

Town & Parish Council Conference

4 November 2009
Post Conference Report



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Introduction

In response to the feedback you gave at our first conference in April, we have committed to holding two Parish & Town Council conferences each year. These conferences provide an excellent opportunity for us to develop our working relationship and to discuss some of the key challenges we need to tackle together on behalf of our residents.

At this, our second conference, nearly 150 Parish & Town Council representatives had a chance to contribute to the early development of two key strategies: the Community Engagement Strategy; and the Sustainable Community Strategy, as well as network with colleagues and meet the Council's new chief executive, Richard Carr. We also hosted an open forum to respond to your questions and concerns. As we did not have the time on the night to answer all of the questions you submitted, this report takes the opportunity to do so, as well as providing a summary of the conference, and a write up of all the comments from the roundtable discussions and feedback forms.

Thank you to all who were able to participate as your involvement is critical to our joint working for the benefit of all our communities. Our next conference will be held on 9th June 2010 at Priory House, Chicksands. Please put this date in your diaries.

These conferences are not the only ways in which we will work together and we will continue to consult with you in between times through a variety of means.

Finally, as we welcome in the New Year let me wish you all a very happy and prosperous 2010.



Councillor Tricia Turner MBE
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council

P.E. Turner.

Economic briefing for the public sector

The Conference was preceded by an economic briefing for the public sector from Clive Heaphy, Director of Corporate Resources, which was well received. One question which was raised during that session, and to which the Council committed to respond to, is detailed below.

Question

Please clarify Central Bedfordshire Council's policy position for road closures.

Answer

The £150 charge for road closures relates to advertising. This is a genuine cost to the authority (made by Tribal who do the advertising on our behalf). There are many requests for road closures that come from charities all over the district. If we did not pass this cost on, then the tax payer would have to pay a significant amount of additional money to subsidise these activities.

The Conference

The objectives of the Conference were to:

- introduce the new Chief Executive, Richard Carr;
- update on progress towards implementing the Community Engagement Strategy;
- contribute to the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Central Bedfordshire; and
- enable open communications between the Council and Town & Parish Councils.

Welcome and introduction

Councillor Tricia Turner MBE, Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council welcomed everyone to the Conference and introduced the new Chief Executive, Richard Carr.

Introducing the new Chief Executive

Richard Carr, the new Chief Executive, introduced himself and shared his thoughts on Central Bedfordshire.

Community Engagement Strategy

Councillor Richard Stay, Deputy Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, gave a presentation on the draft Community Engagement Strategy, outlining the five key principles, which are:

- Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions
- Enabling councillors to be leaders in and for their communities
- Enhancing the role of Town & Parish Councils
- Building the capacity for local people to engage
- Ensuring a joined-up, strategic and coordinated partnership approach.

The presentation focussed in on the support for Town & Parish Councils, which includes:

- bi-annual Town & Parish Council Conferences;
- identifying opportunities for devolving services, and budgets, to Town & Parish Councils (where they want them);
- supporting clusters of Town & Parish Councils working together to resolve common issues; and
- providing a key contact point for Central Bedfordshire Council for Town & Parish Councils.

This was followed by round table discussions on what Town & Parish Councils would like to gain from the localism agenda in the context of the five principles in the Council's agreed policy position.

The outcomes of those discussions can be found in Appendix 1 and are summarised as follows:

- Challenges around devolving services to Town & Parish Councils eg. grass cutting, weed control, hedge cutting and street cleaning.
- Concerns around how devolved services will be funded.
- Overwhelming support from Town & Parish Councils to work together wherever possible.
- Named contacts at Central Bedfordshire Council are preferred rather than a single hotline number.
- Improved / better communications between Central Bedfordshire Council and Town & Parish Councils is needed.
- Greater involvement is wanted from Town & Parish Councils in influencing local planning decisions.

Sustainable Community Strategy

Richard Ellis, Director of Business Transformation gave a presentation on the Sustainable Community Strategy, detailing the draft priorities that were beginning to emerge, as follows:

- Supporting and caring for a vulnerable and ageing population.
- Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.
- Promoting healthier lifestyles for all.
- Ensuring our local people have the skills to prosper.
- Keeping our communities safe.
- Nurturing a sense of pride and belonging by providing opportunities for everyone to take part in community life.
- Maximising employment and housing opportunities to meet the needs of our growing population.

This was followed by round table discussions on whether these priorities reflected the critical issues for Central Bedfordshire and how they related to Town & Parish Council's own communities.

The outcomes of those discussions can be found in Appendix 2 and are summarised as follows:

- There was strong support for all of the emerging priorities.
- Jobs growth should match housing growth.
- Requirement for robust infrastructure and budgets in order to deliver improvement to roads, transport and local facilities.
- Need to minimise the impact on the environment by the use of brownfield sites.
- Need to engage communities to ensure success.
- Sharing of local events / facilities, tied into robust infrastructure.
- Concerns about access to public transport, particularly in rural areas.

Open Forum

There was an opportunity to send in questions in advance which could be answered on the night in a session format similar to that of "Question Time". Thank you to everyone who took the time to send in their questions. Although only some could be put forward on the night, the table below gives answers to all the questions which were received.

