Consensus in the Countryside

Reaching shared agreement in policy, planning and management

Proceedings from a workshop held at
Devon County Hall, Exeter
on 15 February 1996

Jointly organised by

THE ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

and

Countryside Recreation Network

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Acknowledgements

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CONSENSUS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
INTRODUCTION

This conference emerged from links between personnel at the Countryside Recreation Network and Environmental Resolve (based with The Environment Council). It appeared that a number of CRN's member agencies, and others involved in countryside planning and management issues, were beginning to make use of collaborative working methods which bordered on 'consensus building' - though few might ever use this term. At the same time, Environmental Resolve's continuing national work in promoting consensus building methods suggested a wish by many potential practitioners to consolidate practice and share experience, and begin to develop both core principles and means of promoting more use of consensus approaches.

Once it had been decided to hold the conference, the 'hunches' described above proved to be perhaps more correct than anticipated. Informal networking, by both CRN and Resolve, highlighted a surprisingly large number, and an even more surprising range, of projects underway around the UK where motivated individuals were grasping for the benefits that consensus building is argued to offer. This informal study generated few examples of the clear, distinctive and explicit use of consensus building, but the word 'consensus' was being used regularly. Other keen people were clearly taking a consensus approach, but were apparently unaware that this was what they were doing! Perhaps this is a positive indicator of the commonsense basis of consensus building?

The conference that emerged was therefore in part an 'advocacy day', promoting the potential of consensus building and considering how and where to carry it forward into more widespread and regular practice. The programme (see overleaf) reflected this, through the examples presented, attention to common themes and ideas, carefully facilitated workshop sessions, and production of this feedback report. The overall feeling throughout the day about the value of consensus building was clearly positive, although a number of important issues and concerns were also raised, to which the advocates of consensus building must respond if progress is to be made.

The report which follows includes not just the formal papers but also all the many ideas, issues and suggestions which emerged during the 'arrivals exercise' and the afternoon workshops. The main overview paper given on the day has been amended to include important additional examples and themes brought by participants or sent in soon after; (and referenced in an Appendix). The author of the overview paper - Jeff Bishop - has also drafted a short, personal 'Reflections' paper at the end of the report, suggesting key themes and actions to take forward what is clearly a rapidly increasing and widely shared commitment to creating 'Consensus in the Countryside'.

Particular thanks are due to Devon County Council for hosting the event, the Rural Development Commission for sponsorship to underpin core costs, English Nature for supporting the preparation of the paper on the Blackdown Hills, to the speakers and to the workshop facilitators. Environmental Resolve and the Countryside Recreation Network thank all of these, but also all the participants for their contributions.

Consensus in the Countryside
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15 February 1996, Devon County Hall, Exeter

Programme

0930	Coffee and 'arrivals exercise'
1000	Introductions: Councillor Kate Bulley, Devon County Council Hally Ingram, Environmental Resolve
1015	Setting the Scene: An overview Jeff Bishop of Environmental Resolve and BDOR
1045	Lessons from the Blackdown Hills Management Plan Project A critical review of recent work by David Dixon, Blackdown Hills Project Officer and Jo Rose, BDOR
1115	Coffee
1140	Two examples of collaborative working: Borders Forum on Sustainable Development Roddy Mackay, Borders Region Community Involvement in Wildlife Management Elaine Harrison, RSPB
1240	Discussion, chaired by David Rees, Rural Development Commission
1300	Lunch
1400	Facilitated Workshops Working from a common brief, these workshops will use participants' experiences to gain a fuller picture of where and how consensus approaches are beginning to be used, the barriers to progress, and some potential ways forward
1530	Tea
1550	Feedback and final discussion, chaired by Richard Broadhurst, Forestry Authority and Chair of the Countryside Recreation Network
1620	Close

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exchanging and spreading information to develop best
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THE 'ARRIVALS EXERCISE'

As people assembled for the conference, they were asked to take part in a very brief exercise. The aim of this was substantive (its results were of direct relevance to the day) but also social (to encourage people to mix and meet). It certainly achieved the latter, generating an excellent 'hubbub' which had to be stopped in order for the event to start!

The core of the exercise involved the generation of short sharp - even stereotyped - reactions to two questions or statements:

- "Consensus building is a load of rubbish because ....."
  and
- "Consensus building is an essential way forward because ...."

Participants were each given two post-its and asked to respond to each statement on their own behalf or as others might respond. Post-its were tacked onto two large sheets of paper, people being asked to try to add theirs to similar ones if possible. Obvious clusters emerged and these were considered a little more thoroughly as the day proceeded, before some quick results were fed back to the assembled group. What follows is the set of main headings (ours) with the words or phrases used under each heading (from participants). This material provides a useful setting of everyday, 'street views' through which the other material in the report can be considered.

Rubbish because ....:

<u>Leave it to 'them'</u>: Only government can deliver - Management needs to know its aims and objectives - The decisions you end up with are not what you think should be done.

<u>Ignorance</u>: "Consensus" can be dangerous if people don't understand what the word 'consensus" means - Ignorance of whole issue - Consensus can mean "group think" which is dangerous (ie. if the group thinks it's right it must be right!) - Re-think the word "consensus" - should we value differences but agree to move on.

<u>Doesn't work</u>: Consensus = fudge - Waste of time - The process can be "engineered" to achieve a pre-conceived outcome - Politicians won't abide by the outcome - At the end of the day it comes down to who holds the purse strings - Some agendas for the countryside are mutually exclusive - People don't want to look stupid - Consensus is a waste of time - You can't be all things to all men and women - Consensus not permanent; only reached at one point in time.

<u>Delay</u>: They cause endless and circular debate - It takes for ever - Takes too long and then policies change - All talk and no action - Too much bureaucracy - Delays action - No decision gets made - Too many different ideas.

<u>Disagreements</u>: Nobody agrees - People often have short-term, narrow or selfish goals - People won't compromise - People just never agree.

<u>Apathy/Involvement</u>: Apathy! (On behalf of interest groups) - Nobody wants to know - It's only interested and organised groups that become involved, not the public at large - Not enough people become involved - Can't possible involve everyone.

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Essential because ...:

General: Why consensus? - To force government to act - Otherwise locals get upset and start to make problems - Because consensus and collaboration are quite different things - Must have consensus when so many different objectives - It is critical because of the diversity of views - Necessary for implementation.

Plans for people: People must move "corporately" if any real progress to be made - The issues that unite people are actually greater than those which divide - Policies and plans are made for people - Ordinary people need a say in their own lives - The public are affected and are needed to maintain achievements.

Ownership: "Consensus" is critical to ensure everyone involved "owns" the project - To obtain ownership of the task - People must feel that they have a stake (no comeback later) - feeling part of processes and decisions is important.

Commitment: Pursuit of all groups - Individuals - Conservation is for everyone - Views on the land are passionately held.

Resources: Resources are scarce - Address issues of local concern - Lack of resources - Make the most of our rural area - Without consensus most useful environmental strategy would be blocked.

Best solutions: They are the only solutions that work - To arrive at most workable result - To finds solutions that work (are adoptable).

Miscellaneous: Time consuming in the short term, but less time and energy consuming in the long term - Lasting value.

CONSENSUS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: AN OVERVIEW

Jeff Bishop: BDOR and Environmental Resolve

Introduction

This opening paper of the conference aims to:

- set the scene,
- provide a framework within (and around) which discussions can develop, and
- place the first 'markers' for ways ahead after the event.

The paper will cover five things:

- a background to issues of 'countryside', 'community involvement' and 'partnership', the three themes which appear to be coming together at this time,
- the reasons for the developing interest in a consensus approach, some of the benefits it can bring, and some of its main principles,
- an interim analysis of on what and with whom consensus approaches are beginning to be applied,
- a similarly quick analysis of actual approaches and methods in use, and
- some initial hints at things to consider to carry such approaches forward and gain - on a regular, everyday basis - the benefits they offer.

Before starting, however, it would be useful to spend a few moments making clear what is seen as the focus of the conference. It is not the aim of the day to discuss substantive issues of countryside policy or practice, nor to deal with particular pieces of information and detail about the specific projects described or discussed. Neither is it the intention to deal with smaller scale or more local aspects of community participation - what is often termed the 'community action' end.

Though all these are important in the broader scene, the real focus of the conference is the long (one might almost say 'getting longer every week') list of plans, initiatives and programmes for addressing all sorts of countryside issues and problems, mostly at a larger than local geographic scale. Our concern is therefore with collaborative approaches to strategic planning and management, whether this be in statutory plans or purely voluntary agreements, and including ongoing implementation as well as the initial plan-making stages. We are, in essence concerned with what is still in Britain (very sadly) the great unmentioned - ie. issues of 'how' rather than 'what'.

Background

Our concerns today would seem to focus on what is happening as three circles of interest and action start to move together and overlap. These clusters of issues and themes are illustrated below. They are 'Countryside' , 'Community Involvement', and 'Partnership':
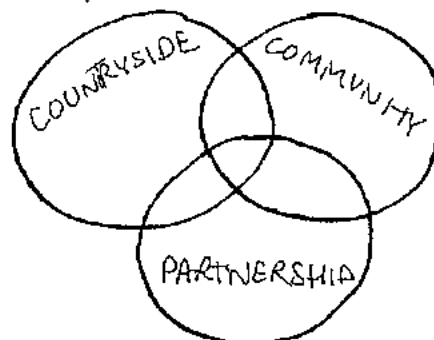
Up to now, the circles have been largely independent or have overlapped in pairs. As will be seen, we are now in a situation where it has become almost impossible to avoid the questions of how to deal with what happens 'when worlds collide'. The terms and circles are somewhat arbitrary but serve the purpose of making subsequent points. The significant elements in their content can be elaborated as follows.

Countryside

Historically, the countryside has been thought of as a less obvious 'thing' to plan for and manage than towns and cities. It is 'natural' rather than 'man-made' (in itself a subject for a day's discussion!), it is less apparently subject to rapid change and pressure, and it is geographically dispersed and ecologically complex. Although we have Town and Country Planning Acts, there is a common perception that everything beyond the urban boundary is really just 'white land'; a feeling exacerbated by the unique freedoms from planning control given to the agricultural industry (or just 'agriculture' for those who worry about the word 'industry').

Yet, there are now a number of large agencies dealing explicitly or implicitly with the countryside as a distinct single 'thing': Countryside Commission, Rural Development Commission, Forestry Commission. There are no equivalents of these in urban areas, highlighted in the anomaly of the Countryside Council for Wales also having responsibility for all urban areas!

Until recently, the pattern of intervention in the countryside was - as in urban areas - mainly one of single issue policies and practices: housing, employment, transport, agriculture. All separate; never shall they meet! Now we see a whole medley of initiatives, programmes, designations, even competitions, mostly aimed explicitly at linking at least two or three - sometimes 'all' - issues together into integrated approaches. A few of these - at least certainly the newer ones (unlike Local Plans, for example) come with some sort of legal basis from government policy. Nevertheless, it is a feature of all of them that they have a lot of 'bark' but very little 'bite'. It is also important to note that fewer are now dependent on the certainties and clarity of the fixed feature 'Plan' but are rooted in the complexities and evolution of ongoing, longer-term and necessarily flexible, management.

The reasons behind this are quite diverse. In terms of general issues, there has been a growing realisation (not new to many actually working in rural areas!) that deprivation, poverty, poor housing and lack of facilities is not just an inner city or urban problem. More specifically, certain initiatives have arisen out of a number of perceived imbalances between resources and people: conflicts between environment and agriculture, building development and retention of local services, environmental quality and access, environmental resources and leisure/sport/tourism. The net result is a lot of people sitting in rooms working out how to deal with their new remit to take forward often complex, uncertain, long term and integrated initiatives.

Community Involvement

In the last few years, the question 'should we involve the community?' has been replaced by 'how can we involve the community?'. Such questions are being asked sometimes by people who see this as natural, inevitable and correct approach; sometimes by those who are reluctant, but see little real choice. Caution is correct, however, even for the 'keenies'. In discussing this conference with people, it is amazing how often creating consensus on strategic planning and management has been entirely mixed up in their minds with local level community action, as in community tree planting trees. As a previous Countryside Recreation Network conference showed ('Communities and Their Countryside') there is now an enormous amount of extremely effective work going on to enable people to take

direct action to improve their local situation; (often called self-help in societies where there's no choice about how something gets provided).

Even then, however, much practice still sees local people as the free labour rather than those who decide about a project in the first place, plan and design it, and then achieve it; (perhaps even - shame on me - using a contractor rather than their own free labour!). There is therefore, not surprisingly, a big jump that then takes place - accompanied by a shift down several rungs of the famous 'ladder of participation' - to forms of involvement in things such as Local Plans. In general, (as the BDOR research for the Department of the Environment showed), UK practice on engaging the wider community properly (ie. at any level other than just informing a few of them) on larger area and strategic planning is very poor indeed. A few sparkling exceptions only confirm the rule, although, as will be seen, they also give clues as to <u>how</u> this leap can be made using consensus approaches.

