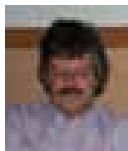




Rural Community Summit 2011 held on Wednesday 2nd March at The Education Centre, Norton

The Tees Valley Rural Community Summit was an opportunity for representatives of the rural communities within Tees Valley to share some of their experiences at the same time as being briefed on key areas of change with regard to the sector. This report seeks to capture the context, information given and ideas for future action resulting from the event.



The event opened with a Key Note Speech by Terry Carroll, Consultant for the Centre for Rural Economy Newcastle University on the theme of Big Society. His presentation provided an introduction to the Big Society concept, exploring the context, meaning and substance, Localism and Community Led Planning and implications for rural areas and how best to respond. The presentation drew attention to the many aspect of rural live which already have the principles of Big Society engrained within and as such provide an example through which Big Society can be explored. He drew attention to the opportunities that the "Localism Bill" will encourage the rural, voluntary and community sectors to take up.



Doff Pollard Chief Officer of Tees Valley Rural Community Council followed this with an up to date briefing about the consultations currently open and being managed through the Department of Communities and Local Government on the "Right to Buy", "The Right to Challenge" and the "Right to Build and Neighbourhood Planning". The government was inviting people to respond to these ideas through their consultations which would feed back into the consideration of the Localism Bill.

Information sessions then provided attendees with a chance to have a briefing of three of the following sessions, Community Led Planning and Housing, Transport, Access to Services, Rural Broadband and Fuel Poverty. Each of these sessions provided both a context anticipated future opportunities and a local example of activity in this area. The following questions in relation to the topic areas were asked within each workshop.

What can TVRCC do to support Communities?

What can communities do to support themselves?

What can other agencies do to support communities?

Doff Pollard gave a brief outline after lunch of the key areas of work (those covered by the information sessions) TVRCC will be undertaking from the start of April 2011 as part of the contract TVRCC will be delivering on behalf of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.



The day ended with feedback from the Information sessions. There was support for the work being undertaken and TVRCC were encouraged to do more. There are lots of examples of communities helping themselves, there needs to be much greater attention drawn to this and how others might try to explore issues within their own community. A variety of actions were identified for other agencies broadly support a recognition of the needs of rural communities.

Information from each of the information sessions is covered in the following pages and the outcomes and actions are included at the end of the document.

All the sessions have Powerpoint slides to support the material presented and copies of these are available on request from:

TVRCC
Tel: (01642) 213852
E-mail: dpollard@teesvalleyrcc.org.uk

Access to Services Information Session

The Access to Services Information Session was run four times during the day, with around 30 people attending. It gave delegates an opportunity to hear more about TVRCC's recent Access to Services Survey and baseline data collection project and a real example of community activism from Sadberge Village Hall.

The survey carried out in December 2009 – January 2010, aimed to establish a baseline of services within the rural communities of the Tees Valley and was developed by TVRCC to be as 'light touch' and easy to complete as possible. It was sent to key contacts within each of the 64 villages/communities we identified as being rural and within the Tees Valley.

The responses given by members of each community, gave TVRCC an up to date picture of what currently exists within these communities and where there are gaps in service provision. (It should be noted that these responses were based on individual perceptions of services available in their community, which may differ slightly from what actually exists.)



The survey looked at 52 key 'services' rather than activities and mainly focused on physical things such as schools, village halls, pubs and post offices. Using the data collected during the survey, TVRCC have been able to plot where services currently exist on large sized maps. Some of the key findings from the 64 communities that we surveyed were:

Transport/Petrol Station/ Garages

14 garages/petrol stations located within the rural areas.

Broadband

32 communities (one third) have a broadband service and in most cases this is patchy and at the lowest speed

Early Years and Education

Gaps were found in early years and education provision with only a third (23) having a nursery, 26 a primary school and 9 a Secondary School.

Children's Play Areas

Just over a third of the communities (33) had a children's play area.

Access to a shop, Post Office or bank

Astonishingly only 28 have a shop, only 25 have a post office and 7 a bank.

