



a broader parish

working together,
improving rural communities

by Claire Steel, Véronique Jochum, Jemma Grieve and Sally Cooke

NCVO produces a wide range of accessible books and reports for organisations working in the voluntary and community sector.

Subjects covered include:

- Trustee and governance
- Employment and diversity
- Finance and sustainable funding
- Managing, marketing and communications
- Voluntary sector research and policy
- Performance improvement

For more information about the complete range of NCVO titles, go to www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications or phone NCVO's HelpDesk free on **0800 2 798 798**.

Members of NCVO receive a 30% discount on all titles, and membership is free for organisations with an income of less than £10,000 per year. To find out more, go to www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/membership or ring our Membership team on **020 7520 2414**.

Published by NCVO
Regent's Wharf All Saints Street London N1 9RL

Published September 2006

© NCVO 2006

Registered Charity Number: 225922

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of NCVO.

Design by **wave**

Printed by Latimer Trend & Co.

ISBN: 0 7199 1689 5

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this publication. However, NCVO cannot be held responsible for any action an individual or organisation takes, or fails to take, as a result of this information.

Acknowledgements

This report has been written by Claire Steel, Véronique Jochum, Jemma Grieve and Sally Cooke, with grateful thanks for invaluable contributions and editorial support from Ann Blackmore and Jake Eliot.

We would like to thank all the parish clerks, councillors and volunteers that participated in our case study interviews and in particular Gill Claydon, Peter Stutt, Gordon Fisher and Ian Brooker who helped set up the interviews and provided additional information on their parish. Thanks are also due to those individuals that were interviewed for the case exemplars.

In addition, we would like to thank those individuals that participated in the initial scoping interviews: Angela Ellis Paine (Volunteering England), Richard Yarwood (Plymouth University), Michael Woods (Aberystwyth University), Kirsten Bennett (Cambridgeshire ACRE), Stephen Owen (Gloucestershire University) and Philippa Read (Community First).

This report forms part of NCVO's programme of research and policy development, focussing specifically on the needs of voluntary and community organisations working in rural areas. We aim to increase awareness and understanding of the scope and impact of rural voluntary activity and develop and promote policy to support the work of the voluntary sector in rural areas. NCVO's rural work is funded by the Commission for Rural Communities, an operating division of the Countryside Agency.

Contents

Chapter 1	5
Introduction	
Chapter 2	7
Policy Context	
Chapter 3	15
On the Ground	
Case Study 1	15
Consulting with the community by producing a parish plan	
Case Study 2	22
Providing services by establishing a community shop	
Case Study 3	27
Providing advocacy and voice for the community by campaigning to save the local community centre	
Case exemplars	32
Promoting a healthy civil society by organising and promoting community events	
Chapter 4	35
Policy and Research Analysis	
Chapter 5	51
Key Themes and Issues for the Future	
Appendix A	61
A Guide to the role and functions of parish councils	
Appendix B	65
Research Methodology	
Further Reading	66

Introduction

chapter one

This report looks at the role of parish councils, a tier of community level governance that has been in operation for over a century¹, and their relationships with local voluntary and community groups. We believe that there are valuable lessons to be learnt from the parish council experience, not least because of the enduring nature of this experience and the local scale at which community governance is in operation.

Community engagement has been high on the government agenda since 1997. This has brought the voluntary and community sector (VCS), public service delivery organisations and various tiers of government into greater and more frequent proximity. In the initial phase we saw the introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) bringing these various parties together to develop Community Strategies at a local level. We have since seen the Treasury, and increasingly now other government departments, exploring the potential for greater public service delivery by the VCS. And we have seen significant VCS involvement in some flagship partnership programmes such as Sure Start and New Deal for Communities. The rationale for all this cross-sector activity has been to increase the engagement of communities and community representatives both in identifying community needs and delivering solutions. The ultimate aim being to improve public services and administration by making them more responsive to the needs of individuals and communities and to reduce the damaging effects of exclusion experienced by those for whom services were previously either inaccessible or ineffective in relation to their needs.

The early phases of change in this area were very much centrally driven. However, in the last 2 or 3 years we have seen an increasing willingness on the part of central government, and urgency on the part of local practitioners, to acknowledge that if greater engagement and partnership is to have a real and lasting impact for local communities, then it needs to be driven and sustained at a much more local level. Proposals for the devolution of responsibilities away from central government and greater community involvement in governance and public services are now writ large across the agendas of many government departments including the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Defra.

These are important steps in the process but if ‘double devolution’ is to have its desired effect we also need to emphasise ‘double democratisation’³. That is to say, government should not focus solely on what it can devolve down from the centre but also on what it can evolve up from the local level. We need to understand how the processes of representative and participative democracy can best

David Miliband, when Minister for Local Government and Communities, spoke about ‘double devolution’ from central government to local government and from local government to local communities. He said that:

“modern society will only reach its potential when citizens individually and collectively are able to use their knowledge and capacity to shape their lives and their communities”²

¹ See Appendix 1 for a summary of the role and functions of parish councils.

² Speech by David Miliband (January 2006) NLGN Annual Conference ‘Empowerment and the deal for devolution’.

³ Held, D. (1989), Political theory and the modern state, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Phil Woolas, the current Local Government Minister, has recently re-emphasised the government's commitment to double devolution and said that:

“We want there to be flexibility about neighbourhood governance but want it to be based on the models of parish and town councils”⁴

work together to fully engage citizens and to reap results for communities and the neighbourhoods they live in.

As government and others seek solutions to the tricky issue of community participation and community governance we need to ensure that we learn from the activities and mechanisms already in place. During Summer and Autumn 2005, NCVO undertook research to look specifically at the relationship between parish councils and the voluntary and community sector in rural areas. **We examined four areas of activity where parish councils and community organisations are both playing an active part:**

- community consultation;
- service delivery;
- campaigning and advocacy; and
- community events.

We set out to explore two issues:

- how the relationships between parish councils and voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) impact on community governance and community participation; and
- how community members engage in the processes/activities of community governance and community participation.

The findings of this research⁵, help us to understand the contribution voluntary action can make to community governance, but also the difficulties which can be encountered along the way. This report identifies important considerations for the future of parish councils and programmes aimed at deepening democracy and engagement in rural areas. It also weighs up what some of this learning might tell us more generally about the conditions necessary for neighbourhood level governance structures to be effective.

⁴ Speech by Phil Woolas to the NALC Local Vision Conference, 1 June 2006, as reported in Local Government First, 10 June 2006.

⁵ See Appendix 2 for a description of the research methodology.

Policy context

chapter two

As the introduction in Chapter 1 sketched out, there is currently a great deal of debate going on within and between central and local government on issues of community participation, community governance and service delivery. Both parish councils and voluntary and community organisations are, and should be, key players in this debate and in the implementation of any proposals which seek to enhance engagement and participation in services and administration at the local community level.

Focusing on engagement in a number of specifically rural localities, this report looks at the essential role many such organisations can play. Before we go on to outline the research, its findings and its potential policy implications, it would be useful here to set out in a little more detail some of the current government agendas and programmes to which these issues, and indeed our findings, are relevant.

Localism and the future of local government

It is clear from David Miliband's views on devolution that greater localism is very much the direction of travel for emerging community and local government policy.

In 2004 the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department for Communities and Local Government) opened a wide ranging debate on the future of local government. Under the banner of local:vision, this on-going piece of work touches on a number of themes to which community participation, community governance and the role of parish councils and voluntary and community organisations are relevant. These themes are briefly outlined below.

Neighbourhoods

The Government has been keen to emphasise the potential for greater neighbourhood level engagement in the improvement of public services. The paper, *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why neighbourhoods matter*, outlined proposals for establishing neighbourhood arrangements in every area; the intention being to provide a way for communities to be engaged in the improvement of public services and to help re-engage citizens with the institutions of government more broadly. Government recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be appropriate. They propose a National Framework Statement which would outline the principles for neighbourhood arrangements, options for what these arrangements might include, and the type of neighbourhood bodies which might take them forward.

Parish councils are presented as one possible model for the delivery

of these neighbourhood arrangements, which might include: extra powers to deal with anti-social behaviour; neighbourhood contracts with service providers; or triggers for action in response to under-performance in local services and some delegation of budgets.

It is expected that the Government's proposals for neighbourhood governance structures and functions will be published in the forthcoming Local Government White Paper expected in Autumn 2006.

Local Leadership

Another strand of the local:vision debate has been about the nature of local leadership.

The document *Vibrant Local Leadership* explores several aspects of local leadership including the leadership role of councillors at neighbourhood level. The report acknowledged that the explicit community advocacy role of councillors has been under-developed, and that the role of councillors, both as local leaders and as advocates on behalf of their community, needs to be strengthened. Although the report focuses mainly on the role of councillors in principal authorities, many of the issues raised are of equal relevance to parish councils and their members. This will be especially true if their roles are to be enhanced as a result of the neighbourhoods agenda. For example, the document explores some of the options for improving the recruitment, retention and diversity of councillors and enhancing the support available to them which could include induction, skills and administrative support.

LSPs and LAAs

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has recently completed a consultation on the future of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). LSPs are intended to be the "partnership of partnerships" at a local level, bringing together representatives from the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to develop community strategies and help co-ordinate local services and activities. The consultation paper *Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future* discussed how these partnerships could support neighbourhood engagement and ensure that neighbourhoods and parishes could influence the local priorities identified in community strategies. The consultation document stressed that LSPs would need "a co-ordinated approach to community engagement and a commitment to the resources necessary to support it" if they are to be effective in achieving this.

LSPs are also responsible for delivering Local Area Agreements (LAAs). These agreements between central and local government, first

introduced as pilots in 2005, identify an agreed set of local priorities and targets in return for which Local Authorities and their partners gain greater freedom to pool certain central government funding streams to address priorities as they see fit. LAAs are due to be rolled out to every local authority area by April 2007. As LAAs are developed and reviewed an increasing number of funding streams are being drawn in to the LAA pot, including from April 2006 funding for the Rural Social and Community Programme (see below).

Community Ownership and Asset transfer

Another key theme introduced under the local:vision umbrella is that of community ownership and asset transfer. Government believes that community ownership and/or management of physical assets could have an important role to play in the achievement of a number of objectives including: increased citizen engagement at neighbourhood level; improvements in the quality of neighbourhood level services; the growth of social enterprise; and the development of community anchor organisations.

A recent report⁶ set out some recommendations for how community ownership and community management of assets might be enhanced. These include a promotion campaign, an incentive fund and the introduction of a 'Community Right to Buy' as well as funding and capacity building support. These and other ideas are the subject of on-going discussion.

Local government functions and finance

Alongside the local:vision debate another critical local government review is taking place in the form of the Lyons Inquiry. This independent inquiry, led by Sir Michael Lyons, is looking at both the functions and the finance of local government. The findings of the inquiry will feed into Government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. Both the inquiry and the local:vision debate are expected to inform the Local Government White Paper due to be published in Autumn 2006.

Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship

Government has acknowledged that there is something of a dent in our democracy. We have seen a decline in the number of people choosing to participate in the electoral process in recent years, particularly at local level. The Government Civil Renewal and the Active Citizenship agendas are both designed to help turn this around by creating a virtuous cycle of community participation and engagement with government institutions.

⁶ ODPM (2006) Communities Taking Control: Final Report of the Cross-sector Work Group on Community Ownership and Management of Assets.

Under the banner of Together We Can, the DCLG is working across government departments to encourage a joined up approach to Civil Renewal. This work has included the introduction of a Civic Pioneers programme, which aims to strengthen and promote the role that local government plays in developing civil renewal. The DCLG is playing an important part in promoting the development of community anchor organisations and exploring options for community ownership. This encompasses the development of recent proposals for enhancing community ownership and asset transfer outlined above.

Parish Councils⁷

In line with the general thrust of government policy in recent years, the Rural White Paper published in 2000 also promoted: devolution of responsibility away from central government; partnership working; and community involvement in governance and public services. This was followed by the Haskins review in 2003 which recommended the decentralisation of rural delivery with key decisions being taken at regional or local level.

Parish councils have been identified as potential drivers for change and improvement within local communities. As a result a number of policy initiatives have been introduced to help strengthen parish councils and enhance their leadership role at local community level.

Quality Parishes Scheme

The Quality Parishes Scheme was proposed in the Rural White Paper and launched in 2003 to raise the profile of parish councils and promote good practice in governance with a view to parish councils potentially taking on a bigger role, including responsibility for some service delivery. To be accredited as a Quality Parish Council a parish council must show that it can meet a set of quality standards. These standards include:

- an electoral mandate which means at least 80% of councillors stood for election (even if not contested);
- a qualified clerk⁸;
- at least 6 open council meetings per year;
- good communication with the community including residents and VCOs;
- production of an annual report and accounts; and
- a defined ethical framework that requires councillors to sign up to a code of conduct and register their interests.

