

togetherwecan

Cultivating Communities: The Green and Clean agenda

Buile Hill Park, Salford, Manchester
24 June 2008, 9.30 am - 4.30 pm

Cultivating Communities Conference Report



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Area based visits: Four afternoon visits took participants to projects and initiatives in Salford. For further information please contact:	
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Chair's Opening Address

Conference attendees were welcomed by the Conference Chair, Diana Martin.

Diana explained how Neighbourhood Management (NM) works across the 8 wards within the city supporting communities to become better engaged with partners. Working in small localities at a local level is effective, resulting in neighbourhood decisions and services responsive to local need. She outlined the NM structures including the newly formed Neighbourhood Partnership Board which is established to provide strong collective vision and drive to improve neighbourhoods on a partnership basis.

Salford Council is strongly committed to devolving budgets including £100,000 Highways budget per ward area. These meet the needs and priorities identified in the local Community Action Plans. Over £1.5 million funding per annum is devolved and spent at a local level with residents making key decisions regarding its allocation.

Salford is one of 18 Empowering Authorities that CLG have identified, working across the country to identify and share best practice. An example of good practice is the Spotlighting process which involves examining in detail at a local level issues and problems experienced, drawing in key partners including community members, to look at how to resolve them.

Key Note Speakers:

Margaret McLeod, Chairperson North West Together We Can (NWTWC)

Margaret began by explaining how Regional Empowerment Partnerships provide opportunities to find out about empowerment and ways to get involved. North West Together We Can is one such regional partnership, funded through North West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Network, and also through the Department of Communities and Local Government.

At the NWTWC Conference held last year, a participatory budget exercise distributed £40,000 of funding to 14 innovative projects including a First Aider on every street, an Active Citizens programme, and Broughton in Bloom.

Margaret gave details of the range of work and research undertaken by NWTWC which includes commissioning research from the Gender & Participation unit at Manchester University, establishing Action Learning Sets, and organising Learning Exchange seminars. There are publications available from NWTWC which detail all this activity, and information will also be available on a new NWTWC website.

Key priorities for 2008-9 include continuing to promote best practice and expertise, and bringing together activists, elected members, officers, and community workers in order to share learning and experiences.

For further information, or to forward good case study examples please contact:

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Gerry Stone, Chairperson, Seedley and Langworthy Development Trust.

Gerry introduced herself as the Chair of SALT and Community Governance Officer for Salford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). She is eagerly awaiting the government White Paper on Empowerment and will be involved in mapping Salford LSP's response to it.

She stressed the need for officers to work in true partnership with local people. Key to this is the need to develop and build relationships of trust. Local people give so much to their community, through hours of voluntary time and effort; officers must give back in the form of knowledge and opportunities for residents to positively contribute and make an impact, and to work together for improvements.

Professor Chris Allen, Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University

Chris Allen explained that he had been working with SALT researching the role that it plays locally as a community-led organization delivering services at a neighbourhood level.

Communities want to know that they can influence decisions; that they are respected. This cuts both ways, as the best way to do this is to form positive, constructive relationships with communities. Empowering communities is at the heart of the Guide Neighbourhoods programme, which SALT is part of. Recognition is at a national level through the CLG which funds the programme. Communities need to be listened to. SALT emerged from the community in response to problems at the time; it provides a 'passage point' or flow of information regarding neighbourhood problems and needs. Need for 'micro' interventions, local priorities need to be addressed alongside 'macro' interventions.

Often causes of decline are seen as widespread existing outside of the neighbourhood. The focus of regeneration policy has often been an outward focus, accompanied by macro interventions. Community anchor organisations like SALT emphasis issues within the neighbourhood; the focus is on the community and its resources, interventions are often small-scale but have a positive impact. Chris outlined the difference between a 'transformational agenda' & 'real-life agenda'. Investment / resources needed to support community anchors.

Toby Blume, Chief Executive of Urban Forum

Toby began by explaining that Urban Forum is a membership organisation for community groups involved in urban regeneration, linking community experience and policy making.

