



## Partnership Works...

# Rother Local Area Action Plans Support Programme

In 2004 the Rother Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) identified the need for more effective community engagement and consultation as a priority for the District. The partnership agreed that the effective development and implementation of Local Action Plans (LAPs) would be a key delivery method for their vision. Action Plans are defined by the partnership as "the end result of the whole community voicing its opinions on what actions it wishes to see taken in its local area in the future".

In 2005 the LSP set up the 'Local Action Plans Consortium', to oversee the Rother Local Area Plans Support Programme. As a result of this programme there are now 33 Local Action Plans either published or in progress, with only two wards/parishes not currently engaged, out of 35 identified communities.





## The Challenge

Rother is a rural district covering an area of 200 square miles. It has 38 Councillors covering 20 Wards and 29 Parishes, with population densities as low as 40-50 people/sq mile in smaller parishes to over 3,000 people/sq mile in the larger Wards. From the Residents Satisfaction survey undertaken in 2003, it was clear that support was required to develop a long-term and sustainable project to encourage and enable greater communication, engagement and consultation between the District Council, Strategic Partnership and residents.

## The Action

The Rother Local Action Plans consortium was formed in 2005 with a membership of key delivery partners including Rother District Council, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and East Sussex County Council. The consortium met quarterly and their first task was to draw up a project specification. It was agreed that the first phase of the project would be managed by Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) and supported by Rother Voluntary Action. In 2005, with funding from the second homes budget, two Community Development Workers were employed. Their role was to engage with the community as a whole, beyond the 'usual suspects', for example encouraging communication with Children and Youth groups. The employment of these community workers led to a new, more inclusive style of community engagement, moving away from traditional 'Parish Planning' which tended to centre solely around Parish Councils and their Members.

In 2007, project management passed to Rother Voluntary Action and the project began to shift its focus to the urban area of Bexhill. This area presented its own set of challenges and, to ensure neighbourhood involvement in an unparished town of 40,000 residents, the project had to develop new community structures and also begin to involve local councillors more deeply as potential community champions.



## The Impact

The consortium commissioned the publication of a resource pack, to explain the LAP support programme to wider partners. The pack, published in October 2007, was distributed to all LAP groups and LSP partners. It was positively received and enabled partners to gain a greater understanding and awareness of the process.

The Local Action Plans Support Programme is due to end in March 2010, by which time it will have been running for four and a half years. It is hoped that every identified community will then have a published Action Plan and an established LAP group, or coordinator, to take responsibility for future updates and the maintenance of frequent communication with the partners involved.

The project has been funded from the second homes budget, with additional contributions from Rother District Council, East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. Council Members have been actively involved with the LAP process from the very beginning, being the key link as community leaders.





Gina Sanderson, Chief Officer at Rother Voluntary Action says "RVA heartily endorses the decision by Rother LSP to ensure meaningful community engagement by its development of the LAP programme. RVA has been happy to assist its development on the ground with wide spread community participation and the delivery of Local Action Plans which are now being implemented by communities across the District".

The programme has had a wider impact than simply engaging residents in decision making processes that affect their environment. There have been measurable outcomes against specific requests, for example in one community a need for children's play equipment was identified as an overarching priority. Funding was then applied for through the Community Grants Scheme and a play area was designed and installed. Within Bexhill, the need for neighbourhood communities to come together on a regular basis to discuss local issues, forward community-related actions and foster community spirit has been met by the setting up of regular Forums & discussion groups. The need for affordable housing in rural areas has also been prioritised and this has been fed directly into key policies, including the Housing Strategy and the Local Development Framework.

## Lessons Learnt

- Encourage people to think about a new way of working, consult as widely as possible and be inclusive in your approach.
- Give every resident the chance to contribute, using a variety of methods in order to reach as many people as possible e.g. by distributing questionnaires; holding open days / consultation events; running focus groups; undertaking video-based consultation (in particular with youth groups); creating effective communication channels with existing community groups.
- Maintain regular contact with those you engage with, keep them informed of progress.
- Be careful to manage expectations and not make promises that cannot be delivered.
- Be conscious of the fact that there is no 'one size fits all' delivery method - be flexible in your approach.
- Make plans short, sharp and concise - not too 'wordy'.
- Publish completed plans as widely as possible, distribute to households and publish on websites.
- Encourage communities to work together, where appropriate, on community-led projects particularly when making coordinated funding bids.





## Organisations Involved

Rother District Council  
Rother Voluntary Action  
East Sussex County Council  
Sussex Police  
Rother Association of Local Councils  
Rother Homes  
Action in rural Sussex

## Contact

Ian Coleman  
Rother Local Action Plan Development Officer

Old Bank Chambers  
1 Buckhurst Road  
Bexhill on sea  
East Sussex  
TN40 1QF

01424 217259

07816 413496

[ian.coleman@rothervoluntaryaction.org.uk](mailto:ian.coleman@rothervoluntaryaction.org.uk)

## Further Information

Rother Voluntary Action is a community led organisation supporting Rother's Community and Voluntary sector. It also provides services and facilities direct to the community.

For more information and copies of the published Local Area Plans, please visit Rother Voluntary Action at [www.rothervoluntaryaction.org.uk](http://www.rothervoluntaryaction.org.uk)

Action in rural Sussex was established in 1931 as Sussex Rural Community Council and has worked with rural communities ever since. For more information visit [www.ruralsussex.org.uk](http://www.ruralsussex.org.uk)





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01424 787864

[lsp@rother.gov.uk](mailto:lsp@rother.gov.uk)