

Pathways of Influence

A report on community led and parish planning from NWRCC

Research lead by the North West Rural Community Councils, in collaboration with Government Office North West and Rural Innovation and funded by Carnegie UK Trust has been launched on the effect of parish planning within our communities. This briefing sheet outlines some of those findings.

The parish planning process enables local people to work together to consider their needs for the future and develop an action plan that will help them achieve their shared ambitions. In Cheshire, the term Parish Planning is more commonly used than community led planning and to date, over 70 parish plans are at varying stages of development and delivery in the Cheshire area.

The process embodies a number of important core characteristics:

- It is led by the community, driven and resourced through grass roots action.
- It is elective, in other words the people working on community plans are volunteers
- It is supported by experienced independent facilitators and tool kits based upon national and local best practice.
- It involves extensive community participation and engagement.
- It brings together a well researched evidence base which, alongside in depth consultation, underpins its conclusions.
- Throughout, the focus is on identifying actions that can be undertaken to tackle locally identified problems and issues.

Cheshire Community Action, formerly Cheshire Community Council, is a local charity dedicated to helping you develop your local communities through self-help, encouragement and support.

We are committed to providing funding advice and support for projects which will protect and enhance the communities of Cheshire, Warrington and Halton, building strong and active communities.

Established in 1930.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Cheshire Community Action (formerly Cheshire Community Council)

Cohesive, empowered, and active communities in which people can influence the decisions that affect their locality are at the heart of the Government's vision for Britain. The Local Government White Paper introduced a commitment to empower communities to have greater influence over decisions that affect them. It proposed a new duty on Local Government to consult and involve local people in their policy development and encourages the implementation of local charters. These proposals have now been statutorily enacted in The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act which received

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Royal Assent in October 2007. Community led planning must be at the heart this Duty to Involve. Put simply, community planning matters because you can't **shape places** without it.

Community planning is nothing new. For the last 10 years, many rural communities have been engaged in parish planning processes designed to empower and increase their influence over the decisions that affect them. Research carried out in the North West found that parish planning was an effective way to get communities working together to deliver local actions and improvements. However, it also found that the ability of these same communities to influence public policy and service delivery was limited.

As recently as July 2007 Defra¹ found that despite a policy framework that is 'broadly supportive of neighbourhood/parish plans',

'there is often little recognition, by both local authorities and mainstream service providers, of the widespread benefits that parish plans can provide'.

The findings of our study mirror many of those identified by Defra.

There are ten Headline Findings of this research which include

1. The activity of community planning develops community capacity and cohesion.
2. Failure to achieve satisfactory influence from community planning frustrates participants and acts as a disincentive to engage with statutory agencies and service deliverers in the future.
3. To be effective and worthwhile a Community Plan must offer quality, credibility and be soundly evidence based.
4. Facilitation by neutral third parties helps communities through the process and gives principal authorities and services deliverers' confidence in the outcome.
5. Involvement of Councillors is Critical.
6. Formal Processes Help Statutory Agencies make best Use of Community Plans.

The full report issues "calls to action" on each of these points which are aimed at all partners in the process, including the communities themselves. In an exciting and dynamic time, where the shift of power is moving to communities and the people within them, capturing that enthusiasm, helping in that place shaping, is a core aspect of Cheshire Community Action's work.

The full report can be found at www.cheshireaction.org.uk. Alternatively, a CD and printed summary can be ordered by contacting enquiries@cheshireaction.org.uk or calling 01244 323602.

1 Integration of Parish Plans into a Wider System of Government, July 2007, SQW Consulting Ltd for Defra, London

E&OE 08. This briefing sheet forms some of the opinions of members, staff, volunteers and/or Directors of Cheshire Community Action. It is one view of the report from a rural Cheshire perspective and is not intended to be the sole view, replacing others.