His presentation provided an overview of recent and current policy around community empowerment. Since Hazel Blear's appointment there have been lots of policy papers from the

DCLG. including those around:-

- Local Area Agreements & the Duty to Involve
- Neighbourhood Governance & Petitions
- Participatory Budgeting
- Joining things up – LSP having more co-ordinated approaches to community engagement.

Some of the challenges he identified included:-

- Everyone talks about empowerment but do we have a consensus of where we are going? Are we speaking the same language?
- Agencies are asked to 'join up' what is often 'unjoinable', complicated etc
- Changing established cultures, practices etc takes time – cannot be resolved speedily.
- Capacity to be able to engage is vital; diminishing funding available for community development and capacity building work

Solutions:-

- Empowerment is a goal worth striving for – it is about the fair sharing of power.
- Collective action is needed, not competition. It is about working together to re-define the relationship between the citizen and the state

Final thoughts included starting with what's simple whilst recognizing there is along way to go. The need to recognise too that it is about poverty – poverty needs to be back on the political radar. A national Urban Forum Conference will be held in Manchester later this year themed around poverty debates / issues.

Questions taken from the audience include:-

Q: "Were there any plans to recycle the flowers from Tatton Park?"

A: wasn't aware of it, but suggested making an approach with an offer to recycle plants to community groups, etc.

Q: "There is double-speak between the planning regulations as they exist & the empowerment agenda – local peoples rights to protest at a public enquiry are being eroded" - Have Urban Forum challenged this?

A: Yes representations have been made to both the DCLG & the Royal Town Planning Institute. Urban Forum has submitted a response to the planning bill – see the website for further information.

Q: "How is it possible to overcome public cynicism given the petitioning record of central government?"

A: Key lies in the elected members representing local views and interests & being supported & resourced to work to represent their local communities more effectively.

Q: "Has the devolved budget increased in Salford from £2.88 per head to £2.96 per head?"

A: Yes, it has been increased to £2.96 (inflation rise). This equates to between £60,000-£100,000 per neighbourhood depending on their size.

Q: "Interesting presentations ... what matters to communities doesn't always tally with service providers. Why doesn't the NM team place staff in community-based organizations such as SALT?"

A: They do! There is a member of the NM team based at SALT working collaboratively on neighbourhood issues.

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Plenary session notes:

Councillor John Merry, Leader of Salford City Council

Investment in the city's economy is a key priority – Salford is the most improved local authority in the country. Over 60% of local people have 5 or more GCSE's. Education is a pathway out of poverty. Not denying Salford's past but building on it and capitalizing on the passion of Salford's people to create a new and vibrant city.

Hilary Wainwright, Author 'Reclaim the state experiments in popular Democracy.'

In 'climate chaos' – effects of climate change is seen regularly on our TV's; it is reversible - people can make a difference. It is a global problem so a global solution is needed but we cannot rely on global decision-makers to make the changes.

Need for effective public transport systems – metro link expansion, improved cycle ways, bus systems etc. Need a package of investment to ensure that there are strong alternatives to travelling by car, plane, etc.

Question: "If we had more effective IT systems & harnessed the technology that is available, would we need to travel so much?" A: Broadband connections, video-conferencing, Skype etc. can all contribute to reducing our carbon footprint.

The North West is the home of the co-operative movement, responsible for shifting the economy in a good way. Need to see an understanding of business isn't always modelled on the private sector – can apply business methods & efficiency notions to social & environmental goals too.

Wayne Priestley, Assistant Director, Environmental Services ‘Parks for People’

Salford is 60% green space; we are proud of this as a city as well as the fact that Salford had the first municipal park – Peel Park on the Crescent. Whilst parks once received heavy investment now only 1 in 5 parks nationally are in good condition. £3.5 billion is needed to bring them into a good state.

Wayne’s presentation outlined the ‘Parks for People’ strategy, the core components of which include:-

- Strategy development
- Master planning
- Sourcing the funding
- Partnerships
- Sustainability

for the 10 largest parks in the city.

Key points included:

- Need for local people to be interested and active in the parks: good record of supporting Friends of Parks groups, the council conduct park surveys, link with local schools, etc.
- Events in the park are popular, over 30,000 people attended events in the park last year.
- Successful ranger service in the parks – support health promotion, school bulb planting schemes, health walks, etc.
- Looking at the possibility of community centres in the park; base for the ranger services.
- Important to retain the heritage of the parks.
- Need to create multi-functional parks that meet the communities’ needs.