This general pattern is well summed up in a simple diagram. In the chart below, the vertical axis represents degrees or levels of community involvement, using the 'ladder' analogy, so moving up from non-participation (manipulation) through one-way methods (information and consultation) to slowly more participative approaches towards community control. The horizontal axis may be thought of broadly as geographic scale (going up from left to right) but may also be thought of - for purposes we return to later - as going up the scale of size and complexity of affected 'community' for any initiative. The diagonal bar represents general practice to date.
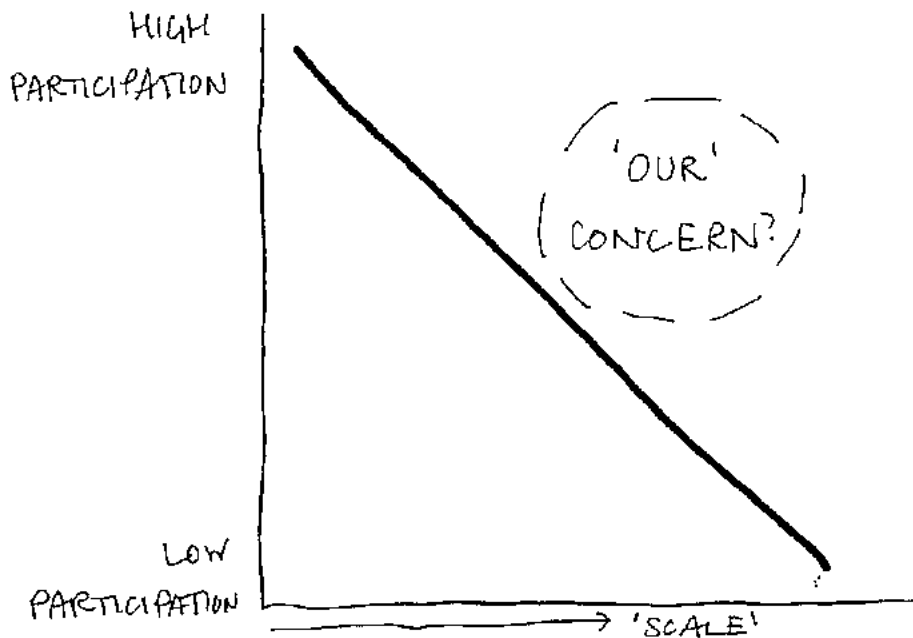
The most important point to note here is that attempts to give 'the community' a <u>real</u> say or stake in strategic or large scale plans and policies that affect them would require the achievement of some projects well up into the top right of the diagram. That's the issue taxing those people mentioned above - those sitting in rooms working out how to deal with their new remit.

Partnership

The word 'partnership' is like many being used today; it can hide a multitude of sins, but this does not mean there's nothing in there of value. As agencies and departments familiar with making progress on their own particular issue - housing, recreation, farming - found themselves facing problems that cut across these old boundaries, new ways of working

were seen to be necessary. Not only that, but links were being encouraged (some might say demanded or even extorted) across the traditional divides of sectors - notably the public/private sector divide. Given that the early stages of urban initiatives (eg. Urban Programme) were led very strongly by government money up front, backed by requirements for leverage, and the emphasis was on conventionally understood development projects (offices, shops, roads), the natural method adopted was to form 'partnerships'.

Since then, as issues have become more complex and their inter-connections better understood, as longer-term thinking has been encouraged, and as intervention through planning and management has regained some legitimacy, the term 'partnership' has begun to take on a much broader meaning. More recent partnerships have therefore developed with an explicit aim of finding ways to involve the wider community affected by any plan or development. It is from experiences that many organisations have had with partnership, (in particular from experiences of community involvement), that eyes are being cast towards consensus building as a format for enabling multi-partner work to find itself a niche in the broader community setting.

Successful partnership working has led to:

- a culture change from exclusivity (of sectors or professions) to inclusivity,
- a growing realisation of the benefits which flow from sharing,
- a shift away from 'sticks' and towards methods which provide 'carrots',
- more effort being placed into removing problems up front than solving them later,
- broader and more coherent forms of community involvement, and
- interest in approaches which can work over time rather than just once.

Consensus Building

Bringing together the trends described above has added urgency to the search for ways of handling what is now a far more complex world of planning, decision-making, management, and implementation.

Consensus building has no single clear pedigree. As a term and set of activities, it surfaced first in the USA as a response - within their strong traditions of participative local democracy - to the professionalisation of community involvement during the period of 'advocacy planning' in the 1960s. As smaller communities came up against ever larger corporate institutions, there was a search for non-adversarial forms of conflict resolution that were not determined entirely by the ability to brief expensive lawyers. Cases such as Bhopal, native American lands and the Exon Valdez helped to bring the issue to the fore and to raise what was, for big business, the spectre of legislative limits on their activities.

In a sometimes desperate rush to avoid legislation, and with help from a number of academic dispute resolution professionals, approaches started to develop in which all main 'stakeholders' (sorry - others got there first!) came together within a carefully managed process to reach agreed solutions. Examples of successful consensus building work on environmental issues now include the Canadian 'Round Tables' structure, numerous specific site and area management projects in the USA, river recreation management in France and catchment management planning in Australia.

Consensus approaches were seen to be particularly attractive in environmental settings because:

- there are many 'actors' with varying views and differential power,
- the process enables an explicit balance of quantitative and qualitative issues,
- no standard, external solutions exist or are acceptable,

- partial solutions produce clear losers alongside clear winners,
- successful implementation depends upon the commitment of all to the solution,
- there is a potential model for wider community involvement, and
- the process is patently coherent, inclusive, and able to build up skill, knowledge, experience and commitment over time.

There are, however, important questions about the general applicability of such approaches to the UK situation. Our democratic system is very different, especially locally, being far more representative than participative. Consensus building therefore produces difficult challenges for local councillors for example. What is more, our lowest level representative base (ie. voters to representative) is much larger than in the USA or France. We have different attitudes to personal rights, to authority, to professionals and to the role of government; (please discuss, do not use both sides of the paper!). We have also become, in recent years a far more centralised country with ever more opaque decision-making by those at the centre. Finally, of course, we love a good bit of adversarial management; someone to shout at, argue about, and blame. The very word 'consensus' is, for a variety of reasons, mistrusted by many.

Nevertheless, as has been stated already, there is no doubt at all that this is the direction in which many are now searching for ways forward. Before moving to look at what appears to be happening with consensus approaches to countryside management, it is worth spending a moment considering some principles - especially since, like 'Forums' and 'Sustainability', consensus building may already be becoming more a clever phrase to use than a rigorously applied set of procedures. Though (to be honest) rarely fulfilled totally in practice, the following are some of the principles argued to underpin good consensus building practice:

- Commitment to abide by outcomes: There is little point in entering a process which aims to bring people closer and closer together around common solutions if one or other party retains some eventual veto over any results. Either they (and those they represent) have agreed to an outcome or they haven't.
- Openness, honesty, trust: Commitment is, however, a two-way issue; it can only reasonably be secured if all parties are open and honest (for example, not holding back key information for a subsequent committee meeting), and if the process builds trust.
- Inclusiveness: Consensus building demands great care in establishing, as early as possible, the whole gamut of possible views about an issue and involving all those individuals and groups with such views - not just the obvious friends, or even enemies.
- Shared responsibility for success: Once work is underway, it may be led - 'facilitated' is the usual word - but those involved are not passive actors waiting for the mythical 'someone else' to solve things for them; everybody must take an active role in seeking progress.
- Common information base: So often, conflicts roll on and on simply because different groups argue from different bases of important issues and key information. A consensus process pays attention to sharing all information, seeking common agreements, and seeking further information which can take things forward.
- Mutual 'education' and exchange: If information, attitudes and values are to be in the open, and shared between all, then there will inevitably be a shifting of perceptions and a development of personal and group knowledge. By paying attention to this, one can help to avoid conflicts on subsequent occasions and enable everybody to be (as it were) one step up the ladder at the start next time.
- Multiple options are identified: It is banal to suggest that any complex environmental issue has one neat, simple solution. Though there are disadvantages when people come at things from different directions, this can

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bring into the room the advantage of diverse and innovative options and solutions - and a base for a more creative agreed solution.

- Decisions made by consensus: We still rely far too heavily, in almost all our procedures, on the ultimately debilitating system of majority votes, very often in situations where another approach would generate a different, and more widely agreed decision. By working towards decisions which are supported by all, one greatly increases the chances that those people will back, rather than scupper, later implementation.

- Shared responsibility for outcomes and implementation: This leads to the final principle; that once a decision has been reached by consensus, those involved take on a responsibility to back the decision (and how it was reached) through any verification process, and then into the stages of implementation.

Where are Consensus Approaches being used in Countryside Recreation?

Preparation for this conference provided an opportunity to research more widely for examples on which consensus approaches are being used, or those which are coming closer to a collaborative way of working. A very wide range of examples was located and it has been possible to do some initial analysis. The following seven aspects have been considered.

1. Focus

The examples appear to fall into three main categories.

A. Place determined:
Those which are determined at the outset by a particular area or type of place. Seven sub-categories emerged, though some also overlap.

Statutory boundary: Local or Structure Plan, (water) Catchment Management Plan, National Park Plan.
Quality of Area: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), specific named forest (which could include National Park again).
Coast: Management Plans for firths, shoreline areas, estuaries, coastal zones.
Water: Management Plans for river, lake, canal or a region (see above).
Linear: path, road/route, (canal again).
Local: town/village, parish/community council area, farm, farm Stewardship schemes, Development Trusts.

B. Use determined:
Those determined mainly by pressures from particular activities: eg. sport, recreation, access, transport, planning, agriculture, forestry.

General: AONB, traffic management, Round Tables for road schemes.
Visitors/Tourists/Access: a variety of forms of Visitor Management Plans' Tourism Management Plans, Long Distance Paths access agreements, Common Land Forum, 'Adventure Forums', Citizens' Charters (for waterway access).

C. People determined:
Those determined mainly by attributes of a particular community or set of community issues (eg. poverty, unemployment).

Rural development areas
Rural Challenge schemes
Village Appraisals/Local Jigso (in Wales)
Local Agenda 21 (LA21)

CADISPA (Conservation and Development in Sparsely Populated Areas: a WWF scheme)
Rural Strategies
European 5B projects
Regeneration strategies
Health for All/Health of the Nation initiatives

2. Geographic Scale

This is fairly straightforward in that different examples addressed areas of a different size or specific geographic nature.

A. County or larger: Structure Plans, Catchment Management Plans, National Parks
B. District or similar: local authority, AONB, firths, RDAs.
C. Sub-district: Visitor Management Plans, some RDAs.
D. Linear: paths, rivers, canals, rail lines, (coasts?).
E. Local/site: village traffic schemes, stewardship, Rural Challenge, ESA, Development Trusts.

3. Who Initiates?

Almost all the larger projects appear to have been initiated by or through central or local government, or by government agencies (eg. the Rural Development Commission).

Some were initiated by voluntary bodies, eg. the National Trust or RSPB, or an organisation such as FWAG.

Some started at local level, initiated mainly by local people, eg. Village Design Statements, Development Trusts, some traffic management. There then appears to be some uncertainty over what eventual support these might receive, or what status their results might be given (regardless of the quality of any processes used).

4. Who is Involved?

Most projects appear to describe some combination of the following:

Statutory bodies: local authorities, quangoes, central government.
Voluntary bodies: national ones (National Trust), national ones with local branches (CPRE/FoE), or local and independent ones.
Community organisations: village association, neighbourhood society.
Business: predominantly landowners/farmers, less often other businesses.

It is rare to see any argued or clearly developed idea of a 'wider community' - ie. the focus is mainly on those people resident in or near an area, thus often excluding broader groups and some smaller local businesses and employers. As suggested above, the private sector is poorly represented. When issues of tourism and access are under consideration, outsider groups are involved - though often by a local representative or member. There appears to be a clear focus on assembling a smallish group/'forum' of around 12 to 15 people. For many of the 'people-oriented' projects there may not only be some careful targetting of specific groups but also a deliberately redistributive weighting given to their views.

5. Why and When?

Almost all (though this is far from clearly described) seem to have started either because (a) a problem/conflict has arisen or will arise very soon, or (b) experience of past failures suggests a new approach. However, several seem to have started not just because one

group or agency suggested an alternative was needed, but because _several_ found themselves thinking that way.

Some work is being started well up-front to produce almost generic guidelines.
Some work is being done to decide whether to proceed with something.
Some work is being done on policy-based plans.
Some work is being done on agreeing management/implementation procedures.

A few projects were about securing support for some plan or proposal already virtually finalised!

