan work with the timescale required for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. The need to ensure the LDF is consistent with the Community Strategy ought to be a trigger to better links but that does not yet appear to have been properly recognised or acted upon.

4.8.4 The recent MCTA guidance manual is good but some groups did not seem to use it. Though there is no explicit mention of contacting planning departments in the manual, most (but certainly not all) project teams seem to have contacted them anyway, in some way, or were encouraged to do so by others.

4.8.5 As with Parish Plans, few groups mentioned having any input to their LPA's Statement of Community Involvement.

4.8.6 Despite all of this, some MCTI groups still find it hard to understand what they see as the extremely complex organisational structures of District and County Councils, and find it difficult to navigate their way from one department to another. Moreover, they generally find little help available to do so. While inter-departmental working ('joined-up' planning) is always seen as important, the everyday reality of it makes the process of integration (with all departments, not just planning) extremely difficult.

4.8.7 In general (as with Parish Plans), planning departments still feel under considerable pressure to stick with tried and tested approaches to the 'material considerations' they can apply to development issues in MCTI Plans and the weight that must be given to national planning policy. They fear legal challenge and the probability of significant financial costs if they adopt a more radical approach.

4.8.8 By contrast, as MCTI work is often now linked into the planning agenda, all parties are more likely to see work such as that done on sites, potential Area Action Plans and Sustainability Appraisals as collaborative rather than just dumped on locals to do. However, there is little evidence as yet that better links to the new planning system will strengthen the ability of MCTI action plans to secure funding support for their projects, though the better MCTI projects are starting to see the potential of tapping into S106 monies.

4.8.9 Good MCTI projects can provide an extremely useful, if still initial, evidence base for LDF work. However, standards of evidence – and local planning authority acceptance of it – are highly variable. Moreover, that robustness does not yet appear to hold much sway against what are seen by local people to be the top-down dictates of the Regional Spatial Strategy. This may make MCTI groups even more frustrated than those doing Parish Plans because the MCTI groups have had their aspirations actually raised through their networking, public sector contacts etc.

4.8.10 As with Parish Plans, there is some concern from local communities about becoming too linked in to public sector systems and funding regimes. Some communities may become disengaged if they feel they are losing an appropriate level of control.

## **4.9 General Comments on Better Integration**

4.9.1 There are clearly many 'cultures' in operation with all forms of Community Plan. Among the most significant are:

- Different cultural ideas about the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches.
- Different ideas about the value of professional system ideas, information and priorities and those of many in local communities.

- Different attitudes to the benefits (or not) of more aspirational, 'blue sky' thinking.
- Different attitudes to the value of having a coherent overall plan as compared to focusing heavily on ad hoc actions and projects.
- Different ideas about the relative worth of staying broad and holistic even if that reduces the status of any resulting plan and the value of narrowing down to add the significant legal status that integration into planning can bring.

4.9.2 In general, spatial planners operate and think top-down and strategically (including reference to national and regional interests), see their role as mediating between the broader and the local interests (and that 'plans' are the best medium for this), think long term and plan-led, feel heavily constrained by democratic accountability, confidentiality requirements and the law (and fear of the cost of breaching it), think about controlling the initiatives of others, are development and delivery/feasibility orientated, and operate according to a long planning cycle.

4.9.3 Community planning groups, on the other hand, operate and think bottom-up and local, see their role as mediating between conflicting local concerns (and that 'dialogue' is the best medium for this), are funding and activity/project-led, are quick-hit and wish-list orientated, do not feel heavily bound by legal, confidentiality and democratic constraints, and have a shorter planning cycle.

4.9.4 If one can separate people from the specific circumstances and pressures of much of what is currently happening, there is clear and widespread recognition of the need for better integration of community and spatial planning. At the same time there are concerns, particularly among planners, about its potential to add to delays and to 'surface' rather than resolve conflict. Perceived advantages of better integration include:

- Community planning has the potential to improve the evidence base, content and deliverability of both community and spatial plans.
- It could reduce waste, frustration and delays in both community and spatial planning processes.
- It has the potential to ensure development is more sustainable and communities more empowered.
- It has the potential to provide a clear audit trail from the community to Local Development Frameworks and planning decisions.

4.9.5 A few caveats are noted:

- Integration needs to be secured in ways that are resource efficient and effective. It should not, for example, introduce another layer of bureaucracy but rather work within existing organisational arrangements as far as possible.
- It should not be at the expense of local groups being able to explore blue sky aspirational thinking before project and policy ideas become too hardened and finalised (mainly when issues of feasibility and deliverability become all important, to the exclusion of everything else).
- It needs to be conducted as a genuine and honest exercise; in particular both community groups and planners need to feel that it makes a difference, that it improves things. Doing it for its own sake is not good enough.

4.9.6 There is also perceived to be one particular matter of urgency in relation to integration. The resolution to the current tension between top-down pressures via the RSS and bottom-up pressures from Community Plans is widely seen to lie in the process of producing Local Development Frameworks, especially Core Strategies.

4.9.7 Core Strategies can and should build on a robust evidence base which can be generated in part from information provided in various local Community Plans. As of now, the

general view is that such evidence falls short of what is needed to produce a Core Strategy at District level that can shape and rebalance the broad policies of the RSS to better meet local priorities. If local voices are to be heard in the development of Core Strategies, better baseline information is needed – and needed **urgently**.

4.9.8 If this does not happen and the Core Strategies still end up top-down and overly determined by the RSS, community confidence in future Community Plans could well be seriously eroded and difficult to re-establish.

## 5. A WIDER FUTURE VISION FOR COMMUNITY PLANS

### 5.1 Why a “Wider Future Vision”?

5.1.1 The changes that flow from the planning reforms are clearly beginning to have an impact. In the team’s view the changes offer in principle as many opportunities as challenges for Community Plans, perhaps more. However, as of now, the general impression in relation to community planning is that how planners and others are currently coping with the changes is creating in practice far more challenges than opportunities. In particular, there is:

- uncertainty over the real meaning of ‘spatial’ planning;
- uncertainty about the meaning, methods and effects of Sustainability Appraisal;
- a heightened gap between policy (especially if more spatial) and development control;
- confusion (including among planners) about the sheer complexity of the new system;
- at best confusion, at worst real anger about the (perceived) top-down nature of the RSS;
- little clarity or focus in approaches to rural area planning;
- a lack of attention being given to strategic planning issues within the current LSP and LAA structures;
- a patent lack of time to support Community Plans or at least to give them enough priority to secure officer time;
- confusion about whether community involvement means any sort of power shift;
- a general stubborn lack of culture change amongst planners.

5.1.2 Better integration of community and spatial planning is widely regarded as beneficial – for both the planning function and community based groups. For improved integration to occur there needs to be, inter alia:

- Early and continuing, structured dialogue between community plan groups and planners (at District and County levels, and also to include others such as transport staff).
- Buy-in to integration at senior levels within national, regional and local planning authorities.
- Resources and protocols that enable and secure that dialogue, in ways that engage the participants efficiently and effectively - that give them, for example the capacity (including the knowledge and time) to engage with one another on a reasonably level footing.

5.1.3 In the short term we are also about to witness major changes (as outlined earlier) in terms of:

- A new generation of LSPs that is much more about collaboratively linking top-down to bottom-up, from regional to local.
- A shift to Sustainable Community Strategies which will require them to be more holistic, more long term and less parochial.
- The introduction of Local Area Agreements which have the potential to relate locally determined priorities to integrated funding streams.
- Some form of ‘double devolution’ down to ‘districts’ (or whatever they get called) and then down again to local level (neighbourhood/parish/town).

5.1.4 There is probably also the very beginnings of a more coherent approach to all aspects of rural planning, service delivery and innovative forms of governance.

5.1.5 The speculative model that follows is drawn mainly from an approach developed in North Dorset (see later for detail), elaborated by the study team on the basis of the results of this study.

## **5.2 A Possible Future Model**

5.2. This possible model for the future for Community Plans generically might be as follows. It is expressed in standard 'vision mode', ie. retrospectively, as a description of how things 'are' in the ideal future. In so doing the model inevitably makes assumptions that best practice in general is the norm and the best of the possible changes in LSPs, LAAs etc. have taken place. (Should they not do so, much of the model still stands but it would be less effective.)

*5.2.A. Community Strategies (at County and District level) have now become Sustainable Community Strategies. They are therefore more outward-looking (beyond conventional geographic and other boundaries), more comprehensive (covering all aspects of the sustainable development agenda) and longer term (looking perhaps 20 or more years ahead).*

*5.2.B Community Plans now have the potential to be seen as 'Local Sustainable Community Strategies'. This is however only a potential or an ambition; it is not a requirement, because there is still a need to ensure that local communities have the option to scope their Plan in a way that they determine for themselves.*

*5.2.C Community Plan groups are nevertheless encouraged to be more outward-looking and hence to negotiate between communities in any area to reach shared agreement. (The new guidance includes a form of 'agreement' to ensure this happens properly.) Greater attention is now paid to top-down and feasibility constraints, while still encouraging and celebrating the more blue sky, aspirational way of thinking. 'Between communities' means that town and related parishes often work together as in MCTI practice, although Community Plans are still being done at parish level (and still being called 'Parish Plans'). Equally, groups of parishes are more often coming together to produce overall Community Plans. This also means that the now revitalised LSP has the responsibility for looking at the balance of Community Plan aspirations across a district.*

*5.2.D In this context there is now more of a spectrum of approaches between what used to be called Parish Plans and MCTI projects; ie. more variations as locally appropriate, not just two different models; (although the 'old' names are still being used to provide continuity). There is even a role for sub-local 'plans' to address specific issues, often around proposals for specific developments. The key change was to develop a framework of support that did not just allow for appropriate local variations but actively sought to promote them.*

*5.2.E There are now still examples of communities taking the option of choosing to develop their Community Plans outside this general system; (though they now genuinely choose rather than choosing by default as happened in the past). This is seen by some as essential because they wish to genuinely make their own points in their own way. Not linking in to the formal approach does not necessarily mean that such groups are excluded from accessing project funds, neither does it mean that their views are necessarily of less value within the planning system (if soundly based). In this way community groups can choose to focus on particular issues (and so deliberately not be comprehensive). They may also choose to work on short term matters as against taking the long term approach being followed by LSPs and their Sustainable Community Strategies. On the other hand, they cannot choose merely to be parochial.*

*5.2.F As LSPs have started to take on the new roles suggested in the 2005 consultation paper, they have become the key bodies to promote, support and respond to Community Plans. This has required appropriate and timely support and input from planners; it is no longer an option and is now properly planned and managed. In addition, positive involvement with community planning is part of Corporate Performance Assessment. Procedures as a*

whole are now a form of Quality Assurance to ensure appropriate standards, and training via bodies such as MCTA and SWAN is available to ensure this.

5.2.G Any Community Plan group seeking funding for its work follows a procedure, much as with MCTI projects, to show that it will be done 'properly' as above. Funding is also more likely to be awarded if it can be shown that the LSP will help to provide appropriate support; (though funding is not linked directly to the LSP). Funding for Community Plans is managed via the LSP/LAA (with input from key voluntary sector agencies much as used to happen in Rural Action) in a way that enables the pooling of all possible funds, including that via Defra. That has succeeded in diversifying funding sources.

5.2.H Rural Community Councils are continuing to be the agents managing the grant aid process and have ensured that their staff have developed better awareness/knowledge of and contacts within LSPs and planning (and links to those who know more).

