

Gloucestershire Parish and Community Led Plan Case Study

Randwick Parish Plan

Completion Date: 2006

Population: 1402



Compiled by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC)

Randwick Community-Led Action Plan Case Study

Interviewee

Richard Huxford – Chairman, Randwick Parish Council.
Calvin Williams – Chairman, Randwick Parish Plan Group

Background

Randwick parish lies high up on a south-facing slope of the Cotswold escarpment overlooking the Frome Valley to the west of Stroud. It is evident from prehistoric earthworks in the woods above the village that humans have long been active in the area but the first recorded reference to Randwick dates only from the late 11th. Century, at which time it lay in the parish of Standish and belonged to Gloucester Abbey

From the 17th. to the 19th. Century the parish became very fragmented and widely dispersed, with 42 elements scattered as far afield as Moreton Valence and the River Frome. Most residents were engaged in agriculture or the cloth industry, either within the parish or close by. During the decade leading up to 1894 when civil parishes were established as the lowest tier of the new local government system, Randwick parish became a single compact area, with the majority of inhabitants living in dwellings to the north east of St John's Church. Apart from small communities at Westrip, Humphries End and Townsend, most other dwellings in the parish were isolated. The population then was said to be about 500.

Thus at the start of the 20th. Century the parish comprised four main groups of stone cottages, with further individual dwellings scattered along the road leading from Ebley to Edge, which runs through the middle of the parish. Lower down the slope, most of the land was used for agriculture or as orchards. Within the parish were three public houses, one church, three chapels, a school, post office, several shops and a number of local tradesmen.

Little significant change took place until public utilities had been widely introduced in the middle of the Century. However, that innovation coupled with the national house-building programme that followed the second World War, changed the parish markedly. Much of the former agricultural land to the south of the village was progressively given over to housing and by 1960 the population had risen to 830, few of whom were employed within the parish. To satisfy the growing need for a community meeting place, a village hall was built, largely by public subscription in 1964.

Meanwhile, national fears about potential loss of the rural landscape had been growing. In 1931, the National Trust had acquired Standish and Randwick Woods, with the aim of protecting them from development. In 1966 the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was established and the older parts of Randwick fell within it. In 1990 the ANOB was extended, so the only parts of the parish not included were the southern areas of housing built after World War II. Finally, in 1990 the Randwick Conservation Area was established.

Following the building programmes of the 1960s and 70s no further major developments were undertaken, but several in-fill areas of housing have been completed. Over the intervening years general social changes have had their effect, with the result that within the parish there are now only 2 public houses, no chapels, no post office, no shops and fewer tradesmen. However, a second primary school has been built within the parish to accommodate the post war population growth. In 2004 there were officially 623 households and a population of 1402, which has since remained fairly static.

What is a Community-Led Plan

A Community Led Plan is a document that sets out a vision for a community future based on sound local research looking at social, environmental and economic life. It celebrates positive features and activities, highlights community needs and contains a detailed action plan to help the community meet those needs. Community led plans are produced by and for communities, based on a detailed survey and consultation process which involves the whole community, prompts action and influences others. Good community plans, use the Community Led Planning Toolkit framework, are supported by external facilitators and can demonstrate a robust evaluation process that ensures their quality.

The Process

It was agreed by the Parish Council after preliminary discussions with GRCC to develop a Parish Plan and to apply for funding to help make it happen.

An open meeting was held to introduce the concept of a plan to the parish, to explain how it would benefit the parish, its possible scope and the need for widespread consultation and involvement beyond the workings of the Parish Council. This preliminary meeting was well attended by over seventy parishioners. As a result of the support the Parish Council decided to go ahead and a second open meeting was held when a similar number of parishioners attended. The Parish Council strongly advocated the view that the Parish Plan should be led from hereon by a strong “independent (of the PC) community champion” as Chairman of the Parish Plan Steering Committee and such a person was duly elected at this meeting. Also at this meeting we sought views regarding aspects of parish life under key headings which became consistent throughout the process. These headings were:

- 1) Natural Environment - Green spaces, footpaths, walks & access to the countryside, wildlife, noise and air pollution
- 2) Built Environment - housing roads & traffic, village design
- 3) Social & Leisure – education leisure facilities employment
- 4) Services – transport facilities and community buildings

During the meeting we also recruited a number of volunteers, in three categories – those interested in being on the steering committee, those interested in being in an interest group (focusing on one of the four key areas and those willing to help out “as and when” or with a specialist skill such as photography, design or analysis, etc.

