

Strong & Resilient West End

A twelve month Pilot Community Involvement Project
Delivered by Cheltenham West End Partnership



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Report date: September 2009

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This report covers the experience of the 'Strong and Resilient West End' Pilot Project and presents the lessons learned as a 'model' to assist other resident's groups

The intention of the project was to provide the means to deliver the three 'underlying principles' in Cheltenham's Sustainable Community Strategy:

- 1 The principle of promoting community engagement and participation
- 2 The principle of tackling inequalities and promoting cohesion
- 3 The principle of tackling climate change

Delivering these principles helps to build strong and resilient communities assisting them to deal with major challenges such as the floods of 2007.

1.2 Background

The project has been funded by Cheltenham Strategic Partnership and undertaken by Cheltenham West End Partnership (CWEP) which employed a Community involvement worker on a 12 month contract to deliver the project. See Appendix 1 for the funding proposal.

Data from the 'MaiDen' service shows that the area covered constitutes a deprived area of Cheltenham with the highest incidence of diverse communities in the town. Resident Involvement in the Lower High Street area has previously been inconsistent. This area consists of 649 occupied houses (at time of writing and 15 unoccupied houses), approximately 271 flats and a large number of independent businesses. The map of the area covered is included as Appendix 2. The project area consists of the Lower High Street Character Area with slight additions (which is part of the Town Centre Conservation Area).

Aim of Project: "...to create an integrated and strong community where people from different backgrounds feel that they are part of a cohesive neighbourhood"

The planned outcomes of the project were:

1. A community profile
2. Identification of tensions and opportunities
3. An active and representative residents' forum
4. An active and representative traders' forum
5. Increase in local volunteering
6. Community champions
7. A model that can be rolled out across other parts of Cheltenham

2.0 Methodology

Collecting Information

Figure 1 shows a flow-diagram which covers the approach to the project.

2.1 Door-to-Door survey

The door-to-door survey was structured with open-ended, qualitative questions to enable residents to describe and explain their opinions in as much detail as they wished. It also included quantitative data in respect of some demographics and transience of the resident population. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix 2.

At the beginning of the surveying a small number of streets were visited in day time hours. After this these streets were returned to in the evening to visit the houses at which no response was received in the first visit. Each street was surveyed in this way.

Some volunteers assisted with the survey work, this included University students and residents. It was arranged where possible to involve these residents with surveying their own streets, where they may already know the residents and share some common concerns. It also provided a means to help residents get to know their neighbours better, a key part of the aim of the project.

Through carrying out the survey work the opportunity was taken to promote drop-in sessions for residents which were used to begin the formation of a 'Resident's Forum'.