So far over 300 councils have been recognised under the Quality

⁷ Appendix A provides a guide to the roles and functions of parish councils.

⁸ One who has a Certificate in Local Council Administration.

Parishes Scheme, with many more working towards accreditation.

Following the publication of the Rural White Paper in 2000, the National Training Strategy for Parish and Town Councils⁹ was developed. The Strategy provides the framework for improving the skills of clerks and councillors, coupled with the establishment of a network for the delivery of its aims through local County Training Partnerships. The Certificate in Local Council Administration, a core skills qualification for parish clerks was also established to provide the main test on clerk's qualifications for the Quality Parishes Scheme. Over 1000 clerks have registered to undertake the Certificate and over 500 have already passed. A broad range of other initiatives have also been implemented. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) reports that the strategy has proved a success and there is now a culture of training, learning skills in the parish sector.

Defra has also provided some funding through the Quality Parish Investment Fund to support projects which: promote partnership working (particularly with principal authorities); improve services to local people; improve community engagement; and address social exclusion and disadvantage.

Parish Plans

Over the last few years the Government has also encouraged parish councils to undertake parish planning exercises. Parish planning involves widespread consultation with local businesses, residents and VCOs within the parish. It provides an opportunity for the whole community to contribute to the identification of local priorities. Based on consultation, the parish plans which are produced, describe the parish and outline an action plan for improvements. These plans are used to inform parish council activity and can be used as supplementary planning documents for local authorities and other partners involved in developing community strategies for the wider area.

Government has provided advice and support for parish planning processes through the Vital Villages Scheme¹⁰. By April 2004 over 1000 parish plans had been produced under this scheme although a number have been funded through other means. A conservative estimate is that one in eight parishes now has a parish plan. From 2006 parish plans are expected to be funded through the Rural Social and Community Programme (see below).

Rural Social and Community Programme

In line with proposals to devolve responsibilities down to a sub-regional level, Defra launched the Rural Social and Community Programme (RSCP) in November 2005. From April 2006 – March

⁹ NALC and the Countryside Agency (2001)
A national training strategy for parish and town councils.

¹⁰ The Vital Villages scheme was run by the Countryside Agency until March 2005. It provided £38m to support community led projects. For more information about the Vital Village Scheme and the projects it supported see www.countryside.gov.uk/VitalVillages/.

2008 £27 million has been made available to:

- enhance the community capacity building and entrepreneurial capability of rural communities;
- help socially excluded individuals; and
- develop the capacity of the VCS and parish councils to achieve the above¹¹.

This RSCP will provide £13.5 million per annum for two years. The majority of funding, £9 million in each financial year, will be used to support activity at sub-regional level. A further £3.5 million will be used to support services provided by Rural Community Councils (RCCs) under contract with Defra. The remaining £1 million will support delivery of the programme at regional and national level.

The programme is structured to encourage joint working, including between parish councils and rural VCOs and between the parish level and local authorities and service providers at district and county level. RSCP funding has been included amongst the funding streams which can be pooled as part of an LAA. The activities which will be undertaken with RSCP funds have been determined by local (usually county level) partners based on agreed local priorities. Although it will usually be a county level LSP that is responsible for delivery of LAA targets, they will need to work with partners operating at parish level (including parish councils and rural VCOs) in order to do so effectively¹².

Links with voluntary sector infrastructure

It is also worth noting the relationships parish councils have with voluntary sector infrastructure bodies. Most notably the 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) support parish councils closely, especially providing advice about parish planning and administering Defra funds for parish planning. RCCs often work together with County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) to share information and support local communities. Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) are less focussed specifically on rural issues but many also work with Parish and Town Councils in their area.

¹¹ Defra (2005) Rural Social and Community Programme: A Consultation Document.

¹² For more information see NCVO briefing on the Rural Social and Community Programme www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/rural.

Parish Councils share some features with the VCS, such as the voluntary nature of parish councillors (and, in a significant minority of cases, the parish clerk) but Parish Councils are statutory bodies and as such there are also fundamental differences. Nevertheless, many parish councils find the services of voluntary sector infrastructure bodies of value to them. It allows them to network with a variety of other organisations and, through infrastructure bodies, influence public sector bodies for the benefit of their community.

The Quality Parishes and Parish Planning initiatives have certainly had an impact both on parish councils and on the engagement of communities and community groups at this level. In some cases the membership and practices of parish councils have changed significantly in the course of seeking accreditation and working in partnership with others to produce parish plans. The direct relevance of the other key themes in the local government and civil renewal agendas is also evident in the areas we studied.

As the Rural Social and Community Programme is implemented and the local government agenda moves forward, particularly on issues of neighbourhood governance, community ownership and local leadership, it is vital that the recommendations and practices which emerge are ones which:

- link up at the local parish level;
- genuinely promote civil renewal through community engagement in all its forms; and
- most importantly, continue to be informed by that engagement and the nature of it.

The case studies and the research and policy analysis that follow highlight some of these key issues and where some of the major challenges might lie.

On the ground

chapter three

About the research

The research aimed to explore how some of the key policy concepts such as governance and active citizenship related to practice. The case studies and case exemplars in the following pages focus on a small number of local projects and serve to illustrate the dynamics of community life, looking at the way organisational structures and individuals contribute to their communities. They highlight the complexities of reality on the ground and identify, beyond the local context of each parish, commonalities of experience, which can help inform policy frameworks and debates.

Each case study includes some contextual information on the parish, a short and factual presentation of the local community project at the time the fieldwork was carried out, a summary of the key findings and finally a brief update.

Location

Stokenham is one of the larger parishes of the South Hams district of Devon, geographically dispersed over an area of 15 square miles, with approximately seven miles of coastline. The parish includes seven villages (Chillington, Stokenham, Torcross, Beesands, Beeson, Hallsands and Kellaton) as well as several smaller hamlets. The coastal area of Stokenham is an area of great natural wealth with many special designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within the parish boundaries.

Local Economy

Traditionally the parish has been dependent on fishing and farming, now however, the construction industry (25%) and distribution, hotels and restaurants sector (25%) dominate.

Population and housing

The parish has a population of 1,949 almost half of which lives in Chillington (906). There is an ageing population with a third of the population over 65. Current parish tenure is dominated by the owner-occupied sector (85% of total properties) with a significant loss in social housing (-38%) in the last 10 years. House prices have risen in recent years partly due to the growth in second and holiday homes (20% of parish properties).

CASE STUDY ONE

PARISH PROFILE

Consulting with the community by producing a parish plan

Services and facilities

The parish has a range of services and facilities mostly located in Chillington and Stokenham including a health centre, a primary school, pubs, village and parish halls and a selection of shops as well as restaurants and pubs in the more touristy area of Torcross. Plans for a housing, employment and community facilities development project in Chillington, first established in 1996, are still in the pipeline following a feasibility study in 2004. Most residents use the outside town Kingsbridge (5 miles) for shopping, sport and banking but socialise in the parish.

Groups and activities

Stokenham has a selection of parish events and there are a range of local voluntary and community groups including Chillington Community Association, the 25 Club group for men, a WRVS affiliated luncheon club and Start Circle of Friends, a support group for Chillington health centre. Many of these use the Parish Hall in Stokenham village or the Village Hall in Chillington. The parish also has four churches and three church groups.

Parish council

Stokenham was one of the first eight parishes in the country to be awarded Quality Parish status in 2003. The councillors are mostly male, aged over 55, from Stokenham or Chillington and over a third were born in the parish. Many of the councillors are retired and belong to a range of societies. There have been no contested elections in the last 12 years.

Sources: Stokenham Parish Plan, April 2004; Census 2001

Key story

The parish of Stokenham has put together a parish plan, which identifies the needs and aspirations of the parish and contains a plan of action for the future. The parish council initiated the project in the Summer of 2002 following a meeting on parish plans organised by Devon Community Council. Once funding was obtained through the Vital Villages scheme of the Countryside Agency, the parish council delegated powers to a committee – the parish plan core group committee – to take the project forward. The committee included five parish councillors, the parish clerk and five other members of the community recruited for the skills they could bring to the process. Only three committee members (all involved in the parish council) followed through the many phases of the parish plan. The other members took part more episodically depending on the task at hand. The parish plan process involved organising a number of consultation

events, which different members of the core group committee facilitated (December 2002 to March 2003). The first consultation event was aimed at local voluntary organisations, clubs and societies. It was shortly followed by three separate events aimed at particular sections of the community – teenagers, senior citizens and local businesses. Later a total of nine road-show events were organised in the different villages and hamlets of Stokenham, mostly in community facilities and where necessary in private homes.

The data collated during the consultation events was used to design a questionnaire that was then hand-delivered to all 1,104 households in the parish by a team of over 40 volunteers, partly recruited through local voluntary organisations and community groups (September 2003). Approximately 60% of the households responded. Their responses were analysed and used to form the action plan, which was ratified by the parish council and launched at the parish annual meeting, attended by 170 parishioners (April 2004). A summarised parish plan was distributed to all households and a full version to local statutory bodies.

The parish plan has had a number of direct and indirect outcomes that have benefited the community. Direct outcomes include the creation of a community history group and the creation of a footpath linking together two of the villages in the parish. Beyond this, the parish plan process and the resulting actions have contributed to strengthening the relationship between the parish council and community members, and between the parish council and other tiers of government. Many of the proposed actions in the plan have now been achieved. Those remaining are more complex and require longer-term actions largely dependent on the intervention of a range of external partners. It is these actions and the issues they are trying to address, in particular the development of Chillington centre, that have led to some tensions.

Key issues/findings

A pro-active parish council is the driving force

The parish plan project was initiated and led to a great extent by the parish council, although other members of the community were involved (including in the core group committee). Three members of the parish council, who were also part of the core group committee – the chairman, the parish clerk and one of the parish councillors – played a pivotal role in managing and coordinating the whole process. The project was seen as an opportunity to build stronger links with the community and with partners in local government. Largely because the parish clerk was in the process of completing a local

policy degree course, ideas around community participation were more easily taken on board and implemented. Interestingly, the project used a combination of approaches that reflected the need for flexibility: whilst emphasis was placed on community consultation and participation, it was also about driving the process, showing leadership and moving things forward. At times this involved what one of the interviewees referred to as ‘telling and selling’. This combination, plus the enthusiasm and commitment of those involved, contributed to the plan’s success.

The parish council has actively taken forward the plan, linking where possible with local authorities, statutory bodies and funders. The parish plan illustrates the dynamism of the parish council, one of the first parish councils in England to obtain Quality Parish status (2003), as do other parish council initiatives such as the recent launch of a campaign promoting locally produced food. However, this dynamism has not always existed – the parish council has changed significantly over the last few years: the team of parish councillors has to a large extent been renewed, the average age has decreased and the parish clerk has developed her role considerably.

Community consultation is easier than community participation

People were involved in the parish plan process in a range of ways – for instance, taking part in the core group committee, volunteering to hold one of the road-show events in their home, or simply completing the parish plan questionnaire. This proved to be effective with an impressive 60% of the parish responding to the questionnaire. However, most of the process involved a restricted number of individuals, principally the members of the core group committee, who were invited to join the committee by the parish council for their skills (e.g. expertise and experience in public relations). As is often the case, the selection of these members mostly relied on personal networks. Previous NCVO research has highlighted how involvement of this type frequently relies on a limited pool of individuals with a similar profile and this raises concerns around diversity and inclusiveness.

In Stokenham, as in other places, the challenge has been about striking the right balance between having participation processes that are sufficiently inclusive and moving the project forward. Although those in the core group committee showed a real willingness to be participative, widespread participation was difficult to achieve and a small team of dedicated people was the chosen option. One of the main obstacles to wider participation was the lack of resources for community capacity building, both in terms of funding and time. Another obstacle was the need to obtain results. But participation

was nevertheless broadened through having core group committee members who were not formally connected to the parish council and by episodically involving volunteers. The contribution of the core group committee has been significant and their very thorough approach to consultation has meant that community members have been able to define their own agenda for the future of the parish.

Community groups and the parish council mutually support each other

In the context of the parish plan, patterns of mutual support between the parish council and voluntary and community groups were manifest. The local WRVS provided, for instance, access to a part of the community – senior citizens – that would otherwise have been far harder to reach. Voluntary and community groups also provided volunteers for very specific tasks such as tea-making for some of the consultation events (e.g. the WRVS, again) or the distribution and collection of the parish plan questionnaire (e.g. the 25 Club). The parish plan was later instrumental in setting-up the community history group. Interest in such a group was expressed during the consultation events at which potential members were asked to come forward. The parish council promoted the group through the parish website and paid for the village hall when the group held its first meeting.

