Evaluation of Neighbourhood Action Planning in Park Wood,
including Planning for Real® methods

Catherine Negus, August 2012

Purpose and structure of this evaluation

This evaluation aims to identify successes and obstacles to success in the Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) which took place in Park Wood from 2010-2012. It makes recommendations for the roll-out of NAP into other priority areas identified in the Borough of Maidstone.

Two objectives identified in July 2009 related to the project's role as a pilot prior to rollout in other areas, and will be fulfilled by this evaluation:
- Gain an understanding of the impact of the project in resolving the issues faced by people living in Park Wood (including how effectively it has utilised public resources).
- Understand the success factors, the barriers to improving outcomes and the weaknesses in the approach utilised by the project.

As well as reporting on interviews conducted in June and July 2012 with representatives of community organisations and agencies, this evaluation incorporates findings from initial evaluations carried out in June 2010 and July 2011, and from the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of the project presented to Cabinet in June 2012. It also draws together information from a large amount of documentation on the project to enable observations and recommendations to be made.

Purpose and objectives of the Neighbourhood Action Planning project

Overall purpose: to work with local communities/residents to examine the problems and opportunities that exist in the area, making recommendations for improvements where necessary and working with residents and partners to deliver them.

Objectives of the project:
- Develop a common understanding of issues within Park Wood
- Make recommendations to the key agencies that will develop into the Neighbourhood Action Plan
- Influence the development of other policies, plans and strategies and investment decisions relating to these areas
- Build up an understanding of investment by the agencies in the priority areas, and look for opportunities for investment in the future (objective added in July 2009).

It has also been requested that this evaluation consider how well the project:
- Promoted engagement with the community
- Supported and developed partnership working.

The question of whether the project promoted engagement with the community includes:
- Did the project enable residents to express their views fully, and encourage them to get involved in this process? Were all sections of the community represented?
- Has the project improved the relationship between agencies and residents in order to enable continued expression of views and 'embed' engagement?

- Has the project encouraged residents to take a more active role in improving their area for themselves? Does this involve all sections of the community?
- Were residents' views taken into account by agencies working in the area?

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3. Has the project improved the relationship between agencies and residents in order to enable continued expression of views and 'embed' engagement?

4. Has the project encouraged and supported residents to take a more active role in improving their area for themselves? Does this involve all sections of the community?

5. How well did Neighbourhood Action Planning lead to a common understanding of investment by the agencies in the priority areas (to inform identification of opportunities for future investment)?

6. How well has the project supported and developed partnership working?

7. How far did Neighbourhood Action Planning influence agencies' policies, strategies, and investment decisions? Ultimately what was the impact of the project in resolving the issues faced by people living in Park Wood (and thus how effectively has it utilised public resources)?

Executive summary

In 2010 a Planning for Real® exercise was undertaken in Park Wood. The purpose of this was to work with local communities/residents to examine the problems and opportunities that exist in the area, making recommendations for improvements where necessary and then working with residents and partners to deliver them.

A map of Park Wood was made by Bell Wood primary school, and in the first instance residents were asked to put flags into the maps indicating what they thought the problems on the estate were and any particular areas they felt were affected. These were then listed and residents were asked to vote on what they considered to be the most pressing issues. Approximately 12.5% of residents took place in this exercise.

Key concerns expressed by residents were; community safety, leisure, traffic/transport and the local environment. However, statistics show that Park Wood residents are significantly disadvantaged in the other important spheres of health/life expectancy, educational attainment and employment/economic activity. There are also high rates of teenage pregnancies. Focus groups in spring 2011 were used to explore the reasons for disadvantages in these areas, leading to the development of a 'composite' plan. The extent to which agencies can fund work outside statutory issues is limited, so including their priorities in planning is important for transparency and to promote buy-in. However, links between agency and resident priorities could have been made earlier and better. Whilst 35 residents participated in this, attendance at a follow-up round-table meeting was low. Likewise, meetings introduced under neighbourhood management measures in autumn 2011 were poorly attended. Reasons suggested for this include consultation fatigue, people being either contented or too busy coping with everyday struggles, and in particular, reluctance to attend formal meetings.

Planning For Real® mapping activities generated enthusiasm and provided a clear way for residents to express their views. However, discussion groups were also fruitful, revealing individual stories and the complexity of factors in people's lives. Residents suggested innovative solutions.

Resident volunteers involved at the start of the project have largely drifted away. Unfortunately an early residents' group dissolved in early 2011. However, the Planning for Real® project and focus on Park Wood helped to develop Parents is the Word, and both this group and R-Shop were positive about the support received from MBC.

There was some suggestion that there had been a missed opportunity to coordinate use of residents' enthusiasm, the strong sense of community and well-developed networks, saying that a lot could be achieved for free if the right people were encouraged. Suggestions for how current groups can build their capacity and increase agencies' confidence in them included improving planning skills and organisation, managing tensions, and following model constitutions, and support is needed in this.

A *What's On* guide to the area is now produced annually. This has potential, but social media and word of mouth may be better ways of communicating in areas like Park Wood. Community groups are important in helping other residents to access services, as they have built up knowledge of who to contact, and NAP increased groups' links with key agency officers and Councillors.

Work took place in spring 2011 to map investment by agencies in the area though in future this should take place at earlier stages of projects. Initial response levels were disappointing though further work filled in some gaps.

NAP led to the reinstatement of bi-monthly multi-agency meetings hosted by Fusion. However, over time there have been several different meeting structures for coordinating work, and documentation

is unclear. The July 2011 evaluation found that the project had strengthened relationships between groups and increased the focus on Park Wood, though this may have been lost in more recent work. There were some possible instances of lack of 'joined up working' but analysis in June 2011 suggested that there is relatively little duplication, despite possible fragmentation of service delivery between different hubs.

There is a sense that progress against the Neighbourhood Action Plan has been slow, particularly from agencies other than MBC. To some extent, this may be due to poor communication about successes – production of a regular 'report card' has not happened. Perception surveys suggest that residents' image of the area is improving, though it is hard to know how much of this is due to NAP. Many but not all actions have been taken forward, with most progress in the areas of environmental cleanliness, refuse collection, antisocial behaviour and CCTV. The Tomorrow's People job club and Working It Out programme may not have happened without NAP. There have been some delays to implementation of the environmental improvements identified in the Plan.

There have been challenges in getting the plan underway, though financial pressures have also held back activity. There are some indications that the Neighbourhood Action Plan had a limited influence over partners' priorities. The Action Plan itself included too many actions, and time limits were vague – future plans should be more realistic and robust. Performance management was weak and the Project Board could have provided more direction, using the Covalent system as a reviewing mechanism. The management of the plan and its enactment, and work in getting buy-in from partners, were impacted by changing roles and reduced staff resources, and staff turnover was lamented also by residents who had built up trust and contacts via individuals.

Recommendations

1. Before beginning future neighbourhood planning, there needs to be agreement and understanding from all agencies and funders about how far agencies' priorities should be interwoven into the resulting plan and how this will be done.
2. Any future Neighbourhood Action Planning should start with a desk study of statistics relating to the area and all partners' key concerns, followed by discussion groups with residents/agencies as a precursor to, for example, Planning for Real®. However, agencies should not become too dominant and inhibit residents from expressing their own genuinely felt priorities.
3. Statistics should also be examined in detail before being used in discussions. For example, it would be useful to look into the question of whether there really is high teenage conception in Park Wood or whether pregnant girls tend to move there.
4. When discussing statistics with residents, more care should be taken to make them accessible – resident volunteers might be used in perfecting explanations before roll-out to a wider audience.
5. The way in which statistics are presented for resident discussion needs to be managed carefully:
   - Care should be taken to emphasise that agencies are on 'the same side' as residents, rather than seeming to blame them for issues like lower life expectancy - for example, agencies might note the impact that stress or income have on lifestyle choices.
   - Where residents focus on short-term issues because they feel more pressing, links with longer-term statistical evidence should be drawn out from an early stage – for example, residents in Park Wood highlighted anti-social behaviour and drug use, which could be linked to the fact that life expectancy is lower.
   - Issues like health and unemployment can be referred to as 'underlying issues', which could lead to fruitful conversations with residents about how these issues contribute to more immediate concerns like anti-social behaviour. This is preferable to implying that they are more important than residents' expressed concerns.

