

Involving volunteers in regenerating your community

THE CHALLENGE

The market town of Dursley evolved as a centre for cloth production between the 15th and 18th centuries. In later years it emerged as an industrial hub with companies such as the engine makers Listers, electrical circuits manufacturers Mawdsley's and upholsterers Bymacks providing thousands of jobs.

Their subsequent decline left a major hole in Dursley and the neighbouring community of Cam, leading to pockets of deprivation due to high unemployment, low income and low skills.

In 2000 the **South West Regional Development Agency** (SWRDA) stepped in to buy the 37 hectares of land between Dursley and Cam that had once been home to Lister Petter. Since then it has been working closely with people from both communities to draw up a masterplan for the site, now known as Littlecombe, which includes housing, employment and local facilities.

Dursley and Cam were also chosen as one of six pilot areas in Gloucestershire to receive funding under the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative due to the decline in its industrial base and the effects of the Foot and Mouth epidemic of 2001.

A partnership of councils, business representatives and other organisations joined forces under the banner of Vale Vision to use £65,000 from SWRDA to carry out a **health check** for the area, with public consultations and community meetings among the methods used to find out what people wanted to see in the future. From this, a **Community Strategic Plan** for the next 10 to 20 years was drawn up that would bring about long term benefits for residents:

Launched in May 2005, the plan's mission statement was: "To develop a thriving community that recognises and respects and provides for the varied needs of the people that live, work in or visit the area. We will conserve and care for our attractive environment, whilst providing learning opportunities, jobs, access to services and leisure activities for everybody."

To date (Spring 07) Vale Vision has successfully bid for £600,000 worth of funding to carry out a range of 10 initial projects with the help of an army of volunteers. A further 30 projects are set out in the plan.





DEVELOPING THE IDEA

Vale Vision is working with a wide range of organisations to address the problems currently being experienced in Dursley and Cam. A number of **working parties** have been set up, consisting of representatives from various organisations and volunteers, to develop various projects designed to tackle various issues.

These include:

- A partnership with the local GL11 Community Project, The Learning Community, Rednock School, Stroud College, SWDRA, developers St Modwen, Stroud District Council and local companies to provide skills development to match people with opportunities that will come to the area with the redevelopment of Littlecombe site. This has resulted in the development of a Construction Skills Centre. An on-site Assessment and Training Centre (OSAT) is also planned for people who already have skills but need accreditation to work on large building contracts.
- A study commissioned by Vale Vision, Stroud District and Dursley Town Councils to guide future town centre redevelopment.
- A needs and demand study to find what kind of community provision for social, educational and training facilities will be needed in the future in Cam and Dursley.
- A quarterly What's On leaflet giving details of events in the area. The leaflet is distributed to visitor and tourist points.
- A group working to develop a cycle route from nearby Uley to the Cam and Dursley Railway Station.
- A Healthy Living partnership, led by a local GP, which discusses issues and develops opportunities to improve the standards of those living in deprived areas.
- A sports partnership to improve sports and active leisure facilities and to make them available to a wider range of people.
- A group looking to develop a sculpture trail in the woods near Dursley.
- A group with specialist knowledge of renewable energy schemes to promote their use in the Vale Vision area.
- Future projects include steps to improve access to the beautiful countryside around Cam and Dursley and to provide better facilities for visitors and tourists to the area; a job seekers' club for the over 25s and a club for bereaved people in Cam.

Vale Vision is now a registered company limited by guarantee. Its work is overseen by a board of trustees – **Vale Vision Development Trust Ltd** – while a paid **programme manager**, employed on a part time basis, looks after its day-to-day management.



MAKING IT HAPPEN

Vale Vision relies on the involvement of local volunteers to achieve the aims set out in its Community Strategic Plan. Volunteers are made up of people of all ages and experience.

The public are kept informed of Vale Vision's work through a regular newsletter and reports in the press, as well as a "shop window" located in Dursley town centre. This shop/office, opened in March 2006 and funded by **Gloucestershire Community Trust** supported by **Stroud District Council**, is widely used as a "one stop shop" for people looking for information and advice. It also provides office space for the programme manager as well as the volunteers who assist with administrative duties.

