RURAL PROOFING BRADFORD VISION
The Local Strategic Partnership of the Bradford District

A report for the National Demonstration Project of the Countryside Agency
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SUMMARY

The key elements for the success in approaching the rural proofing of a local strategic partnership in a metropolitan local authority area are:

- that the local authority has itself made some progress on rural proofing, recognising that rural proofing is essentially about raising rural awareness

- that there is an understanding of the different types of settlement in which people live in the local authority area, generating the robust datasets that are needed to enable their characterisation, and using this knowledge to inform service delivery

- that an action learning approach is taken for rural proofing, raising rural awareness both within the local strategic partnership and with the key partners that have responsibility for service delivery across the whole of the local authority area

- that there is a spatial dimension to the community strategy

- that there is a developing supportive relation between the principal authority and the parish and town councils in the local authority area, and between the local strategic partnership and the parish and town councils

INTRODUCTION

The Bradford District has undertaken a project funded by the Countryside Agency through their National Demonstration Project on Rural Proofing Local Strategic Partnerships. The national project covers several themes that the Countryside Agency has identified and which raise rural proofing issues and challenges for local strategic partnerships. Because of the nature of the Bradford District, it is seen to provide example for local authority areas that contain the mix of a dominant urban centre but with outlying rural areas. The project started in October 2003 and this report is a review of its lessons learnt.

Rural Proofing - equity and community cohesion

Wherever people live, they have a right to public service and an involvement in community planning. This is the basis of rural proofing in the Bradford District and it is accomplished by facing up to the differences and difficulties that may occur in engaging dispersed settlements and in delivering services to them. It is a process of questioning, identifying the issues affecting dispersed settlements, and in raising awareness of these settlements amongst all of the people of the District.

Local authorities have a duty of care for the wellbeing of their citizens, and were shown the importance of rural proofing in the Rural White Paper (2000). An added impetus to rural proofing in the Bradford District comes from a commitment to social inclusion and community cohesiveness. Community cohesion is primarily thought of in terms of cross-cultural harmony, but in the Bradford District the importance of a geographical dimension to community cohesion is recognised, and the role that it can play in bringing together the different types of community across the district. Bradford is taking a long-term approach to improving community cohesion throughout the District, with the work being jointly developed by Bradford Council and Bradford Vision, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

LSPs have a key role in community planning, supporting the local authority in its duty to draw up a community strategy for its area. The role of an LSP in service delivery is less clear since in the main an LSP is not in itself a service provider. Thus the influence that an LSP can have over service delivery comes through the involvement of the individual partners to the LSP, who certainly will have responsibility in different service areas. These service providers, not least the local authority, are where the accomplishment of equity in service delivery can be brought about.

LSPs and Neighbourhood Renewal

Government set Neighbourhood Renewal, along with community planning, as a key activity of an LSP. Bradford Vision faces an additional requirement. In common with the LSPs in larger city, metropolitan and unitary authority areas, central government has provided Bradford Vision with targeted funding for Neighbourhood Renewal. This places a challenging obligation on Bradford Vision to use it to tackle deprivation in geographical areas of multiple disadvantage, with progress being measured by improvement on "floor targets" set for employment, education, crime, health, and housing and environment. LSPs that have Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) have thus had to make difficult choices over its use.

Government provides NRF on the basis of deprivation in specific wards and these wards are almost invariably in urban areas. Government did not intend that NRF should be spent only in these wards. In practice, meeting the performance assessment on floor targets for neighbourhood renewal inevitably takes the greater priority for NRF, allowing little scope for spending or active engagement with communities in non-deprived communities, and thus ruling out its universal use across the whole of a local authority area. This makes this very significant

activity of an LSP in receipt of NRF unsuited to wholesale rural proofing. However, as the next section will show, taking an innovative approach in the use of NRF can blur the edges and can also provide evidence for a legitimate extension of use.

Bending the mainstream

In the Bradford context, nevertheless, elements of mainstreaming of NRF have been achieved. Funding of priming initiatives away from the targeted urban areas has needed approval from the regional Government Office, but out of this has come benefits to its dispersed settlements.

