

Evaluation of the South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme - Report H: Neighbourhood Infrastructure

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Evaluation of the South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme

Report H: Neighbourhood Infrastructure

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Yorkshire Forward

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Report H: Investment in Neighbourhood Infrastructure

Yorkshire Forward: South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure
Programme

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive Summary | i |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. About SYSIP and the Evaluation | 4 |
| 2.1. Introduction | 4 |
| 2.2. Rationale for SYSIP | 4 |
| 2.3. Undertaking the Evaluation | 6 |
| 3. Policy Context | 8 |
| 3.1. National | 8 |
| 3.2. Regional and Local Policy Agendas: the backdrop to SYSIP | 9 |
| 4. About Neighbourhood Infrastructure | 12 |
| 4.1. What is Neighbourhood Infrastructure? | 12 |
| 4.2. Who benefits from neighbourhood infrastructure? | 14 |
| 5. Process Outcomes | 16 |
| 5.1. Introduction | 16 |
| 5.2. Adding Value to Mainstream Service Delivery | 17 |
| 5.3. Geographic Scale of Community Anchor Organisations | 17 |
| 6. Plausibility and Sustainability | 20 |
| 6.1. Introduction | 20 |
| 6.2. Target Achievement | 20 |
| 6.3. Sustainability | 21 |
| 6.4. Conclusion: a legacy of SYSIP? | 22 |
| 7. Strategic Added Value | 24 |
| 8. Conclusion, Good Practice and Recommendations | 26 |
| 8.1. Introduction: The future of neighbourhood infrastructure | 26 |
| 8.2. Good Practice | 27 |
| 8.3. Recommendations | 27 |

Executive Summary

Introduction

The South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme (SYSIP) made a considerable investment in Neighbourhood Infrastructure of over one third programme resources. This funding was largely concentrated on Sheffield, although some funds supported community oriented projects elsewhere, notably the Barnsley Association of Community Partnership. Funding in Sheffield focused on the Sheffield Community Action Plans project and two major investments in Zest (formerly Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance) and SOAR (South and Owlerton Area Regeneration).

The report finds that the SYSIP funding coincided with a period of significant policy changes which had significant effects for neighbourhood infrastructure. These included shifts in national agendas (for instance the end of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and introduction of Area Based Grants) and locally (such as the establishment of community assemblies in Sheffield).

We found wide ranging rationales for the ranging from more traditional forms of community development and community economic development through to community anchor organisations and involvement/empowerment activities.

The focus of the funding was primarily around the sustainability of activities and the contribution (or added value) of neighbourhood activity to local agendas (whether in terms of service delivery, governance and empowerment, or regeneration).

About Neighbourhood Infrastructure

Definitions of neighbourhood infrastructure were wide ranging and it was not possible to define a singular and simple (investment) model. If there is a common feature of neighbourhood infrastructure it is that it involves high levels of community engagement, and that funders, recognising these benefits, support core as well as project and service staff. During the SYSIP programme, there was considerable policy interest in 'place making' and 'place shaping', agendas in which neighbourhood infrastructure had a clear role.

Although some neighbourhood infrastructure bodies focused on the **development of place** and therefore capital expenditure (most notably SOAR, but also others), others had a greater focus on services (for instance ZEST).

Process Outcomes

The Sheffield CAPs project, Zest and SOAR, and BACP were found to invest in activities which were found to build neighbourhood capacity. The report finds that capacity building took time but that benefits were brought in terms of developing better services (whether around health, education or policing).

Where such investments appear to have had greatest success is where they have had a clear rationale and supported organisations which had the organisational capacity and scale to develop. Unfortunately, many of the process outcomes were found to be

shortlived and reliant on the direct funding from SYSIP. This was most typically in smaller neighbourhood groups with more limited resources.

Sustainability

At the start of the SYSIP programme there was considerable debate about the voluntary and community sector, and especially neighbourhood infrastructure, being 'grant dependent'. This assertion is overly simplistic and implies that there are no benefits from funds invested through grant based mechanisms. Few neighbourhood infrastructure organisations are able to achieve 'financial sustainability' from service and investment (e.g. returns from assets) income alone: they require other funding to sustain their services.