5.2.I 'Local Enablers' – taking different forms in different areas – are now the crucial people for helping to advance Community Plans in any area. They are involved from 'day one' of any Community Plan and have to understand, communicate and help to make happen the links and connections between all parts of 'the system'. They also have the skills to steer the community planning group to the best possible set of people, policies, funds etc. Good knowledge of planning is important for enablers (and in some places the enablers are Planning Aid officers) although an enabler does not need to be a planner.

5.2.J It is the 'day one' meeting (or meetings) that helps to set the community planning group off in the best possible direction; be that linked closely to planning or not, heavily service delivery oriented or project oriented, within the formal system or outside. That can be reviewed as necessary but it ensures that a group is making conscious choices at the right time all through the process.

6.2.K The enablers (operating at District level) work closely with a new breed of LSP Coordinators and have a locally appropriate level of seniority or access/influence. This is important because, to succeed at all, an enabler needs to be able to secure time, information and resources from other professionals and also work to change cultures and 'break down silo boundaries' of professions, departments and agencies (eg. with the PCT or Police). Enablers play a key part in building capacity to support community planning within all areas of the public sector, so are tasked with promoting community planning generally, not just supporting specific plans. They are supported in this by the LSPs.

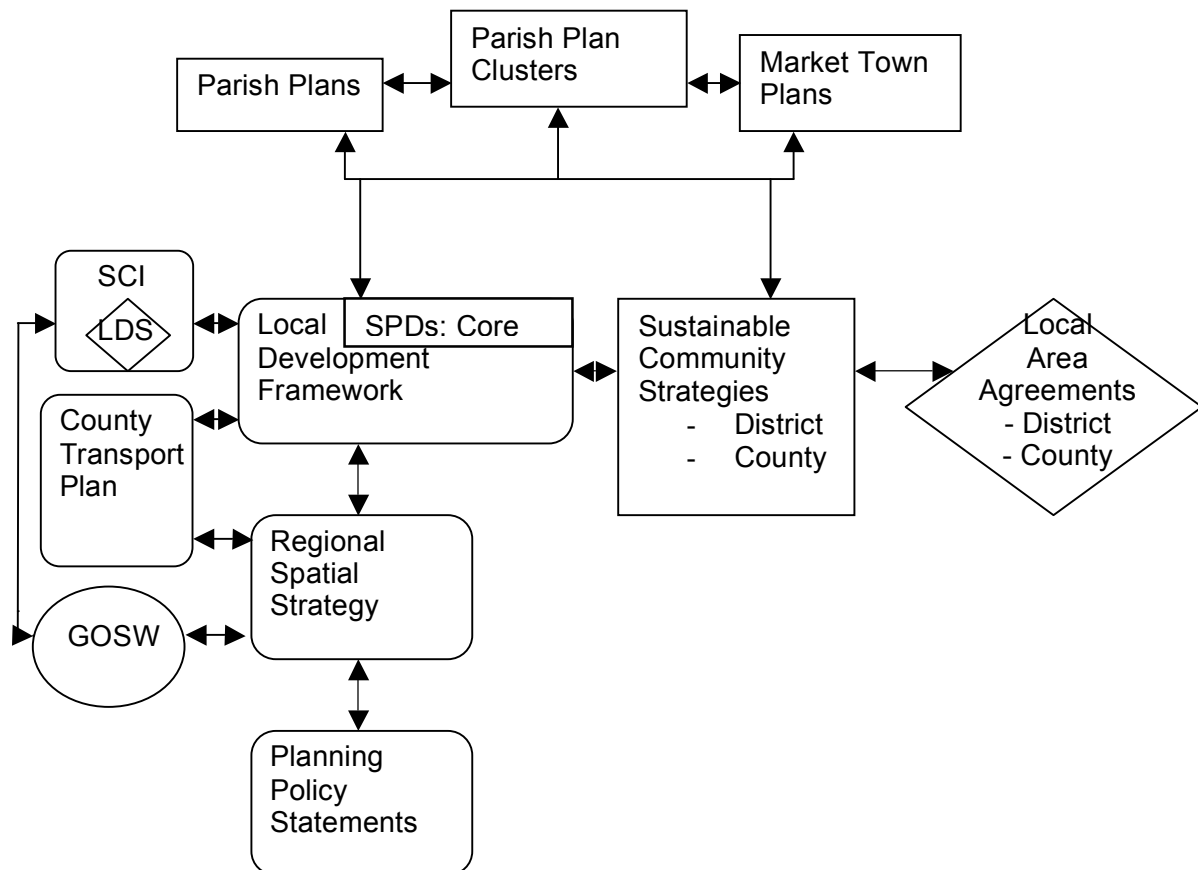
5.2.L Formal adoption of a whole Community Plan into the planning system as SPD has now become an exception. However, appropriate aspects of what emerges within a Community Plan are regularly being lodged in the LPA's Core Strategy (which is entirely consistent with and links into the Sustainable Community Strategy), other policies, possible AAPs, relevant SPDs (eg. as a Village Design Statement), development control policies and practice and S106 distribution (or policy). In general, the information and evidence produced by this new generation of Community Plans is noticeably more robust in terms of influencing all public policy, including planning. This is partly because the enablers also have access to resources that make it possible for them to aggregate the results of Community Plans across a whole area and champion them with key agencies. The evidence collected as part of the Community Plan process, as well as key principles of the process itself, is strongly determined by a Concordat and more detailed Protocols mutually agreed between community planning groups, LSPs, LPAs and key voluntary sector agencies.

5.2.M Community Plans have learnt from the best MCTI practice and now develop sharp Action Plans that have links into LAA-based local funding mechanisms. Those Action Plans contain a very wide mixture of 'projects' able to be implemented at various scales, by various people in various ways. The Action Plans are also regularly monitored, reviewed and, if

necessary, changed. The increased momentum created by close working relationships has successfully enlarged the pool of available funding; it is no longer just a matter of doing more with less.

5.2.N Community Plans are also specifying how the local community expects (within the frame of the SCI) to be involved in projects being planned in its area by developers or even the local authority.

5.2.O Key aspects of this alternative approach are captured in the following diagram:



### 5.3 An Example to Draw From

5.3.1 The nearest thing the project team knows to this future model is what has emerged from the Shaftesbury case study. This is underway (and still developing) in North Dorset. In brief, this works as follows:

- North Dorset District Council operate their own ‘Community Planning Model’ (which looks likely to be developed further at County level).
- They do not have a single LSP; they operate across four Community Planning areas.
- Within each area, based on market towns, the Community Plans are produced in partnerships built up from Parish Plans then Town/Area Plans (one of which is an MCTI project).
- These are heavily mediated, provide a robust evidence-base and hence have sound and realistic action plans with projects that may need funding.
- The Community Plan areas are all represented on the County LSP. (At present this causes a problem because as yet they still only get one vote!)

- Their sound base has secured more LSP funding for North Dorset initiatives than for any other district.
- North Dorset District Council is also now setting up an arms-length regeneration body that is already pooling an agreed proportion of funding from organisations such as Objective 2, Pathfinder, Rural Renaissance, HLF and LSP – in part via the LAA (for which they are a pilot).
- As of now it has to be said that they are not entirely happy with the democracy of the decision-making within the new organisation, but feel that what is going in by way of priorities is genuinely reflected in what is coming out in terms of value-added delivery.
- The North Dorset LDF is already using, for its Core Strategy, much of the information base from the four areas, the people, networks etc. – and apparently very productively; (if within what they judge to be a currently uncomfortable RSS housing allocation assumption).

## **6. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING INTEGRATION**

6.1 The earlier section about the changing context made clear the team's view that the recent, current and forthcoming changes are likely to demand a significant change to the general scope and pattern of Community Plans, to their funding, procedures, and especially their links to the planning system. On that basis it might seem inappropriate to include a section on improving integration merely with planning. Nevertheless, the new approach described later may not be widely supported and it will take time to put in place. In the meantime, and even regardless of the more major changes, much can valuably be done to improve practice in integrating Community Plans into the formal planning system. Taking on board what follows would not only generate improvements in the short term, it would have value even within a changed context. This is a challenging list and it is unlikely that all initiatives could be put in place at one time.

6.2 The text in this section describes what the authors believe should happen to improve integration with planning. Appendix 5 is a chart outlining suggested responsibilities, funding sources and timescales.

6.3 It is also important to point out that, in the team's view, **no policy changes are strictly necessary** to enable any of what follows to be implemented successfully.

### **6.4 Clarification of Planning Procedures and Requirements**

6.4.1 We include within this the production, as a matter of urgency, of information and guidance to planners and communities about:

- The final status of Regional Spatial Strategies and the approach necessary to amend or fine-tune RSS policies to meet robustly evidence-based community aspirations within Community Plans.
- The role that good Community Plans can play in the development of LDF Core Strategies.
- How evidence bases are best constructed to achieve this.
- The scope for communities or parishes to act together to help produce 'Rural Area Action Plans' for areas subject to – or perhaps lacking but needing - development pressure.
- The specific procedures for Community Plans that may become, if only in part, SPD.
- The meaning of 'spatial' in the context of typical Community Plan coverage, building on work already done by the Planning Officers' Society (POS).
- The status of Community Plan conclusions and proposals as 'material considerations' in development control decisions and how the planning system can enable community projects via S106 planning obligations (another issue addressed recently by POS).

6.4.2 The latter point is especially important and a source of much current uncertainty. Clarity on whether the following may, in appropriate circumstances, constitute valid material considerations in deciding planning applications would be particularly helpful:

- Whether there would be sufficient police officers locally to ensure adequate security for residents.
- Whether a proposed development would lead to a loss of community feeling (eg. as a result of increasing the size of the settlement).
- Whether there would be sufficient revenue to ensure the proper maintenance of local parks consequent upon the increased use resulting from the proposed development.
- Possible loss of local shops as a result of permitting supermarket proposals.
- The effect of the proposed development on neighbouring property values.

## **6.5 Developing a ‘Community-Friendly’ Sustainability Appraisal Methodology**

6.5.1 This could be part of the above but is listed separately because it is extremely important and involves the development of original material. Clearly, any community moving towards SPD status for any plan or part of it will need to liaise extremely carefully with the local planning authority to agree the scope and ‘soundness’ of any SA that is being produced.

6.5.2 The approach to be taken will clearly need to be one of partnership because the technical and procedural demands of SA work are so considerable. It is likely that, in most cases, the SA work will remain the prime responsibility of the LPA to control and manage, yet local communities can, and should be encouraged to, play a major role in the actual survey work. Though challenging for both parties, this would also be a major and valuable learning experience.

6.5.3 The team consider that agreement could be reached on the scope and format of SA work that could be undertaken jointly by an LPA and a community to support community plan outputs. (The Planning Inspectorate’s view is understood to be that SA work for a Community Plan needs to be “proportionate and appropriate”, not elaborate and comprehensive.) That will require new material and guidance (and perhaps a specific mention in any Protocols). However the production of detailed approaches and methods does not need to be entirely new. There is already considerable proven experience from community environmental auditing from the time of Local Agenda 21 and longer term experience from communities working to produce Village Design Statement material within the frame set down clearly by the Countryside Agency (and based on guidance from Planning Inspectors).

6.5.4 We mention VDSs here because we are concerned about the implications of the separation of Parish Plans (now with Defra), from Design Statements (going with Natural England). Any SA guidance would need to be common to both procedures and hence supported by both agencies.

6.5.5 There is an important proviso, however. If reasonable agreement cannot be reached about the practical viability of a partnership approach to SA work then this should be made extremely clear to all – especially communities – and they should be advised from the start not to attempt formal adoption.