Questions taken from the audience included:-

Q: "Is the Ranger Service in Albert Park going to be lost?"

A: No decision has yet been made about the rangers. There has been reduced funding but they do provide a valuable service which is widely recognized.

Q: "If people relied more on IT and technology they might lose a sense of self, lose the conversational aspects to meeting and talking to local people and communities. Communication skills would be lost."

A: Still a need for meetings, human contact. Not a replacement of this.

Q: "There is a need for public sector to be bolder, more imaginative. There are some good examples of this in the North West."

A: Yes, we need to capture these.

Q: "How do you ensure people feel part of the park when it is a new development?"

A: Don't rely on just one method. Within the park there is a need for Friends groups, stakeholder groups, community committee feedback, leafleting people – include as many different people in as many different ways as possible.

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Workshop Notes

Workshop: Toby Blume – ‘Engagement, empowerment, environment. National, regional and local good practice’

Discussion points:

- What are the challenges and opportunities with Empowerment?
- Empowerment=Engagement=Participation and Involvement
- What do people think are the issues? Do they resonate or conflict with Empowerment as a term?
- What is the role of the state in protecting minority interests e.g. gypsies’ communities?
- Are there too many definitions to what Empowerment is? Is there a need to define what it means? But without a broad definition it could lead to confusion.

Group Work: What are the problems and obstacles we face in moving forward?

- If we had too much individual empowerment we would get anarchy
- Empowerment is strongest when there is consensus
- In order to get consensus people need to know what is going on - through publicity, marketing
- Community Empowerment definition changed over the years
- Key word is Partnership
- Some people in the community still need support

Individual Empowerment

- Local Councillors can feel threatened
- Partnership is the key to empowerment.
- Democracy and Empowerment linked
- People have this already - not to be dished out like patronage
- Community Empowerment Networks – uncertain future

People have a say in decisions that affect them

- Is this concept a good idea?
- Cannot have a say in everything

Problems / Issues

- Representation has flaws.
- Capacity building Vs Capacity Releasing
- Change not always owned by the community
- Shift from grants to procurement
- Need to avoid reinventing the wheel - duplication of effort
- Communications
- Competing priorities
- Not seeing results
- Costs

Workshop: Simon Gershon, 'Many Outputs of a Community Orchard'

Introduction:

How do we perceive the world? We are tool users and identify things by what they are, our perceptions & relationships we have with them are secondary. We need to think about ourselves & relationships with others as primary to how the world works.

What is primary? Things or relationships, object centred focus = 'goods', relationships focused = 'buying into a service'

We are unusual in society & are highly industrialised / own possessions.

- No relationship with people who make things i.e. clothes from China
- Globalisation goes with object centred
- Localisation is more natural way

Individual Identity

- We have groups who empower individuals
- We need to get more balanced
- We need to identify self through relationships with groups
- We are concerned with physical security
- Not many possessions in West Africa, but a sense of giving

We think of ourselves as different from nature. World is in a mess leading to global environmental catastrophe. This is the wrong thinking – we are all part of the web of life and need to care about living things.

"There is a challenge as people do not care, how do we change this?" Under the spectrum of how people connect to the wider world, small percentage of people will do the right thing. Some will never change, however 80 % of people can change. We need to connect and find ways for people to feel part of the wider environment; this will lead them to care for the environment.

What happens at the Orchard?

The Orchard receives £10,000 grant from 'Breathing Spaces' to run school projects. This grant supports equipment & teachers' packs etc; it strengthens connections with schools & young people - i.e. primary school activities, litter pick etc.

Volunteering Side

Millennium Commission Grant was awarded for 3 years to employ a professional gardener. Once the funding came to an end, the gardener was no longer able to coordinate the skills, learning etc. Simon Gershon joined the Orchard at this time and now coordinates the volunteer programme. The County Council offer support through helping volunteers to develop skills such as tree cutting etc. Families and retired people are encouraged to get involved in volunteering.

Future is to use volunteers rather than employing professional gardeners. Simon would like to develop outreach side of the project as this is the only community orchard in Lancaster.