The following questions were responded to during the conference

| Council | Name | Question | Answer |
|------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| Streatley Parish | Geoffrey Farr | Beds CC gave us names of staff for particular areas of work ie. Grass cutting, pavement care etc. Central Beds does not seem to have the confidence to give PC's these names, which extends the time on telephone etc. Will you be releasing these names to aid progress of works? | <p>CBC would be happy to release details, however this is likely to be lengthy. Our Customer Service Centre (0300 300 8000) enables callers to be connected to our service providers. A full list of all of our services and contact numbers is included in the back pages of our News Central magazine. In addition, we have proposed a dedicated contact number for T&P Councils to speed up the process of contacting the appropriate people within CBC.</p> <p>Please note that immediately after the conference the contact details of all senior managers was circulated.</p> |
| Shefford Town | Jennifer Harrison | What do you see as the future of local bus services and the Bus Pass scheme within Central Bedfordshire's area? | <p>Local bus services are subject to a review of all passenger transport in Central Bedfordshire, under the umbrella of preparations for the next Local Transport Plan. It is anticipated that the review will recommend a number of changes to the way that local bus services are delivered, as well as clarifying the Council's policy on matters such as rural accessibility, and combating congestion in our urban areas. The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme looks set to remain in force for the time being, so free travel will continue to be enjoyed by elderly people and people with disabilities in Central Bedfordshire. The Council has no plans to make any alterations to the non-statutory element of the concession scheme, which is the ability to travel free on weekday mornings before 9:30.</p> |
| Kensworth Parish | CLlr Robin Radford MBE | Correspondence - Why is some correspondence coming from several different sources ie. Bedford, Dunstable and Chicksands given the headquarters for Central Bedfordshire is Chicksands? Isn't it about time that Central Bedfordshire "Put its House in Order"! | <p>CBC is in the process of consolidating its offices, however this will take time and is a huge task. It should be noted that the head office address is: Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ and any correspondence sent there will be forwarded on as appropriate.</p> |

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| Blunham Parish | Cllr Malcolm Mugridge | Does Central Bedfordshire operate a letter / email tracking system for comments and enquiries received from the public to ensure their acknowledgement and a timely reply? If not, does the Council consider such a system is a good idea? If yes, should this also apply to it's major long term partners and contractors. | CBC does not operate a tracking system for general correspondence. Although we are not currently researching this, if an affordable and cost effective system is identified that would improve the quality of service to our customers this will be considered. If a system is implemented then this would also apply to partners. |
| Totternhoe Parish | Cllr Peter Tasker | In view of the Central Bedfordshire budget shortfall as now advised when will the Council be able to introduce Council Tax Bands across the whole Authority Area that are equal and not continue with the current 2 tier system. | Executive on 8 December 2009 approved the draft budget for consultation, which incorporated a proposal to harmonise Council Tax rates for 1 April 2011. |
| Stondon Parish | Cllr Peter Brown | I have asked, and will continue to ask, that Town & Parish Councils be afforded the same consultation opportunity as Ward Members when attending Committee Decisions meetings eg. planning & boundaries, rather than the current 3 minute one way inadequate currently practised. Excuses given to date regarding time and constitution constraints are unacceptable. Talk is cheap. Why can't we work closely together as you claim is your wish? | Research has revealed that many Councils apply a time limit to speaking rights that tends to be 3 minutes. Best practice guidance (The Planning Offices Society, Practice Note 1 - Public Speaking in Planning Committees) states that a time limit of 3 minutes or 5 minutes per speaker should be given. Only one example was found of a Council with a 5 minute speaking rule. The Constitution of Central Bedfordshire Council allows the Chairman of the Development Management Committee (DMC) discretion to vary the 3 minute rule where an application affects more than one town/parish when he or she considers it conducive to the despatch of business and will not cause prejudice to the parties involved. CBC's approach is therefore entirely consistent with what other councils are doing, and with best practice. (Other best practice guidance includes - Local Government Association - Probity in Planning - revised guidance note on good planning practice for councillors and officers dealing with planning matters). |

The following questions were not raised during the conference

| Council | Name | Question | Answer |
|------------------|------------------------|---|---|
| Kensworth Parish | Cllr Robin Radford MBE | Human Resources - It would appear that whereas Central Bedfordshire has reduced the total number of serving councillors the reduction in staff has not been proportionate to the reduction in service cover of the three merged authorities. Why? | The priority for the new unitary authority was to ensure business continuity from day one and to make sure the quality of service remained high. This was achieved. The Council is now responding to delivering substantial savings and has recently committed to reducing the senior management overhead by 20%. Work to implement this has already begun. |
| BRCC | Cllr Jim Gledhill | Why am I and a number of parish councils unable to open attachments to emails received from Central Bedfordshire Council? It appears that with emails emanating from Priory House it is possible to see and open attachments but with those received from Borough Hall, Melbourne House and the Dunstable Offices it is frequently not so. Recipients of emails with unopenable attachments report that either the attachment box is blank or that it contains an icon with winmail.dat. In the latter case it is not possible to open the attachment either. It would appear that email recipients facing this problem do not experience similar problems with emails from any other sender. | If recipients have access to a webmail version of their email account then this usually has no problem opening attachments sent in different formats. Alternatively request the sender to re-send the email in HTML format, they should then be able to open attachments. |
| Stotfold Town | Cllr Alan Cooper | Sustainable Community Strategy - What are your current and future proposals for the provision of public transport to urban areas with particular reference to towns and villages | As long as congestion and control of air quality remain important factors in the management of our urban areas, it is anticipated that the Council will continue to pursue policies designed to encourage people to switch from driving cars to more environmentally friendly and economically sustainable modes of travel, such as walking, cycling and using public transport. Furthermore, the problems of accessibility in rural areas are high on the agenda, and likely to be the focus of many of the recommendations of the review of passenger transport, which is expected to report in 2010. |

| | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|---|---|
| Stotfold Town | Cllr Alan Cooper | Community Engagement Strategy - Question on the lack on community engagement in regard to the LDF Task Force, with particular reference to the admission of public to attend the meetings under the attendance rules contained in the constitution for all meetings. | On the creation of Central Bedfordshire, a new Task Force was set up under the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Sustainable Communities to oversee production of LDF documents but also to examine various housing and transport strategy documents. The OSC meeting on 4 August 2009 set up the Development Strategy Task Force and established its terms of reference etc. The issue of public involvement in these meetings was discussed. Members' views at that stage was that Members needed an informal arena in which to develop ideas and discuss issues prior to public consultation and that public attendance at these meetings would not usually be appropriate. The Task Force is not a decision-making body but makes recommendations to Executive or to the Portfolio Holder. All its recommendations are considered, in public, by the OSC. The Chairman of the Task Force is able to invite representatives to give evidence to the Task Force on specific issues. During the discussions on potential Site Allocations the Task Force heard from a number of Town and Parish Councils who provided local input to inform the recommendations from Task Force. |
| Stotfold Town | Cllr Malcolm Smith | In view of the fact that the Mid-Beds/South Beds bid for Unitary Status rested on the assurance that, unlike the County bid, it would enable Council Tax to be reduced, why is it that, to equalise Mid- and South-Beds Council Tax it has been decided to increase ours rather than to show them how to reduce theirs? And what measures are you now proposing to take to reduce Council Tax for the whole Council Area in future years? | Key factor that has changed is, not surprisingly, the state of the economy - lost investment interest on cashflow, loss of income from planning fees and increased benefits case loads. This on top of national pressures in respect of Looked After Children following the Baby Peter case, the ageing population and greater taxes on landfill. In spite of all of these emerging and ongoing financial pressures we are working hard to minimise the Council Tax burden. |
| Southill Parish | Cllr Paul A Gowers | Given the recent concerns expressed by Southill Parish Council regarding extremely dangerous high speeds of vehicles could the council outline its plans to address this important issue and provide notice of practical plans to control speeding vehicles on the B658. | The speed limit review of the B658 was carried out in the financial year 2008/09. The road was assessed using the Department of Transport criteria, which includes the road function (i.e. through route or local access), casualty records, police concerns, speed data, road lay-out, environment and visibility of the existing speed limit locations. Having assessed the existing speed limit, we feel that it is appropriate for this location and no further work is planned. However, we will forward the Parish Council's concerns, together with our relevant data, on to Bedfordshire Police Traffic Management for their consideration and possible future action. |

| | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Clifton Parish | Barry & Cllr Pauline Livesey | Beds CC had a well established network of Tree Wardens. There has been no communication from Central Beds to Tree Wardens. Has the scheme been consigned to the scrap heap? Is Central Beds no longer interested in trees? | All tree wardens in the Central Bedfordshire area received confirmation of a tree scheme this winter and an application for trees and materials. Several responses have been received, although most enquiries regarding the scheme generally have come from the north. The scheme is running in a similar way to the previous county model and this will need to be reviewed. Volunteers will be asked how they would like to be involved in this process. Tree wardens' input over the years has been amazing in establishing many new hedgerows and trees. |
| Studham Parish | Cllrs Des Salmon & Tony Gatehouse | As you are dealing with Parish Councils who perhaps are not so well organised as Town Councils could you please give larger notice at events which are planned well in advance. Could the arrangements for communicating be more realistic ie. sensible deadlines | As part of the feedback for the Conference we have been advised that more notice is required to enable the matter to be brought before Council meetings. This has been noted and will be factored into all future events. |
| Kensworth Parish | Cllr Robin Radford MBE | Grasscutting - Parishes should again be given the opportunity to take on the responsibility for grasscutting (some parishes are currently responsible some are not ie. Billington) and be given the full re-imburement for all grasscutting within and without the 30mph speed limits ie. all grasscutting within the parish boundaries. | CBC support the devolvement of services such as grasscutting to Town & Parish Councils and understand that funding will be required as a result. Any actions CBC take are with potential devolvement in mind. |
| Stondon Parish | Cllr Peter Brown | Given that we were told by Tricia Turner at the last Town & Parish Council meeting that you wish to work closely together in partnership with Town & Parish Councils why then is this not happening? If anything things have got worse. | CBC is keen to work in partnership with Town & Parish Councils and we encourage you to talk to us about any concerns you have. The bi-annual conferences are an opportunity for us to discuss the big challenges, and officers and members will be happy to meet with you in response to specific requests. |

