

**Rural Theme Group  
Nottinghamshire**

---

**Rural Infrastructure Review  
Nottinghamshire**

**Final Report**

---

**Tellus 42**

August 2004

---

## Contents

---

1 Introduction . . . . .	3
2 Policy Context . . . . .	4
3 Agency Hierarchy . . . . .	7
• Village support groups	
• Support agencies	
• Statutory authorities	
4 Village Survey . . . . .	12
• Range of issues	
• Tackling the issues	
• Support agencies used	
• Main findings	
5 Village and Community Hall Management . . . . .	19
6 Improving Communications . . . . .	24
• Notts News surveys	
• Village survey	
• Newsletter workshops	
7 Parish Council Training Needs . . . . .	29
• Quality Council training	
• Village survey	
• Provisional findings	
8 Summary Conclusions . . . . .	35

Acknowledgements

References

Appendix - LSP Structures

The government is funding a review of all voluntary and community sectors - in particular their infrastructure organisations (Councils for Voluntary Service, community centres and Rural Community Councils etc) - prior to agreeing Infrastructure Investment Plans for every county.

Nottinghamshire and the city of Nottingham are undergoing such a review, under the Nottinghamshire Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Consortium. This review is important. It will identify

- the potential to develop local infrastructure organisations (or support agencies) ,
- the support needs of 'frontline' organisations in both urban and rural communities, and
- how local communications between the various agencies can be improved.

One of the key subgroups of that Consortium is the Rural Theme Group, chaired by the Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council (NRCC), and involving the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Notts News, Southwell diocese, Nottinghamshire Association of Village and Community Halls (NAVACH) and others. This group commissioned community planners Tellus 42 to undertake a Rural Infrastructure Review. The two main objectives are:

- to ensure that rural issues are fairly represented in the Infrastructure Investment Plan and in any funding programme that emerges from the Plan, and
- to investigate the infrastructure support needs of the rural sector.

The Rural Theme Group suggested that we focus on the following tasks.

- To survey a representative sample of 12 villages and parishes throughout the county. In each we would meet representatives of the parish council (including clerk and councillors), villages newsletters, local churches and village hall committees to discuss main issues, their own activities and any barriers they face, training needs, and support agencies they use.
- To facilitate part of the NAVACH AGM conference on 22nd June. Our session would investigate the support needs of village and community halls, as well as the major obstacles they face in maintaining such important local facilities.
- To arrange and facilitate two workshops on local communications within villages. Discussions would clarify the main support needs of local editors, their training needs and IT backup, keeping enough staff and volunteers, and making the newsletters more viable (by increasing income, reducing costs, and better marketing etc).

- To identify key training needs of local parishes. For this, the emphasis was on parish councils and clerks, but we also covered village halls and newsletters as well.
- 

## 2

## Policy Context

---

The government is currently asking each county to review all their voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations - hereafter referred to as support agencies. This is a major opportunity to clarify a very diffuse and complex subject, and to define a strategy that co-ordinates their many activities for the benefit of all the local user groups who need various levels of support, training and promotion.

Among all the government reports and guidelines, perhaps the most relevant is *Building Civil Renewal: Government support for community capacity building and proposals for change* (Home Office Civil Renewal Unit 2003). According to this report, there are two main ways in which support for community groups can be provided.

The first is through a wide variety of different bodies that they currently rely on, including

- local voluntary organisations,
- national specialist umbrella bodies,
- local authorities,
- regional agencies, and
- central government departments and agencies.

The second way of providing local support (and perhaps the more relevant for this rural infrastructure review) is directed at community level. This includes:

- a local representative **forum or network**. Examples given are a community association, development trust or area forum. For this rural study, the local forum could be in the form of a parish or village newsletter (although parish councils can also act as local forums),
- a **physical hub** as the base for individual or collective community activity. Here village halls are the obvious examples,
- access to generic **capacity building** workers - whether through the district CVS, the county-wide Nottinghamshire RCC, or locally through a local development trust, and
- easy access to **small grants**. Here the main local sources of small grants would be the parish councils and local charitable trusts.

This second method of support suggests how villages fit within the overall review of support agencies (infrastructure organisations). It is also important because it shows that

much of that key support work is already provided locally in villages.

This in turn raises the issue of 'rural proofing'. It is difficult to define the real problems in villages because population numbers are so much smaller. It is difficult to identify so many problems because in many cases the people are so isolated. It is difficult to deliver the necessary professional and voluntary services because the dispersal of people makes it so much more costly. It is difficult for villages to meet and agree a clear uniform message. And because of these difficulties (problems concealed, higher delivery costs, fewer voters, and no clear voice) it is easier for funding agencies to ignore these issues or reduce their significance within the regional and sub-regional strategies.

The regional government office (GOEM) has set out the *Purpose of the East Midlands Early Investment Programme* as follows.

*The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Infrastructure Early Investment Programme (EIP) is concerned with beginning to strengthen and improve existing VCS infrastructure organisations and identifying and tackling 'gaps' in infrastructure in the East Midlands.*

i) Programme funding is only for support agencies - not public or private sector bodies, nor frontline voluntary or community groups.

ii) A definition of support agencies might be those voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations and networks that play a supporting, co-ordinating, representation, policy-making and development role for other voluntary and community groups, including social enterprises.

iii) The Early Investment Programme aims to:

- assist the development of support agencies and their services,
- engage communities more effectively, including more influence on public services and encouraging volunteering,
- commit diverse funding agencies to the development of sustainable support agencies,
- ensure that support for community groups in rural areas is available to a similar standard to that available towns and cities,
- increase the level and range of support for frontline groups delivering and shaping public services,
- develop more efficient and sustainable ways of providing support to local groups,
- respond to the unmet needs of specialist or marginalized groups and rural areas, and
- increase investment in infrastructure from other sources, including revenue income.

At district level, one Nottinghamshire borough's review of relationships with parishes produced an interesting 21 page summary of comments from a round of meetings throughout the district. Comments relate to the following:

- an information overload and the need to simplify or summarize reports,
- a lack of information about specific roles or support agencies,
- ignorance of key partnerships, notably the LSP,
- no recognition of local identity. Villages were lumped together as eastern, southern and western, instead of in clusters around market towns or along major through-routes etc
- parishes often feel patronized ('planning law has more weight than local perceptions, issues are usually 'parish pump' rather than strategic),
- isolation affects all parishes, and it is difficult to combine with other villages,
- too many non-specific or strategic meetings with no clear outputs,
- the best meetings address specific issues, but there is often no feedback, and
- there are too few annual meetings in which they can network and agree common aims.

It may be dangerous to generalize from these aggregate comments. However, while parish councils are the first statutory tier of local government, they are often ignored or patronized - parochial being dismissed as 'parish pump'. Too many district councils regard themselves as the first tier of local government. Nottinghamshire CC goes one stage further, putting the county as the first tier of local government, then the districts, with the parish councils third. There is a similar hierarchy between community groups, support agencies and national bodies.

---

From the above policy context, we can say that support agencies are those that support other groups. They not only support, co-ordinate and develop the role of local voluntary and community groups, but also represent, research and help make policy for the development of the sector as a whole.

Now we need to look at the relationships between them and the various agencies that they work with. Within the rural context, we think there are several strategic levels at which support agencies operate. While the strategic Infrastructure Review by the consultants Flying Giraffe looks at support agencies from the 'top down', in our rural review, we are looking from the bottom up.

### 1 Village Support Groups

Villages will usually have a wide range of community groups. These may include women's institutes, church groups, sports clubs, heritage societies, youth clubs, drama groups and residents' associations etc. In most villages, however, there are three key 'frontline' groups that also perform some support agency functions. All three have a vital role to play in the life and regeneration of their communities. They also perform three of the four support systems referred to in *Building Civil Renewal*.

- First is the village hall or community centre with its management committee. There are other physical examples of village hubs, including sports pitches, social clubs, primary schools, churches and health clinics. However, the village hall is designed to house as wide a range of activities, facilities and services as possible. As a physical/**social hub**, therefore, it is often the main door into village life.
- Second is the village newsletter. Typically produced as a church magazine, parish newsletter or voluntary paper, adverts can help to ensure that it is self-financing. There are also other forms of village communications, from notice boards and word-of-mouth to interactive parish websites. All these means of communicating form the community's **information network** or local voice.
- Third are the parish councils (or 'parish meetings' for those with less than 250 registered voters). Although not eligible for any funding through the Infrastructure Investment Plan, parish councils have an essential role in supporting and developing local groups and their projects. Not only do they act as the local forum for policy and action within the village, but they often award **small grants** for local projects. Several villages also have their own local charitable trust that awards significant grants to the local community.
- In some parishes, the parish council also performs a leadership role for the village, acting as both a voice for the community and a forum for local action.
- Other key agencies include local churches and chapels. These often act as social hubs, accommodating a range of activities for children, young families and the elderly in their halls, and as local networks through church magazines.

## 2 Support Agencies

Though most villages have their own hubs, networks and access to small grants, the one support system that they usually lack is access to 'generic community development workers'. This is where the support agencies come in. Essentially they have two broad functions. The first is to support local groups through providing information on government requirements and funding programmes etc, face-to-face advice on developing the group or project, and training courses to raise in-house skills in the voluntary and community sector. This is an internal role within the voluntary and community sector. The second - external - role is to promote village needs outside the sector, whether through local research, developing policy and advocating on behalf of the sector among local strategic bodies etc.

For this review, we are primarily concerned only with the support role to the village groups. How support agencies advocate and develop policy is largely dealt with in the strategic review by Flying Giraffe, though we refer to these issues in the last section. Within this study, we discuss village needs for community development work and generic capacity building (for Notts RCC and CVSs respectively) focussing on village halls, local newsletters and parish councils.

### a) Generic Development Agencies

There are a number of generic support agencies that offer information, advice and training for the three village agencies mentioned above.

- Each district has its own CVS (council for voluntary services) or in Broxtowe their volunteer bureau. Basic roles for any CVS are to track and develop volunteers (usually through a volunteer bureau), to provide training for volunteers and for local groups, to provide information to community groups through newsletters, and to promote and co-ordinate the work of voluntary and community groups through their resource and development work. Essentially, this role may be summarized as **capacity building** (development, support, enabling representation, strategic partnership and liaison).
- At county level is the Nottinghamshire RCC with its specialist rural role. While the focus for a CVS is on volunteers, training and information, the RCC has a much more inter-active role in **community development**, working with local groups and parishes to develop village design statements, parish plans, village halls, and local transport plans etc.
- Other area-wide agencies include NAVO (Nottinghamshire Association of Voluntary Organisations), largely concerned with maintaining a **database** for the whole sector, and the Nottinghamshire Community Foundation, which **funds** various projects.

### b) Specialist Support Agencies

In addition to the generic agencies above, there are several specialist support agencies relevant to villages.

- NALC (the National Association of Local Councils) and the LSCC (Local Society of Council Clerks) offer various services for parish councillors and clerks, including training courses, annual meetings and an information service.

- NAVACH (the Nottinghamshire Association of Village and Community Halls) offers advice and training for village and community hall committees. Advice on how to adapt or build a village hall is provided through a combination of honorary advisers and RCC Rural Officers who work closely with NAVACH providing additional support linked to ACRE's national village halls service.
- Notts News (and to a lesser extent ACE the national Association for Church Editors) support local newsletters. In addition, however, several agencies (including Nottinghamshire RCC and Bassetlaw CVS) provide IT training and support for newsletter design.
- TANC and VOSE are two other support groups, offering advice, training and project development support.

### **c) Issue-based Agencies.**

These include environmental, campaign and lobbying groups that can offer specific technical advice and professional support. They include such local and national bodies as the CPRE (Campaign for the Protection of Rural England), Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and Building Preservation Trust, Groundwork Trusts, British Horse Society, Sustrans, Friends of the Earth, the Association of Burial Authorities etc.

## **3 Statutory Authorities**

The village groups and support agencies do not work in a vacuum. They can only operate within the statutory framework, and often depend on the support and resources of the various local authorities and government agencies. The level of information and quality of relations is an indication of how effective local strategic partnerships are between the public and voluntary sectors.

### **a) Local Authorities.**

District and county councils often provide crucial support, both to the village and the support agencies. They can fund village halls and local projects, employ community development workers, develop Compacts with the VCS, and provide key technical advice (e.g. on planning, highways or environmental health issues).