6. All plans should be validated by the community, particularly if they are adapted at a later stage to take agencies' views into account.
7. Numerical approaches such as Planning for Real® mapping should not be the only approach used. Allowing people to tell their individual stories and explain the complexities in their lives, as well as numerical and faceless studies, are important in getting a full picture of the interaction of different issues. This may also reveal tensions which are not visible from statistics alone.
8. Future Neighbourhood Action Planning projects should make use of the Planning for Real® methodology or similar creative, visual methods (including children making any models). Participatory budgeting is another useful technique and should be combined with prioritisation discussions where possible.
9. Consultations aimed at gathering a representative sample of simple data should reproduce elements which encouraged Park Wood residents to get involved: outdoor locations, the team going out to residents rather than expecting residents to come to them, the speed of the plotting activity, anonymity, and involving residents in organising the activity to make people feel comfortable.
10. A non-formal approach should be taken in as many meetings as possible. This should be made clear to encourage residents to attend. Children and babies should be welcomed at meetings.
11. Food should be provided at meetings to encourage people to attend – this is more important than incentives such as shopping vouchers but project leaders should experiment with different incentives.
12. Meetings should be timed carefully to avoid clashing with sporting events and popular TV shows.
13. Once detailed Census data is released in spring 2013, the ethnic, age and gender profile of people who participated in the Park Wood project should be compared with that of the area as a whole. Future NAP activities should consider whether there are ways to include particularly disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, and reproduce the Park Wood project's efforts to include those who could not attend certain meetings by allowing for one-to-one interviews at convenient times.
14. Agencies should offer support from the start to community groups producing or wishing to produce newsletters. Newsletters produced by agencies should be checked by resident volunteers for clarity.
15. Agencies should prioritise communication channels popular with residents such as social media (Facebook, LinkedIn), and ensure that local community figures are kept informed and encouraged to spread information by word of mouth.
16. Ensure that all partners make each other aware of consultation they are carrying out, both to stop duplication and so that existing mechanisms can be utilised.
17. Where decisions need to be made about the specifics of plan delivery, resident groups should be used as a starting point for consultation (for example, Parents is the Word was used as a sounding board in the selection of Groundworks for environmental improvements).
18. Project leaders should avoid the creation of a large number of different meetings. Given the context, existing traditionally officer-only meetings such as Multi-Agency Partnerships meetings could be expanded to include residents more routinely.
19. Future projects should begin with an assessment of the potential in the area as well as the problems – for example, strong perception of community or word-of-mouth information sharing. Even if existing resident groups are not ready to help organise the project they should be kept informed and can be supported later.
20. If no residents' association is present or forthcoming, project leaders should aim to set up small-scale groups to work on individual projects or issues. This may be more accessible and less intimidating to residents, and create motivation and focus.
21. Agencies should outline from the start the types of support they can provide to residents and resident groups, or individual community action projects, in tackling issues themselves (for

example training or bulk buy cheap stationery). A more structured framework of support for groups could be drawn from this, and this should include a specified contact officer for groups needing support. Issues highlighted as reducing agencies' confidence in local groups indicated that further support might be needed in developing skills in planning, organisation, conflict management, and developing formal constitutions.

22. Support should be well advertised and should also highlight to residents the funding that might be available to them.

23. Agencies should decide what is needed as a minimum for them to begin working with groups and accept that they will grow and develop only through support and practice. Where agencies feel unable to work with poorly constituted groups, they should seek support from organisations such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

24. The costs of hiring halls should be reviewed, and any discounts available to local groups well advertised.

25. Agencies should minimise the amount of paperwork needed when organising events, and ensure that it is clear who to contact for support.

26. Neighbourhood Action Plans should place more emphasis on the actions residents can undertake themselves, and how agencies can support them. Agencies may need to take the lead in organising some one-off actions or projects with resident support. Activities with an element of 'fun', which help build skills and could go on a CV, and which people do not feel are the basic responsibilities of agencies, are likely to get most interest. Care should be taken to explain these carefully in publicity.

27. Future projects should make efforts to engage with typically more disengaged groups, such as men.

28. Project boards should discuss partners' existing and potential contributions in an area at the start of NAP projects. This type of discussion might help build understanding between partners, strengthen buy-in to the project (or draw attention early on to problems with partner engagement and information sharing), and help in setting reasonable expectations. It would also help in eliminating overlap and making best use of the resources and structures already available.

29. NAP should use a clear, coherent meeting structure with consistent membership, to help give the project a sense of direction and reduce duplication.

30. In proposing solutions to issues raised by NAP, agencies should be on guard against duplication of services and also avoid creating new hubs, instead concentrating services into fewer, enhanced community facilities.

31. There should be much clearer lists and documentation of partners and their responsibilities, and of the project as a whole. Electronic filing should be meticulous.

32. Whilst paper surveys are not particularly popular in Park Wood, some perception surveys were undertaken by various services during the course of NAP. Any future surveys should include more specific questions about people's views on the impact of NAP projects, in order to aid with future evaluations.

33. A simple 'you said, we did' report card setting out progress against key NAP outcomes should be published on a regular basis. Social media could be used to publicise this. The Safer Maidstone Partnership should also develop a communication plan to help raise public understanding of the successful way crime and other high priority issues are being dealt with.

34. Problems with resourcing or commitment by agencies should be escalated to the project board and/or Locality Board.

35. Neighbourhood Action Plans should include fewer actions. A realistic plan based on the assessment of resources made at the start is essential to public confidence and partner buy-in.

36. Actions in Neighbourhood Action Plans should have more robust time frames with actual deadlines set for completion.

37. A dedicated project officer is needed to help to steer work throughout NAP projects. Their appointment should be set against a clear pathway through the project, including the clear meeting structures and documentation systems discussed above.
38. Action against Neighbourhood Action Plans should be monitored using Covalent, to which all partners should be given access. There should be a reporting system to enable project boards and the dedicated project officer to monitor and follow up on progress.

1. **How well did Neighbourhood Action Planning lead to a common understanding of issues in the area (and thus identify opportunities for future investment)?**

a) Tension between the priorities of residents and agencies

Neighbourhood Action Plans have been developed across the UK to address local issues and improve the quality of life for residents. The Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) process began by using Planning for Real® techniques with the support of the Planning for Real Community Consultation organisation. This involved residents using categorised flags to map their concerns on a model of the area made by local schoolchildren, presented at 'roadshow' consultations in locations across the ward. Prioritisation and action planning workshops and votes at a community exhibition were then used to narrow down options.

Key concerns were community safety, leisure, traffic/transport and the local environment. The most frequently mentioned problems (those with at least 20 mentions) were 'young people hanging around', alcohol and drug issues, traffic speed, people afraid to go out at night and not feeling safe, dog mess, vandalism and graffiti, parking, litter and illegal dumping, housing damp and mould, bullying, and noisy neighbours. The most frequently suggested improvement measures were security cameras, more police foot patrols, pedestrian crossings, smoking bans, provision of litter bins, a skateboard or roller park, traffic lights or calming, poop scoop bins and dog walking areas/dog free zones, and a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. The top actions voted for at a subsequent exhibition were a litter campaign, streamlined measures to tackle noisy neighbours, a dog mess campaign, a job club, a restorative justice project involving young people, a lollipop crossing patrol, traffic safety rails, a walking bus, a Safety in Action month, wheelie bins to tackle dumping, a tree planting day, a girls' football team, a newsletter and a residents' forum.

However, statistics show that Park Wood residents are significantly disadvantaged in the other important spheres of health/life expectancy, educational attainment and employment/economic activity, which were not issues they placed most emphasis on. There are also high rates of teenage pregnancies (though there is speculation as to whether this is because girls who become pregnant across the Borough tend to be housed in Park Wood due to they type of housing there). These are issues prioritised by many of the agencies working in the area, sometimes according to statutory duty, and many have funding directly related to goals in these areas. The Council and Local Strategic Partnership (now Locality Board) identified in summer 2010 that further work needed to be undertaken to engage residents and the agencies in the development of a 'composite' plan which included actions to tackle these problems as well as residents' expressed priorities. Including residents in this would help ensure that the limited resources available would be utilised in the most effective manner possible.