A study was commissioned by Bradford Vision to look at data held below ward level on indices of multiple deprivation in two of the rural wards of the district. As will be shown later, ward level data in a metropolitan authority is a blunt instrument for identifying the characteristics of rural settlements. The result of the study was the identification of hidden pockets of deprivation, leading to methods to enable greater discrimination in distinguishing multiple deprivation in the rural areas. The study has thus made possible the legitimate use of NRF for neighbourhood action planning in the two rural settlements of Cottingley and Denholme that are outside of the NRF targeted urban wards, the resultant Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAP) being supported by a neighbourhood renewal development grant.

In the case of Denholme, a transport survey carried out for the NAP revealed the difficulty that its young people faced in accessing employment in the urban centres. The NAP provided the evidence that enabled the local voluntary sector to work with a mainstream regeneration partnership to develop a Wheels to Work Scheme, securing funding for a two-year project through the partnership from the Regional Development Agency, with topping up from the Countryside Agency.

Response to traumatic community change has also been possible, with using NRF for neighbourhood action planning in Stockbridge, a community that suffered severely in the flooding of October 2000. Subsequently, the District-wide Environment Partnership has allocated NRF to Bingley Voluntary Action to work with 10 communities in the District to draw up local flood action plans.

Activities in the District's Community Cohesion program have also been supported by NRF. Example comes from a schools twinning project that brings together young people and teachers, spanning a range of cultures but also bridging the urban and rural backgrounds of these children.

A key use of NRF by Bradford Vision noted earlier has been the considerable investment in developing the locality action planning process that is used by multiply disadvantaged communities to develop their Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAP). The experience gained from this has led to local action planning being recognised as a process that would be valuable for all the communities of the District to take part in. Thus a commitment has been made in the Council's Corporate Plan to support an increase in locality action planning, such as in parish planning and also through a new pilot initiative in action planning in the suburbs, and to incorporate all of these action plans into future revisions of the Community Strategy (see later).

THE APPROACH TO RURAL PROOFING BRADFORD VISION

There have been some key elements that have contributed to the approach to rural proofing Bradford Vision. It should be recognised that in the Bradford context, rural proofing is essentially about raising rural awareness in a District that is typically classified as urban. It is also clear that it is important that the local authority is already making progress on rural proofing so that it can provide an enabling leadership on this within the local strategic partnership. Experience of this earlier work in the local authority has shown the value of an action learning approach to rural proofing, and this was adopted by the project.

The early stages of the project saw the completion of Bradford Councils rural plan followed by a development to a workable use of the classification of settlement types indicated in the plan. This gave the project a key tool in working with partners to enable them to understand for themselves the different levels of service delivery that are required for different rural communities. Other key elements have shown their worth as the project has progressed, especially the focus on working with the thematic partnerships in the LSP since they have the greatest role in service delivery. What follows is a description of each of these key elements in more detail with example of their operation, or the intended outcome from their eventual influence.

A Rural Proofing Local Authority

Various external characterisations have reinforced an impression of a dominant urban centre for the Bradford District:
*   the classification of Bradford Council as an urban council by the former Rural Development Commission and reaffirmed in a report for the Countryside Agency (Oxford University, 2000)
*   the urban-inclusive boundary that is created by Objective 2 European funding and the succession of urban, area-based regeneration initiatives since the 1980s;
*   the New Deal for Communities programme investing £50m in urban areas of Bradford over a period of 10 years;

In spite of this, it can be shown that two-thirds of the land area of the District is rural (it has Green Belt protection) and that about one third of the population live in this rural area. As a most recent report on rural services for DEFRA has remarked, "West Yorkshire is regarded as an urban area, but contains within it a number of sparsely populated hill farming areas" (Review of Evidence on Additional Costs of Delivering Services to Rural Communities, April 2004). It is because the Bradford District has recognised this for itself that strategies and plans developed by Bradford Council in the last three years have been influenced by a process of rural proofing. Recently, as a result of advocacy from the project, rural proofing has been included as a cross-cutting theme in the guidance for drawing up Departmental Service Plans, thus embedding it within the council.

While rural proofing has progressed within the council, a series of outreach activities were carried out to encourage rural communities to feel that Bradford Council appreciates the particular priorities of people living within the rural areas. Thus wide-ranging formal consultation was undertaken within the appropriate Neighbourhood Forums on rural issues, and officers attended Parish and Town Council meetings across the District to observe their business and collate their issues.

