

INTRODUCTION

‘Crucial to our success will be the degree to which the community transforms its dependency culture into one of self-confidence and enterprise’.

This paper is an attempt to map out the general principles that should guide the approach to community empowerment and capacity building for the Marsh Farm NDC Programme. Based upon those principles, it presents a work programme for the initial period of community development support leading up to the recruitment of the Community Development Co-ordinator post.

As a neighbourhood, there are many unique features about Marsh Farm. What has struck me most is the vision, commitment and imagination of the community representatives that I have met. Over recent years, I have been directly involved in four Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Programmes, three New Deal for Communities (NDC) Programmes, and two Sure Start Programmes. In my experience, deprived and disadvantaged areas often have had the ‘community stuffing’ knocked out of them. Marsh Farm, in contrast, is a resilient community that has evolved many different strategies to cope and survive with a high degree of social and economic stress. Consequently, it has a vibrant community that is bubbling with ideas and fired with enthusiasm.

Therefore, any approach to community empowerment must be appropriate to the special circumstances on Marsh Farm. The wealth of community activity and the strength of community bonds indicates that the level of social capital in the area is high. On the other hand, economic capital is low. The BMG household survey showed Marsh Farm to be an area characterised by a low income levels and high levels of unemployment. Around 40% of the population are dependant upon benefits. The BMG study concludes:

‘Job creation is key, in order to promote the regeneration of the area and to support local services and businesses. This forms a key strand of policy to keep money and wealth within the local community rather than ‘leaking’ out to other communities’.

AN APPROACH FOR MARSH FARM

An effective programme of community empowerment should have a measurable and long lasting impact on the economic regeneration of the area. Indeed, the work of the Centre of Community Enterprise, which is quoted more extensively later in this paper, suggests that viable and sustainable communities must have a high degree of local control over economic activities and resources. The central proposition of this paper is that local economic control is best exercised through various forms of mutual and community enterprise. Community empowerment can then be described as an investment strategy aimed at stimulating and supporting community self-help, initiative and enterprise. Such an approach knits together social and economic goals in order to increase the ‘common wealth’ of the community.

It will need to link into and complement the NDC proposals for the use of the Coulters Building. This is the flagship project of the NDC Programme. A feasibility study for the Coulters Building was completed by Donaldsons in association with Enterprise

Plc. The feasibility study recommends that the building should be used as a 'community resource and entrepreneurial hub'. In other words, as a centre for social and community enterprise.

'The size and location of the Coulters building offers tremendous scope and considerable scale to accommodate the diverse range of existing community-oriented services, as well as providing a physical base for the NDC process. Additionally, though, the Building should provide a creative and enabling hub at the physical heart of the estate that is both accessible to, owned and managed by the local community in its widest sense.'

It follows that such an approach to community empowerment will focus on the following main elements:

- It mobilises community resources
- It is inclusive and involves all sections of the community
- It builds community capacity and social entrepreneurship
- It opens doors to sources of finance and technical/professional support
- It promotes self-help, social enterprise, community ownership and the 'mutualisation' of local public and private sector services and

The initial period of community support work is designed to establish solid foundations for the longer-term programme of community empowerment. The immediate priorities are:

- To gather information in order to produce an accurate community profile of the area and to assemble a good contacts database.
- To develop an initial capacity building training programme.
- To develop a framework that will provide the strategic setting for community empowerment and capacity building in the Marsh Farm NDC area including the development of the appropriate community indicators.
- To establish the Community Outreach Project as a prototype community enterprise.
- To set up a community chest programme.

But before we consider how those priorities can be implemented through an activity plan, it is worth reviewing some of the principles of effective community development.

