

THREE RIVERS
A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

“..... for the benefit of all who live and work in and around Gillingham.....”

draft
COMMUNITY ACTION
PLAN

December 2004

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT:

- To express a vision of the Partnership's area of benefit as the community would like it be
- To provide an opportunity to involve the whole community in shaping the Partnership's priorities
- To provide a context for determining the Partnership's future priorities and structure
- To identify key actions which the Partnership will initiate or support in order to realise this vision
- To represent the needs and aspirations of the community to the statutory bodies who can help us to achieve our aims
- To influence the developing policies of statutory bodies
- To widen community participation

SETTING THE SCENE

The Three Rivers Partnership was established in 2003, with the invaluable help of Dorset Community Action and our Community Development Worker. It is a company limited by guarantee and has applied for charitable status

Three Rivers is run by an elected Board of Trustees, representing a wide range of community organisations, Town and County Councils and the parishes within our area of benefit. Essential to its success are the energy and enthusiasm of a large number of volunteers who have given time and expertise unstintingly to four working parties:

- Community & Leisure Facilities
- Open Spaces
- Children and Young People
- Meeting Places

Gillingham is a rapidly growing town (population just under 10,000, with another 5,000 living in the villages within the area of benefit) whose amenities and infrastructure do not match its size. A major thrust from the outset has been to secure appropriate community and leisure facilities. In constructive partnership with Gillingham Town Council and North Dorset District Council, positive progress has been made and, currently, business plans are being produced and additional sources of funding being actively researched.

Local people have consistently expressed concern at the rapidity with which green spaces have been swallowed up by residential developments. The Open Spaces group have been active in identifying land which merits protection and conservation and recommending ways in which amenity land can be expanded, enhanced, accessed and enjoyed.

The formation of the four working parties reflects community priorities which have been established by various consultation exercises over the last few years.

During its first year the Partnership went through a systematic visioning exercise in order to establish its own priorities and to inform strategic planning for the future. We felt it was essential to do an independent and thorough-going assessment ourselves of the needs and aspirations of the community so that we could develop a progressive strategy for the future which will drive our subsequent agenda. Already, some of this strategic thinking has been incorporated into the charitable objects presented to the Charity Commission.

To focus discussion we identified key areas for potential development:

- Economic generation
- Culture, Arts & Sport
- Transport
- Our Environment
- Skills & Learning
- Social Well-being

These headings are similar to the major areas of concern identified in the vision statements of other partnerships and conform closely to key issues established by Dorset Strategic Partnership Forum.

For each topic we analysed strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities and highlighted action points which would potentially contribute to the achievement of the vision.

To achieve its ambitions, the Partnership will have to secure considerable capital funding to finance projects and reliable revenue funding to ensure effective administration and management. A Funding Group has been set up and is in the process of developing a business plan for the Partnership.

Three Rivers has made a very positive beginning. Excellent relationships have been established with Town and District Councils and exciting projects are being undertaken which increasingly seem realistic and realisable. The Partnership is totally committed to serving the community, by making good serious deficits in provision, enhancing the environment, and promoting the cohesion and community spirit of Gillingham and its hinterland.

This document sets out to summarise our collective vision and provide the context for the development of our Business Plan.

This work has taken into account the following consultations in Gillingham:

<i>Consultation</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>
The Gillingham Community Profile	Healthworks	1998
The Gillingham Regeneration Study	Driver Jonas	1998
Gillingham Community and Leisure Facilities	Atlantic Consultants	1998
Three Rivers Project	Gillingham Civic Society	1999
Gillingham Community Priorities	DCA	2002
Community Facilities	North Dorset District Council	2002
Leisure/Community Facilities	Three Rivers Partnership	2003

ECONOMIC GENERATION

From the mid nineteenth century, following the arrival of the railway connecting Gillingham to Salisbury and London, a strong industrial base developed in the town associated with food, agriculture and the building trade. Large scale production and distribution provided considerable employment in the town and the surrounding villages. As a consequence, despite or perhaps even as a consequence of the reduction in agricultural activity, there is a large and skilled workforce, many now self-employed. The skilled artisans of Gillingham go far and wide to ply their trades. Bath, Bristol, Taunton, Poole, Bournemouth, Southampton and Winchester are all within an hour's travel of Gillingham thanks to the motor car. London is less than 2 hours by train.

