

# Network Update

Edition 2  
Sept 2003

West Midlands



## Staff Briefing



### Network report - Alison Chappell, Chair

Hi all. I'm Alison Chappell, Chief Officer for Warwickshire Rural Community Council and nominated Chair of the Network.

My team at Warwickshire, consists of 12 members of staff, many of whom are part time. You could say we would be classed as a more traditional RCC, focusing less on projects but in the main supporting village halls, parish plans, vital villages and transport partnerships. Recently, we have secured funds for and appointed a Rural Housing Enabler.

*Welcome to the second edition of the RCC Network Staff update.*

Since the first edition back in March of this year, the Network have been as busy as ever. You'll find this newsletter packed with information about projects that have been completed and those beginning, along with information about key areas likely to impact on the voluntary and community sector.

The most exciting news for us is that we have secured funding for the next three years, which means Michelle can continue as Network Co-ordinator 2 days per week, the website can be further developed and the we can concentrate on enabling the local voluntary and community sector have a voice at a regional level on rural policy and strategic planning.

I hope you find this a useful document, but please feel free to let Michelle know if there are ways in which we could improve the updates.

#### Inside this issue:

Regional Audit of Community Buildings	2
Website	2
RSEF 2	3
Network Launch	3
Cross Cutting Review	3
Malcolm Kimber	4
Haskins Review	4

#### Facts:

- \* The Network has secured £171,002 for the next 3 years
- \* The Network has a new website:  
[www.wmrccn.org.uk](http://www.wmrccn.org.uk)
- \* A West Midlands database now exists for RCC's holding up to date information about 675 community buildings

### Contacts for the RCC's

#### Shropshire

01743 360641

[www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk](http://www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk)

#### Staffordshire

01785 242525

[www.staffs.org.uk](http://www.staffs.org.uk)

#### Warwickshire

02476 531280

[www.ruralwarwickshire.org](http://www.ruralwarwickshire.org)

#### Herefordshire and Worcestershire

01684 573334

[www.communityhw.org.uk](http://www.communityhw.org.uk)

I may be able to help point you to the right member of staff at each RCC, so please feel free to ask me:

**Michelle O'Neill**

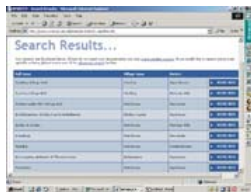
Co-ordinator, WMRCCN

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## Regional Audit of Community Buildings



Community First successfully applied to Advantage West Midlands on behalf of the RCC Network for £29,814.06, matched with £10,000 re-applied from the Rural Support Agencies Fund under-allocation. Funding was used to conduct a region wide audit of community buildings, identifying their role in community regeneration.

There are approximately 1000 Community Buildings across the region each with the potential to play a key part in community regeneration. Many already make an important contribution to the social economy by providing the local infrastructure from which key services are delivered such as health and child-care initiatives. There is a growing recognition of the strategic importance of this network of locally controlled and managed multi-purpose centres in facilitating community regeneration and in delivering key services. Increasingly community buildings are providing a source of local venues for accessing new learners, links to progressing to higher levels of learning and for widening participation and many are engaged in hosting ICT resources - bringing information and other online services into the heart of many isolated and remote rural communities. Broadening the role and function of community buildings is a key strategy to ensuring their long-term sustainability following the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Building the capacity and skills of these multi-purpose community organisations is key, though time consuming and complex role for the RCC's at a local level. And as the sophistication and complexity of the functions performed by Community Buildings develops so too does the demand for technical support, business planning and project development expertise. As we build ourselves as a Network to respond to these needs, gathering information about community buildings and their potential role in economic regeneration can help us influence how key agencies invest their funds.

The project aimed to map community building facilities and services across the region in order to provide an accessible database for the whole region. This Network database would aim to provide common details for all community buildings, opportunity to identify economic development and offer management information to influ-

ence the investment of regeneration funds.

