

Coordinators Activity & Finance Update

Activities

Our Network Events have been very successful this year - 110 people have attended these in Martock, Frome, Ilminster and here today – we've found a formula that works; though we will vary the starting time. The NE's are the cornerstone of the Forum's services. seen and heard about some great projects and hopefully passed on some knowledge. Good feedback. And guests from Glos & Dorset Forums and Partnerships which is great sharing – me and Carol have been to other Fora's events.

Email Bulletins - 162 people in Partnerships, Town Councils, Local Authorities and community groups now receive these. Again, good feedback.

Signposting & Information service – answered 56 queries in the year (how to do this, who to speak to for that etc)

Membership

This year we have gained some new Standard members – Transition Minehead and Somerton Historic Building Preservation Trust. Sadly, Action for Chard Town decided to disband, though I have been involved in discussions with SSDC Officers about future arrangements regarding community engagement in the town.

After much lobbying I secured a place on the County LSP's Stronger Communities group as a voice for market towns. Hopefully this will prove to be a worthwhile exercise! And fed into the County LSP's Economic Leaders Group.

Continued to play an active role in the regional Market Towns Network – SW Market Towns Conference in Tiverton on Feb 20th, Somerset will have 18 places, reserve your place by email with me soon!

Assisting Paul Chadwick at County Council on the MT Regen Fund again this year – up to £25k available for capital projects in towns. See our website for more information.

I promoted the AMT Awards for the first time, and helped with 4 applications, so was very happy that the Ilminster Old Railway Heritage Project won the regional award in the Environment and Community category. It was a shame that the local press ran with SSDC's press release rather than mine, as we didn't get a mention! So much for Partnership working...

Survey of Members – major piece of work this year, to try and show the value of MTP's, is the survey (available on our website).

10 SMTF member org's took part; the diversity of our members came through strongly – from small Parish Plan groups to large Market Town Partnerships, all with different operational and legal structures.

Key findings;

- **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** (a good return on investment in those groups of around half a million)

Press release on this imminent.

I attended the Action for Market Towns Conference in Melton Mowbray in Leics; report on our site; but a key thing i took away was the importance of developing Distinctiveness – marking out the reasons why a certain town is special; its one of our big positives we have over larger, clone towns. Melton sells itself as the 'Rural Capital of Food and Drink!' I'm sure there are many benefits to making the most of a town's attributes, for locals and visitors, and its something the Market Towns Forum would like to develop with a town or two in the next year.

Finances – we do not give a separate Financial Report at our AGM as our accounts are managed by the Community Council and therefore appear in their audited Accounts.

However, I'd like to give you an indication of our funding situation. we currently receive £23k a year from the RDA via GMTF (tha accountable body for the funding of all the SW Fora) and almost £9k a year from Somerset County Council. Our expenditure is around the same.

But the RDA funds end in March 2011 (14 months away). Filling the considerable gap in funding will be difficult, esp with LA budget cuts. District Councils have not funded the Forum, except for Network Event catering for which we are grateful!

I've developed a funding strategy which has a number of strands; one being membership charges (i hear you groan!). The Forum has been free for all since inception, thanks to funding from Rural Renaissance, Somerset County Council and the RDA, but we will need to introduce reasonable charges for our services if we are to continue.

Membership could well include a couple of days of support and advice – either developing a Partnership or a project.

We will also be developing services (focusing on town centre vitality) that – hopefully – Town and District Councils will want to fund, or form the basis for applications to the LARC's.

Training

We have developed 2 training courses – on Making Projects Happen and Funding your projects and services – that are taking place on Saturday 16th Jan and Saturday 6th Feb in Langport and Glastonbury. Limited places to keep high quality. Developed with CEU specifically for MT Partnerships but will also be of real value to other community groups involved in regeneration work. Small charge will apply. I will promote these in the next couple of weeks.

Thanks – to Carol for her two years as Chair – been a great help, in particular with the regional Network negotiations and with general diplomacy! Her drive to support community-based activity in towns and in Ilminster in particular is impressive.

(text below not read out due to lack of time)

Future of community planning – the landscape for us is changing, for a number of reasons; a lack of central govt support for community planning in towns (both in policies and funding), preferring instead LA-led Placeshaping activity as we've seen in Chard; also some LA's in Somerset never liked the strategic focus of MCTi's (& felt they were 'holding LA's to account'). If Town Councils also lose faith with Partnerships, it is going to be very hard going!

yet there is a long-standing focus by govt on the community & voluntary sector taking a key part in developing 'sustainable communities'. Partnerships and community groups delivering regeneration in our towns need to be smart in adapting to the funding opportunities – such as the Communitybuilders fund which supports capital works to create community hubs – and perhaps focus on projects that could give an income as well as being visible – Information centres such as Wiveliscombe's are a great example.

Myself and Carol visited a Community engagement Forum in Devon and reported back, and some Somerset Partnerships are interested in forming these; but they will need some funding to cover costs – and the political will to take part in these.

LA's are moving towards 'commisioning' services from the third sector; getting ready to bid for these can be a difficult and time-consuming process, and CVS organisations are in a much better position to do this than Market Town Partnerships.

and we in the Forum need to be open to support any community engagement activities emerging in the towns and adapt to these.

Thank you.