Beyond the parish plan, the parish council was seen to have an important role in supporting voluntary and community groups both financially, often quite symbolically through small donations for specific projects (e.g. buying a set of saucepans for the WRVS luncheon club), and non-financially by promoting the activities of these groups. In the case of Stokenham, interviewees were keen to stress that the parish council and the local voluntary and community groups have very distinctive roles – whilst voluntary and community groups focused on specific interest groups, the parish council was seen as representing the whole community. However, there was some overlap between the parish council and Chillington Community Association: both were involved in voicing community interests regarding the development of Chillington centre, which partly explains some of the tensions surrounding the project.

Informal ties are more important than formal connections

As shown previously, voluntary and community groups contributed to the parish plan in different ways, but the collaboration that existed was completely informal. It was often triggered by over-lapping membership, with members of the core group committee also being members of voluntary and community groups. In most cases interviewees referred to their ties with particular individuals rather than the actual groups these individuals were involved in, which reinforced the informal nature of the help provided. As the focus was more on individuals than existing structures and because some individuals had 'multiple hats', there was a definite blurring of boundaries between the different sectors, to the extent that the term sector often did not seem appropriate here. In many ways, these informal ties based on individual relationships represent an advantage – it is mostly when people are asked to participate by someone they know that they do. But there is a potential downside - poor sustainability: are the links developed between organisations more likely to disappear when the person with over-lapping membership leaves?

Recruiting active citizens is far from straightforward

Recruitment was certainly more challenging when people were expected to do more than just 'help out'. For the parish plan, there was a lot of goodwill when it came to doing specific and time-limited tasks and the core group committee successfully took this on board. In the case of Stokenham more generally, community involvement was more frequently geared towards leisure activities or action-oriented activities that had immediate results – for instance baking a cake for the village fête or driving someone to the local surgery. Whether people were short of time, thought they did not have the necessary skills, were not prepared to take on the responsibilities involved or lacked enthusiasm for committees and meetings, recruiting people for governance was always far more problematic – people rarely put themselves forward, but had to be asked or persuaded (as some interviewees highlighted).

Keeping the momentum going is a real challenge

Knowing how to keep the momentum going, capitalise on the parish plan's success and embed a culture of involvement is still a real challenge for the parish council. It has taken forward many of the actions in the parish plan, mostly by linking with other organisations and institutions (availability of broadband, greater police presence and accessibility, provision of educational courses such as First Aid training etc.). But, there has been limited involvement of community members in implementing these actions – except for those actions

that directly concerned voluntary and community groups (i.e. the community history group and the drama group). It is now three years since the actual consultation, which did involve a wide range of people, took place (2002-03). Repeating the parish plan process to renew the plan is impossible for cost reasons, so the parish council has suggested putting together a rolling panel of parishioners who would regularly be asked their views and ideas for further actions. What remains key is how the parish council communicates with the community and keeps the community informed and engaged. During the parish plan, the core group committee actively promoted the process using a whole range of communication channels – the local press, parish magazine, parish website, local shops etc. Since the parish plan has been completed, the parish council has regularly provided feedback on what progress has been made. However, even though the information is publicly available, interest has weakened as the drop in attendance at the parish annual meeting the year after the parish plan was launched indicates.

Update – Summer 2006

The parish council has found it difficult recruiting volunteers for the rolling panel they wanted to put together for consultations. Consequently they are having to think of other ways this could be achieved. The campaign to promote local products has been particularly successful and the planning application for the development of Chillington centre is currently under consideration.

Providing services by establishing a community shop

CASE STUDY TWO

Location

The parish of Exbourne with Jacobstowe is a small rural parish located in West Devon. It is made up of two villages: Exbourne and Jacobstowe, that sit astride the River Okement. Both villages are small, although Exbourne has more than twice as many residents as Jacobstowe. The parish is just four miles from the market town of Hatherleigh and five miles from the town of Okehampton.

PARISH PROFILE

Local Economy

Exbourne with Jacobstowe is a working, largely agricultural, parish that was hit badly by the 2001 foot and mouth crisis. A number of small businesses related to farming and the food industry are located in the parish, including a market garden and a grocery business supplying local restaurants.

Population and housing

The population of the parish is relatively static at 436 although the demographic make-up is shifting with a decrease in younger people and an increase in older people. Exbourne is low in the index of deprivation but there are 46% of households on an income of below £15,000. Although larger properties are being developed, there are few available for young people, which is a concern. As a result of the parish plan process there is work on an affordable housing scheme.

Services and facilities

Services and facilities have declined in both villages but particularly in Jacobstowe where there is now only a church. Exbourne retains a successful primary school attracting children from both inside and outside the parish, as well as some basic facilities such as the public house and church. The village shop/post office was closed in 2001 but has been replaced by a temporary service operating two mornings a week in the village hall. Better shopping facilities are found in Hatherleigh and Okehampton, however for some, particularly the elderly and the young, these are hard to access because the provision of public transport is poor.

Groups and activities

A range of events are held in Exbourne including village shows and fetes. Although the parish has groups such as the Women's Institute, Silverband and the Community Association that run the shop and satellite post office, a lot of activities and clubs are held in Hatherleigh. Many parish sports facilities, such as the tennis court, have been removed and there is no longer a village football team, although the Playing Field Committee is still active.

Parish Council

Exbourne with Jacobstowe Parish Council is made up of seven councillors, only one of whom is female. The majority of parish councillors (five out of seven) are still working. Five of them are incomers, but none have lived in the parish for less than five years. All councillors have been on the parish council for five years or less. In 2005 they published their parish plan, the development of which was led by one of the parish councillors.

Sources: Exbourne with Jacobstowe Parish Plan, 2005; Exbourne Community Shop Feasibility Study, 2003; Census 1991; Census 2001

Key story

In 2001, Exbourne faced the prospect of the village shop/post office closing. As a result of a public meeting, initiated by the village vicar, a number of residents formed a committee to explore ways in which the shop/post office could be continued. The original idea was to purchase the building and run it as a community shop, but the committee lacked the funds to do so. After six years of trying to sell the shop as a going concern, the owners were eventually authorised to sell the premises as a residential property.

Following the closure of the shop (December 2001), the committee set up a temporary facility in the village hall – a small shop, a satellite post office and a café – open every Monday and Friday morning, with the help of volunteers and the assistance of Okehampton post office. The committee, currently composed of five members (including two parish councillors and the vicar), has, over the last four years, explored many different avenues for a more permanent solution. After much investigation and debate, the committee has opted for the construction of a completely new facility and has developed plans for an earth-sheltered building, situated opposite the local pub and primary school, which would employ at least one full-time employee.

The committee has formed a community association, which is registered as an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS). The community association includes volunteers who contribute to the running of the shop and the organisation of fundraising events as well as members who have bought shares. At the time of the interviews, funding of over £30,000 had been granted from outside sources (e.g. Plunkett Foundation, Carnegie Trust) and an additional £8,300 had been obtained through local fundraising (Open Gardens, Mediterranean evening etc.). The committee was in the process of putting together a business plan aimed at potential funders (e.g. Defra).

An initial survey (2002) carried out by the committee showed that almost everybody in the parish (94%) wanted a permanent shop in the

parish. However, reactions towards the committee's innovative and ambitious proposal have been mixed, as reflected in the recent parish plan in which 30% said they disapproved of the current location (March 2005). Viability and parking have been the major concerns of those who have expressed opposition or reservations. Without any other plausible alternatives, the committee decided to go ahead. West Devon Borough Council granted outline planning permission for the shop premises and the detailed planning application was submitted by the parish council on behalf of the committee in October 2005.

Key issues/findings

The small, dedicated committee is under increasing pressure

The project has been led by a small group of community members, who felt very strongly that the shop/post office played an important role in the parish, both providing goods and services and as a hub where people could meet. Following the initial public meeting, a number of people put themselves forward to form a committee – some with very specific ideas on how the project could be taken forward (e.g. having a shop in the local pub), others with past experience of community initiatives or fundraising. Over the years, the committee has changed in composition – those who had come to the committee with very specific ideas left once these had been rejected, and others have stepped down because of changing personal circumstances. This has put increasing pressure on the remaining members who have found the project (which has involved managing and running the facility as well as identifying potential funders, completing numerous application forms and writing a business plan) time-consuming, complex and at times frustrating. The project has required a degree of professionalism that has been particularly demanding and needed the support of advisors. Although the recent arrival of new members has given it some new impetus, maintaining enthusiasm over time has been an issue. Four years down the line, the committee is still very active. However, criticism of the project has struck members hard, especially those involved over the long-term and who are now quite emotionally involved.

The parish council is supportive but cautious

The parish council of Exbourne supports community activities directly through a range of donations – last year, out of its £4,400 budget, £800 was given to local voluntary and community groups or to groups outside the parish but providing a service locally. However, there is, at times, debate amongst the parish councillors as to the level of involvement that the parish council should have. This is exemplified by the shop and post office project, to which three parish councillors

are closely linked – the first as the committee member responsible for the weekly running of the existing facility, the second also as a committee member and as the son of the farmer who owns the field under which the building will be built, and the third as the partner of the committee's former chair. As with cross-membership more generally, this proximity is likely to have raised concerns in terms of power, decision-making and potential conflicts of interest. If so, this will have been resolved by parish councillors declaring a prejudicial interest and abstaining from voting.

The shop and post office project is a good illustration of the dilemmas facing the parish council and parish councillors in their community leadership role – whether the parish council should be able to push an idea forward even if it does not have the full support of the community, or whether it should be impartial and not favour one initiative or one group more than the other. These questions were raised when the committee asked the parish council to be the applicant on its detailed planning application (thereby saving several hundred pounds). After calling a public meeting where this was debated, the parish council voted in favour.

Wavering community support reflects local tensions

Although the support of the community was initially very high, it was less the case at the time of the interviews. The committee has been confronted by some very vocal opposition from certain members of the community who have criticised the project for its grandeur. To a large extent the criticism the committee has received reflects wider divisions and tensions that exist in the parish between locals and incomers. Whilst the committee, predominantly made up of incomers, considers its proposal as forward-looking and innovative, some locals have viewed it as over-ambitious and unsuitable in a rural context. Although the committee believes this is only the position of a minority, it is concerned about the effect this may have on others, especially on the silent majority that is more likely to be ambivalent. Whereas parishioners have supported the project by using the shop/post office and by taking part in the many fundraising events that have been organised, recruiting active members and regular volunteers has been difficult. Even amongst those who have bought shares, involvement has been limited.

Good communication and linkages are key success factors

One of the factors that may have influenced community support is the relative lack of information the community has received about the project – the committee has produced a newsletter but only five issues had been published in the last four years.

To a certain extent the committee has prioritised linking with agencies and funders to obtain support over communicating with the community, but this linking activity has been resource intensive. The committee has worked successfully with various partners such as the Community Council of Devon and ViRSA (Village Retail Services Association) that have provided both financial and non-financial support. Despite these positive outcomes, building and managing relationships has at times been a difficult exercise. Although problems in terms of relationships have been isolated, they stress the need to get on board individuals who have influence and agencies that are gatekeepers to resources.

Size matters and influences participation

The size of Exbourne has greatly influenced the way the project has evolved. It has meant that from the start a limited number of people were able or willing to get involved and that there are increased levels of cross-membership of those who have been active. This has contributed to volunteer burnout and greater concentration of power in terms of decision-making. It has also meant a degree of competition amongst existing groups, as the slightly strained relationship between the shop/post office committee and the village hall committee illustrates. And because the project has been controversial, peer pressure has equally played a role – the idea of taking sides and the implication this may have for relationships have acted as a deterrent to action.

CASE STUDY TWO

Update – Summer 2006

The detailed planning application was turned down by the Borough Council in December 2005. They deferred a decision for a while whilst talks took place with the Conservation Officer. He put forward a design that the Parish Council would not support, so the shop/post office committee decided to push the original design, which was refused. A new design was then presented to the community in mid-March. A redesigned planning permission was finally granted. The committee is now looking for funding for the project and are hoping to open the new shop, cafe and post office in early 2008.

Providing advocacy and voice for the community by campaigning to save the local community centre

Location

Winkleigh parish is in the southern part of Torridge District in Devon. The main village is the hillside village of Winkleigh, where five roads meet. In addition there are a number of smaller villages and hamlets such as Hollacombe. The nearest towns are North Tawton (6 miles), Hatherleigh (12 miles) and Torrington (13 miles).

Local Economy

There is mixed land use in the parish, but agriculture remains the biggest employer. Concerns have arisen in the community over the proposed development of a biomass power station on a former Second World War airfield, situated on the outskirts of Winkleigh. There are lower unemployment levels in the parish than the national average but salary levels are also lower.