There appears to be some growing influence from developing public awareness of participation and consensus building, to the point that some projects are being influenced towards such approaches - but it is early days to be certain of this.

6. Funding?

In terms of the exercise of producing the plan or programme, most examples were funded by the initiating agencies or groups - eg. English Nature. In some cases such plans clearly 'belonged' to a sole group, so only they paid - eg. NRA and Catchment Management Plans. In other cases - eg. AONB Management Plans - the initiating agency (the Countryside Commission expects (requires?) contributions from local authorities and other agencies. European funding is apparently playing a considerable lead or underpinning role.

What must not be ignored is the often unvalued but absolutely critical contributions of free time by many people and groups. Such time can often be considerable and comes - with different meanings and implications - from both statutory bodies and voluntary groups.

In terms of the implications of plans for future funding - especially their degree of 'clout' over the spending plans of other bodies - there are several variations.

Some plans - eg. ESA, traffic calming - are being produced to determine how some money will be spent.
Some plans - eg. AONBs - have a once-removed link to possible funding for certain items.
Some plans - eg. Local Plans - have no link to future spending.

There were no examples (as yet) of Millennium/Lottery funding but they are certain to emerge soon. This also relates to general awareness of the availability of different forms of funding (eg. Rural Action). There were no examples - again as yet - of developer-led initiatives; (by contrast with many projects in City Challenge areas).

7. Status

There are differences between the plans and agreements in terms of the status or influence they will secure once complete.

Some plans - eg. local plans, catchment management plans - are being produced because the law requires it.
Some - eg. AONB Management Plans - have more remote legal backing behind them and hence can have 'bark but little bite'.
Some are purely advisory - eg. most visitor management plans or LA 21

There are also differences in terms of any requirements for involvement/consultation and the effect this will have on the eventual influence of any plan or proposal.

Some legal baselines actually require consultation/involvement - notably Local Plans.
Some non-legal procedures - eg. Rural Challenge or LA21 - make consultation a core requirement.
In many others, the choice to use a collaborative method is either a generally endorsed part of the culture or is a purely voluntary, often personal choice.

But ... in all cases, it is never clear what 'stick' would be wielded were someone to produce a plan with no, or with gratuitous, involvement!

How are Consensus Approaches being handled in Countryside Recreation?

The information studied is unclear about the methods through which much of the work is actually undertaken, and it is informative to note that in not a single report was any attempt made to explain the working process clearly and fully in its own right. Some respondents and reports did not use the term 'consensus building', sometimes not even the single word 'consensus'. Several project brochures mentioned new ways of working, occasionally specifically mentioning 'consensus' in a sub-text.

Consensus approaches appear to be understood as a format which brings together a reasonable number of representative from stakeholder groups and bodies and helps them work together until they agree something. It is very unlikely that any of the examples studied used the full panoply of detailed procedures, ground rules and methods often understood to be 'proper' consensus building (and outlined earlier). Communication processes seem to be assumed rather than explained; (despite the importantly different ways of handling this issue).

This differs from community participation in a number of ways - notably that it (a) precludes (though sometimes runs parallel with) 'distance' work such as questionnaires, individualised or large sample work such as interviews, and (b) focuses on representatives rather than original source groups or individuals. No report made specific mention of introducing any sort of outside, independent, expert 'facilitator'.

This latter point is important, not because outside people are always necessary, but because the lack of questioning about who runs or manages the process indicates the minimal attention being paid to the achievement of a truly shared outcome. Though it is always possible for one or other involved party to provide the process management necesary to reach a mutually agreed solution, experience shows that this must be handled with great care.

With the exception of some specific guidelines work, all the examples described procedures used to address a specific situation, not a continuing programme or set of situations.

In summary, therefore, the general terms 'consensus' or 'consensus building' are beginning to be used in a very wide variety of situations. The principal arguments focus on a search for ways to bring into the process, as early as possible, all those who will have to live with, or share in implementing, a plan or programme of action. Early involvement is seen more as a way of preventing later argument than generating creative new solutions. In detail, however, the term consensus building appears to be be being applied casually to a number of exercises involving little more than well-managed round table discussions. There is almost no discussion of specific frameworks or methods. Whether anything more 'correct' is needed remains to be discussed!

Implications for the Future

This topic will be discussed more fully at the event. All we wish to highlight here are a few questions emerging from the above analysis, as a prompt to conference debate.

- Is everybody sitting in separate rooms all re-inventing wheels? If so, this is a waste in many ways.
- Can we be sharper about the general appropriateness of consensus approaches to certain situations, and then sharpen our ideas on the appropriateness of some specific methods?
- Is enough attention yet being paid to matters of 'process'? If not, will the next outcome be a series of sloppy and poorly managed projects?
- If consensus approaches do have common principles and methods for many situations, how can people and agencies share in this and slowly build practice over time?
- Is it too early to make any judgements, since so much of the purpose of consensus building is to ease problems over longish timescales?
- If part of consensus work involves 'backtracking' to remove past prejudices and conflicts, is there nothing we can do to stop them building up in the first place? Can we shift our society's inbuilt adversarial attitudes?
- Consensus work requires (and often uses hidden) resources. It may be argued that investing X now saves 10X later, but how can we persuade those with the cash to make such an investment, especially when the organisation investing is not necessarily the one which will save!

References

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REPORT ON THE BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT INITIATIVE.

Presented by Jo Rose, BDOR Ltd and Dave Dixon, the Blackdown Hills project officer

The Blackdown Hills were designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in June 1991. The AONB straddles two county councils and four district council boundaries. The local authorities and other statutory and countryside agencies co ordinate the management of the AONB through a Joint Advisory Council, in common with many other AONBs. As in other AONB areas the proposed designation was not greeted with universal approval.

Why a Consensus Building Plan for the Blackdown Hills?

The Blackdown Hills provide a classic picture of the pastoral English landscape. The Blackdown Hills are a mosaic of semi-natural habitats of regional and national importance. The landscape is further enhanced by the many C15th and C17th farmsteads and manor houses built in local chertstone. The communities of the Blackdown Hills are independently minded and from the earliest days of the designation process have expressed a strong belief that the Blackdown Hills is, and should remain, a 'living landscape'.

The concept of the 'living landscape' is at the heart of the consensus approach to the AONB management plan preparation.. The plan itself, to be effective, will need not only to reflect the demands of managing the landscape to conserve its visual quality, but also to be practical and reflect the economic, social and cultural needs of the communities of the Blackdown Hills. Traditionally an AONB management plan has been written through the employment of an AONB project officer, and defined primarily by the demands of the conservation aspects. In the light of the current importance of sustainability, a more community based approach was felt to be a more appropriate approach to defining the management plan for the Blackdown Hills. This approach would enable economic, social and cultural issues, so important to local people, to be fully integrated with conservation principles.

In the past many AONB management plans have not been fully effective as they have failed to reflect many of the realities of local economics or have simply not been accepted by local people. A community based approach enables the plan to not only reflect local feelings and perceptions, but also to have the active participation of local people as it evolves. The approach provides for a two way learning process; information and local knowledge is able to be fed directly into the plan. It can influence decisions and change or challenge misconceptions or prejudices over the plan, the AONB status and the agencies involved. The final plan will also develop a greater degree of understanding and support from the local constituency and thereby

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add weight to the programme of actions that will implement the final management plan.

The Blackdown Hills is an area that is not well known or clearly geographically defined. A central issue for the AONB management plan preparation was to ensure that there was local 'ownership' of the plan and its objectives. The community involvement was not seen to be limited to the plan preparation alone, but to provide a basis for the continuing participation of local people and interests in the implementation of the plan. The preparation process would encourage communities to take actions in support of the management plan objectives and to create a mutually supportive relationship and dialogue between the organisations and agencies with interests in the AONB, and local people.

Establishing the involvement process

Successful community involvement is largely dependant on the way that the process is prepared and organised. It is essential that all the parties involved in and managing the process accept and adhere to a number of fundamental principles. In the Blackdown Hills initiative the following principles were adopted.

Fundamental principles

Independent advisers

Building trust and confidence between local people and the managing agencies was an essential requirement for the consensus building approach. This need was felt to be best satisfied by the involvement of independent consultants to manage the process. While there was inevitably a cost involved, management of the process by someone with no vested interests in the outcome of the plan was able to facilitate the process rather than treat it as a problem solving exercise.

Clarity

Creating opportunities for participation is not sufficient unto itself. Unless the subject matter is relevant and reflects local priorities and interests, responses are likely to be poor. The earlier broad awareness raising and consultative exercise undertaken in the Blackdown Hills provided a spring board for launching the involvement process on a community led agenda. Although the relevance of issues is a vital impetus to involvement, it is equally important to be clear, right from the beginning, as to how people's involvement will fit into the overall process of the management plan preparation.

Inclusiveness

Many community involvement programmes find it difficult to accommodate an open door approach to participation. Frequently the limitations of accessing the 'whole community' and possible unrepresentativeness are used as a means of devaluing community involvement. Generally this a red herring and a way of avoiding

contention or a questioning of the professional infallibility.. Throughout the duration of the involvement process means were continually sought to increase opportunities for involvement, and all comments were both recorded and retained to demonstrate that this approach had been followed.

Honesty

Traditionally an AONB management plan deals with issues that directly influence the conservation of the landscape and its natural features and habitats. In the Blackdown Hills the agenda of issues for inclusion was more open and not predetermined. This enabled a broader interpretation of the issues and a greater relevance to be demonstrated to all the participants. However, it was made clear to everyone from the outset that while the debate could be wide ranging, a management plan was only able to encompass relevant issues. Additional matters would need to be considered through other means. The process would endeavour to identify how those additional matters could be dealt with. As well as encouraging an open door approach to the issues under debate, all the participants accepted that there would be a free exchange of all information between the parties. This was to be an important element in developing mutual trust and a positive attitude towards joint working.

Commitment to Outcomes

Consensus building does not only affect the drafting and compilation of the management plan. It extends to the implementation and review processes as well. Therefore it is necessary for there to be a joint commitment by all the parties taking part. In the case of the Blackdown Hills it was agreed that outcomes would not only be respected but that they would affect the 'product' of the management plan directly. To ensure that this was seen to be the case the timetable for the community involvement would extend to annual community conferences where the progress of the implementation could be examined and assessed.

Involvement Programme

The community involvement programme consisted of four distinct phases.

1.   Preparation

The officers and members of the JAC and the voluntary groups were well briefed as to the implications of working through a consensus process, as described above. In addition village communities and parish councils were introduced to the idea of sharing in the preparation of the management plan for the AONB. This was undertaken well in advance of any direct contact with specific groups. Parish councils, local newsletter and community networks carried advance warnings of events and an explanation of the involvement process.

2   Round Tables

A series of open meetings were held over an extended period during the spring and early summer of 1995. The meetings were held in a variety of village or parish halls throughout the Blackdown Hills area. To ensure that there were, as far as possible,

opportunities for everyone to participate, different times of the day and days of the week were chosen. Each of the round tables followed a standard format to ensure that the contributions were compatible.

ROUND TABLE AGENDA

- ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE VISION OF THE FUTURE
- A SIMPLE PRESENTATION OF PROCEDURE AND TIMETABLE FOR THE MANAGEMENT PLAN, EMPHASISING THE RELEVANCE OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN TO LOCAL INTERESTS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE
- IDENTIFYING THE BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS OF LIVING IN THE BLACKDOWN HILLS
- IDENTIFICATION OF COMMUNITY ISSUES
- INITIAL IDEAS AND PRIORITIES AND ACTION PLANNING

The aim of the round tables was to identify a comprehensive list of issues that would form the basis of a more concentrated problem solving approach through a series of community led topic groups. A full report of all the community defined issues was circulated over the summer to participants. Summary reports of the round tables were published in the Blackdown Hills Newsletter.

3. The Blackdown Hills Community Conference

Condensing the wide range of issues identified in the round tables was the first objective of a Community Conference on the Management Plan, held in early Autumn 1995. The report from the round tables provided the baseline of information for determining the nature of the topic groups. Delegates to the conference considered the content and discussed areas that they felt required further examination or interests that were not evident in the report, e.g., the unemployed.