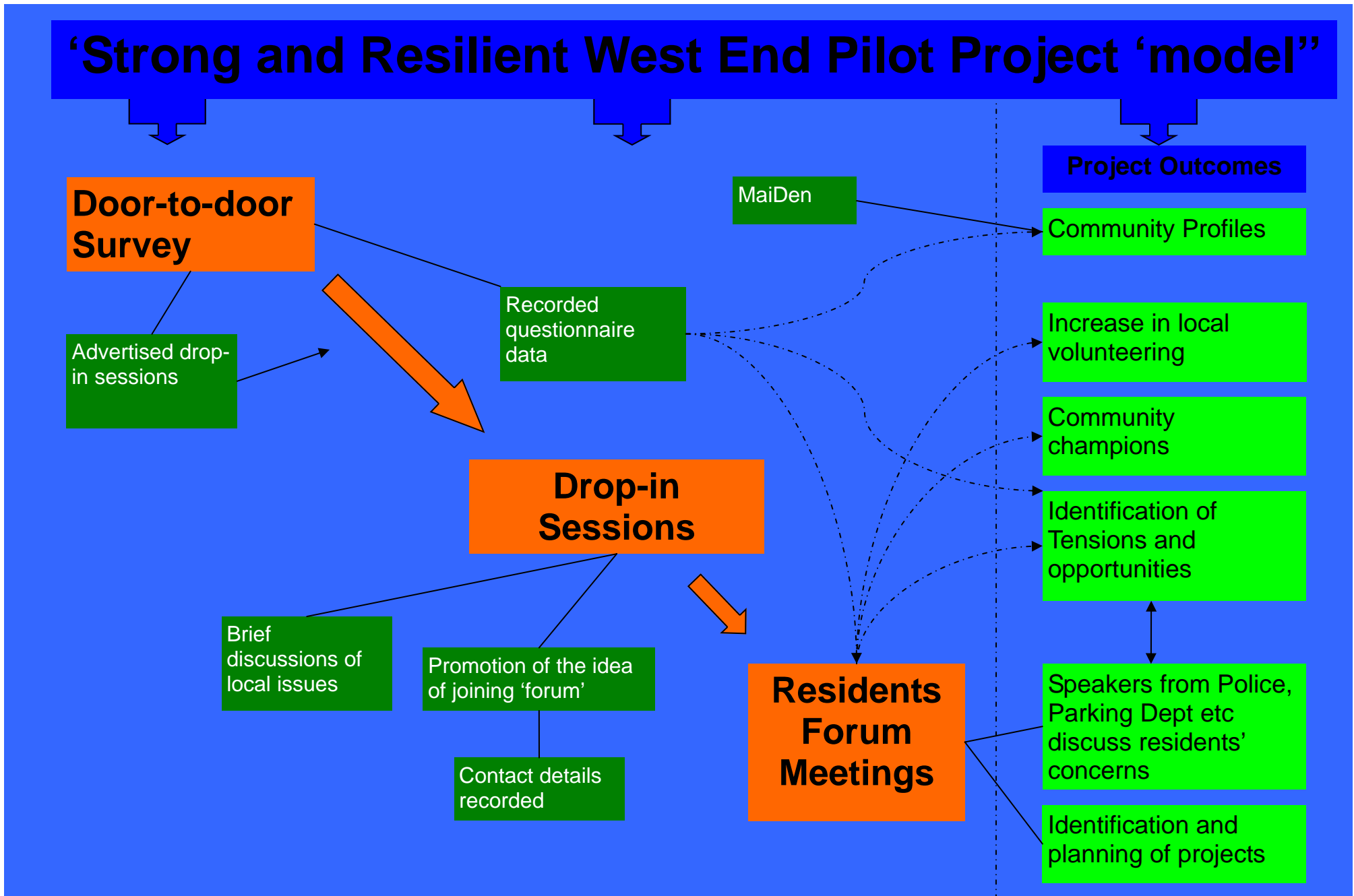
Introducing ourselves

For the surveying a standard introduction was agreed so that the resident would quickly learn the purpose of the visit and the organisation that the researcher represented. Of course one of the main challenges was to get past the initial assumption that the researchers were sales people.

MaiDen

MaiDen was contacted and asked to provide demographic data on the area. Due to privacy restrictions the data they could provide was at the level of Census Output Area (COA) instead of street level. Therefore the 'Community profile' folder has been presented by COA.

Figure 1. Flow diagram of the project



2.2 Developing a resident's forum

Drop-in Sessions

- These enabled us to start developing relationships with interested residents before the completion of the survey and first full Residents meetings.

'Residents Forum' meetings

- These were advertised to all of the residents in the area through both delivered invites reminders to those that had expressed an interest in attending meetings and as part of the community newsletter that CWEP produces and delivers.
- In the early phases of the forum we held meetings without a scheduled 'theme' (i.e. to discuss parking) as we were aiming to set up a group that would be interested in general community involvement on a range of issues rather than base it around a single issue.
- We later invited some speakers to discuss issues identified by residents (PCSOs and staff from the Parking department).
- The meetings were also used to remind people of the purpose of the project and the need for them to take ownership by the end of it to ensure sustainability (see section 2.4 Sustaining progress).

2.3 Presentation of Information

The progress of surveying work carried out on each street was logged into a spreadsheet. This contained the door numbers of each street and the nature of response (or lack of) at the door. A basic code system was used to record this data.

In addition to this the answers to the survey question of each respondent was listed with house number into a single spreadsheet file.

It was decided that where a street had less than 25 percent of households completing a survey, that it would be revisited in an attempt to improve this. If this was unsuccessful then the survey was sent with a stamped addressed envelope and delivered to the addresses in question, although this applied to only a few streets.

These results were sorted by street where the qualitative responses were categorised to show the main concerns and issues etc for each street individually. This was done to try and work out any variation across the survey area. This also helped monitor the relative response rate of each street.

'Street profiles' of a page per street were compiled featuring a summary of key survey findings, researcher observations and photos. These were added into the appropriate 'Census Output Area' sections of the 'Community Profile' folder along with MaiDen spreadsheets, survey data for each street and 'Action sheets' cataloguing our work in dealing with the problems reported.

2.4 Sustaining Progress

The Forum

It is intended that CWEP will continue to support the resident's forum. However this will be dependent on the residents themselves playing an active role in organising and running the forum. Meetings will be hosted by CWEP without charge at the Community Resource Centre, and advice and contacts will be provided by CWEP. Training will also be provided to them, covering such skills as chairing meetings, taking minutes etc. This will enable the Residents Forum to continue into the future and to ensure the sustainability of the project and therefore the development of a stronger and more resilient community.

Identification of Community Champions

Identifying 'Community champions' will offer the potential for these residents to advocate for environmental and social improvements in their streets into the future and provide a valuable link into the forum.