The usual channel is for parishes through their clerks to make strong links with key officers within the relevant district and county authorities. This is invaluable for the technical support and advice that such officers can provide, but it is largely restricted to specific issues. On generic community matters, liaison will usually be through the Nottinghamshire RCC or one of the other support agencies acting in their advocate's role.

Finally, both Bassetlaw and Rushcliffe are currently looking at ways of ensuring adequate levels of rural proofing in all their work, and the work of the LSPs to which we now turn.

### **b) Local Strategic Partnerships**

The work of local government and other statutory authorities (like health, colleges and the police) is increasingly co-ordinated by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Yet a review of

the seven district websites show that all are issue-based (typically health, regeneration, safety, environment, social and training themes). Only one - Mansfield - specifically includes area-based teams, and the voluntary and community sector, showing how they relate to the main board. (See Appendix for the different diagrams.)

This lack of visible presence of parishes makes it all the more important that channels for raising rural issues are clearly defined. This can be in one of four ways.

- The first is through the parish plan that some villages have produced with Countryside Agency funding. This agency has just published new guidelines on how LSPs should themselves publish local 'bridging' guides for parish plans to access LSPs. It has to be said that some parishes with their own parish plans are not always satisfied with the response that they receive from their district councils, so there may be some cynicism as to how positively the LSP might support them.
- Second, some district councils have appointed a dedicated 'rural affairs' officer (with corresponding council member) to raise specific rural issues, and ensure that aspects of general strategic policies are all considered as part of a 'rural proofing' exercise.
- Third, some councils have set up Local Area Forums to help implement strategic policies in the area. These groups of parishes are being set up in Bassetlaw for example, and developed as very local strategic groups that may even have access to council budgets in order to deliver local services. The county also supports 16 such forums with a small grant of £5,000 and officer assistance.
- And finally, there are informal clusters of parishes, which get together to discuss issues and policies of joint concern - such as traffic conditions on the main road linking them - as and when the issues arise and give sufficient cause for local concern. NALC has its own patchwork of area committees, which meet infrequently.

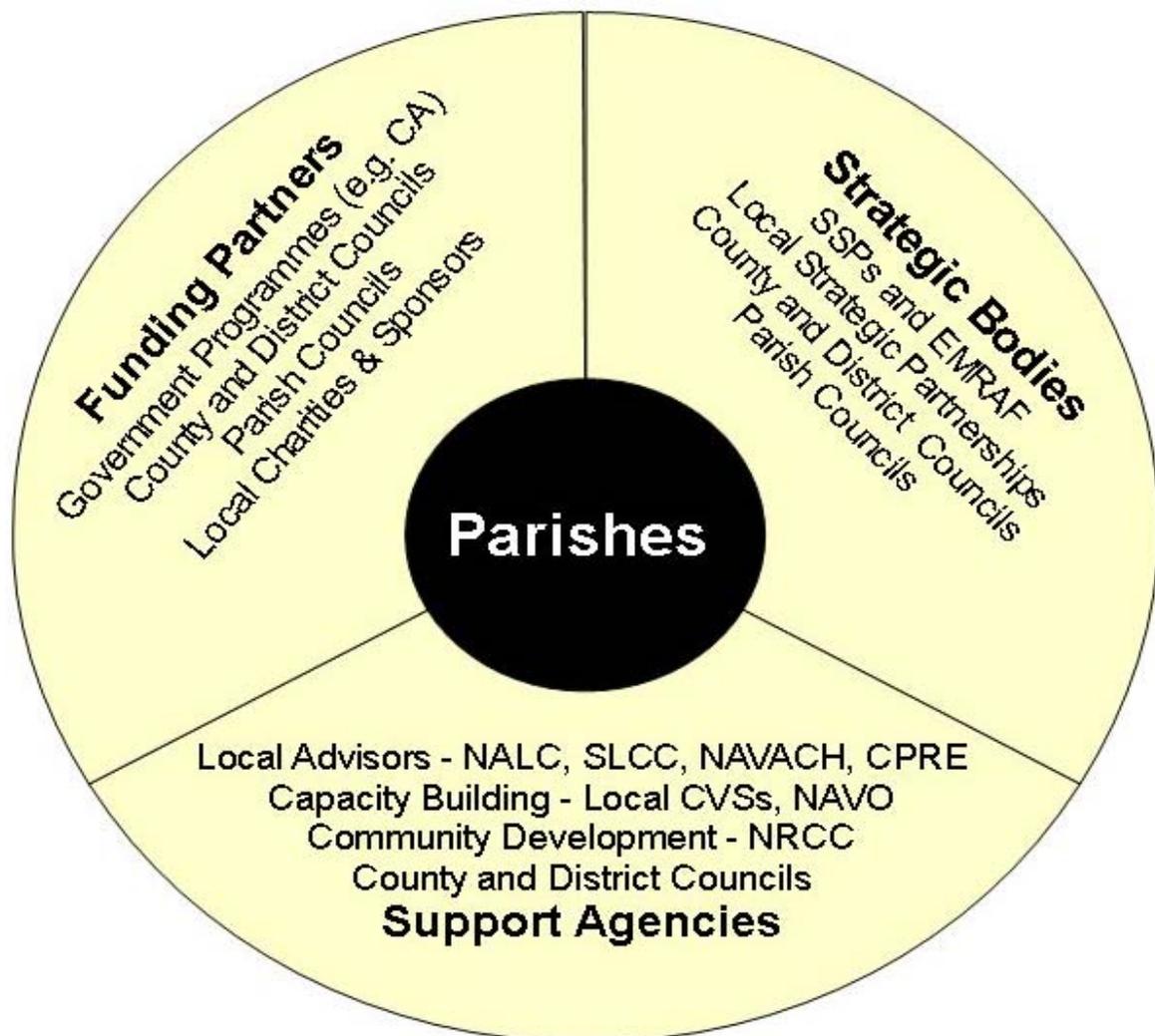
The issue is whether there is a role for such area-wide committees (formal or informal). Are they best when issue-based, or can they develop as local management forums, with budgets to undertake that role. And how influential are they with LSPs etc.

### **c) Regional and National Agencies**

'When it comes to regional strategy, we are at the bottom of the pile'. For parishes, the main agencies are EMRAF (East Midlands Rural Area Forum), emda, Regeneration East Midlands, GOEM (Government Office East Midlands), School for Social Entrepreneurs, and SEEM (Social Enterprise East Midlands).

Perhaps the most important national body is the Countryside Agency, which has regional offices, and has overseen the Vital Villages funding programme. This has supported various transport, housing and community development work, largely through the local RCCs. In their latest report, *Planning for Vital Communities*, they suggest how villages might bridge the gap between their own parish action plans and the policy agencies, in particular the LSPs. English Nature and DEFRA are also significant policy bodies.

This concludes our review of the policy context and the relationships between the various village, support and statutory agencies. It might best be illustrated by the following diagram.



Each of the village groups needs to find its own role and status within the 'mind map' of

- support agencies, who can develop the internal capacity of the village groups, and help give them a more effective external voice,
- strategic bodies, and how parishes, newsletters and village halls can combine or cluster to raise their profile and influence strategic policies, and
- funding partners - not only how to access external funding, but equally important, how to raise funds within their local communities.

We now pass onto the results of our village survey and the three specific tasks of our review, with recommendations and suggestions at the end of each section. Finally, we bring it all together with a summary of the main findings and more general conclusions for the rural needs of the support agencies.

For our survey, 12 villages were selected from the six rural districts in the county to give a representative sample of size, location, and relative wealth. We were only able to meet ten - one large parish declined, another did not respond after our initial contact, and it was impossible to arrange meetings in four other villages within the timescale due to holidays etc.

The ten parishes included small towns, villages and hamlets, commuter settlements, ex-mining communities, and peripheral villages. In each village, we sought a group meeting with the following:

- parish clerk and parish councillor (preferably chair or committee chair),
- local vicar, minister or priest,
- editor of the village newsletter or magazine, and
- member of the local village hall management committee.

The following 'agenda' was sent to each parish clerk in advance of each visit.

1. what are the three or four main problems in your village,
2. what are your general roles within the village, and
3. do you have any role in addressing these specific issues.
4. as a clerk/councillor/vicar/editor/hall manager, what barriers do you face in your duties,
5. what are the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation,
6. can you identify any skills gaps or training needs to help address these barriers.
7. how does the parish communicate within the village (notice boards, newsletters, website, word of mouth etc), and
8. is it up to speed in IT.
9. what external bodies do you work with - e.g. networks with other parish councils or newsletter editors,
10. how well do you work with the local authority and do you have influence over their decisions,
11. what outside agencies have you worked with or received support from, and
12. what would you most like to see in the Infrastructure Investment Plan, and any other issue not already covered?

We visited the following villages. (See Acknowledgements for the people we met.)

- Annesley Felly and Selston in Ashfield

- Everton in Bassetlaw
- Brinsley in Broxtowe
- Burton Joyce in Gedling
- Clifton (North and South), Gunthorpe and Farnsfield in Newark and Sherwood
- Elton on the Hill and Ruddington in Rushcliffe

### **The Range of Issues**

Ten settlements out of about 200 parishes will not raise all the issues that affect village life. But they provide an interesting benchmark of common themes and specific issues.

- In Ruddington, main issues were youth disaffection, isolation, particularly among the elderly, affordable housing, and crime 'spillover' from nearby urban areas.
- In Elton, traffic conditions on the main road and side lanes, lack of public transport, difficulties in dealing with large utilities, and lack of families in the village.
- In Everton, affordable housing (and the need for young families to keep their school), planning decisions affecting local character, traffic conditions on the main road, and dog dirt.
- In Farnsfield, poor communications, internally and externally, local transport, youth disaffection, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and lack of policing.
- In Selston, traffic conditions and speeding, planning threat (for a landfill site), ASB and lack of policing, litter and dogs.
- In Brinsley, youth disaffection, inadequate meeting space, traffic conditions on M1 approach routes, and gas and oil exploration in the area.
- Burton Joyce, ASB and the youth club closing (again), traffic on the A612 dangerous, voluntary support difficult (with local societies closing), affordable housing and housing for older people, and litter (only 3rd last year in Best Kept Village).
- Annesley Felly, a disjointed community and poor parish since pit closure, cemetery maintenance (and the cost of making gravestones safe), traffic on the main road, lack of policing, and litter and off-road flytipping.
- Gunthorpe, no local shops, traffic on the A 6097, reliability of bus service (which doesn't always come into village), flooding and gravel extraction, and affordable housing.
- The South Clifton clerk was new, so unsure what the main issues are. While for North Clifton parish meeting the issues were lack of a play space, traffic speeds on the main roads, and the desire for a nature reserve.

These issues can be seen as a mix of the generic and specific. Generic themes were the following:

- youth disaffection, ASB and lack of local policing (7 mentions)
- traffic conditions on the main road and speeding on side roads (8)

- affordable housing, lack of families and threat to local schools (5)
- litter, including dog dirt and fly tipping (4)
- lack of public transport and its reliability (3)
- and one mention each for isolation of the elderly, no local shops, planning affecting local character, and poor communications (internally and externally).

Specific issues were as follows:

- crime spillover from the city
- dealing with the large utilities
- a major landfill site scheme
- inadequate meeting space
- threat of gas/oil exploration
- poor parish since pit closure
- lack of play space
- cemetery maintenance
- flooding and gravel extraction

These issues may be generically rural (such as affordable housing or local transport), specific to a group of villages (including traffic conditions on main roads or major planning applications), or common to both towns and villages (such as youth facilities and community safety). They provide possible themes against which community plans and area strategies can be 'rural proofed'. (See chapter 8 for further discussion on the issue of rural proofing.)

### **Their Input in Tackling the Issues**

Some of these issues are 'parish pump' in scale and should be dealt with locally. Most, however, raise strategic issues that need to be addressed by the relevant authorities - including housing and planning, highways and public transport providers, the police, social services, health, youth and community services. Many also point to the need for much better communications and concerted action among villages to ensure that the major issues are addressed. And of course most parishes will be under-resourced - although only one mentioned the problem specifically.

Even those issues that are parish pump in scale - like litter and dog dirt, cemetery maintenance and meeting space - suggest the need for more powers of local management to cover litter removal, verge cutting and public toilet maintenance. Local management might even develop to include more ambitious contracts for example on local housing maintenance, car park management, youth work and community development.