THE BLACKDOWN HILLS COMMUNITY CONFERENCE CONSIDERED:

- THE ROUND TABLE ISSUES REPORT
- THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEMES AND KEY ISSUES
- AGREEING FUTURE PROCESS FOR DEALING WITH THE ISSUES
- IDENTIFICATION OF TOPIC GROUPS,, INCLUDING THEIR MEMBERSHIP, TIMESCALE AND MANAGEMENT
- A METHOD OF REPORT BACK TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY AND A MEANS OF INTEGRATING DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE TOPIC GROUPS

The conference agreed on the remit and composition of four topics for group discussions, these were;

- AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT
- ACCESS & MOVEMENT
- PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
- COMMUNITY NEEDS

4. Topic Groups

During the Autumn and early winter the community based topic groups met to discuss and develop recommendations for the management plan. Each group met three times and followed a similar three meeting plan

THE THREE MEETING PLAN

1ST MEETING

To
- IDENTIFY/ CONFIRM THEMES, DISCUSS SCOPE, SET AIMS, FURTHER INFORMATION NEEDS,
- CONSIDER HOW TO TACKLE THE TOPIC (WHO DOES WHAT FROM NOW ON)
- AGREE WORK TO PREPARE FOR NEXT MEETING - INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AND RESEARCH

2ND MEETING

To
- PRESENT INDIVIDUAL PRELIMINARY INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
- UNDERTAKE GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND CRITIQUE, CLARIFICATION
- REBRIEF FOR FINAL MEETING

3RD MEETING

To.
- PRESENT REVISED DRAFT PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
- ENSURE COMPATIBILITY AND LINKAGES WITH OTHER TOPICS,
- REFINE FINAL COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS
- CONSIDERED AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

During all the meetings delegates from the community were encouraged to
focus on solutions to the problems rather than reiterating the problem again,
look for mutually supportive actions or areas of conflict with other topic groups,
assess how far the views being expressed were broadly, narrowly or specifically
representative of the communities of the Blackdown Hills, and consider to what
extent the issue can be dealt with effectively within the management plan.

Four reports were produced by the topic groups before Christmas 1995. These outlined recommendations for the management plan and further amplified them by identifying direct and practical action or other issues that would need to be considered in implementing the recommendations.

The reports were circulated during the New Year and at the end of February were formally adopted as the basis for drafting the Blackdown Hills management plan.

Achievements of the Consensus Building process

While the effectiveness of the management plan when it is implemented has to remain speculative, there are already a number of positive results from the initiative.

The AONB and the need for the management plan is much better understood, amongst and between interested agencies and organisations. The debate that the process has started is continuing. Local councillors are aware of far greater interest in the issues that the process identified. New community initiatives are already being developed. Staff of the Blackdown Hills project are aware that local contacts have become far more positive.

The management plan has been conceived by approximately 300 people and because of this it has greatly increased its chances of receiving the support and resources necessary for its implementation. The draft plan is due to be published in May 1996 and the level of continuing local support and interest will be assessed when the first review and monitoring conference is held in the Autumn.

CONSENSUS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE CONFERENCE
A CASE STUDY OF THE
SCOTTISH BORDERS FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL AGENDA 21

"The key to Local Agenda 21 - what makes it more than just a collection of environmental initiatives at local level - is the idea of actively involving the local community together in working towards sustainable development.

Local Government Management Board 1994

THE BORDERS SITUATION

The Borders Region is sandwiched between Central Scotland and Northern England. The Region's boundaries to the south are coterminous with Scotland's boundary with England. The horseshoe of hills - the Lammermuir, Moorfoot and Pentland Hills in the north, the Tweedsmuir Hills in the west, and the Cheviot Hills in the south - represent a natural boundary which separates the Borders from the rest of Scotland. Almost the whole of the River Tweed catchment area is contained within these hills and the course of the river gives the Borders its distinctive character. The population of the Region is now increasing after a long period of decline from a figure of 130,000 persons in 1881 to 97,000 persons in 1971. The Borders is essentially a rural community with no dominant urban centre. There are only five settlements with a population of over 5,000 persons, and none of them exceeds 16,000 people. Some 37,000 people, over one third of the population live in small villages of under 1,500 population or in the countryside.

There are material differences between the local communities which comprise Borders Region. Berwickshire District is predominantly rural with a relatively large amount of employment in agriculture and fishing and related industries. The Central Borders, which includes Ettrick and Lauderdale and Roxburgh Districts, has a range of manufacturing firms, primarily textiles and electronics, located in its main settlements. The Galashiels/Melrose/Newtown St Boswells triangle is the principal service centre for the rest of the Region. In Tweeddale District, the economy is primarily service based with Peebles acting as a significant tourist centre.

AN AREA SUSTAINABILITY STUDY OF ETTRICK AND LAUDERDALE

Arising from the Rio De Janeiro Earth Summit held in 1992 sustainable development is a global goal, which requires both global and local action in order to succeed.

Recognising this, in 1993 Scottish Borders Enterprise along with Scottish Enterprise National, and Scottish Natural Heritage jointly funded a study to explore the implications that the adoption of sustainable development principles might have for a specified

geographic area - Ettrick & Lauderdale District, and to identify the scope for pursuing sustainable development in that area.. The District and Regional Councils along with Rural Forum and the funding partners formed the Steering Group for the project. The project was carried out by a team headed by Cobham Resource Consultants.

The project illustrated the complexity of the subject of sustainability and the difficulties that can be encountered in placing a local area within the global context. It also illustrated the fact that sustainability is not just a technical issue for professionals to investigate. Sustainable development requires decisions to be made by individuals, and the community which together comprise the local political process.

One of the main recommendations contained in the Ettrick & Lauderdale study was that a Forum needed to be established which would prepare and implement a "Sustainability Strategy" for the Borders.

LAUNCH OF THE FORUM

The first stage in setting up a Forum in the Borders was a day long seminar held in Selkirk on Saturday 25 March 1995. The seminar was arranged by the Steering Group of officials from the agencies who had been involved in the Ettrick & Lauderdale Study. The seminar sought to involve the wider Borders community in setting the agenda for sustainable development in the region.

The specific aims of the seminar were:

- to gauge the aspirations of the community, so that they may define the aims of sustainable development in the Borders

- to validate the Scottish Borders Forum on Sustainable Development, and to invite participation in it from interested parties

The seminar which was chaired by Magnus Magnusson, Chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage and involved various guest speakers, followed a community consultation exercise, in which 1,500 leaflets were distributed to various organisations both local and national, including all community councils, inviting participation in the seminar.

In total, an excellent turnout of 96 delegates attended the seminar, representing a varied range of sectoral interests, including public agencies, land managers, community groups, environmental organisations, politicians and interested individuals.

The participants demonstrated a high level of interest in, and understanding of, the issues concerned with sustainable development. There was generally a positive attitude to the process, and the proposal to set up a Scottish Borders Forum on Sustainable Development was endorsed by those present.

SETTING UP THE STEERING GROUP

i. Follow-up meeting

Following the March seminar to launch the Scottish Borders Forum on Sustainable Development a follow-up meeting was held on 1 June 1995 to consider the outcomes of the seminar and appoint a Steering Group. The purpose of the meeting was to decide on a number of key issues as follows:

- a common agreement on the roles/aims of the Forum

- a structure which allowed the objectives of the Forum to be tackled effectively, including;

    a. the chairperson of the Forum;
    b. the composition of the Steering Group;
    c. the focus and composition of any working groups

- some indication of how the work of the Forum was expected to develop

ii. The Sectoral Interests

European experience in the formation of, and participation in working groups suggests that groups should consist of at least one member of four different role groups. This experience was used to guide those who were involved in setting up the Steering Group. The role groups are as follows:

The Policy Group: to include local policy makers, local politicians, representatives from local government and other service sectors;

The Technological Expert Group: to include technological experts with experience on energy and water supply, waste management, housing and architecture, land use;

The Residents Group: to include members of community councils, local environmental organisations and active residents;

The Private Sector Group; to include entrepreneurs representing local or national business e.g. environmental industry, contractors, housing developers.

At the June meeting attended by 50 people, volunteers were asked to put their names forward to serve on the Steering Group. In total there were 16 volunteers. The agencies involved in setting up the Forum invited four more people who had previously expressed an interest, to join the Steering Group and take the numbers involved up to 20. This allowed any weaknesses in terms of (a) sectoral interests, and (b) geographical interests to be rectified.

The types of sectoral interests represented on the Steering Group indicate membership from the four groups identified above. Interests include:

Architecture, Community Councils, Cycling, Community Woodlands, Environmental Organisations, Environmental Businesses, Forestry, Local Authorities, National Farmers Union, River Purification Board, Organic Gardeners, and Women's Rural Institute.

At the initial meeting following discussions within the Steering Group it was agreed that it would be more appropriate for the Convener of the Forum to be a representative of the "community", rather than a business person with a sectoral interest. Both the Convener and Vice-Convener are representatives of Community Councils in the Borders.

iii.   The Geographical Interest

As mentioned previously there are material differences between the local communities which comprise Borders Region. Because of these distinct geographical interests it also became important for the Steering Group to have a geographical spread in its membership. The first Steering group membership was split between the Districts as follows:

Berwickshire 3 members	Ettrick & Lauderdale 6 members
Roxburgh 6 members	Tweeddale 4 members
Outwith Borders Region 1 member	

iv.   Meetings

Meetings of the Steering Group are usually held once a month, at a central location with on average 15 members of the Steering Group and 5 members of the Advisory Group present.   Meetings of the Forum are held every six months at a central location, with on average 80-90 members present. All meetings are open to anybody with an interest in Local Agenda 21.

THE ADVISORY GROUP

The Steering Group of the Forum is assisted by an Advisory Group comprising officials from the following organisations:

Borders Regional Council }	Scottish Borders Council (after April
Ettrick & Lauderdale District Council}	1996)
Scottish Borders Enterprise	
Scottish Natural Heritage	

Local authority involvement on the Advisory Group includes representation from different Departments e.g. Planning & Development, Environmental Services and Community Education.

Support by the Advisory Group to the Steering Group, includes:

Advice and Participation - The Advisory Group is present at all the Steering Group meetings, and is available for any guidance required by the Steering Group;

Meeting Space - Venues for Steering Group meetings are provided free of charge by the Advisory Group;

Administration - All administrative duties for the Steering Group are undertaken by the Advisory Group;

Finance - The Advisory Group has provided the finance to meet costs such as - travelling and other expenses incurred by the Steering Group in attending Steering Group and Sub-Group meetings and publication costs for the Borders Globe newsletter.

SUB-GROUPS

Working or Focus Group have also been set up by the Steering Group to deal with either administrative type duties applicable to the Steering Group, for example a Finance Sub-Group has been set up to deal with expenditure matters, and a Public Relations Sub-Group has been set up to produce a newsletter, and issue press releases etc. In addition Working Groups have been established to look at particular projects e.g. Sustainable Indicators Sub-Group. Membership of the Sub-Groups tends to consist of four or five members , with assistance from the Advisory Group if required, and meetings are held as, and when required.

ROLE OF THE FORUM

Following the March seminar a feedback and forward planning questionnaire was sent out to all those that had attended, plus others that had expressed an interest in being represented on the Forum. One of the main purposes of this questionnaire was to receive feedback from prospective members of the Forum as to how they saw its role developing. The feedback proved extremely useful and it is interesting to note that there was a general consensus amongst those responding on the role of the Forum.

Arising from the possible roles of the Forum which were identified, the aim or vision of the Forum was endorsed by the Steering Group as follows:

To provide a Forum to translate the concept of sustainable development into practical action for the Scottish Borders by:

- **linking the aspirations of the community at large to those agencies that have the means to deliver**

- providing information and encouraging debate to widen understanding of Local Agenda 21

- developing suitable projects for action

- formulating a strategy for the development of a Local Agenda 21

DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECTS

From the outset it has been the intention that the Forum needed to actively involve itself in projects which assist in raising awareness and promote sustainable development in the Borders in order to be seen as successful.

In the initial stages the efforts of the Steering Group have been concentrated on identifying and developing potential projects which are realistic and achievable by the new Forum in a relatively short time-scale, rather than on projects which may have major implications for the budgets of the Advisory Group. The Steering Group has concentrated on a number of projects including Village Appraisals, Parish Mapping, Global Action Plan, Sustainable Communities, Home Composting, Sustainable Indicators, Transport and a newsletter.

The above projects were presented by the Steering Group to a full meeting of the Forum held in November 1995. Again the Forum meeting was well attended with over 80 persons present on the day. The projects presented were supported by the Forum, with particular enthusiasm being shown for carrying out village appraisals.

Details on three projects which have made particular progress - Home Composting, the "Borders Globe" Newsletter, and Community Sustainable Indicators are included as an appendix to this report.

NEXT ACTIONS

In addition to developing the projects which it is supporting in various communities in the Borders the next key action by the Steering Group is to prepare a report by the end of March 1996 for submission to the Advisory Group. The purpose of the report will be to draw together what the Forum has achieved, what it sees as the main issues being, what its priorities are for the forthcoming year e.g. funding of the projects it is promoting, area committees, awareness raising, appointment of co-ordinator, etc. The report will then be submitted to the organisations on the Advisory Group who will identify how the recommendations made in the report can be implemented. For example, it is envisaged that obtaining funding for particular projects will be a key concern of the Steering Group. In respect of this the agencies have identified the EU LEADER programme which is aimed at community-based development within rural areas, as a potential source of funding.