To provide a bigger stage for engagement with the districts rural communities, a conference entitled Rural Renaissance was planned for January 2002, and a study of the aspirations of the Districts rural land users was commissioned to report shortly afterwards. Delegates to the conference represented every aspect of the rural area of the district. A full days program had

national keynote speakers and workshops on rural economies, rural health, the future of rural youth services, the changing face of parish councils, and enjoying the countryside. The Rural Aspirations report was launched in the Bradford Chamber of Commerce in March 2002 and provided a snapshot of perceptions as the rural land use community came out from being under the trauma of the national outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

The conference and report threw up areas where further work could be carried out with rural communities. A series of themed workshops and seminars were held on rural tourism, rural transport and flooding. The perception that resources were focussed towards the deprived urban areas was articulated strongly during these workshops and was noted in the Corporate Performance Assessment report of September 2002. This led to Bradford Council calling for the development of a rural plan.

The contents of the plan were developed over 2003. Research on urban-rural classification in relation to the situation in the Bradford District was commissioned from Prof. Neil Ward of the Geography Dept., Leeds University. On the basis of this research, 11 wards in the District could be identified in the rural plan as having rural characteristics within their boundary. In addition, proposals were made on a classification of settlement type in those rural areas. The further development of this classification and its practical application is reported in the next section.

The bulk of the rural plan uses the thematic headings of the community strategy as its framework to look at service provision in those rural wards. It thus mirrors the working themes of strategic partnerships that make up a large part of the LSP. Each section takes a policy development approach to the issues, with council services and their partners laying out the rural issues and how these are being addressed. Examples of the development of new rural initiatives are given and it is notable that many of these are often based on bringing in new resources from outside of the district. These include a rural housing enabler project, a Wheels to Work scheme, and various rural transport surveys carried out within the District.

The production of a rural plan provides a continuing context for the rural proofing of the local authority. It offers a guide to the strategic approach being taken by the Council and its partners to the issues raised through the consultation processes, and it gives examples that can be used as learning points. The rural plan demonstrates how the Council and its partners will ensure that they can respond to rural communities through rural proofing their policies and actions in the longer term.

Classification of Settlement Types and the Precision of Data

The basis of achieving equity of service delivery across the Bradford District is an understanding of the different types of settlement and what that says for the approach and level of service that needs to be provided. It might be thought that this is self-evident. However, current orthodoxy indicates that we should separate the urban from the rural, as has been done with the external classification of local authorities.

In that classification, there is no recognition that a local authority area may be a mixture of urban and rural settlements. Thus in a local authority area classified as urban, it is not uncommon to find that economies of scale, the needs of gross performance indicators, and a tendency to work best where there is adequate funding, can mean that the rural areas are overlooked in the rush to play the numbers game. Rural proofing is the counter to this, but it assumes that there is an understanding of what being rural is, and transferring that to an appreciation of where there is a rural characteristic in the local authority area.

Bradford Council is classified as an urban local authority. If we are to believe the Countryside Agency's Ward Level Definition of Rural Areas (Office of National Statistics, 2001) then the

Bradford District has only two wards out of 30 that have a rural characteristic. At least this admits to some rurality in the district, but this external classification does not match with local perception. The fault lies with these external classifications using data compiled at ward level in a mechanistic process to determine rurality (see the explanation later). Bradford Council therefore commissioned its own study of urban-rural definitions and what that meant for the circumstances in the Bradford District.

The study by Prof. Neil Ward of the Geography Department of Leeds University used variations in population density as a way in to assessing rurality in the Bradford District. It allowed a local reassessment such that 11 wards could be identified as having a rural characteristic within their boundary (Marginalised Metropolitan Ruralities: Defining Rural Bradford, Sept 2003). Thus for the first time since its inception in 1974, Bradford Council had a definition of what constitutes the rural area of its District, and this definition was endorsed by the Executive in March of this year.

The study also began to characterise the different types of settlement that exist in the Bradford District, based on both population and on function. The project has taken this preliminary characterisation further and developed it into a classification that can be applied to all of its settlements. The classification recognises three settlement types, distinct from the main urban centre of the city. These are:

Rural Service Centres - Smaller urban settlements (population >10,000) that have open countryside to the majority of their boundary and are not part of the larger urban continuum. They offer major services to rural communities such as health and emergency services; shopping zones; education activities; and operate as a transport hub. The towns of Bingley, Ilkley and Keighley fall into this category.