Projects

One of the questions in the survey asked what kind of activities residents would like to see being held in the Resource Centre or by CWEP for local residents. For one of the later residents meetings we took a shortlist of the most popular suggestions and held a vote. It was decided that CWEP would begin work on the project ideas voted as the top three most popular. This included forming a Local History group, running regular pub quizzes and setting up an Environmental Improvement Group. With the support of CWEP and active involvement and leadership of residents these projects have the potential to provide sustainable improvements to the community and help build community resilience. These projects will be a means for residents from different parts of the area to get to know each other through shared interests.

3.0 Did we achieve our aim and project outcomes?

It can be considered from the successful achievement of the intended outcomes of the project, that we have achieved the aim of the project:

“...to create an integrated and strong community where people from different backgrounds feel that they are part of a cohesive neighbourhood”.

A report of our achievements in meeting the outcomes is listed in the table below.

Report against planned outcomes

Planned Outcome	Report
Household Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 26 Streets in the area • At the time of surveying there were 649 Occupied houses in the area (15 unoccupied) • 227 Surveys completed out of 649 occupied Houses (35% return rate) • Mail-out of survey forms done to 259 flats (30 flats inaccessible) – 5 returned
A Community Profile	Profiles prepared for each street. They include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs • Observations/perceptions of surveyors • Responses to survey questions • MaiDen data (at Census Output Area level)
Identification of tensions and opportunities	Determined through survey and Residents' Forum meetings: Main issues identified: Parking (33%) Cleanliness (30%) Noise (19%) Community Safety/Crime (17%) Main positive points: Close to town (68%) Quiet (9%) Many (47%) don't identify area as a 'community' but significantly 21% do and 18% identify their street (or immediate area) as one. Majority have lived in area for less than 4 years (62%), although significantly 13% have lived here for over 20 years. 54% of respondents speak to between one and five of their neighbours regularly. 20% do not

	<p>speak to any.</p> <p>When asked about activities in the Resource centre respondents seem to favour educational courses and in particular extra-curricular including arts/crafts, photography, cookery etc.</p> <p>We have also installed a 'Report It!' box in the reception of the Community Resource Centre to encourage residents to report problems to CWEP that they have not been able to resolve through contact with the relevant authorities or agencies.</p>
An active and representative Residents forum	A total of 53 residents have attended one of our Resident's meetings.
An active and representative Traders forum	There is a significant number of traders that also live in the area and the tensions and opportunities identified (through survey and traders meetings) by them are considered alongside those of the residents. The trader's forum is holding regular meetings with a core group of actively involved traders who have agreed priorities for projects to improve the area and promote business.
Increase in local volunteering	<p>Successfully engaged local people as volunteers with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific activities at the Community Resource centre (i.e. Christmas event) and outside (i.e. pub quiz) • Assisting with surveys • Assisting with newsletter delivery • Translation of materials
Community champions	A core group of committed residents has emerged and a number of these have agreed to take on the role of 'Community champions', helping to ensure sustainability
A model that can be rolled out across other parts of Cheltenham	This report details the lessons learned from the pilot project for the benefit of those wishing to start up new residents groups. An easily accessible toolkit will also be published setting out the model.

The project as a whole, as it was stated in the introduction, was intended to help address the three underlying principles of Cheltenham's Sustainable community Strategy.

Principle 1: The principle of promoting community engagement and participation

This principle was met through the survey and meetings of residents and traders. The emphasis we put on contacting us and on residents reporting problems to authorities also helped achieve this principle.

Principle 2: The principle of tackling inequalities and promoting cohesion

A more cohesive community has been achieved through residents and traders from the area meeting each other for the first time through coming together for meetings. This has also been achieved through residents surveying other residents for the door to door survey and encouraging their neighbours to attend meetings.

The infrastructure that has been set up in the form of active forums for Residents and traders provides the opportunity to over time deliver reductions in inequalities through some of the projects that the forum is interested in pursuing particularly those regarding extra-curricular activities.

Principle 3: The principle of tackling climate change

CWEP will in the second half of 2009 begin work on a community garden in one of two possible locations in the Lower High Street area. Bee-keeping is an idea being pursued to assist in the nationwide effort to protect bees that have suffered considerably from habitat destruction.

The residents group will be invited alongside the traders and other interested local people to attend CWEP organised cookery demonstration lessons in the Community Resource Centre. These provide the opportunity to promote healthy eating and also the use of fresh ingredients in cooking to help to combat the growth in sales of processed or ready-made groceries with high food miles (or carbon footprint).

A project that the Resident's forum wishes to pursue is an 'Environmental Improvement Group' which will provide an opportunity to tackle aesthetic issues but also encourage residents to get involved in the community garden and to educate and promote energy efficiency, home-growing, recycling and perhaps a local 'free-cycle' scheme. CWEP will encourage this new resident-led group to work alongside partners such as Vision21 to help the community work together to tackle climate change.