THE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

There is now a considerable body of literature on the theory and good practice in community development, capacity building and the formation of regeneration partnerships. I do not need intend to review it in its entirety here. But four publications are worth looking at in some detail. These are:

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Guidance for the DETR
- The Scottish Development Centre's toolkit
- Regeneration and Community from the Community Development Foundation
- Centre for Community Enterprise's work on Resilient Communities.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Guidance for the DETR

A useful paper has been produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for the DETR as part of the guidance for SRB bids. It includes a useful summary of the main areas to consider in the development of effective community involvement strategies. This is presented in full overleaf.

<p>Getting started</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map local organisations. • Understand local priorities and skills. • Build confidence through early project work. • Develop a vision and action plans with local communities. <p>Involving communities in partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create partnership structures that work for local communities. • Make resources available for community groups. • Arrange training for both community activists and professionals. • Help community groups with administrative and financial procedures. <p>Creating strong local organisations with their own assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a partnership 'forward strategy', including a strong role for community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider possible models for successor organisations including: development trusts; neighbourhood management organisations; LETS; and credit unions. <p>Developing an infrastructure to build and sustain community organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept that community organisations need long-term support. • Contribute to the better co-ordination of training and support services. • Take steps to secure pre-bid resources for community groups. <p>Monitoring progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a framework for evaluating both concrete outputs and key processes in community involvement. • Ensure appropriate monitoring of progress both by the partnership and the Regional Development Agencies.
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The Scottish Development Centre’s toolkit

The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) has published a toolkit for measuring community development, which includes a comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative community involvement indicators. It has also produced a useful model of the community economic development process. This sets out a planned development process that has three main purposes:

- To enable communities to plan, run and formulate economic regeneration projects.
- To empower communities to influence and communicate effectively with external organisations.
- To ensure that economic regeneration is sustained after the programme ends.

To which I would add a fourth main purpose:

- To assist communities to form effective partnerships with other relevant stakeholders.

The question of how to achieve effective partnership working arrangements has received a lot of attention over recent years. Many of the principles draw upon management and organisational theory, covering such topics as communications, team-working, etc. A good introductory guide is *Building Effective Local partnerships*, written by NCVO on behalf of the Local Government Board. Val Harris has developed a useful organisational checklist for evaluating partnership working arrangements. One of the critical elements is that there is a clarity of roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Whilst establishing that clarity needs to be done for all the stakeholders, in this paper I have concentrated upon the local community as a key stakeholder in the regeneration process.

Regeneration and Community from the Community Development Foundation

As defined in the Community Development Foundation's publication, *Regeneration and Community*, the community (and community organisations) has five roles in regeneration. These are:

- Beneficiaries and users of services
- Consultation and representation of local opinion
- The source of community activity
- Deliverers of services and generators of community economic development
- Potential long-term partners.

In deprived and disadvantaged areas, for the local community to be empowered to play a full and equal role in the regeneration process requires a systematically formulated programme of capacity building. The aim of capacity building is primarily to develop the effectiveness of local community representatives and community organisations. It has three main elements:

- Developing people
- Developing organisations
- Developing community infrastructure.

The important point to remember is that to involve the community in partnerships in any meaningful way requires time, resources, sensitivity and often changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Centre for Community Enterprise's work on Resilient Communities

From Canada comes an exciting new approach to community development. The Centre for Community Enterprise has spent the last three years developing community responses to the havoc wrought on small town communities in British Columbia by globalisation. The volatility of the commodity markets has destabilised the traditional primary industries of fishing, forestry, mining and agriculture causing widespread economic disruption.

The work of the Centre for Community Enterprise examines how some communities overcome such traumatic episodes. These are called 'resilient communities'.

Resilient communities are those communities that 'have taken steps that have enabled them to survive crisis, influence change, and become healthy, vital places for their citizens'.