Dispersed Settlements – Rural-facing communities (population >3,500 and <10,000) with open countryside to at least 75% of their boundary. They have some facilities and services, and may have a history of small-scale industry but are now often residential in nature. There are 11 of these in the district with Oakworth, Queensbury, Silsden, and Thornton being examples.

Rural Villages – Small settlements (population <3,500) surrounded by open countryside and with little or no facilities. There are about 20 of the these in the district, some of the smallest being places like Egypt or Stanbury which are a collection of a few houses, and on up to Cullingworth and Addingham that have a range of households around a recognisable village centre and thus have a distinct village identity.

Simple maps of the district have been produced that locate these different settlement types and which are accompanied by population data. The identification of settlements and their allocation to settlement type was aided by the use of the council's Geographical Information System (GIS). This allows a visual check on the number and location of households in all parts of the district, coupled with population data for user-selectable combinations of those households. These maps and population data have proved invaluable in enabling service providers and communities to understand the different approaches to service provision in rural areas and to develop appropriate and effective methods of delivery.

The other four metropolitan authorities that constitute West Yorkshire share the same urban classification as Bradford Council, but they are also beginning to share a belief that this is a misrepresentation and an increasingly unworkable classification if they are to ensure that they look to the well being of all of the settlements in their districts. Further research has been commissioned through the West Yorkshire Rural Partnership, newly formed by these authorities, to evaluate the usefulness of the settlement classification developed by the project across the other four metropolitan areas of the sub-region.

The settlement classification has received support in the wider scale. Officers from various local

planning authorities within the region have been piloting work on a typology of settlement as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy for Yorkshire and the Humber. While the nomenclature of settlement type may differ, the pilot classification carried out in the Bradford District is a mirror image. The same is so for the classifications for the district shown in The New Urban/Rural Definitions Project for England and Wales. This project was a collaborative initiative between ONS, ODPM, Countryside Agency, DEFRA and National Assembly for Wales (www.rural-urban.org.uk). The importance of subjecting data from such a national project to local scrutiny is highlighted by this new classification study, which erroneously classifies a large part of Ilkley Moor as being an urban settlement.

Erroneous classification often arises because of the use of data sets that are too large to allow variation in character to show up. This may not be as much of a problem in an entirely urban area, but it becomes a real problem where there are mixed areas or areas that are entirely rural. This is demonstrated by the comparative use of the ward level data of a metropolitan authority. Tong is a mixed urban-rural ward to the southeastern corner of Bradford District. The ward ranks 247 out of 8,414 in England on indices of deprivation. However, that ranking does not begin to characterise a ward that has half its land area as open countryside; has the bulk of its population on that rural fringe; but has also the small rural village of Tong set in, and dependent for its living, on that open countryside. Does the ward data imply that the village of Tong must be one of the most deprived rural villages in England?

The difficulty with ward level data arises because of the large population size of wards in a metropolitan district, which is about 15,000 for both urban and rural wards in the Bradford District. A rural ward in the district covers a larger geographical area than an urban ward because it has a lower population density. Because of this larger geographical area it may also contain as many as five individual settlements, all of which may have differing characteristic. Thus the aggregated characteristic of the five shown in the ward level data may be masking what could be a real need in just one of the individual settlements. It should be noted that a rural ward in a non-unitary local authority area has a population size (about 3,000) that is only one fifth of that of a rural ward in a metropolitan council area.

This bluntness of ward level data for rural wards in the Bradford District was the key premise of the study on rural disadvantage in two of its rural wards, commissioned by the LSP (Bingley Bypassed: Hidden Poverty in Bingley and Bingley Rural Wards, March 2003). The study made use of data from the Bradford District Deprivation Index that is available through a possibly unique internet-based GIS developed by the Bradford Community Statistics Project (www.bcsp-web.org/bddimaps/maingeo.cfm). The project is partly funded by the European Regional Development Fund and supported by Bradford Council. It shows data on deprivation from the 2001 Census, which is given a locational basis down to the level of individual census output areas (about 125 households) and allows the user to select areas on this scale that show multiple deprivation. It can therefore identify hidden pockets of disadvantage that are being masked at ward level. As was explained earlier, this study led to the legitimate use of NRF to support two rural communities to undertake neighbourhood action planning and to receive a neighbourhood renewal development grant.