Healthcare/Chemists

Only 15 doctors surgeries and 13 chemists, (mostly located together) to cover the 64 communities.

Village Halls/Community Buildings/Pubs

45 have a community building/village hall and 47 have a pub.

A leaflet was produced for the session and handed out, which contained information regarding some of the information collected. Copies of this are available from Fiona at TVRCC.

In the second part of the session, we heard a presentation from Sadberge Village Hall on their Cafe project. Shelia Hodgson explained that the cafe had been started as a result of the Post Office and shop closing. It began being run by volunteers one morning a week and operates every day from 9-1pm employing one person.

The Cafe and shop sells locally sourced, freshly made goods as well as newspapers, bread, milk and other fresh goods. All profits go back to the village hall.

For more information contact:

Fiona Chesters
(01642) 213852
E-mail: fchesters@teesvalleyrcc.org.uk

Rural Broadband

The Rural Broadband Information Session was run twice during the day, with 18 people attending. This session gave delegates an opportunity to hear about the issues that people have with broadband when they live in the rural areas, the probable causes and possible ways forward.

Simon Roberson from BT gave an informative talk and began by explaining some of the causes of problems with broadband for people in rural areas for example the distance the home is from the exchange, signal loss over copper cables and internal extension wiring in the home. It was suggested that people checked what speed is available from the local exchange, that they are getting the best speed available from their ISP contract and whether a BT Accelerator could help (*more information about these are available from the BT website*). Simon talked about Broadband Enabling Technology (BET) which is a new product which has been developed to help overcome problems. To find out which exchange you are connected to and what speed of broadband is available from it; you can use the availability checker from BT

or independent sites such as SamKnows. The website addresses that Simon gave are;

www.dslchecker.bt.com/adsl/adslchecker.welcome
www.samknows.com/broadband/broadband_availability

Simon gave an explanation of some of the jargon that is used on the various websites - ADSL Max is "normal" broadband offering up to 8Mbps, ADSL2+ / 21CN is higher speed copper broadband offering up to 20Mbps which is available on most of the large exchanges in Tees Valley. Everyone was advised to check whether they have been upgraded by their ISP and if their line will support ADSL2+ as it can improve speeds.

Information was then given about the future of broadband and we were told that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt had announced that by 2012 the Governments goal is to enable Britain to "have the best superfast broadband network in Europe." £830million pounds of public funding is going to be available for superfast broadband in rural

areas between now and 2017, £230 million from digital switchover under spend and £150million pa (from 2013) from BBC license fee settlement.

Simon explained that BT has an increased ambition and financial commitment going from £1.5bn investment to roll fibre out to 40%, to £2.5bn to reach two thirds of the UK, installing more than 37,000 new cabinets and over 200,000 distribution points and laying more than 50,000km of fibre, supported by 32,000 engineers. Additional funding will be available to partners to reach the "final third" (the rural areas). BT will be engaging across the country with local authorities and devolved governments and building business models to make the ambitions of the final third a commercial reality.

Copies of this presentation are available from:

Janice McColm
Tel: (01642) 213852
E-mail: jmccolm@teesvalleyrcc.org.uk



Community Planning and the Localism Bill

The Community Planning and Localism session was run four times during the day, with around 30 people attending. The sessions consisted of two separate presentations.

Rosemary Young, Spatial Planning Manager for Stockton on Tees Borough Council's presentation explained how the Localism Bill would affect Neighbourhood Planning, particularly in relation to Planning Law.

Mary McDermott, East Cleveland Rural Development Officer for TVRCC's, presentation explained what Neighbourhood or Community Plans were and the benefits of undertaking one and how this was linked to the Government's idea of 'Big Society'.

The sessions allowed participants to relate



their own experiences and discussed the impact the new laws could have within their communities.

The Localism Bill is in its draft form at the moment, and is therefore subject to change, with much of its detail still to be decided.

In relation to Neighbourhood Planning, the idea is to encourage a bottom-up approach to enable communities to be able to make decisions about their environment and to take responsibility for their area.

