



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

The Devon Heartlands Community Partnership

Carnegie UK Trust Rural Action Research Project

**3rd Interim
Progress Report**

Engaging Rural Communities in Ongoing Community Planning

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Report Summary

Welcome to this the third interim report of the Devon Heartlands Rural Action Research Project on the theme of engaging rural communities in ongoing Community led Planning. It should be read in conjunction with earlier reports all of which are available to view or download from our website at www.devonheartlands.co.uk and of course on the Carnegie Community Planning partners Hub. The Devon Heartlands RARP operates at 4 levels or Tiers: **Local, District, County** and **Regional**. The following table provides a summary of current engagement and activity.

Tier 1 Local	Details of RARP Tier Engagement to-date
Community Project Groups	1. Devon Heartlands project to develop Okehampton Mill as a community asset presented at a conference attended by over 50 people in April. DH Feasibility study on schedule. 2. Disappointment with the temporary closure of Dartmoor Railway our project is stalled. However a new owner is in negotiation and we are ready to continue towards delivery of this important community project which will enhance Access to Services for the community.
Dev Heartlands Community Forum	Devon Heartlands Community Forum meetings remain well attended and are now being considered for other areas.
Town/ Parish Councils	Improved opportunity to work with the Devon Association of Parish Councils and the Community Council for Devon as a new focus on Parish Planning is developed.
Tier 2 District	
West Devon LSP	Devon Heartlands and all West Devon Market Town Partnerships now have seat on WD LSP Board supported by DH RARP work and through Joint Partnership. LSP Members remain on RARP working Group.
West Devon Borough Council	Some Funding has been secured from West Devon Borough Council to support of the DH Community Forum Project
West Devon Planning	Remain on RARP working Group,
West Devon CVS	Remain on RARP working Group and DH Community Forum,
West Devon Joint Partnership	Devon Towns Forum to provide funding support through West Devon Joint Partnership Chairman for LSP Community Engagement Activity
Tier 3 County	
Devon County Council	Remain on RARP working Group and appraised through Devon Towns Forum links. DCC Chief Executive has expressed interest in Carnegie RARP and is supportive of its aims of promoting Community Engagement.
Devon Strategic Partnership	Devon Heartlands contribute to DSP/ LAA Stronger Communities Priority Block, NASP Programme and DSP Community Plans Database Project
Devon Towns Forum	Remain Key Partners on RARP and provide funding to support Joint Partnership
Devon Rural Network	Devon Heartlands engage with DRN and DRN Action Groups (Note DH Forum chair has been elected chair of DRN also.)
Community Council of Devon	Remain key RARP partners.
Tier 4 Regional	
Market & Coastal Towns Assn.	Are to cease operations in June 2008 with a new emphasis on the Devon Towns Forum to support Market Town level CLP
Devon Towns Forum	DTF now part of SW Market and Coastal Towns Network that will maintain a regional dimension to Community Led Planning
South West Acre Network	Devon Heartlands RARP remains engaged with SWAN Re: Regional Framework, Community Plans Protocols and Quality Standards.
Gloucestershire Parish Plans Network	Devon Heartlands RARP presented at Network meeting which was well received.
Other	
SWRDA	Local Community Planning Partnership LSP engagement as advocated and undertaken by Devon Heartlands is now strongly endorsed by SWRDA

Major activities since last report:

Carnegie Community Planning Partners Meeting April 2008

In April Devon Heartlands were honoured to host the Carnegie UK Trust's Community Planning Partners meeting in Devon. Carnegie partners came from all over the UK to very rural Spreyton situated on the edge of Dartmoor. The delegates greatly enjoyed the excellent local food and accommodation including the facilities at Spreyton Parish Hall. The meeting was held over two days and included lively debates and presentations. This culminated in some key steps being outlined including making the work of all Community Planning Partners part of a set of findings and experiences that could be used to influence government and others as to the value and needs of Community led Planning. Our partners Action for Market Towns and ACRE are leading this initiative to stress the value to all tiers of government and the agencies of engaged and influential communities. Devon Heartland's presentation to the meeting was well received and echoed many of the comments and experiences of other partners. Some of the key findings are bulleted below:

- Community led Planning is a distinct part of the wider Voluntary and Community Sector but needs to be mainstreamed and resourced appropriately
- CLP offers a unique process for dynamic cross cutting and diverse engagement and support democratic processes
- It offers complementary channels for communication and engagement
- It offers valuable sources of evidence and consultation
- It underpins the importance of people, their community, their voice and their ideas
- It is an essential element in any sustainable and inclusive community.
- CLP should be empowering, informed and responsible



The presentation outlined some of the challenges remaining to be addressed:

- There is no overarching Strategy for Community led Planning
- Government, Local Authorities and the Agencies under value and under resource Community Led Planning
- Rural Communities require bespoke solutions
- Resources for CLP are not ring-fenced or clearly defined within LAA's or LDF's etc
- Agencies still tend to work top-down and in silo
- Agencies still default to in-house partners and are not sufficiently inclusive
- Communities need consistent ongoing support and advice to be effective and not destructive
- The Community Capacity and Confidence gained to-date is at serious risk if CLP does not deliver real inclusion!



Trevor Cherrett

Community Planning Partners Meeting Continued:



The Community Planning Partners Meeting was facilitated by Trevor Cherrett (photo above) who pulled much of the partners experience together into a concise set of learning actions. Trevor will incorporate these within future reports including the work proposed by Chris Wade of Action for Market Towns and ACRE described in his presentation.

A paper prepared by Chris Wade CEO of Action for Market Towns, together with Sylvia Brown of ACRE was circulated to delegates entitled 'Rolling out rural experience of community empowerment'. This set out comprehensive examples of Community led Planning and urged a proper response to both past and future initiatives and the need for those in government to be more aware of the benefits and low cost of well resourced and organised CLP.

Chris Wade

Allan Williams from ACRE gave a presentation on a proposal for a Regional Plans and Projects Database, outlining its potential to link with the existing Devon County 'Communities in Action' Database and even further potential for a national database. Allan had previously met with Devon's database lead officer Matt Bell with whom Devon Heartlands works closely in their support for the database project.



Allan Williams

The Partners meeting also included a site visit to Dartmoor Railway which is one of Devon Heartlands key community projects and had a quick look at the site for the Okehampton Mill Site Learning Resources Centre. Following site visits the delegates returned to Spreyton for a presentation from Tom Langdon Davies Chairman of the Devon Towns Forum who emphasised the important progress that had been made arising from the action research undertaken by Devon Heartlands and its partners.

Devon Heartlands Host Community Empowerment Event April 2008

In April Devon Heartlands also hosted the Devon Towns Forum conference on Community Empowerment and Community Asset Transfer. Key note speakers included Carnegie RARP Partner Hazel Stuteley OBE and Karen Bridgeford from Devon County Council.

Members of the local community mixed with others from further afield to hear the presentations. The conference was also attended by representatives of local organisations, Councillors and members of the Community. Devon Heartlands Community Forum Vice Chairman Bob Dunnett provided material and photographs of the Okehampton Mill Site together with information from the Okehampton Town Design statement and Okehampton MCTi Community Plan that advocate a community redevelopment for the Okehampton Mill site.



Hazel Stuteley OBE inspires delegates at the DTF Community Assets Event

Community Empowerment and Community Asset Transfer Event Continued:



Devon Heartlands Manager Ewen Rae also answered questions and gave details of the Devon Heartlands Okehampton Mill Site project for which we are undertaking a feasibility study to convert this redundant building into a much needed Learning resources Centre for Okehampton.

Sgt. Jonathan Longman and Okehampton's Community Support Officer were also in attendance for this important community event for Okehampton. Pictured with Hazel Stuteley our key note presenter. Okehampton Community Police Officers are frequently in attendance at the monthly Devon Heartlands Community Forum meetings and are always willing to support the local community.

Presentation of Devon Heartlands RARP to Gloucestershire Parish Plans Network

In March 2008 and arising from our engagement with the South West Acre Network we were asked to present our Carnegie Action Research to the Gloucestershire Parish Plans Network. The slide show and presentation was well received and is also available on our website. Devon Heartlands have now made several presentations of their RARP all of which have been well received.

