

This is one of a series of case studies produced as part of the 'Learning from the Big Society Project'. It aims to draw lessons from the Eden Valley Big Society Vanguard, covering the parish groupings in Upper Eden, Heart of Eden and Lyvennet Valley, each of whom had worked together to produce a Community Led Plan for their area.

Many of the projects covered in the case studies are currently in development but we can still learn from the experiences of the communities and agencies involved.

The Challenge

Local people in the towns and villages of the Eden Valley, as elsewhere, have been getting involved in attempting to shape the future of their communities, initially through drawing up their own parish or market town plans. These 'community-led plans', in their various forms, have led to many of the actions now underway in the Eden Valley. However it has proved challenging to find ways for the aspirations expressed at the parish and town level to fit with the strategic objectives and priorities being developed for the wider area.

The introduction of Neighbourhood Plans aims to address this by empowering local communities to take a more active role in the development of planning policies at the local level, not only to reflect local needs better, but through their active engagement to encourage communities to develop and exercise an even greater sense of control and civic responsibility.

Background

The Upper Eden Community Plan, published in 2009, covers seventeen parishes around Kirkby Stephen, many of which are very sparsely populated.

One element of the plan was to ask the Local Planning Authority for a policy solution to a number of issues. It set out two suggested housing policies for the area which would help rural settlements remain sustainable by

allowing small scale development across the Upper Eden Community Plan area. This element of the plan was Commended by the RTPI in 2009 as making a valuable contribution to rural planning.

The Project

The two policies formulated by the group were a rural housing allocation policy and a rural self-build affordable housing policy. They were developed in response to concerns expressed during the community plan consultation about the affordability of housing and the difficulty for young people to find places to live in the area.

The intention was to have these policies incorporated and adopted in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Framework, and following that, as a back up project, to create an Area Action Plan containing non-statutory policies which will be adopted by Eden District Council as the local planning authority.

The UECP Rural Housing Allocation Policy suggests a development rate of one per cent per year, so for each parish of 100 houses, one new house could be built each year.

The UECP Rural Self-build Affordable Housing Policy would encourage self-build affordable housing in rural areas to meet an identified need for people with local connections and a Section 106 agreement would secure its affordability in perpetuity.

Upper Eden Local Planning Policy

What have the challenges been?

Eden District Council and the Regional Development Agency were reluctant to incorporate localised planning policies in their adopted documents, and; Eden District Council were unresponsive to the request for an Area Action Plan. As a result the UECP Group have found it difficult to take this project forward.

What has been achieved?

As a result of being part of the Big Society vanguard, and their commitment to developing local planning policies, the Government has decided to support the UECP group in its development of new planning policies to trial the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. The group is prioritising Community Sustainability and the areas that they hope to influence most by planning policy are:

- Housing that is affordable and suitable for local people and communities in rural areas
- Flexibility on housing on farms and rural businesses
- More specialised housing for the elderly
- Housing densities suitable for the area
- Helping to deliver Fibre for Broadband Internet Access
- Proposing a general growth limit for rural communities of one per cent per year

It is the only pilot Neighbourhood Planning project led by the community instead of a local authority.

The development of a Neighbourhood Plan may give the Upper Eden Community Plan group the opportunity to have their policies adopted following a local referendum.

The Learning

If a community has a commitment to a project it can be worthwhile pursuing it even if the opportunities to develop it at the time are limited. In the case of this project, government policy has caught up with the ambitions of the community to develop their own planning policy and they are moving closer to making the adoption of specific planning policies for their area a reality.

Contact Details

A copy of the **Upper Eden Community Plan** and information about group's work including the Neighbourhood planning pilot can be found at www.uecp.org.uk Tel: 07759 665233

Department of Communities and Local Government are overseeing the development of Neighbourhood Planning.
www.communities.gov.uk Tel: 0303 444 0000

For more information about this and other case studies in this series, please contact ACT on Tel: 01768 840 827 or Email: info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

Topics covered in this series:

- **Community Housing**
- **Community Broadband**
- **Community Owned Enterprise**
- **Community Renewable Energy**
- **Neighbourhood Planning**
- **Community Transport**



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