

Partnership Award for Sustainable Communities

IT'S NOT JUST WHAT WE DO, IT'S THE WAY THAT WE DO IT

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Sustainability is at the heart of the Oldham Partnership's thoughts and actions. Together with the North West Regional Development Agency, the Partnership developed "Oldham Beyond" – the ambitious 20-year vision for Oldham's future – which paints a picture of the journey the Borough will take towards creating a sustainable community. Oldham Beyond is the backbone of Oldham's Community Strategy.

A community strategy which clearly articulates how it will help deliver a genuinely sustainable community and secure a more sustainable future for all

In May 2005 the Oldham Partnership published its updated version of the Community Strategy, the blueprint for regenerating and uplifting the Borough. The Strategy comprehensively illustrates the steps that will be taken in the next three to five years around ten key themes, that will mould Oldham into a sustainable community. It elaborates on the first version (published in 2002) by incorporating the progress that has been made, and including the exemplary Oldham Beyond, the regeneration vision for the Borough. Oldham Beyond builds upon the fact that Oldham Borough is "many places and one" by celebrating the distinctiveness of different communities. It not only focuses upon the development of the Town Centre and other "economic engines" in the Borough but, most significantly, recognises the importance of district centres in providing a focus for sustainable and confident communities.

By following the detailed plans outlined in the Community Strategy, the Oldham Partnership will realise its vision of making 'Oldham – a place where everyone is proud to belong'. For each step along this journey, a lead organisation has been identified, and the work has been mapped to a range of social, economic, and environmental indicators. This ensures that the Community Strategy is structured and manageable, that ownership is clear, and that the organisations and agencies in the Partnership understand their role in the development of Oldham as a sustainable community.

There are two central groups which ensure that the work of the Oldham Partnership is co-ordinated and focused. After a review of their working practices, a more strategic system was introduced. The Oldham Partnership Executive has restructured itself along the lines of a Local Public Service Board, which will be the first of its kind in Greater Manchester and one of the few yet created nationally. The Executive commissions work in line with the strategic priorities of the Borough, through the Partnership structure and through the service delivery organisations. They are supported by the Steering Group – the policy making and debating forum of the Partnership –

which includes representatives from the voluntary and community sectors. The Steering Group is chaired by Bill Edwards, a local resident and Chairman of Oldham's Environment Partnership. Bill has sat on a number of sustainability appraisal panels, and has been championing sustainable development in Oldham for many years.

The Oldham Partnership is prioritising its targets for the future through the Local Area Agreement (LAA). This will be the delivery mechanism for Oldham's Community Strategy – it will allow the Partnership to focus resources on the local issues which build sustainable communities. Rather than being content with a balance of social, economic and environmental indicators, the Partnership will include the “ecological footprint” of the Borough within the LAA as a means of tracking the long-term perspective, rather than simply looking at a three year horizon. Put simply, its not just what we do, it's how we do it that's important.

To ensure that resources are allocated to the development of a sustainable community, a Commissioning Framework has been developed by the Partnership in conjunction with Deloitte. This mechanism formalises cross-organisational working and strategic resource allocation, based on a strong culture of evidence and evaluation, which allows the Partnership to accurately understand local priorities. This has manifested itself in the production of the 'Oldham In Profile' report and the establishment of the Performance Management Framework. The Oldham In Profile report monitors the progress that has been made against the Community Strategy across a range of indicators. The Performance Management Framework complements this document, as reports are submitted and examined on a quarterly basis from each of the themes in the Community Strategy. This enables the Partnership to initiate cross cutting interventions and programmes, to ensure that the vision stays on track. By allocating resources to locally determined priorities, and critically examining the effectiveness of the interventions, the Oldham Partnership is able to evaluate its progress towards the development of a sustainable community.

Examples of ways in which the partnership has sought to recognise and address long-term issues which will impact on residents of the future, or the area's impacts on communities in the wider region or even internationally.

Oldham has a long history of using sustainability appraisals to improve the quality of its strategies. The Community Strategy was no exception. In July 2004 the Oldham Partnership used a “speed dating” workshop where members of the Partnership identified new opportunities for joint working, by highlighting the crosscutting policies and strategies in the Borough. This helped to minimise any conflicts between programmes, and overcame the artificial barriers of thematic responsibility. The workshop was followed by two events in October. The first was a PLAN-IT simulation day, where the Chairs and Co-ordinators of the Oldham Partnership's thematic partnerships took part in a software-based simulation of LSP decision-making, focused on resource allocation. It built on the session in July by illustrating the interconnectedness of the different policy areas, and highlighted how open and well-communicated resource allocation can assist progression towards

strategic goals. The third phase expanded on this at a two-day session in late October 2004, where members of the Oldham Partnership used the Integrated Appraisal Toolkit. The Toolkit integrates sustainability considerations into the development and implementation of projects and programmes, and enabled the Partnership to assess the impact on sustainability of its top ten priorities.

