

Somerset Market Towns Forum

Survey of Members 2009



Summary of Key Findings

- **Somerset's Market Town Partnerships are delivering projects identified in Community Plans and support Community Engagement**
- **Nearly 29,000 people have engaged in Community-Led Planning activity in Market Towns and large villages in Somerset since 2000**
- **Approximately 550 volunteers have worked in MT Partnerships since 2000**
- **Volunteers hours in the year April 08-March 09 were an estimated 15,960**
- **Volunteers hours since SMTF Member Towns' Community Plans were launched total an estimated 97,600**
- **Significant projects delivered include;** traffic calming schemes, two community offices/information centres, a community transport scheme, extension of a cycle trail, a free car park, affordable and sheltered housing, administering grants to renovate shop fronts, developing a market, employment of a full time youth worker, the enlargement and improvement of recreation grounds, Youth Centre refurbishment and several town centre 'De-clutter' enhancement projects. In total there are over 500 projects in the 18 Member Towns' Community Plans.
- **Estimated amount of investment in Market Towns** influenced by our Member Town organisations since 2000 is **£4.125m**

Introduction

This is SMTF's first survey of its Member Towns, and aims to show the value of Community-Led Planning activity in our Market Towns.

We know that our Members are an important part of Market Town regeneration, whether this is economic, social or environmental regeneration, and this survey shows the contribution that volunteers in the Market Towns are making.

There are over 130 people involved in action across the towns of Somerset who form our membership. These are the Committee members of Market Town Partnerships and contacts in Town Councils – there are many more involved in particular projects in towns.

Each has been involved in a Community-Led planning activity – either a Market & Coastal Town initiative, a non-MCTi Community Plan or a Parish Plan.

A year on from the end of the Market & Coastal Towns Association, and with RDA and Local Authority resources increasingly scarce, it is a trying time for Market Town Partnerships. Project funding is getting increasingly more difficult to source (though Somerset County Council's Market Town Regeneration Fund is a welcome development); 'core' funding after Community

Plans have been published has been rare, and this survey shows that most Partnerships do not currently have assets or services that can provide alternative income streams.

The most successful Partnerships are those with good quality management committee Members or Directors, a solid structure (regular meetings including some public meetings, monitoring and constitution), a good level of support from District/Borough Council Officers, working relationships with Town, District and County Councillors and links to Local Strategic Partnerships. Where one or more of these elements are missing, progress can be very difficult for Town Partnerships.

Undertaking Community-Led Planning in 18 Towns and large villages has resulted in creating a body of people experienced in community engagement and project delivery, and provides an on-going opportunity for local people to get involved in improving their towns. This is Community Empowerment in action. These people and groups deserve to be supported more by Local Government – both financially and with staff support.

I am proud to work with these people, all working to improve the quality of life in their towns.

Matt Day
Coordinator, SMTF
October 2009

Survey Responses

Surveys were sent to all 18 Member Towns in June 2009.

14 of our members are Market Town Partnerships, 3 are Town Councils, 1 is a Development Trust.

Completed survey; 10 Member Towns returned a survey, a 55% response rate. A full list of respondents is given at Appendix 1.

Of the 10 responses, 8 are Partnerships, 2 are Town Councils.

6 of these had been through the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi), 3 had completed Parish Plans, and 1 had completed a non-MCTi Community Plan.

Since the Survey was circulated, Action for Chard Town have disbanded. Vision for Frome have just started their delivery of projects.

Volunteering

Partnerships only answered the following four questions (not Town Councils)

Since the start of each Partnership, **the total number of Volunteers who have worked in the organisations is 314, an average of 39**. The Partnership with the most Volunteers was the Ilminster Forum with 79. Projected across our 14 Member Partnerships this would be an estimated 546 Volunteers.

Respondents told that **10 Volunteers had gone on to become Elected Representatives** (i.e. Town, Parish, District or County Councillors) after becoming involved in Community-Led Planning.

Estimated Volunteer hours spent on 'Core' work (i.e. attending meetings of the Partnership, events, training, consultations) - not on projects - **in the year April 08- March 09 was 2680**, giving an average of 335. Projected across our 14 Member Partnerships this would be an estimated 4690 hours.

Estimated Volunteer hours spent on 'Core' work (i.e. attending meetings of the Partnership, events, training, consultations) - not on projects - **since the launch of the Community Plan was 15143**, giving an average of 1892. Projected across our 14 Member Partnerships this would be an estimated 26488 hours. Wiveliscombe Area Partnership had the highest amount – 7985 hours.

