

## Planning with communities

[Back to title page](#)

Contents:

[Introduction](#)

[The modernising agenda](#)

[Modernising planning](#)

[The benefits of community engagement](#)

[People and planning](#)

[New technology offers opportunity and choice](#)

["I now know not to be afraid to speak up"](#)

[Community advocacy](#)

[No one right answer](#)

[Use of appropriate techniques](#)

[Community responsibility](#)

[Working in partnership](#)

[Community institutions](#)

[Community strategies and plans](#)

[Neighbourhood community strategies](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Useful contacts](#)

[Case studies](#)

### Introduction

This guide celebrates the role that planners play in community planning.

For many years the planning profession has publicly recognised outstanding examples of planning practice. A common feature of the most successful projects has been the involvement of local people. The profession's recognition of the value of engaging with communities is not new, but working in collaboration with local people has risen in priority and has become central to many aspects of planning.

The term 'community planning' can be interpreted in different ways. For most planners it involves the activity of town and country planning operating at a neighbourhood level, working with local people to plan their locality. As such it has parallels in community architecture or community local economic development. But the term is also now used to describe the process by which local authorities work in partnership with other public agencies and the community in the preparation of plans or strategies. This results in the production of a community plan or community strategy identifying goals and priorities for the area. Both interpretations are based on an acceptance of the need to involve local people in decisions which shape the future of their community.

This guide explores the opportunities opening up to planners as a result of the changing agendas at national and local levels. It begins by reviewing the context for community planning in terms of the government's modernising programme and considers the benefits of working with communities. This is followed by a series of [case studies](#) chosen to demonstrate the range and diversity of community planning activity as well as the benefits, challenges and lessons that can be learned. These are drawn from both the statutory and non-statutory sectors. The guide is aimed at planners in general, not only those currently working in mainstream planning but also those in related fields.

### The modernising agenda

The current focus on community engagement is part of a wider modernising agenda launched by the Labour government after its election in 1997. Local government has been charged with improving the delivery of local services, particularly via the application of Best

Value principles; maintaining an ethical framework which ensures high standards of probity; and enhancing democratic renewal by re-examining the relationship between councils and their electorates.

A major theme has been the need to re-establish the democratic legitimacy of local government, making it more open and responsive to local people. Several aspects of this are crucial. The first is the concept of 'community

leadership', which emphasises the central role councils can play in taking an overview of the needs of their area and co-ordinating the required action to address these needs. The Local Government Association has identified a range of benchmarks for community leadership. These include building vision and direction, involving and learning from communities, standing up for communities and being accountable to communities.

The second element involves the reassessment of electoral procedures, including the use of new technologies for voting, and a re-examination of the political structures of local councils with the creation of executive mayors. The third strand is concerned with the methods required to facilitate community input to policy and decision making processes. A great deal of applied research is under way into the use of innovative techniques such as citizens' juries, peoples' panels and public question times.

This change in focus is important for planners and planning practice. In the past, the planning system was one of the very few policy arenas where there was a statutory requirement to involve the public and particular approaches and methods were developed within this framework. The modernising agenda and its concern with democratic renewal means that community engagement has become a key principle for policy makers across the public sector. Not only are new techniques being pioneered, but new institutional mechanisms are being created which will enable individuals to play a greater role in shaping the future of their lives.

Planners can benefit hugely from this new environment.

## **Modernising planning**

The landscape within which planning operates is changing. Across the UK moves are being made to modernise planning in order to meet the challenges of delivering sustainable development, economic regeneration and environmental quality. Development planning frameworks are being altered and streamlined, regulation is being reduced and more emphasis is being put on management of the system. Despite differences in approach in the four planning jurisdictions, common goals are evident: the need to improve the quality and speed of decisions; to provide clarity of policy; to inspire confidence amongst the public and the business sector; to integrate land use plans with other plans and processes; and to engage the community more effectively.