From our brief survey, we found many important examples of local action:

- one parish managed its own museum and IT association and community transport scheme for local people. It also worked with the local youth worker (although the local drugs worker post had gone),
- one parish anxious to promote an indoor sports facility held a parish poll. This however was voted down by local objectors (perhaps because it was on the wrong site?) - which suggests the need for better communication skills,
- another parish arranged Planning for Real events in three villages, to produce action plans. It is also working with other parishes (and the district) to fight the planning threat of a landfill site,
- several parishes work with neighbouring parishes to object to contentious planning schemes, on common highway problems, and to manage fundraising events. One parish was a member of the NE Bassetlaw Forum for six parishes, which works well. May even get BDC funding for key services. Good to fight for road safety issues along the route, and to lobby for the re-opening of the Gainsborough-Doncaster railway for passengers. Another parish however felt that despite local links, it was 'heads against a brick wall on getting traffic improvements'. Another felt that councils and agencies were good at blitzing an area - 'but then they forget you',
- one parish was already undertaking a feasibility design for a new or expanded village hall, working with NRCC, TANC, VOSE and the Nottinghamshire Community Foundation,
- another parish was good at working with active residents association and action groups on village management, traffic network and policy development. But it was poor at internal liaison - for example the parish council and parochial church council had only met for the first time last year,
- one parish undertook a parish survey (helped by Nottinghamshire RCC) because it was losing its young people, even though new private housing had been built in the historic mining village. This raises a common issue of new development being allowed even though it does not address key local concerns, with specific cases mentioned in three villages,
- all the parishes have a parish newsletter or church magazine.

We should mention here that we also reviewed the work of some local churches as well as parishes in our village survey. Although we only met eight ministers or church council members, some of their work is vital in addressing some of these issues. Examples include the following:

- one church ran a children's summer playscheme with 20 volunteers, all of whom had to be vetted by the police at £25 a go (all money raised locally). It also held coffee clubs and outings for the elderly (using the local community transport service),
- lunch clubs for the elderly, with volunteers to pick up those unable to walk to the church hall, another important facility that religious groups often provide in the community,

- playgroups for local parents and toddlers, often the first social links made by young parents, and
- church magazines, which usually carry at least one page for parishes and others to fill in with the local news.

Churches, chapels and other denominations are therefore usually an integral part of village life. In particular, church halls and magazines can play a vital role, as explained in the next two sections. Other key agencies are local trusts. One village trust we met helps with hall maintenance and other community facilities.

## Support Agencies

External relations with support agencies seem in the main to be positive. From the hierarchy mentioned above (section 3), we asked in a neutral way which agencies they used for support or to develop local projects. The following lists the main support agencies mentioned.

- Networks with neighbouring parishes are the first level. These only emerge over issues of common concern - e.g. over traffic conditions on major roads (often crossing county boundaries), or large inappropriate planning applications. They can be very effective, though not when there are only two parishes in the district as in Ashfield. There is no common support strategy for parishes and parish clerks, partly due to the lack of staff and resources at NALC and SLCC. This is in marked contrast with school governing bodies where the county provides support for governors (as suggested by one clerk who sits on the three school bodies).
- All parishes mentioned good relations with RCC and their project officers. Helped with parish plans, village hall expansion and IT support.
- The CVSs offer volunteer placements and training. Bassetlaw CVS good for IT training and website design, and was mentioned by villages in two other districts. EVB (Eastwood volunteer bureau) provides signposting. Six parishes had no contact with their local CVS, although one was referred to as 'no more than a paper factory'.
- Important support for five parish councils came from the Nottinghamshire branch of the National Association for Local Councils (NALC), and four clerks used the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC).
- TANC and VOSE were also mentioned for their support and training.
- Three clerks mentioned the importance of making local contacts with key officers in their district council (planning, highways, environmental health). Rushcliffe has produced a very useful A-Z of local services. Broxtowe produces a funding booklet. Everton has excellent relations with Bassetlaw (which does all their printing at very competitive rates) and Nottinghamshire CC. Key officers in both district and county councils are vital - more so than councillor support, which is usually restricted to information-sharing with council policy and neighbouring parishes.
- 'Community development officer was excellent, but she has been promoted and not replaced'. District provides planning and legal training.
- Planning liaison is poor. 'They [the district] say it is good, since we agree on 90% of all applications. We say that it is usually the 10% that are significant applications in which we are effectively ignored'. Insufficient provision for affordable housing. Parish plan not yet adopted. Also the issue about planning gain - whether it is always got, where it is spent, and who decides how it is spent. One new housing development in the middle of our historic village got everyone upset, resulting in a revived parish council.

- There is little effective liaison with the police. ‘They have no rural strategy’. ‘Impossible to get them to log incidents’. On the other hand, they will attend meetings when invited, and they are the only agency to use local newsletters.
- Local campaign and specialist agencies that help with information, technical advice and lobbying support included the local branch of the CPRE (5), Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (2), a local canal partnership, Nottinghamshire Building Preservation Trust, Young Farmers and NFU, local women’s institutes and history societies.
- National agencies included the Association of Burial Authorities, English Nature (for SSSIs), the British Horse Society, and Countryside Agency.
- At the sub-regional and regional level, there is little evidence of emda and the local strategic partnerships thinking rural, understanding their concerns, or addressing their problems. ‘When it comes to emda, parishes are bottom of the pile’. Other partnerships and quangos can also be remote from parish life, e.g. East Midlands Environment Link and regional area forum. Sub-regional strategic plans and the new local area forums seem to have little relevance to the work of parish clerks.
- Finally, there was ‘no lack of support agencies, but don’t know how to access them’. This suggests the need for a simple guide to all the support agencies and a mind map of all the services available.

#### **4 Main Findings of Survey**

In our survey of the ten villages, main findings are as follows.

- At the village level, all local groups seem underfunded. Village halls, with all their legal, insurance, building and disability access (DDA) responsibilities are vulnerable. Parish councils too often rely entirely on modest income or small annual grant, without raising a precept. Some rely on unpaid clerks, and many have no training budgets to support and develop the training agencies. Only the newsletters are relatively secure, although some rely on subscriptions (which will exclude many residents).
- Of the support agencies, those most frequently mentioned were the Nottinghamshire RCC, the Bassetlaw CVS (even mentioned by villages outside the district), NALC and the CPRE. Not mentioned were several CVSs, Age Concern, Groundwork, minority support groups, NAVO and NYON (Nottinghamshire Youth Organisations Network). (To some extent, these omissions may reflect our small sample.)
- There are mixed reactions to the support from local authorities. Some find them helpful and have good relations with key officers. Others find them unhelpful, typically over planning applications (‘they ignore our comments if we differ from them, despite having completed our own parish plan’). They are also ‘at the bottom of the pile’ when it comes to initiatives to tackle road safety, rural deprivation or crime.
- There are also mixed feelings about local area forums. One is actively engaged, and hopes that significant funding will be channelled through its forum. Another finds them ‘just another talking shop’. What seems clear is that local forums,

whether formal or informal, are best if they are focussed on issues of local concern, or have budgets to deliver local services.

- At present, it is felt that the LSPs are too remote. Parishes have little confidence that rural issues are given a fair hearing. The feeling is that there is too much on 'strategic policy' at the expense of 'parish pump' issues - even though these issues may raise serious strategic implications.
- Beyond the LSP, there is no clear mind map to the emerging sub-regional strategic partnerships (in Nottinghamshire, the GNP and the Alliance), with their access to all the government funding programmes. On the one hand, for example, the loss of Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme is regretted. On the other, emda now pass money down to the Alliance SSP, which has set up its own district-based decision panel.
- Finally, back at the local level, some councils are more reactive than instigating. They can be very formal, even over their arrangements for allowing the public to raise issues of concern. Nor do many parishes have procedures for dealing with internal disputes or external complaints. They also often lack a clear forward strategy for tackling major issues or conflicts.

---

## 5

# Village and Community Hall Management

---

On the 22nd June, NAVACH held a conference as part of their AGM. 85 people turned up, representing 28 halls, as well as parish councillors and various agencies. This was an excellent turnout.

Tellus 42 facilitated the second half of the evening with a session on managing village and community halls. After a short introduction that set the context for village halls (with village halls as the window into village life, but beset with many management problems), we set the meeting two main tasks

- a questionnaire to be filled in by someone for each village hall present, and
- group discussion and feedback to identify and prioritize the general challenges and organisation matters affecting hall managers.

The results of the questionnaire are set out below.

---

## Managing Village and Community Halls NAVACH Questionnaire

---

### Name of building with Village or Community Halls

Bigwood, Blidworth, Burton Joyce, Cropwell Butler and Tythby, Cuckney, East Markham, Edwinstowe, Egmanton, Everton, Gotham, Gringley on the Hill, Kingston on Soar, Lambley, Langar cum Barnstone, Mansfield, Northfield, Norwell, Ollerton, Plumtree, Ruddington, South Muskham and L Carlton, Thurgarton, Underwood, Walkeringham, Watnall, Weston, and Willoughby on the Wolds.

### Q1 How often is the building regularly used each week? (please tick)

Under 5 times **4** Between 5 and 10 times **10** Over 10 times **13 (1 varies)**

This confirms show how well used the village halls are, despite the fact that over two thirds of them have 'competition' from other halls.

### Q2 What other community spaces and buildings are there in your village?

Several **5**, Church halls **6**, Community hall **1**, Miners Welfare **2**, Sports Clubs **2**, None **9**

### Q3 What are the biggest problems you face? (please tick as appropriate)

	not an issue	a minor issue	a real problem	a major headache	agg. score
Coping with 'redtape' (insurance etc)	7	4	8	5	35
Recruiting/retaining committees	4	6	13	3	41
Maintaining the building	-	6	9	12	60
Getting groups to share the space	11	9	5	1	22
Dealing with vandalism	11	9	1	5	26
Promoting events	9	10	6	2	28
Managing the finances	10	9	2	4	25
Meeting the needs of users	8	14	2	1	19

**Q4 Specific training needs** (please tick the training you've had in the last two years, and the training you would like in the next)

	Had	Would Like
• accounts	6	1
• asbestos	5	4
• building design	1	6
• charitable status	7	5
• child/vulnerable adult protection	6	4
• disability discrimination act	12	4
• equal opportunities	5	2
• first aid	5	7
• food hygiene	7	5
• health and safety	10	6
• information technology	4	4
• insurance	4	5
• licensing	4	8
• planning major events	1	9
• risk assessment	6	8
• volunteer management	3	10
• employment matters	5	5

- marketing - 13
- Any others? - **Funding** - 3

## **Q5 What services or resources do you need?**

Funding **17** Building improvements **10** DDA **2** Others (including staff and events) **2**

## **Q7 Which agencies support the work of your hall?**

Parish council **14**, NRCC **13**, NAVACH **8**, District council **5**, Notts CC **3**, CVS **3**, TANC, EVB, WREN, Diocese, local trust, local school **1 each**, No agency **6**

## **Thank you for your help – Tellus 42**

---

This questionnaire was complemented by group discussions at ten tables, which focussed around general challenges and management matters. Five main issues were discussed under general challenges. The order of priority for these issues is based roughly on the rankings given by the ten tables.

### 1 'Managing the hall, keeping volunteers and committee training'

- four groups put this as the number one priority,
- two of those groups added legal advice,
- another mentioned pressure on committee members, employment and public liability,
- the difficulties of getting volunteers and committee members puts increased pressure on one or two willing volunteers, and
- lack of time to manage the hall, attend various meetings, go on training courses, take out registration and insurance, and make funding applications etc.

### 2 'Financial management, cost controls, and sources of funding'

- three groups mentioned funding as the top priority,
- 'funding is a major headache'

### 3 'Inclusion and community involvement'

- two groups prioritized inclusion,
- community involvement was difficult - consultation overload,
- 'where do the results of consultations go!'

### 4 'Property management, caretaking, security, cleaning and maintenance issues'

- one group mentioned anger at the amount of red tape, and building costs
- legislation affects buildings and already overburdened volunteers

### 5 'Marketing, lettings policy and income generation'

- there is no networking or sharing of resources or skills.