Population and Housing

According to the latest census the parish population is 1,300, a third of whom are over 45. The population has quite significantly increased since 1991 (1,060 parishioners) due to recent housing developments.

Services and Facilities

The parish has many services and facilities, which are mostly located in Winkleigh village. These include a post office, a church and chapel, two pubs and a range of retail facilities, including some that can be found at the airfield. The parish is served by a surgery, a pre-school and primary school and has a Community Centre, Village Hall and a Sports Centre. Public transport links do exist but visiting neighbouring villages such as Chulmleigh is difficult.

Groups and Activities

There are a wide range of activities and groups in Winkleigh. These include traditional groups such as the youth group and badminton club as well as groups and organisations such as the Community Centre of Winkleigh Support Group (CCOWS), which is campaigning to retain the Community Centre, and Winkleigh Society, a civic society that, amongst other activities, publishes the local newsletter 'Distinctly Winkleigh' and organises events.

Parish Council

The parish council is made up of eleven councillors, two of whom are women. The great majority of councillors are over 50 (75%). All except one have lived in the parish for 30 years or more, and four have been on the parish council for at least 15 years. A parish appraisal was carried out in 1996 and a parish plan was developed in 2005.

Source: Winkleigh Parish Plan, 2005; Census 1991; Census 2001

Key story

The community centre was founded in 1973, when the village school left its building for larger premises. Although still under Devon County Council control, it has always been run by a local management committee. In 2003 the community centre narrowly escaped closure, when its management committee struggled to find people willing to replace existing members. Shortly after, Devon County Council announced their intention to dispose of the building, but offered Winkleigh a chance to put forward a case to keep and manage the centre for the community (Spring 2004).

Following this announcement, a steering committee – the Community Centre of Winkleigh Support group (CCOWS) - was formed to campaign for the survival of the community centre and complete a feasibility study and business plan for the community to own and run the centre itself. The steering group is composed of six members. Although completely separate from the management committee, three of these members also sit on the management committee as chairman, secretary and treasurer.

The group has used various methods to explore community needs and the provision of additional services. These have included organising a public meeting, having suggestion boxes, distributing a user questionnaire, and taking part in the parish plan exhibition day and community buildings roundtable. Services envisaged for the future include IT training, a youth drop-in centre, a cyber café and a heritage resource facility. Whilst these initiatives have shown that the community believes it should retain and develop the community centre, in practice the number of responses to the group's call for help has been disappointing, even amongst those who are currently using the centre.

Nevertheless, some support has been provided by existing local groups such as the parish plan steering group (especially from the person writing the parish plan who is now a member of CCOWS) and Winkleigh Society, which has promoted the group's activities through its website and newsletter. At the request of the CCOWS, there is parish council representation at its meetings, but due to personal circumstances and other pressing issues (e.g. the biomass project) that have required a lot of time and energy, the parish council's contribution has been fairly limited. Numerous meetings with other stakeholders and potential partners have been arranged, including local authorities, statutory agencies, infrastructure bodies and funders. At the time of the fieldwork funding had been obtained from several sources, including Enterprise 4 Inclusion, a programme financed by DEFRA aimed at enterprise-based activities which benefit socially excluded people in English rural communities.

The group expected to finalise its feasibility study and business plan in March 2006, after it has been presented to the community in February. The process has taken longer than planned, largely because it has been unclear until recently whether Devon County Council really had the deeds to the building, which significantly complicated matters.

Key issues/findings

The quickly changing environment has transformed community life

The parish of Winkleigh has expanded very quickly over recent years leading to some significant changes in the community, including in terms of participation. Between 1991 and 2001, the population increased by almost 25% and the latest estimates for 2006 indicate that this trend has accelerated. The growth in population is largely due to the construction of two major housing developments, which have brought to the parish 150 new households. Newcomers have mostly been retired and semi-retired people, which has meant that the proportion of parishioners over 65 years has grown disproportionately in comparison to other age groups.

Incomers of all ages have often wanted to integrate and have been keen to get involved in community activities. Often professionals, they have brought with them experience and expertise that have proved useful. This is certainly the case with CCOWS, whose six members are all incomers, half of whom have arrived in the parish since 2000. Incomers have certainly widened the range of people getting involved, but they have also challenged existing patterns of involvement, which has led to the emergence of new groups such as the Winkleigh Society and contributed to changes at the parish council level, not least the stepping down of its chairman who had been in post for 20 years. Their involvement has often reflected their outlook on rural community life, which has at times been quite different to the views of those who have been in the parish longer, especially those who have been 'born and bred' in the parish.

Participation can be competitive

CCOWS has found getting support from parishioners and the parish council difficult. One of the main reasons behind this has been the competition it has faced from other issues that the parish has recently had to address. The main source of competition has been the proposed construction of the biomass power station, WINBEG, which has encountered very strong opposition locally. At the time of writing, the judgement of the planning authority, Torridge District Council, was still pending. Both Devon County Council and the parish council have recommended it refuses planning permission. The parish

council's recommendation was made once the Winkleigh Village Community Working Party (formed at a public meeting arranged by the parish council and which included parish councillors and members of the community) had completed its report examining the pros and cons of the project. In parallel, there has been active campaigning against the project by members of Winkleigh Society and DUST (Devon Under Serious Threat), a protest group specifically formed to fight against WINBEG. This complex and very technical project (the cost of which is estimated at £37million) has put a lot of pressure on the parish council and community activists. Perceived as a threat for the future of the parish and its residents, it has largely dominated the agenda of the parish and shaped local governance and participation for the last two years. Due to limited resources other issues such as the community centre have been, in comparison, somewhat neglected.

Managing expectations is critical

Despite these setbacks, CCOWS has been able to make significant progress thanks to the commitment of its few members. Overstretched, they have been disappointed with the support of the parish council which they viewed as being mostly symbolic. Their parish council representative stood down for health reasons and was replaced at meetings, either by the parish council chairman or another parish councillor, but attendance has not been consistent. CCOWS expected the parish council to play a greater role from the outset, however the parish council envisaged being more actively involved once the feasibility study and business plan have been completed. Members of CCOWS had hoped that the parish council would have a more hands-on approach and would be more vocal in supporting and promoting their cause, especially to other tiers of government. As with other issues and groups, expectations as to what the parish council is able to do, exceeded the parish council's resources. As is often the case, relationships between voluntary and community organisations and state institutions can be hampered by a lack of clarity regarding role, resources and responsibilities.

Working together is a learning curve

The parish has seen over the last few years a new breed of community activity, which has mostly been about advocacy and campaigning. CCOWS belongs to this category, although it is also concerned with service provision. This is equally the case with Winkleigh Society, which is primarily aimed at promoting the parish but also organises community events. A protest group like DUST has, however, been exclusively in the business of campaigning. There has been quite an important overlap between the concerns of some of these groups and

those of the parish council. This overlap has led to some tensions and frustration on both sides, which differences in approach and process have accentuated.

There have been some conflicting views within the parish council and amongst community activists on leadership, particularly with regards to the relative importance of deliberation, decision-making and action. This is particularly well illustrated by the WINBEG project but there are parallels with the community centre project. Before making a decision against WINBEG, the parish council waited for all the evidence to be gathered. Whilst the parish council may have been considered by some as being too slow in showing its disapproval and too focused on procedures, it strongly believed its priority to be transparent, collective decision-making. And this was more difficult to achieve in a structure such as the parish council, which has to deal with a greater variety of issues and a greater diversity of people, than in single-issue groups such as DUST. However, the positive relationship between the Winkleigh Village Working Party and the parish council shows that some form of partnership can be achieved. This model has since then been replicated with a group looking at traffic related issues. And the parish council believes that future collaboration with community groups is the way forward for the implementation of the parish plan.

Update – Summer 2006

The property department of Devon County Council wants to complete the sale of the community centre by the end of financial year 2006-2007. Following consultation with the community, CCOWS have submitted a business plan to Devon County Council who will respond at a meeting in September. The parish council has started to work with CCOWS on some of the shared issues, namely car parking and youth provision. There is now a new representative from the parish council to attend CCOWS meetings. CCOWS are now confident that the project will be successful.

case exemplars

Promoting a healthy civil society by organising and promoting community events

The parish councils that were contacted often commented on the limited relationship they had with community groups when it came to local events. In some instances the parish council had no formal engagement in the organisation of community events, however parish councillors frequently got involved in a personal capacity. In other instances the parish council was happy to contribute to costs (insurance, facilities etc.) or help promote events through their newsletter or website, but left the actual organisation to local residents and groups, including sometimes to independent village events committees. The research also identified cases in which more formal links between parish councils and community groups existed and cases in which the parish council seemed to be the dominant partner. Below are five case exemplars illustrating the diversity of possibilities and corroborating some of the findings from the full case studies on the importance of key individuals, overlapping membership and linking social capital.

The parish council's engagement in organising events ranges from little formal involvement...

Case exemplar 1 – Cottingham (population of 910)

Cottingham Day and other village events are run by ad-hoc groups of volunteers. The parish council supports such events and parish councillors often get involved as individuals, but not formally as parish council representatives. In the case of the recent VE day celebrations the parish council allowed the organisers free use of the recreation ground.

Case exemplar 2 – Darenth (population of 4,779)

In Darenth, the village events committee is kept separate from the parish council. The committee organises all community events and while there is some overlap of membership with the parish council, it is seen as a distinct body that emerges from the work of local community groups and individuals in the community. It does its own fundraising and has never applied to the council for funding.

to having parish council sub-committees with community representatives...

Case exemplar 3 – Trowell (population of 2,480)

Trowell has a village events committee made up of the parish council chair, vice chair, parish clerk (who is the treasurer of the committee) and any other parish councillor who wishes to attend. The committee also includes representatives of local groups involved in events, including the Church and the Women's Institute. Other members of the community join the committee for a single event and sometimes stay on when they realise the breadth of work the committee does. The committee usually organises two events a year, the Trowell Festival in the summer and an event at Christmas. The clerk worked at the Borough Council for 18 years prior to joining Trowell Parish Council. It was through her experience at the Borough Council that she became aware of the opportunity presented by the Village Venture fund for community arts. Trowell used a Village Venture fund grant to get the New Perspectives theatre company to devise a play around the village, based on interviews with inhabitants.

Case exemplar 4 – Bradwell (population of 1,883)

Every summer Bradwell holds a traditional village carnival with fete stalls and events, a fancy dress competition and a torch-lit procession. The parish council retains ultimate responsibility for the carnival, but does not directly manage the event. The parish clerk described the carnival committee as a sub committee of the parish council. It includes both parish councillors and villagers but it is governed under the financial rules and standing orders of the council. The parish newsletter of May 2005, reported that the carnival committee held a fundraising dance that aimed to make £1,000, but lost £300. A proposal was put to the following council meeting, and seconded, that there should be no further pre-carnival fundraising events and that the parish clerk should draw up new financial guidelines for the carnival committee. A counter proposal was made that the carnival committee should become independent of the parish council and that the £3,000 of parish funds recently granted to it should be returned to general parish funds, with the remaining funds transferred to the new independent committee. This motion was seconded and approved. However, it was then revealed that virtually none of the current carnival committee members wanted to serve on an independent committee because they were unwilling to bear the personal financial

risk. Since this meant having no new committee quorum to administer the funds, it was decided to rescind the decision. The original proposition for the clerk to draw up new guidelines for the committee was passed.

...and working in partnership.

Case exemplar 5 – Dawlish (population of 12,761)

The Dawlish carnival, which dates back to 1891, is now an eight-day event and was attended by some 75,000 people in 2005. There are fourteen members on the carnival committee, who meet every month, and every fortnight in the month running up to the event. The chairman of the committee sees the council and the committee as ‘working in partnership’, with the council providing backing to the carnival in a way it had not done previously. This is partly due to a particularly good working relationship with the clerk. Several instances of partnership working were highlighted:

- With the help of the clerk, the council helped form a standing committee on carnival safety that consisted of councillors, the emergency services and a representative of South Devon carnival association. The committee organised a marshalling and first aid course in the town, which trained 12 residents and two district council staff from a nearby holiday resort. The council put up a £1,000 grant, which represented about half the cost of the training.
- The chair of the carnival committee sits on the Council’s civic amenities committee, which deals with most quality of life issues. It is especially relevant to the carnival because of the importance of footpaths and lawns to its organisation. The committee includes ten councillors and three other members of the community that meet once a month.
- A bid to make electric cables available on the lawn where the carnival’s marquee is erected was successful. The success of the bid was partly due to the contribution of the town clerk, who linked the proposal with a wider campaign for Christmas lights in that same location.