The Orchard is situated in the middle of two housing estates; this brings problems such as fruits are picked up before they are ripe, some goes to waste. Notices are regularly hung up but this has not made much of a difference.

Question: "Has the orchard reduced any anti social behaviour on the estates?" A: It is difficult to say – the orchard is one of the affluent areas & well patrolled by PCSO's.

How did the Orchard start?

When the council started selling off land in the area, some of the residents came together and bought the orchard land in order to stop developers building houses etc. The Orchard may turn into an urban nature reserve / urban farm in the future. No protected status has been received yet. This could be a long process.

How long did it take to establish?

It was quite a quick process in terms of getting funding & grants etc. The orchard had to be a 'Charitable Trust' at time of Millennium Commission. Harvesting takes 3 or 4 years for most & small varieties can harvest after 1 year.

Ethnic Minorities Involvement

Lancaster has small numbers of Black and Ethnic Minority Groups. There is a small Pakistani community, but not many of them use the Orchard. However, there are allotment plots near the Orchard which are used by this community.

Problems in managing an Orchard

- Anti Social Behaviour
- Vandalism
- Alcohol Issues
- Drug Taking
- Motorbikes
- Dog fouling
- Using woods for dumping garden waste

The Orchard organise events such as 'Apple Day' for children to get involved and take ownership of the project etc. (Including Scout groups)

The Orchard has lots of plants and wild flowers such as daffodils & bluebells and they are all good for wildlife.

The Orchard needs volunteers. There are a lot of people with skills, and training is needed to put these skills into use.

Workshop: Annie Merry, Carole Parker - Action Learning. 'Sharing challenges and solutions to support community development and learning.' (pre workshop details)

This interactive workshop will enable participants to have a taste of and consider developing Action Learning as a means to finding answers and workable solutions to difficult issues or challenges within the workplace through interaction within a group setting.

Faiths4Change, working with CP Community Regeneration Services, devised and delivered a method of Action Learning enabling people from community development and related fields to come together in Action Learning Sets in Liverpool, Burnley, Manchester and Preston earlier this year.

We will share our learning and experience within the workshop by:

- Introducing Action Learning
- Enabling participants, in small groups, to use their knowledge, experience and creativity to consider workable solutions to common real life challenges, such as

Questions:

- How can we facilitate real discussion between diverse groups about our differences, and so help to bring us closer together?
- How do we embed the principals of community engagement across the organisation and make community working an enjoyable priority for all staff?
- How can we attract more male volunteers to projects, and so have a more diverse volunteer profile which represents the community?
- How do we measure success in community engagement?
- How can young people be encouraged to be considerate of their environment?

Workshop: Caroline Downy – 'What lessons have we learned and what more is there to do?'

Wildlife for its own sake

- Small areas can be of significant wildlife value
- Can be educational experience for all the community to see and share e.g. rare species an area where together and see wildlife
- Specialist interest e.g. bee keeping
- A local small area can be more accessible to community
- Young people can get involved they can help with rare species
- Supports mental health & help with anger management & obesity i.e.; getting fit green gym
- Making an impact being part of a solution
- A raised bed for growing food for every year group in school.

Wildlife and People & appreciating Urban Nature

- People will see species they have never seen
- Education=environment, species
- Reduce fear
- Promote understanding
- Awareness of role within eco system
- Respect for nature and plants, animals
- Teaching people to protect them not destroy them
- Wildlife sites as a catalyst for moving on to Regeneration initiatives
- Urban food growing schemes
- Gardening for wildlife
- No noise pollution-hearing the environment birds trees, etc

Workshop: Tracy Todhunter – ‘Low Carbon Community Network. ‘Community engagement in environmental issues.’ (pre workshop details)

Workshop Aims

- To give participants an overview of the projects currently running in the UK
- Motivators and barriers – what works and what doesn't!
- An overview of agencies that are supporting community action on climate change and how to approach them for support

Tracey Todhunter is a freelance writer and trainer, working with communities for over 20 years. She lives in the Cheshire Village of Ashton Hayes, where the Parish Council has set itself the aim of being the “first carbon neutral village in England”.