All respondents answered the following.

Estimated Volunteer hours spent on projects coming from Community Plans **in the year April 08- March 09 was 5967** giving an average of 663 (Frome were not included as it is too early in process for them). Projected across the 17 towns active with projects, this amounts to an estimated 11271 hours.

Estimated Volunteer hours spent on projects coming from Community Plans **since the launch of the Community Plan was 37,658** giving an average of 4184 (Frome not counted as too early in process for them). Projected across the 17 towns active with projects, this amounts to an estimated 71128 hours.

Community Engagement

Members were asked to estimate how many local people they have engaged with, since starting their Community Plan – this totalled 16050, an average of 1605.

Projected across our Member Towns, this gives an estimated 28,890 people engaged in Community-Led Planning activity (all of the Plans date from 2000 or later). This engagement was by various means including consultations, events, surveys, public meetings, etc.

In the year April 08-March 09, the respondent Member Towns completed the following Community Engagement;

We have held two Information/Open Days and circulated a Newsletter

Parish Annual Assembly meeting April 08

Chard - Countryside Open Day, AGM

Frome - Two open consultation events with MDC (one a family fun day), a standing display for the whole community in the town centre, some 6 focused workshops, website and e-mail access for community comment. Questionnaires to schools, pubs etc.

Wiveliscombe - There was public consultation on both the original plan (extensive) and the recent review. we report to our partner agencies regularly and to the public through the Wiveliscombe Messenger

Shepton Mallet - AGM, Consultations with residents and residents' groups, and with traders and commercial bodies

Consultations with statutory bodies

Public concerts (4) and Public meetings

Martock - Worked with young people in several groups

Consultation, information leaflets and public meeting for the MUCF project. PR for the Community Office to attract service providers and volunteers. Youth Centre AGM

Crewkerne - AGM and a display at Opportunity Crewkerne (a local funding competition)

Other support sought

Other organisations that SMTF Member Towns seek support, advice or guidance from include (in descending order);

District/Borough Council (often Regeneration Officer or similar) 8

Planning Authority 5

Somerset County Council 5

Town/Parish Council 5

Highways service at Somerset County Council 4

Local Strategic Partnership 4

Other Towns through the SMTF Network Events 2

Community Council for Somerset 2

Somerset Association of Local Councils, 2

Police 2

MCTA (now defunct) 2

Other towns through own efforts 1

Somerset County Youth Service

Sub-District Community Partnership 1

Wessex Reinvestment Trust 1

Yeovil College, 1

Citizens Advice Bureau, 1

Somerset Rural Youth Project, 1

Somerset Chamber of Commerce 1

Local Chamber of Commerce 1

Funding

SMTF Member Towns who responded have received a total of £303,120 'core' funding.

MCTi towns on average received £48,500; Parish Plans on average received £1530. The Ilminster Forum (a non-MCTi Community Plan) received £7290.

The funding came from the following sources;

Market & Coastal Towns Association (managing Regional Development Agency funding) 6
District/Borough Council 5
Community Council for Somerset (managing DEFRA funding for Parish Plans) 1
Town/Parish Council 1

Member Towns were asked if they had developed any alternative income streams to grants.

Wiveliscombe have developed two – rental income from their Community Office (a number of organisations and agencies use this facility), and a Service Level Agreement with Taunton Deane Borough Council to deliver Community-Led Planning activity in the Ten Parishes area.

Martock set up Making the Most of Martock (M3) Ltd as a not-for-profit community development company limited by guarantee, which generates revenue primarily from their local magazine and the producers' market. Also, as part of the Market House Community Office project, Martock Parish Council took over running of the public toilets from South Somerset District Council, with a capital sum to cover this.

8 other Member Towns responded that so far no alternative sources had been developed.

Respondents were asked, in the year April 08 - March 09, what level of financial investment in their town was made, which their Partnership had a direct influence in securing – this totalled £477,185.

One respondent replied they didn't know and Frome are not included in the above.

This gives an average of £68,170.

Respondents were asked to estimate the total level of investment in their town since the launch of their Community Plan, that their Partnership had a direct influence in securing. Eight towns responded, with the total being £1,833,636.

One respondent replied they didn't know and Frome are not included in the figure.

This gives an average total investment per town of £229,200.

Projected across the 18 Member Towns, this gives an estimated total of £4.125 million worth of investment in our Market Towns, directly influenced by our Member Towns.