Although the funding from SYSIP was considerable it should be placed in context: on its own it was far less than area based regeneration initiatives previously funded, most notably New Deal for Communities and the Single Regeneration Budget. Neighbourhood organisations without access to wider resources (often through their own limited development) were unlikely to be sustainable by the end of the programme.

Conclusion

SYSIP investment in neighbourhood infrastructure was not strategic. The business case presented to Yorkshire Forward (and Objective 1) was that the neighbourhood infrastructure projects were part of developing a more sustainable infrastructure of organisations. The SYSIP funding followed considerable funding for many organisations which had started in the 1990s with the early SRB programmes and the 1994-99 Objective 2 Structural Funds and URBAN programmes. Zest and SOAR were found have demonstrated how this funding could be used to develop capacity and diversify income streams. They are however exemplars for the SYSIP programme.

The SYSIP investment made incorrect assumptions that all CAP areas would develop along similar lines and ultimately establish some form of sustainable grass-roots based community regeneration body (such as Zest, SOAR and Manor and Castle Development Trust). This now appears very unrealistic. This is not to argue that neighbourhood based approaches do not work, rather that they will have differing scales and that attention needs to be given to investment in key critical activities (such as community engagement, organisation building, leadership and skills). Investment was available elsewhere in SYSIP to support these activities but either through limited access or resources in one area being limited, organisations floundered.

The value for money from the CAPs programme has been variable: good in some parts and poor in others. Where it has worked well additional resources have been secured and empowerment activities have thrived in diverse and frequently difficult contexts.

SYSIP was intended to make a substantial contribution to Yorkshire Forward's economic inclusion agenda and RES targets. This has not been achieved. There appear three main reasons for this: there was a need for a clearer Programme against which projects would be awarded; suggest a Programme required leadership either from Yorkshire Forward or local government; and there should have been a clearer focus on economic outcomes. A contributory factor, in implementation, were the multiple levels of subcontracting and monitoring. It was unclear where this rested – with local authorities or Yorkshire Forward. As result there was weak performance management of SYSIP.

Looking to the future, SYSIP has undoubtedly created some strong neighbourhood organisations. They are well placed to secure further income, although nonetheless face a

challenging and difficult environment. Elsewhere the picture is more mixed, particularly in Sheffield. To some extent, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham took earlier steps to rationalise neighbourhood infrastructure organisations, to clarify its relationship with local empowerment and governance agendas, and to invest in a select group of organisations which could add to delivery. This happened in part in Sheffield but not a sufficient extent.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme (SYSIP) was supported by Yorkshire Forward, the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme and the South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council which committed investment funds of around £36.8 million (with £24.1 million from Yorkshire Forward, £11.6 million from the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme and £1 million from the Learning and Skills Council) to voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations in South Yorkshire between 2006 and 2009.

SYSIP funded three projects which operate directly at a neighbourhood level: the Sheffield Community Action Plans (CAPs), Sheffield Community Infrastructure (in particular the funding for SOAR and NUCA/ZEST) and through Barnsley Community Infrastructure, the Association of Community Partnerships. The focus here is primarily on the support for the Sheffield CAPs and NUCA and ZEST.

Tied up within the funding of neighbourhood infrastructure are a whole series of project, programme and strategic rationales, including:

- Community Development: work to support community development and in particular support neighbourhoods to contribute to area and local plans
- Community Economic Development (CED): activities delivered and controlled by communities to improve economic outcomes for residents
- Community Anchor Organisations (CAO): Organisations that function as a conduit and enabler of activities, whether delivered by the CAO or influenced by the CAO on behalf of the area
- Neighbourhood Capacity: Increasing the capacity of neighbourhood organisations.

The original funding for neighbourhood infrastructure totalled nearly £13 million (for the Sheffield Community Action Plans project). It was very much intended to represent a final Objective 1 Programme and Yorkshire Forward investment, and therefore was approved in the context of placing neighbourhood infrastructure on a more sustainable footing.