The Government is keen to devolve power and provide a statutory framework which encompasses the "Right to Buy", the "Right to Challenge" and the "Right to Build". These are initiatives that give more control and incentives to communities to acquire local assets, build local housing and challenge decisions made on their behalf. The Neighbourhood Plan will need to be written by a qualifying body (eg a Parish Council) or another "recognised" body, such as a Development Trust. This group would decide what the Plan included. The Plan would need to give regard to national planning policy and conform to strategic policies contained within the Local Plan, be consistent with other adopted local plans and be compatible with EU Law.

These plans would be prepared in the same way a Community Led Plan would be prepared, by the community and involving extensive consultation. However, they would be examined by an independent examiner whose role it would be to consider its fit with the Local Development Plan, national policy alignment and alignment with other neighbouring plans. It would then proceed to a community referendum on whether to adopt it, and would then be adopted by the Local Authority (both the independent examiner and the referendum would be paid for by the Local Authority).

Community/Neighbourhood Plans

Clearly, Community or Neighbourhood Plans have

been around for a long time, though they may become more significant to Local Authorities with the advent of the Localism Bill.

Most successful plans are led by the Community, and include inputs from other stakeholders like schools, churches, local businesses and service providers. They usually cover a specific area, or "recognised" community, and include a mixture of hard facts, statistical data and the perceptions and opinions of local residents. They set out what is good and bad about an area, with suggestions on how to improve facilities and services, usually contained in an action plan.

Benefits

The process allows

- a "joined-up" approach to problem-solving and more efficient use of staff, money and resources.
- It encourages residents to get involved in making decisions that affect their lives, ultimately resulting in increased confidence and satisfaction.
- It enhances community spirit and reinforces a sense of purpose and aspiration
- It provides "hard" evidence to back up a case for change or for a funding application.

Further information and copies of the presentations are available from:

Mary McDermott
Tel: (01287) 643904
E-mail: mmcdermott@teesvalleyrcc.org.uk

Fuel Poverty Information Session

The Fuel Poverty Information Session was run once during the day, giving delegates an opportunity to learn about fuel poverty and the Calor FREE Project. A presentation on an oil consortium that has been developed in Liverton village, was also given.

Diane Bland from NEA explained that the definition of fuel poverty is where households spend more than 10% of disposable income on fuel for health and comfort. The causes of fuel poverty were explained, low income, poor insulation standards, inefficient or expensive heating systems, rising fuel prices etc. The consequences are many and include cold, damp, unhealthy homes leading to high fuel bills; less disposable income, poor nutrition, health problems, lost life chances, social exclusion, excess winter deaths, safety risks and climate change. Advice was given on heating the household and how decreasing indoor temperature below the comfort zone progressively influences the maintenance of health. Information was given about government schemes including Warm Front which is a government-funded grant scheme providing central heating, controls, and energy efficiency measures to the most vulnerable householders to minimise their risk of fuel poverty.

Janice McColm, Rural Development Officer for TVRCC, gave a presentation on the Calor FREE project. Working with national partners Calor are delivering an energy advice initiative which is called FREE (Future of Rural Energy England). FREE is a rural energy advisorship programme, primarily but not exclusively aimed at off-grid communities across England. The project which started in 2010 is a 3 year initiative, aimed at tackling fuel poverty and promoting energy efficiency in rural communities. The delivery partners for this programme are: RCAN (Rural Community Action Network) and NEA (National Energy Action). The aim of the project is to raise awareness and solutions for energy efficiency in the rural areas. A booklet on the project was distributed and copies are available from TVRCC.



The workshop concluded with a presentation given by Marguerite Benson, a resident from Liverton village in East Cleveland who spoke about the oil syndicate that has been set up in the village. Liverton village is situated in Redcar and Cleveland and is located in the Parish of Loftus, which suffers levels of high social deprivation. There are 65 adults in the village occupying 50 homes which are largely stone built with a pantile or slate roof. The housing stock comprises of two terraces of stone cottages with semi-detached and detached houses around a village green. Houses in the middle of the village are situated in a conservation area. The requirements of the Planning Department and Council Policy mean that the householders have to maintain single glazed, wooden framed sash windows. The villagers are not on 'mains' gas and rely on a variety of fuels to heat their homes. The central heating is usually oil fired. In 2009 it was proposed that an Oil Syndicate was developed which would reduce heating costs for oil, the flow of commercial traffic through the village and help to reduce the villages carbon footprint. The Co-ordinator negotiates the price for each oil delivery and they are not 'locked in' to any agreement. To date, they have had two deliveries of oil and gained a reduction of 7 pence per litre in our oil costs.