Focus groups in spring 2011 were used to explore the reasons for disadvantages shown by statistics in the areas of health, education, employment and teenage pregnancy, and residents' ideas on how to address them.

Nearly all of residents' most-cited problems and most-suggested solutions were included in the Neighbourhood Action Plan as 'high priority', and where they were not, related ideas were. Other high-priority actions from the Plan are scattered quite evenly among the other problems and suggested solutions, which reflects the input of agencies into the composite Plan.[1]

While there were attempts to relate residents' expressed priorities to the partners' concerns about other issues, there is some sense that ultimately this meant two different streams of work with

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[1] *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15* (November 2011)

tenuous links between them.[2] The way in which partner organisations' priorities were addressed was identified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review in June 2012 as one of the less successful aspects of the project. Some Councillors disagreed about the need to link the two sets of priorities, arguing that the NAP process should be about residents identifying the problems as they saw them, and remain separate from statutory priorities and the priorities arising from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.[3] However, particularly given the financial climate, the extent to which agencies can work outside statutory issues with funding linked to specific goals is limited. Including partners' priorities in a composite plan may therefore be important not only for transparency but also to manage residents' expectations, and help partners to engage fully with the project. Residents' input to discussions on addressing agencies' priorities could also be very fruitful and empowering. Furthermore, NAP might be more productive in terms of relationship building if it enabled residents to understand agencies' priorities.[4]

Looking at why the issues of health, education, employment and teenage pregnancy were not highlighted by large numbers of residents can help in assessing whether including them in the final composite action plan ultimately undermines resident empowerment, and how best to resolve any tension, so that NAP can be used to achieve the best outcomes.

- It is possible that some people do not see unemployment, poor qualifications or teenage pregnancy as problems. However, among people interviewed there was a sense that the majority of residents in Park Wood *do* want to work. As for education, some people want improvement and send their children to better schools in other areas, whereas others do not see low attainment as a problem.[5] During a Cabinet Away Day meeting with teenage mothers in Park Wood, it was noted that even when girls do not see their own situations as problematic, their aspirations for their children are often very different. Other young mothers stated that they 'wished they'd known' what it would be like and that girls in school had no idea. Grandmothers too were critical of the phenomenon of teenage parenthood.[6]

- Residents may not have raised these issues as priorities because, given the difficult circumstances in which many of them are living, they tend to focus on more pressing, immediate and frightening issues such as personal safety and the neighbourhood environment.[7] However, residents at focus groups noted for themselves the connections between the priorities of agencies and residents - for example, between drug use and life expectancy, or anti-social behaviour and unemployment. This demonstrates that consolidating the two sets of priorities was not entirely false or forced. Officers felt that drawing out this parity at an earlier stage (and with larger groups of residents) might help bring priorities closer together and reduce tensions.[8]

- Many residents also find it difficult to identify with, and even resent, characterisation of Park Wood as a 'deprived' area, for example priding themselves on a sense of community, the fact that their children play happily together, and their ability to cope day to day.[9] Whilst some see the statistics as important and interesting, others see them as another way of stigmatising the area and putting people down.[10] They may feel that they are being criticised by agencies that do not understand the realities of their lives (for example, smoking is often seen as a personal choice and

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[2] Discussion with Sarah Robson and Ellie Kershaw (MBC)
[3] MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012
[4] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[5] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Councillor Ring; comments from other people sitting in Fusion café with Ms Webster
[6] Discussion with Sarah Robson and Ellie Kershaw (MBC); interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[7] Interviews with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People) and Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)
[8] Discussion with Ellie Kershaw (MBC)
[9] Interviews with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People) and Councillor Ring
[10] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word), Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy) and Councillor Ring

coping mechanism). They may feel that instead agencies should focus on more isolated but extreme behaviours such as use of hard drugs, which is seen to take up the attention of pharmacists above average families with children.[11]

- At the same time, however, the same interviewees stressed that many people in Park Wood do not fully *understand* the statistics which show the area to be deprived in certain spheres. They take a more pragmatic and immediate approach, for example helping girls who get pregnant without looking at the broad picture of teenage pregnancy.[12] This was emphasised when residents gave evidence to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – they said that agencies often used complicated language and confusing diagrams when simple, clear information was needed.[13]
- It is possible that it did not occur to people to plot issues such as these on a physical map, hence the bias towards behaviour- and environment-focused issues. During focus groups, it was individual stories and the complexity of factors in individuals' lives which emerged clearly.

The residents' contributions to focus groups were thoughtful and revealing and they came up with some innovative solutions, showing that working together on all the issues can be fruitful.

b) <u>Tensions between the priorities of different residents or resulting from the interpretations and outcomes of data collected</u>

In focus group discussions, young people highlighted discontent with the way they are sometimes portrayed, saying that they found antisocial behaviour by other youths just as intimidating as older residents did. As the biggest concern highlighted in by Planning for Real® was 'young people hanging around', this does suggest that a numerical approach may not always reveal the full story, and people's more detailed views need to be incorporated as well.

Among mothers, there was some resentment that teenagers seem to receive more attention precisely because they're seen as a problem – there is a perception that there is much less available for younger children at the park. [14] This demonstrates that approaches to tackle issues need to be seen to be fair, as well as identification of the issues.

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<u>Recommendations</u>

1. Before beginning future neighbourhood planning, there needs to be agreement and understanding from all agencies and funders about how far agencies' priorities should be interwoven into the resulting plan and how this will be done.

2. Any future Neighbourhood Action Planning should start with a desk study of statistics relating to the area and all partners' key concerns, followed by discussion groups with residents/agencies as a precursor to, for example, Planning for Real®. However, agencies should not become too dominant and inhibit residents from expressing their own genuinely felt priorities.

3. Statistics should also be examined in detail before being used in discussions. For example, it would be useful to look into the question of whether there really is high teenage conception in Park Wood or whether pregnant girls tend to move there.

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[11] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Councillor Ring
[12] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Councillor Ring
[13] MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012
[14] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)

4. When discussing statistics with residents, more care should be taken to make them accessible – resident volunteers might be used in perfecting explanations before roll-out to a wider audience.

5. The way in which statistics are presented for resident discussion needs to be managed carefully:
   - Care should be taken to emphasise that agencies are on 'the same side' as residents, rather than seeming to blame them for issues like lower life expectancy - for example, agencies might note the impact that stress or income have on lifestyle choices.
   - Where residents focus on short-term issues because they feel more pressing, links with longer-term statistical evidence should be drawn out from an early stage – for example, residents in Park Wood highlighted anti-social behaviour and drug use, which could be linked to the fact that life expectancy is lower.
   - Issues like health and unemployment can be referred to as 'underlying issues', which could lead to fruitful conversations with residents about how these issues contribute to more immediate concerns like anti-social behaviour. This is preferable to implying that they are more important than residents' expressed concerns.

6. All plans should be validated by the community, particularly if they are adapted at a later stage to take agencies' views into account.

7. Numerical approaches such as Planning for Real® mapping should not be the only approach used. Allowing people to tell their individual stories and explain the complexities in their lives, as well as numerical and faceless studies, are important in getting a full picture of the interaction of different issues. This may also reveal tensions which are not visible from statistics alone.

2. Did the project enable residents to express their views fully, and encourage them to get involved in this process? Were all sections of the community represented?

a) Planning for Real®: community roadshows to map residents' concerns

A target of holding 20 roadshow consultations was met.[15] 471 residents expressed their views at these events (which is 11% of Park Wood's 4,280 residents aged 5-85; or 21% of 2,200 households).[16] However, an interviewee argued that involvement of the children in the school, who helped make the model used before mapping their concerns, disguises quite low voluntary involvement.[17]

The project focused on the centre of the ward which matches the area ranked in the 10% of most deprived in the UK, so a higher proportion of the most deprived residents could take part. Events were run at different times of day in order to be accessible for working residents or those with childcare responsibilities.