## **6.6 Creative Approaches to Community Involvement in Community Planning**

6.6.1 A reasonable number of local community groups, and a few planning authorities, do not need any advice on planning and undertaking creative community involvement. However the general level of practice remains poor, there is much that could be learned by sharing good practice between planners and community groups and the next wave of Community Plans will undoubtedly need to be developed around a much stronger baseline of good but also creative practice.

6.6.2 An engaging, challenging yet practical guide to community involvement for Community Plans would be of considerable value (and would also be of benefit to planners generally). No new ‘research’ work is needed for processes, requirements, methods etc. but some original thinking will be needed to ensure that the guide is sharp and topical in terms of ensuring that the approaches suggested meet all current and emerging standards. In this

context it is important to note that the next wave of SCIs is likely to be for Sustainable Community Strategies as well as LDFs so quality criteria for engagement will apply to Community Plans in both contexts.

## **6.7 Promotion of and Support for an ‘Enabler’ Role**

6.7.1 All planning departments in the South West could aim to have one person whose role it is to act as a contact point for all Community Plans. Those people could receive initial training and be ‘networked’ with forms of mentoring and shadowing support between authorities to build shared capacity – though it is important for such a post to be relatively senior in order to carry the necessary weight to effect the required degree of coordination. Part of this role could also be supported via Planning Aid (especially in disadvantaged communities).

## **6.8 Production of Guidance Materials**

6.8.1 We are aware that a group of RCCs in the South East are currently working to produce some next generation guidance on Parish Plans, mainly for local groups. The Derbyshire RCC has just commissioned a study very similar to this one (though with the specific aim of generating guidance) and officers at Defra are about to start work on updating the earlier Countryside Agency guidance. There is no doubt more underway in different regions so a short, sharp exercise needs to be conducted to ‘map’, more fully than this project was able to do, what is available and planned around the country in terms of guidance on all forms of Community Plan. The links with planning need to be made very explicit in such guidance.

6.8.2 If further guidance on integration is necessary following the study above (eg. about integration, surveys etc.), it may well be no more than an assembly of guidance from all the existing sources. Whatever is produced should certainly be common to both Parish Plans and MCTI projects and should be produced as generic national material from which specific local groups and agencies – MCTA, SWAN, an individual RCC, SWRTPI etc. – could produce their own specifically targeted versions.

6.8.3 For South West material specifically, this would be a series of separate pamphlets, guides, leaflets, website material etc. aimed at specific groups – LPAs, MCTI groups, Parish Plan Groups, RCCs etc. Where possible this would not be entirely new materials but updates for existing guides – eg. that for MCTI groups – and it would be important to ensure a basic level of consistency, whoever produces each resource, especially on aspects of grant aid..

6.8.4 There is also, we understand, work underway to produce a ‘toolkit’ for LSP officers (and perhaps planners) on how to do an aggregated audit of developing Community Plans at an early stage to highlight (then act on) issues/actions with LSP and LDF implications. This could become a crucial mechanism for ensuring the integration of Community Plans with Spatial Plans. Such an Audit would highlight issues/actions noted in emerging Community Plans that have spatial planning implications, and in particular any conflicts and overlaps between the issues/actions noted in emerging Community Plans and those in (current and emerging) Spatial Plans (i.e. Local Development Documents). The Audit could then recommend actions needed to resolve any differences. The Forest of Dean District are already working on something similar so, as with general guidance above, some action is needed to check for other related initiatives across the country and to produce a single (if locally adaptable) model.

## **6.9 Awareness Raising**

6.9.1 The project results highlight a need to raise awareness amongst local communities, planners, local authorities as a whole, LSPs, consultant professionals and support agencies such as RCCs, (perhaps also developers). This can and should be achieved in a medley of ways. Some might best be traditional – short leaflets etc., some can be specifically targeted – briefings for planners, some can and should be more creative – eg, using the web or DVDs (as one member of this team has done very successfully with an earlier Local Plan).

6.9.2 There is also value in awareness-raising events (different to those for ‘training’ that follow below). Conferences and road-shows have their place. In particular the team suggest a Regional Conference that brings different groups together to discuss the meaning and implications of spatial planning, the link through to development control and specifically ‘material considerations’, and the future use of S106.

6.9.3 There is also benefit to be drawn from continuing to collect, write up and disseminate examples of good practice.

## **6.10 Education and Training**

6.10.1 As far as this project team is aware, there are only one or two planning schools in the UK that currently teach much at all about community planning (which is semi-optional) or community involvement (although it is now a statutory requirement). This is chilling. There is one leading school of planning in the South West where an exciting initiative could be developed to engage planning students with real life community planning projects for mutual benefit. If well received it could be promoted nationally

6.10.2 There is also a need for CPD training for planners around community planning and related aspects (eg. development economics and creative approaches to S106), especially in ways that bring planners together with RCC staff and MCTI facilitators to examine the full use of the new system in community planning settings.

6.10.3 Training for local communities is of course always needed but more difficult to deliver; (it could perhaps be linked to grant aid in the future). The team is keen to see programmes which are more than a parade of speakers for a day. The team is aware of some examples of effective training for community planning groups formerly funded by The Countryside Agency SW Vital Villages Team. In South Somerset and Cornwall in particular the ‘Moving Parish Projects Forward’ training programme was successfully developed in partnership with local officers. South West Planning Aid also collaborated to design a training day to raise the awareness among community planning groups of how to effectively work with in the new planning system. These courses could be adapted, updated and rolled out across the region. Both these projects also included a capacity building element: the professional trainer worked alongside local community development officers and/or Planning Aid officers so that they could eventually deliver the training on their patch according to demand.

6.10.4 A different form of support (which also serves to take the load off simply appointing people) would be to promote the further development across the region of Local Facilitator Networks – perhaps aiming for one per district. The networks would need to have memberships far wider than those at present (which are internal to local authorities) and we would also suggest a) linking into the existing network of MCTI facilitators, b) linking in to Planning Aid and c) ensuring at least one person in each district is from the planning department.

## **6.11 Developing Protocols and Securing Key Party Sign-up**

6.11.1 The idea of Protocols is gathering momentum as a way of securing high profile, in advance sign-up of key parties to an agreed set of principles and procedures (and, to some extent, resourcing). The South West can already claim a lead in this area of work with the 'Protocols for Community Engagement in Wind Power Projects' which are now being used as a model across the whole of the UK, with support from DCLG (planning) in England.

6.11.2 In a way some aspects of Protocols already exist within the 'Tests of Soundness' for Local Development Documents (and the SCI). The wind protocols team has ensured that its documents complement rather than repeat or contradict anything in the SCI tests, which suggests that it would be possible to develop protocols – eg. about the production of genuinely useful evidence base information – that could put in place coherent, area-wide approaches to community planning that root it properly into LDFs.

6.11.3 A slightly different form of protocol – most commonly termed a 'Concordat' – could also be used, separately or together with the protocols, to secure a broad, higher level, in-principle commitment in principle from key parties to support community planning.

## **7. ACTIONS TO ENABLE THE VISION**

7.1 The 'Future Vision' for Community Plans is not about inventing something entirely afresh; it is focused on what appears to be a natural and perhaps inevitable response to changes which are already happening or very likely to happen. But, in total, these changes suggest a need for far more than some simple clarification and fine-tuning of the existing or forthcoming system. Moreover, they are far-reaching and challenging, requiring a change in attitude and 'culture' more than in procedures and methods (many of which, from Parish Plans and MCTI projects, are robust).

7.2 The approach outlined is indeed a 'Vision' and there are many things beyond Community Plans that would need to be put in place before one could even create the context for this vision to operate successfully – notably the best of the changes implicit in ideas about double devolution, a new generation of LSPs etc. This section highlights a range of actions that could and should take place, specifically within and around community planning, to begin to deliver the culture and system change necessary to deliver the vision. As before, this agenda includes things that are national, not just those directly within the remit of this project's regional clients.

7.3 The list also includes different elements of the agenda outlined earlier in terms of improving integration – for example, training will be needed but it will be more and different to that suggested earlier. In addition, some of those actions outlined earlier would be essential precursors to put in place to begin to deliver this more challenging agenda. Also, as expressed earlier, it is the team's view that **no policy changes are necessary** to enable any of what follows to be implemented successfully.

7.4 As in the previous section, the text here describes what the authors believe should happen. The chart in Appendix 5 again outlines suggested responsibilities, funding sources and timescales.

### **7.5 Promotion of the Emerging Approach**

7.5.1 Because much of what we are suggesting in the future model is a straightforward response to emerging changes and the results from practice, it is possible but unlikely that the current team is the first to develop such ideas. It would be valuable to try to find out if others around the country have developed or are developing similar or alternative models. This needs to be established quickly.

7.5.2 As of now, one reason why most local planners do not give weight to community planning is because they believe that the DCLG does not value it. Whether directly or indirectly, this also knocks on to local communities who share the belief that DCLG has little interest in Community Plans. That may or may not be the case but it is such a widespread belief that it needs to be addressed.

7.5.3 As this project has proceeded an idea has taken shape for a 24 hour workshop/conference to bring together high level practitioners and policy makers to discuss, develop, agree and hopefully sign up to this emerging programme of work. In particular this would focus on securing support for the notion that community plans could become a form of Local Sustainable Community Strategy. This requires lobbying with the DCLG and Defra in particular but also Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities. This agenda would also be of interest to the Home Office.

## **7.6 Promotion of and Support for the 'Enabler' Role**

7.6.1 The 'enabler' is seen here as the person who is available to act as an intermediary, guide, adviser and network supporter for all involved in the Community Plan process – local people, planners, other local authority departments, the LSP, perhaps even developers. Their role would be, above all, to give advice to set off any plan process in the most appropriate direction by bringing key people together on 'day one'. Support would still be needed at other stages (especially if a key change of direction were needed) but their early involvement is crucial. The enabler could be based in one of several organisations or even be independent. This is perhaps the most important proposal of all because, with that in place, even if other things were still unresolved, enormous positive progress could be made.

7.6.2 It is valuable to note a recent initiative from the national Planning Aid body, in association with DCLG (LSP team), to encourage all authorities/LSPs to ensure that every area has some form of 'Community Champion', perhaps a local elected member or community activist, who can press for, promote, guide and support community planning – and that includes help with Community Plans. The South West group is now well placed to push that approach forward generally and put in place a demonstration initiative with 'champions' in perhaps one district per county. Those people could be specifically tasked with advancing practice on the next generation of Community Plans (though they are not the full time enablers that the team is suggesting are needed).

## **7.7 Promotion of a new breed of LSP Coordinators**

7.7.1 This is complementary to the development of a network of enablers. The Local Strategic Partnerships Consultation Paper talks about "*LSPs better able to support neighbourhood engagement and to help ensure the views of neighbourhoods and parish councils can influence strategic local service deliver and spending.*"

7.7.2 If they are to do this, and address the many other challenges raised in the paper, the next generation of LSP Coordinators will have quite different and far more senior and proactive roles than those doing the job at present. As part of next stage work on LSPs, this needs to be considered carefully as the roles of Coordinators are elaborated. Having such people in place could make a significant difference to the effectiveness of the enablers - and vice-versa.

## **7.8 Production of Guidance Materials, Awareness Raising, Education and Training**

7.8.1 These headings were introduced in the earlier section and more and different work would be needed on each as the new approach developed. With one exception, it is premature to describe specific activities.