By examining the Sustainability Appraisal, the Oldham Partnership has ensured that its plans for regenerating and revitalizing the Borough are sustainable. The Oldham Beyond project is a nationally recognized example of this. Oldham Beyond outlines a route for Oldham's renaissance, encompassing its people, communities, economy, transport, housing market and physical regeneration. This ambitious vision for the Borough is built on sound principles of sustainability, as highlighted by the high prominence given to projects such as the re-opening of Alexandra Park (officially recognized with Green Flag status in October 2005) and the energy efficiency of the revitalised housing stock in the Borough. Oldham Beyond was invited to showcase this vision at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference in January / February 2005. The Oldham Beyond stand – an innovative multi-screen display playing the vision for Oldham in a continuous DVD – was praised by the Deputy Prime Minister at the event, and has since been used as a case study by Yvette Cooper MP in a speech delivered at the 'Sustainable Communities – Integrating Strategies to Drive Successful Delivery' conference in June 2005. Oldham Beyond was the only example of urban regeneration from the North of England which featured in her presentation.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Having great vision is one thing, but the biggest challenge for LSPs is putting the "community" into their Community Strategy. Sustainable communities are outward facing and understand the impact they have on others. Community cohesion is also at the heart of our Community Strategy, and at the heart of making our communities sustainable. The Oldham Partnership has used a series of innovative projects to capture the imagination and energy of the Borough's residents.

Effective participation which informs and involves communities to develop a local vision for a more sustainable future

"Building Good Relations" is an excellent example of a long-term initiative that has empowered local residents to take control and play a leading role in their communities. This project, facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland, began in 2003/04 with a series of one-day workshops, attended by thirty-five people providing a cross-section of the civic leadership in Oldham. This included councillors, community activists, police officers, and representatives from the business and faith communities. The workshops provided a "safe space" in which to debate difficult issues such as segregation. During late-2004 further workshops were held to develop civic leadership around community cohesion, and the experience and knowledge

shared in these sessions has been used to inform the new Community Strategy. The workshops identified key issues within two specific, but different, neighbourhoods and a programme of actions are currently underway to improve local participation in civic life. The next phase is to develop the mediation skills of the participants and enable them to cascade their experience to others.

Oldham Borough has a larger than average number of young people and their views and those of their families are crucial to building Oldham's future. Throughout the summer of 2005, a survey of 3,000 children and young people and their carers took place in association with The Children's Society. The survey – which used the Priority Search software package – asked people to rank what they considered to be their priority areas, according to the five key outcomes in Every Child Matters. This information has been analysed from a number of perspectives to enable the Oldham Partnership to clearly understand the needs of the children and young people in the Borough. The reports split the responses by age groups, by geographical areas or by other criteria such as those who are in care, or those who have a disability. This precise information is then used to form appropriate policies and interventions, which address the priorities for children and young people, which they themselves have identified.

The Oldham Partnership produced a summary version of the Community Strategy which was distributed to every household in the Borough, and a display stand on the Community Strategy was taken to the Area Committee meetings throughout the Borough. This ensured that the residents of the Borough were fully informed on the Oldham Partnership's plans to develop a sustainable community.

A commitment to partnership training and development which improves understanding and skills about sustainable communities and the principles which underpin this approach

“Bridging the Gap”, initiated by Oldham's Community Empowerment Team, focused on removing some of the barriers to community activists getting involved in the decision making processes (see Appendix 1). A programme of courses to develop their techniques and skills was held from November 2004 to March 2005. It involved 167 representatives from the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector, as well as members of the Oldham Partnership Executive & Steering Group, chief officers, and funding providers. The training programme for the voluntary, community & faith sector had four modules, all of which were identified by the community as barriers to engagement. They were:

- Assertiveness;
- Negotiating skills;
- Handling difficult people;
- Managing meetings.

These modules, and the network of support provided, enabled members of the community to get involved in the process of developing a sustainable community in Oldham.

Examples of one or more successful joined-up solutions which cut across traditional service boundaries and achieve social, economic and environmental goals in an integrated way

“Neighbourhood Solutions” is the Oldham Partnership’s way of working at a neighbourhood level to tackle issues that adversely affect the quality of life for local people. It involves a group of Area Action Teams (AATs) working across the Borough to resolve local conflict and ensure that work takes place in a co-ordinated manner through the local service delivery organisations. The AATs contain representatives from the service providers within the Council (e.g. Environmental Services, Youth Service), Police, Primary Care Trust, Housing Associations, Connexions and the voluntary and community sector (see Appendix 2). The AATs then work together to address local issues at a local level.

A key element of Neighbourhood Solutions is the involvement of Councillors and Co-optees from Area Committees, who play a central role in prioritising the neighbourhoods for action, helping local people to get involved, and facilitating the identification of local issues. Even more importantly, they are involved in identifying the best solutions to stop the problems from recurring.