Note: Shepton21 also enabled further funding of an economic impact study, the findings of which supported the expansion of the Bath and West Showground helping them obtain some £150 million of development funding.

SMTF Member Towns' Projects

Members listed the three most significant projects from their Community Plan that have been completed;

*Enhancement of the Sustrans Cycle Track.
Out of school activities.*

Setting up a community web site.

Construction of a free car park for Wedmore.

Improved road safety with the provision of additional signage and lines and reduction of HGV traffic and voluntary one-way system for lorries.

Speed restrictions outside Wedmore First School. Use of speed visors and speed guns to help reduce traffic speed.

Improved Saturday Market.

Bus passenger survey resulting in improved bus service (Sunday service now operating).

Raising awareness of learning opportunities (Best Event Award from Campaign for Learning).

Nil – Plan launched in May, new organization being established.

Launch of regular Newsletter.

Walking maps.

More benches.

Wiveliscombe Community Office

Wivey Link Community Transport

Members listed the three most important unfulfilled projects identified in their Plan;

Swimming pool project, Ilminster

Town Design Statement

Parking & Traffic Improvement Plan

Provision of affordable housing

Additional youth facilities – multi-purpose play area, skate park and ramps

Sheltered housing for the elderly

Enviro project plans sitting on shelf!

Commemorative Garden little progress due to planning etc

Saturday market in Holyrood Street, Chard.

Transport Review and improvements.

Business Association.

Sport facilities.

Review land use to support such activities as more allotments and green play and leisure spaces.

Improve commercial returns in the town by raising town profile and marketing and reducing/removing charging for car parks.

Meeting local housing needs.

Facelift Project – administering grants to renovate shop fronts.

Establishing an extended market.

Setting up four new websites for the community.

Market House renovation and Community Office

Enlargement and improvement of the recreation ground

Youth Centre refurbishment and employment of full time youth worker

Phase I of Declutter Crewkerne

Transport Booklet

Extension of Conservation Area in Crewkerne Town Centre

Improve youth facilities, particularly establishing a Town Centre Youth Café.

Community Centre.

Strategic Plan for Wiveliscombe.

Town Hall project.

Improve land use, transport routes and traffic flows in and around Shepton Mallet.

Develop and manage a Community Advice, Training and Employment Centre (CATEC) in Shepton Mallet.

Marketing the town.

Community facility improvements (awaits outcome of MUCF project).

Formation of Martock Business Association.

Sustainment of Martock Environment Group.

Traffic Management Plan (UDF)

Sports and Youth facility

Tourism Marketing Strategy

Priorities

The most pressing current issues for SMTF Member Towns were;

Income to ensure sustainability (of the Partnership)

Retention of town's car parking facilities

Financial support for repairs and development of new facilities at the three village halls in the parish

Currently, to establish a revised and expanded implementation organization through community meetings in May, June and July, in liaison with the Town Council, and with a clear, new role.

Getting people to plan for the future particularly local businesses

A Strategic Plan for Wiveliscombe itself

Increasing community involvement in the town's future.

Lack of funding

Whether or not to take forward the MUCF Project in the face of minority but vocal opposition

Traffic Management

Members were asked to list any strategies, policies or initiatives that their Partnership had influenced since their Plan was launched – these included;

District Sustainable Community Strategies and Community Cohesion Strategy

MDC Local Development Framework, Frome Town Council Policy Plan 2008 -2011

All local plans affecting the Ten Parishes. The point is that this area was often disregarded by District and County Councils and we have ensured that it is very much in their focus now.

District Council's sign-up to Sustainable Communities Act

Mendip Sustainable Community Strategy & Mendip Local Development Framework

Town Council policies and projects

Section 106 priorities

SSDC Corporate Plan, South Somerset Market Towns Vision, South Somerset Local Development Framework

Member Towns responded that completed or current projects from their Community Plan tackled the following Local Area Agreement priorities;

- Reduced CO2 emissions

Production of a Transport Booklet to encourage people to use public transport.

Bus passenger survey resulting in improved bus service

Wivey Link

Transport Booklet and Event

- Delivered Affordable Homes

Wiveliscombe - two projects, one for local elderly, the other affordable homes to meet local housing needs

- Improved Access to Services (by using Public Transport, Walking or Cycling)

Production of a Transport Booklet to encourage people to use public transport.

The creation of two new permissive footpaths.

The productions of seven walks leaflets

The enhancement of the Sustrans cycletrack

Bus passenger survey resulting in improved bus service

S21's LINKS group is actively involved in trying to support and develop new and improved footpath links.

