

Building Strong and Prosperous Communities in Ashford

Putting Social Inclusion into Practice in Ashford



30th April 2007

The Willow Centre - 28 Brookfield Road, South Ashford

Joint Sponsored Event by:



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Aims of the day

- To engage with others and share learning, experience, information and knowledge.
- To further develop skills which will enable positive social change and aid social exclusion.
- To promote the added value of Community Development and the development of Sustainable Communities.
- To follow up and respond to issues raised at the 5th December 2006 event organised by Social Inclusion Partnership South East and Ashford Partnership.
- To introduce a participatory tool that can be applied to involving people in social inclusion agendas.
- To practice using the tool as applied to a specific area facing growth in Ashford.
- To develop from this practice, a model approach that will be useful in social inclusion work in Ashford and across the South East

List of Attendees

David Geoghegan	Community Liaison Officer, Kent County Council david.geoghegan@kent.gov.uk
Tracey Kerly	Housing Department, Ashford Borough Council tracey.kerley@ashford.gov.uk
Nick Watkin	Housing Department, Ashford Borough Council nick.watkin@ashford.gov.uk
Richard Finlinson	Chairman, Ashford Community Network richard.finlinson@virgin.net
Cllr Allen Wells	Ashford Borough Council allnwlls@aol.com
Cllr Paul Clokie	Leader, Ashford Borough Council paul.clokie@ashford.gov.uk
Michelle Byrne	Cultural Services, Ashford Borough Council michelle.byrne@ashford.gov.uk
Ian Bailey	Cultural Services, Ashford Borough Council ian.bailey@ashford.gov.uk
Philippa Dale	Tenant Participation Officer, Ashford Borough Council philippa.dale@ashford.gov.uk
Nathan Anthony	Major Sites Planning Team, Ashford Borough Council nathan.anthony@ashford.gov.uk
John Stevens	Social Inclusion Partnership South East equalvoices@ntlworld.com
Sharyn Locke	Facilitator, Sostenga lillipilli@riseup.net
Dhara Thompson	Facilitator, Sostenga equalitystreet@post.com

Report written by Sostenga,
Community Development
Work collective
www.sostenga.net



Outline of the day

10.00	Introductions Recap on December 5 event Outline today
10.30	Working with a real example: “South Ashford” Pooling knowledge about the area
11.10	Break
11.25	Planning responses to the situation Discussing results – key themes Today and the wider process Evaluation
1.00	Lunch

We started with a Group Agreement about how we wanted to work together:

- Confidentiality can be asked for if want to share learning from experience
- We will actively listen to each other
- It's ok to ask questions
- We will stick to time
- We need a balance between real information and speculation when working with the exercise

The planning exercise itself was outlined and described as:

- A creative approach
- A way of dealing with the complexity of different issues
- An efficient use of time to cover a large area of ground
- Able to offer “what if?” insights
- A chance to build relationships among participants
- A space to share ideas
- A space to hear and air different points of view

The exercise was based on **The Regeneration Game** produced by NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Learning www.niace.org.uk)

What people wanted from the day

- Opportunities and problem solving
- Encourage community forum
- Take ideas back to my team
- Move to more action at the sharp end
- Support people to do things for themselves
- Bear in mind: South Ashford is 3 distinct areas
- Hear what others in this group think should be happening
- Develop community pride
- How to *sustain* the good initiatives that get started
- How to increase understanding and appreciation of diversity
- Supporting community participants to stay in for the long term
- Getting beyond housing to community/environment issues
- Concrete steps in diversity/equality issues
- How to produce a deliverable meaningful strategy – perhaps in small segments that can practically occur
- Grasping the nettles: action!
- Delivery in *partnership*
- Practical tools for social inclusion
- Ideas and ways to proceed



Working with a real example: “South Ashford”

The area we worked with in the planning exercise was “South Ashford”, incorporating the three distinct areas of Christchurch, Beaver & Brookfield and Stanhope. Some of the characteristics of the three areas were:

Christchurch - build around the railway line, now comparatively old properties, some decaying

Beaver & Brookfield - regeneration is starting, it’s a mix of shops and residential, including Housing Association housing

Stanhope - has planned and happening regeneration, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) round 5, originally built in the 1960s

All three areas have experienced SRB rounds 1 and 2.