An Action Learning Approach to Rural Proofing and Rural Awareness

Rural proofing is often approached by the use of checklists. While this has some merit in universality of approach, it can become just a mechanical evaluation of documents, processes or organisations without imparting any of the real issues of rural proofing to the organisations and people involved. Moreover, the checklist approach has little element of raising rural awareness, and presumably assumes that the checklist user has sufficient knowledge of the rural scene for it to be a meaningful approach.

Embedding rural proofing is better achieved through an action learning process, raising rural awareness where it is needed, and creating opportunities for policy and operational teams to discover effective approaches for themselves for their function or service delivery, given particular rural issues and circumstances. This can be done on a case study basis, but a greater value comes when there is a process of discovery on real issues and then real work is carried out.

Rural awareness is important in understanding how the dispersed settlements of the Bradford District can be engaged in community planning. Plans and strategies produced within the LSP have arisen at district level and are informed by consultation at thematic and area-based conferences within the Bradford District. Clearly this approach is in need of widening if it is to reflect more genuinely the aspirations of the dispersed settlements as they likely would be lost or diluted at area or thematic conferences.

In taking on a responsibility for community planning in the district, Bradford Vision recognised a need to undergo rural awareness training. The project was able to facilitate this over a series of sessions with the operational team and management of the local strategic partnership. At the first session, information was gradually built up on the basics of rural proofing and on the settlement classification system. At each stage, group work was supported around simple questions:

- Do policies and services discriminate against people in dispersed communities? Can you think of examples of rural discrimination?
- What services do you expect to find in rural service centres? Can you give examples?
- What would you expect to see 100-150 years ago in the dispersed communities? What would you expect to see now?
- What do you think characterises a rural village?

Later sessions looked at a range of rural issues that included:

- challenges facing the district's rural communities
- possible outcomes of the Review of Rural Delivery on local service delivery (the Haskins Report)
- reform of the CAP and the decoupling of agricultural subsidy from production
- working with the thematic partnerships of the LSP on rural service delivery
- the parish and town councils across the district and a comparison between parish plans, neighbourhood action plans and urban village plans (the latter will be explained in a later section)

The contemporary view is that service providers should be engaging with their service users, questioning and identifying the issues affecting them and then determining what approach and level of service delivery will meet their needs. In the case of dispersed settlements, service providers may not yet have started to do this effectively, and may have little experience or understanding of the rural areas. A first task of rural proofing then is to raise their awareness of these dispersed settlements and to get them to appreciate the differences that exist between them. This is where the settlement classification developed by the project has been invaluable in raising awareness of the different settlement types. The follow-on from this is in the creation of opportunities for service providers to engage with their service users from those dispersed settlements.

The project hosted a meeting of the Rural Workers Network, an initiative that draws in workers in the rural areas of the district, from the public, private and voluntary sector. These meetings serve to bring network members up to date with the national and local rural agenda, and to share

amongst themselves knowledge of the rural initiatives that they are involved in. Network members were also presented with the settlement classification and with an overall view of the role of the LSP and the Community Strategy.

In the discussion that followed, a Police Inspector from Community Safety showed that he had quickly grasped lessons from the settlement classification when he assessed different levels of service that can be provided with regard to the different settlement types: police stations are found in the rural service centres; most of the dispersed settlements have police contact points linked to the police stations, as do some of the larger rural villages although they are often combined with general information points (co-location). Where the rural villages were not able to set up police contact points, they would be supported to develop their neighbourhood watch schemes to effectively cover the whole of the settlement.

The key strategic partnerships in Bradford Vision are brought together under the banner of a Partnership Delivery Team (PDT). Meetings of the PDT ensure good lines of communication between the different thematic partnerships and with the operational team of Bradford Vision. As a group, the PDT share good practice and look at how best the resources and services they represent can be effectively used to meet the needs of the district. Meetings of the PDT thus offered a route to bringing a rural influence into these partnerships.

Again, the first action was to raise rural awareness but, with these service providers, it goes beyond an explanation of settlement classification and into discussion of examples where services providers have had to modify their service delivery or enter into new partnerships to be able to deliver the required service. Examples on the rural housing enablers project and on the rural transport scheme from the Rural Plan were used as a learning tool for this mixed audience, followed by a discussion of the routes for engagement for rural communities with Bradford Vision.