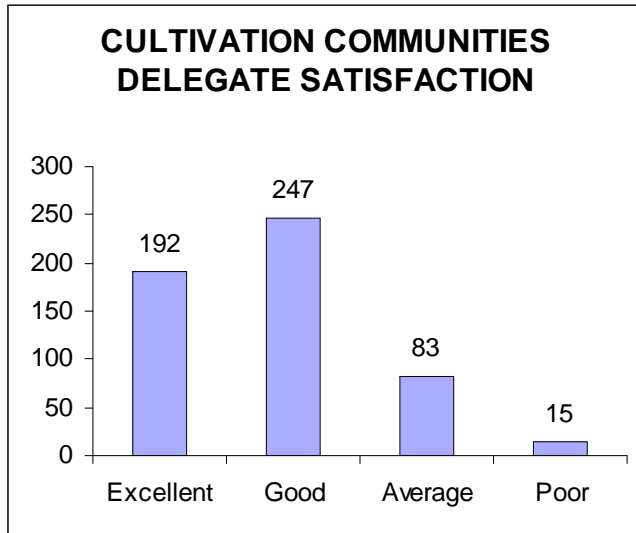
She will tell the story of Ashton Hayes from a resident's perspective and share case studies from communities across the UK who are embarking on projects to reduce their environmental impact and showing how these have increased community cohesion and a sense of belonging in the community. Tracey has spent the past year visiting low carbon community projects and writes for her local paper highlighting the many low carbon communities in Cheshire.

Tracey is currently working on the 2008 Low Carbon Communities Conference which will be held on 4th October in Llangollen, Denbigshire. Building on the success of last year's event at University of Chester this year's event is aiming to be the biggest grass roots events for low carbon communities ever held and has already had press interest from across Europe.

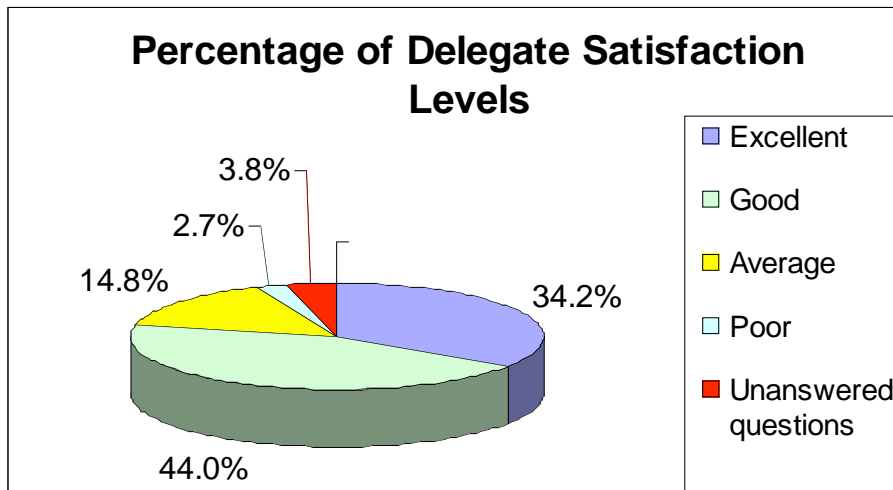
CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES DELEGATE EVALUATION

- 51 evaluation forms were received back from delegates.
- Each form asked delegates 11 questions which covered various topics about the day.
- Overall 537 answers were answered from a possible 561.

The satisfaction rates for the conference are:



In terms of percentages, this equates to an overall satisfaction rate of 94.5% (answering either excellent, good or average):



Positive comments included:

- Keynote speakers appeared well thought out and related to each other without much duplication.
- The contents of the workshops were generally felt to be useful.
- Good networking opportunity, lots of contacts formed.
- Excellent feedback on the afternoon visits – “refreshing”, “inspiring”, “good to meet residents and seeing what they had achieved”.
- Very varied and well delivered conference.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Information on transport should have included cycle lanes and public transport directions.
- Style of seating should be more participatory – circles of seating not straight lines.
- The speaker system was not good – too much feedback / amplification.
- Not enough vegetarian and vegan options at lunch.

“Thank you to all who attended the conference and helped with the organisation.”