

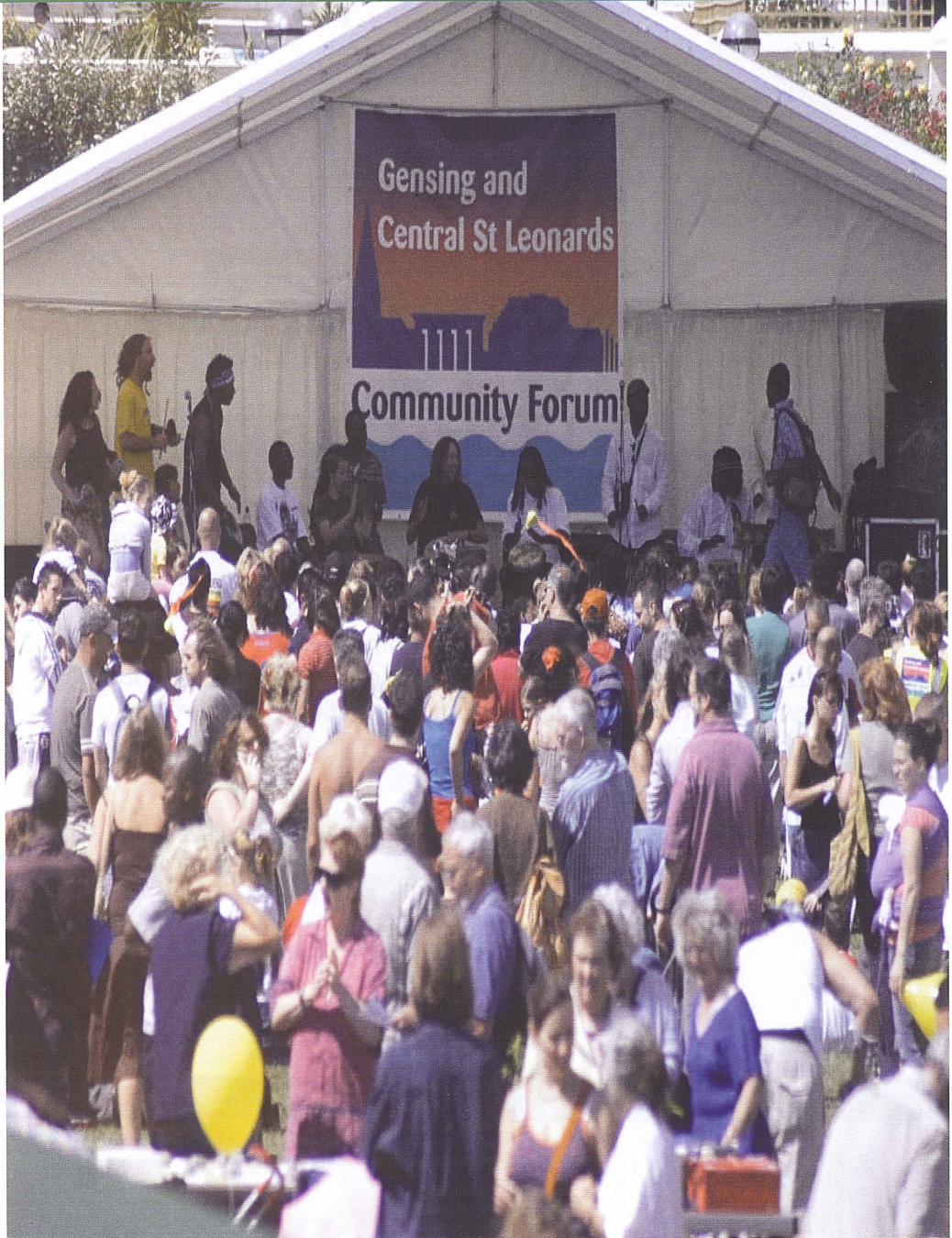
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partnership

A Case Study

Partnership Works...

Neighbourhood Forums in Hastings

In 2000, Hastings was highlighted as an area suffering from significant levels of deprivation, and took part in the central Government scheme to receive Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to improve and invest in the local area. As part of this funding, four Neighbourhood Forums were established across Hastings in the most deprived ward areas. These forums have provided a voice for the local community, including control over how to use the funding available. These forums are continuing to grow, initiating new projects and supporting other groups within Hastings.



The Challenge

In 2001, the Government launched a scheme to offer funding to those local authority areas that were suffering from significant levels of deprivation (88 authorities in total). This deprivation was calculated through the Indices of Deprivation, a method of using a number of indicators to give an area a single score of deprivation. This score can then be easily compared to other areas. The Indices of Deprivation published in 2000 showed that Hastings was in the top 20% of the country for the highest levels of deprivation.

Hastings Borough Council was initially awarded three years of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) and then a further 4 years; funding which was specifically available for deprived areas. While the need for this funding was clear, the challenge for Hastings was to make sure that this funding was put to the best possible use – to improve Hastings for current residents and visitors, and to protect its future.



