

Consulting and Engaging Our Communities Through Neighbourhood Networks

Introduction

Within each and every part of Barnsley there is a wealth of skills, experience, and talents that help to make our communities great places to live, work, and play. This includes individuals and groups (most of whom give their time and energy for free) who make things happen.

This range of individuals and groups that are active in any particular neighbourhood are, in a sense, what makes that community what it is.

They can:

- bring people together,
- support young and elderly people,
- tackle problems such as anti-social behaviour,
- support schools and education,
- improve the environment,
- help at times of crisis such as flooding,
- support local business,
- help to hold community 'celebrations',
- influence planning and development decisions,
- ...the list goes on!

This range of individuals and groups could be described as an informal 'virtual' network of all the individuals and groups working independently or together to make the neighbourhood a better place. A simpler term for this would be the 'neighbourhood network'.

Describing Neighbourhood Networks

Every community will already have a neighbourhood network, and each network will be different – reflecting the particular make-up of that community. Examples of who might be involved include:



Part of the future role for the Council is to improve how we recognise the valuable work, strengths, and assets that exist within these networks and determine what can be done to support them. Our response will include how we can look to improve local information hubs and bringing together aspects of the network to support each other. This won't necessarily be done by the Council, but we will look how we can support a Neighbourhood Network to help itself. This may be co-ordinated by an existing community group who will provide the communication channels to bring others in the network together.

Being part of a network will not only bring benefit to the area it operates within, but also to the individual groups who are part of it. Groups within the network will be able to learn and share information and skills from each other on things such as fundraising, planning events, and marketing.

The benefits for individual groups being part of a neighbourhood network will be:

- Effective networking and co-ordination - encouraging a shared vision where everyone can see a purpose
- Empowerment - creating the opportunities for people to feel confident to be involved
- Engaging others in the process - spreading the culture and values
- Recognising achievement - rewarding involvement - celebrating success
- Influencing what is happening in your local area

Engaging Neighbourhood Networks

To build on the Big Conversation of 2012, where we started to outline something of the challenges facing Barnsley and the Council and why change is needed in the way we work together, an open public event which acknowledges and celebrates what is already happening in the area could be used to start the dialogue. This might be an existing volunteer celebration event, community network meeting, or other event already planned for the area. The event can be facilitated using supporting materials, displays, existing ward data, community group profiles etc, and we have the facility to provide interactive voting equipment to consult and enable participation from people attending.

The overall purpose of such an event is ultimately to invite and encourage participation, and help shape what needs to happen at a local level on the basis of the evidence presented.

The flow chart in Appendix A describes this approach and the relationship between Neighbourhood Networks and Ward Alliances. The Ward Alliance has the main role for local planning and decision making but is supported strongly by the wider network of local groups and organisations, who will play a major role in creating local solutions and continuing to build capacity and involvement in the local area through initiatives such as community pride, community first, social media etc.

The pace of progress will largely be dependant on the area itself. Some wards will have almost ready made groups and forums who can progress this quickly, but others may require more support with building the capacity and interest to be involved. The timescales will therefore be ward specific, and the exact format that ongoing consultation, engagement, and participation activity will take will be influenced by the individual Ward Alliances.

Supporting Neighbourhood Networks

The Council is now considering how we can best support our neighbourhood networks to flourish and to act as a support network amongst the groups that exist in each community.

As part of this we may seek an existing community group in each neighbourhood to act as a 'hub' for communication within that area. This could include neighbourhood newsletters, local posters/advertisements, organising information sharing events, or maintaining an on-line discussion/information sharing group.

The approach will be different in each area, but the principles to be adopted will be the same:

- An enabling and facilitating approach
- Respecting everyone's views and experience
- Actively listening
- Ensuring action is taken and based on the views of those involved
- Effective networking and co-ordination - encouraging a shared vision where everyone can see a purpose
- Empowerment - creating the opportunities for people to feel confident to be involved
- Engaging others in the process - spreading the culture and values
- Recognising achievement, rewarding involvement, celebrating success
- Prioritising communication
- Building trust

Neighbourhood Network Development Fund (NNDF)

In order to develop Neighbourhood Networks and promote health and wellbeing, £2,000¹ will be available per ward to support the development of Neighbourhood Networks and the delivery of local ward plans in 2013/14.

This Neighbourhood Network Development Fund (NNDF) will use the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* framework as a tool to guide and shape the use of this fund. This means that funded activity will broadly need to fit into the following themes within the framework:

- Connect
- Be active
- Take notice
- Keep learning
- Give

The NNDF will be available to 'pump prime' the actions within local ward action plans that can demonstrate an improvement in health and wellbeing, and an asset based approach to community development.

¹ Funding is available for 2013/14 only and is being made available via Public Health Department.

Ward Alliances will make recommendations on the use of the funding to support the Ward Plans and development of wider social networks, linking community groups in the ward.

BMBC will manage the funding, which will complement the Ward Alliance Fund.

Monitoring the use of the Five Ways to Wellbeing

The table below describes examples of activity mapped against the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* and shows how it can be used at individual, community, organisational, and policy levels, where the purpose of improving wellbeing can be direct or indirect. This framework could be used to track how the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* is being used across the One Barnsley partnership in order to improve the wellbeing of the population of Barnsley.

	Children's Services	Adults and Communities	Planning and Transport	Housing	Environmental	Work and the Economy
Connect	Intergenerational activities - facilitating contact between younger and older residents	Local area co-ordination - work with individuals, families, and communities to support people with disabilities	Designing traffic free spaces into developments - to encourage social connections	The Big Lunch - events to encourage neighbours to get to know each other	An area based growing competition - to improve local environments through collaboration between residents	Encouraging business to take advantage of support - to make them more competitive
Be Active	Support buddies for disabled young people - to help them take part in sport and physical activities	Health walks scheme - to encourage physical activity and use of the natural environment	Town centre cycle paths - to encourage physical activity and low carbon travel	Enable tenants to grow their own food - through community owned allotments	Green Gym - to promote health and fitness, and support conservation activities	Encourage the unemployed to engage with volunteering - to increase skills, keep active, and improve wellbeing
Take Notice	Public art project devised with young people - to encourage appreciation of public spaces	Festival for social inclusion - e.g. the Barnsley Pride events	Auditing green space provision - to ensure access to the natural environment	Gardening support for vulnerable residents - to maintain outdoor spaces	Resident involvement in wildlife protection - to encourage appreciation of local biodiversity	Citizens taking note of what job opportunities there are - and concentrate on transferable skills. With business, look for markets to

						expand into and new skills development
Keep Learning	Online directory of learning activities for young people - to encourage participation and enjoyment of learning	Adult learning - as an alternative to prescribing anti-depressants for mild mental health problems	Identifying sites for self-builders - to encourage people to learn the innovative and entrepreneurial skills needed to build homes	Provide training - as part of resident involvement in decision making for tenants, to encourage learning through participation	Community planting day events - to teach basic skills and improve public spaces	Focussing on skills attainment - maximising the digital agenda as a conduit for learning and a subject in its own right
Give	Peer support awards for young people - to recognise their efforts in helping others	Timebanking - to encourage skills swapping and reciprocal volunteering as a route to build social networks	Supporting volunteer led 'walking bus' schemes - to encourage volunteering, physical activity, and safe travel to school	Use peer support models - to enable independent living and residential support to promote mutual support	Encouraging volunteers to 'adopt' their local area - to help maintain the quality of their public space	Local business support networks - of volunteers giving time and expertise to provide business support to local enterprise