No assumptions were made about the range of individual needs for rural proofing amongst such a diverse grouping. Instead, Partnerships were invited to respond to the project with what support they felt would be appropriate. This led to individual pieces of work with elements of the various partnerships. Examples of this have included:

- Rural awareness raising with the Healthy Bradford Group and with the Primary Care Trusts (PCT) of the district. A seminar was then set up between the PCTs and emergency services of the Bradford District, with the Institute of Rural Health to explore the potential of collaboration with the rural proofing project of the Rural Health Forum.
- A compilation of consultations on rural transport issues and the settlement classification was presented to Transport Planners in preparation for drawing up their next stage of rural transport initiatives.
- Work with the voluntary and community sector of the Building Communities Partnership on proposals for rural infrastructure for voluntary services and for a proposal for District-wide audit of community strengths carried out by Policy and Research in Community Development and Lifelong Learning.

Working with the Environment Partnership has offered the potential to add significantly to an understanding of the rural areas of the district. The District's Multi-Agency Environment Strategy is missing a rural dimension. In discussion with the partnership, a proposal was drawn up – entitled A Clear View of the Landscape - to aggregate knowledge on land use in the open countryside of the district, such as farming, woodlands, open space parks and open access areas. Going further, it was proposed to also capture the less tangible rewards of the rural area such as its ecological/environmental goods and services. These encompass water catchments and purification, maintenance of air quality, carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, wildlife refuge (biodiversity) and the aesthetic pleasure of landscapes and our enjoyment of them.

The outcome of this work with the Environment Partnership is to use the information in simple

visual format for awareness raising to create a greater appreciation of the districts open countryside. In addition, various aspects could be used for consultation (see below) and others for incorporation as part of the biodiversity strategy in the Community Strategy. First meetings between Yorkshire Water, the Environment Agency, Countryside Service, Forest of Bradford and other local land use interests has produced early data and a commitment to proceed further.

Bradford Council held a very successful district-wide rural conference in January 2002, attracting 150 delegates to hear national speakers such as Chris Baines, writer and broadcaster, and Pam Warhurst, deputy chair of the Countryside Agency. It was recognised early on in the project that a second rural conference, organised jointly between Bradford Vision and Bradford Council had the potential to secure a number of aims of the rural proofing project. It would be an opportunity for Bradford Vision to develop its profile with the rural community, and it would be a way of involving partnerships in work that focussed on the rural areas.

The format of the conference, to be held in the autumn, is a set of repeated workshops where partnerships introduce what they perceive to be rural issues and have these tested by the facilitated discussion that follows in the workshop group. Five workshops have been devised by the following partnerships: Economic Development, Safer Communities, Building Communities, Health Improvement, and Housing. A Market Place of displays will take place during the conference, giving a first opportunity to display information from the work with the Environment Partnership and receive feedback on it, and for the partnerships to show their work across the district.

A Spatial Dimension to the Community Strategy

The requirement to incorporate a spatial dimension into revisions of a community strategy can be based on the original guidance, where there was a reference to location in community planning. More recently, the proposed Local Development Framework for local planning authorities indicates a need for a link into the community strategy, such that the spatial dimension in this case reflects physical planning. It is early days for Local Development Frameworks and so Bradford Vision and Bradford Council have focused on a spatial dimension for community planning in revisions of the Bradford District's Community Strategy.

A review was carried out of how the public sector of the district responds to local communities through geographic mechanisms, and how those local communities could be given a voice. The impression gained was of a number of disparate structures and mechanisms across the District supporting various sectors. There was no clear plan of how they inter-related, or broad understanding of which communities or issues were covered. This is reflected by the fact that a Rural Plan had to be developed by Bradford Council, separating out the rural issues from the urban, before eventually in the longer term the rural can be incorporated back into an overall view.

Bradford Vision through its Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, has evolved a process of Neighbourhood Action Planning that has seen 60 communities develop local action plans and begin to work on them, supported by a Neighbourhood Renewal Development Grant. These nodes of activity were mainly independent of each other, not seeking or receiving much in the way of co-ordinated support or service, lending weight to the analysis shown above. Thus a first proposal was the bringing together of NAPs in geographic clusterings so that there could be some master planning of issues and actions and a co-ordination of effort behind them.

