

Name of Exercise Washington Millenium Project

Location: City of Sunderland, UK

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Article 7/Capacity Building*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To encourage public participation in the development of an improved living environment in Washington, a town of Sunderland.

Background:

This model project is being developed through an innovative partnership approach in an effort to address social and environmental problems in a holistic and inclusive way. Central to the partnership is the local community itself, with a representative Forum, Sunderland's Local Agenda 21 team and the Environment Agency (the UK Government's licensing body). The partnership is also supported by a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, in addition to other Council Departments.

'New' Washington, a town of 62,000 residents, was built in the late 1960's around a series of coal mines. These comprised industrial activities, housing and associated services. When the New Town was constructed, no real improvements were made to the infrastructure of the existing settlements or to support the communities when the coal mines closed. The communities were split and dispirited. The design of the New Town did not encourage growth and interaction but tended to isolate individuals. Although the physical area was enhanced by the creation of parkland and open spaces, these ironically served as divides and barriers for residents, instead of common places to gather. The parklands and open spaces also have design faults, for instance, the new drainage system directs domestic and industrial waste into open streams running through the parks. The result is that open spaces are also seen as dumping grounds for waste.

As demonstrated at the Aarhus Convention visit to Washington in December 1999, a holistic approach is being adopted to encourage more sustainable living and working practices. Issues such as environmental awareness, waste reduction recycling and sustainable transport have been discussed and implemented. The Millennium project aims to address the situation where Washington people have little community spirit, are not encouraged to use their open spaces for leisure and recreation due to pollution and mismanagement, do not have skills to engage in discussion making for improvements and have a sense of isolation and lack of ownership of their town.

The aim of the project is to improve quality of life in Washington by focusing on community participation to encourage engagement in, and ownership of, the development of a more sustainable, social, economical and natural neighbourhood.

The project itself has 3 elements involving cross-country development and delivery of sustainable environmental practices. These strands are:

1. The engagement of groups and individuals from within the local community to participate in the identification, prioritisation, design, implementation, monitoring and celebration of a wide range of initiatives. Through such wide ranging public participation a real sense of community ownership of local issues and their solutions, based on sustainable community building will be achieved.
2. Working with Businesses to identify and prevent potential pollution incidents, promoting more environmentally friendly production/operation methods – including the use of materials from sustainable sources and encouraging recycling and the use of local labour markets. In addition, the provision of an interface between businesses and the communities to encourage dialogue on local issues such as pollution through industrial purposes, vandalism, traffic flow issues and localised training, etc.
3. The design, support, and promotion of the development of a sustainable transport system throughout Washington through community based initiatives. These including the linking up and expansion of local cycle ways with the "Coast to Coast" and "National Route 1" cycle networks.

Participation Techniques Used:

Central to the project is the development and delivery of a community led action plan with clear, achievable objectives and targets with monitoring and review at regular intervals by the Community Forum. The process must be inclusive and accessible to the whole community, with special emphasis on engaging excluded groups, such as youth, single parents, illiterate and the disabled.

The planning and resourcing of community participation and action has been developed through the Community Forum with the support of the Local Agenda 21 Co-ordinator and the major partners in the project. This process began in May 1998 and the community was fully involved at all stages of the project, including the planning and delivery of the awareness raising events (e.g. Festival '99), community consultation initiatives and deciding priorities, who else should be involved and which projects to develop.

Funding for this part of the project has come directly from the council's LA 21 budget and the Environment Agency to start the process. To manage the whole project, a 3 stage system has been adopted: theme groups have been established to undertake the day to day running of the various elements of the Project, a steering group with large community representation keeps the process going and provides co-ordination, and to support the steering group, a community chaired management team meets quarterly to discuss more strategic regional issues. The review and monitoring of the project is administered through the steering group in conjunction with the Community Forum.

The success of the project relies on community participation, which is achieved through:

- consultation events, designed with the Community Forum to be open and accessible;
- a programme of awareness raising campaigns to promote more sustainable life styles, business practices and protection of the natural environment;
- training opportunities for local people to enable them to meet future needs and to increase the community's skills.

Consultation Events

1. **Participatory Appraisals:** This is a process of learning from and with local people about their situation, perceptions, aspirations and preferences. Firstly, local people attended a 3-day training event in facilitation techniques. As a result, participatory events were delivered by these new community facilitators in 4 of the 18 villages that comprise Washington. The results were very positive, with over 550 individuals, many of whom had previously only ever received questionnaires in the post, being involved in the process. Each village came up with 50-65 suggestions for change and improvement. These were then prioritised by local people through a simple but democratic process for inclusion in the overall Action Plan. Following the events, feedback sessions were conducted with the new facilitators with very positive results. A community accessible report is being produced and distribution will be complemented by exhibitions in each village. There will be a travelling exhibition to all 4 villages; to their main community facilities and schools, which will culminate in a week long exhibition at Washington's main shopping area. In addition, the village community groups will receive copies of the report, as will local Housing Offices, libraries etc. The next phase is to train more local people and then support them to hold their own Participatory Appraisals in their villages.

