

TVPAGM14th June 2007

The fifth Test Valley Partnership AGM took place on a tranquil midsummer evening at the delightful Hillier Gardens. This annual event provides an opportunity to share successes and celebrate the considerable and varied work of the partnership over the past year.

Chairman's Report

Our newly elected Chairman, Janet Blann, reflected on a year of progress and changes for the Partnership including her election as Chair, and the election of Ian Carr, Leader of the Borough Council, as Vice-Chair. Janet thanked Barbara North, our previous Chairman, for all she had done for the Partnership during her time as Chair.

The Annual Report of the Partnership sets out the key developments for the Partnership over the past year, including the progress made by each of the eight Action Groups.

Janet highlighted the good work being undertaken as part of the Turnaround Project, a multi-agency project tackling community development in the Alamein Ward in Andover. Two significant developments for the Turnaround Project had been the forming of a community association for King Arthur's Hall, and the securing of a shop in Atholl Court with plans for the development of a one-stop information service for the community.

Further detail on progress across all areas of the Partnership can be found in the Annual Report which will be made available on the Partnership's website www.yourtestvalley.gov.uk.

'Your Test Valley' - the revised Community Plan

Bernard Sully set the scene for the review of the Community Plan, copies of which were distributed to partners on arrival. Bernard explained that the Community Plan is a long term, high level and 'overarching' document, and as such represents those things upon which we can all agree and sets the context for all of our other strategic plans.

The review of the Plan was not intended to be a complete overhaul from scratch, and therefore there had not been a revisiting of the extensive original plan. Early on in the process it was proposed that the 8 priority themes would remain as the framework for the revised Plan.

The full Plan is intended to be somewhat of an organic document which will be reviewed and updated periodically. A more attractive and accessible summary version of the document will be developed to help convey the Plan's central themes to a wider audience. The Plan will be distributed to all partners and made available on the partnership's website. Any comments or observations are always welcome.

Andover Vision

One of the most exciting developments in the past year has undoubtedly been the launch of the Andover Vision. Sue Sheppard, Vision Manager, outlined some of the many projects being undertaken in Andover which will contribute to the delivery of the Vision. Sue has been in post for only a few months but has already seen much progress. A resident of Andover her whole life, Sue says she now 'eats, sleeps and drinks' the Vision, and has a passionate commitment to the town and its future.

An immediate aim is to develop the Vision brand, and everyone in the town to recognise the Andover Vision logo. A vision document was distributed to all houses in Andover last November, and many projects are being 'badged' with the vision logo, including a plaque at The Lights, aboard at the new Cinema, and association with events in the town such as Andover Live, a sports fair and food fair.

Sue has been working to engage the local press, and the Vision has also made it onto television, with a feature aired on ITV in May this year. The Andover Advertiser is sponsoring the Pride of Andover Award event which is being staged at The Lights, with Esther Rantzen presenting the awards.

One of Sue's biggest challenges is to engage local businesses. Sue is working to forge links between local schools and business, with the aim to encourage businesses to 'adopt a school'. Children are also being involved in the Vision with two children from each school becoming 'vision ambassadors'. They will be working with Andover College to write a child-friendly version of the Vision.

Longparish Parish Plan

Fiona Gould gave an insight into community planning at the local level with an interesting account of her experiences in developing the Longparish Parish Plan.

Longparish is a long thin parish, just east of Andover, with a population of around 700. The village has 2 pubs, a village hall, a shop and post office, and an active parish council. Together was prompted by concerns that residents didn't want their parish to lose its vibrancy and turn into a 'chocolate box', commuter-village or retirement village.

Twelve volunteers were rounded up, including two from the parish council. The group was committed to ensuring participation in the process by as many people as possible, and devised many methods of consultation with residents, on with residents, with the offer of refreshments always proving a useful incentive. Their commitment was rewarded by an impressive response rate of 500 out of 700 residents.

The group was also certain that they didn't want the plan to be just a wish list, but that things should get done. An implementation group is now established as a subgroup of the parish council and early wins have included the introduction of broadband, new notice boards, and an annual welcome reception for newcomers. There has also been work to address speed limits, and village support for affordable housing development, working with the Borough Council.

Fiona reflected that all in all it had been a very worthwhile process, and had some words of advice for those thinking of pursuing a parish plan. It does take longer than you think – Longparish took 3 years from start to completion of the actual plan, before even starting to implement it. It also pays to have people with a mixture of skills on your group if you can possibly arrange it.

Romsey 20/20

Jill Gething gave an overview of the overview of the work being carried out on the Romsey 20/20 Vision which is a long term plan for the future of Romsey. A health check had been carried out which was a community based fact finding exercise, leading to a community vision and action plan for the area.

Future work will revolve around securing funding for the delivery of the action plan and identifying other projects for future development. To date £19,500 has been pledged by public agencies and the local business community to raise the level of marketing to attract visitors. Work on this marketing project is underway with a subcommittee looking at branding, visitor/shoppers surveys and a marketing programme for 2008.

Stockbridge Way Forward

Hugh Saxton gave a brief update to partners on recent developments with the Stockbridge Way Forward. In early June the Stockbridge Area Partnership was delighted to hear it had won approval for a bid for £130,000 of SEEDA funding under the Hampshire Market Towns Programme (subject to planning permission and match funding). This grant is only part of a comprehensive scheme, called the Stockbridge Enhancement Programme, which has arisen from the health check and action plan called 'Stockbridge, The Way Forward'.

The programme, which will begin in earnest later in the year, will run for several years and cost £954,000, of which most (85%) will be capital expenditure to upgrade the Town Hall. The remainder will support a variety of work concerning economic and tourism initiatives, appointment of a town manager, traffic management and youth work.

The first key event prompted by the bid will be the Stockbridge Trout Festival on Saturday 30 June and Sunday 1 July.

Community Day for Migrant Workers

Sandra Hawke introduced Barbara Storey from SOS Polish in Southampton, who had worked with the Borough Council and other agencies to put on a community information day for migrant workers at the Guildhall in April. The event was attended by more than 70 people and a range of agencies were on hand to provide information on living and working in Andover and surrounding areas. These included the Police, Fire Service, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), employment office, housing providers, and education services. Translators were also on hand to assist.

Barbara spoke of the experience of Polish people arriving in the UK. She said they were often highly qualified, motivated and were keen to work. She asked that the best use be made of their skills, and to ensure they were safe and made welcome. They needed councils and other services to be able to help them to unlock the potential that they could offer, and open the door to inclusion.

The event in Andover was publicised in a Polish newsletter that is distributed across the UK and in Europe. It is hoped that a similar event might be held in the south of the borough at a future date.

Andover Food Bank

Mollie Antrobus gave a brief report on the Andover Food Bank which had been started up at St John Baptist Church in Andover and now has wider involvement through Churches Together in Andover, working with a range of organisations, including the statutory sector, CAB, Crisis and other churches.

The project involves supermarket and food providers, and public donations of food. In the first year, 8547kg of food had been distributed, feeding 831 people for 3 days, who would otherwise have been without food. 116 of these were children under 16. Many reasons contributed to people needing to seek this help, the most common included delaying getting benefits, and homelessness. It is hoped that the project will grow and be publicised more widely so that greater numbers of people in need know how to seek this support when needed.

Ideas, comments and support for the project are most welcome.

Chairman's Closing Remarks

Janet rounded off the evening by thanking everyone for attending, and pledging her commitment to the partnership and its future success.