Concerning organisation matters, the following points were made:

- there is a widespread lack of awareness of NAVACH. It needs to be better promoted - for which of course it may require extra resources,
- services it could provide include funding and legal advice, website for local halls with telephone numbers, networks among village halls, 'a joint insurance scheme would be useful', and act as a conduit of information and access to experts,
- membership fees were generally accepted. Suggestions were for a nominal amount, £5, £20, £20 to £30, £25, £25 to £35, and 'fees to reflect finances of each hall',
- other agencies mentioned were Notts RCC (mentioned by six groups), RPA (twice), NCC, Ashfield Links, NALC, and ACRE (one mention each), and
- networking with other halls is one of the real benefits of these events - 'we feel isolated'.

## Recommendations and Suggestions

In the following, we differentiate between recommendations and suggestions. Our **recommendations** are those policies or projects that we are confident should be undertaken. Our **suggestions** raise major issues that need further work or clarification and reflect such factors as:

- the need for much more background research,
- more discussion with support agencies, councils and funding bodies, and
- confirmation of demand and the real benefits for their communities.

## Recommendations

1. That a county-wide strategy be developed to raise the profile of village halls as a focus for civic pride and the significant role they play as 'recruitment centres' in parish life. The strategy might also link them into clusters, partly to counter their isolation, partly to share skills, and partly to investigate the sharing of equipment and possible cost savings.
2. That this strategy be promoted through biennial meetings arranged by NAVACH, which should be on fixed dates. Perhaps the next one could be on generic issues (e.g. fundraising and volunteer management), followed up by workshops covering specific issues, such as the new licensing procedures, and the potential for a joint building insurance scheme etc.
3. That a database be prepared on all village and community halls (perhaps with the help of parish clerks), covering size and facilities, activities and number of user groups, age and condition of building, ownership and funding sources, maintenance and insurance costs, and any plans for expansion. This could be in the form of a survey based on the questionnaire used at the AGM above.
4. That NAVACH prepares or commissions a business plan that clarifies its roles, defines its staff requirements, agrees a funding strategy to make it viable, and develops a marketing strategy so that it becomes the first point of contact for all halls. Even the name might benefit from a change.
5. That a conference hosted by NAVACH for parish and district councils be held to share best practice of managing halls and partnership working. Defining a more sustainable funding strategy is often complicated by differences of ownership, with village hall trusts either owning the freehold, or a lease from parish council, the district authority or another body. These bodies give very different levels of financial support to the village halls, which could be explained in the conference.

## Suggestions

6. That a funding strategy be prepared for all village and community halls, based on the needs identified in the database, the capital value of the buildings (anything in excess of £50 million), the annual revenue income and outgoings, and the value of the volunteer input. (Valuing volunteers is important - and if managing a building costs 5% of its capital value, then volunteers skills could be as much as £2.5million a year). While most village halls can cover running and maintenance costs, the general lack for major capital funding is chronic. For such capital works village halls would benefit from an endowment fund of £2 million. The argument must be that village halls are a vital resource, not a financial burden.

After village halls (the social hubs in their communities), we come onto the subject of village networks or forums. Within the scope of this review, we focussed on local newsletters, though it should be emphasized that they are only one of the several means of local communication. Others include word-of-mouth, notice boards, local meetings and interactive websites.

### **Notts News Surveys**

Earlier this year, Notts News undertook a survey of its 124 newsletter members, and received 39 replies (a creditable 31.5% response). The main points were as follows.

- Of the 39 newsletters, 17 were church magazines, 17 independent newsletters, and 4 run by the local parish council.
- Regularity was as follows. 24 monthly, 6 bi-monthly or ten issues pa, and 3 quarterly.
- 10 produced their newsletters in other formats - 6 large print, 3 website and 1 on tape.
- Funding - adverts 31, subscriptions (usually for church magazines) 17, parish council 10, donations or sponsors 10, church 5. Parish newsletters are generally free.
- Production. The 39 newsletters involved 8 paid editors and 20 paid printers. There were also 33 volunteers, though since a newsletter at one of our meetings boasted as many as 50 volunteers, numbers are very variable.
- Other forms of local information and networks included notice boards (all 38), shop and post office windows, pubs, libraries and the internet (17).
- Main needs were for more production volunteers 9, more distributors and finance 8 each, artwork and articles 8, training 5, and help with editing and printing 2.

Other key points made were

- the need for funds for new machinery,
- recognition for the work of volunteers,
- the need for local authorities to make more use of local newsletters to inform residents of roadworks, planning items, policing issues etc,
- training needed in computer graphics, IT and the internet,
- difficulties in getting articles and getting them on time,
- how to price adverts, and

- a comparative survey of different publishing tools.

(Last year, Notts News undertook a survey of its members and received 44 responses (a 35.5% response). Two main points emerged.

- Printing - 15 had their own printing equipment (of which 6 were used by other newsletters), while 24 used a commercial printer. 26 would be interested in using a joint printing facility, and most could provide copy in electronic format.
- Finance - 31 paid for printing from subscription and advert income, 24 received support from their parish council or church, while only 4 depended on some form of grant for printing. Yet 22 depended on some form of grant to help cover printing costs. About half felt there was likely to be a problem funding printing costs in the future.)

## Village Survey

From our village meetings, the following summarizes local communication methods

- Parish meetings in Elton on the Hill help as and when necessary, with minutes given to every household in the village (64 on the electoral roll). Notice board by telephone box, and one inside church for PCC news. Local newsletters if necessary between meetings. Word of mouth by parish clerk. For IT, all rely on personal computers which can create bug problems.
- *The Rudd* is out every month, for sale (50 pence) with a 550 print run, less than 10% of village population. Also local information technology association, but parish council not on the web. Notice board recently vandalized, internal boards in halls, schools and shop windows. Virtual Villages scheme coming to an end. Ruddington will maintain their initiative because they have free (volunteer) IT technical support (RCC offer support at £40/hour). 'Communications still a problem in this village'.
- Everton (with about 330 households) has open sessions at council meetings, a local parish newsletter, and bi-monthly member surgeries (to date poorly attended). Couldn't have produced their parish plan without IT and emails.
- Farnsfield with about 3,000 residents has notice boards, a church magazine with parish news page, (but only to subscribers), various local websites (but not one for the parish), and a local directory.
- There are three newsletters for the Selston parish - one for each village - entirely self-funded. No local newspaper for about 5,300 households. Communications between the three villages is difficult, and there is no community transport.
- Burton Joyce with 3,500 people has a parish magazine with print run of 1,100. This is church-based but not 'churchy'. Posters, notice boards, the Co-op and parish minutes in the library. No website yet.
- Annesley Felly (of about 500 households) is starting a quarterly newsletter, and recently set up a new website (course from CVS). The new vicar mentioned that there is also a website for the whole diocese, which is a great help for local vicars looking for youth workers, events management and bouncy castles etc.

- Gunthorpe has a church parish magazine that covers three villages. Includes parish council minutes, train and bus timetables.
- South Clifton produces a newsletter twice a year.

### **Newsletter Workshops**

In our invitation to all newsletter editors, we suggested the same agenda for the two workshops, covering technology, marketing, staffing issues, and finances. The newsletters represented were the *Badger News*, *Carlton News*, *Community News* (for Underwood Bagthorpe Selston Jacksdale Westwood), *The Dover Beck* (Oxton, Epperstone and Gonalston), *Forest Town Crier*, *Langold Village News*, *Lowdham with Caythorpe and Gunthorpe Parish Magazine*, and *Ranskill Star*, plus *Notts News* and *The Ace* (Association of Church Editors). Print runs ranged from 1,100 to 6,100. The main discussion points were as follows.

#### a) Technology and design

Through discussion, the advantages of website newsletters were agreed as follows.

- Websites are cheaper to run,
- they can be made inter-active, involving the readership much more easily than letters,
- they reach a wider international audience, which
- may attract more advertisers, and
- they are live all the time.

Against which websites can be very time consuming to keep them fresh. However, not everyone has the technology, so websites must be regarded as a supplement not a replacement to newsletters. Two of the ten newsletters attending the workshops had a backup website, but none were ready or willing to transfer solely to the web. Main concerns were that:

- our constitution specifies that a copy shall be delivered to every household,
- our newsletter involves 50 volunteers in producing and delivering the newsletter. That in itself is an important aspect of village life, talking to local people in each street,
- hard copies of each newsletter are part of our village archive. Technology may be moving on, making paper redundant, but the long-term quality of CD copies is at present risky, yet
- webs must be part of our forward strategy. To schoolchildren, it is almost second nature. 'Pictures don't have to be static, words don't have to be silent.'

At the second workshop, some were interested in training and IT support to upgrade their desktop publishing skills, improve the design of their newsletters and the quality of images.

#### b) Marketing to increase the readership

This subject raised perhaps the most contentious issue - whether or not to cover local issues of current concern.

- Against getting involved were those whose constitutions expressly forbid any political coverage. There would also be political flak from councillors and councils. There was strong reluctance 'to stir up a hornet's nest' - even the use of a spot colour could raise problems if associated with any of the main parties. Another problem is that covering such issues would almost certainly need interviews of proponents, opponents and local people to ensure a balance in articles. This would make the job much more onerous.
- In favour were those (a definite minority) who could see that such coverage might increase interest among their readership. Also in some cases, councils might like to test local opinion on contentious issues (providing each side is balanced). There is also the issue that if newsletters are an important source of archive material, then ignoring local contentious issues could give a very distorted view of village life.

The general feeling was that newsletters should cover information and events calendars, human interest stories, and sounding out local opinion of clear options. They should not be part of any campaign. The Nottinghamshire RCC is investigating a local press cuttings service with the county council, ensuring that relevant officers and members receive key articles. This would promote the value of newsletters. It could also work in reverse, so that newsletters are notified of forthcoming council activities.

Most were cautious in their relations with the local press. One newsletter sent copies to their nearest local paper, but most were ignored or refused help, being considered solely as competition for local advertising.

#### c) The value of volunteers

Surprisingly, this seemed to raise the least problem. Most had no difficulty in finding volunteers to help with delivering the newsletters. However, most also had concerns about continuity after they themselves stopped editing, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to involve young people and 'incomers'. It is not clear why this differs from the wider survey findings by Notts News earlier this year, except that our sample was significantly smaller than the 39 newsletters in that survey.

#### d) Financial viability

Perhaps the most heartening discussion point was that all the established newsletters were viable, or would be within a year. One newsletter with a moderate print run said that she had no worries about continuity - when she retired, there was a local business man who was interested in running it. Many newsletters would attract business people as viable business ventures - which is a major success for those volunteers who have established them.

One small issue concerns church magazines, most of which also depend on subscriptions. Although these are voluntary, inevitably they will exclude significant sections of any local community, quite apart from the fact that they will also have a strong religious content. It is not possible to say to what extent such magazines complement parish newsletters, or

compete with them. Few parishes will be able to support both.

Options discussed for raising income and reducing costs were as follows.

- A readership survey would confirm local levels of interest, while a similar survey of their advertisers would check on the newsletter's effectiveness, and comparison of advertising rates with the local papers. Rates should reflect not only costs of production and distribution, but also the hidden costs of all the volunteer effort (cf our comments above about the real value of managing village halls). One newsletter reported that two of their advertisers had asked to be taken out for a while, since they were still coping with the demand set up by earlier adverts!
- Printing costs could be reduced in one of two ways. Groups of newsletters could combine to commission three year contracts from one printer, achieving bulk savings. Alternatively, newsletters could set up a joint venture to purchase their own printing machine (perhaps with a local CVS or the Notts RCC), with resultant savings set aside to employ a print assistant. Such a venture might develop into a social enterprise that could begin to make real surpluses for training local people in all aspects of newsletter editing, design, marketing and production.

## **Recommendations**

7. That every newsletter reviews its business as a 'going concern', with proper costings for printing, equivalent costs for production and distribution, all set against the existing and potential income.
8. That newsletters undertake surveys of their readers and advertisers to assess the reach within their community, and the effectiveness of their adverts. The purpose is to review its editorial contents and advert rates. Ensuing profits (or surpluses) could be used to improve the newsletters or deliver other benefits to the community - e.g. in training young people, or projects to reduce social isolation through the newsletter.
9. That, as with NAVACH, we think Notts News should develop a business plan. This would clarify its functions, the staff and skills needed to undertake those activities, how it should be funded and marketed.
10. That the AGM of Notes News discusses the issue of setting up local groups or clusters of newsletters, investigating the potential for joint policy development and cost savings etc. The news editors should also consider the ways they use district newspapers and the virtual villages events page to promote activities and events to a wider audience. Also that the annual design competition be reintroduced, perhaps involving leading print designers or the regional press.