1.2 Research Undertaken

The research undertaken for this theme included:

- interviews with Sheffield City Council and Barnsley MBC neighbourhoods/community teams
- interviews with the Area Panel Coordinators in Sheffield (representing the areas covered by the CAPs, ZEST and SOAR)
- interviews with neighbourhood infrastructure organisations including SOAR, ZEST and South Sheffield Partnership

- interviews with Neighbourhood Forum Coordinators (for Broomhall, Lowedges, Gleadless Valley, Arbourthorne, Parson Cross, Foxhill and Tinsley)
- interviews with project personnel (including SSP BME Infrastructure Project, Gleadless Online and Arbourthorne Environmental)
- analysis of Monitoring data.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The report is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines our approach to the evaluation; Section 3 outlines the Policy Context for Neighbourhood Structure and the changes since the launch of SYSIP; Section 4 provides a working definition of Neighbourhood infrastructure; Section 5 discusses Process Outcomes from the funding; Section 6 considers issues of Plausability and Sustainability of Infrastructure; Section 7 the Strategic Added Value from the funding; and Section 8 concludes with an outline of good practice and recommendations.

2. About SYSIP and the Evaluation

2.1. Introduction

The **aim of SYSIP** is to increase the sustainability of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in South Yorkshire through support to infrastructure organisations. Through helping frontline VCS organisations become more effective, this is intended to bring wider economic and social impacts. The programme consists of six elements, each with complementary aims:

1. Barnsley Community Infrastructure
2. Doncaster Social Infrastructure
3. Rotherham Social Infrastructure
4. Sheffield Community Infrastructure
5. Sheffield Community Action Plan Programme
6. Academy for Community Leadership.

The programme was **evaluated** by researchers at Sheffield Hallam University, working in partnership with consultants mtl and COGS, in order to:

- estimate the impacts of the activities over time on VCS infrastructure and the economic regeneration of South Yorkshire
- help build monitoring and evaluation capacity in South Yorkshire
- capture learning and inform future action during the course of the programme.

The evaluation ran in three phases from **March 2007 to June 2009** and involved:

- reviewing the context, development and delivery of the programme
- assessing the impacts of the programme on the development of VCS organisations in South Yorkshire
- considering whether the programme is effectively meeting the needs of VCS organisations - particularly those from 'hard to reach' groups
- identifying good practice developed by the programme and individual elements
- assessing the sustainability of activities developed by the programme
- making recommendations for the future development of social and community infrastructure building programmes.

2.2. Rationale for SYSIP

The core costs of the SYSIP projects were met by Yorkshire Forward, South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme, and the Learning and Skills Council. The investment in the SYSIP projects was made jointly by these organisations and funding from each (largely) runs concurrently.

The funding provided was in a range of voluntary and community sector 'infrastructure' activities and associated projects. Investment in VCS 'infrastructure' has been part of economic development programmes in the region since 1995 (as part of the EU Objective 2 programmes and linked SRB programmes of this period). Investment under the South Yorkshire Objective 1 programme extended investment, by seeking to invest funds more equitably in deprived neighbourhoods, through the support of communities of interest (e.g. organisations working with black and minority ethnic groups, and people with disabilities), as well as support to district and sub-regional level infrastructure organisations (e.g. local infrastructure organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Service - CVSs and to groups such as the AfCL and the South Yorkshire Open Forum).

Funding under SYSIP was made at a time when VCS organisations faced a reported 'funding cliff edge' with significant declines in UK and EU regional and regeneration funding going to VCS organisations. The **rationale** for SYSIP was therefore very much to provide support for a transitional period which allowed VCS infrastructure to be supported at an appropriate scale (for the funding available) and to seek sustainability without EU Structural Funds and SRB funding. Such sustainability it is suggested would be through VCS organisations attracting funding locally through new commissioning and procurement opportunities, through charging for services, and in some cases reconfiguring the scale/scope of organisations, through for example merger.

Under BERR (now BIS) evaluation guidance, RDAs may intervene for the following rationales: market failure (including provision of public goods, externalities, imperfect information and market power) and equity. The SYSIP projects can be seen to address these in different ways:

- *equity*: this is the main rationale for the SYSIP investments - namely that the RDA investment helps to reduce disparities between areas or different groups. Measures of the performance of SYSIP should therefore be derived from this
- *market failure*: investment in VCS organisations working in deprived areas and with disadvantaged groups can be seen to be seeking to address myriad market failures. Under the BERR framework, investment in VCS infrastructure does contain public good elements (e.g. advice and guidance available to all residents of a community) and externalities (e.g. neighbourhood effects from increasing employment or wellbeing)
- *investment in volunteer centres*: the interventions of the RDA have been to establish/continue support for volunteer centres. The work of the volunteer centres has primarily been in disadvantaged communities or hard to reach groups (including workless individuals). The justification for support here is therefore very much on *equity* grounds
- *acquisition and utilisation of assets*: this theme covers asset management and purchase physical assets (buildings). The rationale for RDA intervention includes *equity* arguments (e.g. for asset management), but also seeks to address perceived market barriers faced by VCS organisations (for example in bringing together a critical mass of infrastructure activities in one place), and therefore address issues of *market power* and *imperfect information*
- *core infrastructure services*: these are primarily justified on *equity* and *public goods* grounds
- *neighbourhood infrastructure*: these are primarily justified on equity grounds through increasing resources going to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the focus on stimulating economic related activities

- *partnership*: this was seen as a cross-cutting theme and could be justified on *public goods* grounds.

These issues are considered further in the thematic sections and more extensively in the section on impact.

2.3. Undertaking the Evaluation

The evaluation proceeded in three phases in 2007, 2008 and 2009 respectively. The research in 2007 focused on the development of an evaluation framework, interviewing stakeholders and an initial review of data. The research in 2008 undertook to complete the substantive research tasks around five separate themes and to run a programme of masterclasses. The research in 2009 focused on the primary fieldwork around core infrastructure services, an extensive round of stakeholder interviews, analysis of final monitoring data, and analysis of an array of other data sources (notably the NSTSO and financial account data). Judgements to inform the estimate of impact have also been made.

3. Policy Context

3.1. National

A core aim of current policy is to ‘re-balance’ the relationships between central and local government, and between local government, communities and citizens. In 2005 Government identified two central and closely interconnected challenges¹:

- to secure sustainable improvements in public services; and
- to re-engage citizens with the institutions of government.

The Local Government White Paper (Building Strong and Prosperous Communities, (2006) and the subsequent Local Government and Public Health Involvement Act (LGPHI, 2007) reinforce the need for citizens and communities to shape policy, services and place. ‘Neighbourhoods’ are seen to provide the interface between local, central government and the public and involving residents in governance is seen as significant in potentially changing the relationships between statutory agencies and communities. The ‘Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance’ draft consultation (CLG, 2007c) focused on this cultural shift (the ‘new settlement’) as enshrined in recent policy formulation. Components of the Guidance include:

- a recognition that every place is different with distinctive strengths and needs
- a new approach that creates space for distinctive local priorities and local innovation
- a commitment to widen and deepen the involvement of local communities in shaping their own future
- an enhanced role for elected members at the neighbourhood level.

In addition, government has published a Third Sector Strategy (CLG 2007a) which promotes a greater role for voluntary and community sector in ensuring responsiveness to need and a greater role in delivering services.

Implementation is planned to take place in part through Local Area Agreements. Of particular relevance is the national PSA 21 which aims to build more cohesive, empowered and active communities and comprises six indicators relating to the extent to which communities feel they can influence decisions, the extent of active citizenship and volunteering, the level of neighbourliness and people in an area getting on well together.

Specific programmes and initiatives to help create and embed the new settlement are in various stages of being piloted, tested and evaluated and many are contained within the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) Empowerment Action Plan (CLG, 2007b). These include Participatory Budgeting - involving local people in making decisions about resource allocation and is most likely to be successful at neighbourhood / community level; Community Anchor Development - the development of community led centres as a way of supporting community sector

¹ ‘Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter’ (ODPM)

infrastructure in neighbourhoods and future sustainability of community driven development and responsive local services (a proposal in *Communities in Control* Empowerment White Paper, to establish 'communitybuilders' programme to support this initiative; Neighbourhood Charters - agreements between local authorities / public agencies and communities that set out expectations on both sides and ultimately rely on some form of neighbourhood partnership between service providers, decision makers and communities; the development of social enterprise and the community management of assets - local authorities are encouraged to assess where ownership and management of assets located within neighbourhoods best lie.

Within these national policies and guidance sits *the recognition that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for neighbourhood arrangements*; so the challenge is to identify key principles and baseline approaches which can be applied across the board and relate to current council and partner structures but can be adapted as relevant into the local setting.

In July 2008, the Empowerment White Paper was published, including elements around community involvement in the design and delivery of local public services and support for active citizenship.