The tradition of the Free School dating from 1516, its successors the Grammar School and the Secondary Modern are now combined into one of the finest 11-18 Schools in the country, ranked in the top 100 nationally, supported by an outstanding pyramid of town and village primary schools which together provide a well educated and motivated workforce. Low crime levels and "old fashioned" values are combined with quality housing available at relatively affordable prices. Gillingham also offers opportunities for commercial development on land already zoned for it and there are other areas available for redevelopment.

The 50% growth in population in the last decade makes the Gillingham area and North Dorset District one of the fastest growing in the South West. This continuing growth provides excellent opportunities for the retail and service industries.

These advantages have been recognised by discerning international and national organisations. Sigma Aldrich Chemicals led the way on the Brickfields Estate where Dextra Lighting has proved that one can grow a national business from a local beginning. Sherman Chemicals re-located there too when national DIY chain Focus took over and re-developed their site. South West Packaging has grown to meet the needs of many other producers in Southern Britain. Waitrose took the risk, developed a green field site and found that this corner of England filled their store seven days a week. Somerfield raised their game and reinvested in their future. Lidl have recently added to the challenge on the High Street. Many other businesses have grown up around Gillingham. Small ones have grown into larger ones and joined those family run businesses who can trace their roots back into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Traditional and high tech industries co-exist in a rural and yet urban environment which mixes the old and the new very successfully.

Economic generation is an important part of a vibrant community. Three Rivers will be encouraging its partners and other relevant organisations (e.g. Gillingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry, NDDC) to take up the challenge of these aspects of the vision.

Vision: A thriving local economy providing a range of employment opportunities appropriate to the skills and education of a growing population.

Actions:

- Encourage attractive business parks
- Promote our area, through, for example, Business Fairs
- Encourage inward investment
- Support the establishment of a One Stop Shop for businesses
- Support the increasing trend towards home-working
- Encourage creative & imaginative industries to locate in the area
- Retain well-qualified young people through appropriate job opportunities
- Influence the local development framework
- Support and encourage the establishment of a Credit Union
- Create an environment where SMEs can flourish

- Encourage tourism and promote the Gillingham area as a Gateway to better known tourist destinations
- Encourage the provision of tourist accommodation
- Encourage the provision of more extensive pre-school child care facilities to enable parents to work
- Provide facilities and amenities for young people to encourage retention
- Support initiatives to provide affordable housing in the area
- Incorporate workshop/office/social enterprise units into new Community Facility

CULTURE, ARTS & SPORT

We take it as self-evident that a community's fundamental well-being is critically dependent on adequate opportunities to participate in appropriate cultural, artistic and sporting activities. Such activities are central to a rich community life and fundamental to individuals' physical and mental health, personal fulfilment and sense of self-worth.

There is much to be positive about. Gillingham and its rural hinterland has thriving sports clubs, established performing groups, a film society, an extensive Artsreach programme operating at Gillingham School, an ambitious and highly successful Community Festival, a number of creative businesses and, currently, enthusiastic involvement in the Salisbury Festival's *In Praise of Earth* project. There are nearly 150 organisations serving the varied needs of the local community.

However, facilities generally have not kept up with growth in population. The Leisure Centre has to be replaced and Gillingham has never had a dedicated community facility.

Clearly, there is considerable unmet need but huge potential for development and already Three Rivers is playing an energetic and integral role in procuring appropriate Leisure and Community facilities.

While, inevitably, we are somewhat preoccupied by this task, we must not become wholly focused on Gillingham. The villages within our area of benefit have deficits, too: lack of sports facilities and village halls urgently needing upgrading, for example.

Vision: Suitable opportunities for all members of our community to be fully engaged in cultural, sporting and artistic activities, underpinned by high quality, accessible facilities appropriate to the diversity of needs of local residents.