It is particularly significant that there is a common commitment to the provision of planning systems that give local people opportunities to shape and influence their local environment. Openness and transparency are repeatedly stressed, together with accessibility and inclusiveness. Whatever the particular arrangements put in place to deliver a modern planning service, it is clear that one of the tests of effectiveness in the future will be the extent to which the community is empowered.

## **The benefits of community engagement**

*"What is the point of cities built without the people's wisdom" (Brecht)*

There are many benefits to be gained from adopting an inclusive approach to planning initiatives, some relating to public agencies and some to the communities themselves. For public agencies, community engagement can assist in the identification of needs and problems, inform policy-making at a local level and help target services in the most appropriate manner. It can also provide feedback on the effectiveness of service delivery and identify where greater co-operation and co-ordination with other organisations and

agencies are needed. For the community, involvement allows local people to identify their own needs and priorities, opens up decision-making processes to those normally excluded such as young people or ethnic minorities, helps to build community spirit and a sense of local ownership, encourages an acceptance of responsibility and empowers individuals and groups.

Community engagement does not provide all the answers to the problems facing planning. However, working co-operatively can help to develop credibility and trust, lead to more flexible and creative responses to planning issues and provide a stable foundation on which to manage future change and uncertainty.

## **People and planning**

The planning profession's history of working with communities can be traced back to the late 1960s and the publication of the Skeffington report 'People and Planning'. That report accepted the need to involve the public in planning and made far-reaching recommendations which influenced subsequent legislation in the early 1970s. Publicity and consultation became required components of the statutory planning system providing local people with opportunities to comment on and object to development plans and planning applications. Planners in the 1970s embraced this new responsibility with some enthusiasm, and time and effort was spent preparing exhibitions and organising public meetings.

Despite the enthusiasm, the response from the public was typically disappointing. Gradually this led many councils to reassess their commitment to public consultation and to carry out only the minimum necessary to meet the requirements of the planning acts. However, some planning authorities stayed committed to the principle of participation and devised new strategies to overcome the barriers to engagement. As a result, the planning profession today has a wealth of experience of working with communities and valuable examples of good practice to which we can refer.

## **New technology offers opportunities and choice**

Effective public access to planning information is crucial to the process of encouraging the public to get involved in decisions about their environment.

Frequently, local people either don't hear about changes in their neighbourhood until they happen or don't know how to make their views known. The provision of open and accessible information about planning can have many benefits. These include greater public understanding of planning issues, increased public scrutiny of policies and decisions, enhanced public confidence and accountability and a stronger democratic basis to the planning system.

Planning authorities across the country are making great strides in improving the provision of planning information to the public, for example by simplifying planning application forms, producing clear, jargon-free advice for applicants and using new technology. Use of the internet is particularly exciting. Members of the public can interrogate a web site from anywhere in the world, twenty-four hours a day. A range of information can be provided in a user-friendly, accessible way and in a form that is easy to assimilate and interpret. No longer do people need prior knowledge of what to ask for.

New technology used in this way allows planners to be more customer-focused.

Wandsworth Council is leading in such developments and provides an excellent example for others to follow ([case study 1](#)).

## **"I now know not to be afraid to speak up"**

It is not only the provision of information that is important. Knowledge and understanding about the operation of the planning system is needed if the public are to feel able to actively participate. The public do not always have the confidence to challenge officials and to ask difficult but pertinent questions. Do planners have a role in promoting such awareness and building 'planning capacity'?

The answer is a resounding yes. Initiatives such as Planning Aid for Scotland's CLEAR Project (Community Local Environmental Awareness) and West Midland and Yorkshire Planning Aid's Rural Planning Outreach Project ([case study 2](#)) demonstrate the added value that can be gained from demystifying the planning process and building self-confidence to enable participation.

### **Community advocacy**

There is increasing recognition that people need access to independent and impartial advice to participate effectively in the planning system. Planning consultants provide such a service, but some sections of society are excluded due to lack of resources. There is an on-going debate about the best way to address this issue. Planning Aid, where individual planners give their time on a voluntary basis, provides one possible model and Community Technical Aid, an independent group employing specialists in planning and architecture, provides an alternative model ([case study 3](#)).