FEEDBACK

Traditionally, public agencies have tended to present proposals to communities e.g. Planning Departments producing Local Plans, with the community being asked for their views. The Forum has involved the community at the very start of the project, being asked to come up with their own proposals on how it should proceed, what projects it should develop, etc. It has taken a while for the Steering Group to realise that they have a major role to play in determining how the Forum develops. In other words, they have expected the Advisory Group to tell them what they should be doing.

Building up a working relationship between the Advisory Group and the Steering Group is a critical part of the process. In the Borders Forum, the Advisory Group works in tandem with the Steering Group rather than leading the Steering Group. However in the early stages the danger is that too much emphasis and responsibility is placed on the Steering Group. Too much can be expected of them. At this stage and indeed throughout the process it is essential that proper guidance and support is provided by the Advisory Group. Finding the right balance is critical to the success of the process.

The advantages of the Forum set-up is in encouraging all sectors of the community to listen to each other and understand each others point of view. However it can be difficult for ordinary lay persons to express an opinion and enter into a dialogue with others on subjects they know little about. The opportunity must therefore be taken to obtain expert advice on each subject, an expert who can explain processes and issues in simple terms. Ordinary people are put off by jargon. It is imperative however, that all members of the Forum feel that they are equally important, no matter their background.

It is also worth mentioning that the Forum is dealing with an issue which is relatively new, and certainly very complex. There are so many issues involved in sustainable development, that it has been difficult for discussions at Steering Group meetings to remain focused. It has been much easier to make progress when individual projects have been identified and progressed.

Generally, there has been a very positive attitude to the process particularly from local communities and environmental organisations. However, business and industry have been more sceptical. Women and young people are also under-represented at Forum meetings, and it will be a major challenge for the Forum to attract these people.

FEEDFORWARD

From my own experience of working with the Forum, during the first six months of its existence, I can offer the following words of wisdom.

Allow the Steering Group to get to know each other - The process of people getting to know each other is very important. In the Borders we essentially started with a blank sheet of paper. Volunteers for the Steering Group identified themselves at a public meeting. Very few of the members knew each other, each others backgrounds, etc. They

only had one thing in common - an interest in sustainable development. The first meetings of the Steering Group were therefore very much a case of people getting to know each other.

Build on existing strengths in the community, activists, enthusiasts etc. - It is important to start with people who are already active in communities. e.g. working with those already active in the network of community councils. Cultivate those who are enthusiastic and motivated to take action. Over time the Steering Group has been making more contacts with interested parties, and increasing Forum membership.

Keep the remit of the Steering Group focused - The subject of sustainable development is far too wide-ranging and involves so many complex issues that it is only possible for a community forum to scratch the surface of the subject. By narrowing down the focus of the Steering Group to concentrating on a small number of community project, has helped the Forum to make progress, in a relatively short space of time.

Not Just A Talking Shop - There is always a danger with a new Forum, with 20 individuals with their own agendas, on such a wide-ranging topic that meetings will end up as talking shops. Those who were involved were clear from the outset that this Forum needed to be more than just a talking shop. Some practical projects needed to be developed in order to give the Forum a measure of credibility. The development of the home composting project, including all the local and national coverage it has received has been a major boost for the Steering Group.

Do not take advantage - It must be recognised especially by the agencies involved that the Steering Group is made up of members who give there time voluntarily. Many of the Steering Group are already involved in voluntary activities, so there is a great deal of pressure on their time. The agencies promoting the Forum should not be seen to be taking advantage of this. It has been suggested, that the agencies are getting volunteers to undertake projects that the agencies should be doing themselves - on the cheap.

Leadership - The chairperson of the Forum must be a "jack of all trades" - abilities such as knowledge of communities and how they operate, knowledge of issues involved in sustainable development are essential. In addition he/she has to be strong in character, a diplomat, a listener, a motivator, a leader, etc.

Membership - The ideal community group will bring together people from different sectoral and geographical interests. It should not be dominated by one individual or organisation. Flexibility of membership is also important i.e. allow those with an interest to become part of the Forum and make their views known. In the Borders interested individuals are free to join the Steering Group

And finally,

Budget - The Forum needs finance to at least provide for general and travelling expenses.

CONCLUSION

The Scottish Borders Forum for Sustainable Development is a Community forum representing the views of the community. It is not a local authority forum, a Scottish Borders Enterprise forum, a Scottish Natural Heritage forum, or any other public agency forum. It involves a two-way process of close working between the public agencies and the community, but is not heavily influenced by any of the public agencies. The decisions of the Forum will however, be expected to influence the future policies and projects of the agencies, who are members of the Advisory Group, such as the new Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Borders Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage.

The involvement of the community is essential to the success of the process, offering benefits such as, involving more people, generating greater local commitment, gaining the benefit of local knowledge, skills and ideas, and encouraging sustainable policies, decisions and outcomes. The agencies involved have provided the framework for involving communities and encouraging participation.

This initiative is an important step forward in achieving a Local Agenda 21 for the Borders. The Forum and Steering Group meetings have been very useful in identifying the interest in sustainable development in the Region. The building of partnership links between communities and public agencies is however still in its early stages. The approach is new to both the communities and the agencies, however a sense of confidence and trust is being built, and it is hoped that through this Forum, communities in the Region will be able to translate the concept of sustainable development into action.

Roddy Mackay,
Department of Planning and Development,
Borders Regional Council,

7 February 1996

APPENDIX 1 - EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS BEING SUPPORTED BY THE SCOTTISH BORDERS FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

i.   Community Home Composting

"The Borders village of Newcastleton - already close to the cutting edge of sustainable development with plans to power houses and businesses from forest waste - now has the chance to be the composting capital of Scotland.."

The Scotsman
31 January 1996

In this project the emphasis is that the project is community led, with the particular scheme being developed to suit the community where the trial is being piloted. In the community of Newcastleton a questionnaire and explanatory leaflet is going to every house in the village (400 households) in order to identify households willing to participate. It is hoped that at least one third of all households will become involved in the project.

ii.   The Borders Globe Newsletter

A major task of the Forum is that of raising awareness amongst communities in the Borders on sustainable issues. The production of the "Borders Globe" newsletter is seen as an important catalyst in raising the profile of the Forum, involving groups and individuals not already committed to the Forum, and bridging the gaps between the public agencies and the communities.

The newsletter provides information on projects which are being promoted by the Forum; articles on various aspects of Local Agenda 21, and information on projects being carried out by members of the Advisory Group, and any other body with an interest in sustainable development matters. The first newsletter was produced in December with the intention being to produce it in a quarterly basis. Copies of the newsletter are distributed through the Community Councils, libraries, schools, Council offices, voluntary and other organisations with an interest in Local Agenda 21.

iii.   Community Sustainability Indicators

In recent years people have started to use "indicators" to measure and enhance their quality of life, local decision-making and their surrounding environment. Currently, Scottish Natural Heritage is sponsoring a national indicators project in three communities in different parts of Scotland, one of which is in the Borders. It was because the framework of the Borders Forum existed, that SNH decided that one of the pilot areas should be in the region.

The purpose of the project is to:

"identify a methodology for using the concept of sustainability indicators as an educative and participative tool within local communities, as part of a Local Agenda 21 process"

The development of indicators is seen as a way of: (a) raising awareness; (b) assisting wider community participation in Local Agenda 21; (c) allowing for the development of community sustainability plans; and (d) providing the basis for practical action by individuals and communities.

The forum supports the project and indeed the community where the pilot project has just commenced, was chosen by the Steering Group of the Forum. A sub-group of the Steering Group has also made input into the project.

A CONSENSUS APPROACH

The Cirl Bunting Project in South Devon
(The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)

1   SITUATION
Species decline
The cirl bunting is a rare, localised and declining Red Data Bird.
Confined to south Devon and a few sites in Cornwall.
An obscure farmland bird associated with mixed farming in a
picturesque landscape.

ISSUE
Why is the cirl bunting in decline?
Agricultural change, in particular the loss of mixed farming and
especially winter stubbles.

How do we reverse the decline?

RSPB

2 STAKEHOLDERS

Central and Direct:
  The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
  English Nature
  The Countryside Commission
  The National Trust
  Devon County Council
  South Hams District Council Environment Service
  Teignbridge District Council
  Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
  Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food

Farmers and landowners (in Countryside Stewardship Target Area)

Other farmers and landowners

Local community (residents of south Devon)

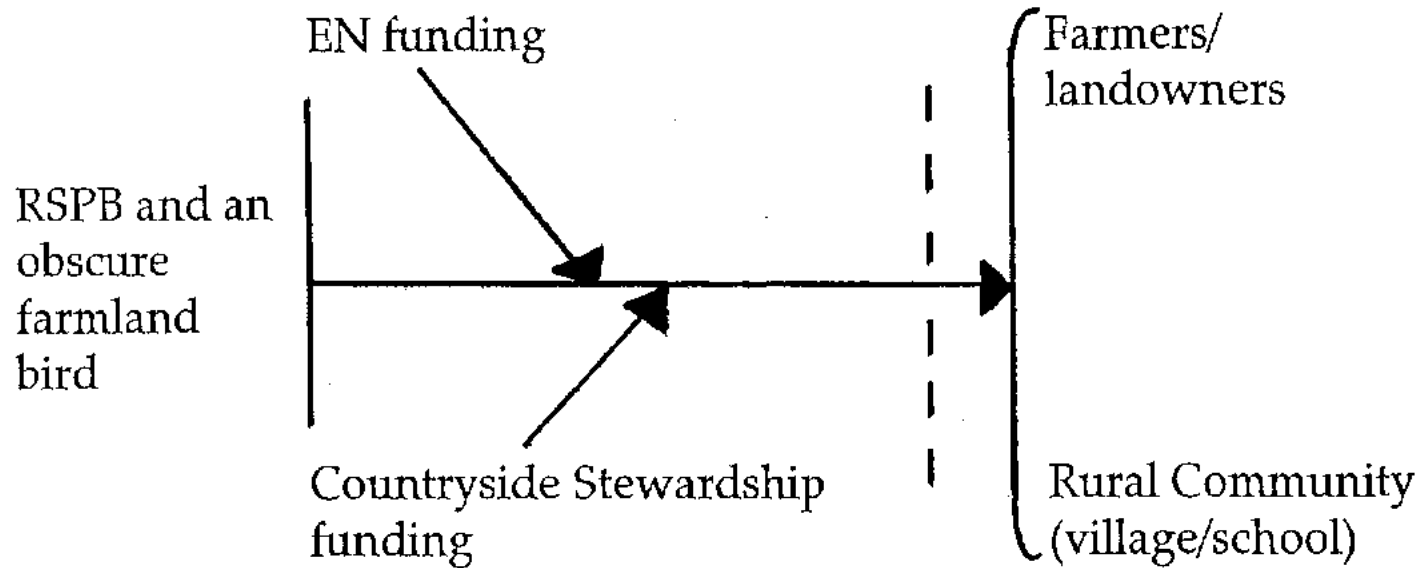Peripheral:
  Visitors/Tourists
  (Farm Extensification and Habitat Restoration is directly linked to
  landscape quality)

RSPB

3 MOTIVATION

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds led.
Partnerships were developed with central stakeholders to deliver
objectives.

4 INITIATION

EN funding

RSPB and an
obscure
farmland
bird

Countryside Stewardship
funding

Farmers/
landowners

Rural Community
(village/school)

RSPB

4   INITIATION

Two parallel strands of activity:

Advice to farmers

↓

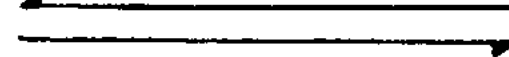Countryside Stewardship take-up and Set-Aside implementation

↓

Education Access Initiative (offers additional financial assistance to farmers)

'Save Our Cirl Buntings' school project:
Winter feeding in school grounds (with commercial sponsorship from CJ Wildbird Foods)
- 22 primary schools 1994/95
- 12 primary schools 1995/96

FARM ⟷ 'Save Our Cirl Buntings' ⟷ SCHOOL

LINK
1996/97

Pilot scheme on one farm in 1996, which may be promoted on other farms

↓

Community Action

5 WORKING METHODS

MECHANISMS	MEETINGS	INFORMATION	EVENTS*	DISPLAY	FORUM**
TARGET AUDIENCES					
Statutory organisations	■			■	
Local authorities	■		■		
Farmers and landowners	■	■			
Volunteers	■	■			
RSPB members		■			
Local schools and colleges	■	■	■		
Wider community		■	■	■	■
Visitors and Tourists		■	■	■	■

*   eg, Local Agricultural Shows and Guided Walks
(Partnership with South Hams Environment Service)

** Local Agenda 21 linked Environmental Forum
- Parish approach in core tetrads
(expanded in Section 6: Outcomes)

Product/Publication	Target Audiences (Stakeholders)
1 Research papers (1985-91)	Statutory organisations
2 Conservation Management Advice leaflets (1991)	Farmers and landowners
3 *Farming and Wildlife* Handbook (1994)	Advisers, Agricultural Colleges
4 *Lowland Farmland Birds* management guidelines (1995)	Farmers and landowners
5 Species information (1996)	All
6 Cirl Bunting Bulletins (1994-96)	All
7 Cirl Bunting Newsletter (1995-96)	'Bunting Hunting' Recorders and Volunteers
8 'Save Our Cirl Buntings' Schools Project (i) Teachers' Information Pack (1994-95) (for winter feeding in school grounds) (ii) Teachers' Guidance Notes (1996-97) (for Education Access/ School-Farm Link) (iii) SOCB Badges (1995-)	 Primary Schools Primary Schools All
9 *Conservation Review* article (1992)	All
10 European Nature Conservation Year Magazine (1995)	All
11 BBC Radio 4 Natural History Programme (1996)	All
12 *Birds* magazine article (1996)	RSPB members
13 *Bird Life* magazine article (1997?)	YOC members
14 *Wings* series of TV films (Channel 4) (scheduled for showing in February 1997)	All

5 WORKING METHODS

Number of positive land-management agreements   13

Number of schools in Save Our Cirl Buntings project 1994/95   22

Number of schools in Save Our Cirl Buntings project 1995/96   12

Number of schools in School-Farm Link 1996/97   34
(contacted - uptake?)