We then moved onto an analysis of the three areas in some more detail:

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <p>Well-established local communities Affinity with area Strong funding Responds to deprivation indices</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <p>Too much structure in facilities Not a need-led service Struggle to get the community to cross boroughs Funding – why do “they” get it?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>Ring road Precarity – employment not for life Funding – only for one thing at a time Fear – Stanhope seen as “rough, socially awkward” Fear – view of young people Complacency in other areas</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>Network of urban community forums Parish Council Regeneration project in Stanhope Ashford – new facilities, resources, jobs in future? Facilities open to public – integration will</p>

Overall assessment of the situation now in the three areas of “South Ashford”

Robust			
Stable	ENVIRONMENT Needs more integration	COMMUNITY Integration / Involvement Localised sense of community	ECONOMY
Fragile			

This assessment would be worth revisiting in the future to see if there are any changes

Planning our responses to the situation

We then moved on to look at some resources which would help address the situation in the three areas of “South Ashford”.

About twenty four pre-prepared cards were spread around the table for people to look at and consider. They each described a resource or project and what would be needed to put that into place.

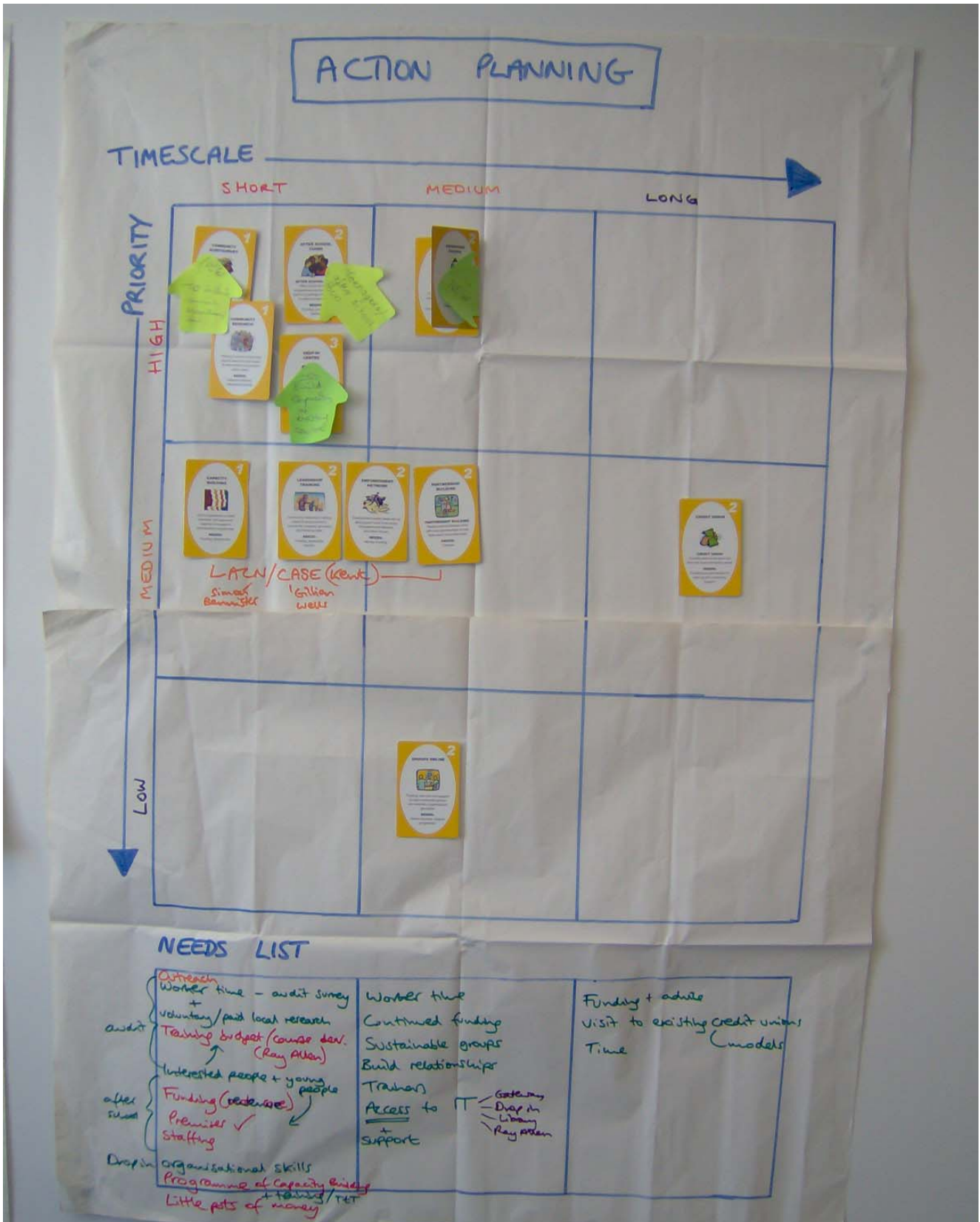
Each card also had a number 1, 2 or 3 to represent the cost of the resource, with 1 being the cheapest and 3 the most expensive. The total budget available was 18 points from all the cards, so the group collectively decided which cards to keep.