3.2. Regional and Local Policy Agendas: the backdrop to SYSIP

Funding for Neighbourhood Infrastructure was implemented against the backdrop of the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, now being implemented in a range of ways, including the creation of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (implemented through Area Based Grants) to sharpen the economic aspects of neighbourhood renewal. Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships also have played a supporting role to local authorities and their partners, for example:

- demographic change, increased diversity and community cohesion
- differing needs and demands across communities and neighbourhoods.²

However, what became evident through our research in neighbourhoods for the evaluation was that 'neighbourhood agendas' in the context of regional policy programmes is not new and need in all cases to be assessed over a longer time horizon. Two key catalysts in this have been the use of Structural Funds to support community economic development (since the 1994-96 Objective 2 programmes) and the use of SRB programmes in the sub-region. Both have given a priority to neighbourhood action, although in the case of the Structural Funds this has been with a strong economic focus and a strong community engagement focus. The South Yorkshire Objective 1 programme (with both its commitment to CAPs and the Pioneer Areas) sought to create a more level playing field – with the intensity of aid to neighbourhoods capped on a per capita basis.

However, by the start of the Objective 1 programme it appears that some neighbourhood organisations had built far greater capacity than others – in part reflecting the receipt of greater funding, but also for reasons of organisational capacity and entrepreneurialism. Against this backdrop further changes were occurring. For instance, within Sheffield NEDAs (Neighbourhood Economic Development Agencies) were proposed together with a strengthening of Community

² For example, 'leadership and community engagement might be key in driving up performance in Neighbourhoods', (Yorkshire and Humber Regional Improvement & Efficiency Strategy 2008-2011 – updated 21 May 2008).

Anchor Organisations. However, with a change in the political landscape Sheffield, further changes have brought the establishment of neighbourhood assemblies (covering a larger area than the CAPs), the end of area panels, and the prospect of devolved budgets and participatory budgeting. The change in direction in Sheffield is alongside a commitment to move from an agenda of reducing the gap in an array of inequalities between areas to one focused more squarely on inequalities between people.

The development of Community Assemblies (CA) has brought an increasing awareness that there is a need for structures and engagement mechanisms that sit below the Community Assemblies as they cover such wide areas. In the North East area the CA team is looking to include three major community organisations on the Partner Panel that would broadly reflect the geographical spread of the area. They do not think that one organisation could provide the CA with wide enough access to local organisations and knowledge.

By contrast, Barnsley did not receive the funding requested to support its neighbourhood activities, but did receive investment to support neighbourhood partnership development. BMBC's emphasis was therefore placed on supporting the Association for Community Partnerships (BACP). As a result of the support a successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund's BASIS funding stream was made. The BASIS project proposes a joint model for subsidiarity, whereby core infrastructure is provided centrally and promotes neighbourhood development. At the same time BMBC is instrumental in supporting this model of infrastructure to develop its community leadership role.

4. About Neighbourhood Infrastructure

4.1. What is Neighbourhood Infrastructure?

We found no common definition of neighbourhood infrastructure. It appears to comprise the following:

- knowledge of local needs and what is on the ground
- an accessible and visible base
- engagement staff
- leadership and opportunities for voice and influence
- access to information
- access to relevant services
- sense of place and identity
- a partnership framework.

The primary functions of neighbourhood infrastructure are conceived as:

- access to relevant services at the most local level, and
- access to partnership bodies and decision makers.

The variance in the way in which community forums have used the funding investment and shaped themselves into a particular 'form', tends to centre on the relative emphasis between these two functions, and the presence of a reasonably local but larger VCS body which can provide additional support – those now described as Neighbourhood Economic Development Agencies (NEDAs) in the Sheffield context.

Neighbourhood Economic Development Agencies (NEDAs)

NEDAs are neighbourhood based third sector organisations that lead [on] economic development in their area. They vary in size and the range of activities that they undertake, but they all engage with local people and businesses to help them improve their economic circumstances.

The work of NEDAs is not confined in all cases simply to addressing issues relating to employment, skills and enterprise. In some cases NEDAs will also fulfil other roles that are crucial to their neighbourhoods and are a valuable service to key stakeholders (including Sheffield City Council). A NEDA might, for example, also provide services aimed at improving the local environment, providing activities for young people, or delivering services for elderly people.

NEDAs can be 'issue specific', for example concentrating upon addressing economic challenges facing particular communities of interest such as women and BME communities.