RSPB

6 OUTCOMES - PRESENT:

- The decline of the cirl bunting has been reversed:

  118 pairs in 1989
  370 pairs in 1995

- The farming community is now motivated to take up Countryside Stewardship and other positive land management schemes.

- The cirl bunting as South Devon's 'special bird' is now well known within the consciousness of the people of South Hams.

RSPB

7 FEEDBACK/FEEDFORWARD

What we have learnt? What we would do differently?

- Research the community
  - what do they know about the cirl bunting?
  - what do they think about their farmland landscape?

- Commence Public Affairs and Conservation Management Advice programmes simultaneously

- Develop 'Village Bunting' and 'Save Our Cirl Buntings' school projects together

- Emphasise the good news story and progress (reversing species decline)

- Do not underestimate the potential for community involvement and delivery, especially within the context of Biodiversity Action Plans and Local Agenda 21
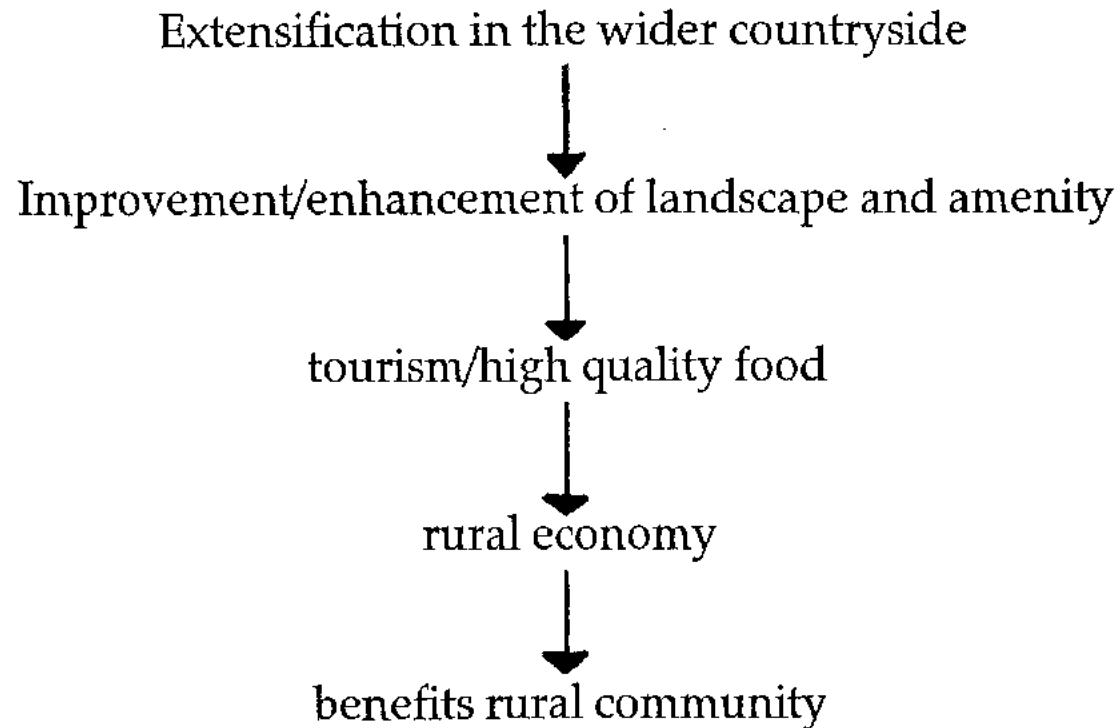
RSPB

6 OUTCOMES - FUTURE:

- Community Action programme. Building support and awareness with:

  - local events (Tree Dressing Day, Bio-Banner)
  - Village Extensification (could be progressed as a Local Agenda 21 initiative).

- To raise the profile of the cirl bunting as an emblem of South Devon and as a symbol of environmental quality.

- To create an understanding of the conservation issues which affect this species.

- To influence land management and behavour in village communities so that the local environment is more cirl bunting-friendly and the 'village bunting' returns.

- To increase the population and range of the cirl bunting.

RSPB

6 OUTCOMES - VISION:

'The cirl bunting becomes a symbol of the quality of the farmland environment'

Extensification in the wider countryside

↓

Improvement/enhancement of landscape and amenity

↓

tourism/high quality food

↓

rural economy

↓

benefits rural community

RSPB

AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

Conference participants were divided randomly into three large groups for afternoon workshops. Each addressed the following same issues or questions:

- What should be added to the provisional list of 'who, what, why and where' introduced in the overview paper?
- What are the main queries or issues raised by this overview and the applicability/value of consensus approaches?
- What are the main barriers to advancing practice on consensus building?
- What are some of the solutions to, or ways through/over, these barriers?

Each group was facilitated, and people worked on two main occasions in sub groups. Each sub group produced notes on large sheets of paper, while all acted together to generate lists of barriers and summaries of main points. Each sub group tended to work in its own distinctive manner so, although the following is a (virtually) verbatim annotation of comments, there is inevitable variation in quantity, style and coverage.

The outcomes are presented in the sequence of questions listed above. Each cluster of comments relates to notes from a particular group or sub group. Repeat notes have been left in deliberately, to highlight common views.

The final summary is by the conference organisers.

Additions to the Overview Paper

Pick out uses more clearly: sport, recreation, access, cultural, transport, planning process, forestry, community forests, farming.
Highlight the role of experts: insiders and outsiders, power relations, role of facilitators.
Scale: query of how big can it get to deal with geography, group size, representativeness.
Focus: poverty, geographic realities and social cohesiveness.
What is the communications process used?
New examples: FWAG genesis, sporting conflicts, consensus for funding on varying research agendas; 'blue skies' research v. user groups. common land forum.

Good/new examples: Round Table Inquiries (eg. recent Highway Agency ones), County Structure Plan Review, Recreation (ref. Environment Select Committee), Blackdowns project, Millennium/Lottery projects (Beer Marine Heritage Centre, Culm Valley Cycleway), exception housing schemes.

List could include: small scale local (parish, village street) examples such as ponds and trees, working groups for LA21, regional strategies (eg. for sport), catchment management plans, riverside groups.
Specific techniques: visioning, stakeholder conferences, 'future search'.

Good/new examples (and who suggested): 5B grant group projects such as Tamar 2000, and environmental projects (ADAS), Seaton Regeneration Study, East Devon AONB, Exmouth Estuaryside (East Devon District Council), developing a consensus approach within personnel and advisory work, esp. LA21 (Devon County Council), IWAC, Citizens' Charter (British Waterways).

Key points: allow for overlap of boundaries/issues, define 'quality of area' (eg. aesthetic, recreation value and opportunities), availability of funding could affect

'Focus' objectives, within 'People determined' distinguish voluntary, funded, top-down and bottom-up schemes, add global and Europe to 'Scale', can local people initiate as individuals, 'Why and When' can include previously excluded people seeking a new approach.

Good/new examples: LA21, AONBs, conservation strategies, 'Focus' to include AONB plan, estuary plan, community forests - at district scale, 'People' to include 'health of the nation' projects, 'Who' to say something about experts and the disenfranchised, 'Why and When' to consider public awareness and frameworks.

Good/new examples: under 'Focus' use could cover sport conflicts, recreation conflicts, access conflicts, cultural/historic, transport, planning process, farming, forestry, community forests, 'People' could include sports national bodies, grant and development area, European influence, 'Geographic Scale' could include parish, anti-race groups, informal groups, neighbourhood watch, 'Who Initiates' could include individuals, 'Who is Involved' could include lobbies, pressure groups, sports clubs, 'Why and When' could include management of possible change, (effects of) legislation, 'Funding' could include knowledge of funds/grants available, resource limited.

Case Study 'testing': focus - Catchment Management Plans (NRA policy, five years life, annual review), internal group - leads with Steering Group of invitees, pre-consultation - through letters to organisations, consultation - on information generated (largely) internally, missing - community view before they are told what is important.

Good/new examples: 'Focus' - estuary (eg. dart and Exe), project specific (eg. energy initiative), 'Who' could include European Union, Harbour and Navigation authorities, and individuals.

Good/new examples: developer-led schemes, funding requirements (eg. Lottery), regeneration-led schemes, village appraisals, as reaction to a threat or real situation.

Appropriate settings: examples where there are: complex situations, polarised conflicts, groups with differing agendas, low skill/knowledge base, confusions between consensus/consultation and participation/democracy.

Summary issues from one overall group: is there ever a clear framework or starting point? Should we include specific, one-off mediations? Spin-offs and added benefits are an important element. The term community organisations is too broad. What are the economic arguments/benefits? Do not forget the criterion of FUN!

Critical Issues/Questions

Need a method for including everybody; must not marginalise anybody.
Must be seen to be representative.
'Letting go': a mechanism to define mentors.
Lack of education/expertise.
Implementation.

What is negotiable?
Consequences of raising expectations.
Limitations of delivery and credibility.
Who is left out (not involved)? This needs testing (and outputs).
How does this become a process rather than an exercise?
Is a locally defined view necessarily better (eg. Exmoor National Park)?
What is the role of the process?

Is it too 'safe' (you can't lose)?
Accept the limitations of the process.
How do you consult over wide areas?
How can you construct partnerships with local authorities?
Consultation with statutory bodies can result in polarisation - especially if limited.

What is the role of technical experts? Control and/or input? The role of facilitators?
Are these people inside or outside the process?
Power relations always intrude.
Communication and reporting: issues of funding, how, results/feedback, scale.
Scale of project: questions of representation and group size.
Dealing with social cohesion and common interests.
Choosing the appropriate tool for the appropriate jobs.
Who pays for facilitators?

Dealing with fear by vested interests, how to highlight the common good.
Getting honesty in the whole group's response.

Must reach true consensus for all.
Show it can be realistic, achievable, owned, and make a difference.
Need to show clear benefits.
People need to be prepared to let go.
Can get process fatigue - especially amongst volunteers.
Effective communication critical to start out with.
Avoiding jargon.

Barriers

People in the three groups listed barriers in the same way but tended to 'map' them differently. In all cases, however, clear clusters or groups of barriers emerged, (though the names for a few of the clusters were not shown on the sheets, so those included are ours).

Group A

Facilitators
Lack of skills - Skilled facilitators (lack of ...) - Imaginative facilitator (lack of)

Resources and Time
Attitudes of the media (conflict journalism) - Lack of resources/time/finance etc. - Resources - Time - Resources - Cost/time - Resources - Resources - Time - Resources - Resources - Money - Timetables - Cost of process consultants -Lack of volunteer time - Convincing that it's worth spending the money

Distrust
Lack of trust/cynicism - Distrust - Mistrust that the result will incur penalties - Distrust - Trust - Cynicism (of authority, of even honest approaches) - Fear

Statutory power/Outcome
Need to produce results - Unpredictable outcome - Unknown/unagreed outcome - Statutory obligations - Ownership - The system: (a) Statute, (b) Adversarial approach - Statutory powers

Lack of Awareness and Information
Poor information - Information - Lack of awareness of the CB process - People not used to being asked - People don't understand what it means - Lack of awareness
Politics
Politics and regulations - The "system" - Politics

Involvement
Exclusion -Participants, ie. including everyone affected - Not possible to involve everyone - Lack of representation - Commitment from all "actors" - Communicate process to all, positively - How to ensure all groups are represented - Old established residents/incomers

Different Views
Don't want to start talking to one another - Prejudice - Single issue groups - Individual opinions - Different "mindsets" - Entrenched views - Apathy - Apathy - Apathy - Unwillingness - Preconceptions - Fear

Vested Interests
Hidden agenda - The adversarial nature of our democracy - Nimbysm - Monied interest - Vested interest - Don't want to share power

Miscellaneous
Defining starting premises: clean sheet approach - Townies - Disregarding local situations - Difficult to measure progress - Perception of future - Lifestyles - Wealth and lack of it

Group B

First Grouping
Individual apathy - Apathy - Apathy of people - Lack of expertise (technical) - Lack of inclusion - Lack of interest - People: lack of trust, unable to let go of process - Lack of trust - Lack of vision and ability to think of new process - Loss of respect for governance/democratic process - Fear - Fear - Fear of change - "Mindset" to new ideas - Ignorance - Education - Educational - Knowledge (and back round to apathy again!)