Next steps...

Once resources and projects fitting within the budget of 18 points were decided by the group, the next stage was to place the cards by priority and by time-scale. In doing this there was much discussion about what made a practical order for work to be undertaken. The group also started suggesting where support could already be found for the new resources and projects suggested. The next page shows the completed chart, with all the needs represented at the bottom. Below is a transcript of the chart:

		TIMESCALE →		
		Short	Medium	Long
PRIORITY ↓	Low		Credit Union (2) set up and run from local community centre <i>Needs: funding and advice/help for start-up and continuing support</i>	
	Medium	Newsletter/awareness raising (2) series of events/newsletter for community groups around funding issues <i>Needs: research, organising, interested residents, support with writing/production</i>	Empowerment network (2) development worker sets up and supports local community empowerment network and other forums <i>Needs: worker, funding</i> Partnership building (2) trainers and facilitators work with local partnerships to help them work more effectively <i>Needs: trainers</i>	Groups online (2) funding, services and support to help community groups and voluntary organisations get online <i>Needs: online services, support programme</i>
	High	Community audit/survey (1) of relevant project, groups and agencies. To include community aspirations/needs <i>Needs: Development Team</i> After school clubs (2) recreation programmes developed as part of a package of measures to reduce juvenile crime, with teenagers/after school focus <i>Needs: funding, premises, staffing</i> Community research (1) training courses to help local people research issues for themselves and prepare action plans <i>Needs: research trainers, interested activists</i> Drop-in centre (3) build the capacity of existing centres <i>Needs: funding, organisation</i>	Capacity building (1) joint programmes to build residents' and agencies' capacity to engage in participation programmes <i>Needs: funding, programme</i> Leadership training (2) linked to programmes in community mapping, advocacy and lobbying skills <i>Needs: funding, leadership training</i>	



Funding possibilities for activities/resources prioritised

- Section 106 money for Community Development workers and capacity building
- Housing Department for residents' association
- Ashford Borough Council borough training, that residents can join in on
- Community Development South East/Together We Can money for 'improving relationships' between local people and local authority

What I'll take away from today

- Extend access (eg evenings) to existing venues (sorting out the trusts that run them)
- Community audit (questionnaire) – run by community members?
- Exclusion that needs to be addressed with regard to resources – what is out there already which we can improve access to
- That a diverse group often comes back to the simplest ideas (we did today)
- Drop-in centre - community group usage of centres is vital
- Access be also be improved simply by better promotion of how existing centres *are* available and on what terms...also visiting and learning from places that DO run 7am-7pm to find out how they do it – eg run by multiple orgs/projects
- Increased pool of community members needed
- Need meetings like today to keep sharing what's needed and responding to this
- Want to find out more about after-school clubs, creating “community” schools, report back to LSP
- Communications – always more to aim for, always worth putting more resources into
- Ashford Community Network and Case Kent need to get in on the ground to make it all happen ASAP!
- Looking into Community leaderships courses