Policy and research analysis

chapter four

In addition to the insight these case studies provide into the individual projects concerned, the research also offers a rich source of information about community governance and community participation at the very local level. Although our research focused on rural parishes, we believe that many of the findings could also have relevance for neighbourhood level governance elsewhere. The discussion which follows attempts to draw out the key cross-cutting themes from these case studies and to differentiate where findings are specifically rural and where they might have wider relevance.

Parish Councils and VCOs

To start with it is useful to reflect on the nature of parish councils and VCOs operating at a parish level. It is evident from the research that both parish councils and voluntary groups are playing a significant role across a range of activities including community consultation, the support and delivery of services, campaigning and advocacy and the social aspect of community life. As most VCOs have expertise in one or more of these areas of activity and the vast majority work at the local level, this tends to be the case not just at parish council level but at local government level more generally. What is perhaps different at the parish level is that because parish councillors are usually unpaid (and therefore effectively volunteers) and because they frequently have dual or multiple roles within their community, it can be more difficult to differentiate between governance and other participative roles.

Our research set out to look at the relationship between parish councils and VCOs operating at this very local level. It is evident from the case studies that at different stages and in different circumstances, parish councils and voluntary groups play different roles, sometimes as partners and sometimes as competitors. We also see shifts in who takes the lead. In many ways the relationship appears to be a symbiotic one, which evolves and changes dependent on circumstance and composition. A distinction is often drawn between civic and civil participation, where civic participation is associated with government structures such as parish councils and civil participation with voluntary and community groups¹³. But as the case studies show, in reality these are very much entwined with both parish councils and voluntary groups contributing to community governance, community leadership and community life more broadly. Consequently, our research findings perhaps tell us more about the nature of participation at the community level than they do about the relationship between parish councils and VCOs per se.

¹³ Jochum, V., Pratten, B. and Wilding, K. (2005) Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate, NCVO.

Part 1 The Rural Dimension

Rural areas are distinct from those in more urban and suburban settings in a number of ways. These include the existence of relatively small, discrete communities and the history of community governance in the form of parish councils. There are a number of factors arising from the case studies which reflect these rural circumstances and have an impact on the nature of the community participation and community governance taking place there.

Although the history and perception of parish councils may be particular to rural areas, a number of other factors identified here may be more a reflection of the scale on which parishes operate than of their rurality per se. If this is the case, these factors will be significant to the devolution debate and the policies which emerge from it, especially as neighbourhood level governance is promoted more widely.

Perceptions and expectations of parish councils

During our research we asked interviewees to discuss the role of the parish council. Opinions varied, depending largely on the levels of involvement the interviewees had with the council. However, as the first tier of government, the parish council was seen primarily as a statutory authority, an official body that 'had to be there', unlike the community groups formed out of choice. According to interviewees the parish council had several key roles as:

- the local planning authority;
- an 'information hub' providing information on the parish and various official matters;
- a 'problem solver' dealing with any local issues that arose and who people would contact if a problem occurred; and as
- a 'middleman' between local residents and other tiers of government, both providing information and, importantly, advocacy on behalf of the community.

Although community representation was considered to be the remit of both parish councils and community groups, interviewees, irrespective of their connections, believed the role of the parish council was to represent the community as a whole, whereas community groups were more likely to represent particular interests.

The case studies show that expectations of the parish council vary widely. Whilst some expected the parish council to be able to respond to any issue the parish faced, others saw them as almost powerless. In some cases, an inflated perception of the parish council's power and

resources lead to high and sometimes unrealistic expectations of what it could achieve. Where these expectations were not met they lead to disappointment and frustration. Perceptions of what community groups could achieve were often distorted too, with people particularly critical when progress was slow.

Scale – recruitment/competition/overlap/pressure/visibility

It was clear from the case studies that the scale at which parishes operate in terms of population meant that the recruitment of sufficient numbers of individuals, both as parish councillors and for other activities, was a challenge. This meant that there was an element of competition between various groups and committees, including the parish council, for the time of willing volunteers. It also placed greater pressure on those who were involved, who were often involved in more than one activity.

The fact that parish councillors are members of relatively small local communities was seen to have both advantages and disadvantages. Some interviewees thought it was easier for parish councillors to respond to local needs compared to other tiers of government because of their immersion in the community. However, some interviewees, including several parish councillors, also saw the downsides. These included being available 24/7 and not being able to switch off. Having neighbours, friends and acquaintances in the parish made the demarcation between public and private spheres less clear. Interviewees felt there was a risk of becoming too emotionally involved and therefore possibly less objective when making decisions. This could be the case particularly when friends and neighbours were potentially divided by certain projects or proposals.

What this highlights is not only the degree of social capital in operation at the parish level but also the degree of visibility that individuals felt when taking on active roles within a small community. As the Exbourne case study highlights, when the shop and post office project was being criticised, the committee members trying to take this forward were being directly criticised by their peers. Where the boundaries between governance and participation and, for the individual, between public and private are blurred, so too are the boundaries between what is appropriate accountability and what can feel like personal criticism. This theme is picked up later in the discussion on representation and leadership.

“We might say ‘would you go and deliver some questionnaires for us’ and they’d say ‘yes, I know two other people who would’, so it would snowball like that.”

(parish council member)

“It worries me, there’s some people who aren’t aware that it’s going on or there’s something they could do and say something, you worry that it’s going to be a small group of people, the same group of people that always drive things on, that’s just my personal feeling.”

(parish council member)

Social links – mobilisation/diversity

The small scale on which parishes operate clearly impacts on both social capital and community relationships. Social links can be seen to have a significant part to play in various aspects of community participation¹⁴.

Personal connections can be particularly important in the recruitment of new participants. In the Stokenham case study people often became involved in delivering questionnaires or hosting road-show events because they were asked by someone they knew.

Interestingly, most interviewees referred to their ties with particular individuals rather than the groups or institutions these individuals were involved in. This emphasises the importance of certain key individuals and to some extent helps to explain the blurring of boundaries between the organisations (see multiple roles below).

The community can certainly benefit from this kind of bonding social capital¹⁵ which helps with the mobilisation of volunteers. It can also help to enhance the level of participation in the locality as a proportion of the population. However, it can also mean that groups, including parish councils and community groups, can become closed cliques inadvertently discouraging more diverse participation. As previous studies have indicated, the recruitment of participants based on social connections tends to engage those with high social and human capital and therefore continues to reproduce existing social structures¹⁶.

If we start from the premise that participation in general is a good thing, then utilising social connections to enhance it is in itself benign. However, where a group is seeking to represent or serve an entire community, as a parish council arguably should be, the extent to which that group reflects the diversity of the community becomes more important for the group’s own legitimacy and for the quality and fairness of the decisions it is able to make. This theme is also picked up later in the discussion of representation and leadership.

Multiple roles – cross membership/sustainability/impartiality

Personal and social links also had a direct impact on the relationship between parish councils and voluntary and community groups involved in the case study areas. Most notably because of the frequency of over-lapping membership. In each case study, many of the activities taking place in the parish seemed to revolve around a limited number of key individuals. These local ‘movers and shakers’ were usually involved in more than one type of activity. They were

¹⁴ Yates, H. and Jochum, V. (2003) It’s who you know that counts: The Role of the Voluntary Sector in the Development of Social Capital in Rural Areas, NCVO.

¹⁵ Bonding social capital is a term used to describe social links between, often similar, individuals.

¹⁶ Shucksmith, M. (2000) Endogenous development, social capital and social inclusion, *Sociologia Ruralis* 40 (2)

often members of the parish council or various groups and committees, and quite frequently both.

Cross-membership can be seen to have distinct advantages when it comes to getting things done. Where councillors and/or their friends were involved with voluntary groups in the area (or vice versa) this sometimes lead to greater collaboration (mostly informal) between groups, with positive outcomes for the community. Collaboration between the parish council and various voluntary groups in the development of the Stokenham parish plan is one such positive example. However, cross-membership also raises issues around sustainability and impartiality.

Where links between organisations are forged on the basis of individual know-how or connections it can mean that these links are vulnerable and prove unsustainable when key individuals move on. Where one group is in a position to support another financially cross-membership and personal connections can make it difficult for otherwise transparent and accountable organisations to demonstrate the highest standards of governance.

Local/Incomers divide

The way in which incomers and the local population relate to one another seems to be an especially significant issue in rural areas. The community projects included in the research demonstrated that incomers had a considerable impact in terms of participation. Through their involvement, incomers had, to a large extent, increased the overall number of active individuals. In the Winkleigh case study incomers were the ones who were leading the campaign to save community facilities and who were helping to establish new community activities. The parish council had itself changed because of the influence of incomers.

However, tensions between locals and incomers were not uncommon. These often reflected divergent views on the future of the parish. In some cases, the incomers were the ones promoting change and in others they seemed, on the contrary, to be the ones resisting it for fear that it would damage the 'ruralness' of the area. In the Exbourne case study it is a small but very vocal group of locals who think the plans for the shop and post office are over-ambitious and who are critical of the committee predominantly made up of incomers.

This is a factor which we might think less relevant to participation and governance in more urban or suburban settings where the population of neighbourhoods tends to be more fluid. However, it may be that the introduction of community governance mechanisms at a much more local neighbourhood level would in itself make these

“They [incomers] come in and they try to alter things. They don't think that we've done anything, that's the opinion I get, they don't think that we've ever been involved with anything. They come in, they try to take over and they ruffle a lot of feathers I'm afraid.”

(community member)

¹⁴ Yates, H. and Jochum, V. (2003) It's who you know that counts: The Role of the Voluntary Sector in the Development of Social Capital in Rural Areas, NCVO.

population flows more evident and conceivably result in similar tensions there too.

Demographic profile

Rising house prices, the purchase of properties by retired buyers and/or holiday-makers and the lack of youth employment opportunities, which had been accentuated by the foot-and-mouth crisis, all had an impact on the demographic profile of the areas we studies. Inward migration in these areas was predominantly of retired and semi-retired people which contributed to an ageing population. Though it is not possible to say exactly what impact this had on participation, it was certainly true that those involved, particularly in governance roles, were usually over 40 and skilled, some with experience of involvement in community groups or activities. This dominant profile is likely also to have been a consequence of the social connections which brought people to the roles in the first place and for the many who were retired or semi-retired the amount of time these roles required.

Part 2 Wider issues

Participation – type and motivation

Participation in consultation, one-off action based roles or short term informal activities are more attractive to most than are the longer term or more official roles associated with governance.

The case studies highlighted a variety of different types of participation in which people are involved. These range from being a parish councillor or being a member of a voluntary group or committee in a governance capacity, to helping out as a volunteer on either a one off or on-going basis. There appear to be a number of factors motivating people to participate. These included where they:

- had a specific skill to offer;
- had a personal interest in the issues involved;
- had a sense of duty to the community or loyalty to someone already involved; and
- saw the social benefits of involvement.

It is important to note that parish councils relate to communities of place and while some VCOs are also based around place, others may be issue or interest group driven.

Motivations such as social status also played a role for some parish councillors. However, most were clearly motivated by a genuine desire to serve their community and make a difference, as were those individuals actively involved in community groups.

The parish councillors we interviewed were keen to stress that they shared a number of things in common with other community activists and volunteers. For example, they had no political affiliation (this is true of most though not all parish councils) and acted in a voluntary capacity. For these parish councillors, involvement in other community groups and activities was almost the norm. Despite the parish councillor role being an official role in the first tier of local government, they often made little distinction between the two types of participation.

On the other hand, it was not uncommon amongst those solely involved in community groups to completely reject the idea of becoming a parish councillor. Some had little interest in the issues the parish council had to deal with, such as footpaths or churchyards, which they perceived as being quite mundane. Others talked about the weight of formality, the constraining processes and procedures they would have to comply with, and the limited powers they felt the parish council had in comparison with other tiers of government. A number plainly felt more comfortable being outside any official

“You meet a lot of people and you make a lot of friends. So I thoroughly enjoyed it, I would recommend anybody to take up some sort of voluntary work, not that I’m doing very much at the moment, I’m taking a back seat for a bit, I’ve got a new grandchild.”

(community member)

“The lady that was already on the management committee that was part of my group, she said, ‘would you come along to the AGM, we’re about to collapse on the floor’ and that’s how the chairman got roped in as well, because it was just about to fizzle out completely.”

(community member)

“I don’t work very well with those kind of constraints, I’m better at winding people up, using the system to beat itself up and you can’t do that when you’re in their position. It’s easy to agitate when you’re outside but when you’re a parish councillor, you do have certain constraints on you and you can’t do that.”

(community member)

“I actually think they’re [parish councillors] quite a wide and dynamic range at the moment, I remember when I first moved in here I went to one meeting and thought, ‘never again’ it was just utterly moribund.”

(community member)

structure and having the freedom to oppose.