It is a short step from that clustering to see the existing Area Committee system as providing an internal sectioning of the district to provide a home for community planning and service support for those clusterings. The district provides a range of neighbourhood support services through Area Committees whose boundaries follow those of the five parliamentary constituencies. Area

Committees can thus develop Area Plans, incorporating the master planning of the NAP clusters and other locality action plans such as Area Based Initiatives (ABI) arising from regeneration.

Parish and Town councils exist predominantly in the rural areas of the Bradford District, with one of the Area Committee areas being completely parished. Parish or town plans can therefore also be given a home in the Area Committee Plans, thus bringing with them a rural dimension to local action planning. While it is the case that parish and town councils are a predominantly rural phenomena, the district has seen its first urban parish council this year and there are likely to be more in the coming years.

The parish and town plans, NAPs and ABIs cover a spectrum of urban and rural community aspiration. However, there is increasing recognition that there has been a lack of national and local attention given to suburban areas (see In Suburbia, produced by the Local Government Association with SE England Regional Assembly, Civic Trust, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, London Borough of Harrow, Hampshire County Council and Rushmoor Borough Council, 2002). These suburban communities fall between the urban and rural in that they do not benefit from initiative/regeneration monies, or from rural subsidy or funding, and they probably have no system that supports them for local action planning.

In the Bradford District, support for development of local action planning in these suburbs was identified as one of the priorities in the Community Cohesion Delivery Plan, giving rise to a proposal for an Urban Village program that supports action planning (see later). Incorporation into the Area Committee plans of these new, Urban Village Plans will add to their completeness, and to the substance of the spatial dimension to community planning in the community strategy.

All the foregoing arrangements were the subject matter of a series of reports taken to the Executive of Bradford Council this year. The papers dealt with the spatial dimension to community planning within future revisions of the community strategy; new arrangements for area committees, including their actions in response to local action plans; services to rural areas in the district (the subject of the Rural Plan); and the Urban Villages program. It is worth noting that the seven pilot suburban areas in the Urban Villages report were selected for their high degree of local identification as revealed by an analysis of addresses given by attendees at Neighbourhood Forum meetings. Funding for the program is a combination of capital development funding from Bradford Council, with funding for local action planning and a development support grant from the Community Cohesion program, via NRF.

A Developing Relation with Parish and Town Councils

There are a number of references to parish councils in the various guidance notes on a community strategy and on a local strategic partnership. In preparing community strategies, parish councils are regarded as being a specific route for involvement of people living in rural communities. The guidance on community strategies also indicates that parish councils have an important role in helping to implement elements of the community strategy.

A caveat for the future should be added to the assumption that parish councils encompass only rural communities since a time can be envisioned when the whole of the Bradford District, both urban and rural, may be parished. There are four new parish councils in the district this year, one of which is the first urban parish. Nevertheless, it is predominantly true at present that parish and town councils in the Bradford District cover the rural areas.

The guidance for LSPs recommends that they need good mechanisms to engage with village communities and their parish councils if they are to be effective. Added to this is the guidance from the Quality Parish and Town Council scheme, which says that parish councils should be involved with their principal authorities in preparing community strategies, and that ideally parish

plans should be incorporated into community strategies. All in all, this guidance raises the importance of parish and town councils, and provides an impetus for Bradford Council and Bradford Vision to develop further their relationship with them.

The history of parish councils in the Bradford District dates primarily from the local government reorganisation in 1974 that brought the District Council into existence, and saw parish and town councils replace the old Urban District Councils. An arrangement was made for the parish and town councils to receive grants for their expenditure from the District Council. There were no formal or regular meeting arrangements between the two tiers of local governance.

A number of events came together in the last few years to prompt a review of the relationship between Bradford Council and the parish and town councils in the district. The aforementioned Quality Parish and Town Council scheme described a new framework for relations, putting an emphasis on parish councils to reach a standard that showed their effectiveness, with the principal authorities exploring ways to devolve function and budgets. In addition, a guide on funding arrangements with parish councils (DTLR 2002) arrived in time to help in the review of the agreement on the grants to parish and town councils in the district, that was coming to an end.