NEDAs will always be community anchor organisations.

The rationale for this model of neighbourhood infrastructure is that it involves high levels of community engagement, and that funding bodies, recognising these benefits to services, make investments in a core staff team. An example of this is ZEST (formerly known as NUCA), where neighbourhood infrastructure is seen to provide a mechanism for public sector agencies to engage with people and respond to the 'sensitivities' of individual neighbourhoods: that is they challenge the *"assumption that poor people are the same wherever they are"* (L Moynahan, ZEST). Neighbourhood infrastructure therefore seeks to provide the opportunity for local communities to articulate their needs and inform agencies about the ways in which they need to tailor their services within a locality.

Staff are required to ensure engagement of communities, communication mechanisms - newsletters are viewed as significant in getting information out, and to some extent bringing in local views and feedback - and overwhelmingly to help create a sense of 'place'.

Example: Parson Cross Forum

This forum developed a strategy which focused on physical and environmental change in the area, together with providing support to small community groups with practical help, such as with bookkeeping and small grants. Although its geographical boundaries are 'fuzzy', this appears to help neighbourhood based bodies understand residents' perceptions of what constitutes the neighbourhood (as opposed to using formal administrative boundaries).

In Barnsley, SYSIP funding has been used to develop more of a subsidiarity model of infrastructure. This approach *"places services at the geographic level from which they can best be delivered"*; and *"If realistically applied can deliver generic, grassroots and community development alongside strategic works. Provides a genuine contribution to YF objectives through links to community and long-term VCS development"*. (Meridian Pure, 2004b).

ZEST claims to provide a model of what this can deliver in practice: the library stocks books in Arabic and employs Arabic and Somali speakers, the Advice Centre can deal knowledgeably with queries on specific immigration, and issues pertinent to migrant families are picked up immediately through local intelligence. The argument here is that statutory bodies would rely more heavily on *data* rather than *local intelligence*.

The rationale is that SYSIP has provided the conditions (primarily funding) to enable a range of different organisations to emerge which are each sensitive to local conditions: a contrast here can be drawn between Lowedges Forum (serving a predominantly White area) and Broomhall Forum (serving a younger and more ethnically diverse area). It was also stressed that neighbourhood forums act independently – as one respondent noted *"it is not healthy to have agents of service providers as the only route to gather intelligence on whether services are working well or not – people can have a tendency to say what they think you want to hear."* Of course, the neighbourhood infrastructure bodies are not necessarily independent either. To be sustainable, these *independent* bodies need secure funding from statutory agencies.

4.2. Who benefits from neighbourhood infrastructure?

“Neighbourhood infrastructure is a community based organisation trying to listen to the community and developing the organisation in order to respond to need.”

The activities of community forums vary but in most cases achieving appropriate service provision at the most local level is paramount: the example of the Lowedges Community and Safety Forum sees providing access to local services as its key aim. There are therefore many examples of how individual residents have benefited from this increased access to services, many of which have been locally devised to meet identified need, for example, the health walks group, the writers’ workshop. Lowedges Community and Safety Forum has evidence of how it has contributed to people feeling less isolated – connecting young mothers into services and groups for example. This is illustrated by the following cases of individual experiences:

Individual Accounts of Lowedges Forum

I was introduced to the Forum by a friend. A chance meeting one night when she asked me if I would consider helping out at the local Youth Club, as they were short of staff and could do with someone to help in the Art room. At the time I was unemployed and welcomed the distraction. I soon started to look forward to my Tuesday evenings as a play worker. In fact it was this, and the children that made me realize what a bright future this country has. I was interviewed for one of the paid vacancies and was fortunate enough to be accepted.

The Forum suggested that certain qualifications would be advantageous and provided the funding for me to attain certificates in Health & Safety Playworx Training, Child Protection, Playworx Core Chunks-Team, Playworx Training-Play, Challenging Behaviour, Food Hygiene and Emergency / Child & Baby First Aid. As well as the Tuesday Youth Club I was also asked to take part in the Play Schemes that we have during the holiday periods. It was suggested that I might start teaching Art at the Learning wing and again the Forum provided the funding for me to achieve passes in the 7302 Certificate in Delivering Learning and the level 3 Certificate in Education Principles and Practice.