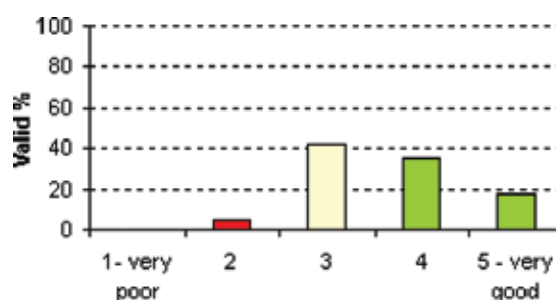
| | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|--|---|
| Kensworth Parish | Cllr Robin Radford MBE | Library Services - Why does the mobile library travel from one end of the district (Biggleswade) to the other (Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade) which must entail at least 2 hours travel in total? | When we became Central Bedfordshire & Bedford Borough we had to share the two mobiles and two Library Link vehicles on a 2 each basis. Our Library Link vehicle (serving residential homes, sheltered accommodation etc) is based at Flitwick (the mobile that used to be based there was transferred to Bedford). The mobile library that remained in Central was the one based at Biggleswade so we have to cover the whole of Central with that vehicle in terms of the mobile library service. |
| Shefford Town | Paul Mackin | How do you see Central Bedfordshire Councils progress towards improving communication with Town & Parish Councils and devolving responsibility for "local issues"? | <p>From April 2010 we will be producing a Local Strategic Partnership Newsletter. This will be circulated to our stakeholders - including all Town and Parish Councils. This will complement our twice yearly Town & Parish Council conferences and all of the dialogue we have individually with Town & Parish Councils on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>CBC has made a policy statement at the conference to work closely with Town & Parish Councils to devolve budgets for quality of life services to those who want them and where the service will be enhanced by doing so. Devolved budgets will be distributed by allocating the pro-rata costs for delivering the same service on a broader area-wide basis.</p> |

Feedback on the Conference

A conference feedback form was provided in the Delegate Packs and below are the results from the 47 completed forms received.

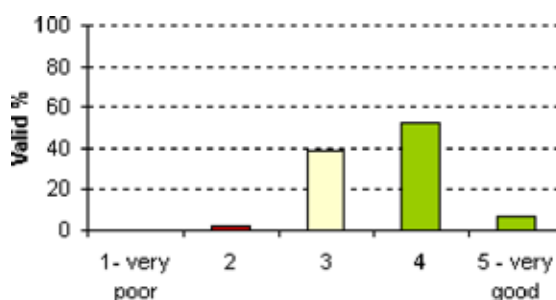
Introducing the new Chief Executive, Richard Carr

| | Count | % | Valid % |
|-------------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| 1- very poor | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| 3 | 19 | 40 | 42 |
| 4 | 16 | 34 | 36 |
| 5 - very good | 8 | 17 | 18 |
| Total | 45 | 96 | 100 |
| Missing | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Grand total | 47 | 100 | 104 |
| Mean score | 3.67 | | |
| % Good | 53 | | |



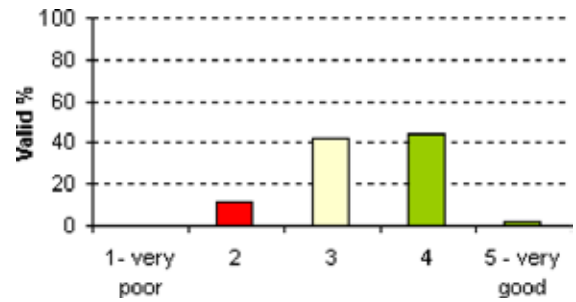
Updating you on the progress towards implementing the Community Engagement Strategy

| | Count | % | Valid % |
|-------------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| 1- very poor | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 17 | 36 | 39 |
| 4 | 23 | 49 | 52 |
| 5 - very good | 3 | 6 | 7 |
| Total | 44 | 94 | 100 |
| Missing | 3 | 6 | |
| Grand total | 47 | 100 | |
| Mean score | 3.64 | | |
| % Good | 59 | | |



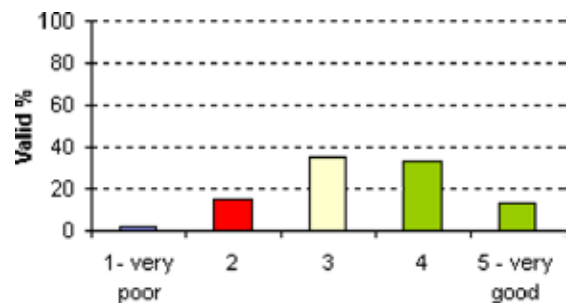
Allowing you to contribute to the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Central Bedfordshire

| | Count | % | Valid % |
|-------------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| 1- very poor | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 5 | 11 | 11 |
| 3 | 19 | 40 | 42 |
| 4 | 20 | 43 | 44 |
| 5 - very good | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 45 | 96 | 100 |
| Missing | 2 | 4 | |
| Grand total | 47 | 100 | |
| Mean score | 3.38 | | |
| % Good | 47 | | |