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[15] Evaluation of the project in June 2010
[16] *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15* (November 2011)
[17] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)

It is not possible to compare the breakdown of participants' characteristics to the population of the ward given that up-to-date Census data at ward level is not yet available. However:

- 193 participants (41%) were male and 278 (59%) were female, with equal participation between the genders up to age 16, slightly more males aged 17-20, then a substantial majority of participants female from age 21 upwards.[18] This may reflect the population of the ward as there is a perception that male residents tend to be more temporary, with a lot of single mothers living in the area.
- The majority of respondents were White British.[19] Again, the general perception is that this reflects the ward's population.
- [Guesses off the graph: 185 aged 12 and under, 36 aged 13-16, 8 aged 17-20, 40 aged 21-25, 55 aged 26-36, 38 aged 37-47, 9 aged 48-58, 25 aged 59-69, 34 aged 70 and over]. Half the flags (1465 comments) were put on the model by children and young people.[20]

Some of the most vulnerable people in many deprived areas are disabled. As there does not seem to be a disability group or forum for Park Wood, it is hard to assess whether disabled people felt their voices were heard during the Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) process. Part of the aim of the project was to bring consultation closer to home to enable the vulnerable to take part. However, given that many of the activities took place outdoors and in public spaces it is possible that this group were not able to participate fully. This is problematic especially given that many suggestions related to environmental changes and safety, and given that agencies highlighted health as an important issue in the area. However, the Neighbourhood Action Plan did place a high emphasis on disability access issues 'out of proportion' to the number of residents who mentioned them, to take into account vulnerabilities.

The Planning For Real® activities involving mapping people's concerns on a model of the area seem to have generated enthusiasm and provided a very clear way for residents to express their views – they were often the element of NAP people remembered most.[21] However, some residents were cynical about the process given that they felt agencies had broken promises in the past.[22] Elements which were cited as factors in the success of this exercise were:

- including residents on the team running the exercise, which made others feel comfortable and encouraged them to join in – officers alone might have been intimidating;[23]
- the speed of the exercise – people only had to contribute a minute or two of their time;[24]
- the team going out to the community rather than expecting them to come to meetings or venues;[25]
- anonymity, because many residents were reporting issues such as antisocial behaviour by neighbours, or bullying[26] (whilst one interviewee felt that collecting names and email addresses at this stage might have helped to sustain involvement[27], this might undermine the aim of getting as many people as possible to express their views);
- the visual and engaging method; and

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[18] *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15* (November 2011)

[19] *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15* (November 2011)

[20] *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15* (November 2011)

[21] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word), Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People), Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) and Councillor Ring; MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012

[22] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)

[23] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)

[24] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)

[25] Interview with Councillor Ring

[26] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)

[27] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)

- the children's involvement in making the model and talking about it to family.[28]

Outdoor venues worked well as they caught the attention of people going about their daily business.[29] These were much more successful than activities, for example, at a local church.[30]

Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) mentioned that whilst some agencies had been apprehensive, people made realistic, reasonable and practical suggestions, rather than asking for the impossible (such as a local swimming pool).[31]

b) Prioritisation and voting on actions

At an exhibition of results of the Planning for Real® exercise, held at the Easter Fair/Community Day in April 2010, 120 residents voted on 'top actions.' These means that a target of consulting with 12.5% of residents (600 people) was nominally met.[32] It is however quite possible that some of these people were the same as those initially consulted.

At this event, residents were asked 'Have we listened to you?' Over 70% said 'yes', fewer than 10% said 'no' and about 10% said 'don't know'. Comments included positive reinforcement, six comments requesting that public toilets be reopened, and one expressing concern about whether plans would be enacted: 'At the moment we are being listened to but remain a little sceptical; just hope all plans and comments are stuck to, to build a brighter future for our children.'

c) Focus groups on health, employment, skills and teenage pregnancy

For the later phase of work focused on the topics of health, unemployment, educational attainment and teenage pregnancy, focus groups were held for different age groups. These were open to all within the target age groups, but recruitment was achieved via the parent and toddler group, voluntary group, Tomorrow's People, Fusion, R-Shop and Parents is the Word. A £15 shopping voucher was given to each participant, though some said they would have attended anyway for the food and to be involved. Only three people attended the first age 16-24 group discussion, but a follow-up was organised with Cornwallis and New Line Learning sixth formers through their Community Director.[33] A target of 8-12 participants was achieved for each other discussion group, with a total of 35 residents participating. In addition, one-to-one structured discussions were held with a further five parents with young children at the Meadows toddler group, as they would not have been able to attend the evening meetings.[34] The discussions were extremely interesting and encouraged people to share individual stories and experiences.[35]

A follow-up round-table/'strategic choices' meeting was held to discuss these ideas. Councillor Ring felt that the method of using paper tablecloths to jot down ideas worked well, and that the MBC officer running the session (Ellie Kershaw) had the right approach to get people talking. People from different backgrounds (e.g. a pensioner and a young woman on benefits) were able to share different views without animosity and learn from each other.[36] However, attendance was low (about

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[28] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[29] Interview with Councillor Ring
[30] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[31] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[32] Evaluation of the project in June 2010
[33] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[34] Report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011
[35] Interview with Councillor Ring; report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011
[36] Interview with Councillor Ring

5 residents) because the meeting was held during an England football match! (Miss Kershaw also notes from previous experience that holding meetings during *Coronation Street* tends to stop older residents from attending).[37]

When the revised action plan was circulated, very few comments were received (only Fusion, Tomorrow's People and Connexions responded).[38] This means that the composite plan was not validated by the community in the same way as the original version.

d) Participative budgeting on environmental initiatives

The original Neighbourhood Action Plan included a list of improvements wanted on MBC land. At a series of roadshow events and participatory budgeting exercises held in July, August and October 2011, residents were given a limited budget (£50,000) and asked to prioritise the projects of most importance. Residents recognised that some improvements were not essential or else might exacerbate rather than improve anti-social behaviour issues. The plans were radically simplified as a result. Design visuals were then drawn up and presented by Kent and Medway Groundwork Trust's Landscape Design Team to a meeting of local residents and stakeholders on 18th October 2011. Based on the discussions, a final list of improvements was drawn up and the costs re-estimated by Groundwork at £31,857.[39]

e) Neighbourhood management meetings phase

The July 2011 evaluation found that 'residents in Park Wood are reluctant to attend formal meetings or open events' - street based consultation, or work with existing groups, was more effective.'[40] Indeed, Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) Steering Group meeting minutes from autumn 2010 indicate that meetings attracted few residents (1 on 13th September, 4 on 8th October, 1 for a visual audit on 11th October). A 'Community Forum' event on 29/11 was more widely publicised and attracted 5 residents plus 2 residents representing Park Wood Pride residents' association.[41] Low attendance, and larger representation of staff than residents, makes consultation much less meaningful and can also impact on partners' enthusiasm. Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) felt that lack of engagement was the biggest challenge NAP had faced.[42]

Some suggested that residents had simply become bored with the process going on for too long without real results being visible.[43] Some residents and Councillor Ring argued that in order for community engagement ever to work in Park Wood, approaches need to change fundamentally. Residents cannot be expected to conform to traditional meetings with 'hands up' contributions, but discussions should instead be less formal ('more like a family discussion') and agencies should accept that young children may be present (as was the case during interviews conducted for this evaluation).[44] Others felt that the approach had *not* been particularly formal – perhaps residents were not aware of this, or perhaps apathy, contentment or people already struggling to cope in daily life were bigger reasons for low attendance. It was suggested that some early participants had primarily wanted to resolve personal issues (such as wanting a bigger house) and dropped out when this did not happen.[45] This chimes with the perception among some residents that people attend

[37] Discussion with Ellie Kershaw (MBC)
[38] Project highlight report for July-September 2011
[39] Project highlight report for November 2011; evaluation of the project in July 2011
[40] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[41] From Steering Group and PNAP Community Forum meeting minutes
[42] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[43] Interviews with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People) and Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[44] Interviews with Councillor Ring, Jade Webster (Parents is the Word), and Jackie Pye and Angela Horniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy) (all mentioned the issue of children separately)
[45] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)

such meetings are just the 'moaners' and that events such as visual audits were primarily a photo opportunity for agencies and politicians wanting to score points.[46]

The possibility of offering incentives for attendance was mentioned, but it is not clear whether this would subvert the purpose of the meetings. It was suggested that thematic and creative incentives could be used.[47]

Recommendations

8. Future Neighbourhood Action Planning projects should make use of the Planning for Real® methodology or similar creative, visual methods (including children making any models). Participatory budgeting is another useful technique and should be combined with prioritisation discussions where possible. *(As noted in recommendation 7 above, approaches should also be used which encourage people to tell their individual stories and explain the complexities in their lives.)*

9. Consultations aimed at gathering a representative sample of simple data should reproduce elements which encouraged Park Wood residents to get involved: outdoor locations, the team going out to residents rather than expecting residents to come to them, the speed of the plotting activity, anonymity, and involving residents in organising the activity to make people feel comfortable.