7.8.2 Making real progress in democratic renewal needs to start in schools through more creative approaches to 'Citizenship'. As the government agenda for devolution to neighbourhoods (and hence parishes and market towns) moves forward it seems self-evident that this offers an unmissable opportunity to engage young people directly with the process as a means of 'teaching' citizenship in a totally real-life context. Good Parish Plans and MCTI projects have worked in related ways with schools so offer the beginnings of a useful model for this. Could that be advanced further with a specific initiative?

## **7.9 Funding Sources for Community Plans**

7.9.1 Within the coherent model of Community Plans as proposed, the existing distinctions between Parish Plans and MCTI Strategic Community Plans would probably cease as more linked and hybrid versions are encouraged to develop. In that context, the funding regimes from central or regional sources should probably also be integrated. The North Dorset model offers one example of how that might be managed and has the added value of enabling planned access to additional funds beyond those used most commonly to date (such as those from Defra for Parish Plans). In this context that means that the funds currently managed by Defra would be devolved to local LAA related groups.

7.9.2 The team suggests a pilot approach in the South West that a) draws in the funding currently available for Community Plan in Dorset into the North Dorset model's pooling regime (with the RCC/MCTA as managing agents if appropriate) and b) tries out 2/3 more pooling and funding management approaches in different areas. If started, our suggested 'conditions' for grant allocation (eg. pre-agreement with a local authority including planners) should apply. (The West of England currently operates a form of pooling through its Panel; a model that can be compared with what used to happen to deliver Rural Action grant aid.)

7.9.3 Planning Delivery Grant continues to be an important source of funding for planning departments (though changes are afoot). At present its allocation appears to be something determined by individual authorities. If that is the case it is probably no surprise that no single authority can deliver enough funding to address community planning properly. Is there scope for an initiative that brings together relatively small amounts of PDG from several authorities to set in place a development programme on community planning?

## ***7.10 Developing Protocols and Securing Key Party Sign-up***

7.10.1 This is only mentioned again because the Protocols developed 'now' to deal with the issues of integration with planning would need to be updated in the context of the new model being proposed. This might result in a formal Concordat to complement the Protocols.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1 Key Results**

8.1.1 The study shows that practice across the South West around Community Plans is extremely varied. Much is extremely good, reflecting the enormous amount of effort and skill put into the process by local people, most of it in their spare time. There does not however appear to be a reciprocal amount of effort – nor even appropriate skill – put into supporting Community Plans by local government generally, and a general under-valuing of community level activity. There are however some notable exceptions, both authorities as a whole and, more commonly, highly motivated individuals (planners and others). The RCCs are also doing their best with limited resources to promote and support all forms of community planning.

8.1.2 In the past, a large part of the effort on Parish Plans was placed on integration of the results, especially the final plans, into the formal planning system through ‘adoption’ as SPG. This was always based partly on published guidance or exhortation (for example in the Rural White Paper 2000 and implicitly in Countryside Agency then RCC guidance) and partly on an assumption that this was the best approach. This has proved to be, for many, almost a diversion and may have resulted in losses of impact and effectiveness for some Parish Plans. By virtue of their scale, funding procedures, external support system (and often the use of outside professionals) MCTI projects were less affected by the idea of formal links to planning.

8.1.3 Despite the original intentions of those drafting the Act, the changes to the planning system have, if anything, had a negative effect on Parish Plans– to date at least. The complexity of the system, the demands for a robust evidence base and especially the shift from SPG to SPD (and the associated Sustainability Appraisal) have all confused both local people and planners. The changes have had less effect on MCTI work, for similar reasons as those quoted above, but again the potential of the new system does not yet seem to have been grasped or realised. Delays in changes to the planning obligations procedures have also not helped.

### **8.2 A Future Approach – less planning-oriented**

8.2.1 It is the team’s view that, rather than focus solely on fine-tuning just the links between Community Plans and statutory planning, there are other significant changes underway that could create a far better context to act as the prime base for the next generation of Community Plans. By shifting the locus of Community Plans, this would also take the pressure off the planning link and enable everybody to be far sharper and more effective in defining exactly where and how planning links can help Community Plans. (At the same time, the role of Parish Councils within the planning system remains important.)

8.2.2 The suggested change of locus is about linking Community Plans to the new approaches to LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and ‘Double Devolution’ (and, of course, LDFs). This new approach:

- tackles head-on the old conflict between top-down and bottom-up by showing that this need not be an either/or choice;
- engages communities with others like them at a local level;
- picks up on the type of holistic approach that community groups have always argued that they operate (and the public sector does not); and
- integrates this through the practical delivery of targeted support and funding to coherent programmes of community level action.

8.2.3 It is also the team's view that all of this can be achieved with **no changes to policy, general procedures or funding regimes**. It requires a range of practical measures (training, guidance etc.) but nothing more fundamental. Delivering what the team considers to be an immensely exciting new period for Community Plans is about will, commitment, openness to fresh thinking, creativity and putting 'flesh on the bones' of the very principles that are already espoused in government and local policy. What is undoubtedly needed, however, is prompt, coherent, inter-departmental and inter-agency action.

# APPENDICES

## A.1 APPENDIX 1: The Initially Agreed Process

A.1.1 The following is abstracted directly from the team's original tender and forms the basis on which the project was commissioned in early January 2006.

- **Group Meeting:** Mention is made in the brief of an early meeting with the client group. We would value this because the group promoting this project is in its own right a focus of considerable knowledge and experience. Though a formal part of that meeting may be needed for contractual reasons, we would facilitate other parts in workshop format to get the most from the discussion. If, time permitting, others were able to join that event it would be even more valuable.
- **Networking for Contacts and Examples:** A key task during the above meeting, for which the team will have done some preparation, will be to 'map' contacts, networks, sources etc. for information and case study material. The team members have many to contribute but again the group's contribution will be invaluable. This process will also elicit the key questions to be asked of different people.
- **Telephone and Email Contacts:** The team anticipates the core of the 'research' part of the work to involve a round of telephone and email interviews with suggested people through January 2006. Simple profomas will be prepared and used to enable consistency and one key question to all contacts will also be about others they know of that may not yet be known to the team and about valuable reports, guides etc. Particular emphasis will be placed on what respondents believe to be the major barriers and hurdles facing community groups (including Parish Councils) within the new planning system, in ensuring that community based plans are integrated into spatial plans (eg. Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents), and of course any ways that have been found to overcome these. The contacts made across the South West will be of particular value because they may lead to specific case studies. It is however our view that "in-depth" and "detailed" case studies (as in the brief) will neither be possible nor appropriate within the demanding timescale.
- **Attending the National Conference:** Provided that a booking can be made (the closing date is the 12th December) one team member will attend the National Conference on 8<sup>th</sup> February, hopefully creating an opportunity to seek participant input and ideas (and perhaps further contacts.)
- **SWAN Conference:** As suggested earlier, it will be our aim to use the SWAN conference as a positive part of the study. By late February it will certainly be possible to put a considerable amount of evidence and some initial ideas on 'ways forward' in front of participants. This does of course depend on being able to create appropriate opportunities within the conference programme; we hope that is possible. We are also assuming that most or all of the project partners will be at the conference and that we can find an opportunity for an informal progress meeting, looking towards project completion by the end of March.
- **Towards a Final Report:** Following the conference the team will begin to prepare the final report. A few more key contacts may need to be made to focus on specific issues; (for example how best to disseminate results, or sources of further funding).
- **Final Steering Group meeting:** The Draft Final report will be presented to a final Steering Group meeting and this will again be discussed a facilitated way to maximise benefits to all. The final version can then be produced, responding to issues raised at this final meeting.

## **A.2 APPENDIX 2: The Work as Completed**

A.2.1 The balance of work as outlined above changed as the project proceeded. In summary, this was as follows:

- **Group Meeting:** Completed as above.
- **Networking for Contacts and Examples:** This was done more extensively than originally anticipated because it soon emerged that there were a number of initiatives underway across the country, other pieces of research, similar studies, key contacts etc. This work therefore broadened to look at the national context for Community Plans in particular and at the rapidly changing general/policy context.
- **Telephone and email contacts:** This was to be the core of the project – the small ‘case studies’ of particular projects but also of support by (for example) RCCs and local authorities, especially planners. The introduction of some fuller case studies (see later), the fact that early contacts were doing no more than verifying results from other studies, the changing context and the developing focus on looking ahead all generated the conclusion that effort on specific projects, except for further verification, would be wasteful. 9 specific projects were identified for the short case studies and these were completed.
- **National Conference:** This was attended by Jeff Bishop for the team/project.
- **SWAN Conference:** This did not take place within the project timetable. However the Devon Towns Forum conference did take place. Jeff Bishop and Barry Pearce attended, presented and helped to manage the group discussions in a way that has informed the project.
- **Towards a Final Report:** As arranged.
- **Final report:** To come.

### **A.2.2 Parallel work with Defra and CRC Case Studies**

As the project commenced, the team was approached by Defra via Scott Jacobs-Lange about the possibility of including three fuller and more thorough case studies. The brief for this additional work was developed collaboratively and, though it started with a focus on Parish Plans, one MCTI example was included. The three case studies were commissioned and that work has become completely integral with what we shall call this project.

The three Defra case studies were defined in the agreed brief as follows:

- **Case Study 1:** Focused on a Parish Plan that has succeeded in clearing the key hurdles in translation from pre-planning reforms to adoption within the new regime.
- **Case Study 2:** Looking at a Parish Plan that has focused mainly on a wider agenda of social and economic issues and actions rather than planning-related ones (though there may well be some of these in the chosen example).
- **Case Study 3:** Focusing on a community trying to grapple with the very new agendas of changing LSP practice, Local Area Agreements, ‘Compacts’, ‘Sustainable Community Strategies’ and so forth. The aim of this case study would be to highlight what problems and opportunities the group is facing as they attempt to engage with these new agendas.

This also provided the team with the opportunity to add a fourth member - Felicity Sylvester, who had been project officer for the Countryside Agency’s pilot project on Parish Plans in Caradon District. As well as widening the resource this also accessed some highly relevant experience. In the end the final choices of location and those undertaking the case studies were:

Case Study 1: **Kilkhampton** in North Cornwall District (Felicity Sylvester)

Case Study 2: **Minchinhampton** in Stroud District (Rowena Harris)

Case Study 3: **Shaftesbury** in North Dorset District (Jeff Bishop)

Partly as a result of these networks, the team was then approached by Trevor Cherrett of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC). The CRC was keen to support two further case studies, focusing in particular on community plan work in more disadvantaged communities. The two extra case studies, to be done in a very similar way to the Defra examples, were commissioned as follows:

Case Study 4: **Norton Radstock** in Bath and North East Somerset Council (Barry Pearce)

Case Study 5: **Westward Ho!** in Torridge District (Felicity Sylvester)

More information on material generated, sources used, people interviewed etc. follows in the relevant sections.

### **A.3 APPENDIX 3: Sources Of The Emerging Results**

A3.1 We have drawn on a wide range of sources for the results of the project. These are described here, with some commentary on each. (A list of key documents is in a later Appendix.)

#### **A.3.2 Encouragement for More Community Input**

Almost everywhere one looks today, in all areas of public policy, greater community engagement or involvement, more emphasis on community-led or community-owned initiatives are the norm. In the last few years, every part of central government has been either suggesting, exhorting or even requiring fuller and better participation, shared decision-making and a stronger place for community 'voices'. This approach is now even embedded in performance review for local government. Some examples of all of these are in the document list in the Appendix. The paper on future LSPs mentioned above is also part of this stream of guidance.