It seems that people were most keen to respond to issues that they thought affected them, especially if negatively. People were also more likely to get involved if they thought they would enjoy the experience. The success of community events and leisure activities demonstrated how important the social dimension of participation was. This was particularly the case for those new to the area.

In general it was easier to get people to participate in one-off or action orientated roles than it was to get them involved in more formal or procedural activities associated with governance. Even when concern or interest in an issue was high, for example where 60% of the local population responded on the priorities for the parish plan in Stokenham or where 94% of villagers wanted a local shop in Exbourne, it still proved difficult to get people to participate in more substantial and sustained ways. These factors clearly contributed to the difficulties parish councils encountered in recruiting sufficient numbers of candidates for elections. Only one out of the three parishes in the study had recently had a contested election.

Representation and leadership – the whole community remit

Representation of the community is a concern for both parish councils and community groups. For parish councils in particular this raises issues of legitimacy, wider community engagement, impartiality and support.

Although councillors were often keen to emphasise the similarity between their role and that of other community activists and volunteers, there is an important difference when it comes to objective leadership and their role as representatives for the whole community. As elected members of a formal tier of government, parish councillors have a responsibility to the whole community and, linked to their democratic accountability, a leadership role within it.

The flawed nature of the democratic process (with such frequently uncontested elections) and the relatively narrow range of people engaged in the parish council (not demographically speaking representative of the community) does however call into question the legitimacy of their leadership role and certainly limits their potential to be seen as the primary representatives of their community elsewhere. Awareness of these factors had led to greater efforts on the part of parish councils to engage more widely with the community through a variety of other mechanisms. However, it had also contributed to some tensions where respective roles were unclear.

In all the case study areas there were community groups who also had a strong role to play in representing the community. Some of these, for example the Winkleigh Society, had a community-wide remit like the parish council, others, however, focused on specific groups or interests. Both community groups and parish councils used community development approaches such as open meetings and consultations to assess community needs and opinions and provide a platform for community participation. Where they did so, both parish councils and other groups with a community-wide remit had the difficult task of reconciling the divergent and sometimes conflicting views expressed with the public good. In contrast single issue groups and those representing a particular section of the community were generally able to focus on an agreed position. This difference was the source of some tensions.

Parish councillors highlighted the importance of listening to all views and gathering the evidence that would allow them to make an informed decision when voting. In doing this, impartiality was sometimes difficult to maintain. Parish councillors were under pressure both internally, because they did not always share the same opinions and vision of leadership or the public good, and externally, because members of the community and community groups wanted a speedier decision or a more committed position one way or the other. The pressure to respond accordingly was particularly strong when one or more of the parish councillors were close to community groups that had already made their views known. Although community groups viewed impartiality as important, excessive neutrality and the inability to 'take sides', was thought at times to be damaging and was interpreted by some as a lack of leadership.

The Winkleigh case study highlights the nature of the challenge for parish councils and others in taking on broad representative roles. Because of its responsibility to weigh up the interests of the whole community, including consideration of factors such as any employment opportunities that the power station might bring to the area, the parish council felt it could not get involved in the campaign against the power station until all the evidence relating to it had been discussed. This delayed the parish council in making its decision to speak out against the development. Despite the delay being in the interests of impartiality and transparent decision making, this example demonstrates how parish councils can be perceived to be inflexible and slow to respond, especially as the eventual decision was to support the 'no' campaign.

“You cannot cut the parish council off and put them up in an ivory tower and say the village looks up to the parish council, that’s not how it works. We’ve got to be on the ground working with the people in the village.”

(parish council member)

“They’ve got an energetic springboard, all these groups, because they have got a single subject arguably, the parish council’s life is much broader.”

(council member)

“I think it was an entirely professional way to go about it, although it was very difficult for the councillors because the community were jumping up and down saying, ‘we don’t want this, why aren’t you saying no?’

(parish council member)

“I think to be a good councillor in my opinion, you have to be aware that some of your decisions won’t be liked by everyone, you have to have that strength of character so you have to be certain that you’re quite happy to say to Mrs. Smith, “yes I know you’ve got a problem with that but ...”

(parish council member)

Some parish council members spoke about the potential for rejection when they put themselves up for election, and disapproval when making decisions on behalf of the community. As leaders some had come to accept that their actions and decisions would be under constant scrutiny, openly criticized, and rarely praised. These were the realities of leadership that they felt other people were not willing to take on personally.

These views were mostly made in reference to parish councils, however they were also present in comments on governance more generally. Those involved in the more contentious projects or in a range of committees felt they too were often subjected to criticism. This is almost certainly a factor in the low numbers of people putting themselves forward for governance roles. It may well be exacerbated by the scale on which parish councils operate, making those involved feel especially visible and accessible to the rest of the community. If this is the case, it is a factor which might equally impact on neighbourhood governance arrangements introduced in other areas. It also raises issues about the level of external support available to those in community governance roles.

Capacity – the burden of participation

Lack of capacity in terms of time, skills and resources has an impact on the nature of participation, the potential for broadening that participation and the effectiveness of parish councils and community groups in their community leadership role.

As was noted earlier, those who were active in the community, including parish councilors, were frequently members of more than one group. This multiple membership meant that the individuals concerned frequently felt over-stretched. It also led to criticism by others which reflected concerns about the distribution of power and the disproportionate influence exercised by a limited number of people.

Those wearing ‘several hats’ acknowledged these issues, but were also keen to stress that more inclusiveness and greater levels of participation were difficult to achieve. They had often advanced calls for others to join, with disappointing results. That said, there was also some ambivalence towards wider participation. Valued primarily for the extra resources it would bring, it was also considered messier, less predictable and less efficient. The necessities of day-to-day management, including fundraising, took precedence over issues such as participation, which required more time and a different set of skills.

It seems the general lack of willingness to take on governance roles exacerbates the trend for multiple membership and therefore the burden placed on the few who are willing to take these roles on. With the time and resources to seek new participants and support new members limited, the narrow demographic profile of those currently engaged is perpetuated. This may in itself act as a barrier to wider participation but for some it may also have been a lack of time, confidence or a perceived lack of skills needed to take on such roles which held them back. This again contributed to the dominant profile of those involved being 40 plus and with relevant previous experience to offer.

In Exbourne, the village shop project, which is entirely volunteer driven, is aiming to provide an important local service for the community. Limited resources have meant that progress has taken a long time - four years between the village shop closure in December 2001 to the rejection of the detailed planning application in December 2005. In Winkleigh the CCOWS group are working towards community ownership and management of the local community centre. Here too, the group had worked hard to secure support and resources from a variety of external sources but had found this time consuming. To get either project fully up and running will take more work to develop sophisticated plans and engage with the community. Both groups felt under pressure, and had experienced some difficulty in gaining the support of key individuals, including in the Winkleigh case a parish council representative. These examples demonstrate the burden that participation, particularly in governance roles, can place on the individuals concerned. They also highlight the resource intensive nature of securing more funding, which presents something of a Catch 22 for both parish councils and community groups working at this level.

The limited capacity of the parish council also had an impact on the support it felt able to give to the CCOWs group for the community centre project. Though supportive of both the community centre and the campaign against the biomass power station, parish councillors were not able to give sufficient time to support both these activities to the extent that those involved would have liked.

If parish councils and community groups are going to be encouraged to take on bigger roles in owning and running community assets and in the delivery of services in future then these capacity issues are going to be critical. Parish councils have already experienced increased expectations from government in terms of their contribution to community governance and policy development. Asked to respond to numerous consultations and attend a range of local, sub-regional and regional meetings, the parish councillors

“We were looking for people with either a lot of personal skills and know-how that could contribute, or people with contacts and influence quite honestly.”

(parish council member)

“We’re preparing a business plan but it’s taking a lot longer than I ever envisaged it would and a lot more work than I ever imagined it would, in fact it’s completely taken over my life.”

(community member)

“The big gap has been in PR and marketing the project, keeping people informed... we haven’t had an individual who has that skill and forte of communicating the ideas and the time to actually do the PR. We’ve suffered for that because we haven’t been upfront enough and pushed the project and a lot of people have thought in the past and probably still think, ‘nothing’s happening’ because they don’t see all the work that goes on behind the scenes.

(community member)

in the case studies highlighted how their workload had increased in recent years. Despite these councillors being particularly dynamic, they expressed concerns about the growing gap between government expectations and reality on the ground, which poor resourcing exacerbated.

Sustainability – broadening participation and communication

Creating sustainable and inclusive local governance mechanisms, representative of the whole community and not over dependent on the active few, requires broader participation. Good communication is one factor essential in achieving this.

A number of issues raised here including capacity, inclusivity and representation are clearly linked to the need for wider community participation to be encouraged and sustained. In reality if the burden on the few committed local ‘movers and shakers’ is ever to be reduced, if the diversity of those engaged is to be broadened and if the representative role of the parish council is to become more robust, then efforts need to be made not just to engage people in consultation and one-off activities, but to sustain that engagement over time.

The Stokenham case study provides an example of how local communities can be involved in influencing local strategy and decisions. The parish planning process provided an opportunity for residents to participate and to express what they thought the priorities were for the parish. Despite impressive efforts to engage through face-to-face consultation and road-show events, the recruitment of volunteers to hand deliver the resulting questionnaire and a 60% response rate to the questionnaire, it proved difficult to sustain those levels of interest or to build on the engagement that had contributed to it. This was a problem for other projects too.

Failure to communicate what was happening had a negative impact on both the perception of parish councils and community groups and on their ability to sustain participation in, or support for their activities. Where groups and parish councils had sought to be more open, community support, dialogue and cooperation had increased. The parish websites, designed and maintained by either the parish council or community groups, and public meetings organised by one or the other, were seen as a step in the right direction. However, some interviewees expressed concerns about the format of public meetings if they were to be accessible and inclusive of a wide range of people. Though websites and public meetings were potentially seen as ways in which community groups and parish councils could improve communication, both require certain skills and are largely dependent

on adequate funding or resources being made available to put these communication measures into place.

Collaboration and competition – the potential for joint working

Collaboration between parish councils and voluntary groups can be an effective way to achieve positive outcomes for the local community. Blurred boundaries between the role of local groups and institutions and limited resources in terms of volunteer time can however contribute to a competitive environment.

Parish councils and community groups in the case studies and case exemplars worked together in a number of ways in order to get things done. The nature of this collaboration ranged from informal arrangements to situations where the parish council provided some financial support or support in terms of representation on another group's board, to situations where the relationship was more substantial.

In the Exbourne example the parish council had a relatively minor role in the shop and post office project. Initially they had given a small cash donation to the project. Later they were able to support the committee, and save it money, by submitting the planning application on its behalf. The Stokenham case study provides an example of much more substantial collaboration where community groups played a significant part in engaging the community in consultation and in development of the parish plan. In Winkleigh an interesting working party model was developing which enables the parish council to benefit from having more formal links with community members and community groups.

Relationships between these groups have the potential to be extremely productive and result in useful outcomes for the community. Where organisations are able to be flexible and to collaborate on projects they are also potentially able to exert greater influence and achieve more. However, there was some scepticism expressed on both sides. Whilst some interviewees suggested that formalised links with the parish council would mean better support, improved sustainability and ultimately greater impact in terms of collective action, this formalisation was a concern amongst other community groups. Some felt that a more formal relationship could potentially compromise their independence and that the processes put in place might prove inflexible and prohibitive. Likewise some parish councillors felt that too close a relationship with community groups would call their impartiality into question.

“My personal view is that the council should not get too close to any individual activity and should be seen as totally impartial, but can be fully supportive of them, even so we’ve got to be seen as being impartial.”

(parish council member)

“At some stage they [community association] seemed to want to take over the parish council, if you know what I mean, they were trying to push their ideas, sometimes against what the parish council were doing.”

(parish council member)

In some cases there was a clear overlap between the remit of the parish councils and community groups. Some parish councillors were more protective of their remit than others and felt that a number of community groups were doing what they in effect considered the parish council’s job.

Perhaps the area where this overlap was most obvious was in the role of advocacy on behalf of the community. Community representation was considered to be the remit of both parish councils and community groups. One of the key roles identified for parish councils was as ‘middlemen’ between local residents and other tiers of government. However, this was also clearly a role in which a number of community groups were engaged. This highlights the complexity of representation. As noted earlier, the parish council is not in a position to be the sole representative of the community, nor do they have the capacity to be so.

If the best interests of communities are to be adequately represented, particularly at district and county level, then the way parish councils and voluntary groups work together to achieve this is likely to be increasingly important.

Linking social capital – access to resources and influence

Making links with external agencies and those in other tiers of government is essential for those seeking to influence decisions or access resources. The capacity of both voluntary groups and parish councils to do this is limited, as is their access to the mechanism through which they might do so.