Enabling open communication between the Council and Town & Parish Councils

| | Count | % | Valid % |
|-------------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| 1- very poor | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 2 | 7 | 15 | 16 |
| 3 | 16 | 34 | 36 |
| 4 | 15 | 32 | 33 |
| 5 - very good | 6 | 13 | 13 |
| Total | 45 | 96 | 100 |
| Missing | 2 | 4 | |
| Grand total | 47 | 100 | |
| Mean score | 3.40 | | |
| % Good | 47 | | |



A summary of comments made about the Conference

| | Count | % |
|---|-------|----|
| General Positive- good event, well organised, provided value | 5 | 11 |
| More time for round table discussions | 4 | 9 |
| Good opportunity for developing open dialogue/ communicating with the Council | 4 | 9 |
| More openness/opportunities to ask questions during open forums (Question Time) | 4 | 9 |
| Poor sound | 3 | 6 |
| Good networking opportunity | 3 | 6 |
| More details around aspects covered | 3 | 6 |
| Economic briefing was useful | 2 | 4 |
| Timing- event overran, alternative day preferred | 2 | 4 |
| Less of a prescribed format | 2 | 4 |
| Two strategies was a lot to consider | 1 | 2 |
| Photographer was distracting | 1 | 2 |
| More around the Councils views on the challenges being faced | 1 | 2 |
| Stronger table facilitation to keep discussions on track | 1 | 2 |
| To find out what other participant's responses were during discussion sessions and the Council's response | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 3 | 6 |

Conclusion

The general consensus from the feedback was that the Conference was worthwhile and met its primary objectives of meeting the new chief executive, contributing to the development of two important partnership strategies, and facilitating an open dialogue. However, you would like more opportunity for two way conversation on issues that impact on Towns and Parishes directly.

What's Next?

We will build on all of the feedback we have received, both formal and informal, to continue to improve how we work together.

We look forward to meeting you all again at our next conference on 9th June 2010 at Priory House, Chicksands. In the meantime, a full copy of this report and the presentations can be found on the Council's website.

Appendix 1 – Community Engagement Strategy

Round Table Discussions Output

(Langford, Potton, Henlow, Caddington)

- Not inspired by the thought of increasing precept by 5% if CBC then only increase by 1% (Langford)
- Need some convincing that hot-line would give priority access. How will it actually work? Needs to be quicker than existing arrangements
- Inconsistency in Service from Customer Services ie. Safeguarding Children – very good. Flytipping was passed onto 3 different services
- If Services are taken on is there potential for phased financial support and we need to identify where services can be shared by neighbouring parishes
- More notice needs to be given on key strategic planning decisions

(Clifton, Leighton-Linslade, Tingrith)

- More meaningful role in planning (Leighton Linslade / Clifton)
- Development – not coalescing with other town / villages (Clifton)
- Ability to access specialist support services eg. Finance / HR (All)
- Grass cutting / weed spraying – good examples of Town & Parish management (Clifton / Leighton Linslade)
- General – list of possible services was uninspiring
- Theatre / markets – Local management (Leighton Linslade)
- General – May not be able to deliver at Town & Parish level, but £ contn to improvement
- More say in policing police in local areas eg. Speeding surveys (pay to get survey done in peak times) (Tingrith, Clifton)
- Line person – not helpful based on previous experience (Leighton Linslade), but may be helpful for newer clerks (inc. general e-mail address) (Clifton)

(Studham, Toddington, Arlesey)

- Hotline – declared names
- Explanation / discussion, devolution of services eg. Grass cutting, street scene (Arlesey)
- Co-ordination of local activity. Lack of duplication eg. Overlap of action, grass cutting by Parish councils then CBC contractors do a few days later
- Forced to change, common area looked after by CBC - grass cutting, trees, road clearing (Studham)
- New maps of contract / Parish responsibilities (Studham)
- Make sure residents aren't "double paying"
- Ward budgets eg. Small hedge needing attention – can Parish arrange local action immediately from ward budget rather than wait for a gang/team to come along

(Heath & Reach, Stanbridge, Eggington, Chalton)

- Devolved Services – Grass hedge cutting – can do even as small parishes. Would need help & guidance on costs / budget / viability & procurement / contract commitment.
- Devolved Services – Better job achievable through local maintenance. Need better information on which areas are currently meant to be cut.
- Devolved Services – Need to be mindful of need for guidance & support from CBC (need help eg. on procurement)
- Devolved Services – Can Central Beds help?

(Southill, Shefford, Dunstable, Steppingley, Northill, Blunham, Caldecote)

- Each Parish or Town Council has to decide – timing an issue for next year
- When can this start 2010/11 or realistically 2011/12?
- Street cleaning, weed control, road closures (Shefford)
- Grass cutting, street cleansing – Parish Councils could share costs eg. Shefford & Southill. Could employ person between the two Parish Councils
- Speeding in villages (B658). Can Southill & Shefford work together on this, also other Parish Councils. Northill, Blunham, Caldecote could potentially work on this too with above. Recognition that Police resources & CBC resources limited.
- Issues noted – supervision of work / contract needed too.
- Dunstable – “man in a van” service jointly funded to deal with local issues – could look at this approach
- Work with local sports clubs (barter / local co-operation) Steppingley Parish Council – cricket club
- Mix of reciprocal arrangements very local or specific & other
- Agree joint meeting between Parish Councils eg. Southill & Shefford – can do anyway
- Level of cynicism re: redistribution of costs
- Concern that multi service approach by Town Councils & Parish Councils would add to precept burden
- Mixed economy approach to provide most relevant / needed services in areas rather than “compromise global” service seen as beneficial

