

REPORT TO AREA COMMITTEE – March 2007
By Richard Lancaster/South Leeds Health For All
Priority Neighbourhood Development Worker (PNDW)

Introduction

The post of Priority Neighbourhood Worker was established at the start of September 2006, working for the Council's Area Management team and the Inner South Area Committee but under the management of the voluntary organisation South Leeds Health for All (SLHFA).

The key function of the post is to support successful community engagement as part of the Neighbourhood Improvement Plan (NIP) process. This would include supporting community groups and individuals, building capacity in groups and delivering on projects in the NIPs.

As agreed with the Area Management Team, work is presently around the Central Middleton Estate and Cottingley and recently also on the Manor Farms. NIPs for the Arthingtons, Hunslet and Recreations/Cleveleys, Holbeck are in the process of development and these will form an important further element of work for the PNDW.

Summary of Achievements

Over the last 6 months the PNDW has enabled groups to engage more effectively with the Area Committee, empowering the groups to affect the decision making processes and having effective mechanisms to do this.

Middleton

The development work with Middleton Community Group (MCG) has seen an increase in people attending meetings and a more structured group organisation. This has allowed MCG to be more effective and assisted in developing a closer working relationship with local councillors and agencies, allowing them access to a consensus of local opinion to deal with NIP issues including ASB, housing issues especially around neglected void properties and street cleansing. Additionally, the group is now able to look at positive actions that they can take in the area such as looking at road calming measures, beginning to support the development of Middleton in Bloom and establishing links with other community groups.

Cottingley

Here the worker has again been able to develop a stronger Cottingley in Bloom group, not just in terms of increasing people attending meetings and events, but also looking at new actions to lift the estate such as new flower beds, baskets around the flats and finally completing the Welcome Boards. Working with Tenants and Residents Association Cottingley (TRAC) has seen newsletters delivered to all homes, as well as supporting newer initiatives associated with TRAC such as helping to develop a Neighbourhood Watch; supporting a lottery application to redevelop the Community Centre Garden; and recently developing intergenerational work between the school and Dulverton Court. This work has further helped local people and groups to have confidence to once again look at special events such as a summer fair.

Manor Farms

While this has been slow to get off the ground the first meeting of a new group has taken place. This provided a wide range of issues that could be included in the NIP including CCTV, tackling antisocial behaviour, environmental issues such as street cleansing and untidy gardens, void properties and a focus on engaging young people.

ACTIVITY IN MORE DETAIL

Middleton

Growth of the Sissons Tenants and Residents Association – this group began in September 2005. It is understood that meetings were attended by a small number of people around 6 or so, no minutes were taken, no agreed or written constitution, mailings were undertaken randomly, difficulties with treasurer role in the group and much of the load was on the chair person. With the arrival of the PDNW in September 2006 the group has been able to develop proper procedures and processes; widened its audience through more mailings; encouraged and supported action by local people such as gaining consensus on proposals for the Sissons Crescent/Road play area and delivery of flyers for meetings.

The group now has

- a constitution,
- new treasurer,
- properly minuted meetings
- developed a core committee known as the 'Small Group' allowed group to action specific objectives such as litter bins and traffic calming measures
- new residents are attending each meeting, which now average 15 to 20 residents
- enhanced designed flyers and posters
- increased mailings from 300 to 750 flyers around the estate
- engaged several members in delivering flyers
- encouraged members to attend Area Committee meetings
- allowed development of neighbourhood watch

The group is now seen by agencies and council departments as a group that can work effectively with them in a supportive and mature manner. Priority issues being dealt with include

Highways

- Immediate traffic calming measures for Sissons Road
- Parking issues around Middleton Circus shops

Cleansing/Streetscene

- Providing bins in locations identified by the group;
- Dog fouling issues
- Litter hot spots

LSH

- Void properties
- Unkempt gardens

Police/PCSO's

- Supporting Police in dealing with antisocial behaviour especially young people

Future developments to include

- Encourage more residents to attend group and develop links with other community groups in Middleton.
- Group to organise 4 small clean ups and other events.
- Develop Middleton in Bloom with garden competition.
- Further small group meetings with specific agencies.

Cottingley

The PNDW arrived on Cottingley towards the end of the NIP process, but has been able to support and develop a range of projects with groups on the estate. The two main groups that have been supported are Cottingley in Bloom and Tenants and Residents Association Cottingley Hall (TRAC).