In agreement with AWM, a proportion of the project funds was used to commission consultants to develop a strategic framework and scoping exercise, establishing the strategic role for multi purpose centres in the rural regeneration zone. This report will be presented separately by the consultants, but in essence they aimed to develop strategic guidance on using investments from a range of sources to:

- Tackle locally identified needs
- Fill gaps in services
- Deliver innovative combinations of uses and funding sources
- Ensure the sustainability of assets created

### Outcomes:

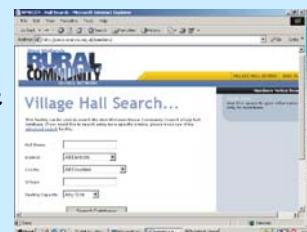
- A strategic framework for Community Buildings
- Development of strategic themes for multi-purpose centres
- Comprehensive mapping of services centred on Community Buildings across Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire
- Accessible, standard information available on the RCCN website. This will contribute to planning of future initiatives involving community facilities.
- Search facility for over 675 community buildings
- Accessible information regarding the future potential of Community Buildings in relation to their particular community. Potential linkages include; access for learning, community enterprise, access to retail services, health services in rural areas.
- Opportunities to add value through the aggregation of services available in local communities

*The final project report is available on the Network website under 'publications'. To access the regional database, ask your local Village Hall Adviser*



[www.wmrccn.org.uk](http://www.wmrccn.org.uk)

Why not visit the new Network website. Although this is currently under development, you can keep up to date with what the Network is doing. Eventually, the website will host a 'staff room' which will give you an opportunity to learn more about your colleagues in other RCC's and share experiences. If you would like to use the village halls database, please ask your village hall adviser for log in details or contact me directly. Please note the log in details given to you are for **RCC use only** and should not be given to external partners. The Network are designing a policy to manage this. [www.wmrccn.org.uk](http://www.wmrccn.org.uk)



## Regional Strategic Engagement Fund 2

The Regional Strategic Engagement Fund was established by RAWM in September 2001 with funding from Advantage West Midlands as a "strategic " fund operating at a regional level. The fund aims to:

- \* provide capacity building support to regionally and sub regionally significant communities to enable them to engage in regional policy and strategy development
- \* facilitate community and voluntary sector engagement tin the development and management of Regeneration Zone

We have been successful in our application to round 2 funds and have gained £171,002 under the rural theme for the next 3 years.

Briefly the aim of the project will be to engage local and voluntary sector groups in regional discussions about rural issues that

could impact upon them. A strategy planning group, comprising senior RCC staff, Chief Officers and Trustee Chairs, will meet on 15 October to discuss potential delivery models.

The bid is based upon several key strands:

- \* employment of a part time Network Co-ordinator (me)
- \* website development—aim to demystify strategic policy, offer on-line consultation and promotion of key issues
- \* staff networking—opportunities for project groups to form on particular issues and ensure consistency in practice across the region
- \* Network publications—further topic papers will be produced by the Network on key issues in the rural community, by work-

ing in partnership with relevant partner organisations

- \* Network engagement/participation — resources to engage the Network in regional and national forums, which includes training and briefing appropriate RCC staff or partner organisations to represent the Network and the sector on rural issues

An event will be hosted in the near future by the Network to brief all RCC staff on the project and how they could be involved.

**RSEF 2 Strategy Planning day:**

**Wednesday 15 October, 10.30am**

**Warwickshire Rural Community Council**

## Network Launch

The Network was successfully launched on Tuesday 3 June at Lakeside Conference Centre, Birmingham. Local and regional agencies and policy makers were invited to learn more about the Network, the role it plays and recent achievements. Our thanks to John Edwards, Chief Executive of AWM, for his formal introduction of the Network and positive words about the future. The event provided a valuable opportunity to present the Networks recently produced policy papers. The Network co-ordinator has copies of the following documents that can be provided individually or as a pack, alternatively check out the website:



- \* Rural Housing
- \* Rural transport
- \* Social Enterprise
- \* Voluntary Sector infrastructure
- \* RSEF 1 summary of activities
- \* Rural Support Agencies Fund Evaluation
- \* VS Regional Engagement, tel. survey

## Infrastructure Strategy

The Active Community Unit (ACU) is co-ordinating the development of a strategy to support voluntary and community sector infrastructure - the 'second tier' umbrella bodies and representative organisations that support voluntary and community organisations.

The strategy is being developed in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and other key stakeholders, in line with key recommendations from the cross cutting review, published in Sept 02.

The Strategy aims to:

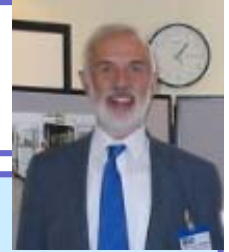
- Develop a sustainable baseline of infrastructure support
- Include proposals to address duplication and gaps in the support available to the sector at national and regional level
- Guide significant government investment in infrastructure support up to April 06 and future policy development

The document will identify key infrastructure functions that can underpin a vibrant

voluntary and community sector, and which could form the basis of an effective sector infrastructure.