Actions:

- Work with Gillingham Town Council and NDDC to provide Leisure & Community facilities to match the needs and aspirations of a rapidly growing population
- Support the villages within the area of benefit in developing and maintaining community facilities
- Encourage affordable access to facilities
- Be proactive in encouraging and promoting the performing and visual arts and community arts projects
- Improve opportunities to enjoy cinema by supporting Moveola/Cinemamobile
- Develop an Arts Forum
- Encourage and support the Gillingham Festival
- Develop a Gillingham & District Sports Forum
- Support all efforts to improve provision for sport and to encourage participation
- Support schemes to extend and improve sports coaching
- Develop schemes to preserve and enhance Gillingham's heritage sites: the Town Bridge and its environs and Kings Court Palace
- Support the replanting of the Royal Forest
- Support the 'Hidden Dorset' project

OUR ENVIRONMENT

The natural beauty of the waterways, countryside and heritage of the area is recognised as a major asset of Gillingham and the surrounding area and a critical factor in its future prosperity. It is essential that future developments, residential, commercial or industrial, do not jeopardize those features of the area which attract people to live here. The loss of open spaces is a major concern to local residents.

It is important to recognise the crucial relationship between the town and its rural hinterland by protecting what is unique in the built and natural environment and heritage, which is highly valued, and enhancing the quality of life of residents by the sensitive management of existing open spaces and the acquisition and development of new ones.

Vision: *A thriving, healthy and attractive town sensitively blended into its rural hinterland, cherishing and managing its built and natural environment and valuing and conserving its unique heritage.*

Actions:

- Enhance Gillingham town centre
- Ensure that Gillingham satisfies the 'dog-walking test', all resident having close and convenient access to an open space suitable for walking a dog.
- Ensure that pedestrian and cycle access to key amenities is improved so that dependency on cars is reduced, cutting pollution and improving health.
- Encourage access without invasion
- Develop a Design Statement for the town
- Improve pedestrian/ wheelchair access
- Develop a network of river walks/paths which are interconnected and separated from traffic
- Develop or re-develop local forests or tree areas
- Develop proactive planning strategies
- Link open spaces through Local Nature Reserve scheme
- Audit open spaces
- Produce management plans for open spaces designated as public amenities
- Seek to bring key open spaces into community ownership
- Promote Gateway concept
- Develop Community Orchard
- Support Neals Yard in the provision of a Community Herb Garden
- Encourage recycling (working with NDDC)
- Encourage sustainable buildings (design, materials, energy efficiency)

TRANSPORT

The basis for any vision for the future must be the present. Good transport links form part of the attraction of Gillingham to both individuals and businesses wishing to relocate: the town is close to the A303 and benefits from a station on the main line between London Waterloo and the far South West. But the present transport situation also threatens business growth in the town and has an adverse effect on the quality of life of many residents.

While the A303 provides good and fast links to other parts of the country, the roads connecting Gillingham to this major trunk road are all B roads. The local road network is unsuitable for through traffic and heavy goods vehicles can cause major disruption when they reach the town centre, disruption exacerbated by the increase in traffic as the town's population increases.

Trains are not as frequent as many would wish. Passengers experience delays and there is a lack of late night services.

On a more local level, links between the town and its surrounding parishes are often poor. Footpaths and cycleways, particularly to and from schools, could be improved. There is a shortage of long term parking for those working in the town.

Vision: Enhanced transport links into Gillingham, improved management of traffic through Gillingham and better access to schools, work places and community facilities.

Actions:

- Develop a more extensive network of footpaths & cycleways
- Support initiatives to reduce dependency on private cars
- Lobby for flexible, integrated and affordable public transport
- Support improvements in traffic management in Gillingham
- Lobby train companies to recognise Gillingham's importance as a Gateway
- Support the development of a double track on the Waterloo-Exeter line
- Promote the concept of a Gillingham transport hub
- Develop a combined transport timetable for Town and Parishes
- Encourage adequate and appropriate car parking
- Support strategies for reducing food miles
- Investigate potential of a freight redistribution system
- Seek ways to influence future town plans

SKILLS & LEARNING

Gillingham and the surrounding villages are fortunate to have excellent Primary Schools and a very successful Comprehensive School with first class facilities. The numbers of young people staying on at school post-16 is rapidly increasing.

Access to training in craft and technical skills has been patchy but is currently improving.

The Adult Education Service locally is well organised and effective and Gillingham has its own enterprising Community Learning initiative (Community Learning in Gillingham, CLIG), currently dedicated to developing ICT skills. The WEA is active locally but has no presence in Gillingham itself.

Gillingham has an excellent museum and a first-rate library with a well used computer suite.

Vision: A well-educated community, benefiting from high quality learning provision, guaranteeing a capable, adaptable workforce to meet the needs of the local economy and providing extensive opportunities for personal growth and enrichment.