Devon Heartlands assist community with Schools Competition:

The Community of Okehampton have been approached through the Devon Heartlands Community forum and its Chairman Philip Wagstaff by the County Council and the Government Department with responsibility for the proposed new school for Okehampton.

At a meeting the community were invited to put forward a proposal for the development of the new school and make recommendations as to its ethos and character. This is a new concept coming from central government and with the support of Devon Heartlands Community Forum and its Chairman the Community and members from the existing schools in the area put together a proposal that has now been presented to Devon County Council.

The community have worked very hard to address this requirement with very little notice and with so much at stake, concerns about the new scheme and the process have been raised and the community await news of the competition outcome.

Activity towards specific RARP outputs:

Further Progress and Activity towards DH RARP Objective 1:

“To use specific local examples, including the experience and outcomes of the Okehampton Area MCTi Community Action Plan, associated Parish Plans and other local community driven issues and to report their relevance and fit in whole or in part, to inform and influence other strategies, policy or priorities”.

1. School Competition:

- 1.1 The support and assistance provided by Devon Heartlands in co-ordinating a Community Meeting at short notice for the purpose of introducing the need for a Schools Competition bid from the Community is evidence of the valuable role played by the DH Community Forum, its Chairman and members. It is a good example of how issues affecting the community can be supported by Devon Heartlands to help rural communities inform policy makers.

2. Community Plans Database

- 2.1 The Community Plans Database identified as an outcome for the Devon Heartlands RARP has been slowly developing over the past few months. Devon Heartlands attended one of a series of training workshops to see how the database operates.
- 2.2 Devon Heartlands is keen to see the database continue and expand as outlined at the Carnegie Partners meeting, with potential for it being extended to a regional or even national database of community plans and projects.
- 2.3 The Database is a potentially valuable tool in that it can provide easy and universal access to community projects and plans, useful to Planners, Policy M and the Agencies as a reliable source of community derived evidence. The database is particularly useful for remote rural communities with limited resources to keep their plans up-to-date and visible.
- 2.4 However, there is a need for the database to be properly supported with ready access to experts and trainers. This has been raised with the Devon Towns Forum who are looking into the issue of ongoing support.

3. A sample of issues raised and pursued through the Devon Heartlands Community Forum

- 3.1 Rural Advocates Report, Support to Disadvantaged People, Bus Passenger Representation, School Truancy, Neighbourhood Watch, Street Furniture, Out of Town Car Park , WDBC Economic Regeneration Grant, Post Office Closures, Boundary Committee, Okehampton Deer Park Group, CAB Home Visiting Service, Senior Council for Devon, Dartmoor Railway, Greater Dartmoor Local Action Group, Okehampton Station Café & Shop, New Primary School, Devon Sustainable Community Strategy, OCRA Sports Hub, Free Bus Passes for Over 60's. This is good evidence of how the Community Forum offers meaningful engagement to local people.
- 3.2 Note: The Senior Council for Devon Okehampton Branch was initiated through the Devon Heartlands Community Forum with a strong ongoing links and co-operation.

Further Progress and Activity towards RARP Objective 2:

“To reference the experience and potential development of the West Devon LSP and of LSP’s generally to better support Community Engagement.”

