

Creating a community identity: Aldermaston Wharf Area Group

The context

Three Parish Councils in Berkshire are working collaboratively to address the particular needs of a community. Aldermaston Wharf is a mixed area development beside the Kennet and Avon Canal. Its 335 homes share a communal outdoor space and a pub; other local amenities include a school, private boatyard and shop. Until September 2009, despite its distinct geographical identity, Aldermaston Wharf had no mechanism for community planning as it falls between the Parish Councils of Aldermaston, Beenham and Padworth. Now, the three have come together to form the Aldermaston Wharf Area Group, to create a co-ordinated approach to activities in the community.

The benefits

By sharing information, the group has increased understanding of the historical context and needs of the Wharf area. It has identified issues which are of particular concern locally and galvanised residents into taking action - for example, a campaign to lobby for a new crossing to increase road safety. As each parish is at a different stage in the community planning process, they have been able to learn from each other.

A unique sense of identity and community spirit is beginning to develop. The group's first joint project, a community tree planting initiative, brought together residents of all ages. Family and adult education courses are now being offered by the local school - a move initiated by a group member who represents both Padworth Parish Council and the school.

The group is also working with St Luke's Trust, a home for adults with learning disabilities, on a joint bid to the Rural Access to Services programme, so St Luke's tennis court can be resurfaced and opened up for community use.

Learning points / top tips for collaboration

Creating some structure makes collaboration more sustainable. At the outset, nominated representatives of each parish met to agree terms of reference. An action plan was then developed. The group was supported throughout by Sarah Ward, Programme Associate for ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England).

Next steps

In the coming year, the group plans to work further with St Luke's, on a joint allotments project. It is also starting to be recognised by other agencies as a valuable point of reference and is in discussion with the Children's Centres Co-ordinator on developing new initiatives for isolated parents and families on the estate.