At this point we had no idea as to what form the planning process would take as we were keen that as many people as possible should have an input in the way that consultation would take place. Indeed this became the subject of a further open meeting with those people who had volunteered to become involved. Out of this meeting a consensus was reached that a parish survey would be undertaken with every household receiving a questionnaire and after that key groups of people would be interviewed to add additional context to the parish survey findings. Interest groups were formed and asked to come up with 10 questions each under their subject headings, which would form the basis of the questionnaire. Over a series of weeks these were debated and a final form of the questionnaire was constructed which, it was felt, covered all the areas we could possibly influence within the plan. Subject areas such as the future of the schools and churches were felt to be beyond our sphere of influence and were therefore not included.

Volunteers delivered and collected the questionnaires and all the answers were collated. Approximately 50% of households responded.

The final phase of the project was to confer with other specific groups who might not be catered for in the questionnaire.

These groups were as follows:

- a) Senior citizens
- b) Youth Groups
- c) Businesses or people employed within the community
- d) Sports groups

From the consultations a prioritised Action Plan was drafted and finalised after several revisions as a result of consultation within the parish and with outside agencies like SDC, GCC, GRCC etc. and links with 31 other external agencies

Finally the whole process was formally adopted by the Parish Council and then published as an official document with copies lodged with various external agencies and locally for reference as well as on the parish website. In addition, a Digest of the parish plan, covering some of the key points arising out of the consultation and which now appear in the Action Plan were also produced (together were a parish map and contacts directory) and delivered to every household in the parish. The digest was subsequently included in a new residents welcome pack provided by church volunteers.

What are your achievements as a community to date?

Natural Environment

- Established post of Part Time Parish Handyman for general maintenance, grass clearing, cleaning bus shelters and planned programme of litter clearance, etc.
- Appointed volunteer Parish Watercourse Warden to monitor the streams ponds and watercourses in Randwick.
- Strengthened the links between the Parish Tree Warden etc and SDC & GCC Tree wardens over issues of tree preservation and public safety e.g. In the Well Leaze
- Identified and improved specific stiles and footpaths within the parish and encouraged the use/replacement of Cotswold stone walls where possible
- Began annually phased programme of providing additional dog-waste bins and salt bins in selected areas of the parish. These needs were identified in the Parish Plan and in consultation with parishioners and involved liaising with outside agencies e.g. SDC and GCC Highways.

Built Environment

- Completed Phases 1 & 2 of a major phased refurbishment & development of the Village Hall to increase and enhance its facilities and usage and reduce its carbon footprint
- Following extensive consultation introduced a voluntary “20 is Plenty” scheme and other traffic calming measures across parish with the appropriate signage as a first phase towards obtaining mandatory 20mph status
- Trialling a scheme to reduce light pollution and energy use between midnight & 5.30am by turning off selected street lighting.

Social & Leisure

- Permanently adopted the experiment of holding Parish Council meetings in different venues and locations across the parish to attract wider community involvement and access as well as a routine Public Forum agenda slot.
- Continued financial provision for parish sporting and community groups e.g. Village Hall & Playing fields Committee, Cricket Club & Brownies etc. with grant criteria based on Parish Plan outcomes
- Ongoing consultation with leisure groups on the redevelopment of the Guide Hut

Services

- Improved Parish Council communications e/g developed Parish Website and Notice Boards to publicise Standing Orders & Financial Regulations, Agendas, Minutes, Reports, etc, monthly “Notes” in Randwick Runner (the weekly parish newsletter) with regular features on Energy Saving & Recycling - tips etc.
- Provided a third notice board within the parish
- Improved liaison with Police, National Trust, GCC Highways and Neighbourhood Watch over parish issues including inappropriate use dumping, improved access, cold calling, etc.
- Major update of the Randwick Parish directory and consequently of mirrored information on the village website.

