

Developing a regeneration partnership - the MCTi route

THE CHALLENGE

Tewkesbury has a great historical perspective, a rich tapestry of interesting buildings, a wonderful Abbey and is surrounded by beautiful countryside. The Town relies on trade, local industries and tourism and it is proud of its heritage and its ability to support its community.

However, like many rural communities, the external sheen of affluence of Tewkesbury and its surrounding villages masks pockets of deprivation which can rival some more urban communities.

The Foot and Mouth crisis in 2001 and, more recently, the devastating floods of 2007 had a major impact on the town and its surrounding communities. But it was the Foot and Mouth outbreak that led to the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) accepting Tewkesbury into the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi) and offered the community £25,000 to set up and run a regeneration partnership.

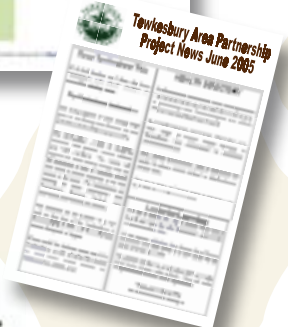
People representing a wide range of local organisations were invited to form the Tewkesbury Area Partnership (TAP), which was launched in November 2002. The £25,000 from SWRDA was boosted with £10,000 from the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum.

The grants TAP received were small compared to similar-sized towns in Gloucestershire. But the MCTi-funded healthcheck and consultation process gave the people of Tewkesbury a golden opportunity to look at the social, cultural, and economic issues affecting their area.

TAP successfully carried out a major consultation involving hundreds of local people and organisations, asking them how they wanted to see the Town and its surrounding villages develop over the next 20 years.

DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP

TAP has already achieved and produced a considerable amount of work on a very small budget; it successfully launched its **community strategic plan** in 2005 (see www.town2town.org.uk – click on Tewkesbury's page to read it) and is in the process of changing from a regeneration partnership into a delivery body.





TAP employed a **Co-ordinator** until Summer 2006 to help with the workload in establishing the partnership and identifying the future projects and priorities. Under the leadership of the Chair Wendy Spence, TAP supported a number of initiatives including:

- The **Tewkesbury Grotspotters**, an anti-litter group of volunteers bringing together a wide range of people.
- Support for a range of new **public festivals**, including the Tewkesbury Food Festival and the Awaken Your Senses Music festivals which have been very successful.
- A **Book of Walks** linked to local heritage and historic sites, encouraging visitors and locals alike to discover more about the community while promoting local food in cafés, pubs and restaurants.

In the Spring of 2006 Wendy resigned the Chair after more than three years at the helm, establishing the Partnership and laying the foundation. The current Chair, Dan Blake, took on the challenge of moving TAP towards making projects happen.

The first stage was to establish a **Steering Group** composed of members of both the Town and Borough Councils and volunteer representatives from local groups. Its prime aims included establishing a priority for projects and feeling the way to becoming a company limited by guarantee. This latter objective was necessary to support the solidity of the organisation and to add the disciplines necessary in running a company.

One of the Steering Group's first decisions was to set up a **Economy and Tourism Working Group**. It was clear that the priorities in the project portfolio were those that affected the economy and tourism potential of the town and it was judged that such a group should concentrate on that activity.

As a result:

- an **Economic Study** has been put forward for consideration by the RDA to act as the baseline for future projects to enhance the economy and increase tourism including better use of the riverside.
- TAP is now in the final throws of incorporation as **Tewkesbury Area Partnership Ltd.**
- A web site is now established as a means of communicating actions and ideas.

The Steering Group is also moving the excellent work of Grotspotters to a new level with a new project **Pride in Tewkesbury** aimed at encouraging people to reduce litter and enhance the environment. This project is being pursued by established groups coming together with a common aim.

The **Washlands Project**, to establish public art at points around the town that delineate the boundaries of Tewkesbury's famous flood line, has attracted the support of Gloucestershire University School of Landscape. A business plan is to be prepared to find funding for a feasibility study.



Most recently, TAP held a very successful **Consultation Workshop** on the issues and opportunities that the re-use of the **Healing's Mill**. This flour milling plant has occupied a large site close to the town centre and its large buildings have been a landmark in Tewkesbury for many years. The aim of the workshop was to give people the chance to discuss the opportunities and issues together having received an expert presentation and with all the options tabled.

TAP's ability to arrange and manage such events gives it an opportunity to provide a service to both the Town and Borough Councils.

GETTING IT STARTED

The initial MCTi funding TAP received was used to:

- Give community members the skills to prepare the Healthcheck (a set of worksheets covering environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility that enable a community to build up the facts and figures to show the current state of their town and hinterland).
- Produce a community plan – covering not just the document, but also the process that led to it.
- Produce the document.
- Employ a part-time co-ordinator, to support the Partnership in making things happen.
- Bring in consultancy support, specifically to cover public event facilitation, Partnership workshop facilitation and drafting of the Action Plan.
- Enable a small number of 'quick win' projects to be funded.

The Plan researched and identified the areas of need in Tewkesbury and suggestion possible solutions and projects which would make a difference. The projects were then prioritised and working groups set up. Support from GMTF and Tewkesbury Borough Council was significant at these stages.

The limited funding that remains will be used to take the Plan forward, especially to help find further funding to enable the actions included in the Plan to be implemented.

While the success of partnership development may well hinge on the personalities of the people involved and their commitment and determination, the level of expert support the group receives along the way is also vital.



The Tewkesbury Area Partnership received significant support from the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum. GMTF played an important role in facilitating and supporting the emergence of TAP in the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi) programme. GMTF acted as advisor, facilitator and mediator throughout the initial stages of the development of the Partnership.