Volunteers are recruited in a variety of ways:

- Direct approaches to people who are experts in their various fields, eg education and health.
- Requests to people who are already on working parties to "fish around" for others within the same fields who might be able to help.
- Notices in the press, newsletters, Vale Vision's "shop window" and website giving details of working groups and inviting people interested in joining in to get in touch.
- Referrals from the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS): people who want to carry out voluntary work within their local communities.
- Referrals from local colleges: some lecturers encourage their students to get involved with organisations such as Vale Vision to put the new skills they have learned into practice.

KEEPING IT GOING

Volunteers on the working parties take responsibility for various aspects of project work and help with things such as fact finding. They are offered training in project working and management.

The people who work in Vale Vision's shop/office help with administration, window displays, publicity and putting together the newsletter. They are given opportunities to learn a range of skills and to study for qualifications such as NVQs in business administration which will ultimately help them to find paid work.

All of the working parties are provided with administrative support by the Vale Vision programme manager and various office volunteers. A major role of the programme manager is to ensure that projects continue to move forward.

Many who have volunteered for Vale Vision say it has given them a real sense of being part of the community and a feeling that they are doing something that will make a difference locally. Others have noted how they have gained confidence and a greater sense of worth by getting involved.



Vale Vision's volunteers have enabled the regeneration partnership to lay the foundations necessary to make a real difference within Cam and Dursley. Their work has already brought in £600,000 worth of funding for a range of projects and their achievements have already done much to break down negative attitudes regarding the future of the area.

The work of volunteers means that Vale Vision is able to drive forward its Community Strategic Plan. Their input brings fresh ideas to the process and enables projects to change and adapt to reflect what is happening within the community as a whole.

TOP TIPS

- **Be seen:** Vale Vision's town centre shop/office means it has a "shop window" to keep residents informed of what it is doing and to appeal for volunteers. It provides space for meetings and access to computers to people who might not otherwise have been able to get involved.
- **Find a good programme manager:** This person is crucial for keeping projects on an even keel. The ideal candidate for this role needs to be able to:
 - run a tight operation
 - provide efficient administrative back up
 - be aware of legislation such as health and safety
 - keep tabs on volunteers, including those studying for qualifications
 - have endless reserves of patience, especially towards those who may bring their own problems into the work place
 - carry out regular reviews of projects.
- **Have somebody in place who is responsible for setting work for volunteers studying for business qualifications:** The person responsible for setting work for volunteers studying for qualifications such as NVQs must have some knowledge of the work candidates are required to carry out and be prepared to check and sign off assignments.
- **Use all means available to recruit volunteers:** Make the most of websites, newsletters, notice boards, shop windows and the local press to raise awareness of various projects and appeal for volunteers.
- **Allow people to try before they join:** Some potential volunteers will want to do their bit for the community but not have a clear idea of where their skills would be best suited. Be prepared for people to try two or three project groups to see which they feel most comfortable with.
- **Remember – you have to start somewhere!** Starting projects can often be difficult but it is often the case that more and more people are prepared to jump on board when schemes are up and running. Start with small goals and use these as the foundations for bigger things.



- **Don't expect things to happen overnight:** Be prepared for some tasks to take a little longer if they are placed in the hands of volunteers, especially if these volunteers are only able to help for just a few hours a week.
- **Budget for administrative support:** Don't forget to ask for money to provide administrative support when grant applications are filled out, particularly when it comes to very demanding projects.
- **Check grant criteria carefully:** When applying for grants, keep checking the funding criteria against what you are asking for. If necessary, go to grant bodies first to avoid wasting time unnecessarily.
- **Involve the Local Authorities at all levels:** start talking to local councils early into projects that affect them or for which their help is needed to implement. implement.

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 'Involving volunteers in regenerating your community' is one in a series of case studies, sponsored by the Market and Coastal Towns Association. each spotlighting an issue or challenge faced by a GMTF member town.

Each case study presents:

- the **initial challenge** or issue faced by the town
- how a **solution** was developed
- how it was **rolled out**
- how it is being **sustained**
- **top tips** – useful information and advice to other communities which may be facing similar issues
- **contact details** to help you find out more