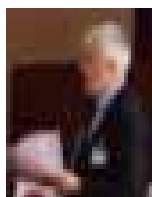
A copy of Diane's presentation is available from:

Janice McColm
TVRCC
Tel: (01642) 213852
E-mail: jmccolm@teesvalleyrcc.org.uk

Transport

The Rural Transport Information Session consisted of two presentations followed by a question and answer session. About 45 people attended the 3 sessions.

The first dealt with the current, often poorly served, state of rural transport and the likely impact of local authority transport budget cuts on service provision. Council subsidised rural routes and Dial-A Ride services are to be reduced or axed, and there will be changes to the concessionary fares scheme – probably involving payment before 9.30am. John Gregory also highlighted some positives including community transport solutions and the government's new Local Sustainable Transport Fund which will enable local authorities to develop projects to meet local need by working in partnership with community groups.



The second presentation concerned Hartlepool Wheels for Freedom, the community transport organisation developed and operated by Ken Fox. Ken outlined the history of HWFF, explained how community transport operates and the vital role it plays in providing travel opportunities and access to services for people unable to use public transport. It was good to hear that HWFF are looking to take on the Dial-A-Ride provision in Hartlepool – a ray of hope amidst the gloomy 2011 prospects for rural transport. Delegates felt that TVRCC could provide useful support to communities by liaising with and lobbying local authorities on their behalf, and by advising community groups on funding matters. Regular rural transport forums – held in different parts of the Tees Valley - would be useful and much appreciated.

Communities could share their needs and perhaps form pressure groups to campaign on public transport matters. There was a general feeling that communities should work in partnership, and not in isolation, to put a case together to try to address their transport problems.

Other agencies should listen to public concerns and provide much better publicity and information

regarding rural transport – particularly in the current climate of changes and cuts. There should be more joined up thinking between public and private service providers.

TVRCC are to start work soon with the local authorities to develop sustainable transport projects to benefit rural areas, funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. We hope to assist with community engagement and consultation. We also intend to support another government initiative aimed at building the capacity of the community transport sector to operate more effectively in its provision of rural transport.

For this work we are aware of the importance of identifying need at a local level, and in order to work most effectively, we need to hear from you – from members of the rural community – to find out what you need and what your transport concerns are. So do keep in touch.

The Summit was extremely useful, but we need ongoing feedback to support our (and your) campaign to improve transport opportunities in the rural Tees Valley.



For copies of all the presentation or further information please contact:

John Gregory

E-mail: jgregory@teesvalleyrcc.org.uk

Feedback from the Summit

At the end of each of the information sessions the participants were asked to address the following three questions. In the light of the discussions what are your suggested actions for:

- 1 TVRCC
- 2 Local communities, and
- 3 Other agencies.

The answers were fed back in the final discussion for comment and debate.

These answers have been combined to provide a mandate for future action. Some of the points are clearly related to a specific topic and others are of a more general nature.

Question 1 - What Can TVRCC do to support communities? (feedback included)

- Include articles on these topics in rural news, e-bulletins and on website
- Feature local stories of what individual communities have achieved
- Highlight the problems facing rural communities.
- Signpost to examples of best practise from local communities and other places
- Collect and signpost groups to information that helps provide evidence
- Promote opportunities, projects, schemes & provide help to community groups & Parish Councils
- Provide support/funding information/advice to community groups through presentations, advice support via the internet etc.
- Bridge across Local Authorities for best practise.
- Bring people together