Randwick Village Hall

The Village Hall development stands as a major achievement in its own right, impacting positively across the four main areas. The consultation outcomes from the Parish Plan provided a clear mandate for improvements and gave the project leaders the foundations for the Village Hall Development Plan as well as key content to include in a range of funding applications. Some of the detail of community aspirations for the facility translated directly in to the Hall Plan and subsequent successes.

Funding applications have benefited tremendously from the Parish Plan research and consultation; although unsuccessful it was a specific requirement in the Lotteries application and it was vital to successful applications to other trusts and the local authority.

How has the Randwick Community Plan helped you to engage with your local authority about services your community needs?

Randwick Parish Plan has been a major factor in strengthening our relationship with all tiers and departments of our local authorities and other external agencies, stakeholders, etc. The Action Plan itself identified a range of specific actions or issues requiring direct liaison with 31 external agencies. Our links with Planning Officers, Highways Dept, Police, National Trust, Stroud Valleys Project, Severn Wye Energy, Cotswold Way, Severn Trent, etc. have all benefited and gained credibility from having issues and actions already identified and published in the Parish Plan Action Plan. As have our links with neighbouring parishes in resolving issues of common interest.

It was particularly helpful in establishing a voluntary “20mph is Plenty” scheme within the parish. It was also crucial in the support and engagement of SDC in the eco-friendly development of the services and facilities of the village hall and playing fields, bringing advice, signposting and resources and through a business-like partnership approach.

What other projects have you got planned for the future

- To continue the development of a Parish Design Statement in conjunction with SDC to inform Supplementary Planning Guidance
- To produce a Parish Environmental Survey & Plan to identify and raise awareness of sensitive sites and habitats within the parish.
- To continue to review, revise and update the Parish Plan Action Plan annually.

Have the actions from the Plan brought any funding into the community e.g. lottery grants, trusts, Village of the Year etc

Major funding was sought and obtained for both completed phases of the Village Hall redevelopment project from within the parish, local authorities and charitable organisations. The many successful applications were only possible by the project having been identified as a major action in the Parish Plan prior to the creation of the Village Hall Development Plan. In the words of one of the project leaders “the Stroud District Council grant of £35,000 would not have come about without the Parish Plan”.

How are you keeping the process alive and advising progress to the community?

Supported by a fixed monthly agenda item at Parish Council meetings open to public, the establishment of the four standing committees integrates the outcomes embodied in the Action Plan directly into council business and consequent reporting

Via the Parish website and reports in the Randwick Runner plus celebratory events like open invitations to meetings and official openings

Through annual comprehensive Parish Plan Review meeting

How has this benefited the community?

It has focussed greater attention on community cohesion and is successfully addressing the need to improve communication and community involvement in parish that is geographically elongated and comprising several widely dispersed relatively isolated settlements.

It has resulted in stronger links with neighbouring parishes and major stakeholders/agencies e.g. SDC, GCC, Police, National Trust and both the local Planning and Highways Departments.

It has strengthened the collective sense of purpose and brought common reference points and direction across all areas of parish discussion and development

What lessons have you learned?

That consultation is the key to developing and sustaining a Parish Plan together with strong leadership, partnership and work ethic of both the Steering Committee and the Parish Council
To prioritise and pace the implementation of the Action Plan issues with both achievable short term and long term projects in order to maintain impetus, interest energy & sanity!

How does the Action Plan link into the Parish Councils future business planning?

It is the main driver and its presence now shapes & guides not only its “day to day” working but also its future direction.

However, we are aware that in prioritising & implementing the Action Plan that it is easy for the interests and issues of some sections of the community that are under-represented (e.g. elderly, youth & the very young, etc.) to become marginalised. We are seeking ways to make ensure that their specific interests and issues continue to be championed.

One piece of advice for others?

Consult, communicate and involve widely as often as possible throughout all phases of the development and implementation of a Parish Plan and plan for the sustainability of that wider involvement.

Quote on the Parish Plan process

The community itself is the key to a successful Parish Plan. It is a vast reservoir of ideas, talent, and effort, in both its development and implementation. By being actively engaged in the process it enables a more effective and efficient phased delivery of those local issues that itself has identified to improve that particular community’s future. A “bottom up” rather than “top down” approach to specific local issues!

If the community own the plan they will lead the action!