



# Community Led Plan Case Study

## Brightwell-cum-Sotwell



### Introduction

The South Oxfordshire Village of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is situated between Oxford and Reading, nestling at the foot of Wittenham Clumps. One of the houses, Mount Vernon, is the original home of the "Bach Flower Remedies" and attracts international visitors.

Twin hearts of the village are the Red Lion Pub and the Community Hall which also houses the Post Office. For the last six years the community, with the Parish Council, have been working to reinstate the Village Shop which closed in 2003. Most of the community commute to work, mainly to the local towns. There is a pre-school, primary school, Scouts, Cubs, Brownies and a variety of social and sports clubs. Brightwell also has twice the national average of retired people. There is a regular bus service and the community can access a car scheme for visits to the Doctors Surgery in the neighbouring town. Milk and fish are delivered to the village. There is a mobile Library and a hairdressing service.



### Key Facts

<b>County:</b>	<b>Oxfordshire</b>
<b>District:</b>	<b>South Oxon</b>
<b>Population:</b>	<b>1550</b>
<b>Plan Complete:</b>	<b>2004</b>



### The Process

In 2003 Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) held a Community Led Planning workshop, which was attended by members of the Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Council. The Village Shop and Post Office had recently closed down and

villagers felt the sustainability of Brightwell was being threatened. The Parish Council felt that undertaking a plan would help to collect evidence from the community to influence their Local Authorities.

A series of public consultation exercises were mounted during 2003, including an open day, a drop in morning at the Community Hall and a Youth Group get together at the Red Lion. These events identified the key issues facing the village and brought forward an enthusiastic highly skilled Steering Group. Working parties were set up around the key issues and a further consultation event was held at the annual fete to inform the questionnaire. The questionnaire itself was hand delivered to all 587 households in October 2003 with a resulting return rate of 73%.

These initial consultations identified affordable housing as a key issue and the ORCC Rural Housing Enabler organised a Housing Needs Survey to be distributed with the questionnaire. A local volunteer with professional experience undertook the data analysis. Preliminary results were disseminated to the Community at a "drop in morning". The final plan was published in March 2004 and delivered to each household.

### What is a Community Led Plan?

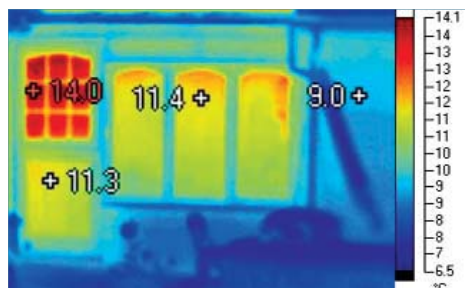
A Community Led Plan is a process that underpins a community's vision for itself across all aspects of social, environmental and economic life. It celebrates positive features and activities, highlights local needs and contains a detailed action plan to help meet those needs.

These plans are produced by and for communities, based on a detailed survey and consultation which is widely inclusive, prompts action and influences others. Good plans; use the Community Led Planning Toolkit framework, are supported by external facilitators from the Rural Community Action Network and include a robust evaluation process that ensures their quality.



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## Achievements to date



### Environment

► The Environment Group organised a meeting on the subject of "Sustainable Energy for the Home" in spring of 2007 which showcased the benefits of using a Thermal Imaging Camera, to identify heat loss areas in housing and community buildings. The Group, supported by the Parish Council submitted a proposal to South Oxfordshire District Council who funded the purchase of a Thermal Imaging Camera to loan out to communities and financed the training of six members of the group.

60 properties, including the School and Community Hall were surveyed using the camera. Each household received a copy of the results of the survey and a "Brief Guide to Energy Saving" booklet containing practical steps to save energy. The Guide was prepared by the Environmental Group, in consultation with the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre. This project won a £500 award in the Communities Competition organised by Oxfordshire Climate Xchange.

► The Environmental Group has worked with Conservation Officers to develop and promote community use of the Millennium Wood and Wellsprings Pond.

### Young People

► The Parish Council, in partnership with the local Sports College and Wallingford Town Council, has provided a grant for the purchase of a mobile skate park.

► The community's young people have been involved in the provision of improved play equipment.

► The Cricket Club has raised funds to set up a Junior Club which is well supported.

► Local school children carried out a "Planning for Real" project. The Environment Group also worked with the school to organise an "Eco Day" using the Thermal Imaging Photos to help the children visualise how they could help to reduce carbon in their homes.