## **Suggestions**

11. That parish newsletters each review their constitutions every so often to ensure that they can adapt to current trends. 100% coverage of households may be important, but the avoidance of any contentious issues on the grounds that they are 'political' needs to be reviewed. In the end, as with key terms like capacity building and community development, there may be some confusion as to exact meanings.
12. That a database should be prepared of all newsletters, which would confirm those that are healthy with the potential to generate surpluses, those that need support to develop and become viable, and those that would benefit from joint marketing and printing. This should develop a strategy for spending surpluses locally (e.g. on sponsoring village carnivals or village halls, and supporting local training schemes, and developing some newsletters as social enterprises.)

The parish council (or parish meeting for parishes under 250 people) is the first tier in local government. They have various statutory functions.

- Parish councils can raise a precept on the council tax, although some do not. (Either they have other sources of income, or they all work as volunteers.)
- They all have parish clerks to advise on their legal responsibilities, although some clerks are unpaid.
- They have the right to comment on all planning applications in their area, which can create tension with the planning authority when their recommendations are overturned.
- Parish councils can be responsible for a wide range of local duties - such as managing local cemeteries, allotments, playing fields, village halls, newsletters, and car parks.

In addition, there are some ways in which they can extend their role, most notably in helping to develop local projects or community groups in their villages.

Chapter 4 above summarized the main issues parishes face, such as youth disaffection and anti-social behaviour, affordable housing and the lack of families in their village, traffic conditions and the lack of public transport. As stated earlier, in the main these are not 'parish pump' issues. They can substantially affect the quality of village life. And even the small issues like dog dirt and road verges raise the question of how these local functions can be better managed.

Within this review, we have only been able to assess training needs in those parishes that we visited. And already, under the government's Quality Councils initiative for parishes, there is a county-wide training scheme aimed at parish councils. This County Training Partnership for parish councils includes the LSCC (Local Society of Council Clerks), Nottinghamshire RCC and NALC (National Association of Local Councils), who manage the scheme in the county. It offers training in core topics and skills as follows.

### 1 Roles and Responsibilities - including

- roles, duties and responsibilities of chair, councillors, clerk and council,
- employment,
- professional development,
- public relations, and
- communications.

## 2 Law and Procedures

- powers and functions of local councils,
- new legislation and sources of advice,
- agendas and meeting procedures,
- Standing Orders, and
- election procedures and conditions of office.

## 3 Finance

- accounting and statutory guidance,
- budgeting, precept and Income,
- internal and external audit process,
- insurance,
- sources of advice on financial matters, and
- Best Value.

## 4 Planning and Community Action

- the planning framework,
- effective observations on planning applications,
- partnership in local government,
- funding sources, and
- active groups in the community.

Each session runs for three hours, except for an Introductory session which lasts about one and a half hours. In addition, NALC, SLCC and the University of Gloucestershire will run additional courses on general or specific themes as required. Unfortunately, training budgets among parish councils are either very small or non-existent, which means that the CTP is probably realistic in its projections for no more than 10 to 15 councillors a year registering for training in the next few years. This highlights the discrepancy between level of training councillors want, and what they actually need.

Most of the topics above relate mainly to the statutory roles of parish councils, and can be supplied by NALC and SLCC. The rest, however, including professional development, public relations and communications (under roles and responsibilities), and partnership in local government and active groups in the community (under planning and community action) quite clearly suggest the potential for community leadership by parish councils. DEFRA (the government department for the environment, food and rural affairs) is encouraging RCCs to take the lead on this work within the county parish training partnerships.

## **Village Survey**

For this training needs analysis, we sought to clarify the following questions (supplied by the rural theme group).

- To what extent do parish councillors see their role as community activists and facilitators?
- What are the barriers that may restrict this role (time, apathy, lack of confidence and skills etc)?
- What are the areas where parish councillors would welcome particular support?
- What are the areas in which they would welcome skills development or training?
- Is there a need or interest in 'whole parish council' training where a facilitated session is held with parish councils to explore with them the role the council as a facilitator for community action and the support they would need to make things happen in their particular village?

From our village meetings, the following issues became apparent.

- 'Training is available, but initially it is difficult to locate'. This suggests the need for a register of providers and courses. Courses should also be offered to parish clusters.
- Marketing and communication skills for parish councillors, including how to engage with the community. One parish has an annual dinner. One saw itself as the funnel between the district council and local residents.
- Making parish procedures more accessible to local people - e.g. working groups rather than formal committees, and much more open parish meetings. All open part of their meetings to the public, but the response is low unless there is a major issue. 'I sit on boards of multinational companies, and incredibly I find that parish council meetings are more formal'.
- A simple induction pack for each parish to welcome new councillors and clerks. All councillors should go on an induction course. Many councillors don't have the time for training. Home videos could be sent to new councillors on the work of parish councils.
- 'Councillors won't go on training - either because they don't want to, it's too far to the training venue, or the subjects on offer are too 'dry''. Few councillors are willing to take up training. Some have a problem over the new Declaration of Interests that excludes parish councillors from district decisions affecting their parish. [This may be a misinterpretation - pointing to the need for better induction or training.]
- There are difficulties in getting some parishes to raise a precept. Also wide variation in precepts, depending on local trusts and maintenance agreements with their district etc. 'Our precept is £30 a head. This is too little for what's needed, but too high for most of our residents' (in an area of high multi-deprivation). Difficulties in accessing grants from GOEM/emda. 'The community empowerment fund has been replaced by the single pot, with much less local delegation, even on small grants'.
- Too many parish clerks are part-time or even unpaid (some by choice). Need procedures for dealing with conflict between clerks and councils (though no parishes we met were in dispute). The role and responsibilities of each need to be

clearly understood. Clerks should be employed for longer hours, and need IT support and equipment.

- Too many underestimate the need for competent clerks, and how time-consuming his/her role is (an example are cemetery audits a recent new burden on most parishes and clerks). Two clerks are training for Quality Parish status, but all will find it difficult to ensure all councillors stand for election (rather than being co-opted). 'I don't know any other clerk yet' suggests isolation.
- Specific training needs mentioned were procedures for dealing with public complaints. One parish would like training or advice on more effective lobbying and campaigning. 'Who lobbies for all parishes?'

### **Provisional Findings**

First, half the parishes felt they had an important role beyond their statutory responsibilities (managing the precept and commenting on planning applications etc). However, there were various difficulties in this wider role - which are essentially twofold.

- i. There is a real difficulty in attracting new councillors to stand for election. All the parishes we met had to co-opt at least some of their members. This is similar to the difficulties that village halls face getting volunteers, but is not such an issue for parish newsletters. For parish councils, it may be that the emphasis on the local government structures and formal council procedures are in themselves off-putting. Parish plans that had influence over district councils might attract more people to become involved.
- ii. Many councils that are keen to get involved in wider community issues may still lack key skills. These include inappropriate public consultations, lack of networking skills or support, and little understanding of the political process or time taken to achieve any progress. There is also little appreciation of how to deal constructively with criticism.

Second, many councillors do not see the need for training. This reinforces the voluntary nature of their work, perhaps at the expense of providing a strategic vision and local action for the village. Informal training might start in the annual meetings that each district hosts for parish councils and their clerks. One half might be devoted to training on specific local authority issues (explaining planning regulations and the rates etc), while the second half could discuss two or three policy issues of strategic concern (the role of parish plans, local village management or developing a strategy for young people etc). Districts might even offer two such joint meetings a year, one hosted by them, the other hosted by the parishes. At present, one district merely uses these events to talk at the audience.

Third, marketing is one major subject area where training is needed.

- This is partly to ensure that local people feel comfortable raising issues at parish council meetings, how to engage communities in issues of joint concern, and how to develop their roles beyond any local parish plan etc. Too many parish council meetings are still too formal, and they find it difficult to engage local people, particularly the young. One might start this process with a welcome note to all new residents.

- Marketing is also needed to show how effective parish councils can be, so attracting new councillors. Status is important - for some, parish council membership is their first step before going on to district, county or even Westminster. However, some parish councils are seen as a small clique within their village - too few are seen as dynamic.
- Parish councils might also benefit from 'protocols' with district and county councils, so that they develop a higher profile, with more influence on key decisions.

Fourth, the actual venues for training may be too remote. Annual training courses in Newstead, Ollerton or Southwell will always be too far for many parishes - particularly those at the periphery of the county. Ideally annual training programmes should be offered throughout the county, within clusters of villages. However, as NALC points out, if attendance at even annual sessions is low, and the first local sessions only attract a handful, professional advisors are unlikely to repeat their voluntary training services. Perhaps a marketing strategy is needed between the parish councils and the training agencies to overcome this problem, and reduce the risk of non-attendance.

Fifth, many parish councils do not have a training budget, and some do not even raise a precept. No precept will often mean that the clerk is unpaid, which we think is wrong. Each parish also needs a training budget, for both clerk and councillors. There is a new training bursary for clerks that would provide up to £100 for smaller parishes (those with incomes under £10,000) provided it was matched by them. This could raise a significant training budget for the county as a whole, and help to ensure that every training provider is better funded by its primary client group.

Sixth, some councillors thought that more might appreciate the importance of training if it were less 'formal'. Some even suggested home learning, at least for induction training, perhaps through a video. One clerk suggested two specific courses for training - in complaints procedures, and working in partnership with local authorities.

Finally, there does seem to be a low level of IT competence. Although two councils mentioned RCC or Bassetlaw CVS for their IT support, others mentioned difficulties of networking through personal computers, their hardware problems and lack of access to broadband. None of the ten parishes had an inter-active website.

## Recommendations

13. That a database be prepared of all the 200 parishes in the county (and those settlements not parished). This should include population, size of council and the number elected, total income a year broken down by precept, local income and district council allocations, and the main items of expenditure. This could form the basis for a co-ordinated website database for all parishes (as for example in Leicestershire).
14. That every parish be encouraged to set a budget that includes adequate payment for its clerk (a few clerks are unpaid) and a training budget for both clerk and councillors. Although it is often at the interface, parish councils are not part of the voluntary sector. They are a major opportunity, denied to urban districts and cities, to show how important and useful local councils should be.
15. That each district hosts at least two meetings a year for all parishes and clerks in their area - with at least one chaired by the parishes. This should improve understanding of common problems, serve as informal training events for those councillors who don't see the need for training, enable much more networking among parishes, and focus on issues of local concern at least once a year.
16. That LSPs (local strategic partnerships) clarify their procedures so that all relevant agencies understand how they can influence their strategic documents. It might help if LSPs alternated meetings, first to discuss district and sub-regional strategy, the other to focus on specifically local issues - to be discussed from the village perspective.
17. That every parish council should review its operations and identify weaknesses that need to be addressed, whether through training, local meetings or negotiation with their district authority. In particular, they should look at how they 'market' their work to residents, and how they involve local people in their work. This might result in a well-designed pack that promotes the activities of parish councillors.

## Suggestions

18. That parish councils might monitor their record with the planning authority and identify reasons for high or low levels of agreement between the two parties. In particular, parishes with parish plans need to monitor these results, and analyse reasons for any differences. It is necessary to strike the right balance between planning law and local opinion.
19. That parishes and districts should investigate the benefits of local area forums. Whether under the formal current setup in Bassetlaw, the more informal forums being supported by the county, or the ad-hoc issue-based forums among neighbouring villages.
20. That all councils (parish, district and county) consider ways of simplifying their paperwork. All major reports should have one page summaries of the main points and recommendations, with the full documents on the web. At present, too much volunteer time is spent speed reading overlong reports, in which major points are lost in the overall verbiage. This is true at all levels of government.

The basic purpose of this rural infrastructure review was to clarify the support needs of key village groups. This we have done in the preceding three sections, with their 20 recommendations and suggestions for village halls, newsletters and parish council training needs.

### **Rural Proofing**

The second task of this rural infrastructure review was to suggest how rural issues could be fairly represented in wider strategies. Here there seem to be two main alternatives. The first, as exemplified by the Countryside Agency's *Rural Proofing - policy makers' checklist* (and by the Greater Nottingham Partnership's *Rural Proofing Framework*), is to ensure that all strategic documents and policies are proofed so that their impact in rural areas takes account of specifically rural characteristics.