- Community Safety Panels – example of local police presence – Localism is more useful – Better co-ordination
- Information on how elderly are being cared for
- CBC need to get their own services fully integrated
- Parishes have had high response to vacancies on Parish Councils
- We have already got item 1 (Notice boards say what is going on, no-one responds). How are you expecting this to happen?
- Why do we want Councillors to be leaders in their Communities?
- Would like to gain the funding to carry out services. Weed control, grass cutting, community development & economic development

- Town / Parish Plan is “building” interest and galvanising local views. But “what’s the point” if involvement has been established over time. Are you going to do this? Talking about it isn’t enough
- Concern that the ground rules may have changed on Parish Plans

- People want proof that “involvement” makes a difference
- Councillors are advocates / “supportive” on local issues – but hedge cutting & weed killing is not community leadership, but grass cutting makes a difference
- Perceived reluctance to give away (relinquish) those things that give aggravation
- Don’t want to see it as cost cutting measure
- Whipsnade Conference – CAN (Community Action Network) – Concern about structure of CANs. Local people must be galvanised
- Strong desire to work with neighbouring Parishes
- There is a lot of business expertise in Parish Councils that is not being used ie. Planning, PCSOs, Licensing
- Hotline no benefit. Directory would help. Named contact – liaison person! We asked for it 6 months ago & not delivered

(Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Eversholt)

- Grass cutting (Dunstable)
- Footpath maintenance (Dunstable)
- Will consider shared arrangements with Houghton Regis (Dunstable)
- Strengthen town centre management committees to become Town management committees – look at the whole town
- Need to examine where service can be enhanced before pursuing devolved services (Houghton Regis)
- Consider promoting “Fix my street” website for residents to report issues (Houghton Regis)
- Want better communication (Houghton Regis)
- Rural Communities – traffic management – rat runs (Eversholt)
- Issues – bus services, public transport, street lighting, rural mobility, deprivation, insufficient support for rural areas. Access to services
- Hotline – dedicated line support – logged & tracked enquiries
- General support for the 5 principles as a framework
- Improved consultation concerning change which impacts on local communities ie. changes to transport / buses
- Improved / better communication between CBC and Town & parish Councils
- Opportunities for clustering between Town / Parish / Ward Councillors

(Shillington, Brogborough)

- Time for consultation (Shillington)
- Remember we meet monthly (Brogborough)
- IT – speed of access, formats love PDF
- Don’t hurry – it’ll go wrong
- To listen takes time
- Give us plenty of notice, 3-4 months as a rule
- Remember there is a lot of knowledge at a Parish Council
- In particular local Planning
- Really want to influence decisions
- “small” projects especially

- Traffic calming
- Speed limit in Sherpen Ave
- We already do the things on suggested services
- Clarity of Contact points to progress queries – people not hotlines

(Dunstable, Flitton, Flitwick, Pulloxhill)

- Influencing decisions :
 - Town & Parish Councils feel powerless on planning issues
 - Knowledge gap by Town & Parish Councillors training need
 - Access to Planning Officers – attending Town & Parish Council meetings
 - Planning “Hotline”
 - Influence on highway improvements to be greater
- Councillors in the Community:
 - Need to improve visibility / ability to contact
 - Help Ward Councillors communicate with residents
 - CBC to recognise that Town & Parish Councils have greater local profile
 - Many CBC Councillors have “split loyalties” – “twin hatters”
 - Ward Councillor to have a budget for use on local issues
- Devolvement:
 - Dunstable very eager to discuss anything and everything – all options open

(Harlington, Stondon)

- Hot line only liked by one Council (Harlington) – but mixed view otherwise as the bigger issue was consistency & continuity of responses (customer tracking)
 - Assistance communicating with the public (Harlington)
 - Messages not getting through particularly to planning (Stondon)
 - Consultation periods too short – 2/3 weeks when Parish Councils meet monthly. Sometimes notice is 24/48 hours eg. LDF consultation & planning (All Councils)
 - Parish Councils’ views not acknowledged particularly re: planning – given only 3 minutes to speak. Need to have an approach for more constructive dialogue (Stondon)
 - More opportunities for officers to talk about Planning Law
 - Parish Councillors must Feel that they are listened to (Stondon)
 - Concern that CBC offloading issues (Stondon)
-
- Not working to take on responsibilities – costs money
 - Actions taken in timely way
 - Could take on some responsibilities if shared (clusters) ie. weeds, verges, pavements if money & workers
 - Barnet “Easyjet Mode 1” “but we are already paying for a deluxe service!”
 - Support Hotline – Potton Council asked for this last time! Should be more experienced people NOT just getting through quicker. Freephone could claim but bother Councillors & Clerk access (not others)

