**Community Action Planning in rural Scotland**

***Preamble***

*A couple of communities have recently asked us to tell a story about why CAPs are useful. It seems funny now to be asked as communities themselves tell this story better than we do – with so many good examples now of enterprising and proactive communities that prepare their plans, organise to make them happen and are successful in developing the projects and actions identified in them.*

*I guess the communities are asking “what did you do to make this come about?” which is a tricky question to ask people in community development as the work is to enable others to do things for themselves. So we cannot claim that ‘we did this’ ….. but maybe just that we were on hand to help prepare the ground.*

*Our aim in developing Community Action Planning 25 years ago was to provide a simple, engaging and ‘agenda free’ process for community development that would enable communities to be able to plan their own future for themselves, assist them to organise in line with their priorities and to see them enabled to develop their own projects and better represent their interests.*

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**History**

Communities have been preparing their own Community Action Plans in rural Scotland for the last 25 years. Communities have seen them as a way of setting out their own priorities for the future of their communities, as a guide for how they organise to make things happen, as a basis for making the case for funds for community projects, making representation on behalf of the community and working in partnership with the public sector.

*We have helped around 150 communities to prepare Community Action Plans either directly or through supporting the development of programmes of Community Action Plans for local authorities and other planning and regeneration bodies.*

Community Action Plans were the platform that launched hundreds of Community Development Trusts across rural Scotland. Communities often identifying that they needed another community development organisation in addition to their Community Council to act on their behalf to develop community projects, purchase land and buildings, employ people and raise funds.

*We have helped over 60 communities to set up Development Trusts following on from preparing Community Action Plans. This is work we did directly ourselves in the first 10 years of our practice but there are now agencies like DTAS and staff within local authorities and third sector organisations that can deliver this support.*

Community Councils have been strengthened by Community Action Plans which have given them a clear community mandate for representing the interests of their communities.

*Where we have worked to help communities to prepare CAPs - Community Councils and their public sector partners have often reported better working relationships as a result.*

Local authorities have recognised the importance of Community Action Plans and their links to Community Planning, Participatory Budgeting, Community Asset Transfer, and Spatial Planning amongst other strategies and policies.

*We developed a programme of Community Action Planning for Stirling Council as part of its role as a pathfinder for Community Planning. Funds from the Community Planning budget were used to fund projects that were identified within Community Action Plans. The Community Planning Officer helped to broker priorities in the CAPs with appropriate Community Planning partners e.g. Health, Police, SNH etc.*

*We developed a programme of Community Action Planning for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust so that their grant programmes became aligned and responsive to CAP community defined priorities.*

*We developed a programme of Community Action Planning for East Ayrshire Council and they have aligned it with their Participatory Budgeting, dovetailed it with their approach to Local Place Planning, and built in representation on their Community Planning Partnership for CAP communities.*

In general, funders have noted that where communities have prepared robust, representative Community Action Plans they have been more successful in accessing their funding.

*Forth Valley LEADER noted that there were less applications to them from areas where communities didn’t have Community Action Plans and more likely to come from communities where we had worked to assist them prepare Plans as part of programmes we had developed for Stirling Council and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park.*

*The National Lottery have asked for up to date Community Action Plans as evidence of community support for specific projects, and to understand where they fitted into a wider community based development strategy.*

**Projects - Some examples out of hundreds**

….and then there are the projects numerous and various……it’s all in there in hundreds of community action plans ……… a small sample of these we have a close connection might include:

*Killin’s first Community Action Plan was used within months of its completion to make the case for the community’s purchase of the privately run Care Home and the establishment of the Killin Care Trust. Its second CAP five years later was the basis for establishing the Killin and Ardeonaig Trust and the development of a range of other projects. The Social Enterprise set up after their third CAP to deliver projects that weren’t being picked up by other existing groups – has formed a partnership with KAT to purchase and run the local newsagents and save the local post office.*

*Strathfillan (Tyndrum and Crianlarich) first CAP identified the importance of affordable housing to the community but also recognised that it was unlikely that the local authority would provide this. Within 18 months of the CAP they established the Strathfillan Community Development Trust, carried out a Housing Needs Study, negotiated with British Rail to buy 5 railway cottages in Crianlarich, and raised the funds needed, and bought and refurbished the cottages. They sold one to the sitting tenant and now manage four houses for rent to local people.*

*In carrying out the CAP for Fullarton in Irvine the community identified (amongst other things) the lack of medical services and the problems associated with it…as well as the need for new improved community facilities. Following a stakeholder interview as part of the CAP process the NHS agreed to identify health needs in the community….and the community started the work of developing a new community centre. The new community centre is now built and has a GP room in it that is used on a rota basis by once hard to access GP surgeries in Irvine.*

*Gartmore identified the need to improve their local pub in their first Community Action Plan – it came through strongly as a dislike in the Community Views Survey and a priority for action. It took a while! ….but it is now community owned and recently featured on a BBC TV show “Save our Pub”. In addition, Gartmore Community Trust were also successful in securing Lottery funding to improve their village hall, using their second CAP as continuing evidence of community need and support.*

*Aberfoyle asked people in their CAP Community Views Survey if the community should purchase their local Garage… a resounding yes …helped the community make a successful bid for funding from the Scottish Land fund to become one of the first community owned petrol stations in Scotland.*

*Isle of Jura Community Action Plan identified the need for a direct ferry link from Jura to the mainland rather than the indirect link through Islay. The Development Trust set up to implement the CAP over 20 years ago now runs the passenger ferry link.*

*Following their first CAP, Doune and Deanston set up the Kilmadock Development Trust they took on an empty shop and turned it into a locally run Tourist Information Centre and Heritage Centre. This helped to regenerate their main street. The Trust also now run the Village Hall and the local village shop and post office.*

*New Cumnock were able to use their Community Action Plan to involve the Princes Trust not only in supporting the establishment of a Heritage Centre in their old Town Hall but in the refurbishment of their outdoor Swimming Pool across the road. The Development Trust the community set up recently has successfully worked with the Council to commission a Master Plan for the town centre.*

*…..oh and one of our favourite small soon seen and successful projects of all time…. The Balfron Heritage Benches. A neat combination of a number of things identified in the CAP i.e. a hilly village, hard for elderly to walk to the shops, with no benches along the way, the birth place of architect Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson, the home of Iron Horse a local iron works company. Out of the CAP was born a project that combined all of these. The design and commissioning of 8 heritage benches made by Iron Horse in the style and colours of Alexander Greek Thomson and that were then situated throughout the village so they could encourage walking to the shops in a hilly village where people could rest, socialise and look out on the great views (also mentioned in the CAP!)*