



Community Led Plan Case Study Brookland



Introduction

Brookland is a small, isolated parish on Romney Marsh. Romney Marsh is steeped in history in which Brookland has played its role with references dating back to the ninth century. The land is predominantly agricultural, being part owned by the Crown and Universities with the balance distributed between several established farming families. Residences are scattered with the historical hub of the old village around the High Street being separated from more recent housing developments by the A259 trunk road.

In 2003, the new Parish Council had been stimulated by the Government's promotion of Parish Plans. The then Parish Council Chair recalled "rather than wait for others not to do something, we decided to do something for ourselves".



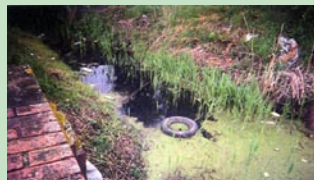
The Process

The Parish Plan kicked off with a well-publicised open-meeting at the Village Hall. Residents were not told what the meeting would be about but were told that it was not to be missed and that refreshments would be provided. This approach stimulated a buzz of excitement around the village that culminated in a well-turned out meeting that included a group of young people. Those present completed post-it notes highlighting their likes and dislikes about living in Brookland.

A Steering Committee, including a young person, was formed and a detailed action plan, rather like a map of the London Underground was drawn up, providing a very visual plan of how and when each part of the process would be carried out. This action plan kept the process on schedule.

A demographic study of the village using local knowledge was undertaken. Age-based focus groups were constructed to hold more detailed discussion on the issues identified at the initial meeting. Six such meetings were held and the findings were published on large wall posters in the Village Hall at a Drop-In day. Again, residents were invited to comment further, using post-it notes stuck to the appropriate wall posters.

A children's photograph day was held and children were paired and provided with disposable cameras. They used these to photograph those parts of the village that they liked or disliked. The best photographs were exhibited and judged at the Drop-In day. The winning photograph is shown on the right.

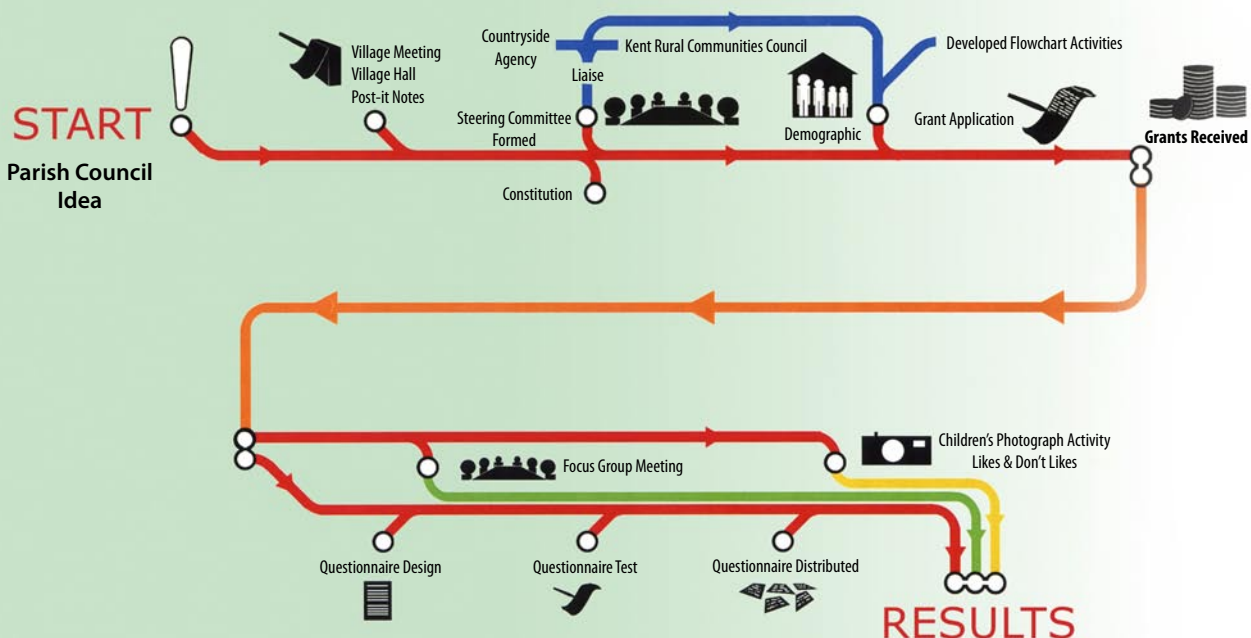


The Parish Plan Group purchased Village Appraisal Software to design and analyse their questionnaire and used the findings, together with those gleaned from the focus groups and other consultation events, to establish an Action Plan.