At the same time, the response at local level has been shown to be very mixed and the type of 'culture change' that the ODPM is promoting appears to be happening slowly in many places, not at all in others. Yet the message has got through to many local communities and their aspirations and expectations of either being heard better or taking greater control have been raised.

Community Plans are clearly caught up in this and might, in some senses, be regarded as a 'litmus test' for the engagement and power shifting agendas because they are about overall plans, about communities taking action for themselves and about communities engaging in the development and implementation of policies and programmes of others.

Within the more general literature we located a report about "The Potential of Parish and Town Councils to Support Neighbourhood Arrangements" (see document list), although it has remarkably little to say about Community Plans – an issue of some concern in the context of the government's emerging neighbourhoods agenda and so-called 'double devolution'.

#### **A.3.3 National and County Material on Community Plans**

The first comment here is fundamental and applies to all sub sections from here on. The literature we have been able to assemble is dominated almost 100% by material about Parish Plans. With the exception of one report that studies both Parish Plans and Market Town Plans, almost all general public and professional discourse is about Parish Plans only. The team may well have missed a tranche of material about Market Town projects but there is certainly nothing of substance about them in the obvious journals.

Information and guidance on Parish Plans started from the Countryside Agency and the Agency has produced material which our local research suggests is used by nearly all parish groups; ("Parish Plans: guidance for parish and town councils" – see document list). The main guidance has been updated and supported by further smaller documents. Support for the parish planning process has now been taken over by Defra. They publish general material which directs people to their local RCC for next stage help (and especially grant aid). We have also picked up occasional articles promoting Parish Plans in the professional press, and journals and newsletters for parish groups.

Many parts of the Countryside Agency are now (or will be shortly) part of Natural England. Though Parish Plans are not a responsibility of Natural England, Village Design Statements will be. This is already causing confusion and, without intervention (see later), could see the emergence of apparently conflicting guidance. Those functions of the Countryside Agency

that are now being picked up by the Commission for Rural Communities appear even more uncertain to others outside and the CRC's future role in relation to Community Plans (if any formally) remains unclear.

Not surprisingly, given its Countryside Agency roots, parish planning is also promoted by ACRE nationally and by the National Association of Local Councils. Both of these also emerge at local level with county RCCs providing encouragement and support (as well as being agents for grant aid) and county Associations of Local Councils also providing help. We have looked at all RCC websites and occasionally moved on to look at support material. Mentions of Parish Plans on websites vary from minimal to extensive. Some RCCs produce Parish Plan Newsletters, others produce 'toolkits' and guides of varying length and depth (and apparently all produced in isolation). Interestingly for later comments, there are few if any mentions of the link to planning.

Two specific events warrant a brief mention. In January 2006, one of our team attended the national Parish Plans conference. This brought together 150 people from across the country (though mainly south/south east), most of whom had been involved directly in parish planning work either from a parish level or as planners or from an RCC (although many had also or alternatively done Village Design Statements). The extent of coverage of Parish Plans was immediately noticeable – in West Berkshire the majority of parishes had done some form of plan but this was not the case generally. Many of the regular problems experienced by practitioners and planners support our later conclusions and are picked up there. Towards the end of the conference Annie Cooper from Defra asked if people would value an updated version of the Countryside Agency guidance. This received a very positive response; another issue picked up later.

The other event was a significant (and unusually lengthy) adjournment debate in Parliament about both parish councils and Parish Plans generally and the link to planning in particular. One important point made in the final statement by the Minister was that the government has no intention to include devolution of planning powers within the emerging 'double devolution' approach.

Two specific national reports are particularly relevant. The first is a report to the Countryside Agency in February 2005 by Malcolm Moseley et al entitled "Local Issues in Rural England – Messages from the Parish and Market Town Plans" (summary appended). Although this focuses on the content issues (ie. which issues proved to be important to people) the report also comments briefly on the process.

The most relevant report however is that by Catherine Hughes in March 2005, also for the Countryside Agency, on "Assessing the Impact of the Parish Plans Grant Scheme in South East England" (summary appended). (For some reason this report 'got lost' between the Agency and the CRC and only came to light – and to the team – late, and by chance.) Catherine's conclusions are substantially consistent with this team's emerging conclusions.

#### ***A.3.4 Parish Plans and the Planning System***

The core source for this is the "Parish Plans: guidance and advice for local planning authorities" published by the Countryside Agency in March 2003, complemented by the guide to communities mentioned above (see document list). The guidance was based primarily on the previous planning system but looked ahead to the new system. At that date however the new system was not fully defined so the guidance is weak in some key areas. It still talks about Supplementary Planning Guidance without mentioning the key differences between that and Supplementary Planning Documents. It says nothing about the introduction of Sustainability Appraisal. In addition, the important advice for parish groups to "contact the local planning authority at the very start of the Parish Plan process" is arguably largely lost in the raft of advice that is given. It has considerable strengths however (of relevance to later

comments) in terms of highlighting the link with Community Strategies, emphasising an holistic and 'spatial' approach and suggesting several ways to add influence to parish planning work other than by formal adoption as (at that stage) SPG. This guidance was reinforced by a section (no. 12) in the Vital Villages Resource Pack. This covers many similar points but is also about the previous system.

The only truly official view from ODPM about Parish Plans that we have found is in a set of 'Frequently Asked Questions' on Local Development Frameworks. This makes it clear that previously produced Parish Plans, or those well on their way to completion, are very unlikely to be adoptable under the new system because they will not have gone through the full procedures; (although they could, presumably, revisit and 'top up'). The guidance does however state that, appropriately done (ie. in full compliance with SPD procedures) a Parish Plan or the spatial components thereof can be formally adopted. This guidance is repeated and reinforced in a Countryside Agency Planning Position Statement of 2005. The team has also seen several internal notes produced by planning officers for their own use or that of members or communities about the potential links between Parish Plans and the new planning system. Though, in general, they work within the guidance just mentioned, there remain some areas of uncertainty, compounded by (what appears to be) conflicting or uncertain guidance from Government Regional Offices.

The most relevant material comes from "The Integration of Parish Plans in the Caradon District of Cornwall". This is a report by Felicity Sylvester on a Countryside Agency national pilot scheme. The work as a whole took a broad view of parish planning (and linked to Market Towns work) but also demonstrates that, appropriately done, Parish Plans can negotiate successfully the procedural hurdles involved with Supplementary Planning Documents in the new system, including the use of Sustainability Appraisal.

### ***A.3.5 Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Development Frameworks***

From before the new planning system had been put in place, work had been underway to reinforce the links between Local Strategic Partnerships (and Community Strategies) and Local Development Frameworks. Entec undertook a study for the ODPM at that time and further information has followed in a number of formal and semi-formal advice papers.

Most recently, the DCLG has commissioned a study to produce practical guidance on the links and how to make them effective. This is relevant because it is about the link between spatial planning and what are now termed Sustainable Community Strategies. The briefing papers for this study, though not really highlighting Community Plans, make clear the role that they can play at a very local level as a form of local Sustainable Community Strategy.

### ***A.3.6 Community Plans Across the South West***

The team was provided with various databases and lists about Parish Plans and MCTI projects across the South West. It proved extremely difficult to locate any single and reliable source of all information so the team chose to look further in two cases:

- **Somerset:** The Vital Villages database listed 32 completed Parish Plans in Somerset, 17 in progress plus another 25 underway since the closure of the Vital Villages programme. 9 grants have been approved for further projects in Somerset during 2006 (but at least one community is proceeding without applying for grant aid).
- **Devon:** The team located mentions of 17 Parish Plans. Of these 15 are not mentioned in their relevant Local Development Scheme with only 2 apparently scheduled to become SPD in the future (adapting from SPG). 6 Village Design Statements are underway and the aim is to make all of these into SPD. Devon has the second largest allocation of Defra funding in the South West but no information was available on how many grants had been given in/for 2006.

Even after this, however, and after contacts with all RCCs, it is not possible to say with certainty that the figures are accurate or up to date.

Overall, on several District Council websites there was no mention of Community or Parish Plans. However, the Teignbridge and Mid Devon sites, for example, mention Parish Plans (the former also mentioning MCTI projects). This information is available through main site pages, not through planning. The East Devon website not only mentions Parish Plans via its planning pages but provides what might almost be called a guide to doing them.

Few Local Development Schemes mention Community Plans in any form, though some make a strong mention of supporting community planning. Again for example, though the Mid Devon website mentions Parish Plans, the Local Development Scheme does not.

Perhaps the clearest and simplest figure received by the team was that from the MCTA stating that 64 projects have been started and supported, of which 37 have already been completed. A further 10 are starting shortly.

### ***A.3.7 Supporting Practice***

The team located a few ‘published’ guides or toolkits on Parish Plans from the regional RCCs. They appear to exist in some areas as informal notes and material shared with groups as they proceed – Oxfordshire’s for example is just a couple of pages on the website.

It appears that, apart from via RCC officers, general help and support, where it is available at all, comes first from a medley of officers with different titles in different authorities - rural regeneration, community development, area case workers. It also comes from some planners. Not all authorities have such officers however and many are on fixed term and/or part-time contracts (and the Caradon appointment has now ceased).

Some districts, eg. South Somerset and North Somerset, and the Countryside Agency, have run awareness and training days on community planning for community representatives, development workers and planners. Summary notes from these have been especially useful because they draw directly from practical experience. There has also been ad hoc training for MCTI facilitators in facilitation work and there are now formal (if internal) ‘Local Facilitator Networks’ in South Somerset and North Somerset Councils.

The fullest and most formal guide is that from the MCTA – what they term their “Sourcebook”. This is very thorough about the core processes at community level but raises, for the team, two important queries. First the guide as a whole appears to be predicated on a statement that there is now some form of “statutory Community Planning” procedure, requirements, demands etc. applying across the country. We are unsure what exactly the term “statutory Community Planning” refers to and are not aware of any such legal requirement. (We suspect that it is a conflation of two statutory requirements - to produce Community Strategies and to deliver community involvement in planning.) Secondly, the guide says almost nothing about the one place where we are aware of at least the potential for some form or degree of statutory support – ie. in the old and now the new planning system.

At one level, this is not of great consequence but a reference was made to “statutory Community Planning” in the preface to an MCTI Community Strategic Plan that the team studied because it was assumed by the local people involved that this would give some weight to their plans. If that is the assumption, people will almost certainly end up being disappointed.

### **A.3.8 Short and Long Case Studies**

Because all the above material provided the team with a series of clear and common messages about existing practice and particularly about potential practice it was decided that less time would be spent on contacting and interviewing people involved with specific Community Plans across the South West. This decision was also taken in the light of a) the commissioning of the 5 more substantial case studies by Defra and the CRC and b) the necessity to consider not so much the retrospective context as the changing future one.

The team therefore went through a selection process to highlight 9 possible examples to look at briefly via (usually) one or two interviews with local people, one with a planner and one with an 'enabler' (from RCC or MCTI). 3 were MCTI projects, the other 6 were Parish Plans at various stages of progress and chosen to vary between those targeted heavily at the statutory planning process (even formal adoption) and those with a broader remit and perhaps no clear planning links at all. The examples were also chosen to give a spread of locations across all counties and several districts.

Having selected the case studies, initial contact was made with potential interviewees in each case study – usually one from a community (Parish or MCTI) group, one from the District planning dept. and one a community enabler. The contacts were usually made through the relevant RCC person or the local planner. This proved time-consuming and the time-lag was worsened in several cases by the difficulty of accessing (and getting a response from) the nominated local people. A table showing who was contacted and interviewed, for which examples, is in a later Appendix.