4.0 Lessons learned

What worked well:

What we did	Why it worked well
Holding Resident drop in sessions to meet interested residents	These meetings, held in advance of the first full Resident's Forum meeting gave us an opportunity to raise awareness of the project in its early stages before the survey work had been completed.
Widely publicising meetings and work of the residents forum	This enabled us to increase the number of people that were aware of meetings and our work and consequently attendance at meetings has consistently increased.
Keeping a computerised record of the progress of the door to door survey by street	This enabled us to maintain an accurate record of survey responses, interested residents and those attending meetings.
Inviting speakers to residents meetings	This gave us an opportunity for residents to voice their concerns on local issues and gain feedback. It also helped ensure that the relevant authorities are aware of the issues and has assisted CWEP in building relationships with authorities.
Recruiting volunteers to assist with the project	The volunteers (most of which were from the University on work-placement modules) were crucial in ensuring the success of the survey, events and Resident's meetings. Another volunteer's ability to translate for members of the Polish community was also very useful, particularly when talking to Polish residents and traders and visitors to the Christmas event.
Organising Christmas party event	This gave us an opportunity to raise the profile of the Community Resource centre and to publicise what we do as a Partnership through our work with residents and traders. It enabled us to build working relationships with the residents that volunteered. It also enabled us to promote businesses in the area.
Identifying Community Champions	Encouraging particularly keen residents to become advocates for their street helps ensure that issues are reported more frequently and that the progress of this project can be maintained into the future.
Asking Resident Forum members to fill out membership forms featuring equal opportunities questions	This enables us to monitor how effectively we are engaging with the diversity of our community.

What didn't work so well:

What we did	Why it didn't work so well
Holding residents meetings based around a single issue	We held two meetings on the subject of parking problems because it was identified as the most important issue in the survey. The single issue meetings meant that it was more difficult to keep the developing forum focussed on other projects to improve the area. It also made delivering some of the project aims more challenging. One particular problem was the way that such meetings attracted more vocal residents with an ability to dominate meetings to the

	detriment of more reserved residents.
Time taken to complete the survey	The survey took more time than had been planned. With more targets for the progression of the door to door survey perhaps it could have been completed more efficiently.
Lack of representation of minority ethnic groups	Despite canvassing the whole area to date we have been unable to attract to meetings many residents who would not class themselves as of 'White British' ethnicity. The planned 'Community Ambassadors' network, where advocates are to be recruited to represent minority ethnic groups in the town, could assist with this. If we had engaged more with local places of worship such as the mosque and Hindu temple, we might have improved the representation of minority ethnic groups in the Resident's forum. If the survey itself had included resident's ethnicity in its questions then this would have shown the number of residents from minority ethnic groups who were consulted on the door step. Through consulting with them this is another means of enabling them to feel that they are a valued part of the community and so feel that they are part of a cohesive neighbourhood as the project aim states.
Engagement with residents that live in flats	Access was often difficult with some flats lacking door bells and even sometimes post boxes. As a result of this, combined with concern that asking residents to come down a number of flights of stairs to answer a survey may have been more likely to provoke a few angry responses it was decided to deliver to the flats the surveys with an envelope for their return. Without the face to face approach this method resulted in a low response rate, although it should be considered that in contrast to houses it is often impossible to know whether or not a flat is occupied.

**Cheltenham West End Partnership
Lower High Street Area
Local Residents 'Door to Door' Survey 2008/2009**

1. What do you most like about the area?	
2. What would you most like to change about the area?	
3. Do you think of the area as a community? (Which streets would you include in your 'Neighbourhood'?)	
Would you be prepared to do any of the following ...	
4. Come to the Resource Centre to meet with other residents to discuss improving the area?	
5. Do something on a voluntary basis that would improve the area. (i.e. litter picking, delivering leaflets/newsletters, helping out elderly neighbours, helping us put on coffee mornings, helping us with fundraising)?	

Please give contact details so that we can be in touch:

Name

Address

Email

Phone

Would you be prepared to answer a few more questions to help us build up a profile of the area?

All information provided will be treated as confidential and will not be connected to you as an individual.

Household Profile

Street and House Number	
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Occupants:							
How many?							
Ages (a-e) categories: a. Under 16, b. 16-30, c.31-45, d. 46-60, e. 60+							
Gender	M / F						
How many employed?							
How many unemployed?							
How many in F/T education?							
How long have you lived in the area?							
How long have you lived in Cheltenham?							
How many of your neighbours do you speak to on a regular basis?							
Are you part of any groups?							
If we were able to find some money to provide things in the area what would you most likely to go to the Resource Centre for? – Or possible activities outside the centre?							

Lower High Street Area

Appendix Two



not to scale

..... Highlights conservation area