This generic approach can be useful, but only up to a point. For example, in a brief look at the seven community plans in Nottinghamshire, villages, parishes and rural issues merit hardly any references - except for Gedling. And even there, the role of parish councils is unclear.

A second more specific approach to rural proofing would be to identify and emphasize the specific issues that are of common concern and need action. One example of concerted action at county level was the pilot project to improve rural bus services in the north of the county (the Keyline, Linkline and Flexline scheme). Other issues could be agreed for each district at their annual parish conferences. From our village survey, issues to focus on might include:

- the importance of parish plans and how to make them more effective,
- new development and the importance of affordable housing to help support essential local facilities,
- traffic conditions on heavy trunk roads, and
- local employment and the need to encourage more rural jobs.

Whatever approach is taken (and we prefer the second), we think rural proofing needs to have an agency that can draw it together. This could be a continuing role for the Rural Theme Group, working in association with the annual parish conferences. It is a major task that will need the following elements and skills:

- an understanding of local governance - the powers and the potential of parish councils to lead in their villages, and agree priorities for action,
- IT support for the whole programme so that everyone involved is better informed about rural policy objectives and action timetables,

- co-ordination of the process, from liaison with parish conferences and LSPs to ensuring that the local community infrastructure and excluded groups are properly engaged. Also monitoring action, and sharing successes.

For this continuing role, perhaps the first task is for the rural theme group to draw up draft terms of reference.

Finally, we return to the three levels of organisation spelt out in section 3. Before that, however, it is important to reiterate that our review is only based on perceptions and meetings with ten village groups, two newsletter workshops, and a session with the NAVACH AGM. The suggestions for support agencies and statutory authorities are only as seen from the village perspectives.

## **Village Support Groups**

We have assessed the importance of three key agencies to village life:

- the village hall acting as the social hub,
- the newsletter providing a forum for local information, and
- the parish council as a strategic forum and local source of small grants.

We have also stressed the importance of another key agent - the church, chapel or other religious venue - for the community facilities they offer beyond their faith activities.

Over-arching all the specific recommendations concerning village halls, newsletters and parish training needs, we think there are three generic issues common to all village support groups. These are lack of co-ordination, lack of marketing skills, and lack of resources.

### **i) Co-ordination**

The first problem - the lack of local co-ordination - stems from the isolation of many local agencies, and the lack of effective partnerships. For example, most of the groups we met had an impressive array of key skills. But for new volunteers and for new specific requirements (e.g. data protection, disabled access, asbestos removal and working with children) not only did they not always know which training agency to turn to, but they seldom approached the same agencies in neighbouring villages to learn from their experience, and share common problems.

In the ten villages we met, there were few partnership structures - either formal or informal. This reinforces the sense of isolation. This is not a criticism, since most villages in our survey were able to get members of their 'local mafia' together at short notice. Yet there are few local agreements between parish council, village hall and newsletter on how each might address and develop key issues. We found examples of councils not supporting village halls, and newsletters avoiding issues on which councils should be seeking community views. In other villages, such co-ordination was happening, but it was largely informal and historic. Examples of good practice are needed so that others might benefit from their success - which might develop into a countywide awards scheme.

## ii) Resources

Second, parish councils, newsletters and village halls are generally under-resourced. This may only reflect the voluntary and community sector in general, but some village support groups themselves ignore funding sources specifically available only to them.

- Training budgets are a clear example. All parishes should set an annual training budget. And now all small parishes should access the training bursaries (via NALC or SLCC).
- Even on something as clear as audits, some small parishes don't accept any grants partly to avoid audit fees. Yet for parishes with income under £5,000 a year, the audit fee is only £50.
- The case for village halls needs to be made loud and clear. Funding new requirements (e.g. for disabled access) needs effective lobbying as well as a clear income and fundraising strategy. There might also be savings to be made from negotiating joint building insurance schemes.
- Some newsletters with commercial value at present do not raise all their potential income. This is money that through agreement could be earmarked for village schemes - such as village hall improvements, local training for young people, and even developing their own social enterprise.

Finally on the question of funding, all parties need to agree a strategy for developing Quality Councils and *Building Civil Renewal*. Part of this will be underpinned by the need to ensure 'best value' from existing resources. Is the following rough division of government funding accurate, and how can one agree how to measure value for money.

- Notts county council           £613m
- Seven district councils       £79m
- Parish councils               £4m
- Support agencies             £2m

The crucial question is whether say doubling the total annual budget of Nottinghamshire's parishes would transform their capacity and capabilities, without affecting education, highways and planning services in any way. Largely this comes down to what extent it is possible and desirable to devolve services down to parishes, and whether this expansion would encourage many more local people to stand for election to their parish councils.

## iii) Marketing

The third weakness of the village support group sector is their lack of any marketing skills. This relates back to the isolation of many village groups, and is perhaps most obvious in the lack of any common message from villages. There is no clear voice for rural issues from the villages themselves. We have suggested that the annual meetings in each district for parish councils be twice a year, or even quarterly. But they should also be open to village hall and newsletter representatives, so that common themes and issues can be aired regularly.

Another way of getting heard is for villages to form clusters. These can be based on

- strategic issues of common concern, like traffic calming,
- newsletter clusters to share common resources like a printing press, or
- parishes working in groups with their district council to develop local delivery of services from a joint budget.

Parishes also need to market their work more effectively among their villages. Local groups, schools, young people and the elderly need to be engaged meaningfully so that the parish councils can speak with confidence on behalf of their residents. For that marketing to be effective, however, it does need resources and responsibilities for local policies and projects. Which brings us on to

## **Statutory Agencies**

The main problem among the public sector seems to be one of attitude. Local village groups feel that their role is misunderstood or belittled. The following comments from our village meetings are how they think they are viewed by the higher authorities. However one-sided they appear, these perceptions point to a failure of communications and effective partnership. Comments included the following.

- ‘On planning applications, our views are ignored. They give much more emphasis to planning law than local opinion’.
- ‘When it comes to strategic policy, we are at the bottom of the pile. LSPs with their strategic overview are not interested in ‘parish pump’ politics’.
- There is general agreement that ‘Nottinghamshire Constabulary is unresponsive’ (against which we should comment that the police are the only agency to use local newsletters regularly).
- ‘At the annual meeting with the district, they talked at us for three hours’.
- At another level, ‘representatives of the ODPM showed little awareness of parishes and parish plans’.

We have suggested that the annual meetings between parishes and districts (and county?) be chaired in rotation, so that parishes can set the agenda at alternate meetings. We also think there is real scope through the local area forums, so long as they are issue-focussed, and are offered access to funds.

Another pressing issue is getting the LSPs to understand and address specifically rural issues. Too many strategic documents repeat general policies concerning economic development, community safety and other ‘targets’. This may mean that local issues are often relegated as too parochial for the strategic vision, or patronized as ‘parish pump’ issues, even though they include such issues as safety on specific sections of main roads, or affordable housing for young families to ensure pupils for small village schools.

Here we would suggest that the LSPs (and even the SSPs) should consider travelling workshops around their area, so that they can meet the villages, discuss the strategic

implications of local issues, and can advise parishes how best to influence their strategic targets.

## Support Agencies

At the heart of any rural infrastructure review is the role of the support agencies. Compared to the three or four key village agencies, there is a plethora of support agencies. Yet we found some ignorance about what services some agencies provide, and some confusion as to which might be the most relevant agency for specific tasks. The Flying Giraffe report confirmed that most agreed there were gaps in support services, and also some overlap. From our meetings with the village groups, the following might improve mutual understanding and better communications.

- To provide better information, we suggest that the support agencies produce an A-Z guide of all their services for local village groups and agencies. It would focus on practical support services that are provided by CVSs, the RCC, and the specific agencies in terms of capacity building, community development, funding support and other resources, with examples in each district. It should also cover all the partnerships that the support agencies sit on, and mechanisms for reporting back to the parishes.
- To deliver services more locally, with effective training 'on their doorstep' etc would ensure that village groups can't excuse themselves on the grounds of it being too far away. Apart from using every annual meeting as an opportunity for at least some group training, training agencies might offer sessions to each village (or group of villages) at one of their parish council meetings - the subject(s) to be agreed by the council and village partners.
- Third is the generic problem of providing a rural voice. Some body needs to promote the range of village issues and problems fairly and cogently so that the strategic partnership policies more accurately reflect these issues and address them. Lobbying must be more effective. At present, there is a county liaison group that meets quarterly (which is administered by NAVO), and the annual meetings for parish councils in each district. These should be used as opportunities to agree common issues of concern, progress made over the last year, and agree action for the next 18 months etc.
- A separate issue (mentioned by several village groups) is that many support agencies and their staff are on short-term funding. This often means that village relations with key members of support agencies and their skills are lost to the community. In the longer term, the revival of villages needs long-term commitment and resources.

In conclusion, there seems to be a lack of co-ordination between parish groups, support agencies and statutory bodies, in which the parish sector is the poor relation. This will only change if all three sectors

- recognize their own strengths and weaknesses,
- understand the potential of working in effective partnerships, and
- focus on important issues that will be implemented.

That underlines the importance of rural proofing, in which the support agencies and the Rural Theme Group have a vital role to play. Nothing will happen without effective communication - which leads us on to one final recommendation.

### **Recommendation**

21. Once this report is agreed by the Rural Theme Group, that it be made available to all parish clerks, village halls and newsletter editors whether by post or e-mail.

Tellus 42  
August 2004.

---

## Acknowledgements

---

Tellus 42 would like to thank all those below who helped with this review.

Eric Ashby	Notts News
Gordon Asher	NAVACH
John Bates	Carlton News
Ian Bradford	Rushcliffe CVS
Len Brookes	Langold's Village News
Kevin Cooper	Nottinghamshire RCC
Jackie Colquitt	Nottinghamshire RCC
Dan Cullen	Nottinghamshire RCC
Barbara and Alan Duffy	Carlton News
John Forkin and Joy Street	Flying Giraffe
Jacque Gandy	Nottinghamshire RCC
Peter Glazier	Carlton News
Paul Green	NAVO
Sharon Hodkin	Newark Advertiser
Ray Hutchings	Rushcliffe BC
Brian Livermore	Notts News
Leigh Marchant	Nottinghamshire County Council
The Ladies	Lowdham WI
Malcolm and Pauline Marples	Forest Town Crier
Dr Bob Middleton	Nottinghamshire RCC
Richard Money	Nottinghamshire County Council
Michael Newstead	BCVS
Lynda Olgilvy	NALC
Nancy Rayner	Carlton News
Don Rowe	Nottinghamshire County Council
Jean Sharman	Carlton News
Norman Simpson	NAVACH
Hilary Skelton	Ranskill Star
Sam Smith	Nottinghamshire RCC
Patricia Stoa	Southwell Diocese
Marilyn Tippett	Nottinghamshire RCC
George Wisz	Audit Commission
Keith Wood	Notts News and ACE

Special thanks to the following interviewees for taking part in the study:

Everton	- David Wright, Liz Jefferies, Barbara de Bel, and David Bardsley
Annesley Felly	- Andrew Ludlow, John Longden, and Rev Liz Turner-Loisel
Brinsley	- Mandy Frost, Stan Smith, and Cllr Hart
Selston	- Jane Johnson, Maureen Barker, Shirley Houseman, Andy Fell, Edward Holt, and Phil Burkitt
Ruddington	- Gavin Walker, Rev Mike Fegredo, and Chris Merton
Elton on the Hill	- Mary Mackie
Burton Joyce	- Lynn West, Rev John Fisher, David and Marion
Gunthorpe	- Mike Elliot, Rev Les Jefferies, Lynn Palmer, Trish Greggs, and Rev Carol Taunton
Farnsfield	- Mike Salt, Doreen Clark, Karen Clarke, David Slight and Rev Faith Cully
North Clifton	- Shirley Day
South Clifton	- Andrea Davis

In particular, we would like to thank staff in the Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council who helped with administrative arrangements for the various workshops and discussion groups and Lynda Ogilvy of the National Association of Local Councils and all the parish clerks who arranged the village meetings.