Access to Services and Community Enterprise

- Keep communities informed of consultations and changes. ie for Post Offices
- Keep an on-going record of the changes in services within local communities
- Inform communities of new, alternative ways and means of delivering services at a local level

Community Planning and Housing

- Help communities work identify and evidence their needs
- Help communities get the best from development, eg monies from Section 106's
- Handholding and support production of Community plans
- Provide example of a plan (similar size village)
- Create stronger links with district planning officers and parish councils
- Enable Parish Councils to inform, involve and inspire local communities to engage in community plans and take appropriate action

Transport

- Maintain awareness of seeking to support cross border travel services (Bus and train)
- Publicise ways of solving transport difficulties especially in areas of recent cuts
- Advocate need tfor service provision
- Continue to hold Transport Forum
- Liaise with community transport hub
- Look for funding
- Liaise with cross border councils for solutions

Fuel Poverty

- Share information about local initiatives to sources cheap supplies

- Publicise the oil sharing scheme.

Broadband

- Lobby on behalf of rural Tees Valley for increased and improved Broadband
- Support development of a Tees Valley bid to BDUK
- Help communities in formulating their own action plan for improvements

Question 2 - What can communities do to support themselves? (feedback included)

- Believe that they can make a difference
- React positively to what is happening and advantage of how it can benefit
- Encourage fellow communities by sharing experience and documentation
- Collect information, unemployment, services, type of population, traffic issues. share the information – talk to each other
- Communication/ sharing and between partners/local groups within the community

Access to Services and Community Enterprise

- Explore ways that local action can fill gaps

Community Planning and Housing

- Hold meetings – work out what people want.... do we all want the same things?
- Identify skills within the community which can be used to produce the plan
- Gain a collective – key messages/aspirations provide consistency in what wanting to achieve and stick with it to negotiate the process

Transport

- Request supermarkets to provide shopping services to from rural communities
- Use existing Bus services, join user group & form pressure group to campaign
- Lobbying councils
- Establish local transport needs in relation to social/education youth provision
- Make people and agencies aware of needs
- Identify/form groups to identify community transport problems for their villages

Fuel Poverty

- Arrange speakers and distribute information on "improving fuel efficiency",



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- Identify activities for community initiative (eg Liverton oil Syndicate)
- Regularly publicise ofgem information company prices of fuel suppliers
- Getting together – including with other villages
- Encourage community banking to take advantage of Direct Debit Reductions, etc, Which may not be available from High Street bank accounts

Broadband

- Check own Broadband speed
- Make agencies aware of difficulties with broadband in local areas
- Provide information to TVRCC
- Lobby suppliers for increased speeds
- Ask BT for Accelerators
- Lobby for better broadband speeds
- Develop local action plans with support of TVRCC
- Insist on paying for the level of service received

Question 3 - What can other agencies do to support communities? (feedback included)

- Keep people in rural areas informed and provide guidance
- Encourage participation
- Listen to the feedback from communities and respond to it
- Help local communities to access funding
- Share needs & look for ways of implementing them through Parish Councils

Access to Services and Community Enterprise

- Consider the obligations to equal opportunities before cutting services
- Consider alternative accessible ways of providing services which are not just on the internet

Community Planning and Housing

- Guidance in relation to writing the documentation needed at a level which will have an impact when considered by planning
- Provide information as this becomes available and maximise use of limits within their networks to promote their services

Transport

- Advocate for joined up thinking between different service providers, to co-ordinate complement service provision
- Work with business to see subsidies for provision as beneficiaries of increased footfall
- School buses and scout group buses etc could be used during the day for the general community
- Listen to public needs and plan to meet needs pressurise government to fund public transport fairly and to change the law that prohibits bus companies cross subsidising services

Fuel Poverty

- Have a one stop information centre to bring together all the various schemes to make comparison easier for public
- Lobby Government to regulate the price of oil - bring oil suppliers into line with controls on gas & electricity supplies
- Councils can provide self help schemes
- Good design of fuel efficiency required to get planning permission

Broadband

- Work with rural community representatives and TVRCC to lobby initiatives to improve Broadband speeds in rural areas.