



Mansfield 2008

Summary Report for rolling forward
Neighbourhood
Renewal

Prepared by
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Rolling forward neighbourhood renewal in Mansfield – A Summary Report

Background to Neighbourhood Renewal in Mansfield

This summary document is based on evidence collected during a four month study. The aim of the study was to develop options for stakeholders to consider in relationship to future neighbourhood renewal working arrangements in Mansfield.

Mansfield Area Partnership became the Local Strategic Partnership [MASP] in 2001 and soon afterwards Mansfield embarked upon delivering neighbourhood renewal following inclusion into the national Neighbourhood Renewal Fund [NRF] Programme in 2002. The key role of MASP remains that of co-ordinating local partners in delivering Mansfield's NR Strategy.

A White Paper (Strong and Prosperous Communities) [WP] issued in October 2006 contains pointers – some permissive, some prescriptive – with regard to future arrangements that will materially affect neighbourhood renewal in Mansfield and elsewhere. The WP encourages local authorities to embrace *neighbourhood working as a mainstream activity*. Consequently, the need to consider the future of existing NRF arrangements in Mansfield has converged with a need to respond to the WP.

The extent to which public service providers have embraced locality working in delivering better outcomes for neighbourhoods is likely to be tested when the new Comprehensive Area Assessment proposals are enacted for Local Authorities [LA] in place of the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime.

The NRF Programme ends on 31 March 2008 and despite a recent government review of sub-national economic development and regeneration, which supports continued neighbourhood level working, there are no absolute guarantees that Mansfield will benefit financially after April 2008.

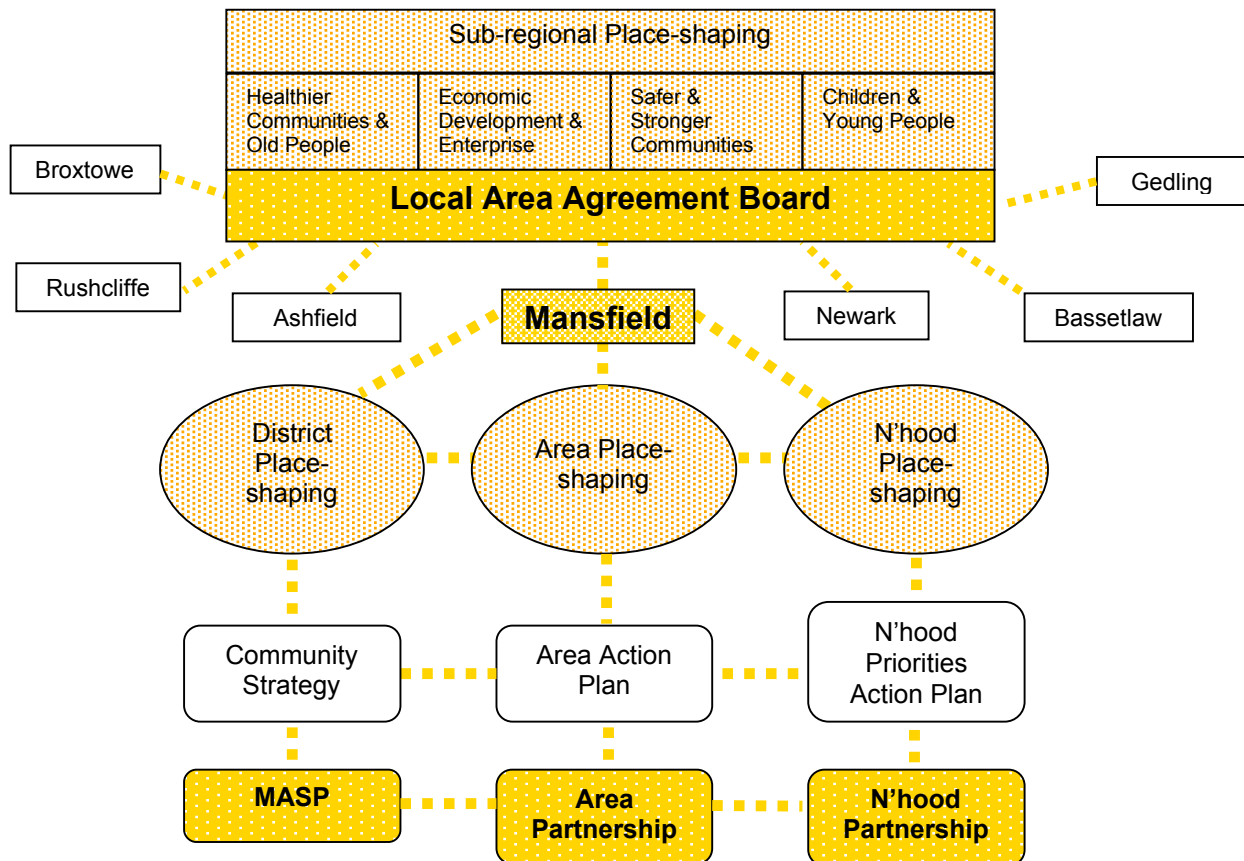
By its very nature, the NRF Programme encouraged pilot schemes so that learning could take place on what worked and what did not within the local context. NRF also encouraged where possible the mainstreaming of initiatives that were successful. Unsurprisingly therefore NR has tended to evolve from its early phases and this has been taken up and matured by lesser or greater extents in other LA areas.