TAP also received excellent support, guidance and networking from the MCTA (Market and Coastal Towns Association) through the MCTA's Gloucestershire community facilitator Sophie Cowdell.

KEEPING IT GOING

Getting a Partnership started is the hard part. Because a lot of work has to be done in research, getting information from other bodies and involving people in the community in something new without the necessary skills, the early stages are less than rewarding.

Additionally, people in the community seeing a new body established expect to see actions - but the work at this stage mainly involves discussion and this can sometimes be dismissed as 'a talking shop'.

Moving from the plan to a delivery body is not easier but it is different in that something can be seen to happen.

However, although it has taken some time, TAP credentials are beginning to be accepted. But there is still a long way to go. TAP's short term strategy is to make a priority of building the relationships with its partners and other bodies.

Networking is vital at any stage but time has to be spent at the transition stage to re-establish the partnership in the eyes of the community.

Events are a good way of doing this and TAP held a new form of Partners event at the end of last year, which took the form of an exhibition drop in.

Most important of all is tapping the goodwill of people to take on tasks and run with them. Leadership and commitment are also vital.



TOP TIPS

- **Co-ordinator or consultant?**

- Despite relatively low levels of funding, TAP chose to spend its money wisely by employing a co-ordinator, Jo Worthy-Jones, who took on the bulk of the time-consuming computer-based analysis and planning for the process.
- Starting on 21 hours a week initially, concentrating on co-ordinating activities and administrative work, Jo increased her hours in 2005 to 28 per week to take on project support officer responsibilities – getting projects identified in the community plan, off the ground.
- Jo was not 'local' but this was generally regarded in the community as a positive as she came into the job with no preconceptions. She was therefore perceived as independent and neutral.
- More money might have paid for consultants, but the Partnership benefited from doing the research and plan themselves because they were involved throughout and knew exactly why decisions were made.

- **Don't assume you're the first to face a challenge – network!**

- Networking with other towns which have either completed a similar process or are experiencing it at the same time, is invaluable. Through the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum there are ample opportunities to share tales of woe as well as find solutions or, at the very least, feel better that you are not alone! Find out more at www.town2town.org.uk
- Contact other co-ordinators via GMTF.

- **Getting the right mix of people, skills and experience on a Partnership is crucial – ask for advice!**

- Unexpected skills are needed – for example photography, willingness to spend many hours asking people to answer questionnaires and staffing stalls.
- The MCTi process was new to everyone and the skills and experience which would be needed through the process could not always be anticipated. However, if you are new to the town, you 'don't know what you don't know' – so ask around; perhaps experienced co-ordinators around the county can advise you – get in touch via the GMTF or, if you are outside Gloucestershire, the Market and Coastal Towns Association.
- Look to existing community organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Earth, Civic Society, U3A (University of the Third Age), the WI, schools, amateur dramatics and mother and toddler groups – to get them involved and ensure a wider representation.



- **People may question the need for a regeneration partnership, what it does and where it ‘fits’.**
 - Independent regeneration partnerships can benefit hugely by being seen as totally independent of local statutory agencies and councils – but can also be seen as a threat.
 - Being talked about – for the right or wrong reasons – at least gets the whole idea of town regeneration on the agenda in a community!
 - Know that you will prove any doubters wrong when the action plan process is complete and you can start turning your plans into projects and really ‘make a difference’.
- **Piggy-back on existing public events to carry out surveys – but choose carefully.**
 - Only go to events with a high proportion of local people – avoid bigger activities which attract too high a proportion of visitors and tourists. Be aware that some people are ‘serial fete-attenders’ and you may find you are meeting the same faces at different events!
 - Think about where you will need to go to meet the people you want to talk to – out of 2,000 surveys distributed, 170 (8.5 per cent) were returned.
 - Have you got enough volunteers in your Partnership to cover all the events and undertake the consultation?
- **Communicate!**
 - Consider producing a summary of the community plan in an easy-to-read community newsletter format to raise awareness of the issues, as was done in Tewkesbury.
- **Understand that not everyone who puts themselves forward to be a member of your Partnership will be supportive at all times.**
 - People will join for many reasons – but debate is healthy and you should expect to defend ideas robustly. Persuading people to change their opinion can lead to very positive results.
 - Target your invitations to people who are known to have useful skills or contacts.
 - Be clear about what is expected of Partnership members but be aware that, as when working with volunteers in any capacity, it is important to be realistic about time and commitment.



- **Raise awareness with some ‘quick win’ projects.**
 - Part of the MCTi funding was ringfenced for use on ‘quick win’ projects to demonstrate to the wider community that the Partnership could deliver projects – not just be seen as a talking shop. The projects chosen by the Partnership were:
 - £300 to the Youth Centre, towards a Youth Survey.
 - £2,000 to Play on the Park at Priors Park, for staff training and qualifications.
 - £1,000 for a Music Festival.
 - £1,500 to smarten up alleyways in Tewkesbury.
 - Be clear about your decision-making methodology for quick win funding – TAP produced a some really useful guidelines for Quick Win criteria – visit the Tewkesbury town page of the GMTF website at www.town2town.org.uk
- **Be flexible.**
 - Allow Partnership meetings occasionally to go off at a tangent – allow people to explore their ideas fully.



CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

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www.town2town.org.uk

Tewkesbury Area Partnership Community Strategic Plan

Available to view or download at www.town2town.org.uk and click on the Tewkesbury town page

Market and Coastal Towns Association

www.mcti.org.uk

South West Regional Development Agency

www.southwestrda.org.uk

Cartoon with thanks to Jo Worthy-Jones, former MCTi co-ordinator for Tewkesbury Area Partnership



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'Developing a regeneration partnership – the MCTi route' 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