### **There is no one right answer in planning ...it all depends on who you are and what you want to achieve**

The planning profession has long had a commitment to equality and inclusiveness. Experience has shown the value to be gained from working with groups who are generally absent from debate on planning matters, such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and young people. Such groups bring different viewpoints and experience to the table and it is vital that their voices are heard. There are many interesting examples of initiatives designed to engage with young people, including the Highland Structure Plan Youth Forum and Birmingham City Council's Youth Focus Group ([case study 4](#)).

### **Use of appropriate techniques**

It is possible to identify a raft of innovative consultation techniques, such as visioning exercises, placecheck surveys and participatory appraisals.

Planning for Real?, developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, has proved particularly valuable as a consultation technique in the planning field ([case study 5](#)). Based on a 3D-model and locally customised option cards, Planning for Real? generates local interest, is inclusive in approach and allows the community to discuss and prioritise proposals.

Another community-based approach which has gained in popularity, is the preparation of village design statements. A village design statement is produced by local people and provides a picture of what makes a place different and special to its inhabitants. Preparing a statement raises local awareness of design issues, but it does much more than that. Village design statements can be adopted as supplementary planning guidance, and as a result they are used in negotiations with developers and applicants. They also inform decisions taken on planning applications and can lead to better quality environments ([case study 6](#)).

### **Community responsibility**

Over the past decade, many local authorities have sought to improve the delivery of local services and strengthen citizen involvement through the process of decentralisation.

Three dimensions of decentralisation can be distinguished: political, involving local communities in consultation and decision-making on local issues; managerial, concerned with moving the management of services nearer the point of service delivery; and physical, improving both the physical access to council offices and increasing awareness of the council and the services it provides.

As part of this process, a number of councils have delegated responsibility for planning applications to the neighbourhood level, empowering local communities. In some localities, planning decisions have been delegated to area or neighbourhood committees, for example in Dumfries and Galloway, while elsewhere this responsibility has been given to parish councils, for example in Taunton Deane ([case study 7](#)).

Experience suggests that the public not only have local knowledge and insight into problems but are also capable of taking appropriate planning decisions.

## Working in partnership

Planners have extensive experience of working with communities in a diverse range of non-statutory planning work, from the regeneration of inner city sites to the creation of footpath networks. Unconstrained by legal requirements and statutory deadlines, planners have had the opportunity to devise community-based approaches which respond to local situations.

Many of the most successful examples of community planning involve planners working in partnership with other agencies and the public.

Partnership approaches have many benefits including the development of a shared vision and agreed priorities, the sharing of knowledge and skills and, the opportunity for joined-up action. Planners bring to such situations knowledge, skills and the experience of co-operative working. Partnership working frequently enables outcomes to be achieved that would not have been possible by agencies working alone. Such success is clearly visible in the planning field. Only by working with others can some planning policies can be taken forward and implemented. Good examples can be found in relation to access to the countryside, urban regeneration and affordable housing ([case study 8](#)).

## Community institutions

Too often, community-based projects are funded on short timescales and, as a result, disappear when resourcing ends. This highlights the importance of creating structures and mechanisms which enable the community to sustain initiatives over the long term.

One such mechanism that has been used very effectively in many planning related projects is the community development trust. Community development trusts are enterprises with social objectives which engage actively in the regeneration of an area whilst ensuring that the benefits are returned to the community. They are community based and locally accountable and typically seek self-sufficiency and independence. While many of the earliest trusts grew out of disputes and conflicts, more recent examples have developed as part of government-funded programmes such as City Challenge and Social Inclusion Partnerships. Great Torrington and District Community Development Trust, for example, has successfully co-ordinated the implementation a ?1 million Rural Challenge programme ([case study 9](#)).

## Community strategies and plans

Planners have a wealth of experience of working with communities. This has traditionally been focused on the local or neighbourhood scale, but a new and exciting opportunity has emerged.