Resilient communities have twenty-three characteristics in common:

1. Leadership is diversified and representative of age, gender, and cultural composition of the community.
2. Elected community leadership is visionary, shares power and builds consensus.
3. Community members are involved in significant community decisions.
4. The community feels a sense of pride.
5. People feel optimistic about the future of the community
6. There is a spirit of mutual assistance and co-operation in the community.
7. People feel a sense of attachment to their community.
8. The community is self-reliant and looks to itself and its own resources to address issues.
9. There is a strong belief in and support for education and learning at all levels.
10. There is a variety of community enterprises in the community involved in a wide range of activity.
11. Organisations in the community have developed partnerships and collaborative working relationships.
12. Employment in the community is diversified beyond a single large employer.
13. Major employers in the community are locally owned and there is a high degree of local control over economic activities and resources.
14. The community has a strategy for increasing independent local ownership.
15. There is an openness to alternative ways of earning a living and economic activity.
16. The community looks outside itself to seek and secure resources (skills, expertise, finance) that will address areas of identified weakness.
17. The community is aware of its competitive position in the broader economy.
18. The community has a Community Economic Development Plan that guides its development.
19. Citizens are involved in the creation and implementation of the community vision and goals.
20. There is on-going action towards achieving the goals in the Community Economic Development Plan.
21. There is regular evaluation of progress towards the community's strategic goals.
22. Organisations use the Community Economic Development Plan to guide their actions.
23. The community adopts a development approach that encompasses all segments of the population.

Adapted from the Community Resilience Manual, developed and designed by the Centre for Community Enterprise.

The clear and consistent message throughout is that community involvement is not an optional bolt on to regeneration, but that it is essential to its success.

ACTIVITY PLAN FOR THE INITIAL PERIOD OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT WORK

Pulling together some of the themes in the paper, it can be seen that there are two main priorities for the initial period of community development work. These are:

- To gather information in order to produce an accurate community profile of the area and to assemble a good contacts database.
- To develop an initial capacity building training programme.
- To develop a framework that will provide the strategic setting for community empowerment and capacity building in the Marsh Farm NDC area including the development of the appropriate community indicators.
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The purpose of the initial community development is to lay a good foundation for the continuing community empowerment for the Marsh Farm Community Development Trust.

a) Community Profiling

The number of community/voluntary groups in the Marsh Farm NDC area is estimated to be around thirty-three. A network of street co-ordinators, consisting of thirty-nine people, has been set up. Another valuable local resource is the estimated one hundred or so residents employed in the delivery of public services in the area. Finally, the Marsh Farm Community Development Trust has established four advisory and several specialist committees as a way of involving residents in the management and delivery of the NDC programme.

There exists, therefore, a critical mass of local community organisations and local residents who can collectively champion and drive the process of community change. What needs to be considered how this critical mass can be linked together properly and how it can continue to expand and develop. Some key factors are:

- Effective communication
- Sharing information, skills and experience
- Open processes that create the space for new ideas and projects
- Transparency of governance.

IT can play a valuable role in the exchange and sharing of information. However, there are many other ways in which information can be communicated quickly and effectively. For instance, the value of word of mouth networks has now been released by advertising companies – they call it ‘viral marketing’. The starting point though should be a community profiling exercise to map the community resources in the area and to construct a comprehensive contacts database. This needs to build upon the open day held on the 25 January 2001 as part of the Coulters feasibility study, and the various sources of information that are held at different locations within the Marsh Farm area.

b) Initial capacity building training programme

The second important priority is for development and implementation of capacity building for the NDC programme. According to the BMG report:

'A high proportion of residents are excluded from the benefits that education and learning can bring. The local partnership needs to create a culture of learning by building on incentives and working in partnership to break down barriers.'

The Marsh Farm Community Trust can send a powerful message to the wider community by committing itself to becoming a learning organisation. This needs to be approached systematically. So that the training of community representatives takes place within a planned programme of personal skills development and fulfils the organisational objectives of the NDC programme. A useful conceptual model is Investors in People, as adapted to a community setting. The training or capacity building programme needs to:

- Recognise and values the skills, knowledge and experience that already exists in the community
- Identify the skills gaps and training needs that are relevant to the organisational requirements of the SRB programme
- Be realistic in the amount of time that people can devote to training in the light of competing commitments
- Recognise that people learn in different ways and that different learning methods are appropriate to different people and different subjects
- Deliver a professional and high quality training experience.