10. A non-formal approach should be taken in as many meetings as possible. This should be made clear to encourage residents to attend. Children and babies should be welcomed at meetings.

11. Food should be provided at meetings to encourage people to attend – this is more important than incentives such as shopping vouchers but project leaders should experiment with different incentives.

12. Meetings should be timed carefully to avoid clashing with sporting events and popular TV shows.

13. Once more detailed Census data is released in spring 2013, the ethnic, age and gender profile of people who participated in the Park Wood project should be compared with that of the area as a whole. Future NAP activities should consider whether there are ways to include particularly disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, and reproduce the Park Wood project's efforts to include those who could not attend certain meetings by allowing for one-to-one interviews at convenient times.

As noted in recommendation 6 above, all plans should be validated by the community, particularly if they are adapted at a later stage to take agencies' views into account.

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[46] Interview with Councillor Ring
[47] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)

3. Has the project improved the relationship between agencies and residents in order to enable continued expression of views and 'embed' engagement?

a) Information provision

Residents were asked if they feel better informed about what is going on in Park Wood and who is in charge of what, especially since the new *What's On* guide was produced as a response to the Neighbourhood Action Planning's (NAP's) findings. This guide has potential, but people in the area often struggle with reading and receive a lot of leaflets (even quite engaged residents admitted that they just throw it away). Parents is the Word will be producing the *What's On* guide from autumn 2012 and want to make it more accessible. There was some confusion among R-Shop Bulk Buy members about why there is not one definitive guide for the area – their own newsletter was running before NAP took place and they think more use could be made of this.[48] However, the different newsletters were produced on the initiative of residents themselves.

Whilst an early assessment found that posters, direct mail and newsletters were the most effective ways of communicating with the Mosaic groups living in Park Wood, representatives of Parents is the Word and R-Shop Bulk Buy agreed that Facebook (and to some extent LinkedIn) and word of mouth are the most effective ways of communicating in Park Wood.[49] The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also concluded that social networking sites provided the quickest and easiest method of communication between residents.[50]

When residents contact agencies, they may be told 'that's not our department' or it may take time to get help with urgent situations, so people are still confused about who runs what. Members of community groups are important in helping as they have built up knowledge of who to contact.[51] There was strong agreement that 'who you know' is key to getting things done. There was some agreement that NAP had built up links with key agency officers and Councillors, but there were also problems with staff turnover meaning contact was broken. As a result of the identified need for neighbourhood management activities, the Mobile Gateway visited the area between September 2011 and March 2012, but this was discontinued due to cost.

People at the Fusion café during interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) agreed that there are often rumours about Golding Homes' activities, and resentment about its regeneration plans. Though the regeneration plans are separate to NAP, there is a feeling that they overshadow any progress made – indeed, during the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of the project, discussions turned to this.[52] However, Caroline McBride argued that Golding has always stressed resident engagement (independent of NAP), and consults with residents regularly, including through formal consultations, events at Fusion, a newsletter, public events and individual meetings with affected tenants.[53]

b) Consultation and working with residents

It was hoped that the NAP process would lead to the establishment of a core residents' or tenants' group which could be the focus of future consultation. Unfortunately an early residents' group (Park

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[48] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy); comments from other people sitting in Fusion café with Ms Webster
[49] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy); comments from other people sitting in Fusion café with Ms Webster
[50] MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012
[51] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[52] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word); comments from other people sitting in Fusion café with Ms Webster
[53] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)

Wood Pride) dissolved in early 2011. There are two main resident-run groups at present: Parents is the Word and R-Shop Bulk Buy, though residents are also involved in other groups run by agencies.

Both groups are positive about MBC and Councillors – for example, members of R-Shop Bulk Buy said that Zena Cooke (Director of Regeneration and Communities at MBC) had listened to and helped develop their ideas. Parents is the Word have been used as a residents' sounding board, for example being involved in the selection of Groundwork for the environmental improvements work. They are also helping to promote dialogue between the council and residents through their regular meetings and social networking sites.[54] Members of R-Shop Bulk Buy however stressed that they would like a greater role as resident representatives, for example taking views from resident-only meetings to the town hall. They emphasised the importance of 'knowing people' in consulting with Park Wood residents.[55]

However, the July 2011 evaluation found that sometimes resident-agency relationships are fragile – for example residents said they had had only limited involved in the Community Day organised by Kent Youth Service on 20th August 2010.[56] During interviews conducted for this evaluation, some expressed negative feelings about agencies' tendency to listen to residents – people felt that they were not liked for expressing their views, and that the remits of officers limited how much they could listen – 'what the community wants to do gets stamped out'.[57]

Since the end of the neighbourhood management arrangements, Multi-Agency Partnerships (MAPs) meetings, hosted by Fusion, are the main way for agencies and residents to meet formally. It was recognised in early 2011 that there could be greater resident engagement and work was ongoing at the time of the July 2011 evaluation to actively involve resident representatives.[58] However, Jade Webster, the chairwoman of Parents is the Word, does not feel it is right that an invitation is necessary and that agencies can 'talk about the people behind their backs'. Ms Webster has recently been invited to a meeting, so can add value to discussions, but she is disappointed that this did not happen much earlier.[59] The Chair of Fusion agrees that there could still be more involvement of residents in the meetings.[60]

Recommendations

14. Agencies should offer support from the start to community groups producing or wishing to produce newsletters. Newsletters produced by agencies should be checked by resident volunteers for clarity.

15. Agencies should prioritise communication channels popular with residents such as social media (Facebook, LinkedIn), and ensure that local community figures are kept informed and encouraged to spread information by word of mouth.

16. Ensure that all partners make each other aware of consultation they are carrying out, both to stop duplication and so that existing mechanisms can be utilised.

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[54] Project highlight report for July–September 2011
[55] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[56] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[57] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Councillor Ring
[58] From a project update from some time in spring 2011; evaluation of the project in July 2011
[59] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)
[60] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)

17. Where decisions need to be made about the specifics of plan delivery, resident groups should be used as a starting point for consultation (for example, Parents is the Word was used as a sounding board in the selection of Groundworks for environmental improvements).

18. Project leaders should avoid the creation of a large number of different meetings. Given the context, existing traditionally officer-only meetings such as Multi-Agency Partnerships meetings could be expanded to include residents more routinely.

Because it is felt to be important to 'know the right people', clear lines of contact and staff continuity are important: this is discussed in section 8.

4. Has the project encouraged and supported residents to take a more active role in improving their area for themselves? Does this involve all sections of the community?

Original evaluation of the project in June 2010 praised the retention of a core team of resident volunteers throughout the project course so far. However, later evaluations found that this team had withered away.[61]

A residents' association could act as a focus not only for consultation but also community action, but the only such group (Park Wood Pride) collapsed in early 2011, and thus failed to reclaim money held by the Council left over from a previous residents' association which had received £40,000 from Safeway.[62] This was stated to be due to lack of MBC support, but MBC had difficulty working with a group with poorly developed governance arrangements (though the group was constituted). Too much expectation from the group may have contributed to its ending, for example hopes that it would take over the steering of the Action Plan.[63]

However, the view of R-Shop Bulk Buy members is that different groups focusing on different topics currently works well and 'too many cooks spoil the broth' if everyone works on the same thing. They see Parents is the Word as a mental health-focused organisation and themselves as focused on cutting living costs. They come together to organise activities like the fete.[64]

R-Shop Bulk Buy support families on a low income by buying products in bulk cheaply at the supermarket, and selling them in the ward, thus reducing the cost of goods and bus travel. They also deliver goods to vulnerable residents. Timebanking is used to encourage people to volunteer. The group were positive about support from MBC in activities as well as through listening to their views, saying that Zena Cooke (MBC) had for example found them free training **[ask Zena]**. However, they disagreed that Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) had played a role in encouraging people to work for their community, as they had been set up before it began. They felt that there had been a missed opportunity to coordinate use of the resources in the community, including people's enthusiasm, the strong sense of community and well-developed networks. For example, they suggested that unemployed people could paint Heather House or run football sessions, in return for skills on their CV. These residents felt that the attempt to involve residents in improvements by running neighbourhood audit walks was doomed to failure – people did not want to give up their evening 'to go and pick up dog poo'.[65] This was not the purpose of the walks, but it is telling that the one 'action' event residents were aware of was both misunderstood and actually more of a surveying exercise.