The Network will be working with Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) to host a regional round table event giving infrastructure agencies in the West Midlands an opportunity to discuss the potential impact of the Governments Infrastructure and strategy review.

## Meet Malcolm Kimber Network Policy Adviser



"I live near Ellesmere in North Shropshire, grow fruit and vegetables organically, am a keen ram-  
 bler and photographer and have a four-year-old grandson who is also very interested in railways"

Malcolm Kimber joined the Community Council of Shropshire (CCS) as Director in May 1985. Four years ago he achieved his aim of moving to part-time work when he resigned as Director and took on the role of Policy and Training Officer. He also gave up his role as Secretary of the Shropshire Association of Parish and Town Councils but retains close contact with the parish council world particularly through training activities. This includes being a very active member of the Shropshire County Training Partnership.

Malcolm carries out policy work on behalf of both CCS and the West Midlands RCC Network. He actually quite enjoys reading consultation documents and items such as the Draft Regional Planning Guidance. It is important that RCCs bring influence to bear on decision-makers and one way of doing this is by making our views known on such consultations. We do need to "bang the drum" on behalf of rural communities and the voluntary and community sector. In recent months he has responded on such matters as the up-dating of Advantage West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy and Lord Haskin's review of rural delivery arrangements. Malcolm is the West Midlands RCC Network representative on the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum set up by government as a result of the Rural White Paper. He chairs the recently established Transport Task Group of the Forum. His other regional involvements include being a Board Member of Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) and being active with the Rural and Environment Sub-group of West Midlands CPRE. He has just been invited to join Advantage West Midlands Market Town Task Group to represent transport interests.

One of Malcolm's major interests is transport and he continues to manage CCS's "Wheels 2 Work" project. He was the principal author of the RCC Network's rural transport policy paper and is involved with the three Rural Transport Partnerships in Shropshire. For the last two years he has been a member of the Rail Passengers Committee Midlands.

## PDF – what is it?

### About the Partnership Development Fund:

The Partnership Development Fund is a small to medium-sized grant pot funded by the Active Community Unit at the Home Office to encourage greater joint working between local voluntary infrastructure organisations. The Partnership Development Fund is run jointly by the three national umbrella organisations:

- \* ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England— national association of RCC's)
  - \* NACVS (National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service)
  - \* NAVB (National Association of Volunteer Bureaux)
- with NACVS as the accountable body directly managing the Fund

### Aims of the Partnership Development Fund:

- \* to promote greater joint working between local voluntary infrastructure organisations. Usually these are local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS), Volunteer Bureaux (VBx) or Rural Community Councils (RCCs), that are members of NACVS, NAVB or ACRE.
- \* to develop new provision and services which support the infrastructure of the local voluntary and community sector where they don't already exist.

### Around the region:

**In Worcestershire** the LDAs and Community First have together brought in consultants to develop ways of working together and develop protocols. These organisations already meet in the Worcestershire LDAs Forum and despite very different sizes and resources have built good relationships over time. The project is being directed by a steering group, with Droitwich Spa CVS leading on managing the contract.

**In Herefordshire** consultants have been employed to develop protocols for joint working between Herefordshire Voluntary Action (recently formed from 4 LDAs), Community Voluntary Action Ledbury and District, and Community First. These organisations already meet together as the Development Agencies Liaison Group and are working

together to ensure organisations and groups on the ground have access to an appropriate range of services. The PDF contract is directed by a Steering Group and managed by Community First.

**In Shropshire** The Shropshire Council for Voluntary Services Partnership was formed in mid 2002 when the partner organisations agreed to the following statement:

"We agree to work together to strengthen voluntary organisations and communities in Shropshire. We will do this through practical action to clarify our common interests and develop our strategic impact."

There are five partner organisations including CVS's and the RCC, all of which perform functions outside of this partnership as well as within it. The Partnership meets every six weeks to share information, feedback from other partnership groups, discuss issues effecting the sector locally and regionally and to decide what practical action they as a partnership can take to address these issues. Particular areas of work which are common to all partners have been identified and an action plan formulated on how they can work collaboratively to more effectively serve the sector.

**In Warwickshire** they have successfully secured £20k to facilitate the development of an LDA forum sub regionally (Coventry and Warwickshire). They are in the process of engaging a consultant to help the forum evaluate their current work, create an action plan and establish protocols for future partnership working.

### For more information, contact:

H&W—Elspeth Rolls

Warwickshire— Alison Chappell

Shropshire— Clare Carter

Andy Halden should be able to provide details for Staffordshire,