Actions:

- Work towards establishing a Community College for North Dorset, embracing training provision and extensive opportunities for life-long learning
- Encourage learning cradle to grave
- Investigate the extent of a skills gap locally
- Support CLIG and provide suitable premises for its operations to expand
- Encourage pre-school provision
- Encourage maintenance of Village Halls as a key resource in Community Learning
- Support and promote the Library and Museum in Gillingham
- Encourage the use and expansion of Mobile Libraries in the Parishes

SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Every project or initiative undertaken or supported by the Partnership is intended to enhance social well-being.

Gillingham and the surrounding villages are pleasant and friendly places to live but there are individuals and groups who are isolated or who have genuine needs which are not fully met by the services and amenities currently available.

We believe in the intrinsic value of a vigorous community life. We also recognise that opportunities to participate in community activities are essential to self-esteem, personal satisfaction and physical and mental health. By promoting involvement in the community, we increase the social capital which contributes significantly to health, happiness and prosperity.

We are also committed to the principle that to effect positive, beneficial changes, individuals, groups, organisations, voluntary and statutory bodies must all work together for the common good, taking the initiative locally and accepting collective responsibility for the development of the communities they belong to.

Vision: A living, thriving, healthy community where everyone has a part to play in creating a better quality of life.

Actions:

- Develop strategies to ensure stronger community involvement in planning
- Support further, mutually beneficial, collaboration between schools and the wider community
- Facilitate improved access to schools
- Support the establishment of a Community Hospital
- Support and promote strategies to enhance community safety
- Support initiatives to improve the provision of day care and services for the elderly and other vulnerable groups
- Engage in an ongoing constructive business / community partnership
- Encourage young people's engagement in the development of services and amenities relevant to their needs
- Improve provision for children and young people
- Investigate the potential for setting up Holiday Clubs for school age children.
- Develop a network of Healthy Walks
- Identify deficits which could be remedied by provision planned into the new community facilities
- Plan for a cohesive, inclusive community
- Support initiatives to provide affordable housing in the area
- Encourage volunteering and support volunteers

APPENDICES

Report on progress during 2004

Summative grid

THREE RIVERS – PROGRESS IN LAST YEAR

Below is a brief update of the activities of our four main Working parties, each set up as a response to very particular community concerns:

Meeting Places W/p:

We now have pretty comprehensive information about venues in the area available for community use. A data base is being developed and information double-checked prior to publication in both hard copy and electronically.

Young People's W/p:

Working with key personnel in the Youth Service locally and with Connexions, we have devised a questionnaire to ascertain young people's perceptions of services available to them locally and deficits in amenities and facilities for young people in the area. When the data is fully analysed, it will provide valuable feedback for service providers and establish the needs which we all should be aiming to satisfy.

Leisure Centre/ Community Facilities W/p:

Ensuring adequate community and leisure facilities for a rapidly growing town has been a major priority for 3Rivers and our partners. The results of its 2003 survey were very influential in establishing the terms of reference for the Gillingham Facilities Project Board set up in association with Gillingham Town Council and North Dorset District Council in March. From the outset meetings have been amicable, focused and positive. We are working towards the realisation one ambitious project with two components. The business plan for the leisure component is being developed by Tony Hurley of NDDC and a Gillingham sub-committee, set up in June, spearheaded by Gillingham councillor Ian Stewart, is developing the business plan for the community element.

The current position:

- The Community Facilities Group Business Plan has been accepted in principle by the Trustees of Three Rivers.
- The £3 m. held by NDDC has been ring fenced and any interest will be added to the capital.
- £100 K has been set aside by GTC.
- £20K has been secured for consultancy work to test the robustness of the business plans, look at the site options, and examine the viability of re-cycling the existing Leisure Centre building.

After the external professional advice we will be focusing on land acquisition, design concepts and, of course, fund-raising.

A spin-off from this working party has been a new group to look at the adequacy of Sports provision locally and establish a Sports Forum.

Open Spaces W/p:

The Open Space Working Party has been one of the most energetic and productive of the groups set up within the Partnership.

This WP was given a 3-part remit on its initiation some 18 months ago

1 To investigate the existing provision of open spaces for amenity use

The first step undertaken by our volunteers was to conduct a comprehensive survey of the area, which is now being pulled together into a full report which will form the basis of our appraisal of the needs of the area.