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[61] Project highlight report for Jan-March 2011
[62] From Steering Group meeting minutes
[63] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[64] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[65] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)

The Planning for Real® project and focus on Park Wood helped to develop Parents is the Word (with 5 members but periodic involvement from many others): members were involved in running Planning for Real® exercises and often met up at Fusion to discuss local issues. Jim Boot (MBC) linked the members up with Councillor Ring who, along with Voluntary Action Maidstone, supported them to become an official group. They now support the community in several ways:

- The group have been commissioned by the Council to organise planting of the Heather House garden and to produce the next edition of the *What's On* guide.
- They are able to link people in need with those in agencies who can help them, because of their increasing knowledge of services and contacts among MBC officers.
- They provide mental health support for each other, including via an online group. They are also working to end the stigma associated with mental health problems. They find that being active in the community can help build confidence.
- They provide mutual support as 'good neighbours' – their visibility and Facebook presence means people come to them for help and they can link them up with support. For example, members help other residents with food until benefit payments arrive, and have supported a teenage mother to get her A-Levels.
- They are keen to improve the image of Park Wood and its residents.
- The group will be talking to the Chamber of Commerce and to Brixton Council about their work.

The group's chairwoman, Jade Webster, said that the MBC Community Development team have provided a lot of support to the group. When they held a fair, there were many forms to fill in, but a contact at the council helped them with this and furthermore delivered equipment to Ms Webster's home.[66] As the group becomes established, its contacts at the Council are becoming firmer and more extensive. Ms Webster felt that other agencies had been less helpful - for example, when Parents is the Word held a car boot sale, Fusion did not put up posters as requested.[67]

Agencies could provide more support to community groups to build capacity, which, in turn, would increase agencies' ability and willingness to work with the groups on projects and give them responsibilities. Issues seen as problematic by some included:

- Some have advised Parents is the Word that it should develop its planning skills, accepting a longer time-frame for projects.[68]
- Others highlighted organisational issues – Parents is the Word members are keen and book many meetings and training, but do not always turn up.[69]
- There has been some tension within the group and this has discouraged some organisations from working with them.[70]
- Mike Fitzgerald, Chair of Fusion and Tomorrow's People, is concerned that Parents is the Word does not follow the model constitution suggested by Action for Communities of six nominated and six elected members.[71]
- Mr Fitzgerald feels that Parents is the Word are not yet ready to take on as many responsibilities as they would like and was sceptical about the time members can spare for activities alongside their parenting commitments.[72] However, the core members of the

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[66] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)
[67] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)
[68] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[69] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) (Golding Homes)
[70] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) (Golding Homes)
[71] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)
[72] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)

group are at-home parents, with working parents contributing as and when they have the time.

However, Councillor Ring also suggested that agencies give up on community groups too easily. Groups such as Parents is the Word are on a steep learning curve, and will make mistakes. For example, Golding Homes did not want to associate with the group after some conflict arose at an event. However, she stressed that it is precisely in order to *build* people's capacity that working with such groups is important.[73] Likewise members of R-Shop Bulk Buy felt that because resident associations have often fallen apart, agencies have little faith in community projects in Park Wood, and this needs to change.[74]

As mentioned above, it is felt that 'who you know' is key to getting things done as well as being heard, and residents like to build up relationships with staff who then stay in post.[75] The loss of the original core team of volunteers was also felt to be partly due to changes in staffing.[76]

Both Ms Webster and Jackie Pye (R-Shop Bulk Buy) mentioned the cost of hiring rooms at Heather House as a major barrier to increased community involvement. Ms Webster wanted to set up an entirely volunteer-led children's summer scheme there. Ms Pye noted that the rooms have to be hired not just for the activity but to allow time to set up and clear too. Both groups are keen to see Heather House become a community-run facility.[77] However, the Community Development team feel that the costs are actually relatively cheap, and stated that both of the resident groups have been offered hire of the Hall for free. This difference in opinion possibly demonstrates a communication issue.[78]

Focus group participants had some good ideas which were not necessarily all taken forward. For example older people said that younger family members did not know how to budget and cook and wanted to set up classes themselves to teach the younger generations. A group of teenage mothers said that before becoming parents they had not comprehended the commitment involved, and they felt it would be good to have teenage parents give talks in schools about 'what it's really like' as teenagers would identify better with them than with lecturers. Given that these were effectively offers of help, they could have been included on the Action Plan itself, including the support needed from agencies.

Anecdotally, it is largely women who get involved in community-run groups and activities. It is felt that among men, only single fathers got involved in Parents is the Word. There is a perception among some that men are 'the problem, sitting around drinking' and 'the women get everything done'.[79] The Working Men's Club was not specifically involved in the Planning for Real® exercises as they are perceived by officers as unwelcoming to outsiders.[80] Lower engagement among men is a trend across the country and may also reflect the ward's demography – there is a perception that men tend to be more transient residents, for example being the partners of more established female residents.

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[73] Interview with Councillor Ring
[74] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[75] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[76] Project highlight report for January-March 2011
[77] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[78] Discussion with Sarah Robson (MBC)
[79] Interview with Councillor Ring
[80] Discussion with Julia Fraser (MBC)

<u>Recommendations</u>

19. Future projects should begin with an assessment of the potential in the area as well as the problems – for example, strong perception of community or word-of-mouth information sharing. Even if existing resident groups are not ready to help organise the project they should be kept informed and can be supported later.

20. If no residents' association is present or forthcoming, project leaders should aim to set up small-scale groups to work on individual projects or issues. This may be more accessible and less intimidating to residents, and create motivation and focus.

21. Agencies should outline from the start the types of support they can provide to residents and resident groups, or individual community action projects, in tackling issues themselves (for example training or bulk buy cheap stationery). A more structured framework of support for groups could be drawn from this, and this should include a specified contact officer for groups needing support. Issues highlighted as reducing agencies' confidence in local groups indicated that further support might be needed in developing skills in planning, organisation, conflict management, and developing formal constitutions.

22. Support should be well advertised and should also highlight to residents the funding that might be available to them.

23. Agencies should decide what is needed as a minimum for them to begin working with groups and accept that they will grow and develop only through support and practice. Where agencies feel unable to work with poorly constituted groups, they should seek support from organisations such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

24. The costs of hiring halls at Heather House (and similar venues in other project areas) should be reviewed, and any discounts available to local groups well advertised.

25. Agencies should minimise the amount of paperwork needed when organising events, and ensure that it is clear who to contact for support.

26. Neighbourhood Action Plans should place more emphasis on the actions residents can undertake themselves, and how agencies can support them. Agencies may need to take the lead in organising some one-off actions or projects with resident support. Activities with an element of 'fun', which help build skills and could go on a CV, and which people do not feel are the basic responsibilities of agencies, are likely to get most interest. Care should be taken to explain these carefully in publicity.

27. Future projects should make efforts to engage with typically more disengaged groups, such as men.

5. How well did Neighbourhood Action Planning lead to a common understanding of investment by the agencies in the priority areas (to inform identification of opportunities for future investment)?