Since 2002 Mansfield, through MASP, has made good progress with regard to neighbourhood renewal which it should be rightly proud of and is worthy of celebration. Some local partnerships have embraced NR principles and developed models around neighbourhood arrangements which may well be in advance of Mansfield, while others are yet to aspire to Mansfield's achievements. A key feature in Mansfield's approach is an emphasis on community engagement predicated on *natural* neighbourhoods.

We know from leading local partnerships that success is often as a result of local circumstances allowing (or providing) stakeholders to operate with a single mind or common agenda. Within this stakeholder mix there is often strong leadership by the LA. So whilst progress has been made in Mansfield there remain opportunities for improvement.

Although we raise a number of key issues discussed briefly in this summary document and more fully in the main document, the central and guiding principle we advocate is that of 'locality working'. In broad terms this requires developing and maintaining quality in partnership working and information sharing; in democracy and local ownership; in service planning and resourcing; and in community engagement where the focus is on local neighbourhoods and areas. Effective locality working will provide the 'golden thread' linking the Local Area Agreement's strategic priority outcomes with priority needs in distinct neighbourhoods.

Diagrammatic representation of the 'golden thread' for Mansfield



We would suggest that defining 'local' in locality working needs to be considered as a flexible term relating to a neighbourhood or a cluster of neighbourhoods that form an 'area'. We do not advocate a 'one size fits all' approach but rather one that adapts to and reflects local conditions and service needs. An example of the consequences of this approach would be that services are differentiated based on local needs rather than services that are blanket-delivered.

Taking this one step further, the 24 Neighbourhood Policing Areas already identified may still have a useful role to play. They benefit from breaking down Mansfield into smaller 'neighbourhood' areas and could be clustered to form larger 'areas'.

The framework for moving NR forward is set by the Options which have been developed from a blend of MASP and local stakeholder objectives with best practice and White Paper objectives. The preferred Options for each of the NR components of Governance and Leadership, Action Plans, Service Resourcing, and Community Engagement, have been independently evaluated and, through stakeholder involvement, democratically arrived at and should be widely owned.

From the outset, and in relation to working arrangements for the options or emergent preferred option, the team of consultants made it explicitly clear that a follow-on project would be required to identify how these arrangements might be implemented once an agreed way forward was adopted.