What is a Parish Plan?

A Parish Plan (also known as a Community Led Plan) is a process that underpins a community's vision for itself across all aspects of social, environmental and economic life. It celebrates positive features and activities, highlights local needs and contains a detailed action plan to help meet those needs.

These plans are produced by and for communities, based on a detailed survey and consultation which is widely inclusive, promotes action and influences others. Good plans; use the Community Led Planning toolkit framework, are supported by external facilitators from the Rural Community Action Network and include a robust evaluation process that ensures their quality.





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Achievements to date

Young People

▶ Asked what they would most like to keep in their village, the young people of Brookland said “the telephone box”. It was the only place in the village to meet and shelter from the weather! Five years and a lot of hard work later, land, planning permission and £36,000 worth of funding having been secured and youth facilities will be installed by the end of February 2009. Facilities will include a youth shelter, with solar-powered light and radio, half football pitch with goal and basketball hoops. The young people of the parish have been involved in choosing the facilities and the final decision was made as a result of negotiation giving consideration to local residents.



▶ A youth club has been established.

Health

▶ CARM (Caring Altogether on Romney Marsh) has worked with the Parish Council to introduce a meeting point at Brookland Village Hall, to provide help and support to older people. This is well attended and includes the chiropody services sought by some 40% of the community.

▶ The Doctor’s surgery continues to be held at the Village Hall, despite earlier doubts that it would continue.



Traffic

▶ A 50 mph speed limit has been imposed on the section of the A259 trunk road that divides the village.



Community Facilities & Activities

- ▶ A football pitch has been developed, adjacent to the Village Hall, and a football team established.
- ▶ Closed at the start of the Parish Plan process, the Village Pub has re-opened.
- ▶ An additional post box has been positioned so that all residents can access the post service without having to walk to the other side of the village, crossing the A259 trunk road.
- ▶ The toddler group has been extended.
- ▶ Other activities have been established including quiz evenings, an art group and a yoga class.

Community Events

- ▶ A regular clean-up day is held annually in April.
- ▶ A village fete will be held, for the first time, in August 2009.

Communication

- ▶ Progress continues to be reported back to the community through the village’s monthly magazine.

Community Benefits

- ▶ Members of the community enjoyed being involved and being asked for their views.
- ▶ A number of projects, including the additional post box and installation of youth facilities, have been the direct result of Parish Plan consultation and more people have been involved in existing projects such as the clean-up day.

Local Authority and Service Provider Engagement

- ▶ The installation of youth facilities has involved excellent support from the Anti-Social Behaviour Investigator within Shepway District Council’s Planning and Communities department, together with the Crime Prevention Officer for the area.

Lessons Learned

- ▶ The production of a Parish Plan involves a lot of hard work and the biggest challenge is motivating people, but it is worth it in the end.
- ▶ The Parish Plan process stimulated action that might not otherwise have happened, or may have taken longer to happen.
- ▶ The Village Appraisal Software was useful for questionnaire compilation and analysis but did not meet requirements with regards questionnaire design. In particular, it was difficult to explore issues in detail that were important to the community. Conversely, questions had to be included that had not been identified by the community as important to the parish.
- ▶ The simplest things sometimes make the biggest impact, for example, an additional post box.

Key Advice for Others

- ▶ Publicise your initial meeting well.
- ▶ Create a buzz at the initial meeting that will help keep the process going with enthusiasm.
- ▶ Involve the community, at all stages, as much as possible.
- ▶ Spend a lot of valuable time talking to residents before thinking about the questionnaire.



This case study forms part of a series evaluating the impacts and benefits of Community Led Plans (including Parish Plans) in Kent. It has been produced by Action with Communities in Rural Kent in collaboration with Brookland Parish. Action with Communities in Rural Kent is a member of South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC) and the national Rural Community Action Network.



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Further Information
www.ruralkent.org.uk www.sercc.org.uk www.acre.org.uk