Shepton 21 also has a representation on the Strawberry Line East Group which is trying to develop a new Multi-User-Path

Community Office service provision, local CAB surgeries, local adult learning classes, bus timetable, footpath enhancement

Transport Booklet/ Walking and Cycling leaflets/ Health Walks

- Assisted people into employment
*Close liaison with Strode College
Community Office employment advice*
- Increased people's engagement with the Arts
*Organised out of school activities with arts basis
Actively assisted and promoted the Bristol Academy of Performing Arts and the Academy Theatre, a registered charity.
Yes two New Arts Group projects are currently working towards this: – Mosaic Project and Arts Trail*
- Supported people over 65 with information, assistance or support
*Newsletters with information
In the process of setting up a forum for older people in the community
Community Office, local CAB
Transport Booklet*
- Made people feel safer in their community
*Working with the Local Action Group on Public Safety Day, holding drug awareness events and neighbourhood watch meetings
Work closely with the police to establish goals and priorities
Employment of PCSO, establishment of Local Action Team, initiatives to tackle ASB
Through MTIG Radiolink and CCTV Camera*
- Improved community cohesion between different types of people
*Chard Countryside Days
Yes - simply through partnership working and publicity
Formation of Youth Parish Council and engagement with the community
Youth Fair and Volunteer Fair and new Community Facility*
- Improved people's health through healthy living activities
*The productions of seven walks leaflets
Raising awareness of learning opportunities
Recreation ground enhancements
Walking leaflets*

Since Member Towns' Plans were launched, 5 respondents had identified increased interest in addressing climate change and peak oil in their community. Comments included;

*Yes. A group was formed to make Ilminster a plastic bag free town, and the Somerset Climate Change group are located in Ilminster.
Sustainable Axbridge Group formed.
Yes, strong proponents in our consultation inputs, and now are members of the new V4F. A strong Sustainable Frome organization exists.
Yes that is why Breathe (Transition group) has been set up.
Yes, Transition Group set up.*

Members were asked had their Partnership produced any other benefits in their community beyond project outcomes and strategic influencing – comments included;

*Increased levels of networking
Established a wider community consultation presence than existed or was achieved before in the town. Much to do to build on this now the plan is issued.
Yes better communication through ta13 newsletter
Better communication
Increased communication between statutory bodies and different sections of the local community.*

More public engagement with Parish Council, greater awareness of youth issues, much debate on community facilities

Community Groups are working together. ABCD meetings brokering table brings groups together – use of future sports and youth pavilion as example

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Only two respondents had a system in place which monitors progress on projects. Comments;

No, because project reports are given at each monthly meeting

We review major unfulfilled projects regularly at relevant working party meetings

No

Not yet, other than accounts auditing.

No

Yes through community plan group - this process is just beginning on the review and each member of the group has been allocated a number of projects on which he/she will report at each meeting

No

Yes. Martock Community Partnership Steering Group formally charged with coordinating and monitoring delivery of the Local Community Plan. Project database created to facilitate this process

No

Reporting of progress to partners is generally patchy - only 3 respondents regularly report to partners – comments were;

Yes the District Council when they consider it necessary.

None

No

Being developed, but new V4F has much wider membership with a commitment to report annually at an AGM.

Yes during production of the Plan but not since

No, but we have town, district and county councillors on our management committee.

At every meeting of Parish Council, Civic Society and business group

Progress reported to Parish Council monthly and to Martock Community Partnership quarterly (SCC, SSSDC, MPC, Parochial Church Council, School Governors, Youth Parish Council)

Update SSSDC and Town Council

Five respondents are planning on reviewing or refreshing their Community Plan;

We consider our plan on an annual basis

Yes

Yes, as an ongoing activity to review annually and re-issue every few years.

No

Not at present

have just done so

Yes

Yes. For discussion with Community Partnership, but probably in 2010

Was reviewed in 2008, will revisit in 2010.

Looking to the future

5 Member Towns are positive about the future of their Partnership; 2 are negative, 3 did not reply. Comments included;

Action for Chard Town now disbanded (for several reasons)

Cautiously optimistic, but early days in establishing a recognized and valued new role.

Neither, but apprehensive due to lack of support from people wanting to think further than next week

Member Towns were asked what they see as the biggest threat to their Partnership.