---

## References

---

Assoc of Notts News: Survey of support needs for printing costs of Notts newsletters, 7/03  
: Survey of Notts Newsletters - Initial Findings, 7/04

Countryside Agency : Rural Proofing - Policy makers checklist

Defra: Community Capacity Building and Voluntary Sector Infrastructure in Rural England,  
: Modernizing Rural Delivery - Lord Haskins Report, 6/04

East Midlands Observatory: Wards in the Bottom 20% of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation

Greater Nottingham Partnership: Rural Proofing Framework

Home Office Civil Renewal Unit: Building Civil Renewal, 12/03

NALC: A Good Councillor's Guide

Nottinghamshire CC, City of Nottingham: Social Need in Nottinghamshire 2004

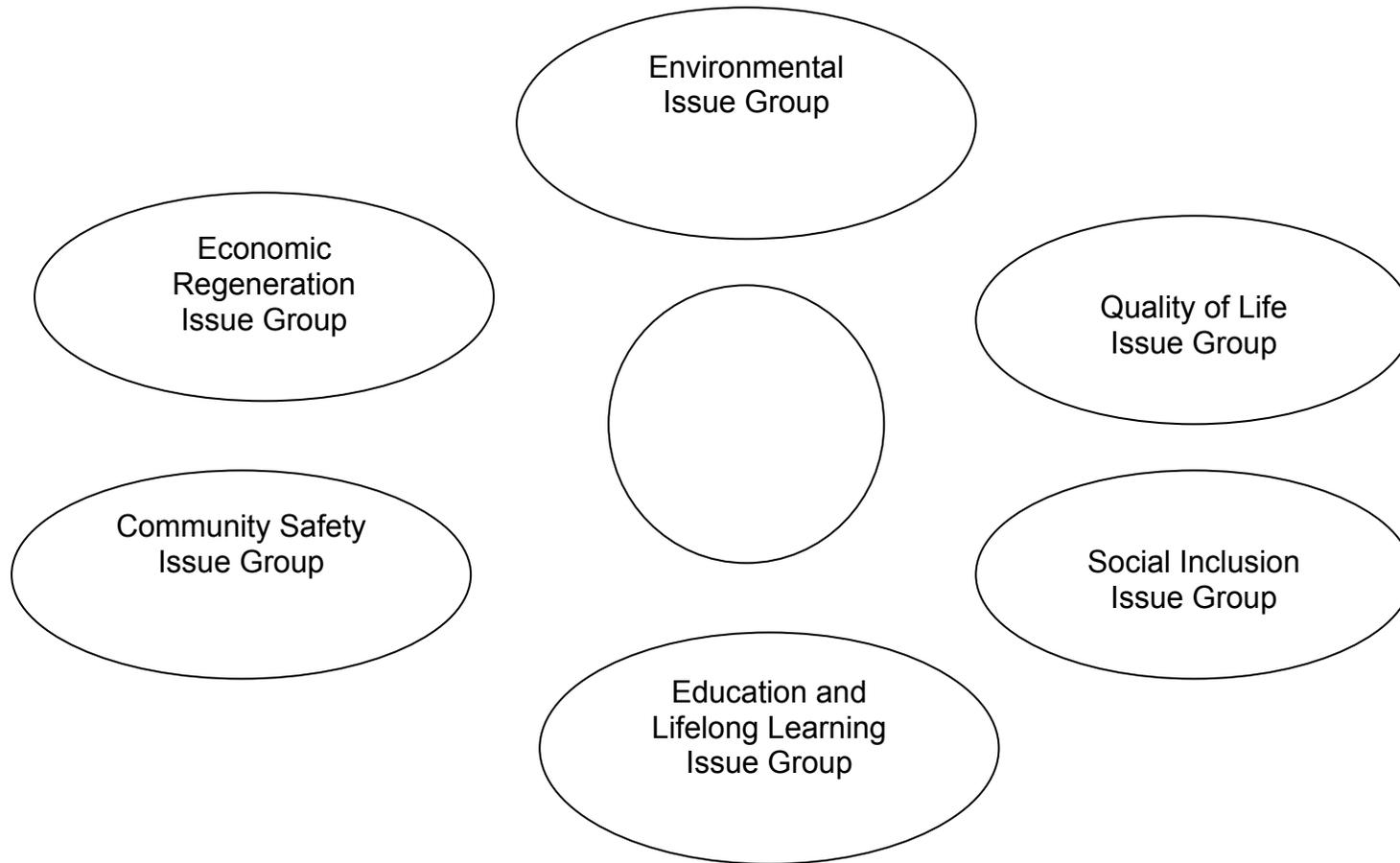
OPM: Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure, 3/04

Rushcliffe BC: Borough/Parishes Relationships  
: Statement - A Partnership with the Parishes

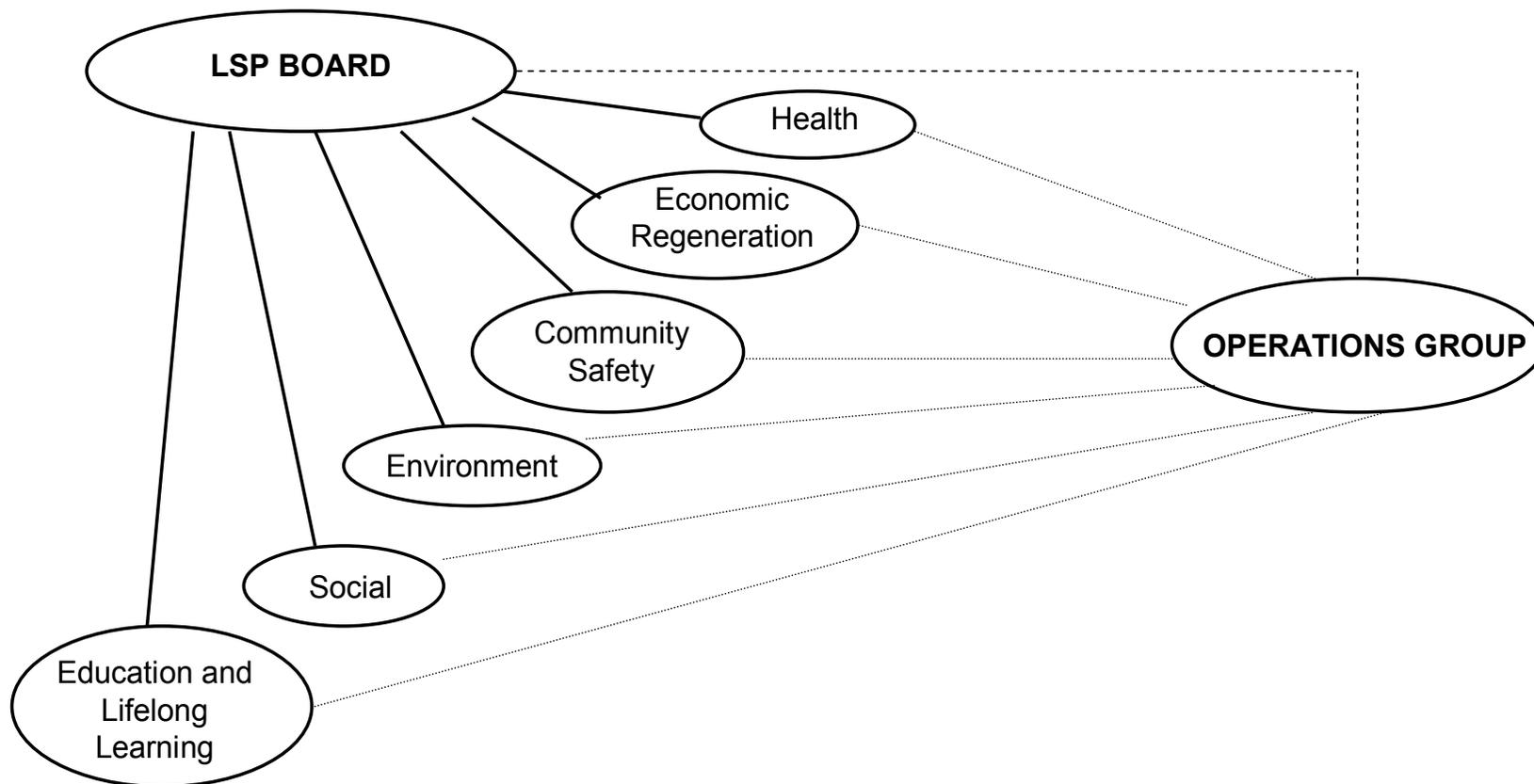
Research of all district, county and agency websites, and numerous village newsletters and parish magazines.



**THE ASHFIELD PARTNERSHIP**

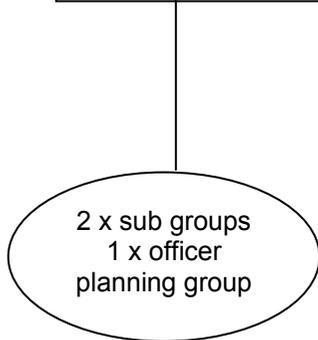
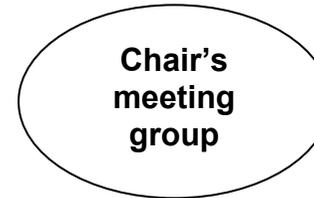