It is also important that the training programme maximises the use of existing training resources. Renaisi has considerable in-house expertise in programme management and project management, and partnership development, and can therefore deliver various elements directly. The DETR has set up a distance learning package on project appraisal in conjunction with the University of the West of England. Access routes also need to be opened up through proper system of signposting and support to the extensive range of different courses and training opportunities that exist within Luton. Other stakeholders in the partnership should be encouraged to open up their training programmes as well. All training should be integrated into a bespoke system of support. One way of achieving this is by introducing individual learning accounts that are formalised as part of a wider contract that specifies the roles and responsibilities of members of the NDC Board and its various committees and advisory groups. This should be treated as part of the wider work of establishing the constitutional structures of the NDC Board in the light of current best practice.

c) Framework document for community empowerment and capacity building in the Marsh Farm NDC

In community development, like most other areas of endeavour, there is no substitute for a properly planned strategy of action. The strategy will determine concrete outcomes and outputs, set targets and performance indicators, and define the processes and methodologies of community involvement. It will help with the identification and the allocation of resources. It will provide the framework for the effective monitoring of community involvement and capacity building initiatives. Without an effective community development strategy, the risk is that a tokenistic form of community involvement could take the place of real participation.

It is critically important that the community development strategy addresses issues of discrimination and disadvantage in order to promote an inclusive approach that engages the whole community. Particular emphasis should be given to outreach work to draw hard-to-reach groups into the economic regeneration process as it is amongst those groups that the worst problems are likely to be concentrated. It almost goes without saying that the community development strategy must be owned by the local community.

d) Community Outreach Project

The community outreach project will be the main mechanism through which the community empowerment strategy will be implemented. Work has started in defining and developing the project with community representatives from the Marsh Farm Community Development Trust. The aim is to establish the community outreach project as a prototype community enterprise so that the developmental experience can be rolled out to other projects in Marsh Farm.

The main functional areas of the community outreach project have been defined as:

- Outreach – acting as link between individual residents and services, networking with service providers, etc.
- Promotion and research – organising community events, surveying needs, and distributing information.
- Organisational support and development – providing capacity building and project development support for community groups and community enterprises.
- Co-ordination – supporting and developing the wider consultative structures, for example the street co-ordinators network.

The intention is that as far as is practicable, and within the NDC's equal opportunities policies and practices, that local people should be recruited and employed by the community outreach project. The exact organisational structure is still to be developed, but it will take the form of a self-managing community enterprise, possibly an industrial and provident society.

The milestones for the development of the project are:

Key Activity		Key Date
Project Approval		December 2001
Advert on estate		December 2001
Closing date for applications		Jan 11 2002
Interviews		Jan 18 2002
Staff in post		4 Feb 2002

e) Community chest programme

The community chest programme is a quick win project that will be of immediate visible benefit to the community. For the first year, it is recommended that a grant fund of £25,000 be established. A full report that defines the criteria for the community chest and the application procedure will be submitted to the next meeting of the NDC Board.

CONCLUSIONS.

In this paper, I have stressed the importance of conducting community development work in a planned and systematic fashion, that has clearly defined outcomes and outputs, and which is capable of being monitored assessed against both qualitative and quantitative measures. My intention is to lay the groundwork for effective community empowerment throughout the lifetime of the NDC programme.

The central proposition is that community development should not be seen only as a social good in its own right (the traditional approach), but as the mechanism for locking in much of considerable inward investment that will flow into the area for the economic benefit of the local community. For this is to be successful, local people must be enabled to participate in the process of wealth creation. The building of social capital will need to proceed hand in hand with the growth in economic capital.

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