### Roads & Transport

► The Parish Council has produced a strategy for repairing and enhancing the road surface.

► Improvements have been made to the Local Bus Service.

### Housing

► The first phase of one and two bedroom apartments has been completed and it is hoped to purchase land for the provision of a second scheme. The support of ORCC's Affordable Housing Enabler has been invaluable to ensure the current development will be kept as a rural exception site.

► The Community Led Plan and Village Design Statement have been very useful in planning appeals.



### Communication

► A Welcome Pack for new residents has been developed including a copy of the Plan.

► A thriving volunteer-run website has been developed, updated by local groups. The Community Plan, Newsletters and activity calendar are all included on the site which is a key resource for the existing community and also for newcomers.

► The satellite Post Office operates from the Community Hall 3 mornings a week and to maximise the social benefits the church has rescheduled its weekly coffee morning so it also links in to the Mobile Library visit.



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## Security

- ▶ A Neighbourhood Watch Group is working in partnership with the new Police initiative: NAGs (Neighbourhood Action Groups).
- ▶ A new CCTV installation at the pavilion has been successful in reducing vandalism.



## In the Works...

- ▶ The reinstatement of a Community Shop is the final Action from the Community Led Plan that needs to be addressed and remains an issue of high interest. The Parish Council and the dedicated Steering Group are negotiating on two possible sites for the shop.
- ▶ One site could potentially support further provision of affordable housing and a further housing needs survey will be considered.
- ▶ The Environmental Group are preparing to hold the 2nd stage of the Energy Saving Audit in November 2008, with a further study of the 60 properties to ascertain the achievements to date.

## Community Benefits

- ▶ The Community Plan Process enabled the community to get to know each other through the interaction and cross over of the groups. This promoted social cohesion.



- ▶ The plan utilised the talents and resources of the large retired sector of the community and has encouraged their involvement in village life.
- ▶ The process has raised both an awareness and interest in what is happening within the community.
- ▶ The energy and enthusiasm generated have encouraged more people to get involved in working for the benefit of their community.

## Local Authority Engagement

Evidence of community need provided by the plan has brought about several key partnership initiatives with local authorities and has built up excellent working relationships. The Community and Parish Council worked with the District Council on the review of the Conservation Area. The Chair of the Plan Committee has become a District Councillor and is a member of the task group consulting on Community Planning. The District Council funded the purchase of a Thermal Imaging Camera and the training of the volunteers.



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## Going Forward

The Action Plan is a living document with progress regularly reviewed by the Parish Council. In addition the Village Design Statement is a useful tool to influence Local Authority Planners and is used in planning appeals.

Updates and progress are communicated to the wider population through the "Villager" Magazine and the improved Parish Notice Boards. Progress is also communicated through the website, which is evolving as an interactive tool for communication. As a result of an online survey, the editorial group have developed new pages and are investigating turning the news pages into a blog.



### Key Advice for Others

Take full advantage of the excellent support, advice and guidance given by your local Rural Community Council.

ORCC were such a supportive, professional organisation that the Chair of the Plan group has become a trustee.

“ This is not just a paper exercise; it's about enabling people to take control of their lives, and say what they want for their community. Brightwell has gained so much from this process, which has highlighted everything we value most about the place we call home.

**Sally Dugan, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Plan Steering Group**

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This case study forms part of a series evaluating the impacts and benefits of Community Led Plans across the South East. It has been funded and produced by the South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC) in partnership with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC). Both are members of the national Rural Community Action Network. [www.acre.org.uk](http://www.acre.org.uk)

## Lessons Learned

- ▶ Community Led Planning should be an open and democratic process with no hidden agendas.
- ▶ Remember that everyone is a volunteer and should be treated with tact and diplomacy throughout the process.
- ▶ Look to utilise the hidden skills and talents within the community.
- ▶ Keep an open mind and ensure all opinions expressed are valued and recorded.
- ▶ Make sure all those involved feel valued throughout the whole process, *appreciate* and *celebrate* are the key words.
- ▶ The availability of expert knowledge was invaluable in analysing data returned from the questionnaire.



### Further Information

[www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk](http://www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk)

[www.oxonrcc.org.uk](http://www.oxonrcc.org.uk)

[www.sercc.org.uk](http://www.sercc.org.uk)