2. **Community Forums:** A series of monthly meetings are held to develop the Action Plan, to identify new opportunities and to secure resources. On average, 30 local people attend, develop their own village initiatives and work with other organisations.

3. *Involvement in City-wide strategies: Local people were able to participate in the development and monitoring of the Local Agenda 21 Strategy for the whole of Sunderland, which is due to be published in November 2000.*

Raising Awareness Campaigns to promote sustainable lifestyles

1. **Environment Action Week:** An annual event comprising practical projects based on local ideas. Everyone in the community is involved.

2. **Pilot recycling and life style schemes:** A number of pilot projects are starting, including the highly successful "Schools and Charities in Sunderland" project demonstrated at the December Workshop. The project, lasting 2 weeks as part of "Environment Action Week", involved 4 Washington schools who

raised over £6,000 (US\$9,600) by recycling 0.56 tonnes of second hand goods through local charity shops. This money has been used by the charities to help in their own specific area of interest. For example, the British Red Cross will purchase medical supplies for emergency disaster relief. Other such initiatives include the setting up of a demonstration "Green Family" project. This will involve one family from each village, chosen by local volunteers, advertising and community groups, trying out a more environmentally friendly and sustainable lifestyle for 3 months by recycling household waste, using energy efficient light bulbs, eating more balanced, fresher and healthy food stuffs, etc.

3. Youth Action Initiatives: A series of art based activities are held throughout the summer when schools are closed for the holidays. Young people from the schools in Washington decide the nature of the activities (sculpture, painting, music, street theatre etc.) designed to raise awareness of the environment within the community and are involved in raising funds for the project.
4. Business seminars: Two sustainable business seminars have been organised to encourage local businesses to examine their production and operation processes and to consider more sustainable and community orientated approaches. The seminars will also promote the benefits of adopting Environmental Management Systems in relation to local communities, legislation and the LA21 Strategy recommendations.
5. Safer Routes to Schools: Pupils and parents are designing local road safety programmes in two of the villages. This includes mapping, planning and prioritising safer routes for pupils to take to go to school. The project also looks at ways of reducing traffic caused by parents taking their children to school in the car. The promotion of these initiatives will be very much led by the pupils themselves to ensure as much capacity building and ownership as possible.
6. Cycling Networks and Events: A cycling group has been established to plan and design local cycle routes. The group is involved in the allocation of local authority funding and resources through participatory workshops.

Training Opportunities

1. Facilitation techniques: As part of the Participatory Appraisals, a 3 day training event in facilitation techniques for local community members was held. This event was organised and facilitated by the LA21 team in partnership with expert trainers. The community itself, supported by the LA21 team, provided venues and advertising. In total, there were 18 trainees who not only represented the local community but also included trainees from the City of Sunderland, Environment Agency, University of Sunderland and members of NGO's such as "Community Environmental Education Development". Participants were invited through the Community Forum, adverts in the local press and by promoting the event through partners within the community and agency networks.
2. Funding workshops: A series of workshops are being run by the grant giving bodies themselves in order to train community members in how to submit grant applications. For example, in November 1999, the County Durham Foundation and the Local Agenda 21 team delivered a seminar attended by 12 community members which involved a workshop on what constitutes a good funding bid document, what funders are looking for and the type of projects they seek to support. For the final part of the seminar practice applications were written and then evaluated. The seminar was attended by a cross-section of community members and school representatives from the Washington area. As a result, 4 separate bids have been submitted by individual group projects.

Stage(s) at which public participated in the process:

Overall, the community is involved in all decision-making processes at as many different levels as possible. One of the main aims of the initiative is to be as open and as transparent as possible. Any issues or problems that arise are shared with the community, who are involved in the implementation of solutions. It is anticipated that through this inclusive and continuous process the community will gradually attain a position of sustainability and self-reliance, as well as responsibility. They will build on experience and success.

What information was made available?

Information about the project, its training initiatives and practical schemes are distributed through a number of mediums including:

- Local and regional newspapers, radio and television
- City of Sunderland publications
- Exhibitions in local facilities, such as shopping areas, schools and colleges, libraries, etc.
- Posters in local shops
- Word of mouth
- Other Community and Council meetings
- Awareness campaigns and indoor and outdoor events
- Internet and web sites
- Partner publications and events

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

Initial results of the participatory appraisal have shown a local desire to tackle issues such as activities for the youth, litter and recycling, dumping of shopping trolleys, personal safety (especially at night) and the general improvement to both public parks and the village centres themselves. However, there was an overwhelming impression that although most people are friendly, there is a distinct lack of community spirit and involvement. The next stage is to go back to the community by the end of April with the draft report and ensure that the interpretation of the participatory appraisal results reflects what people were really saying to the facilitators. The final results and methods will be obtainable from Steve Graham by mid-May.

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