- More street lights back up to CBC rather than devolve more
- Source services cheaper than CBC
- Need quality control standards
- More say on Rights of Way – work together
- Not necessarily able to take on services but want to be informed & consulted (particularly Highways)
- VAS powered
- Ward Councillors need to assist Town & Parish Councils , not how Town & Parish Councils can help CBC
- Have hot email account. Use Ward Councillors to escalate issues
- All agree with enhancing role of Town & Parish Councils
- Particularly planning issues – work with Town & Parish Councils

(Houghton Conquest)

- Concern as Parish Council volunteers, not full time Councillors. Concern asked to do more.
- Share maintenance issues of roads with others a possibility
- Already do grass cutting in Parish
- Engagement with Health services for advice / assistance needed. Ageing population
- Concern about bus services meeting local need. Care group used to assist in getting people about
- “Hotline” – ask Parish Clerks if would be useful
- Concern over waste removal

Appendix 2 – Sustainable Community Strategy

Round Table Discussions Output

Question 1 - Do the priorities reflect the critical issues for Central Bedfordshire?

Question 2 - How do the priorities relate to your own communities?

(Langford, Potton, Henlow, Caddington)

- In supporting our ageing population we need to ensure there is adequate public transport
- The use of village based facilities to provide activities for children and young people complimented by adequate transport to larger towns
- Healthy opportunities to encourage people to pursue sport
- Skills opportunities for those who want to pursue new careers and informed learning for vulnerable adults
- Third sector do not sustain their intervention and it ends up being a waste of time – need to re-think time limited funding
- Police shouldn't distance themselves from anti-social behaviour
- Solving the Catch 22 of getting volunteers to organise community events eg. Potton festival is week long
- Affordable housing for local people is key issue
- ie. All 7 priorities unanimously endorsed

(Clifton, Leighton-Linslade, Tingrith)

Question 1

- Concern re: lack of wider infrastructure to support house building – urban housing in villages – lack of green space (Clifton / Leighton Linslade)
- Amount of building can lead to lack of sustainability, building on green space / food supply (Clifton / Leighton Linslade)
- General – agreement to priorities, but danger that less will be achieved without appropriate infrastructure – context of reduced budgets

Question 2

- Flexible / creative use of land eg. for allotments, school land, large private gardens, unused Central Beds land (Clifton)
- Some reluctance from schools re: use of school grounds (General)
- Healthier Lifestyles – transport from villages to swimming facilities (General)
- Transport after 6pm problematic, safety, taking part in community life (Leighton Linslade)
- Missing element – environment

(Studham, Toddington, Arlesey)

Question 1

- Desirable to see these developed for all communities not “rhetoric” but “reality”

Question 2

- Use brownfield sites (Studham)
- Balance green space – housing / business need (Studham)
- Issue of older children being educated in Toddington (Toddington)
- Need to offer alternatives to the school bus eg. cycle paths, safe pathways (Toddington)
- Lack of accessible green space around the village eg. water walks, networks – green infrastructure (Toddington)
- Encouraging new housing “1,000” into area through LDF (Arlesey)
- More positive “regeneration” of brownfield sites/farms to create local jobs eg. conversion of empty barns (Toddington)
- Increased availability of higher paid people with workshops / infrastructure to support (Studham, Toddington & Arlesey)
- Need to provide employment beyond farming opportunities (Studham)
- Successful village hall events already held – need capacity / volunteers to do more (Studham)
- Already provide voluntary transport (for more vulnerable in community) – rural transport is an issue (Studham)
- Pavements 5 year plan – SW facing to improve / make it safer (Studham / Arlesey)
- More street lighting in certain high risk areas (Studham / Arlesey)
- Children – lower speed limit at local lanes school / nursery (Arlesey)
- Improved road infrastructure / bypass village – growth will have greater impact (Toddington)

(Heath & Reach, Stanbridge, Eggington, Chalton)

- Need to focus on issues we can really influence (Chalton)
- High level aspirations / statements all well & good but can't be resolved in anyway other than locally eg. local promotion of footpaths
- Concern about final statement re: maximising employment & housing. Should be separate (Heath & Reach although consensual support)
- Significant debate about affordable housing – vitals important
- But concern about balance & relationship with need to generate employment
- Concern about resources to “keep communities safe” – not enough resources & not well managed
- Dedicated point of contact really - important & valuable
- Good experience of customer services
- Like idea of somebody you have a relationship with
- Dedicated email for Town & Parish contacts
- Highways Helpdesk good – but only as good as ability to RESOLVE queries
- Not message taking – must understand how the Council works
- Get rid of superfluous / out of date info weekly report
- Create channels for feedback & commentary on info provided (eg. how do we enable people to be able to correct info)

- Broadly content with the 7 BUT is highways covered as it is important? And waste recycling?
- Yes, priorities relate to our communities. Easier for villages than towns – but it is local people rather than the Councils that provide local successes. Could have a greater role.
- Perhaps cluster of businesses eg. on site training
- Importance of recycling, unemployed act as volunteers
- Employment & commuting discussed “life in 21st Century will be challenging in Central Bedfordshire”

(Southill, Shefford, Northill, Blunham, Caldicott, Dunstable, Steppingley)