Community / LSP Engagement Endorsed by SWRDA

1. The importance of achieving engagement between Community led Partnerships and Local Strategic Partnerships has recently been re-emphasised by SWRDA following its decision to discontinue the Market and Coastal Towns Association and the MCTi programme in Devon.
2. SWRDA have asserted that their future focus will be at the strategic and macro economic level and not at the local Community Partnership level which they see as more appropriately the province of Local Authorities and other Community Organisations and thus the particular need for Community led Planning groups to engage with and be represented within the Local Strategic Partnership structure.
3. Engagement with LSP’s was also a stated aim of the Devon Heartlands RARP and we have to that extent been prescient in helping to bring about precisely the sort of engagement the agencies recognise as desirable; indeed the model adopted by West Devon LSP should be seen as a ‘best practice’ exemplar of this.
4. The Devon Heartlands Joint Partnership Initiative is one such mechanism for this type of engagement that is now mirrored in several other areas of the County. Supported by the Devon Towns Forum all Market Town Community planning partnerships are able to become better engaged with their LSP and work collectively. This is a significant outcome for the Devon Heartland RARP and will provide a model for future representational and engagement fora across the County and elsewhere.
5. Devon Heartlands welcomes this new emphasis as a validation of its efforts to secure LSP representation for Community led Planning Partnerships. However possible boundary changes in Devon may introduce further changes and different fora such as Market Town Boards.
6. However the principle of representation and inclusion for community participation at a local level as, for example, established through the work of the RARP will be equally valid in any representational forum. Devon Heartlands will be pleased to continue its support for any emerging model which provides meaningful community inclusion and engagement.
7. Using the 28 Market Towns as Service Centres or Hubs and developing Town Boards is a current proposal of Devon County Council to the Boundary Commission. The role of District Councils under such an arrangement and indeed that of the district level LSP’s has yet to be fully worked out.

Further progress and activity towards DH RARP Objective 3:

“To identify examples of elected representatives supporting the process of Community led Planning in a Community Leadership and Community-well-being role as articulated by the LG Act 2000”

Councillor Involvement

- The Devon Heartlands have always embraced the principle of working with both the elected and participative leaders in the community and both regularly attend our monthly community forum meetings.
- There is strong anecdotal evidence that Community led Planning programmes such as Parish Planning and Market Town Planning have significantly increased the number of people who have either become or are interested in becoming elected representatives within their communities.
- It is not possible for Devon Heartlands to undertake a survey to properly assess this, but we intend to explore the possibility of joining forces with another organisation or agency to obtain a more accurate picture of people who have been engaged in Community Planning that go on to become local Councillors.
- Our Local Community Forum continues to provide an excellent platform in which County, Borough, Town and Parish Councillors can maintain links to their constituents, local organisations and other committees at the local and grass roots level.
- Local Borough Council kept Community Forum apprised of developments & issues re Post Office Closures, enabling the Forum to respond appropriately & to have a common approach with local councils.

Further progress and activity towards DH RARP Objective 4:

“To report the local/rural community’s experience of support, facilitation and influence of Community Planning, Engagement and Inclusion “

Further examples of opportunities for people to engage, contribute and report their concerns and experience as follows:

- Through Community Engagement events Seminars and Conferences e.g. Community Empowerment and Asset Transfer event in April 2008
- Continued engagement with the New Senior Councils for Devon
- Ongoing free monthly Community Forum Meetings
- Positive action undertaken by Devon Heartlands through the RARP on issues raised by the community
- Facilitating local consultation events such as the New Schools Consultation event
- Through Devon Heartlands Project Groups
- By engaging with the West Devon LSP Board and various LSP Theme Groups
- Supporting WDBC / CCD Parish Planning and the development of a Parish Plan for Okehampton Hamlets Parish in 2008
- Taking part in LDF Community Consultation events
- Support for DCC Stronger Communities Group

Further progress and activity towards DH RARP Objective 5:

“Identify obstacles and ‘Pinch Points’ in the current processes and the experience of rural community engagement and influence”.

1. Progress and Opportunities

- Community led Plans Database for Devon now operational
- West Devon Joint Partnership group provide meeting opportunities for the four market Town Community led Planning partnerships of West Devon to meet. The Joint Partnership has initiated discussions with WDBC re continuity funding, which propose funding should be fairly distributed. This could also lever additional funding.
- DH RARP contributing to work with the SWAN ongoing.
- New Partnership Agreement developed by West Devon LSP providing for Market Town Level representation on LSP Board ongoing
- West Devon LSP Community Engagement Strategy published
- Community Plans Protocol adopted for the Sustainable Community Strategy

4. Remaining Challenges:

These remain much the same as detailed in the previous second interim report with the significant difference that the MCTA will have ceased all operations as of June 2008 and there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the future boundary changes and the composition of all Local Authority tiers.