Work took place in spring 2011 to map investment, identify duplication, identify how organisations measure their impact, assess whether outcomes are improving, and find out what might be done better. The summary of this work found that 'The initial responses from the organisations to the survey were disappointing. Only 11/20 organisations responded to the initial survey despite follow-up emails, phone calls and one to one meetings. Of these only 3 provided financial information. However, subsequent follow-up work including re-examining depth interviews held with the key agencies the previous year, and further contact with the agencies, gave a better picture, covering 14 of the 20 organisations considered. The resource mapping exercise identified £1,311,850 of spend within Park Wood. This includes an estimate of primary school spending but excludes health spending except for that provided through Fusion Healthy Living Centre. The organisations which participated in the survey employ 178 staff in Park Wood (but not all of them working exclusively in Park Wood), and have 65 volunteers.[81]

A summary of the resource mapping work concluded that agencies need to be more open about the resources they spend in the area to ensure value for money is being achieved.[82] Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) agreed that more attention could be paid to tracking investment in the project, in order to assess value for money. However, she also said that detailed breakdowns of spending were impossible given that organisations often spread their resources across the whole Borough and do not record how much staff time, for example, is focused on a particular ward.[83]

Recommendations

28. Project boards should discuss partners' existing and potential contributions in an area at the start of NAP projects. This type of discussion might help build understanding between partners, strengthen buy-in to the project (or draw attention early on to problems with partner engagement and information sharing), and help in setting reasonable expectations. It would also help in eliminating overlap and making best use of the resources and structures already available.

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6. How well has the project supported and developed partnership working?

Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People) noted that agencies were working together before Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) – this was even necessary to get some funding.[84]

It is not entirely clear from documentation which agencies were involved from the very start of the NAP project. Mr Fitzgerald believes Fusion was not, though it became very involved and took on some actions.[85] R-Shop Bulk Buy were not involved at the start, other than helping with advertising,

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[81] Report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011
[82] Report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011
[83] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[84] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)
[85] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)

as they did not feel ready.[86] Golding Homes and other agencies, some of which provided funding, were involved from the start.[87]

There were some possible instances of lack of 'joined up working' – for example Mr Fitzgerald questioned why the Mobile Gateway could not have been held in facilities at Fusion/no.5 Parade.[88] A steering group meeting in September 2010 identified possible overlap between Tomorrow's People and Joining Hands, and other concerns about accountabilities and responsibilities.[89] However, in June 2011, analysis of the 39 activities and services running out of six community facilities listed in the new *What's On* guide suggests that there is relatively little duplication. This may not always be apparent to residents who may not distinguish between a sexual health clinic for teenagers such as the one run at Fusion and a support group run for teenage parents at the Meadows. The same assessment identified a risk that the current focus on unemployment would lead to multiple overlapping projects including some just outside the ward – for example the new Senacre Skills Studio (five minutes' walk from Park Wood) has a similar offer to that already provided by Tomorrow's People, Mid Kent College, New Line Learning Academy and Connexions. The assessment also noted that there were six community facilities plus the GP Practice, pointing to a fragmentation of service delivery, and suggested that this might be be wasteful and confusing to residents.[90] R-Shop Bulk Buy members interviewed thought many residents wanted all their health services in the same place.[91]

NAP led to the introduction/reinstatement of some mechanisms to ensure better coordination between partners. Fusion has restarted bi-monthly Multi-Agency Partnerships (MAPs) meetings, and invites resident representatives. There has been a greater emphasis on signposting residents, for example through the *What's On* guide.[92] The July 2011 evaluation found that the project had strengthened relationships between local groups, for example Fusion and Meadows Children's Centre, and led to greater cooperation, for example in setting up the Be Free project.[93] Caroline McBride (Golding Homes), however, feels that while partnership working was strong while the project was 'live', the focus on Park Wood may have since been lost in the work being done between Golding, MBC, the police and health and wellbeing partners through other structures.[94]

There have been several different meeting structures for coordinating work on NAP, including round table meetings among residents and agencies, the Neighbourhood Planning Project Board, meetings of the NAP Steering Group, and the MAPs meetings. It was noted in spring 2011 that there was a risk that this would lead to a perception of duplication, and further meetings should revive old names rather than using new ones.[95] Mr Fitzgerald agrees that it might make sense to pull meetings together, bring people together again, and be more consistent, noting that when 'politics' changes there is a tendency to introduce more new structures.[96]

It is very difficult to understand the project's timeline and progress from the documentation currently available, which could lead to problems in information sharing, clarity of responsibilities, and handover between different agencies and staff. Caroline McBride (Golding Homes) believes there was some confusion over each agency's responsibilities and said that a project plan in Excel

[86] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[87] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[88] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)
[89] From Steering Group meeting minutes
[90] Report to Management Team June 2011 on the Further Work
[91] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[92] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[93] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[94] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[95] Project highlight report for April-June 2011
[96] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)

would enable filtering by organisation.[97] However, the Action Plan does mark clearly which organisations were allocated each action and separate versions were produced.

Recommendations

29. NAP should use a clear, coherent meeting structure with consistent membership, to help give the project a sense of direction and reduce duplication.

30. In proposing solutions to issues raised by NAP, agencies should be on guard against duplication of services and also avoid creating new hubs, instead concentrating services into fewer, enhanced community facilities. *As noted in recommendation 28 above, partners should make known their existing contributions in an area at the start of NAP projects.*

31. There should be much clearer lists and documentation of partners and their responsibilities, and of the project as a whole. Electronic filing should be meticulous.

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7. How far did Neighbourhood Action Planning influence agencies' policies, strategies, and investment decisions? Ultimately what was the impact of the project in resolving the issues faced by people living in Park Wood (and thus how effectively has it utilised public resources)?

The actual Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP) process ran slowly, with for example a large gap between the consultation and production of the final plan, and many delays to consultation on the use of the Growth Point funds for environmental improvements.[98]

a) Progress against the Neighbourhood Action Plan

A visiting member to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt there was a need to identify why action on the residents' priorities had not happened as quickly as it might. There was a strong sense among residents interviewed that few visible results have come out of NAP[99] - at the time of the July 2011 review residents were asking what next steps would be. Members of R-Shop Bulk Buy stated that the main thing to come out of the project was that the Park has been redone and a new bench put in near their shop, and they did not feel a lot had happened – 'it has all gone quiet'. They emphasised that anti-social behaviour is still a problem because there is not enough for young people to do.[100] Some felt that MBC had stuck to its commitments, but other agencies had delivered less - whereas MBC went for the 'quick wins' and took responsibility, other agencies chose actions with 10-year timeframes so they did not have to act immediately. They questioned whether, for example, the police had dealt with drug use and Golding Homes had cleared mould from homes.[101]

However, many actions from the Neighbourhood Action Plan have been taken forward. Key changes triggered include a drive to improve street/open space cleanliness, and refuse collection and bin storage being addressed. From MBC, there is ongoing support from Environmental Services (increased street and park cleaning), Community Safety (action on anti-social behaviour and CCTV),

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[97] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[98] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[99] Interviews with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes), Jade Webster (Parents is the Word), Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy) and Councillor Ring
[100] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[101] Interviews with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) and Councillor Ring

Community Development (youth project at Charlton Community Football), Environmental Health (litter, dog mess, noise enforcement and protocol).[102] The Tomorrow's People job club and Working It Out programme may not have happened without NAP.[103] The July 2011 evaluation found that there has been a greater focus on Park Wood by all partners. The dog fouling campaign might have happened anyway, but NAP gave a voice to residents in Park Wood who had become resigned to a poorer environment, so the campaign did not focus on other areas as it might otherwise have done.[104] However, after visual audits stopped, dumping and graffiti crept back.[105]

There were some delays to implementation of the environmental improvements identified in the Plan and to be funded through £50,000 of Growth Point funding. Costed proposals were developed in consultation with residents in autumn 2011.' And the environmental improvements programme was completed as of this Monday 20 August. Improvements included;

> Parade of shops: new CCTV, repaving, re-turfing, dog bin and community notice board
> Heather House: new fencing, waste bin, community notice board, new signage

b) Changes in resident perceptions of the area

Focus groups in spring 2011 started off by asking what residents think is good and bad about living in Park Wood. All of the groups said that things have improved a lot (though it is not clear what of this was a result of NAP). All groups, including the young peoples' group, said that youth nuisance is a problem.[106]

In November 2011, MBC Environmental Services carried out a residents' perception survey regarding street cleaning, litter and rubbish collection in Park Wood. Since the start of NAP, street cleaning satisfaction rose from 34% to 60% in 3 years.