*The difficulty of partnership working with some local authority bodies
Antipathy from the Town Council – but so far getting good indications of support and a view we should be able to offer helpful and valued assistance to the community. And apathy and a lack of involvement from the community - a bigger challenge to meet, but early days.
changes in personnel
Lack of funding
Complacency. Lack of human resources to deliver projects. Lack of resource to research and apply for external grant funding
lack of support from local people
Lack of funds and administration support*

Member Towns were asked what advice they could give to improve Community-Led Planning and Engagement in the future?

*More support from Town Council & SSDC
Early establishment, and then maintenance, of good lines of communication with elected representatives and council officers is essential. With a clear approach of “what can we do for you?” The community must feel that the results of the consultation and planning will achieve something.
Find the movers and shakers and get them involved
Don't set it up and then pull the financial rug out from under it.
For larger communities, full-time paid community-led planning coordinator
Greater awareness amongst L.A. Officers about what community partnerships are and the level of knowledge and expertise the people involved have of their community. As such it would be beneficial if agencies consulted partnerships as well as Town Councils when they require feedback on issues in a town. It would also help if public sector officers recognised that those involved in partnerships are volunteers and they give their time freely, and are not always available to produce work, attend meetings at short notice.*

6 Member Towns would be willing to support a Community Forum. A Community Forum would be an open engagement Forum that would build on Community-Led Planning and be a place to discuss issues, address current local priorities and 'feed' these up to LSP's and Local Authorities – participative democracy alongside our Elected Representatives. Market Town Partnerships could act as the independent facilitators and the 'secretariat' for these. Comments;

Yes

Yes if it is productive – there needs to be a proper exchange of views

Need to know more

Yes, this is in the Constitution for the new Vision for Frome, where one V4F Forum a year will be fully open to the public to comment on the Plan and provide additional comment, to identify revised or new needs for the town in support of the Plan's review.

Yes

Yes

Yes

Other comments from Members;

One benefit of doing this survey has been that our Partnership has realised the amount of work we've put in and the varied benefits for the town.

Commentary

The survey responses showed the wide variety of SMTF's Member Towns. These range from larger Partnerships, such as Shepton 21 and Wiveliscombe Area Partnership, to Parish Plan groups and Town Councils leading on Parish Plan implementation.

The wide variation of 'investment influenced by' may be due to Partnership Members not including infrastructure projects (such as car parking and traffic improvements) that Town Council Members have included, even though the Community Plan may have been the driver for these. Conversely it appeared more difficult for Member Towns who are Town and Parish Councils to separate projects into 'Community Plan' projects and others that arose from elsewhere.

Some Members are not recording volunteer efforts or other benefits to their town. This lack of monitoring by Partnerships made completing this survey difficult for most. However, this survey has highlighted this issue and several have seen the benefit of recording their efforts more effectively. SMTF has also distributed guidance recently for Partnerships which includes monitoring as a key element of good governance.

Vision for Frome are moving from Community Plan phase to delivery phase so it was too early to include financial investment figures for them.

Conclusions

The figure of £4.125 million of investment influenced by those who have undertaken Community-Led Planning in Somerset's Market Towns and large villages is a good return of an 'investment' in them of around £0.5 million.

Common issues are unsurprising. More funding generally is sought – both for projects and to support Partnerships.

Some Member Towns would like to see more involvement by local people in planning the community's future, citing some apathy.

The complexities of working with Local Authorities – especially in a county with a 2-Tier structure – are a serious concern.

Partnerships cited tensions and misunderstandings about their role with Town Councillors.

Partnerships are keen to support Community Engagement Forums.

APPENDIX 1

Member Towns who responded were;

Axbridge – Town Council
Chard - Action for Chard Town (dissolved in June 09)
Crewkerne – A Better Crewkerne and District
Frome - Vision for Frome
Ilminster – Ilminster Forum
Martock - M3 Community Partnership
Shepton Mallet – Shepton 21 Regeneration Partnership
South Petherton – Parish Plan Group
Wedmore – Parish Council
Wiveliscombe – Wiveliscombe Area Partnership

Member Towns who did not respond were (with relevant comments in italics);

Burnham & Highbridge - *Regen Partnership 'mothballed'; office closed, worker has left due to funding ending, personal issues for Chair mean no time to research and complete*
Castle Cary – Town Council
Langport - *Langport Area Development Trust 'in stasis' – contact and Town Clerk too busy*
Radstock - Mid Somer Valley Partnership
Wellington – Economic Partnership
Watchet – Watchet Action Strategic Partnership (WASP) – *dissolved June 09, new arrangements pending*
Williton – Williton Regeneration Partnership
Wincanton – MCTi Partnership