With funding from Environment Agency, Liveability and Dorset Wildlife Trust the following different expert reports should be completed by Spring 2005

- A desktop compilation of all past surveys held at Dorset Records Office and by local groups)
- A revisit to Professor Good's 1930's area surveys in order to make comparison of loss or retention of habitat in the intervening years.
- Survey of Gillingham's woodland, parkland and rivers – with assistance from local anglers.
- An on-the-ground habitat / land-use survey, which has the aim of filling our knowledge gaps from the desktop survey
- A wetland habitat survey of vegetation and amphibians again with help from the local anglers
- A lichen survey – which has found some very rare specimens

The survey work done so far has highlighted that there are a couple of sites that could potentially qualify as SNCIs and an important road verge.

The community volunteers and GANG are keeping records of

- Hedge surveys
- Bat sightings
- Potential protection of special verges
- Veteran trees

- Protected trees and hedges

2. To investigate the possibilities for enlarging and improving existing amenities

The emphasis here is to ensure the protection areas of interest for the future and to create links which will develop a sustainable wildlife network in the area. This will underpin the production of the Local Development Frameworks, and development of local policy with NDDC

Through Liveability funding we are able to ask Dorset Ecological Consultancy to produce development plans for 10 public open space sites together with production of a strategic overview of the sites.

We are putting together a proposal to lobby for a Gillingham and surroundings dedicated part time worker to oversee open spaces

We were fortunate to have the time of a Dorset Wildlife Trust volunteer in the early summer who was tasked to investigate the S106 areas - to see where there were gaps in developers legal obligations as set out in the 106 agreements.

The report of the findings was passed to NDDC which has recently done a good deal of good work on this issue.

3. To investigate the possibilities for providing new open space facilities

Based on community volunteer surveys and past consultations

- We have applied for funding for extensions to footpaths and cycleways together with bridges linking areas
- We are in negotiation with landowners to acquire new public open spaces
- To make the areas more accessible to all, we propose to replace some stiles and kissing gates with sprung gates
- Will be doing additional planting of trees, orchards, willow shelters, flower meadows, pond and wetland restoration
- Will be organising a community 'task force' with some training
- Publishing a Conservation Area Appraisal

And finally after meetings with Peter Gibbs (PCT) and Ben Heath (NDDC), a 'Healthy Walks' team was produced, which has a strong contingent of qualified leaders who hold regular and frequent walks of varying lengths.

Funding has been applied for a reprint of the Healthy Walks packs for wider distribution

The Civic Society and Three Rivers Project 'Gillingham Town Trail' and the packs of 'Riverside Walks' are waiting on confirmation of funding for their 3rd printing.

When the proposed new links adding to the open space network are completed then new walks will be produced

The popular 'In Praise of Earth' project is progressing very well (thanks to Anne), in spite of being unceremoniously dumped by the Salisbury Festival.

Local specialists have held several different workshops for the participants over the past few months.

Some pieces of work have been completed - and more are nearly finished.

We look forward to viewing the exhibitions in the near future.

What the Board of Trustees has been doing (among other things!)

During the last year we have developed an Action Plan. In this document we express a vision of the Partnership's area of benefit as the community would like it be and will use it to provide an opportunity to involve the whole community in shaping the direction the Partnership will take. It establishes a clear context for determining our future priorities and structure, identifying key actions which the Partnership will initiate or support in order to realise this vision. Through the Action Plan we try to represent the needs and aspirations of the community to the statutory bodies which can help us to achieve our aims and, we hope, influence the developing policies of those statutory bodies.

This document will obviously be extended and refined as aims are achieved and new projects identified.

Capacity Building has been a major objective over the last twelve months. We are working hard to increase membership and widen community involvement. At the same time we have been doing what we can to broaden and deepen our collective knowledge and expertise by attending conferences & courses and educating ourselves about often unfamiliar aspects of our work.

Awareness of Three Rivers is growing and, we hope, credibility, but we do encounter unrealistic expectations and, consequently, disappointment at what is perceived as slow, or no, progress. We are conscious, therefore, that we have to improve communication with individuals and organisations within the community. Recently, we have taken a crucial step in this respect by setting up a web site.

We have successfully applied for membership of the Development Trust Association, which will bring us many benefits including more expertise and have been granted charitable status.

Three Rivers is in the process of defining its own Business Plan, which will inform its future structure and through which we intend to secure sustainability and self-sufficiency.

January 2005