Planners can now use their expertise to contribute to the creation of community strategies or community plans at both local authority and more local levels. In this context, community planning has been described as any process through which a council comes together with other organisations to plan, provide or promote the well-being of the communities it serves.

The concept of community planning, which first appeared in the Labour Party policy statement '*Renewing democracy, rebuilding communities*', provides a means of promoting common agendas and securing integrated service delivery. While the form of implementation varies across the UK, a key element is the involvement of local people. The main output of the community planning process is a community plan or strategy which sets out the strategic vision and an indication of measures to translate that vision into action on the ground.

How does this new community planning agenda relate to town and country planning, and what is the role of planners in the process?

Indications from government suggest that the community strategy or plan will be the lead document in setting an overall framework for policy-making and action at a council level and that the planning system will provide the

mechanism for delivering those aspects of the community strategy that impact on the development and use of land.

Initial community plans or strategies have been prepared for many areas. A review of these reveals certain common themes or priorities, such as social inclusion, sustainable development, prosperity, community health and safety. All of these themes are well known to planners, and indeed underpin most development planning activity. It is clear that the processes of preparing community strategies and development plans are closely inter-related and that each can inform the other. Indeed it is anticipated that work on the preparation of these documents may run in parallel, perhaps with co-ordinated consultation exercises. Such an approach was successfully adopted by Highland Council during 2000 when a joint public consultation exercise was used to involve local communities in the Highland community plan and the Highland structure plan.

In some places, such as South Lanarkshire, planners are already making a significant contribution to the preparation of community strategies, drawing on their existing knowledge and skills ([case study 10](#)). At a strategic level, community planning requires individuals with expertise in reviewing existing strategies and plans, creating strategic visions, collecting and analysing data, negotiating and working in partnership with others to overcome problems and listening to the community. Planners have all of these skills. Above all, however, planners have the ability to provide community strategies with a spatial dimension, an element that has been missing from many of the early examples.

## Neighbourhood community strategies

While most initial effort has been directed to the preparation of strategic community strategies and plans at a local authority level, progress is also being made towards more effective and co-ordinated joint delivery of services at a neighbourhood scale. Increasingly, regeneration programmes such as Social Inclusion Partnerships and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders recognise that effective implementation depends on good local management, which brings together public, private and community interests to secure services that meet the needs of local residents.

These regeneration initiatives effectively demonstrate community planning at the neighbourhood scale. Planners have an important role to play at this level too, tackling complex problems, assisting in the creation of local strategies and helping make locational choices ([case study 11](#)).

## Conclusion

Community planning is now firmly on the planning agenda. Planners are taking the opportunity provided by the current government emphasis on community engagement to work with local people in creative and innovative ways. The case studies in this guide represent only a tiny proportion of the community planning activity currently being undertaken in the UK. Although each illustrates a different aspect of community planning, a number of common themes are evident.

- Community planning is primarily concerned with meeting the needs and aspirations of local people.
- There is a recognition that local people have an important and legitimate role to play in planning the future of their locality.
- A great deal can be achieved by working in partnership with others to achieve positive environmental outcomes.
- There can be benefits for the communities themselves, such as enhanced awareness of local issues, confidence to participate in local affairs and the ability to take responsibility for the future of the neighbourhood.
- Planners possess a range of skills that make them well suited to a community planning approach. In addition to key planning skills such as spatial awareness, strategy formulation, aesthetic and design abilities, planners have expertise in facilitating

discussion and debate, problem solving, negotiation, mediation and advocacy, collaboration and partnership working.

The RTPI's New Vision for Planning challenges the traditional view of planning and seeks an approach that is spatial, sustainable, integrative and inclusive. Working with communities is at the heart of such an approach. Best practice from around the country not only shows what can be achieved but also provides the inspiration for others to follow.