The Action

Central Government believe that high levels of deprivation are best tackled in partnership, and therefore setting up a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was one of the main conditions of receiving Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. Establishing an LSP was also a way of ensuring that any that partners were involved with, and happy about, how the money was to be spent. Hastings and St Leonards LSP was therefore founded in 2002 and a special Neighbourhood Renewal Unit was established within Hastings Borough Council to support the use of the funding.

Four Neighbourhood Forums were set up across Hastings in the most deprived ward areas. These forums were open to local residents to make sure that the community played a central role in deciding how the funding was used. These forums also provided an opportunity for the issues to be raised in structured meetings. These forums were not without their challenges, for example, at the time the area of Gensing and Central St Leonards had a high population turnover of about 40% every 6 months, due to the number of poor quality, privately rented properties in the area.

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Each Neighbourhood Forum has become an independent organisation in their own right. This position has been strengthened now that the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding has ended, and they are supported by limited funding from Hastings Borough Council as well as applying for external funding and developing their own initiatives. Each forum developed a yearly action plan based on the issues that the local community have raised – from how often rubbish bins are collected to what local facilities are provided for young people.

Representatives of the Neighbourhood Forum then met with the key local service providers, such as Sussex Police and NHS Hastings and Rother, at Local Management Board meetings. Based on Neighbourhood Forum action plans, local service providers presented ideas for how they, as service providers, could tackle the issues raised. In previous years the Neighbourhood Forums would consider proposed projects from service providers and help to decide which commissions and projects were right for their area.



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The four Neighbourhood Forums in Hastings form a vital part of the Hastings and St Leonards Strategic Partnership, with each one guaranteed a seat on the Strategic Partnership Board, alongside another 6 voluntary and community sector seats. The high level of voluntary and community sector representation within the LSP highlights to local residents just how important they are to the work that needs to be done.

The Neighbourhood Forums and community sector feed into the LSP via the Community Network, which was also set up as a body that brings together all the voluntary and community organisations in Hastings. This group encompasses communities of interest, geography and identity e.g. disability groups, residents associations and youth groups. The Community Network elects 6 individuals for the additional voluntary and community seats on the LSP.



The Impact

Hastings and St Leonards Strategic Partnership played a central role in the sharing of information and coordination of services within this project. “Bend the spend” was one of the catchphrases used across the town, which captured the idea of shaping services to make them more efficient and to pull more work under one project’s remit.

The existence of the Community Network has meant that a number of issues, such as gaps in representation of different communities, have been raised and tackled. Hastings, for instance, now benefits from both an interfaith forum and an intercultural forum, groups which may not have existed without the support of the Community Network.

The money available through the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding put Hastings in a unique position within East Sussex. The ability to commission services from local organisations through the Neighbourhood Forums has given local residents a very real voice in setting the priorities and choosing the projects that take place in their neighbourhood. It has raised the community’s awareness of Pride of Place, the sustainable community strategy for East Sussex, and given the community confidence in challenging the organisations that are providing local services.

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Each of the Neighbourhood Forums have been involved with significant projects to tackle the deprivation in Hastings, examples of which include the annual St Leonards festival, a men's health day and a new Community Information Centre. The level of funding has also meant that the Neighbourhood Forums have been able to support other groups and initiatives – from providing a training room for local groups to supplying radios for the local pub watch scheme.

The establishment of the both the Neighbourhood Forums and the Community Network has helped to strengthen the position of the Hastings' voluntary and community sector, particularly as 10 seats on the LSP are dedicated to the sector. The LSP Chair role also rotates between a council representative, a business representative and a community representative. These are some of many examples where Hastings and St Leonards Strategic Partnership have clearly set out their commitment to taking the community seriously in all of its decision-making processes.



Lessons Learnt

- While this project has been incredibly worthwhile, it has proved to be a long and complex process which has required patience and determination to see it through
- It is important to keep the momentum of a project like this going, and to always highlight the work that is taking place as proof that the project is making a difference
- The Neighbourhood Forums have provided a way for local people to get their voice heard and to be part of the community coming together for the good of their town
- More can be achieved by working in cooperation with your partners, in sitting down to talk through and understand local issues – building strong relationships is crucial to the success of a project like this

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Further Information

For more information on Neighbourhood Forums, please use the following email addresses/websites:

Castle Ward Forum: castlewardforum@talk21.com

Ore Valley Forum: <http://www.orevalleyforum.co.uk/>

Gensing and Central St Leonards Forum:

<http://www.gcsl.org.uk/>

Greater Hollington Partnership:

<http://www.greaterhollington.info/>

Neighbourhood Renewal was a national government initiative that aimed to drive down poverty in the most deprived neighbourhoods. It sought to bring together service providers, the voluntary sector and the community in an equal partnership to tackle deprivation. For more information on the initiative visit the [National Neighbourhood Renewal website](#).

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