The interviews were very informal though they related to a carefully prepared question set. According to the person being interviewed this covered the overall history of the project (from the initial 'trigger' through to the current state of play), links to the RCC, planning and other agencies, choices to move to any form of adoption (or not, or other link to planning), problems and benefits secured during the process (including obstacles to the integration of community and spatial plans), and key lessons/ messages.

## **A.4 APPENDIX 4: Notes On Examples Studied**

A.4.1 The first part of this Appendix includes brief notes on the example studied. This is followed by a chart that describes who exactly was contacted for each study.

### **A.4.2 Bisley (Stroud, Parish Plan)**

Bisley is a small village in the Cotswolds. It is the attractive part of the area whereas Miserden is much more varied. The local group chose, however, to work with both communities. Initial work started with a Parish Appraisal in 2001 – before there was any agreement to proceed to a Parish Plan. (This used some innovative methods.) The decision to produce a Parish Plan followed soon after and was seen as one of the ways to help to secure ‘Quality parish Council’ status. Nearby communities had already done Parish Plans so they got advice from them and, at the time, from Stroud District planners. Things slowed down and became more uncertain with the changes in the planning system which they found very difficult to engage with (despite having to spend their grant in a fixed period). They have almost finished the parish Plan but are not now seeking adoption as SPG/SPD.

The advice from the planners was to focus efforts on a Village Design Statement that could hopefully incorporate many of their local issues and hopefully secure adoption as SPD (as yet unproven). The local groups are interested in sustainability but also slightly confused and put off by the demands for Sustainability Appraisal. They are keen to use some even more creative methods when they do their VDS.

### **A. 4.3 Child Okeford (North Dorset, Parish Plan)**

This Parish Plan covered two small communities forming a single Parish – Child Okeford and Hanford. Both are villages a few miles North West of Blandford Forum, off any main road. Their joint population is just over 1,100. The triggers to the Parish Plan were the archetypal concerns of traffic and planning (ie. development). Local people had heard about Parish Plans so got started, widened the interest through an open meeting and launched into a survey – which had a good response rate. Some topic groups were set up, a visit was made to a nearby Parish that had already completed a Parish Plan and they were able to conclude that stage quite quickly.

There was no contact at all with the planners throughout the exercise, partly because of previous poor relationships. As it happens there was little in there to concern planners. There was an hiatus as things had to move into implementation and several new people became involved. They divided actions into ones they could achieve alone and ones on which they needed others. Five main projects were agreed, including development of a Village Design Statement (which they hope to get formally adopted). Work is now proceeding on all fronts. Interestingly (see Shaftesbury case below) there was no explicit mention of links to the District Council’s support for and approach to community planning but several mentions of clear support for possible project funding.

### **A.4.4 DAWN (Torridge, MCTI, CRC case)**

DAWN stands for “Developing Appledore, Westward Ho! and Northam”. This MCTI project was chosen as a large parish/town council area in North Devon with several ward areas with high levels of deprivation. It comprises of three different village areas – marine-based Appledore, inland, central and largest Northam, and Westward Ho!, a small seaside resort.

The project was set up in 2002 as one of the early MCTI initiatives. The final report was published in 2004 although this had relatively under-developed action plans which required further development and consultation. Torridge District Council (TDC) and Northam Town Council funded with £5,000 each and SWRDA added £30,000. This was to carry out further

consultations to provide a Regeneration Framework and to undertake statutory consultations for the 3 village plans to become Supplementary Planning Documents as part of the LDF. The plans are not listed in TDC Local Development Scheme 2005. "Hard to reach groups" are listed in the draft Statement of Community Involvement.

Planning consultants were employed to lead the statutory consultations prior to adoption. A Sustainability Appraisal for these documents was also produced and consulted with the framework documents. Consideration was given to the level required for SPD adoptions. TDC Forward planners are now involved in the adoption process and will be compiling the response documents prior to adoption proposed for July 2006.

The frameworks contain some major employment and economic proposals for Appledore, notably a new, enlarged Fish Dock facility. Northam Town Council are consulting on a Town Plan (carried out on the Parish Plan model), but without guidance or financial support. There is no particular focus on "hard to reach groups" although some of the schools have been consulted, there is mention of a youth groups and a skate board group focusing on facilities for young people, and details of work with groups of older residents.

Problems expressed were a lack of guidance in the Devon Community Plans Toolkit on early consultation with the planners, thus their late involvement and some mistrust by the residents on the value of community consultation because of the lack of coordination with the planning control planners who have allowed applications and developments in the villages that are contrary to the consultation outcomes.

#### ***A.4.5 Ivybridge (South Hams, MCTI)***

The Ivybridge Market Town Plan (MTP) was produced in May 2004 (the Ivybridge Area Partnership having been formed in 2003). A District Council run 'town forum' had existed before but then. The MCTA didn't have much involvement in this – the MTP process had started before the MCTA had really formed; most of the initiative came from the Town Council.

The group had applied to go into the MCTI process as a way of getting money/help into the town for a multi-function centre in the town centre – and it was this that effectively kick-started their MTP. The scheme included a library, information area, coffee shop, meeting rooms, multi-purpose exhibition/ cinema/conference area, bar, offices, incubator units – an important community facility, plus a way to get women in the area back to work. The MTP process then brought forward other ideas that had been circulating, and so acted as a catalyst.

Whilst relations with the District Council planning department were difficult at first, the process they went through helped cement better relations (especially with the development control team). Key to resolving the impasse was the involvement of CABE, who acted as honest broker/ go-between/facilitator between the group and the LPA.

A S106 agreement with Tescos will aid regeneration of the town and compensate for the impact of the store on the local retail sector.

#### ***A.4.6 Kilkhampton (North Cornwall, Parish Plan, Defra Case)***

Kilkhampton was chosen because they had completed their plan in 2003, revised it in 2005 and had good support from the North Cornwall District Council (NDDC), including early contact with the Forward Plans and Regeneration Departments.

The work was well coordinated and led by the Chairman of the Parish Council and an action group consisting of Parish Councillors, individuals and representatives of community groups.

Links were established early with both the planning department and regeneration officers. A transport survey already carried out by the Kilkhampton WI was integrated into the parish plan and services were developed with the County Council and the Highways Authority.

In 2005 the NDDC adopted a process for integration of Parish Plans into the LDF and to establish links to the Community Strategy. This was complemented with a series of training sessions (involving Planning Aid South West) and information booklets. The Forward Plans manager is now considering integrating the relevant spatial planning information in the Kilkhampton Parish Plan into the Core Strategy and other Development Plan Documents. Links to the NCDC Open Space Survey and follow-up consultancy is shown in the positive developments in the Parish Council owned Lamb Park.

Future actions include tourist information leaflets, a village website and an annual update on progress at the Annual Parish Council meeting. Problems described include liaison with planning control policies regarding affordable housing permissions and conservation area policies and communication with some council service teams.

#### ***A.4.7 Locking (North Somerset, Parish Plan)***

Locking Parish is part of the Weston Area Action Plan which is currently being developed. The Plan may form part of the evidence base for that process. Planning issues, development pressures, particularly around the ex-airfields and RAF base in the parish and the overloading on the existing transport infrastructure were probably the central motivating factors for the development of a Parish Plan.

The Parish Council want to see the existing pockets of housing in the Parish remain separate from one another and for Locking to maintain an identity that is distinct from nearby Weston Super Mare. Locking Parish Plan group did not receive the usual level of support from the local RCC because there was nobody in post for the critical period of time. Thus there is a perception that the Plan was conceived in a 'silo' without real strategic understanding. The Parish Plan Group, having completed their Plan, were about to enter into discussions with the local planning officers as this report was being written.

#### ***A.4.8 Minchinhampton (Gloucestershire, Parish Plan, Defra Case)***

Minchinhampton was chosen as an example of a Parish Plan that has focused mainly on a wider agenda of social and economic issues and actions rather than planning-related ones.

Minchinhampton is situated to the eastern end of Stroud where the District Council have formed a Parish Plans Forum and where the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council are able to support Parish Plans groups. The Parish includes Minchinhampton Common which is controlled by the National Trust. The Parish Plan Group undertook a comprehensive consultation process to identify local needs and they were encouraged to communicate closely with the relevant authorities about the issues raised.

Completed in 2005, the Action Plan continues to be closely monitored by the Parish Council. Progress so far includes improvements in parking, speed restrictions, new skateboard park on an agreed site, improved liaison with the Conservation Board and Police and a Parish Centre open and functioning.

#### ***A.4.9 Norton Radstock (Bath and North East Somerset, MCTI, CRC case)***

Norton Radstock is a former coal mining area comprising the two towns of Midsomer Norton and Radstock. Mining operations and the associated railyard in Radstock finally closed in the 1970s, leaving a large derelict site of around 18 acres stretching from the town centre into surrounding countryside. In 1998 the Norton Radstock area had been in receipt of

significant SRB funding - £2.9 m – which had funded a number of local community based projects (up until 2003), including the setting up of the Norton Radstock Regeneration Co., established to acquire and develop the former railway land at Radstock and in so doing regenerate the heart of the town. When this source of funding for local projects was coming to an end, the MCTI process was seen by local groups as a way of filling the gap that was going to be left.

The MCTI Community Plan Steering Group itself was formed in 2001. Their Community Plan ('A Brighter Future') was produced in 2005. From among all the projects, 5-6 have been picked out as priorities: a skateboard park, assessing the feasibility of the expansion of the Somer Centre (a community centre) and refurbishment of Victoria Hall (community facilities), the provision of a NR Town Park, the railway land development, and also helping local parishes develop their own parish plans.

There are some key economic/'disadvantage' issues identified by the Community Plan: to do with employment opportunities not keeping pace with housing development; overdependence of the local economy on a small number of large employers; companies likely to be shedding jobs in the near future; a shortage of business premises for smaller companies; the loss of business premises for housing; patchy advice and support for businesses and social enterprises; low literacy, numeracy and work related skills; and insufficient affordable housing for local people.

Whilst the Community Plan contains a section entitled 'How does our plan relate to other plans', there is no mention specifically of the Local Plan or the emerging LDF (or of any other land use or spatial plans). There has been very little contact with the District Council planning department, mainly because the group did not want their ideas to be too heavily constrained, and it has been only recently that a relationship with the planners has started to develop – though they now feel it would have been helpful to have had that contact earlier.

#### ***A.4.10 Shaftesbury (North Dorset, MCTI, Defra case)***

Shaftesbury is an historic town with a population of around 22,000. The project operates across a wider area that includes 9 parishes within North Dorset District and 15 across the County and District border in Salisbury District. This example was chosen deliberately to explore how the local community planning work sits within the context of some challenging new approaches to Community Strategy and LSP work, Local Area Agreements and creative, pooled funding.

The original impetus for becoming an MCTI project was mixed. It included a number of local issues, none major in its own right but all adding up to a long agenda and – at the time - little effective action to address the issues. From an original Working Group the Shaftesbury Task Force was set up and soon became a Limited Company. MCTI funding was secured, a Healthcheck undertaken (with reasonable success) and an Action Plan produced. The latter had more problems because of staff changes, a poor relationship with consultants and local divisions. Practical projects are now being delivered.

This project sits within the frame of the overall 'North Dorset Community Plan Model', corporately supported and funded, that focuses on four main areas (of which Shaftesbury is one) and aims to draw together bottom-up aspirations and plans with top-down strategies and funding. There are strong links with the County LSP and now a new funding pooling mechanism that appears to have already been effective in steering resources towards priority community projects.