## Useful contact

**Community Planning Association.** *At the time of writing the RTPI was in the process of creating a new association for all those engaged or interested in community planning.*

Contact:

Community Planning

RTPI

41 Botolph Lane

London EC3R 8DL

Tel: 0207 929 9494

Fax: 0207 929 9490

Email: [community.planning@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:community.planning@rtpi.org.uk)

**Planning Aid.** *Planning Aid throughout the UK and Ireland is co-ordinated by the RTPI.*

Contact:

Planning Aid Manager

Unit 419, The Custard Factory

Gibb Street, Digbeth

Birmingham B9 4AA

Tel: 0121 766 5282

Fax: 0121 693 1201

Email: [planningaid@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:planningaid@rtpi.org.uk)

### **Community Technical Aid**

445-449 Ormeau Road

Belfast BT7 3GQ

Tel: 01232 642227

Fax: 01232 642467

Email: [info@commtechaid.com](mailto:info@commtechaid.com)

### **Development Trust Association**

2-8 Scrutton Street

London EC2A 4RT

Tel: 0845 458 8336

Fax: 0845 458 8337

Email: [info@dta.org.uk](mailto:info@dta.org.uk)

Web: [www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk)

### **Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation**

The Poplars

Lightmoor

Telford

Shropshire TF4 3QN

Tel: 0870 7700339

Fax: 01952 591771

Web: [www.nifonline.org.uk](http://www.nifonline.org.uk)

## Planning with communities

[Back to the title page](#)

[Back to the Introduction](#)

Case studies:

[1 Wandsworth](#)

[2 West Midlands and Yorkshire Planning Aid's Rural Planning Outreach Project](#)

[3 Community Technical Aid](#)

[4 Birmingham City Council Youth Focus Group](#)

[5 Ffestiniog Planning For Real? Project](#)

[6 Village Design Statements - Stratford](#)

[7 Taunton Deane](#)

[8 Rural Partnership for Change Highland Pilot](#)

[9 Great Torrington and District Community Development Trust](#)

[10 South Lanarkshire Community Plan](#)

[11 Bolton Local Community Planning](#)

### *Case study 1. Wandsworth*

[Back to the text](#)

The Wandsworth planning website has opened up the planning system to the public in an exciting and innovative way. The website allows an individual to view a range of documents, including planning application forms, drawings, and decision notices. Users can submit comments on current applications, check on the current state of progress in the processing of applications, download planning application forms, consult guidance notes, comment on draft policies, from the unitary development plan to supplementary planning guidance on new access design guidelines, and read features about major developments in the locality. Since its introduction in 1996 use of the website has grown rapidly, with over 70,000 hits on the planning Register recorded in 2000. People find using this system liberating as they are able to access a huge range of information easily, from anywhere and at any time. The website has broadened access as it is possible to browse without needing to know exactly what information to ask for.

Planners at Wandsworth have welcomed these developments as representing a better quality of service. It has become easier for officers to access information and to help the public to find the answers to questions. The response from users of the planning service has been very favourable.

Planners at Wandsworth are not resting on their laurels, however. The council is part of the Planning Portal programme being developed by the Planning Inspectorate and it has obtained Pathfinder status as part of the government's drive to make local government services available electronically.

[Back to the text](#)

### *Case study 2. West Midland and Yorkshire Planning Aid's Rural Planning Outreach Project*

[Back to the text](#)

West Midland and Yorkshire Planning Aid's Rural Planning Outreach Project, which ran from August 1998 to March 2001, sought to overcome a lack of what has been called 'planning capacity' in many rural communities. One of the principal aims of the Project was to help

raise public awareness of planning processes and to give local people the confidence to get involved in planning in a positive way.

Central to this aim was a training seminar programme targeted at four main groups: local communities, small businesses, farm enterprises and local authorities. The 188 seminars organised for communities ranged from introductory workshops on development control and development plans to more in-depth sessions on community development techniques such as village appraisals. These events were complemented by a planning resource pack setting out information about the planning system in an accessible way.