An officer group was formed that made recommendations for the grant system to be replaced with a local precept, as the grant system was judged to isolate the parish councils from accountability to their electors. Regular quarterly meetings between Bradford Council and the parish and town councils were inaugurated and a commitment was made to work with existing and new town and parish councils to support their work towards Quality Parish Council status, provide training for their parish clerks, support for their parish planning, support for precepting and budget management and considering, where appropriate, devolution of service delivery. These commitments are contained in the Corporate Goals 2004-05 of Bradford Council's Corporate Plan, and are expressed through active officer support from across the Council.

The quarterly Parish Council Consultation meeting provides a forum to discuss matters of mutual interest and especially the developing charter agreement that will be the framework for the working relationship between parish and town councils and Bradford Council. At the last meeting, parish and town councils were given a presentation on the community strategy and on the LSP. In response, they agreed to a formal request being made to the LSP for a representative of parish and town councils to be appointed to the Board of Bradford Vision. In response, the Chief Executive of Bradford Vision has committed to raising this at a meeting of the Board, and to attend the next meeting of the Parish Council Consultation meeting.

As mentioned in the previous section, a series of reports to the Executive this year clarified some of the growing relationships with parish and town councils in the District. The commitment to include their parish and town plans into Area Committee plans, and hence into the community strategy, was coupled with setting out local accountability of services, including actions responding to NAPs, parish plans, Urban Village plans and other local action planning. Area Committees were also asked to consider the cooption of representatives from parish and town councils on to the Area Committee as a continuation of the partnership building with parish and town councils.

As a contribution to support for parish and town councils, and to the Urban Village program, the project has produced and distributed a local guide to parish planning and developed a training session that utilises the experience of locality action planning in the district. Cullingworth Parish Council, supported by a parish-planning grant from the Countryside Agency, has produced this year the first parish plan in the district. Last year, Denholme Town Council completed a Neighbourhood Action Plan for its town council area, supported by action plan funds from Neighbourhood Renewal (see earlier).

While the context and source of funding for these two local action plans is different, the stimulus to get into action planning and the overall approach of the two plans is similar. Some differences exist: the Cullingworth parish plan has some element of a timeline, with the parish council spreading out its commitment to action over the short and long term. A rural housing survey was also carried out in parallel to the parish plan. In the case of Denholme, a rural transport survey was incorporated into the neighbourhood action planning.

The training session on parish planning took place recently. A panel of experts was assembled for the session, all of whom had been involved in the recent examples given above of locality action planning in the district. The session opened with a comparison of the two local plans, led by the sub-regional officer from the Yorkshire Rural Community Council and supported by parish and town councillors from Cullingworth and Denholme. They then joined with the panel of experts for an open discussion forum. The panel included staff from the District's rural housing enablers project, the sub-regional rural transport partnership, and officers from an area co-ordinators office and from planning.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The principal benefit from undertaking this project has been the opportunity to pursue a rural agenda, raising rural awareness throughout the working structures of Bradford Vision, its strategic partnerships and the local authority services most closely associated with it. At the same time, opportunity has been taken to begin to explain Bradford Vision and the community strategy to rural communities, the workers in those rural communities and to their local systems of governance.

The project has had the advantage of working from within the parallel process of the local authority continuing its progress on rural proofing. The completion of the Rural Plan in the early stages of the project provided an essential resource and learning tool, and the project was able to make a significant contribution in return through its advocacy and subsequent acceptance of rural proofing as a cross-cutting theme in the drawing up of Departmental Service Plans within the council.

A primary aim of the project has been the creation of opportunities for a meeting together in greater understanding of Bradford Vision and partnerships with the rural communities, with the view to forging relationships for the long term. The work that will come out of these relationships will hopefully ensure equity in community planning and of service delivery so that it may be possible to consider eventually the integration of all the communities of the district without having to separate the rural from the urban. The benefits to community cohesion in the district from this are obvious.

The lifetime of the project has seen much of this preparatory work, with a key event of the rural conference taking place a few months hence. The project has therefore put down markers, securing the involvement and commitment of partnerships to work that carries on, and giving stimulus for rural organisations and communities to get into new work that they identify for themselves.

Very much is new and untested. For instance, the detail of the commitment to a spatial dimension of the community strategy still needs to be worked out. It will come with the passage of work and time as the Area Committees understand how to produce their Area action plans, combined with the increasing representational role of parish and town councils; their commitment to parish planning and their developing ability to deliver on services.

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