#### ***A.4.11 Tidworth (Wiltshire, MCTI)***

There is a long history of partnership in Tidworth between Kennet District Council, Wiltshire County Council and the Army, and in 1997 the partnership was awarded SRB funding for 3 years. The exit strategy was to form the Tidworth Development Trust (TDT) in 2000 and which continues to receive core funding from Kennet DC. TDT is one of the partners of the Community Area Partnership which drove forward the application to MCTI for £55K to develop a Community Area Plan in 2001.

The main issues facing the community are lack of a stable population because of the large Army base and a poor local economy. It is felt that boosting the numbers of privately owned housing will balance the high percentages of military (transient) and social housing in the town. The process of developing the Community Area Plan confirmed this need and yet this contradicted the Structure Plan which identified Swindon as the principal urban area for growth.

The Partnership made representations to the Local Plan Public Inquiry in 2004 for the allocation of 3,000 houses as identified in the Tidworth Community Area Plan. The community is clear that their representations are strengthened by their Community Area Plan, although it has not been formally adopted by Kennet DC, and the Partnership has recently been communicating with GOSW and RDA about the RSS and continue to make their case.

The main achievements of the Community Area Plan and the Partnership so far are that a major sports centre has been built by the MOD, managed by Kennet DC, used for army training but also open to the community. Also a piece of land owned by MOD, identified for retail development in the MCTI Plan, will now house a TESCO Metro and the process of accumulating the £12 million to build a Community Resource Centre as identified in the Plan are well underway. Another positive outcome was a local communications strategy which includes the monthly newsletter, local radio and website.

#### ***A.4.12 Wickwar (South Gloucestershire, Parish Plan)***

Wickwar is situated equidistant from the two market towns of Wotton-Under-Edge and Chipping Sodbury in a Unitary Authority. Part of the parish is a conservation area. There is development pressure in this part of the region and a difference of views between officers and members over the potential of Parish Plans in this area.

The Parish Council saw the process of developing a Plan as a way of connecting with the community. Most parishioners wanted Wickwar to remain the same, very few wanted more development so the Parish Plan group felt that there was no need to involve Planners since they believe that at the current time there are no immediate plans for major new developments in Wickwar.

The Group contacted South Gloucestershire Council when the priority issues had been identified and held constructive meetings with officers about transport, recreation, sports & leisure and continuing education issues. They felt well supported by the RCC Community Action during the development of their Plan. The Plan was completed in September 2005. The process for implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Plan is yet to be clarified.

#### ***A.4.13 Winkleigh (Torrige, Parish Plan)***

2 major planning issues – a major planning application for a biomass plant on an ex airfield and the County Council wishing to sell an old school which is now used as a community centre for housing - created a significant level of local opposition. The local group has seen engaging with the planning system as a way of helping the community resist these proposals

(and support others). This has revived the Parish Plan process, which was losing momentum.

The current exercise was initiated in 2003; they had done a Parish Appraisal in 1996, supported by the Countryside Agency and Devon RCC. A Parish Plan was produced in 2005 – they are now working on an Action Plan. They received little help from the District and didn't approach the planners about it when starting out.

Winkleigh has grown very rapidly in recent years, taking a lot of new housing with more in the offing. This put a lot of pressure on local infrastructure (especially sewerage) and the amenity/character of the village. However, since 1996 there has been a growing awareness that the Parish needs to deal with a wider range of issues: the need to improve recreation facilities (especially for young people), and the need for new affordable housing and new employment opportunities to help keep younger people in the village. All the new housing that has been built in the village has been taken up by newcomers, non-locals. The Parish saw that a Parish Plan was needed to resolve these differences and achieve a balance between the concerns of one section of the community (mainly newcomers, who want to see the village character and amenities protected) and another section (the established community and those with children, who want to see the village develop to provide new opportunities for local people).

A big source of frustration is that only recently, two years into the process, have they now been told by the planners that, if they are to get their plan integrated into spatial plans (they want to secure an SPD), they will need to spend £15k employing a consultant to do a Sustainability Appraisal. In addition, most of the community's aspirations are about 'social engineering' quality of life and a sense of community and this does not seem to fit well with the arguments that can be used in planning.

#### ***A.4.14 Wiveliscombe (Taunton Deane, MCTI)***

The Wiveliscombe Area Market Town Initiative, Community Strategy and Action Plan was published in Sept 2003, and covers 10 parishes (mainly in Taunton Deane BC but reaching into West Somerset).

There was little District planning department involvement in the MCTI process – the Council's policy unit was slightly more involved. The MCTI was seen to be mainly an issue for the Council's economic development officers; also the planners seeing completion of their Local Plan as a priority, and didn't see the links between community planning and spatial planning. From an integration perspective the good things have happened since the Plan was published. The District Council (TDBC) has started to see the value in integrating Community Plans, the Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework processes. They are currently embarking on a joint exercise in community involvement for both the CS and LDF. After previously not engaging with Community Plans the District planners are now very pro- both Parish Plans and MCTI schemes – seeing this as a way of securing a strong base of community involvement in their LDF. They also delegate a significant tranche of planning application decisions to Parish Councils.

Key to the new process has been a joint Spatial Planning Working Group (which includes representatives from the Market Towns, Parishes, LDF and CS teams) and an Audit of Community and Spatial Plans which has identified, for each Community Plan, which elements are spatial and which not and then if spatial which LDF document - e.g Core Strategy, AAP - might be able to take it forward. Planning issues in Wiveliscombe include affordable housing, employment land (the community want an 'Incubator'), the need for expanded community facilities (e.g. Doctors surgeries, health care, shops, meeting rooms, family services centre).

## A.5 APPENDIX 5: Implementation Of Necessary Actions

A.5.1 The chart that follows takes each of the suggested actions from sections 6 and 7 and suggests:

- Responsibilities; who might be best placed to move the idea forward.
- Funding: Who might appropriately fund the work.
- Timescale: When to start and how long it might/should take

This is inevitably very provisional and should be taken as illustrative only. There is of course no suggestion that all of these could possibly be commissioned at one time!

A.5.2 Some of the actions within section 6 are essentially the same as some in section 7 (eg. enhancing the role of 'enablers'). The chart keeps these together but also shows to which section (Integration – 6, or Future Vision - 7) they belong.

Action and Reference	Responsibility	Funding	Timescale
Clarification of Planning Procedures and Requirements (Section 6)	DCLG Planning	Planning Advisory Service	Urgent
'Community-Friendly' Sustainability Appraisal Methodology (Section 6)	Defra, Natural England, DCLG Planning	Defra and Natural England	Urgent – within 1 year
Creative Approaches to Community Involvement in Community Planning (Section 6)	Defra with DCLG Planning	Defra with DCLG	Within 1 year
Promotion of and Support for an 'Enabler' Role (Section 6)	GOSW, SWRTPI and SW Planning Aid (PASW)	Regional Centre of Excellence?	9 months to initiate, 3 years to 'prove'
Promotion of and Support for an 'Enabler' Role (Section 7)	DCLG (LSP team) via RTPI and Planning Aid.	DCLG	9 months to initiate, 3 years to 'prove'
Production of Guidance Materials for local groups (Section 6)	Defra	Defra through ACRE, Action for Market Towns and the RTPI	Currently being developed, may need to be extended.
Production of Guidance Materials for groups and planners on integration (Section 6)	Defra and DCLG Planning	Defra and DCLG via the Planning Advisory Service, RTPI. Community Planning Team and/or Planning Officers Society	Urgent – within 6 months.
Production of Guidance Materials for groups and others in the South West (Section 6)	As for this project	GOSW and SWRDA	Within 6 months
Production of Guidance on auditing Community Plans re. LSPs and LDFs (Section 6)	Defra	Defra	Work already underway
Awareness Raising (Section 6)	As for this project	GOSW and SWRDA	Start soon, complete within 1 year
Education and Training in Planning Schools (Section 6)	As for this project	The SWRTPI and the Regional Centre of Excellence?	Start soon, perhaps 2 years to test and refine

Education and Training for planners as CPD (Section 6)	SWRTPI with SWAN and MCTA	SWRTPI with SWAN and MCTA	1 year
Training for local groups, RCCs etc.	SWAN, MCTA and SWPA.	GOSW and SWRDA	1 year
Local Facilitator Networks (Section 6)	As for this project	Mostly self-funding	1 year
Production of Guidance Materials, Awareness Raising, Education/Training (Section 7)	All as above but broadened to include DCLG LSP team etc.	As above	As above
Developing Protocols and Securing Key Party Sign-up (Section 6) (Section 7)	SWRTPI with GOSW and SWRA	GOSW and SWRDA	Start within 1 year but dependent for implementation on some other aspects
Promotion of the Emerging Approach: checking parallel action UK-wide (Section 7)	Defra and DCLG (LSP and Planning teams)	Defra and DCLG	Within 6 months
Promotion of the Emerging Approach: Initial Conference (Section 7)	As for this project	SWRDA	Booked for 10.06
Promotion of a new breed of LSP Coordinators (Section 7)	DCLG LSP team	None needed, part of current review	9 months to initiate, 3 years to 'prove'
Funding Sources for Community Plans (Section 7)	As for this project	DCLG	

## **A.6 APPENDIX 6: Document List**

### **A.6.1 NATIONAL**

#### **A.6.1.1 Engagement generally**

Chanan, G. (2003); *Searching for Solid Foundations*; for ODPM, September.  
[www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm\\_urbpol\\_023886.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_023886.pdf)

Home Office (2004); *Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building*;  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/civil/index.html>

DETR (1998); *Modernising Local Government: local democracy and community leadership*;  
London. <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Briefing.asp?lsection=59&id=SX7367-A7809175&ccat=286>

ODPM (2005); *Making Connections: An Evaluation of the Community Participation Programmes*; Research Report 15, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.  
<http://www.info4local.gov.uk/searchreport.asp?id=24124&frompage=&subject=7>

Audit Commission (2004); *User Focus and Citizen Engagement*; Local Government Briefing 4, London.  
[www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/70071](http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/70071)

*Facilitating Community Involvement: practical guidelines for practitioners and policy makers*;  
Home Office Development and Practice report 27, Home Office, London.  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr27.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr27.pdf)

#### **A.6.1.2 Countryside Agency**

Planning Position Statement – Incorporating rural planning issues in LDF's

Local issues in Rural England – messages from the Parish and Market Town Plans – report by Moseley M, Owen S, Clark M, Kambites C of Countryside and Community Research Unit, Draft Final Report Feb 2005

Example of how a Parish Plan might look (CA 198 December 2004)

What Makes a Good Parish Plan? (CA 199 December 2004)

Community Action Planning: Building on Success in the South West (2004)  
The Integration of Parish Plans in the Caradon District of Cornwall – Final Report – June 2005

A Countryside Agency National Pilot Scheme, Caradon District Council  
[www.caradon.gov.uk/community/](http://www.caradon.gov.uk/community/)

Supporting the Process: Backing the Actions. Guidance for the mainstreaming of Community Action Plans in the South West. 2005??