It may surprise some that the Project also provided training for professional planners and others working in related fields. Here the emphasis was on the use of community development techniques and the dissemination of good practice in community engagement.

Evaluation of the impact of the training suggested that there had been a significant increase in skill levels of participants and many felt much more confident about getting involved in the planning system. The knowledge and skills gained were put to effect in a number of demonstration projects, for example in the preparation of proposals for a new village green in Sawdon, near Scarborough, and the renovation of a children's play area and community space in Cookley, near Kidderminster.

[Back to the text](#)

### *Case study 3. Community Technical Aid*

[Back to the text](#)

Community Technical Aid (CTA) is a voluntary organisation established in Belfast in 1984 to assist projects that benefit disadvantaged communities. It is funded partly by the Northern Ireland Planning Service and partly by fee income. It employs a range of development professions including planners and architects. CTA works with local groups in a number of ways: raising awareness of planning and related issues, assisting groups to participate in the regeneration of their areas and helping groups devise and implement development schemes.

One particular initiative illustrates the value of such work. The community of Ligoneil in the north of Belfast approached CTA to help them prepare a development strategy for their area. The existing development plan had allocated substantial land for housing, but this was now surplus to local needs. The community wished to see the area developed as an urban village, taking advantage of vacant sites and derelict properties to create a new village centre. CTA helped to set up a partnership involving both community groups and statutory agencies such as the Housing Executive and the Planning Service. CTA used their expertise to involve the local community with techniques such as Planning with People, focus groups and workshops. The project has resulted in the preparation of a development strategy for Ligoneil which is expected to influence the new Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

The role of CTA has been vital in this process. It is seen as an independent agency which is able to work with all sections of the community and the various statutory bodies. Central to this work is the ability to recognise and understand the aspirations of the different stakeholders and to help bring them together to act in a unified way. There is recognition that there are no simple, easy answers to problems and that compromise is needed. At Ligoneil the process has been driven by local people and the community has been greatly empowered by the experience.

[Back to the text](#)

#### ***Case study 4. Birmingham City Council Youth Focus Group***

[Back to the text](#)

The planning profession has made very little attempt to involve children and young people in decisions about the future of their environment. Where issues relating to children have been identified, planners have often sought the views of parents, schools or other adult-controlled organisations rather than those of the young people themselves. Birmingham City Council has adopted a different approach. In 1999, the council held a youth convention which was attended by a hundred and forty young people from across the city. Following this, the planning department set up a youth focus group to make sure that the views of young people are fed directly into the planning decision-making process.

The youth focus group is made up of young people from across Birmingham and currently has a membership of around eighteen. Major development proposals are presented to the group by the relevant case officer and comments are put forward to the committee. The group also considers development briefs and local action plans. This is an important mechanism which allows the views of young people to be heard. While the planners accept that the group is not representative, they value its work as the young people raise issues that adults don't know about and often present an alternative perspective.

[Back to the text](#)

#### ***Case study 5. Ffestiniog Planning For Real? Project***

[Back to the text](#)

Planning for Real? was central to the preparation of a community action plan for the Ffestiniog Community Council area. In August 2000, Gwynedd Council commissioned North West Planning Aid Service to work with Cyfle Ffestiniog, the local regeneration agency, to find out what improvements local people wanted to see in their area. The project was broken down into three stages. The first stage involved the organisation of five Planning for Real? events. These events attracted nearly 400 local people drawn from across the community and by the end of the sessions 4800 individual ideas and opinions had been recorded. The second stage consisted of two follow-up prioritisation and action planning sessions where the ideas put forward were sifted, discussed and prioritised. This stage, undertaken by 20 people, resulted in the preparation of a draft community action plan. Finally, four consultation events were held to allow the wider community to comment on the draft plan. These events were attended by 145 people and there was broad support for almost all of the plan.

This project has proved to be of great value. Many of the ideas have been taken on board by Cyfle Ffestiniog as part of its corporate strategy and the community action plan has also influenced the Gwynedd unitary development plan. It has provided local planners with up to date information and views that were otherwise not available.