The Oldham Partnership has provided a training programme to ensure that the Neighbourhood Solutions initiative is a success. In March 2005 the AATs were given training on SARA, a problem-solving model that was developed by the Home Office and is used by Greater Manchester Police. The model has four consecutive stages – Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment. The initiative is supported by GMAC, an intelligence system from Greater Manchester Police.

The Neighbourhood Solutions Project has had particular success in Chadderton, where the AAT identified two key hotspots. The main concern for the agencies was the number of incidents of youth nuisance. The Police had originally allocated resources elsewhere, but changed their mind based on the evidence from the AAT. As a result, they have arrested a local ringleader, worked with Asda to use their CCTV to identify suspects, and increased the number of Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) patrols. The Youth Service and Groundwork are now running a youth justice programme as part of their outreach campaign, and Trading Standards are taking action against four shop-owners after they performed a series of test purchases regarding the sale of alcohol.

The AATs across Oldham have also been working with Mediation Northern Ireland to develop and personalise their programme, and will be working with Salford City Council to run a series of workshop sessions to further develop neighbourhood-working skills. As a direct result of the work with Mediation Northern Ireland, the SCAMP group has been set-up – Shaw & Crompton Activities for More People. The group works towards:

- Accessing a wider range of facilities within the community;
- Breaking down the barriers between different groups in the community;
- Finding ways to make Shaw & Crompton a more inclusive community.

Without the Neighbourhood Solutions programme, this would not have happened.

Another programme that cuts across traditional service boundaries in the Borough is the Festival of Diversity. The Festival is a major Borough-wide joint-project, where 38 organizations and agencies from the voluntary, public and faith sectors celebrate diversity in their own way. The Festival is led by the community, and aims at bringing communities and cultures together by sharing a cultural heritage and respecting diversity through social and cultural activities. It started in 2003, when 10 agencies from the voluntary and public sector organized a range of events around arts, food, dance, sports and music. Since its inception, the Festival has gone from strength to strength (see Appendix 3). In 2005, it took place between 9th July and 6th August with events happening almost every day across the Borough. About 7,000 people attended the 38 events held (20% more than the previous year). New events this year included the first ever Oldham Pride (in which 700 people took part) and the Diversity @ School day, an awareness raising time for pupils from primary schools in the Borough to learn more about other cultures. One of the particularities of the Festival of Diversity is its location: the events were held all around the Borough, enabling organising groups, agencies and communities across the Borough to feel part of the bigger picture.

In Spring 2005, the Oldham Partnership brought Islamic scholar Dr Pasha, of New York University, to Oldham to work with Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities to undertake a major community clean up and highlight the importance of clean environments within Islamic teachings. This has evolved into a major two-year programme called The Green Olympics, which involves the local media to promote a greater understanding of key environmental issues, and provide individuals and groups with the opportunities to take action at a local level (see Appendix 4). The programme was launched in October 2005, and will feature themed campaigns on hot environmental topics such as recycling, conserving wildlife and promoting walking and cycling.

The Festival of Diversity, the Green Olympics and the Neighbourhood Solutions programme are helping to build a sustainable community in Oldham. These immediate programmes need to be supported by longer-term projects, and in University Centre Oldham and the regeneration of the housing market, the Borough has fine examples of this.

The Oldham Partnership has undertaken an ambitious programme of development in the housing market in the Borough, with the support of Housing Market Renewal. Oldham has the second highest number of terraced houses in the country, and the growing population in the Borough demands a wider variety and higher quality of houses. Nothing less than transformational change will do for Oldham.

An innovative relocation loan scheme has been introduced to support residents who are moving as part of the regeneration programme. The residents can get support towards the cost of their new house in the form of a loan – a loan they do not have to pay back until they choose to sell the house. The housing market in Oldham is being radically transformed. With Oldham's position in the Greater Manchester conurbation, and its position between Manchester and Leeds as part of the Northern Way, a rejuvenated housing market in the Borough ensures that it can maximise the opportunities that are on its doorstep, and continue the sustainable development within the Borough.

University Centre Oldham was opened in May 2005, as a satellite campus of Huddersfield University. The introduction of a Higher Education campus in Oldham will leave an indelible mark on the history of the Borough. Oldham has always experienced a skills deficit – talented individuals have left the Borough to pursue their studies in the universities of Leeds and Manchester. With University Centre Oldham – the first University Centre to be opened as a direct result of the work of a Local Strategic Partnership – the talent within Oldham can be unlocked, and the opportunities that were previously closed to those who live in Oldham are now opened to all. With 3,000 extra students expected in the Borough, studying courses from Health & Community Studies to Construction and Project Management to Performing Arts, the future can only be bright for Oldham.