Second Grouping
Hidden agendas - Vested interests "badging" - Internal group conflict - Professional insecurity - Traditions - Everyone wanting too much of their interest considered - Individual agendas of people - Prejudice - Do-gooders imposing what is "right" - Strong lobby groups - Pressure groups fixed goals (tunnel vision) - Vested interests (and back to hidden agendas again!)

Third Grouping
Individuals don't want to be represented - Power (greed) - Power struggle - Representative democracy - Current democratic structure - Fixed stance taken by organisations - Shifts of power - The democratic process? - Local government review - Socialism through the back door - Systematic (and back to individuals again!)

Miscellaneous
Active listening is not easy - Individual poverty - Time - Making time to do it - Time: willingness and ability to attend meetings (evening/weekend) - Who controls the funding - Overkill Resources - "Incomers" bring suburban values to the rural community

Group C

Vested Interests
Willingness to compromise to achieve consensus - Reconciling the irreconcilable! (ie, incompatible stakeholders) - Resistance to change - Organisational constraints - Organisational culture - Vested interests in our culture who prefer adversary - Vested interest: unwilling to negotiate - Uneven power relations - Powerful lobbies - Hidden agenda: initiator not unbiased - Hidden agendas brought to meetings, particularly by organisations - World views (ideologies) that conflict - Wariness of an identified power group - Power imbalance: some individuals have more clout behind them

Fear of Results/Process
Uncomfortable with "unconventional" process - "Diluted" outcomes which really satisfy none of the stakeholders - People's objections purely on the basis of not wanting change or to participate - Fear of result! - Fear of the final result (I may not get my own way) - Wrong expectations - Scared that the outcome is not what we want - Emphasis on product, rather than process

Resources
Resources to implement agreed way - Uneven distribution of resources (political, economic, etc.) - Resources - Funding for process - Finance

Scale
Limitation on numbers of consultees-Geographic scale-Geographical area

Time: Takes Too Long
Difficulty of setting up and executing process (particularly in rural areas) - Perceived lack of time - Time scales - Length of time taken to initiate the process - Time

Ignorance
Ignorance - Ignorance of technique - Alienation: people don't get involved because of low expectations - Individuals - Ignorance - Apathy/lack of enthusiasm - Identifying all of the (key) "stakeholders" - Poor numbers attending venues - Failure of all major interested parties to attend

Intransigence
Deeply entrenched views - Close-minded approach to consultation: minds are already made up - Intransigence - Failure to see other points of view - Lack of agreement by groups: despite an agenda and framework - Disbelief that it works: waste of time - Disinterest in talking with other parties - Wounded pride from earlier encounters - Poor communication skills - In countryside: non-aligned voices - No common interest or language to start process

Arrogance
Demonology - Experts - "Authority" - Technical arrogance: experts unwilling to accept "unscientific" layout - We know best - Arrogance - Material interests that conflict - Consensus building could be side-tracked by one or two noisy individuals - Process hijacked by fringe voice or expert

Miscellaneous
Shortage of "leading" body to promote technique - Belief in process - Good examples - No-one to "champion" the cause and encourage others - Who actually does the implementation?

Solutions

In approaching this session, some groups selected particular barriers and then proposed solutions to them. Their results are listed first - in each case the barrier is underlined, followed by proposed solutions or ways forward. Some people offered actions to take, others suggested arguments to use to persuade possible users.

Time
Build in time scale to agenda (keep to timing)
Show the investment is worth it
Secure early achievements/outcomes
Show that the adversarial approach takes ages
Goals need to be realistic

Fear of Results/Process
Set out the issues clearly at the beginning, and what is negotiable

Resources
Training for participants

Representation across all ages/abilities
Use of focus groups
Proactively canvas individual views

Volunteer fatigue
Pay people!
Keep things local; decisions made at most local level possible
Better planning, commitment and belief

Individual Disempowerment
Publish "good news" examples
Organisations must "walk the talk"

Vested Interests
Show: It's good for you in long term (but could also lose)
        We need your skills
        PR benefits
        Regulations - consent is required

Fear of Result: Truth is best!
There should be confidence in right result
Consultees can be chosen
Power to the people

Time
Stitch in time saves nine
Cut your cloth ...
Ensure there is sufficient time

Ignorance
Inform
Sharing information
PR

Resources
Europe!
Even out costs
Sharing responsibility
Using local talent

Scale
Relates to resources and time: choose level

Time
Build timescale into agenda
Filo-fax marketing
Adversarial approach take ages
Cutting your cloth...
Good investment
Go for some early achievements
Goals need to be realistic

Ignorance
Information
Examples where it has worked

Intransigence
Yoga (!)
Knowing where it won't work

Arrogance
Peer pressure
Redirect the arguments
Seek support of others who can influence
(Hit them with new Filo-fax)
Psychotherapy
Be enthusiastic - suggest benefits

Vested Interests
Show: Good for you in long term
You're going to be exposed if not
If you don't join in you may lose out
We need your skills
Better for you
Be up front about your interest to be involved
PR benefits
You have to (regulations require)
Encourage the view of group responsibility

Fear of Results/Process
(It could not be worse than the alternatives!)
Be clear about issue at beginning (what is negotiated)
Show: It will take longer if you don't do it
It will increase intransigence
Other people will make the decisions, and not you (we choose the consultees!)

Resources
Pool resources
Training for participants

Europe!
Budget with imagination
Use local talent

Scale
Choose the level
Appropriate methods important

Some groups simply listed possible ways forward, not necessarily related to particular barriers, as follows:

User friendly communication - targeted
Facilitation
Effort   - Motivation
                    - Human resources
                    - Funding
                    - Commitment
Realism   - Targets
                    - Ownership
                    - "Worthiness"
                    - Product
Faith   - Belief/Trust
Right people   - Qualities
                    - Skills
                    - Common sense
Education/Training
Incentives/Rewards
Scoping (defining what's what)

Compromise
Leave out some issues
Concentrate on the possible
Short, medium and long term objectives
Learn to listen and accept others' points of view
Broaden people's outlook
Court the media
Hoovering(?)
Information
Policing
Education
Communication
Money
Sales pitch
Examples/experience = trust good practice
Lobbying

Find areas of common interest (usually strategic)
Often depends on change of corporate culture (building trust)
Spread the message of CB's existence and benefits
Use egs. or CB successes to convince organisations to adopt it

Choose achievable project and do it as "good example of process"
Use examples - positive approach
Not be over ambitions with funding available
Collect facts and knowledge from known sources and share

Consensus training "for all" - education - "video" - soap - the Archers
Provide funding, informal/relaxed, good food and venues that provide opportunity for all to attend
Legislation adapted to include consensus opinions
Gain confidence - take time - listen
Existing well-organised groups
Ferret out opinions from non-participants

Be!
Suggest benefits
Be open
Give credibility
Quote good examples
Empower
Vested interest - approach will expose
Alternatives - and what they might get you, ie. take longer!
Increase transience, power to decide will be removed
Deliver the process and provide short term goals
Pool resources by more people
Budget with imagination!
Getting support of others who have influence on arrogant person
Agree common aims
Redirect arrogance and arguments
Peer pressure

Education in the process of CB -- issue of wider society and public bodies
Review of planning process; improve lack of consensus
Do it; the process is educational
Better funding - volunteers
Value officer time
"User friendly" consultants

Examples of good practice
Right people managing it
Keep decisions local
Education in process of achieving consensus
Act locally - venue etc.
Small interconnected groups?
Only through meetings?
Incentives/rewards
Recognition of results
Government has to "walk the talk"
More pro-active
Understand people's motives

Examples of good practice needed - networks
Action on ground through local people
Simple language - no jargon!
Progress checks/monitoring
Small but inter-connected groups
Disseminating results locally, continually
Show clear benefits
Empowerment/motivation/reward/encouragement
THE ANSWER IS IN THE PUB

Overall Summary

Reflecting on the above, a number of clear conclusions emerge under each of the four sections or questions addressed. These - developed by the conference organisers - are as follows.

<u>Additions to the Overview</u>

Some of the following has already been included in the slightly revised main paper. Certain suggested terms and categories were extremely valid if an appropriate framework is to be developed, although examples of such work may not yet have been located or suggested.

In terms of the main analytical headings used, two important points arise - although the problem for both is the availability of such information from project reports or handouts. They are:

- A further main heading on the Role of Experts.
- More information on specific methods and techniques used.

In terms of the categories within the main headings, the following appear to be the more significant comments/additions:

- Clarify/extend the range of what are called 'Uses'
- Also include some more small scale examples under 'Focus' and 'Scale'.
- Clarify 'Quality of Area' further; ie. what definitions and who defines?
- Add Global and Europe to 'Geographic Scale' and the latter to 'Funding'.
- 'Why and When' should include examples of where people previously excluded have sought a say on a subsequent occasion.
- The term' community organisations' may be too broad to be useful.
- 'Funding' should include the Lottery/Millennium Fund.
- Within 'People', include voluntary and bottom-up examples.

In terms of specific additional examples (also see Appendix), the important additions appear to be:

- Recent road planning Round Tables
- Health of the Nation projects

<u>Critical Issues</u>

- Clarification of what is and is not negotiable.
- Principles and methods for choosing a smallish number of people to work together without marginalising any person/group.
- Local views are not the only ones of value, eg. on a national asset such as a National Park or AONB.
- Large scale projects raise tough questions about who is/should be involved.
- There are limitations on what even the best consensus building can achieve.
- What is the role/independence of facilitators, and who pays?
- Contrasts between views of vested interests and the common good.
- Possible 'process fatigue'
- Securing honesty in working relationships.

Barriers

There was noticeable consistency in the main headings which emerged from the listing and grouping of barriers. They can be summarised as:

- Fear of results
- Resources and Time
- Vested interests/Power
- Distrust
- Lack of Awareness and Information
- Facilitators - enough, who, where, costs?
- Ensuring proper involvement
- Dealing positively with different views
- Apathy
- Scale/size/complexity/duration
- Arrogance of experts
- Lack of a 'champion' to drive new approaches through

Solutions

These separated into (a) arguments to use with possible sceptics, and (b) actions to take.

The arguments to use were mostly presented as positive ones (ie. the 'carrot' of why consensus building might be better) but this was also balanced with the drawbacks, delays, conflicts and costs of current approaches (one sort of 'stick'), and the potential problems if key parties tried to avoid consensus approaches in the future (another sort of 'stick'). The main arguments to use were seen as:

- Good in the long term
- PR advantages
- CB becoming more the approach promoted in regulations/guidance
- Good investment
- Adds skills and resources
- Greater certainty of progress
- Eventually saves time and money

The particular actions mentioned several times were:

- Get more examples underway .... quickly
- Assemble a body of good, proven examples
- Make these examples available very widely
- Encourage organisations who mention consensus to 'walk the talk'
- Share information on all aspects - examples, techniques, people etc.
- Provide some training - awareness raising as well as techniques
- Use lobbying, peer pressure, networks - act together
- Use the media better
- Illustrate clear incentives/benefits

And, at the level of actual projects/initiatives:

- Set the right scope, accept limitations, have clear expectations/objectives
- Allow enough time and highlight resource requirements early
- Find the right people to do it but also use local talents
- Simple language, no jargon

REFLECTIONS
by Jeff Bishop

Looking back at this stage on the day as a whole, on the formal papers, on the examples supplied by participants, and on the outcomes of the workshops, a number of major points emerge.

Timing

There were not quite as many people at the event as had been hoped for at the outset. Attributing some of this to marketing is probably correct, but I suspect that more important explanations lie in the subject matter and the timing of the conference. It is notoriously difficult to attract people to events which address processes, especially generic ones that are not solely the preserve of their own group or profession. If this takes care of part of the explanation, the other part almost certainly lies in the current state of general awareness of consensus building. It was a conscious decision to hold this conference at a time suspected to be perhaps one year early - ie. before people already committed to trying a consensus approach started shouting for help when it was probably too late!