Making links with external agencies and those in other tiers of government was important to both parish councils and voluntary groups in our case studies. Previous NCVO research has shown that linking social capital¹⁷ is particularly important for leveraging resources, exercising influence and shaping public policy or decision-making processes¹⁸. Much of the community groups’ energy in the three case studies was devoted to building links with various external institutions, including local authorities, statutory bodies, and funders who they hoped would support them in achieving their objectives. Their first port of call was frequently the parish council, thought to be more approachable in comparison to other tiers of government because parish councillors were based locally and part of the community. But for many projects finding external sources of support, even if the parish council was supportive, was a necessity. The community groups showed great resourcefulness in doing this.

¹⁷ Linking social capital is a concept used to describe social relations with those in authority.

¹⁸ Yates, H. and Jochum, V. (2003) It’s who you know that counts, NCVO.

The groups that focused more on campaigning also established links with institutions and organisations other than the parish council when they needed to influence decision-making processes beyond their locality. This was best illustrated by the Winkleigh biomass campaign, which had involved contacting a range of local, regional and national organisations such as the District Council, the Regional Development Agency, the Government Office for the South West and the Department for Trade and Industry.

Whilst groups with a specific project or issue to address were actively making these links, with some positive results, there are questions about the extent to which parish councils are themselves able to influence other tiers of government either in support of other groups or on behalf of the community as a whole. Although some progress had been made as a result of achieving Quality Parish status, relationships with other tiers of government were not always as positive or constructive as they could be. Influencing decision-making processes involved attending various meetings, responding to consultations and networking with other parish councils, which was very resource intensive. The case studies demonstrated that these relationships could also at times be quite problematic and even conflictual. Tensions arose for example where the district council reversed parish council decisions over contentious planning issues.

Engagement in Local Strategic Partnerships and other mechanisms designed to identify and address local priorities remains, for many VCOs and parish councils, limited and it seems that they do not currently have the capacity to be more involved. If parish councils are to play a bigger role in the governance and representation of their communities in future, then thought needs to be given to both the access they have to these mechanisms and the skills and resources which would be required to enable them to take this on.

“We’re the sort of first stage of local politics basically, because we’ve got people on the ground and in the community and knowing what’s going on, we may not be able to make the final decision ourselves but at least we can help to prod those in higher office, in the right direction.”

(parish council member)

Key themes and issues for the future

5

chapter five

The inter-relationships between individuals and organisations in these case studies highlights the complexity of community participation, representation and governance and some of the difficulties which arise in achieving a balance between them. Parish councils have been identified as one potential model for neighbourhood governance arrangements. This section looks at the key themes and issues which might need to be addressed if we are to refine this model for community governance in rural areas and potentially utilise it, and the learning from it, in developing neighbourhood governance structures elsewhere.

There has been some concern that, with its heavy emphasis on 'neighbourhoods', the devolution agenda may have become too urban focused and therefore less fitting or relevant to rural areas. However, most if not all of the issues touched on here have been ones which have featured to some extent in debate relating to community level governance in both rural and urban areas. Certain aspects highlighted in the research may be heightened by the rural context (e.g. the incomer/local divide) or by the history of community governance in rural areas (e.g. perception of parish councils) but most of the issues that emerge from this research also seem likely to be factors where community governance is introduced on a neighbourhood scale elsewhere.

That said, the way in which these issues are addressed as the devolution agenda progresses may in some cases need to be differentiated along urban and rural lines in order to be effective. This is likely to be the case particularly in relation to the resource and support implications of greater participation and devolved responsibilities. Government must make sure that when addressing these they do not overlook the rural context which brings with it some logistical and demographic challenges and possibly some additional costs¹⁹.

Defining roles

In our case studies there was no one organisation representing the community or providing community leadership. On different issues and at different times there were a number of representatives and leaders taking on different roles, sometimes working in partnership and sometimes working separately. Both parish councils and voluntary groups have a role to play in community representation and leadership, this will continue to be the case even if parish councils are to be given an enhanced community governance role. To some extent this will be dictated by the nature of community engagement and the extent of local resources, but this is an essential aspect of healthy

¹⁹ Yates, H(2004) Funding the Rural Voluntary Sector: Full Cost Recovery & the Rural Premium, NCVO.

local democracy and therefore the existence of this multiplicity of voices and roles needs to be built in to the understanding and operation of community governance mechanisms.

Given the complex relationships between local groups and the prevalence of social links as a mobilising force, further consideration does however need to be given to the mechanisms which are in place to address issues of probity and impartiality. These could build on what has already been achieved through the Quality Parishes Scheme and the Freedom of Information Act. But, care needs to be taken to ensure that these mechanisms are proportionate to the role parish councillors are taking on and the financial resources that they have influence over. Government's key neighbourhoods document²⁰ makes clear that in enhancing the role of parish councils, or introducing new neighbourhood arrangements, the intention is not to create another tier of local government or to introduce unnecessary bureaucracy. A careful balance needs to be struck here between appropriate accountability and levels of formality and bureaucracy which could prove disincentives to engagement.

A number of the tensions and difficulties which arose in the three case studies were clearly caused by a lack of clarity, and in some cases a lack of understanding, of the respective roles of various groups active in the community and the constraints (personal, ethical and financial) which were at play for those involved. To be effective, particularly in engaging and representing community needs and interests, both parish councils and voluntary groups need to be clearer about their respective remits and as transparent as possible both in the way they carry out their roles and in their relationships. The parish planning process was seen to have a positive effect on levels of understanding both between organisations and within the community as a whole. Where these processes are carried out this should be done with enhanced levels of understanding built in as an aim in itself and with the ongoing communication of roles, responsibilities and action as a key sustainable outcome.

Building relationships

If the concept of devolution to community level is to have positive outcomes for communities and result in enhanced levels of engagement, then it is essential that neighbourhood bodies, including parish councils, have access to both service providers and other tiers of government. The priorities identified and decisions made at the community level need to be able to influence the actions and decisions made by these better resourced institutions. There is no greater disincentive to engagement than to feel you have no voice or

²⁰ ODPM (2004) Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter.

power. It is therefore essential that neighbourhood governance mechanisms, including parish councils, are able to feed in to Local Strategic Partnerships and the decisions which are being made at that level, particularly with regard to Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and the community strategies on which they are based.

If we are realistic about the nature of local engagement and the extent of local resources then it is unlikely, even if it were desirable, that parish councils could take on the entire community representation role and their other responsibilities alone. If community governance mechanisms are to be effective in achieving what local people want from public services and for the local environment, then consideration needs to be given to how local groups, including parish councils and voluntary groups, can work together to strengthen community representation and leadership and enhance their influence in relation to other tiers of government. In order to be achievable in terms of resources, and constructive in terms of community engagement, this would most likely need to be a collaborative approach to community representation. An approach where a range of groups and committees potentially work with the parish council to gather community views and provide representation on key issues similar to the way Community Empowerment Networks have developed and worked in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Parish councillors, with their whole community remit and, though limited, democratic accountability, are perhaps best placed to be hubs for this community leadership and representation, though perhaps not in every case being the ones to carry out these roles themselves. Rather, the approach they take could build on the strength of their local networks, underpinned by the duty to consult and engage with the community wherever possible. Where external agencies and statutory authorities seek connections into the community or representatives from the community, the parish council might rightly be their first port of call. Their response should, however, be based on the engagement of others and the sharing of responsibilities, rather than necessarily responding directly themselves in every case. To do this effectively, parish councils and other neighbourhood governance bodies would need to develop a style of leadership which was both flexible and inclusive and very much based on networking and negotiation.

In instances where decisions need to be made on behalf of the whole community, the parish council would again be the appropriate lead. In taking the lead however they should be doing so in partnership on the basis of consultation and wider communication and where possible, on building consensus.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) was created in May 2006 to facilitate better working on the shared agenda around communities and civil renewal. DCLG and Defra will now need to work together to strengthen the support available to local authorities and their partners in rural areas to improve representation and make the necessary links. They could, for example, provide a rural equivalent of the neighbourhood renewal advisers' role which has proven valuable to LSPs and Community Empowerment Networks in the largely urban Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Recruitment difficulties - the implications for neighbourhood governance

The difficulties in recruiting people, particularly to governance roles, presents a potential problem for government in its efforts to implement the devolution agenda. Proposals for neighbourhood level governance are dependent on sufficient numbers of active citizens being prepared to engage with the local policy agenda and take on these roles. This raises a number of issues.

Firstly, the extent to which these roles can be made more attractive. Key factors here include: the perception people have of the influence community governance structures can have over the issues which concern them; whether or not there is any financial recognition for the time they put in or reimbursement of the expenses they incur in doing so; and, the extent to which community governance bodies such as parish councils are engaged in the positive aspects of community life as well as negative issues (such as anti-social behaviour or 'environmental crimes').

Secondly, the extent to which any attempts to recruit people to governance roles within the community taps in to the motivation of individuals. In our case studies people were generally attracted to the social aspects of activities, or to activities related to issues in which they had a particular interest or concern. Conversely, they were negative about what they perceived to be the more formal procedures and the burden of bureaucracy. Time was also a factor, which undoubtedly has implications not just for the number of people willing to get involved but also for the age profile of those putting themselves forward. Based on these observations some consideration needs to be given to how participative roles, and governance roles in particular, are divided up, made more flexible and publicised and supported.

Voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) can be particularly good at getting people to engage in social and interest based activities. By building on this and some of the community development approaches that have already been seen to be effective, VCOs may be

particularly well placed to work with parish councils to enhance both representation and membership. And, potentially to reach out to specific groups within the community who are under represented e.g. younger people.

Thirdly, there may be some specific types of support that would help to recruit greater numbers of active individuals to representative or governance roles. These might include some kind of basic (pre-engagement) training or taster days for individuals considering taking on such roles and introductory or induction training for those newly elected or engaged. This is another area in which parish councils and VCOs could potentially work together. There are examples in both urban and rural areas where VCOs are providing support and training, particularly for community representatives. However, this, like other support mechanisms, requires financial resources to be made available. This kind of support should form an important part of the capacity building which the Rural Social and Community Programme (RSCP) aims to achieve through its funding at sub-regional level and its support for the work of Rural Community Councils, however it should be widely available and not limited to key individuals.

Ultimately it is likely that there will be a limit to the number of individuals that are willing to participate in community governance activities of any type. Therefore the government needs to ensure that they are realistic about likely participation and do not over burden the few individuals already involved.

Community ownership and asset management

Community ownership and asset transfer are both promoted as potential ways in which the community can play a larger part in shaping local services. Like community governance roles, responsibility for these activities requires committed individuals to dedicate substantial amounts of their time to something for which they may get little thanks or reward. There were projects in both the Winkleigh and Exbourne case studies where the community was in a position to own or manage a local service/asset and both had encountered difficulties. Identifying potential funders and filling in application forms had taken a great deal of time. The complex nature of these kinds of projects required certain skills which were difficult to find. Both these factors contributed to slow progress.

The requirements of potential funders and the guidance of advisors was seen to have partially shaped the projects. Whilst helpful in securing resources, this had not always helped in securing community buy-in locally. These kinds of projects undoubtedly need external support. However, thought needs to be given to how they build in

wider participation of the community from the start, and how those taking on leadership roles within the projects can be supported to achieve this. These issues should be addressed in any proposals for capacity building support relating to community ownership and asset management and the structure of any incentive funds in these areas.

Resources and support

The introduction of more robust community participation and governance arrangements and the devolution of responsibilities to the community level undoubtedly requires additional resources. Community engagement in itself can be a costly business and the support needs of those in community governance roles are also likely to increase with their changing roles.

In our response to ‘Empowerment and the deal for devolution’²¹ we set out our view that though the outcomes were difficult to quantify, increasing resources for community engagement should be viewed as a valid investment offset against savings from more appropriately targeted services and the positive societal benefits of more engaged citizens. The question is, in the case of the rural areas we studied and others like them, where would these resources come from and what help would be available to make sure that the engagement mechanisms put in place have the best chance of being effective?

On the issue of funding, the ODPM neighbourhoods paper²² emphasises the need to utilise existing resources better. It also suggests that there may be opportunities to raise funds in certain circumstances and that some budgets could be delegated to a neighbourhood level. A recent paper from the National Association for Local Councils²³ (NALC) makes a range of other suggestions for increasing the financial resources available to parish councils. These include:

- the introduction of some funding from principal authorities to cover election costs and encourage a higher number of contested parish council elections;
- some match funding for the parish precept; and
- parish council access to a proportion of the business rates from their area.

²¹ Vyas, D (2006) Response to the speech by Rt Hon. David Miliband MP Minister of Communities and Local Government: ‘Empowerment and the Deal for Devolution’, NCVO.

²² ODPM (2004) Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why neighbourhoods matter.