**STRUCTURE OF BASSETLAW LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

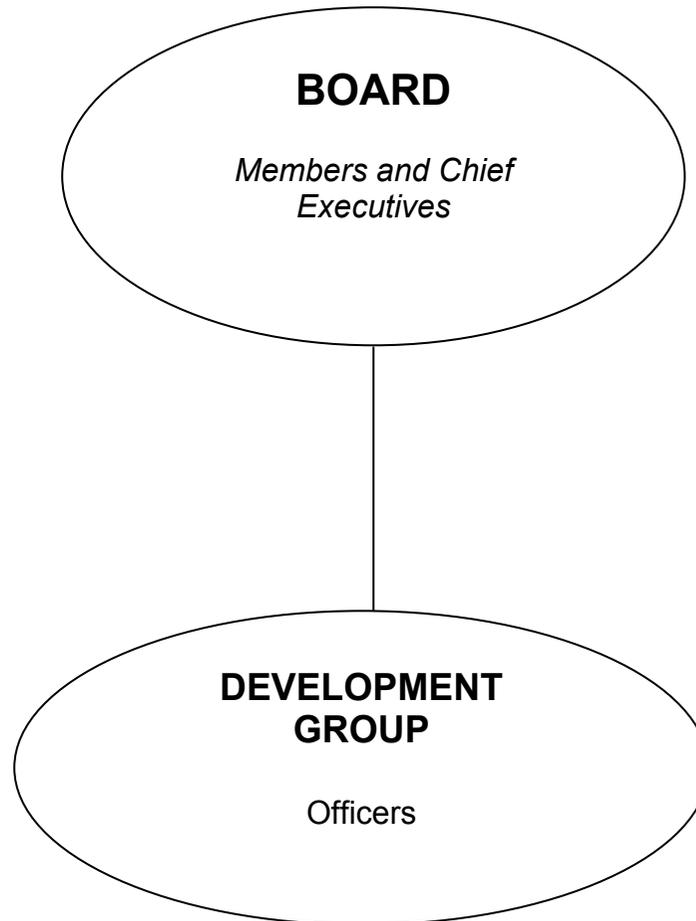


**BROXTOWE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

**BOARD**



# GEDLING LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



**MANSFIELD AREA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

**Ladybrook Estate NMT**

**Bull Farm NMT**

**West Titchfield NMT**

**Northfield Estate NMT**

**Warsop (Royals) NMT**

**Non NRF Neighbourhoods & Communities**

**Neighbourhood Management Development Group**

**Area Assemblies**

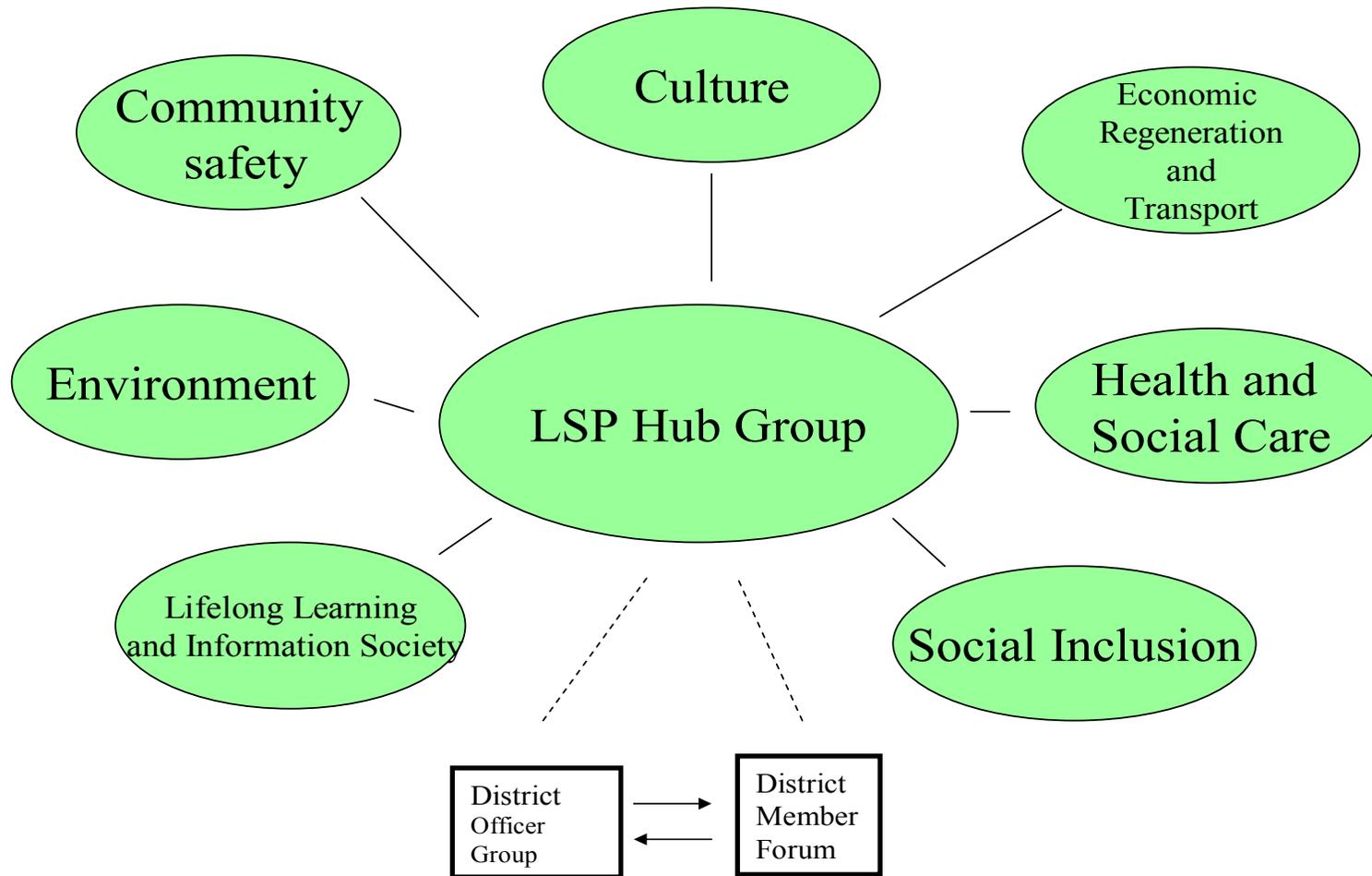
**National Networks**  
**EMDA**  
**GO-EM**  
**Sub Regional Strategic Partnership**  
**Other Local Partnerships**



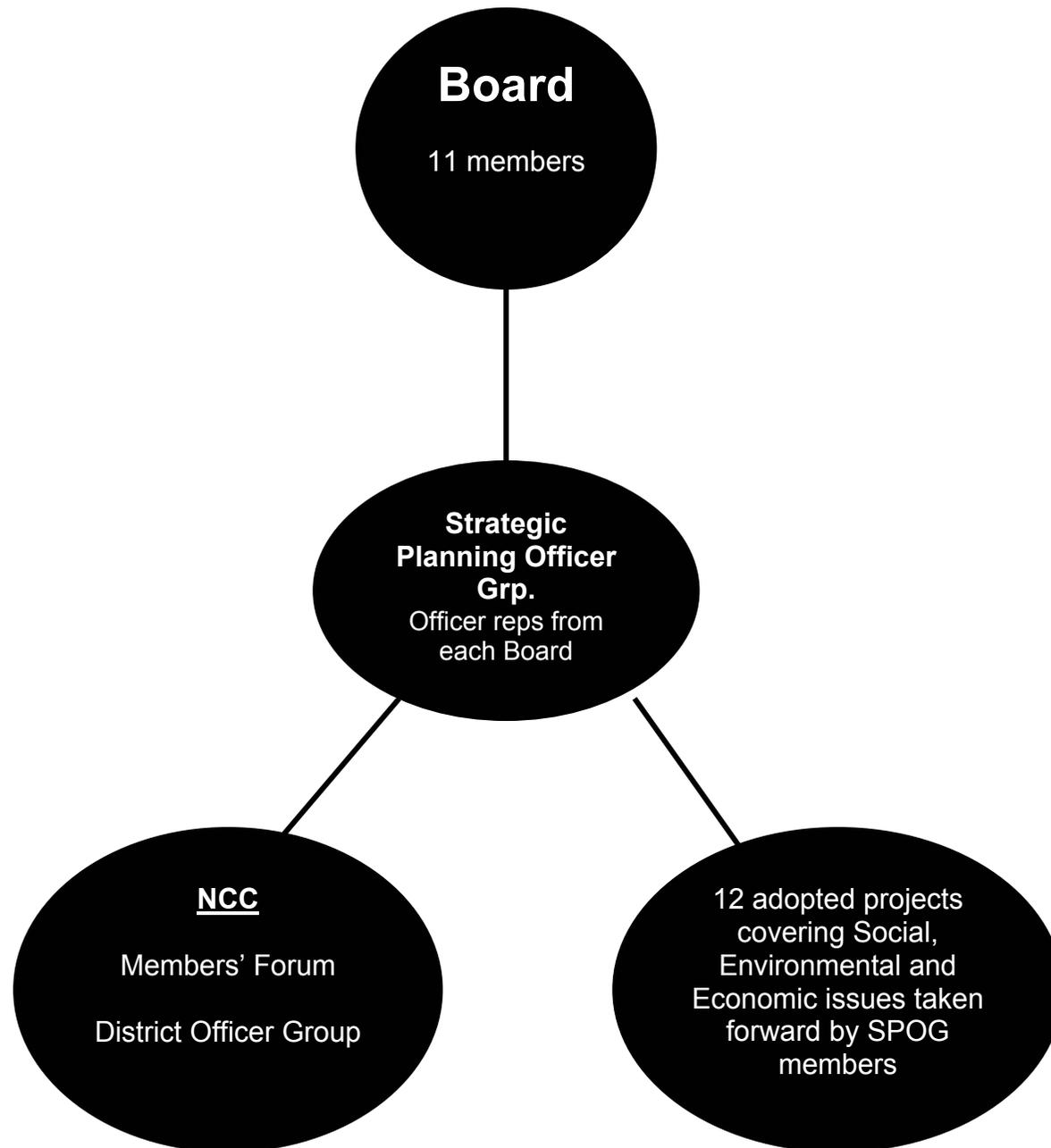
**Community & Voluntary Sector Forum**

**Partners/Service Providers**

## STRUCTURE OF NEWARK AND SHERWOOD LSP



# RUSHCLIFFE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



<b>Rural Theme Group Action Plan</b>					
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Evidence of Need</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead Body</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
<b>Village and Community Halls</b>					
<b>Develop the role of NAVACH</b>	biennial meetings arranged by NAVACH for village and community hall committees	<b>NAVACH agm</b>	<b>Two meetings per annum</b>	<b>NAVACH</b>	<b>£4,000 pa</b>
	a database be prepared on all village and community halls	<b>See current poor databases</b>	<b>December 2004</b>	<b>NAVACH and NRCC</b>	<b>£2,000 pa</b>
	a conference for parish and district councils be held to share best practice on managing halls and partnership working	<b>RIR</b>	<b>February 2005</b>	<b>NAVACH and all councils</b>	<b>£3,000 pa</b>
<b>Secure funding for village and community halls</b>	a business plan for NAVACH that clarifies its roles, defines its staff requirements, agrees a funding strategy to make it viable, and develops a marketing strategy so that it becomes the first point of contact	<b>Proposed at NAVACH agm</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>NAVACH and NRCC</b>	<b>£10,000</b>
	a funding strategy be prepared for all halls, based on the needs of the database, the capital value of the buildings, the annual revenue income and outgoings, and the value of the volunteer input.	<b>further work required</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>NAVACH and NRCC</b>	<b>see business plan above</b>
	investigate the possibility for a capital works endowment fund of £2 million for all halls.	<b>further work required</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>Rural Theme Group</b>	<b>see business plan above</b>

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Evidence of Need</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead Body</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
<b>Newsletters</b>					
<b>Develop the role and independence of newsletters</b>	Notts News should develop a business plan. This would clarify its functions, the staff and skills needed, how it should be funded and marketed.	<b>further work required</b>	<b>July 2005</b>	<b>Notts News</b>	<b>£8,000</b>
	news editors should also consider the ways they use district newspapers and the virtual villages events page to promote activities and events to a wider audience	<b>further work required</b>	<b>December 2004</b>	<b>Notts News, all newsletter editors</b>	
	that the annual design competition be reintroduced	<b>RIR</b>	<b>May 2005</b>	<b>Notts News</b>	
	newsletters each review their constitutions every so often to ensure that they can adapt to current trends	<b>further work required</b>	<b>December 2004</b>	<b>all newsletter editors</b>	
<b>Realize the commercial value of newsletters and investigate there potential as social enterprises</b>	undertake surveys of their readers and advertisers to assess the reach within their community, and the effectiveness of adverts	<b>further work required</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>Notts News, all newsletter editors</b>	
	setting up local groups or clusters of newsletters, investigating the potential for joint policy development and cost savings	<b>further work required</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>Notts News, all newsletter editors</b>	<b>see business plan above</b>
	a database should be prepared, which would confirm those that are profitable, need support, have the potential to generate surpluses, and those that would benefit from joint marketing and printing	<b>further work required</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>Notts News</b>	<b>see business plan above</b>

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Evidence of Need</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead Body</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
<b>Parish Councils</b>					
<b>Raise the profile of parish councils in their communities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• raising the precept</li> <li>• increasing councillor skills</li> <li>• promoting their work</li> </ul>	that a database be prepared of all the 200 parishes in the county, this could form the basis for a co-ordinated website. It should include population, size of council and the number councillors, sources of income and main items of expenditure.	RIR	database by May 2005 and websites by July 2005	Rural Theme Group	database gathering £5,000 pa, and website design £20,000
	every parish be encouraged to set a budget that includes adequate payment for its clerk (a few clerks are unpaid) and a training budget for both clerk and councillors	RIR	May 2005	NALC, SLCC and district councils	£2,000
	every parish council should review its operations and identify weaknesses that need to be addressed, whether through training, local meetings or negotiation with their district authority	RIR	July 2005	SLCC and NALC	£20,000
	well-designed induction packs that promote the activities of parish councillors	RIR	April 2005	Rural Theme Group	£20,000
<b>Improve the value of parish councils within their district and county councils, and with other strategic agencies</b>	each district hosts at least two meetings a year for all parishes and clerks in their area - with at least one chaired by the parishes	RIR	January 2005	NALC,SLCC and district councils	£7,000 pa
	parish councils might monitor their record with the planning authority and identify reasons for high or low levels of agreement between the two parties	RIR	May 2006 onwards	NALC and SLCC	£5,000 pa

Objective	Action	Evidence of Need	Timescale	Lead Body	Estimated Cost
<b>Parish Councils cont...</b>					
	parishes and districts should investigate the benefits of local area forums	further work required	December 2005	All councils	
	induction training throughout county on how the county works and ways to have a voice in decision-making	further work required	April 2005 onwards	Rural Theme Group	£27,000 via LSPs and SSPs
<b>Feedback</b>					
To improve communications	that the Rural Infrastructure Review is circulated to all parish clerks, village halls and newsletter editors	RIR	December 2004	Rural Theme Group	
	all councils (parish, district and county) consider ways of simplifying their paperwork.	further work required	May 2005	NALC, SLCC and all councils	£7,000
	that LSPs and SSPs clarify their procedures so that all relevant agencies can influence their strategic documents		January 2005		