Further follow up:

- Ashford Borough Council while preparing its Inclusion Policy, will draw on today and today's contacts. Want input and ways to support today's ideas
- Today's report will be distributed including participant contacts

Evaluation

1 Very	2	3	4	5 Not at all
-------------------	----------	----------	----------	-------------------------

How useful I found today

III	III	I		
-----	-----	---	--	--

I have a better understanding of the South Ashford area

IIII	II			
-----------------	----	--	--	--

I will be able to use the Regeneration Game *results* from today in my work

II	III	I	I	
----	-----	---	---	--

I would find the Regeneration Game *model* useful in my own work

	III	III	I	
--	-----	-----	---	--

	1 Very	2	3	4	5 Not at all
Happy with Venue	IIII	III			
Lunch	II	II			
Facilitation	IIII	II			

Something I would have liked to be different today

- Would have liked to look at another example as well such as Hothfield
- The invitation to Kent County Council member for South Ashford (Derek Smyth)
- It would have been nicer to see more people take up the invitation, but it worked really well with the 'select band' we had
- Unfortunate number of attendees/representation
- More time but understand member constraints

Steps/actions I will be taking as a result of today

- Draft social inclusion strategy
- Looking to apply what was revealed by different people in to planning department work
- Further discussions with officers for community usage of buildings
- Looking at audit of opportunities in South Ashford
- Inputting to Ashford Borough Council's social inclusion strategy
- Discussing Ashford Community Network/Case Kent's possible involvement in the South Ashford/Stanhope areas with my colleagues
- Find out about after schools and clubs
- Increasing number of tenants involved and encouraging them to do capacity building

Trip to Wokingham

Part of the *Building Strong and Prosperous Communities in Ashford* event on the 5th December 2006 included a presentation about housing in Wokingham, Surrey, by the Head of Tenant Services and the chair of the Tenant Management Board. Following this, Tenants Forum Members and staff from Ashford made a trip to Wokingham in Surrey to share ideas about what works well (and not so well) for the respective councils.

Here, Philippa Dale, Tenant Participation Officer for Ashford Borough Council, describes the trip.

We were made very welcome, visited one of Wokingham's community houses, and observed one of their tenant repair monitoring meetings as well as having the opportunity to pick each others brains.

Wokingham is a unitary authority and has a stock of 2500. One difference between Wokingham and our landlord/tenant relationship, and one which we could easily adopt, was that their forum is seen to run in tandem with their management team, so forum representatives sit on management team and then all decisions are agreed by the forum with the proviso that the head of housing has ultimate responsibility and could veto decisions.

Other ideas we are hoping to investigate include:

- Mystery shopping – the repairs manager is contacting tenants with appointments for a visit against housing officer diaries and they are using fictitious examples and check lists to test the efficiency of their helpdesk

- Officer shadowing by forum members
- Housing Officers advise on radiator bleeding at sign-up – our forum did not agree with this but it raised a discussion about providing appropriate heating instructions on re-lets
- A 50/50 scheme aimed at assisting tenants with the cost of dropped curbs – small pot of money and as long as they meet the criteria the council will contribute half the cost of dropped curb
- A review of sheltered provision to address need through from low to extra care and beyond.
- A meet and greet system where tenants on hard to let estates meet new tenants to give them the 'low down' on living on the estate
- And the imaginative management of the Housing Revenue Account which is adding value by providing amongst other things a Community Development Officer, an extended schools program, a new method of communicating with tenants called Bounce Back, two Community Support Police Officers, a scheme called House Mate where young offenders do gardening for elderly residents, as well as three community houses.

Although there were lots of good things to see the consensus was that 'there is no place like Ashford' which we will hopefully demonstrate when we welcome our new friends on a reciprocal trip later in the year.