Cottingley in Bloom has seen an increase in residents taking an active role as compared to when the PNDW arrived

- 6 new residents attend meetings and actively take part
- New treasurer and signatories to the account
- At the last meeting the resident involved with 'Cottingley in Colour' returning to the group
- Small projects such as putting up hanging baskets on the flats has led to a promise of £100 from LSH for 5 more baskets and TRAC also providing £100 for baskets
- Developed a number of ideas for priority projects
- Welcome boards agreed design and costings

The increase in interest with Cottingley in Bloom has helped to encourage some residents to attend TRAC meetings. The PNDW has provided TRAC with a worker to continue actions in the NIP, now that the official period for the NIP has finished. Through TRAC the PNDW has been able to support

- Newsletter – supported 2nd and produced 3rd delivered to all homes.
- A developing Neighbourhood Watch
- Leafleted flats twice with TRAC and Neighbourhood Watch regarding throwing rubbish out of windows
- Supported application to Big Lottery Breathing Places for work to Community Centre Garden.
- Developing intergenerational work with Dulverton Court

Future Actions to include

- Encouraging further resident involvement in TRAC through publicity, Cottingley in Bloom through developing projects and Neighbourhood Watch through developing a constituted group and agreed aims and actions.

- Encourage TRAC to take greater control of the Cottingley Newsletter as well as 2 x 'Community Groups in Cottingley Flyers to be mailed out in between Newsletters;
- Have at least one 'community fair' over the next year.
- Monitor actions that still need to be completed from the NIP.

Manor Farms

The NIP for this area is presently being developed, but the PNDW role has allowed a focal point for developing a new community/residents group and has been able to support the Tenant Participation Officer for LSH in the area. Complications existed around the old residents group, but a meeting with the remaining committee members on 15th January has resolved this, with the old group now being disbanded. However, some of the committee from this group are keen to be involved in a new group but will do so on a fresh basis. A meeting to begin work on setting up a new group took place on Thursday 1st March. This meeting highlighted a broad range of concerns, which could be included in the NIP.

Future Actions to include

- Encourage more resident involvement
- Have NIP up and running
- Produce a regular newsletter
- Have 2 community/social events to 'celebrate' Manor Farms over the next 12 months.

Other Activities

The PNDW role has allowed support in other small ways outside of current NIPs such as supporting the voluntary manager at Manor Field Hall and advising on the development of community group in the Leasowes Estate, Hunslet.

Conclusion

The Area Committees development of the PNDW role has, through the NIP programme, provided the direct support required by groups and individuals to sustain their positive involvement in the NIP process and beyond. Anecdotal comments from councillors and those supported are very positive about the approach taken by the PNDW.

Intensive work has been carried out over the last 6 months in Middleton and Cottingley and work commenced on the Manor Farms. Plans for the Arthingtons and Recreations are being developed. To ensure the sustainability of existing groups and initiatives and those that are in development over the next 6 months or so, it is requested that the post be funded for a further year, from August 07 to August 08.

It should be acknowledged that the development of groups into strong, sustainable entities is long term and takes time to establish, especially in areas with a mixed history in terms of agency involvement and where people have become sceptical about changes. Over the last six months the main thrust of the PNDW activity has been to concentrate on developing strong

groups, which can look forward to sustainability and are ready, with assistance, to organise and run their own celebration events and practical activities such as clean-ups.

There are two key issues that stand out from work developed over the past six months:

- Firstly, while groups have grown in organisation and confidence, they still need ongoing support. To keep groups positive, small actions and changes are crucial and can mean a lot – for example, rubbish cleared from an unkempt garden or a flowerbed maintained by local people. The PNDW role helps keep local people focused on positive actions they can take even if other perhaps more complicated issues are taking longer to resolve.
- Secondly, issues remain around young people and the difficulties of engaging young people in their local area; the difficulty of acquiring adequate youth provision in the NIP areas the PNDW has been involved in; and the conflicts between young people and others in their estates.

Another year's funding would enable the PNDW to begin to explore the longer term support groups require after the NIPs are complete. In the short term the PNDW intends to publicise the role of PNDWs (both Inner and Outer South Area Committee PNDWs) in the next South Leeds Free Press to celebrate their achievements so far, which may help to start this process. Continued funding would also enable the PNDW to help support groups, along with other agencies, to begin to build better relationships with young people in their areas and attract additional funding into the area to support the work.