This study does not therefore deal with implementation in any detail. However, the key actions and decisions that now need to be taken in relation to the four core elements of Mansfield's NR arrangements (Governance and Leadership; Action Plans; Resourcing Service Delivery; and Community Engagement) are set out in the following sections of this summary report. In our view, if these decisions and actions are taken MASP will not only maintain its position as an effective 'agent' for NR, it will achieve a step change in the development of locality working that will establish it as a pioneer amongst LSPs in its response to the WP.

There are very clear implications for stakeholders in Mansfield if this approach to locality working is adopted in line with the emergent preferred options for each of the four key component areas. Although all stakeholders must share both ownership and responsibility, there are stakeholders whose actions are critical to the success of this next step in locality working.

In general terms stakeholders in the LSP now need to take the following actions:

1. Agree the need to develop effective locality working arrangements that result in differentiated service delivery in accordance with the needs of individual neighbourhoods;
2. Put in place effective mechanisms that relate the practice of locality working directly to the delivery of the targets and outcomes set out in the LAA;
3. Agree a clustering of neighbourhoods, for the entire LA, to create effective Neighbourhood Management areas under new Area Partnership working arrangements;
4. Put in place sufficient capacity to enable Neighbourhood and Area Action Plans to be produced through effective use of data, intelligence and evidence;
5. Put in place sufficient community engagement capacity to ensure that communities across the whole of Mansfield can play an effective role in influencing decisions and in developing and delivering community solutions to neighbourhood problems.

Objectives for Rolling Forward Neighbourhood Renewal in Mansfield

The objectives (set out below) for a future NR Programme are derived from extensive consultations with stakeholders. These objectives seek to address the core elements of NR in Mansfield which are:

- Governance;
- Action Plans;
- Service Delivery, and
- Community Engagement.

Governance

1. Develop a model of governance that enables communities to influence decision-making so that community priorities are mirrored in services plans;
2. Develop a model of Neighbourhood/Area/District Governance that has both *'political' and community support*;

Action Plans

3. Put in place effective neighbourhood action planning processes that *enable evidence based action plans* to be developed;
4. Develop action plans that show both a *high level of community involvement* and *links to LAA and Community Strategy targets* reflected in mainstream service delivery plans;
5. Implement a neighbourhood action planning process that *engages mainstream and voluntary organisations at the neighbourhood level*;

Service Delivery

6. Develop target-driven services that respond to neighbourhood priorities and targets through the use of mainstream service resources;
7. Develop the capacity to implement multi-agency service solutions to neighbourhood problems with clear identification of leadership and responsibility;
8. Develop an appropriate delivery mechanism ensuring that *clear accountability* exists for service responses which reflect targets identified in action plans;

Community Engagement

9. Develop, through a co-ordinated strategy, engagement processes that effectively engage with communities at the neighbourhood level, reflecting the diversity of individual neighbourhoods and enabling communities to participate effectively so that improved service design, delivery, and decision-making takes place;
10. Develop stakeholder engagement processes that enable *non-geographic communities and interest groups to participate* in the setting of priorities and the design and delivery of services.

Key Decisions and Actions – for Governance

For many stakeholders, publication of the WP is regarded as timely. There is widespread acknowledgement that its aspirations – particularly in the context of community/neighbourhood governance – as well as more prescriptive proposals (.e.g. requiring co-operation in the development and delivery of LAAs) should now inform future developments.

Indeed, recent revision of the role of Area Assemblies, have been informed by consideration of the WP, including potential for Local Action Planning and incorporating Neighbourhood Management Teams [NMT]. However, the following key decisions/actions will materially affect how these, and related matters, are delivered.

A much more strategic approach is required and should be provided by both Mansfield District Council [MDC] and Nottinghamshire County Council [NCC] in line with the WP.

Area Partnerships [AP] and other opportunities for more local arrangements, including NMTs, should be integrated within strategic arrangements (through MASP) delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA. It will require:

- Brokering and securing – *not assuming* – a commitment to Local Action Planning by key agencies.
- Clarification of the relationship of MDC and NCC Councillors in APs and any neighbourhood-based arrangements (e.g. NMTs).