Town and Parish Councils (Information and links to further relevant documents)  
[www.countryside.gov.uk/VitalVillages/Local\\_Governance/town\\_and\\_parish\\_councils.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/VitalVillages/Local_Governance/town_and_parish_councils.asp)

Planning for Vital Communities, June 2004  
[www.countryside.gov.uk/Publications/articles/Publication\\_tcm2-19764.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/Publications/articles/Publication_tcm2-19764.asp)

Parish Plans and the Planning System, March 2003

[www.countryside.gov.uk/Publications/articles/Publication\\_tcm2-4308.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/Publications/articles/Publication_tcm2-4308.asp)

Parish Plans and the Statutory Planning System, Vital Villages Resource Pack Section 12

[www.eastdevon.gov.uk/plg-pp-planning\\_system.pdf](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/plg-pp-planning_system.pdf)

#### **A.6.1.3 DCLG (ODPM)**

Report by Entec on developing effective relationships between Community Strategies and LDFs <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/planning/research>

Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future – a consultation paper, December 2005

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162320>

Spatial Plans in Practice, September 2005

[www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143238](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143238)

Local Development Frameworks – Frequently Asked Questions, Supplementary Planning Documents

[www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143898#TopOfPage](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143898#TopOfPage)

#### **A.6.1.4 DEFRA**

The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme (Information and further relevant links)

[www.defra.gov.uk/rural/quality\\_parishes/default.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/quality_parishes/default.htm)

Grants and funding: Schemes – Parish Plans

[www.defra.gov.uk/funding/schemes/pp.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/funding/schemes/pp.htm)

#### **A.6.1.5 Others**

Planning and Inclusion - Stephen Hill and Miffa Salter (April 2004), RTP1

NALC: The Good Councillor's Guide (2003) *'A parish plan is not a land use plan'*

[www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk)

A Better Place to Live (Community Development Foundation Guide to local action on sustainable development 2003)

Compact Code of Good Practice: Consultation and Policy Appraisal

[www.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk/comrace/active/compact/publications](http://www.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk/comrace/active/compact/publications)

The Potential of Parish and Town Councils to Support Neighbourhood Arrangements – November 2005, Andrew Jones, Jasmine Burnley, Ed Cos, Ines Newman, Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

[www.lgiu.org.uk/](http://www.lgiu.org.uk/)

TheyWorkForYou.com. House of Commons debates – Wednesday 18 January 2006  
Parish Councils (Planning)

[www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)

Commission for Rural Communities – Document Library (List of relevant documents)

<http://exchange.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/doclibraryfiles.asp?fdDocumentCategoryId=7>

How to Create a Parish Plan? Dr Wendy Le-las

[www.lelas.co.uk/articles/How%20to%20create%20a%20parish%20plan.pdf](http://www.lelas.co.uk/articles/How%20to%20create%20a%20parish%20plan.pdf)

Engaging and Empowering Citizens: Cleaner Safer Greener Communities  
[www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk/en/1/saengagemp.html](http://www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk/en/1/saengagemp.html)

Together We Can; Home Office Brochure 2005  
<http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/civil/together-we-can/>

“More lessons from the parish plans programme” – Article by Felicity Sylvester  
Town & Country Planning Journal, November 2005

Community Engagement and Local Leadership: The Role for Parish and Town Councils –  
Good Practice Pointers.  
[www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/data/uploads/NALC%20Policy%20Lft.pdf](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/data/uploads/NALC%20Policy%20Lft.pdf)

Parish Councils (Planning) – Hansard report on debate in House of Commons, 18.1.06  
Column 909-936.  
[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm060118/debtext/60118-23.htm#60118-23\\_head0](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm060118/debtext/60118-23.htm#60118-23_head0)

Parish and Town Plans, Market Town Action Plans – links to Local Strategic Partnerships  
and Community Strategies (the Bridges Research Project), report by Moseley M, Owen S,  
Courtney P, Chater C and Cherret T of Countryside and Community Research Unit, Final  
Report April 2004

#### **A.6.2 SOUTH WEST: REGION, COUNTIES, LOCAL**

‘Mainstreaming Community Plans in the South West’ (summary of outputs from workshops  
December 2003 & 2004); Rowena Harris

Planning for your Community – a source book for MCTI groups – May 2005

Making the Most of Your Local Landscape. (Report on research about community plans and  
AONBs), Dorset Community Action, not published.

The Community Plan Tool Kit:  
[www.devonrcc.org/toolkit](http://www.devonrcc.org/toolkit)

Parish Plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance (Sept 2003): F Sylvester, formerly  
Parish Plans Officer, Caradon DC

Combined Parishes of Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle - thoughts upon completion of a Parish  
Plan (2005) by Campbell de Burgh tel 01929 471171 [campbelldeburgh@btinternet.com](mailto:campbelldeburgh@btinternet.com)

The Integration of Parish Plans in the Caradon District of Cornwall, A Countryside Agency  
National Pilot Scheme, Caradon District Council, Final Report June 2005

#### **A.6.3 OTHER REGIONS**

Parish Plan protocol [www.southlakeland.gov.uk/PDF/leaflet-feb%2004.pdf](http://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/PDF/leaflet-feb%2004.pdf)

The New Forest Community Planning Guide, New Forest District Council  
[penny.velander@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:penny.velander@nfdc.gov.uk)

The Parish Action Plan Process – Oxfordshire Rural Community Council  
<http://orcc.3.forumer.com/index.php?showtopic=20>

## ***A.7 APPENDIX 7: Local Issues in Rural England – Messages from the Parish and Market Town Plans (by Malcolm Moseley et al)***

### **A.7.1 Summary**

This document is a summary of research produced by the University of Gloucestershire on behalf of the Countryside Agency. This research distils, categorises and reflects upon the key issues contained in 80 Parish Plans and 40 Market Town Healthchecks from across rural England.

### **A.7.2 Introduction**

By early 2005, the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme and Market Towns Initiative had supported nearly 1,500 rural communities to carry out an assessment of the needs of their towns and villages. This report is a review of Parish & Market Town Plans to capture a broad based view of rural concerns, and to catalogue and review key issues, so that national and regional organisations seeking to work with rural communities in the future have a clear understanding of the issues facing them. England's 1,200 Parish Plans and almost 200 Market Town Healthchecks, all undertaken by local people, were intended, and have been, a basis for concerted local action and are as a result somewhat individualistic in style and in coverage. Notwithstanding that, however, they also collectively comprise a rich resource for producing a 'snapshot' of the issues considered to be most important by the residents of our rural communities.

### **A.7.3 Vital Villages Programme**

- The main objectives for the Vital Villages programme were:
- To encourage small rural communities to identify and act to meet local needs;
- To help small rural communities to meet their needs for local service provision in ways that suit local circumstances;
- To enable small rural communities, and wider partnerships to implement local solutions to meet their local transport needs.

### **A.7.4 Market Towns Initiative**

The Initiative is based on the principles that:

- market towns should be the basis of sustainable rural communities;
- local communities in market towns and their surrounding countryside should have a say in the future of their market towns;
- the revitalisation of market towns should improve peoples' quality of life, provide access to essential services, jobs and goods, and improve the diversity and vitality of rural economies.

### **A.7.5 Issues Arising from Parish Plans**

In the case of the Parish Plans, the top issues emerging nationally were, in descending order:

- road traffic
- housing (in various guises)
- inadequacy of facilities for young people
- law and order / policing
- inadequacy of public transport
- minor environmental concerns
- inadequacy of specific village services
- car parking issues

- environmental protection
- village hall matters

### **A.7.6 Issues arising from Market Town Healthchecks**

In the case of the Market Town Healthchecks, the top concerns (this time placed in no particular order) emerged as:

- road traffic
- deficiencies of the town environment
- inadequacies of public transport
- inadequacies of facilities for young people
- inadequacies of leisure and recreation facilities
- poor range and quality of local shops
- neglect of the towns' tourism potential
- insufficient facilities and support for local business
- poor quality of employment
- affordable housing
- health and health-care issues

### **A.7.7 Conclusions**

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the research carried out, they are:

1. The various towns and parishes of England have their own individual sets of concerns, all of those sets being unique.

2. But taking an overall perspective, one concern is more commonly expressed than any other and that is road traffic. This concern takes various forms with congestion, excess speed, road safety, parking and general environmental nuisance being variously stressed. Road traffic is a major concern both in the small rural towns and parishes.

3. After road traffic, other very commonly expressed concerns include:

- deficiencies of the local physical environment, with the appearance of town centres and town 'gateways' and various 'petty' nuisances especially dog fouling, litter and vandalism all being frequently cited;
- deficiencies in local services and facilities, with public transport to surrounding areas, retail provision, and leisure and recreation provision being most commonly mentioned – though others e.g. health care and policing also feature prominently in certain settlements; and
- certain 'socio-economic issues' especially surrounding the unmet needs of young people often linked loosely to a fear of crime and anti-social behaviour;
- concerns in some areas for an 'unbalanced' housing stock – too little affordable housing for local people, too much pressure to build speculative 'executive' housing; and
- in many of the small towns at least, a need to diversify and strengthen the local economy.

4. The research has identified certain apparent differences of emphasis between categories of places as tentative hypotheses for discussion or further examination:

- the concerns about affordable housing appear more keenly felt in the remoter parishes;
- though they are very widely expressed, traffic-related concerns may be particularly widespread amongst the larger small towns and the more accessible parishes; and

- it is the residents of the small towns rather than of the parishes that more commonly raise the local economy as a concern though this could very well reflect built-in differences in the focus of the town and parish planning exercises.

5. No convincing evidence emerged of significant region-to-region differences in the concerns expressed locally. This lack of evidence may reflect the smallness of sample size at the regional level; it may more substantively reflect the large size and heterogeneity of England's eight regions. Local circumstances rather than regional location appears more meaningful in explaining place-to-place differences in the key experienced concerns.

6. With the conclusion of the Parish Plan and Market Town action plan programmes, at least in their present form, and the changing institutional landscape of rural development in England, there is much that can be learned by the relevant agencies from the research reported here.

*The report recommended that LSPs should draw together the key messages from the Parish & Town Plans to inform the Community Strategies. No mention of Spatial Planning.*

## **A.8 APPENDIX 8: Recommendations from Assessing the Impact of Parish Plans in the South East (by Catherine Hughes)**

**A.8.1 Recommendation:** *It would be a great step forward if the relevant national bodies could agree the advice they give to parishes so that there was a greater chance of discovering a shared purpose.*

**A.8.2 Recommendation:** *At a local level, before parish planning begins, there could be an encouragement for all the parties to have a pre planning dialogue so that expectations of each other are matched.*

**A.8.3 Question:** *How can Local Authorities be rewarded and encouraged to enter into meaningful dialogue as early as possible in the planning process at the parish level?*

**A.8.4 Recommendation:** *When we discussed this issue, there was enthusiasm for something we have called parish prompting. This would involve each parish being given data on the thresholds relevant to its issues of concern, so that the parish can look creatively for ways to meet them. For example, it might prompt collaboration with a neighbouring parish, or even lead to a relaxing of development restrictions in order to achieve the optimum size for services to be available.*

**A.8.5 Question:** *How can parish brokerage be best promoted, perhaps using the services of the Rural Community Councils?*

**A.8.6 Question:** *How can expertise in productive forms of community engagement be made more widely available?*

**A.8.7 Question:** *Is the goal of increasing community participation best served by requirements on local authorities to account to Government Offices on the methodologies they use?*

**A.8.8 Recommendation:** *If Parish Plans are to play a role in this new planning system the nature and extent of this role needs urgent clarification.*

*Question: How can we best encourage a shift of focus where what is valued is not the paper product but the process of mutual challenge, learning and problem solving?*

**A.8.9 Recommendation:** *We believe there is a case for a fundamental re-appraisal not of parish plans per se but of the links between all the various planning processes, both social and land use. Such an appraisal would benefit from exploring how the divergent but legitimate purposes can best be served at the local level.*