- Potential loss of a Regional focus and strategic connectivity for Community led Planning
- An Ad-Hoc approach to resourcing by the agencies and local authorities for Community Planning and support organisations have yet to be addressed.
- Lack of specific government guidance and resources for Community Led Planning and Engagement
- Lack of a coherent funding strategy at any level.
- Several long term Community Projects are beginning to move forward although the Dartmoor Railway project has stalled due to the parent company selling the asset.
- The need for resources to support grass root engagement has been recognised and some funding has been made available, but this funding needs to be mainstreamed.
- Exit strategies that support Community Planning Groups such as transfer of a manageable asset or award of a Service Level Agreement to assist with local service delivery need to be proactively supported by local authorities.
- Integration between Community Led Planning Groups and the wider Voluntary and Community Sector requires further work
- Integrating Community Led Planning with SCS's and LDF's and influencing LAA's may be improved with the establishment of Town Boards as proposed by Devon County Council
- Too much top-down policy imposed rather than worked out and agreed in advance with Community in a co-ordinated way. (For example DH has participated in 5 WD LSP Theme Group workshops but the Theme Action Plan was produced in isolation with no further opportunity to influence & support)
- Two Tiered Community Planning at County and District levels causes a disconnect between wider strategies and opportunities for local Community Planning Groups such as those offered by Local Area Agreements.
- Need to secure funding contributions e.g. from LA's and Agencies for operation of local Community Forums

Further progress and activity towards DH RARP Objective 6:

“To report the experience and effectiveness of available support and facilitation and the influence of Community Development, Engagement and Inclusion: from the Community Partnerships perspective”.

As reported previously several developments are now in place to support and facilitate Community Engagement and Inclusion including:

- The Community Plans Database
- Community Planning reps on the board of the West Devon LSP
- The West Devon Sustainable Community Strategy and Core Strategy are aligned making identification of priorities clearer and now includes an Engagement Strategy and Community Plans Protocol

All the above are welcome collaborative developments. However, it is not possible to gauge their impact or effectiveness as none have been in operation for any length of time or applied to a specific project or activity.

Opportunities to gauge the effectiveness of these policies will arise in the coming months as the meetings and projects that rely on them take place and can be reported.

Appendix 1

Press Release Issued by the Devon Heartlands Community Development Trust 18 April 2008

Internationally Renowned Carnegie UK Trust Come to Devon



Okehampton based Devon Heartlands Community Development Trust were thrilled to act as hosts for the internationally renowned **Carnegie UK Trust** Community Planning Partners Meeting for 2008.

Over the 15th and 16th of April delegates from all parts of the UK and Ireland gathered in the beautiful village of Spreyton to review their work looking at how effectively different rural communities engage with the statutory and voluntary sectors. Devon Heartlands and other delegates gave examples of their Action Research which the Carnegie UK Trust will use to inform government and other policy making bodies about what helps communities and what does not.

With presentations from partners including: Action for Market Towns, Action with Communities in Rural England, the Devon Towns Forum and Devon Heartlands, delegates were brought up to speed with the latest developments in Community led Planning and Community Engagement research.

Chris Wade for AMT said, 'there are now clear messages emerging through the Carnegie Action Research that will be highly valuable to the future of both rural and urban Community led Planning'.

Devon Heartlands who also operate a Community Forum in Okehampton praised the work of their partners within West Devon for work on Community Engagement Strategies and Planning Protocols also, Devon County Council for their drive to establish an on-line database to record every community plan and project across the county. Paul Delahoy leading the Heartland's research said 'We are especially grateful to Carnegie for providing this opportunity to contribute and reflect our experience of working with all our partners.'

Tom Langdon Davies for the Towns forum said 'The Heartlands Carnegie Research has provided real opportunities to share best practice and work across organisational boundaries at every level; this has been a fantastic opportunity to work together.'

ENDS.

Further information about the work of the Carnegie UK Trust can be found on their website at <http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/rarp>

Information about the Devon Heartlands Carnegie Action Research is available at www.devonheartlands.co.uk