[Back to the text](#)

#### ***Case study 6. Village Design Statements - Stratford***

[Back to the text](#)

Planners working for Stratford-on-Avon District Council have extensive experience of developing and using village design statements. Over a three year period, 18 communities have produced statements which allow local people to identify the quality and character of their village and to influence decisions on future developments. Working in this way requires planners with both aesthetic and design knowledge and skills and the ability to listen to community views and facilitate debate and discussion. Typically, initial interest in preparing a village design statement came from the parish council, but in order to take the project forward it was usual to set up a new group whose membership was drawn from a cross-section of the community. Grants have been available both to allow communities to produce the Statements and to support projects to improve the physical fabric or the environment of the village.

What have been the benefits of working with communities in this way? In Stratford, as elsewhere, the Statements have been adopted as supplementary planning guidance. They

have been used in negotiations with developers and have been used successfully in appeals to support the refusal of applications. Indeed, it is felt that better standards of development have been achieved as a result of using the Statements. There have been benefits for the communities too. Being involved in the process of preparing a village design statement has helped local people discover their village and see it in a different way. Participants have learned new knowledge and skills and have developed the capacity to do other tasks collectively.

[Back to the text](#)

#### *Case study 7. Taunton Deane*

[Back to the text](#)

In 1993, Taunton Deane Borough Council took the unusual step of delegating certain planning powers to a group of parish councils in its area. Initially introduced as a pilot covering three councils, the scheme was extended in 1994 and again in 1996 and now covers eight parishes. The categories of applications concerned are broadly similar to those devolved to the chief planning officer and mainly consist of householder applications.

Parish councils involved in the scheme value it greatly. While acknowledging that the applications being dealt with are typically small scale, straightforward and normally uncontroversial, it is felt that the scheme gives them a real opportunity to exercise local democracy at grass roots level. Applications receive a site visit and are debated fully, ensuring informed local decisions. The scheme was reviewed in March 2002 when a number of concerns were raised by the chief planning officer. These included the impact of the scheme on the council's development control performance, its cost, consistency of decisions and issues of parochialism. As is evident in other community-based initiatives, there is a tension between encouraging community ownership and ensuring an efficient process. The council has resolved this tension by agreeing modifications which simplify the scheme but retain community responsibility.

[Back to the text](#)

#### *Case study 8. Rural Partnership for Change Highland Pilot*

[Back to the text](#)

Planners at Highland Council have come together with other agencies and the community to develop new ways of addressing the shortage of affordable housing in rural parts of their area. The project, which was set up by the Scottish Executive, has involved the local authority working with Communities Scotland, local housing trusts and associations and other agencies such as local enterprise companies and the water authority. The joint approach allowed the stakeholders to agree common goals and ways of achieving them, establish joint programming of resources and ensure co-ordinated implementation. The pilot developed a new approach to the identification of housing need which not only uses quantitative data but also incorporates qualitative elements such as local professional knowledge and the views of the community.

Central to the success of the pilot is the work of eight local housing development forums. Local communities are represented on these bodies by the Highland Small Communities Trust and representatives from housing associations in the area although meetings are open to other community representatives. The trust has acted as the main vehicle for engaging with local people. Within a strategic framework, provided by the structure plan and the community plan, the forums have been able to highlight areas of housing stress, identify potential housing sites, and work out ways of overcoming barriers to development. In a very short time, the approach has led to the development of new affordable houses in rural communities.

The planners' role has been crucial to the process, particularly at the local level. Officers have been able to use their local knowledge, gained both through local plan and development control work, to identify potential sites and to work creatively to find solutions

and facilitate development. Whereas in the past affordable housing was frequently developed where sites became available, now it is being built where the need is greatest. The pilot is getting development on the ground in the right places.

[Back to the text](#)

#### *Case study 9. Great Torrington and District Community Development Trust*

[Back to the text](#)

The closure of a major local employer in 1993 was the catalyst for action in the town of Great Torrington, North Devon. Local people joined with public agencies to commission the preparation of a development strategy for the regeneration of the area. Central to the action strategy produced was the creation of a community development trust.