Providing a 'golden thread' connecting individual neighbourhoods through APs to MASP (and, therefore, with the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA) by placing APs within MASP arrangements. This includes revised partnership (governance arrangements) that clearly defines and describes functions at *each* of these levels.

Extending and strengthening the relationship between MDC and MASP to reinforce district and area/neighbourhood components. This will include arrangements for involvement of MDC Councillors by, for example, MASP theme groups being chaired by relevant MDC Cabinet members, and strengthened arrangements in the relationship between MDC Cabinet and a joint body for chairs of APs.

Key Decisions and Actions – for Action Plans

It is important to recognise that Neighbourhood Action Plans [NAPs] are one, very localised aspect of NR action planning and that NMTs have had a significant impact at wider, more strategic levels resulting in successfully addressing issues relating to health and schools, for example. NAPs have been developed since 2003 and principally capture local issues identified by the very local community. Although some have been reviewed they have not progressed beyond their initial format which was fit for the purpose at that time.

There is much to commend the approach of NAPs in endeavouring to engage communities and service providers around local issues, however in general the NAPs lack a comprehensive feel which offers limited currency in the minds of many stakeholders.

Some doubt exists concerning the ability of NAPs to reflect a consensus community view and it is widely acknowledged that they do not contain strategic elements or evidence to support content. They do not influence local service provider plans or thinking and lack effective incorporation of strategic service planning components.

Monitoring and reporting activity and procedures exist less formally and as a result improvement planning and its approval mechanisms are undeveloped. NAPs also appear isolated from the Community Planning process set by both the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA.

The process of producing Action Plans at either neighbourhood or area level needs to be re-designed so that:

Action Plans are evidence based with all partners contributing to processes for collecting and sharing evidence and information, and working with communities in jointly producing Action Plans that have agreed priorities.

Action Plans describe the outcomes that are intended to be achieved at the area and neighbourhood levels and include appropriate performance measures in order that progress can be measured, evaluated, and reported.

Action Plans are realistic and deliverable taking account of risk factors where appropriate and reflecting both community needs and strategic needs of the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy to ensure connectivity.

An 'allocation' of targets to areas is made by the MASP in accordance with its role in delivering the district's contribution to LAA targets through an inclusive process that has involved all partners.

'Improvement Plans' are prepared where under-achievement or failure to achieve targets and outcomes occurs.

Key Decisions and Actions – for Service Delivery

It is reasonable to assume that the objective of the emerging model for the rolling out/forward of neighbourhood renewal in Mansfield is primarily concerned with reducing the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest. To achieve this suggests effective and efficient utilisation of mainstream services. Service providers need therefore to be able to differentiate between neighbourhoods and jointly plan service responses around outcomes for neighbourhoods that are agreed with elected members and residents.

As such the model should be designed around a number of criteria, as follows:

- Strong political leadership at both MDC and NCC, active support from senior managers, and clear lines of accountability for service performance need to be transparent and evident to all;
- A long-term strategy, rather than quick fixes is needed;
- Implementation must be planned, systematic and methodical rather than ad hoc, incremental and opportunistic; and
- Structures and processes that support joint service planning and commissioning must be developed on a multi-agency basis.

The differentiation of service delivery in accordance with the needs and priorities of different neighbourhoods is not currently influenced by the process of preparing Neighbourhood Action Plans although is influenced by NMTs. Service providers do not engage with the neighbourhood action planning process, nor do they produce mainstream service responses.

The process for rolling out/forward neighbourhood renewal should be politically driven. There needs to be a common policy framework developed at both the County and District levels that leads to a re-orientation of service delivery around neighbourhood and LAA priorities.

There needs to be a named senior officer with sufficient seniority and 'clout' at the area level who takes responsibility for ensuring that plans are prepared and targets are met and who is accountable to Area Partnerships.

A systematic service planning processes that triggers routine participation in the preparation of plans and the delivery of local solutions needs to be created and implemented.