²³ NALC and CRC (2005) Ideas Paper on the Neighbourhood Governance Review: The Role and Contribution of Parish and Town Councils,.

On the issue of support, the NALC also makes some helpful suggestions. These include:

- enhancing the role of County Training Partnerships and County Associations of Local Councils in providing training and support to parish councils; and
- developing stronger links with principal authorities through Parish Liaison Officers and Lead Elected Members.

They also make an argument for more linked up support structures at the national level, for example between NALC and the IDeA. Consideration could be given to the introduction of additional support and performance improvement mechanisms similar to those available to principal authorities. These could include opportunities for peer review or a mini Beacon scheme²⁴ focusing on community engagement and specific rural issue, based on a simplified application process and offering the potential for financial rewards.

Participation and governance mechanisms at the very local level should be a matter of partnership and collaboration between local groups and not just the responsibility of parish councils.

Consideration should be given to the kind of support available to other key players including voluntary and community groups, for example through the new Rural Social and Community Programme.

However, this does not address the critical issue of time, which has an impact on the capacity of both parish councils and voluntary and community groups. Our case studies highlighted the extent to which many active individuals, especially those in governance roles, are already over-stretched. If their responsibilities are to be enhanced then in addition to the provision of greater support, other ways may need to be found to increase capacity. These might include developing better structures for the delegation and sharing of responsibilities as suggested above. It might also mean involving a greater number of people in parish councils themselves and perhaps also providing higher levels of paid support e.g. through the parish clerk's role.

Quality parishes and parish plans – the way forward?

The Quality Parishes Scheme (QPS) and the introduction of parish plans definitely appear to have been steps in the right direction for parish councils. The issues parish councils are required to address (elections, ethical conduct, communication, support and transparency) in order to achieve Quality Parish status are certainly the right ones. For example, achieving Quality Parish status had definitely had a positive impact on the way the Stokenham Parish Council was operating. Even though many of the issues, particularly

²⁴ Though the existing Beacon Scheme has been open to the 41 Best Value parish councils since 2002 none have yet applied. This is despite 'improving rural services: empowering communities' being a Round 7 Beacon theme. NALC suggests this is largely a capacity issue for parishes due to the application process being designed with better resourced principal authorities in mind.

those around conflict of interests and contested elections, remain sensitive, the Quality Parish model would appear to be a good one to build on, not just for rural areas but perhaps for neighbourhood governance structures elsewhere.

Bearing in mind the, then ODPM, proposals for the transfer of some responsibilities to the neighbourhood level, which may appear in the forthcoming Local Government White Paper, NALC's call for a review of the QPS in advance of re-accreditation in 2007 seems sensible. However, if the Quality Parish approach were to be introduced more universally (to date, take up amongst parishes has been relatively slow) consideration would need to be given to the resource implications. Working towards Quality Parish status requires a certain level of capacity which for small, poorly funded parishes with limited administrative support, can be a challenge. One of the biggest barriers to obtaining Quality Parish status is the requirement to have a qualified parish clerk. Although funding and support has been made available not all current clerks want to study for the qualification, and funds are not always available within the parish to pay for the time it would take. However, future rounds of the Quality Parish Investment Fund and linking accreditation to other sources of funding could help to provide extra incentives to overcome these barriers and speed up progress.

Parish plans also appear to have had a positive impact on parish councils and the way they engage with the local community. A review carried out by the Countryside Agency²⁵ found that most villages had a positive experience of writing a plan, particularly in terms of building community spirit. All three case studies certainly demonstrated this. The main weaknesses appeared to be in the ability to sustain this engagement. As rural policy moves into a new phase with the introduction of the Rural Social and Community Programme, the ability to sustain positive change is as critical as ever. Though based on positive principles of devolution and partnership, funding is only committed until 2008. The process of improving local governance at parish and neighbourhood level will without doubt take longer term commitment than this.

Defra's consultation document on RSCP²⁶ highlighted parallels between the approach of the programme and the investment the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has made in Community Empowerment Networks and the associated Single Community Programme. The level of resources however, does not compare, either in the terms of the total amount or the length of funding commitment. If RSCP and any forthcoming neighbourhood governance proposals are to be successful in rural areas, the role that district and county level authorities play will be critical. Ultimately, community capacity

²⁵ Countryside Agency(2004) What makes a good Parish Plan?

²⁶ Rural Social and Community Programme: A Consultation Document, Defra (July 2005).

building, engagement and representation will need to be championed and financially supported by principal authorities if sound community level governance and meaningful levels of diverse participation are to be achieved and integrated into decision making processes in future. It is to be hoped that this will be taken into account in the Local Government White Paper expected in Autumn 2006.

A guide to the roles and functions of parish councils

A

Appendix A

What are parish councils?

Parish councils (sometimes called town councils: collectively known as 'local' councils) are the most locally elected body within the English system of local government. Most councils grew up out of ecclesiastical parishes but the two functions of civil and ecclesiastical parish were formally split in law in the 19th century. There are now around 8,500 parish and town councils in England representing some 16 million people²⁷. Parishes vary widely in the number of residents they serve and their budgets. Some parishes serve fewer than 400 people whereas some town or city councils serve thousands, for example Hereford City Council serves over 50,000 residents.

Parish councils are mostly based in rural areas: indeed Greater London is prohibited from setting up town councils. Since 1997, residents who live in any area that is not already wholly or partly within a parish may petition for the establishment of a parish council in their area. This, combined with the government's increased interest in neighbourhood governance (see Chapter 2), has led to over 100 new parish and town councils being established.

Parish council funds are raised through a precept on Council Tax. Because the number of residents within a parish can vary quite significantly this means that their budgets also vary from a few hundred pounds to hundreds of thousands per annum. 41 local councils that have an income of over £500,000 and are therefore subject to the local government Best Value²⁸ regime. But most councils have a significantly lower income than this and estimates of an average income for the bottom 90% is £9,150 per annum²⁹.

Who runs the parish council?

Parish councils are made up of elected councillors. The local community elects parish councillors for four-year terms however, in many areas the elections are not contested³⁰. Although Parish and Town Councils are able to pay their councillors an allowance³¹, very often they do not.

Recent research carried out by LGIU³² found that 26% of parish councillors are also serving councillors for a district, country or unitary local authority (principal authorities). This dual role can be advantageous in facilitating links with the principal authorities. However this does mean that councillors can find themselves trying to resolve conflicts of interest. It is also common for ward councillors

²⁷ NALC and CRC (2005) Ideas Paper on the Neighbourhood Governance Review.

²⁸ The Local Government Act 1999 placed the duty of Best Value on local authorities requiring best value authorities to produce Best Value Performance Plans showing their record of delivering local services and their plans to improve on them (Local Government White Paper, DETR, 1999).

²⁹ Local Government Information Unit (2005) The Potential of Parish and Town Council to Support Neighbourhood Arrangements.

³⁰ Anderson, J., Edwards, B., Fahmy, E., Gardner, G., Woods, M., Participation, Power, and rural Governance in England and Wales Aberystwyth, University of Wales

³¹ Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, Section 25

³² Local Government Information Unit (2005) The Potential of Parish and Town Council to Support Neighbourhood Arrangements.

to attend parish council meetings, but LGIU³³ research has found little evidence that this has caused any major impact or change.

A paid clerk usually supports the parish council, however the level of support varies according to the resources of the council. Many councils can only fund a clerk for a few hours a week so some councils share a clerk between them. This allows them to share resources and means the clerks can apply good practice as demonstrated in other councils. Bigger councils may employ more staff particularly where they are delivering public services or running special projects.

What do parish councils do?

Parish councils have a range of statutory functions. These include:

- Provision and maintenance of local amenities such as allotments, bus shelters, signage and recreational facilities;
- Providing public services such as entertainment and support of the arts, lighting roads and public places and transport schemes; and
- Managing public buildings³⁴.

In addition parish councils are a focus for community representation and activity. For example in the parish planning process, councils lead a process of community engagement to produce a plan that describes the social, environmental and economic features of the parish and includes an action plan for the parish.

Parish councils also have a statutory right to be notified about planning applications. In many cases parishes feed back valuable information to planning authorities about the suitability of a development. Parish councils have long been involved in campaigning, both for and against, developments within or around their parish.

Parish councils have relationships with a wide range of other bodies including neighbouring parishes, the district council, the county council and other statutory authorities such as the Police or the Primary Care Trust (PCT), local businesses, local Voluntary and Community Organisations and Rural Community Councils. Parish councils may also participate on Local Strategic Partnerships and area forums run by the principal authorities.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For full list of functions see NALC website www.nalc.gov.uk.

Parish Council Infrastructure and Support.

A network of County Associations (CALCs) and a National Body (NALC³⁵) support parish and town councils throughout England.³⁶ Parish clerks are represented and supported by the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC³⁷).

At a local level parish councils are also supported by Rural Community Councils who were particularly tasked with supporting parish planning under the Vital Villages scheme.³⁸

³⁵ www.nalc.gov.uk.

³⁶ NALC's members also include Community Councils in Wales.

³⁷ www.slcc.co.uk.

³⁸ The Countryside Agency's Vital Villages Scheme ran from 2001 – 2004.

Research methodology

Appendix B

The main objective of the research was to investigate how the relationship between parish councils and voluntary and community groups impacted on community governance and community participation. In addition to looking at the contribution of the organisations and institutions, the research also aimed to explore how individuals within rural communities engaged in the activities and processes of community governance and community participation.

A number of interviews with academics and researchers were conducted to scope out the key issues around rural community governance and help us to define the research questions, complementing the literature review.

The research used a case study approach that focused on specific local projects reflecting the different functions parish councils and voluntary and community groups share:

- Consulting with the community;
- Providing services or access to services;
- Providing advocacy and voice; and
- Organising or promoting community events.

Potential candidates for the case studies were originally identified through NCVO's rural network and parish council websites. This initial screening phase showed that the relationship between parish councils and voluntary and community groups in the organisation of community events was fairly limited and did not justify carrying out a full case study. The research has instead included several case exemplars that illustrate a range of situations.

Gaining access was negotiated through the parish councils. It was decided that the best way forward would be to use the extensive network of one of the parish clerks we had made contact with. As a result, the case studies are all located in the South West and more precisely in Devon, however, the case exemplars cover a broader range of regions.

The case exemplars are based on telephone interviews with parish clerks and the three main case studies are based on in-depth interviews with a range of different stakeholders. Usually these included parish council members (chairman of parish council, parish councillors and parish clerk) and individuals directly or indirectly involved with the project (community activists, committee members, volunteers etc.). Although centred on specific projects, the interviews addressed wider issues around community governance and community participation and examined existing similarities and differences between the role, activities and processes of parish councils and community groups.

Further reading

Ideas Paper on the Neighbourhood Governance Review: The Role and contribution of Parish and Town Councils CRC and NALC (2005)

Voluntarism and new forms of governance Edwards, B et al. (2006) in Milligan, C and Conradson, D (Eds.), *Landscapes of voluntarism: new spaces of health, welfare and governance*

No Overall Control: experiencing community development in rural Britain Ellis, A. et al. (2005)

People and participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision making Involve (2005)

Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate Jochum, V., Pratten, B. and Wilding, K. (2005), NCVO

The Potential of Parish and Town Councils to Support Neighbourhood Arrangements Jones, Andrew et al. (2005), LGIU

Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter ODPM (2005)

The Future of Local Government: Developing a 10-year Vision ODPM (2004)

Endogenous development, social capital and social inclusion Schucksmith, M. (2000), *Sociologia Ruralis* 40 (2)

Pointers to Good Practice Skinner E, Derounian J, Howes L & Kambites C (2005), Commission for Rural Communities

Response to the speech by Rt. Hon. David Miliband MP, Minister of Communities and Local Government 'Empowerment and the Deal for Devolution' Vyas, D, (2006), NCVO

How voluntary and community organisations can help transform the local relationship Vyas, D (2006), NCVO

Participation, power and rural community governance in England and Wales, report for the Welsh Assembly Government Woods, M et al. (2003)

It's who you know that counts Yates, H. and Jochum, V. (2005), NCVO

This publication can be made available in large print and alternative formats on request.

Please contact NCVO on 020 7713 6161 for more information.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

National Council for Voluntary Organisations

Regent's Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL

T: 020 7713 6161

F: 020 7713 6300

E: ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk

W: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Textphone: 0800 01 88 111

Need to know?

www.askNCVO.org.uk

HelpDesk: 0800 2 798 798

or helpdesk@askncvo.org.uk

Charity Registration: 225922

The paper used for this publication is sourced from sustainable forests.

October 2006

design: wave.coop

ISBN 0-7199-1689-5



9 780719 916892 >

a broader parish

working together,
improving rural
communities