In December 2011, the Community Development team carried out a perception survey at the Mobile Gateway, in which 33 residents participated. Over the range of residents' top priorities in the action plan 37% said things had got better, 36% said things had stayed the same and 16% said things had got worse. Perceptions of 'young people hanging around' and 'drinking at the parade' had improved, and 64% of residents felt that 'visible police presence' was better. Perceptions of dog mess appear to be the most difficult to change.[107]

c) Communication of progress

To some extent, where residents have poor views of the progress on the project seems to be due to a lack of communication. This is problematic as it damages trust between residents and officers, and undermines future work. The spring 2011 resource mapping exercise found that the key problem is not lack of services, but lack of uptake of those services by residents. Agencies felt this was due the reluctance of residents to engage with service providers. Residents in the discussion groups stated that it was down to poor communication. Some people commented that the voluntary groups like Fusion could probably use more help organising and advertising what they do.[108] It was originally planned to have a set of performance measures that are available at ward level on a monthly or quarterly basis are identified and shared with residents and agencies in the form of a quarterly

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[102] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[103] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[104] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[105] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[106] MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012
[107] Project highlight report for October–December 2011; project highlight report for November 2011
[108] Report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011

report card, but this has not happened consistently.[109] Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had found this type of communication, in the form of 'You Said, We Did' reports, to be effective and recommended its further use.[110]

d) How far did the Neighbourhood Action Plan influence the priorities of partners?

It is difficult to establish how far the Neighbourhood Action Plan influenced the priorities of partners. A survey of this was proposed in September 2011, but is only now being enacted.

The resource mapping exercise in spring 2011 found that the top objectives for the majority of organisations relate to employment, training and education followed by health, community development and support for individuals/families. Housing and information/signposting were next.[111] As can be seen from section 1, these priorities are still quite different from most of those expressed by residents.

The July 2011 evaluation found that the project had helped Fusion develop its role, but Mike Fitzgerald, the current chair, feels the priorities identified did not really influence Fusion, because its work is driven by the PCT and adult services contracts, and it has to work for the wider Maidstone not just Park Wood.[112]

Caroline McBride felt that the Plan has not been incorporated into Golding Homes' main plans but remains a separate project (partly because the Plan was not at the strategic level). However, meetings are underway to assess progress against the Plan, so it is still influencing the organisation's work. Though there is a feeling among residents that the regeneration of Park Wood has distracted from their concerns, Ms McBride asserted that work has taken place to ensure that existing homes are decent.[113]

The priorities of Bell Wood School had to change after special measures were introduced there.[114]

e) Other suggested reasons for slow progress

Some Members who took part in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review felt that developers were often slow to deliver on agreements that would provide improvements to an area. The July 2011 evaluation also identified challenges in getting all agencies to accept and address criticism, and noted that residents identify reluctance among agencies to face up to responsibilities.

Most of the agencies represented on the Local Strategic Partnership Board were involved in developing the 'composite' action plan, and this should have encouraged buy-in, though as noted in recommendations above, this would be increased by this work being done at an earlier stage.[115] However, the July 2011 evaluation and report on the further work suggested that participation from some organisations may have been limited by pressures on public organisations due to the financial climate.[116] Partners were unable or unwilling to commit additional resources. For example, the Police were unable to replace the dedicated Park Wood neighbourhood police officer, which impacted on

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[109] From an early Powerpoint on the project plans
[110] MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012

[111] Report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011
[112] Interview with Mike Fitzgerald (Fusion/Tomorrow's People)
[113] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[114] Interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[115] Report to MBC Management Team, *Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan: Further Work,* June 2011
[116] Evaluation of the project in July 2011

tackling alcohol problems at the Parade as the PCSO does not have the power to enforce rules there.[117] In spring 2011, there was no manager at Fusion and Bell Wood school had entered special measures. However, assessments in spring 2011 found that KCC, Golding Homes, Tomorrows' People, Fusion, the Meadows Children's Centre and KCC Children's Preventatives Services continued to be active supporters of the project, and positive meetings had been held with Job Centre Plus and West Kent NHS following the spring 2011 focus groups. Some agencies such as the local GP practice needed to be engaged.[118]

The Action Plan included too many actions, and should have been more rigorously pared down from the outset. [119] Actions were not robust enough, and time limits were vague (e.g. 'short term' or 'medium term').[120] Members of R-Shop Bulk Buy suggested that if agencies were honest from the start about what could realistically be achieved, residents would be happier (when they set up their scheme, they chose just one concept out of 8-9 ideas discussed by residents at a roundtable event).[121] Jade Webster (Parents is the Word) agreed that people do not always understand the financial limitations of agencies and need to be told from the start, and also need to be told what is a reasonable timeframe for action.[122]

Performance management was weak and it was felt that the project management Board, while useful in the beginning, could have followed through with a stronger reviewing mechanism.[123] The Covalent system (introduced to enable different organisations to share performance management information on the Sustainable Community Strategy) would also be ideal for managing NAP. Though initial meetings were held about putting the Action Plan onto the system, this process was abandoned when Jim Boot left the MBC Community Development team.[124] Original plans to establish one-to-one meetings to address performance issues utilising Results Based Accountability or an independent facilitator, a delivery group including resident representatives, and task and finish groups, do not seem to have been put into action.[125] The July 2011 evaluation found a need for light touch neighbourhood management activities to maintain momentum. The Neighbourhood Planning Project Board was resurrected and neighbourhood audit walks organised, but as discussed above, interest was limited.

The management of the plan and its enactment, and work in getting buy-in from partners, were impacted by changing roles and reduced staff resources. The project apprentice left in April 2010 and the project officer's contract ended in September 2010, when the Community Planning Team was merged into the Community Development team, so there were no dedicated workers.[126] There was also reduced capacity in the team, due to the maternity leave of the Community Development Officer, and illness.[127] This impacted on the participatory budgeting process (£50k capital budget) which had to be deferred.

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[117] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[118] May 2011 project plan; evaluation of the project in July 2011
[119] Evaluation of the project in July 2011
[120] Evaluation of the project in July 2011; interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[121] Interview with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy)
[122] Interview with Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)
[123] Evaluation of the project in July 2011; interview with Caroline McBride (Golding Homes)
[124]Discussion with Clare Wood (MBC)
[125] From an early Powerpoint on the project plans; project highlight report for April-June 2011
[126] Project highlight report for July-September 2011; evaluation of the project in July 2011
[127] Project highlight report for January-March 2011

As discussed above, the process did not harness some residents' willingness to get involved in delivering the plan.[128] Members of community groups felt a lot could be achieved for free if the right people were encouraged.[129]

Recommendations

32. Whilst paper surveys are not particularly popular in Park Wood, some perception surveys were undertaken by various services during the course of NAP. Any future surveys should include more specific questions about people's views on the impact of NAP projects, in order to aid with future evaluations.

33. A simple 'you said, we did' report card setting out progress against key NAP outcomes should be published on a regular basis. Social media could be used to publicise this. The Safer Maidstone Partnership should also develop a communication plan to help raise public understanding of the successful way crime and other high priority issues are being dealt with.

34. *As noted in recommendations 1-5, buy-in from agencies to be encouraged by including their priorities from start.* Problems with resourcing or commitment by agencies should be escalated to the project board and/or Locality Board.

35. Neighbourhood Action Plans should include fewer actions. A realistic plan based on the assessment of resources made at the start is essential to public confidence and partner buy-in.

36. Actions in Neighbourhood Action Plans should have more robust time frames with actual deadlines set for completion.

37. A dedicated project officer is needed to help to steer work throughout NAP projects. Their appointment should be set against a clear pathway through the project, including the clear meeting structures and documentation systems discussed above.

38. Action against Neighbourhood Action Plans should be monitored using Covalent, to which all partners should be given access. There should be a reporting system to enable project boards and the dedicated project officer to monitor and follow up on progress.

Recommendations 19-27 discuss ways to make better use of residents' potential and enthusiasm.

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[128] MBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee, *Neighbourhood Action Planning Review*, June 2012
[129] Interviews with Jackie Pye and Angela Holniss (R-Shop Bulk Buy) and Jade Webster (Parents is the Word)