Senior managers need to be responsible for ensuring that their service planning process and, ultimately their service plans, reflect agreed neighbourhood priorities and respond to the need to achieve LAA and neighbourhood outcome targets

Service providers need to undertake joint planning activities so that multi-faceted problems are responded to and co-ordinated through multi-agency solutions.

Minimum service standards need to be prepared and communicated to communities in the form of service charters.

Key Decisions and Actions – for Community Engagement [CE]

There have been some successes in engaging communities in Neighbourhood Management activity across Mansfield and examples of best practice exist. However, despite the recent efforts of community development workers through groups, like the Neighbourhood Involvement Team Support [NIT] group, to improve the exchange of best practice and support across all NMTs and encourage a more strategic approach, there have been only limited attempts to co-ordinate the support of CE activity across partner agencies. This is particularly so at the strategic level.

Many of these weaknesses have already been recognised by partners with the consequence that a Community Engagement Strategy has now been drafted.

Key questions remain however in relation to the extent to which MASP, acting as a co-ordinating body, can provide a strategic steer for community engagement activity resulting in:

- Better resourced training and awareness-raising support;
- Improving the quality of CE by increasing the overall capacity levels for CE. (This is achieved through using CE workers who are not currently involved whilst increasing the opportunity for community participation for residents and volunteers);
- Greater levels of involvement across the 'wider community' in the preparation of NAPs or in the work of the NMTs;

The Community Empowerment Network [CEN] in Mansfield is generally welcomed and gives a voice to the voluntary and community sector. However, there is a disconnection of the CEN from the work of the NMTs and to some degree MASP. This leads to confusion regarding the involvement of these geographic communities within the wider structures supporting Neighbourhood Management and of MASP.

MASP needs to take a lead on community engagement and invest more energy into the emerging strategic approach to the support of community engagement across Mansfield including:

- a review of current resources and practice;
- consideration of future support and a role for the Community Empowerment Network;
- establishment of a community engagement co-ordinating group and raising awareness among partner agencies and within the community of best practice in community engagement.

NMTs need to be challenged more closely on their involvement of the wider community and be supported in addressing this issue.

The CEN needs to consider its future role and whether it needs to make closer links with geographical groups and community groups rather than its current more generic role.

Implementing the Roll Forward of Neighbourhood Renewal in Mansfield

The *Mansfield 2008 Evaluated Options for Rolling Forward Neighbourhood Renewal* report is accompanied by an implementation framework – *Mansfield 2008 Implementation Framework for Rolling Forward Neighbourhood Renewal*. This Implementation Framework describes the processes and priorities for developing the new model for neighbourhood renewal, however, it remains for Mansfield's stakeholders to prepare a detailed implementation plan that reflects these priorities and processes.

The importance of acting now in order to maintain the momentum for the development of a new model of neighbourhood renewal that has been built up through the work of the Neighbourhood Renewal Team and MASP, strengthened through the preparation of the *Mansfield 2008 Evaluated Options for Rolling Forward Neighbourhood Renewal*, report should not be underestimated. Mainstreaming is a 'now' issue. NRF, as it currently exists, comes to an end in March 2008. Though there may be replacement funding to be provided through the LAA this should not be used as an excuse for the postponement of making decisions and taking actions that will be required to sustain the process of neighbourhood renewal by better planning of mainstream services to respond more effectively to the differentiated needs of neighbourhoods.

The implementation plan should be developed under the auspices of MASP with contributions from all partners. In taking forward the implementation plan MASP has a key role in calling partners to account for their individual contributions, but each organisation needs to ensure that it puts in place effective internal mechanisms for delivery. In particular, there is a key role for the elected members of both MDC and NCC in ensuring that their organisations, which have key service provider responsibilities, take the necessary steps to put in place the policies and practices for the effective design and delivery of the new model of neighbourhood renewal.

Conclusions

Mansfield is at the cusp of change for a number of reasons and despite a recent government review of sub-national economic development and regeneration, there are no absolute guarantees that Mansfield will benefit financially beyond April 2008.