- Town Councils can support work with young people
 - Farmers market, locally support initiative
 - For Southill, not seen as having local focus (ie. 7 priorities not relevant)
 - Can see link with Central Beds area & Town Councils
 - Need local transport & health provision – develop Wander Bus across more Parish & Town Councils
 - GP dispensing services –needed locally & to continue for community
 - Provide more services to local older people – practical eg. smaller, bespoke services
 - Potentially develop taxi / bus token scheme
 - Support youth work in towns & villages
 - Explore opportunities with Film clubs, theatre for young people & provide service on Saturdays / Sundays
 - Older people lunch clubs, coffee mornings – work with independent / voluntary groups
 - Share transport to events between Parish Councils - joint publicity, joint events
 - Much around sharing ideas, local services for specific trips eg. to local surgery, leisure centres, lunch clubs, other
 - Sharing school bus – bringing older & young people together
 - Table felt strongly about providing local public transport in their areas
 - Agree they reflect the priorities for their residents
-
- Concerned about top heavy approach to community safety. Prefer local panel feeding into higher level. Duplication at the moment.
 - Funding to encourage clustering of Parishes.
 - Skills training – people losing jobs.
 - Relevant local training – skills audit? Training Centres – re-training of people. Apprenticeships. Links to Growth agenda.
 - Low interest in local area – Lots of people commuting. Don't get involved in community
 - Planned growth will create enormous pressure on jobs
 - Transport integration
 - Transport – can't get to many places on public transport
 - Community Development team – elderly
 - Active in leisure facilities – various programmes over next 10 years. Healthy walking groups

(Harlington, Stondon)

- Crime top of the list (Harlington)
- Emphasise young people into nurturing a sense of pride & belonging (Stondon)
- Concern expressed about use of word "protecting" children – view that this was over emphasised (All)
- Add supporting parents to educate children
- Some areas are commuting areas so maximising employment locally is not so relevant (Harlington)
- Priorities OK but they need to be underpinned by the infrastructure eg. maximising housing needs to be developed alongside adequate school provision
- Localism not stressed in the priorities

- Shopping – Death of town centres!!
- Infrastructure is missing and key to all!!!!
- Green issues / sustainability eg. combined heat & power recycling extended to business
- How promote healthier lifestyles? Living longer, healthier
- Not priorities (or lesser) – nurturing a sense of pride ... it come with the rest; promoting healthier lifestyles. How relate? They are things "you" do – not what "we" do except "nurturing" which "we" do, volunteering fairs, mobile shops might be the way forward.
- The priorities relate to our areas but not our work as Councillors

(Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Eversholt)

- Child poverty – particularly in some areas
- Priority – target unemployment hot spots (Dunstable & Houghton Regis)
- Local jobs growth to match housing growth
- Economic regeneration
- High level jobs – knowledge based economy
- Jobs growth highest priority
- Designated employment areas
- Pride in communities – educate within communities (travel to school)
- Strategic Planning – will infrastructure be in place to cope with growth?
- Provide facilities within local communities – particularly for vulnerable groups eg. local health centres & childrens centres
- Skills – Apprenticeships – local jobs to provide infrastructure – more vocational skills
- Area for consideration would be Economic Regeneration. Strengthen the message of priority 7
- Need to deliver local services in consultation with Town & Parish Councils eg. local resource centre
- Frustration that there is too much focus on planning & not enough on "doing"
- The implementation of local initiatives are outweighed by the economics/cost
- Group feel that the development of cluster groupings would enhance the delivery of the proposed priorities

(Shillington, Brogborough)

- Exactly what any Council should be doing
- Where is sustainability?
- Reduction of carbon footprint
- Nurturing sense of pride is the key
- Maintaining the green belt
- If these are the priorities what will not be done?
- Actions should be short, medium & long term
- What are the quick wins?
- Will CBC circulate the slides from tonight please

(Dunstable, Flitton, Flitwick, Pulloxhill)

- Overall support for 7 priorities but add: highway improvement (All), tackling congestion (Dunstable)
- Varying levels of support to elderly
- Generally good involvement by schools in local communities
- Health
 - Good facilities
 - School meals important
 - Encourage use of rural facilities
- Housing
 - Uneven provision of flats to houses
- Need better mix
 - Need for small house building ie. villages
- Safety
 - Crime & disorder partnerships not working (Dunstable)
 - Police presence good in villages
 - Traffic speed through villages needs addressing
- Community pride
 - No single issue
 - Village shop support (Pulloxhill)
- Jobs / infrastructure first !
- Growth
 - How make sustainable?
 - Where are the jobs coming from?
 - Priority should be more jobs / protect jobs
 - Affordable housing
 - Job types need to match housing stock
- Promote healthy lifestyles – costs less – don't need services
- Skills to prosper. Include vocational courses
- Nurturing woolly ! Agree with concept but not a priority
- Fight housing growth
- Balance housing and growth

(Houghton Conquest)

- Agree with priorities. Real concern over tier education issue.
- Traffic congestion, Public transport, Local shopping – not covered in priorities list
- Public transport to achieve the priorities to be an enabler
- Keeping communities safe – policing levels cause concern. Need to be closer to community
- Sense of pride difficult to achieve. Commute out of village. Local clubs available.
- Involve Health in planning process to design suitable housing. Health as a consultee in Planning.
- Play areas – tie in with healthy lifestyle

Central Bedfordshire in contact



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