Topicality

Despite the above, there is a clear tendency for consensus style approaches to not only be 'in the air' but also on the paper - and official paper at that. We could assemble a whole medley of examples of official documents that directly or indirectly endorse, encourage or even get near to recommending or requiring a consensus approach (eg. the Environment Act requirements on Air Quality Action Plans). Most relevantly for this conference is the statement in the House of Commons Environment Committee report on 'The Environmental Impact of Leisure Activities' to the effect that:

> "We commend the consensus building approach and consider that consultation in local management schemes should begin at an early stage to overcome some of the cultural conflicts which overshadow any evidence of the environmental impacts of leisure."

As both the 'arrivals exercise' and the workshop results show, there is now a real groundswell of interest in ways of avoiding the exclusivity, conflict, tension and waste that is inevitable with partial and adversarial ways of working.

Participants

Again despite the earlier comments on marketing, the day was distinctive in the diversity of those it attracted. While one can highlight some obvious and important 'gaps' (central government, land owners, private sector) it is nevertheless important to point out that the eventual mix was far richer than we had anticipated. This shows the widening of interest in consensus approaches. As we start to look at such approaches for ever more innovative forms of partnership, finding motivated and aware people coming at things from <u>several</u> sides rather than just one will be a real benefit in achieving the next generation of successful examples for which all at the conference were calling.

Examples

The range of people was also reflected in the diversity of examples located in advance, raised at the event, and described in the case studies contributed by participants. Although the apparent focus was 'countryside' and 'recreation', many examples either set this in a broader context (eg. the paper from Borders Region) or offered parallel examples (eg. Round Tables for road planning) which could apply equally in urban areas or on issues such as renewable energy developments. The fact that much of the core process of consensus building is potentially common to all such examples, and interchangeable between them, is a considerable strength. It can add to the likelihood that the next generation of projects will take advantage of already experienced people.

Is 'Countryside Recreation' special?

What follows from this is the inevitable conclusion that there is nothing at the level of basic approaches, principles, even perhaps repertoire of methods or choice of participants, that makes consensus building in water access planning different from consensus building in city centre traffic calming. That said, the refinements offered by participants to the headings, categories and examples in the overview paper all show how careful one has to be in moving from generic principles and shopping lists of methods to constructing a very specific 'recipe' for a very specific, one-off, probably even unique project on countryside recreation (or whatever).

Principles and Methods

The research work that we in BDOR undertook a year or so ago for the DoE on community participation also highlighted the problems of general approaches versus specific solutions. We found that most people undertaking participation activity launched into it on day one with a few methods up the sleeve, a vague outline of a programme, and little clarity about the overall scope of what was up for negotiation as a result of the participatory work. I suspect that one reason why so few of the case study reports analysed for the overview paper described the methods is because the same has been happening there. Although there are now a number of clear principles, strong overall frameworks and proven specific techniques available for serious consensus building, future success now depends critically on how these are combined together and applied in specific situations. While it is always possible to be over-cautious, even purist, about doing things the 'right' way, there are dangers that the growing reputation of consensus building work will be devalued if too many examples advance on poorly thought-out plans. It is obviously important to hold on to people's developing enthusiasm and the positive 'feel' that comes from bringing people together to make shared progress, but that is no substitute for careful preparation and planning.

Where Next?

Interestingly, a number of the suggestions made by people during the workshops sessions at the conference could - if operated together - make a real contribution to tackling some of the issues raised above. A compendium of proven examples, training, better networking and skill sharing, will all help. Although we have no specific plans to build on the shared momentum (though still rightly cautious) built up during the conference, Environmental Resolve will certainly be looking to draw some lessons and suggest further activities. If that can be complemented by work to ground consensus building more firmly within the thinking and practices of CRN agencies, that too will be a bonus. If this report can be a first stage then the event will have been - and I personally think it was - very worthwhile.

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UK/US STEWARDSHIP EXCHANGE: MARYLAND 1994

Issues/Situation/Context: The Exchange operates under a protocol signed by the US National Parks Service and the Countryside Commission. It provides for exchanges of countryside professionals for training opportunities and to spread good practice. Communities bid as "case examples" to be visited by a team of four North American and four UK professionals. Planning, economic development, tourism and conservation issues raised by local communities are the main work of the Exchange and consensus building figures strongly, before, during and after the visit.

Kent & Queen Anne's are two rural counties on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay, historically remote from nearby Washington and Baltimore. Settled in the 1600s from England, the countryside resembles East Anglia, with large arable fields separated by hedgerows, scattered villages and small towns, although penetrated by tidal creeks. US Highways 50/301 from Washington to the coast at Ocean City and to Philadelphia, with the four-mile long Chesapeake Bay Bridge, brought 20th Century America to this quiet corner. Rapid development of commuter and retirement housing, shopping malls and strip development occurred. The water quality of the Bay has declined, threatening traditional activities such as crabbing and a rich ecosystem. Against commercial pressures and weak planning laws, local people felt powerless. Traditional values and countryside qualities were lost. Politicians seemed unresponsive to the concerns of locals, who found it difficult to express their concerns.

Stakeholders: Local activists bid for the team visit, forming a Local Organising Committee (LOC). Members were drawn entirely from the grass roots, with help from voly bods such a local land preservation charity, the Farm Bureau (representing farmers) and The Alliance for Chesapeake Bay (an umbrella non-governmental conservation organisation). Subsequent interest shown by staff from US federal agencies and UK countryside agencies meant that politicians, realtors, commerce and the media had to show interest, particularly as election hustings were in progress.

Motivation: A handful of strongly motivated individuals were key, ranged against the two counties' Planning and Development Commissioners and economic development officials who could not see beyond attempting to attract conventional, large-scale industrial development and further commuter housing as the panacea for the area (and its deprived rural ethnic minorities). Later, as its strength grew, county commissioners, planning officers, tourism officers etc. started to work with rather than against the LOC, particularly those newly elected commissioners who had followed the Exchange.

Initiation: Exchange methods had been worked out long before the LOC was set up. US team members were experienced in community consensus building, drawn from organisations such as the Center for Rural Virginia. Community workshops ("charettes") seeking consensus are the main method used, rather than the British public meeting, which tends to emphasis conflict and feasts on distrust of, rather than working with, authority.

Funding: The LOC raised money locally in order to accommodate the team for a week, present evidence to it and publicise its work. Overall organisation of the team was undertaken by The Countryside Institute on contract to the US National Parks Service.

<u>Working Methods</u>: Evidence was heard by the team from all the relevant bodies, official and voluntary; conservation and development, in the two counties. Field visits were made, often with media interest. The team was given an office and a minibus, so could change the daily programme and call individuals for "interview". Ethnic minority leaders were seen in this way. At the end of the week the team presented a report in the local theatre, calling for: curbs on development, the greening of tourism, strengthened efforts to preserve land and bay shore, continued attention to water quality improvements, encouragment of pride of place and for appropriate small-scale economic development linked to the character of the local environment. This was just what the community wanted to hear! As it was election time prospective candidates made promises. At last the community felt empowered!

<u>Outcomes</u>: The LOC is still meeting and the county commissioners for the two counties meet together, something never before contemplated, although they share issues in common. Kent is pushing a new Comprehensive Plan, which will reduce development densities in the agricultural area (in the US strict control of development in the open countryside is perceived as an infringement of the rights of property). Kent Economic Development Office and Queen Anne's Tourism Office are implementing much of the team's report. Kent County has set up a committee to further the team's report, voting $5,000. But Queen Anne's County Planning Commission and realtors are still hell bent on strip development and on houses for in-comers on plots of 3-5 acres along the Bay's creeks.

<u>Somerset Levels & Moors, UK, 1993</u>: the organisation for the Exchange was essentially similar, but the lead for the LOC was initially from the County Council through the Commission-sponsored Levels and Moors Project. Community interest became strong and now has a very firm place in a new Levels & Moors Partnership, a forum of parish councils, local authorities, voluntary and statutory bodies as recommended by the Exchange team.

<u>Key points</u>:

The UK/US Exchange is available every two years or so: contact Nick Holliday at the Countryside Commission on (01242) 521381.

The work of the LOC is key, but the Exchange team makes local politicians take notice!

Consensus must be built by the LOC: the Exchange team can only repackage messages.

Communities empowered are strong communities, but decades of government by a few powerful individuals ("them") destroys community and allows development not supported by the majority.

Good government allows the community to develop consensus: poor government (or government with vested interests) is content to "divide and rule".

Richard Bull, Countryside Commission, Bridge House, Sion Place, Bristol BS8 4AS.

KA/ch/rose001.wpd

16 February 1996
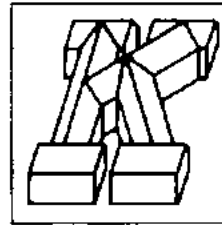
.Ms Jo Rose
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Dear Jo

Consensus Building in the Countryside

Just a note to thank you and your colleagues for the day conference at Devon County Council. It was a most enjoyable day and extremely informative.

Jeff asked for examples of consensus building which could be incorporated in the final report of the day's proceedings. One project which might be worth featuring is the "Rural Action" project which ran in the North Cotswolds in the 1980's. Essentially, it was a collaborative project between the County Planning Department, Cotswold District Council and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council.

"Rural Action" arose from socio-economic analysis of the County as part of the Structure Plan process. The research identified a number of small areas which exhibited a high incidence of the parameters chosen to indicate rural decline. The indicators included unemployment, poor housing conditions and also loss of services. The lack of accessibility to services became a catch all phrase for defining these areas.

A small group of 7 parishes was then chosen as a pilot project. Officers from the County, District and Rural Community Councils then visited each Parish Council with a blank sheet and asked them what problems they saw in their areas and offered to work with them to address these problems. The area was carefully chosen after preliminary discussions with County, District and Parish Councillors and deliberately restricted to a small target area where it was thought successful projects could be generated in the short term. I acted as convenor of this project for 3 or 4 years, but the best person to contact for further information is Paul Fountain, who I believe is now the Deputy County Planning Officer at Gloucestershire (01452 425693).

Paul was instrumental in initiating the project and negotiating with Councillors at an early stage. I am sure he would be willing to provide further information if required.

cont'd.....

Whilst the project was in the Cotswold's AONB and parishes were given a completely free hand to determine their own problems, landscape and traditional rural conflicts such as recreational use did not strongly feature in the problems identified. Rather housing, jobs and transport were the key issues throughout. In response, officers and local people worked together to develop a voluntary minibus scheme called "The Villager" and a rural housing association. Both these projects continue to operate and have been replicated elsewhere. In addition, we worked on bringing redundant agricultural buildings back into useful occupation, particularly for employment purposes, and ran programmes working with village post office/shops to improve product range and ultimately help safeguard them from closure.

I believe this was a very successful example of consensus building which delivered meaningful, long term benefits to the local community. I am sure that as part of your work in the Blackdown Hills, local people will at some point identify a need for housing. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you and local people to deliver sensitively designed schemes to meet this need.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further information on the "Rural Action" project, or feel that Knightstone can assist in delivering affordable accommodation for local people in the Blackdown Hills, or any other area.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

KEITH ANNIS
Planning and Land Manager

PROJECT SUMMARY - PEAK TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

Context: With over 20 million visits annually to the Peak National Park alone, some parts of the Peak District are now under severe pressure from visitors especially at peak periods. Mainly day trips by car these visits create traffic congestion, parking problems, overcrowding and disruption to local residents. Elsewhere heavy recreational use encroaches on environmentally sensitive areas causing footpath erosion and ecological damage.

Stakeholders: The Peak Tourism Partnership was launched in May 1993 and was set up as a national pilot in response to a government report on sustainable tourism "Maintaining the balance". It has been a 3 year co-ordinated partnership between the public and private sectors within the Peak District and included the National Park Authority, the tourist boards ,RDC, CC, EN and 13 local authorities..

Motivation: The objective of the project was to successfully demonstrate good practice in visitor management. It was designed to be a local area initiative with particular emphasis on private sector and community involvement.

Initiation: Consultants were appointed by the Peak Tourism Partnership to draw up visitor management plans for the Castleton-Edale-Hope and Roaches areas of the Peak District.

Working Methods: Community workshops; local working groups; meetings; exhibitions; newsletters; annual reports.

Outcomes: Two visitor Management Plans completed; six consultative draft Local Interpretive Plans completed; Strategic Statement on Environmental and Heritage Interpretation drawn up. 120 individual projects identified within this documentation. Currently funding is being sought to progress these and other mechanisms[eg. appointment of project officers] to implement the agreed strategies.

Feedback: The Partnership generated a lot of energy and enthusiasm and led to a range of initiatives and projects being undertaken. This perhaps meant that a clear overview was sometimes lacking. There was also a tendency for local agendas to dominate eg. traffic related issues received more attention than environmental concerns.

Feedforward:
- need for involvement of key decision-makers
- consultation with local communities but should not be allowed to dominate
- evidence of success needed
- measurable outcomes to gain support and credibility
- need for clear focus and overview
- avoid cumbersome structures and bureaucracy

David Markham
English Nature 14/2/96