The Great Torrington and District Community Development Trust, set up in 1996, exists to foster a thriving economy, create jobs and improve and sustain the quality of life for local people. The trust is a company with charitable status limited by guarantee and is owned and controlled by its members. It has proved to be an invaluable vehicle in the successful regeneration of the town. In 1997 the trust received ?1 million funding from Rural Challenge, matched by ?2.3 million from other sources, to implement the 'Genesis Project'. The funding allowed the trust to purchase a local derelict hotel in the centre of the town and redevelop it to house a Civil War interpretation centre, a computer centre and a range of other community facilities. In addition, the local pannier market has been refurbished, creating eleven permanent retail units. Although owned by the local council, the market is managed by the trust, providing it with a small source of income.

The community development trust has not worked alone in these developments but its role has been crucial in getting things done. It has the strong support of the local community. It has acted as a catalyst for other improvements in the town, such as environmental work in the conservation area carried out by the conservation area partnership. The trust is now looking to the future and is seeking to address new challenges such as the provision of affordable housing in the town, the redevelopment of the Dairy Crest Creamery site and the future use of the town hall.

[Back to the text](#)

#### *Case study 10. South Lanarkshire Community Plan*

[Back to the text](#)

South Lanarkshire Council was one of five pathfinder councils invited by the government in 1998 to pilot the community planning process in Scotland. A community planning partnership was established to initiate the process and this included the council, the police authority, the local enterprise company, two health boards and Scottish Homes.

Drawing on the considerable experience of the local partners, a draft community plan, 'Stronger Together', was produced. This aims to improve the quality of life for all in South Lanarkshire by ensuring equal access to opportunities and to quality services that meet people's needs. Delivery of this vision is organised around three strategic themes: successful and inclusive communities, safe and healthy communities and working and learning communities. The community plan, which has a ten year time scale, is complemented by an annual action plan which sets out current and future actions needed to achieve the partnership's vision. Following consultation with the wider community, South Lanarkshire's first community plan was agreed in December 2000.

Planners have contributed to the development of the community plan in South Lanarkshire in two ways. Firstly, a number of the key officials within the council who are charged with taking the plan forward come from a planning background. This background has proved valuable in the process of creating strategy, particularly in aligning the priorities of the different partnership organisations, as well as in engaging with the general public. Secondly, the planning service, along with other stakeholders, participated in the development of the community plan. They were involved in the process of identifying issues and taking these

forward through workshop sessions. A strategic planning viewpoint was provided by the Glasgow and Clyde Valley structure plan team. It is recognised in South Lanarkshire that there could and perhaps should be closer links between the community planning and development planning processes in the future.

[Back to the text](#)

### *Case study 11. Bolton Local Community Planning*

#### [Back to the text](#)

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council has recognised the importance of responding to community concerns in a holistic and joined-up way. It has adopted a 'people come first and central' philosophy in its approach to service delivery in twelve areas of the borough where it was felt that additional support and resources were needed to help the communities become sustainable. The first step in the local community planning process was therefore to consult with the community using a variety of methods such as fun days, Planning for Real?, themed events and public meetings. As a result, each community had a major input to the action plan produced for its estate.

There has also been recognition of the importance of developing appropriate community infrastructure and support mechanisms as part of the local community planning process. Community panels have been set up, consisting of local people, council officers and representatives of voluntary groups and agencies, to influence service provision in each area. A new corporate group has been established in the council, the Joined Up Locally Group, consisting of senior managers and team leaders from all departments, to provide support to the panels and undertake monitoring and evaluation of the process. A training scheme for officials and community representatives has also been put in place.

Planners working in an economic development context play a part in this process. They bring knowledge and understanding of the development framework of Bolton and ensure that proposals comply with policies in the unitary development plan. Experience of inter-agency working has been important as the process has involved working with others including landlords and local businesses.