I have never encountered anything like the support I have received from the Lowedges Community and Safety Forum. I have realized my life’s ambition of teaching and have increased my subjects to include many forms of ICT. I have discovered the wonderful world of Children. I have found friendship in every corner of this estate through them. I have put 9 certificates on my wall and intend to start the Cert ED Degree course later this year. I have become a very proud member of the Forum ... I am at this time happier than I ever have been, ...none of it would have happened had it not been for the Lowedges Community and Safety Forum.

Chris.J.Parker

I had been ill for years, ... and instead of taking loads of medication to keep it under control I wanted to do something different. Then I heard about the Lowedges Community Wing opening (managed by Lowedges Community & Safety Forum) and that’s when my whole life changed; I took a big step forward. I was one of the very first learners to attend the Wing. I did a variety of courses .. When the tutor was ill and had some time off work, the Forum asked me if I would stand in for her. That’s when my teaching experience began. ...I began with City & guilds in Delivering Learning, ...I am now hoping to do a Cert Ed. Whatever happens I hope to be teaching at the Community Wing for many years to come – because this is where it all began!!!

Tracey Bridges

I left school at 15 with low grade CSE.s having been truant for a lot of the last two years of my schooling, but with my life and career mapped out before me. Overnight I went from being a fit active person to someone who barely had the energy to get dressed and was in severe pain most of the time. I lost all of my confidence and self esteem. It has been a long slow process of rehabilitation over the last few years to reach where I am now.

It began by agreeing to give a friend some mutual support by enrolling in a Painting Plaster Mouldings course at Lowedges Community & Safety Forum for two hours once a week. As my health and my stamina slowly improved, this was followed by a computer course for beginners. Shortly afterwards I embarked on an Open University course entitle "Open to Change". This gave me the supported opportunity to re- evaluate my life, and to try and work out how I was going to fill the gap left by the loss of not just my career but also my way of life ... - if and when I got better.

Many other computer courses followed and I became a learning mentor. Eventually I was persuaded to apply for a part time administration job at Lowedges Community & Safety Forum. Slowly my confidence increased and the staff at Lowedges encouraged me to apply for another part time administration job. Shortly afterwards it was suggested that I might like to become a tutor. I have since completed the City & Guilds 7302 and the J.E.B. Certificate in the Principles & Practice of Delivering Education and I hope to go on to University to study for the Certificate in Education.

Thanks to the opportunities given to me by Lowedges Community & Safety Forum I have regained control of my life, I am no longer dependent on benefits and I have a future.

Gillian Dyal

Community groups and infrastructure bodies are made up of active volunteers and the personal development of these people is also evident. *"Objective 1 set a lot of things off and a number of people developed substantial skills particularly around governance in their roles as Trustees. There's a lot of responsibility involved"* (BACP).

Community groups and organisations also benefit – directly, for example through payroll services (Parson Cross) and development support (Forum support for Lowedges Toddler Group) or indirectly through strategic planning and funding bids which lever in additional resources. Indeed, community groups are the prime beneficiaries of the South Sheffield BME Infrastructure Project. This project has provided the organisational development support needed to 'move on' small or relatively new BME community based groups so that they can benefit from the changing culture and resource base of the voluntary and community sector. These organisations are moving towards a much more enterprising outlook and have benefited for example from being able to apply their learning to relationships formed with the Chamber of Commerce.

The wider community benefits through this might not always be obviously attributable to the neighbourhood body by the beneficiaries. For example, SOAR has led the improvements in local transport services which have resulted in mainstreaming bus services to link the area's neighbourhoods and communities.

5. Process Outcomes

5.1. Introduction

The SYSIP investment appears to have enabled SOAR to secure funding for a range of locally based projects and to manage contracts on behalf of its constituent neighbourhoods. It is believed that these developments could not have been achieved with SRB 5 (the funding source it had prior to SYSIP) and they needed the longer term investment and the availability of capital investment.

Lowedges Forum describes how SYSIP funds have enabled development which was not possible before: for example the Forum was previously running IT classes but in a small and inappropriate space; it now operates through dedicated space (at the community wing developed in the local school) and at a much higher and more effective level. Similarly, the youth provision has stretched to meet the needs of different age ranges. Other funds drawn in for more specific provision, it is argued, have only been forthcoming because of the infrastructure development enabled through the SYSIP programme. For example it enabled the Forum to rent additional office space in another flat as the office base for some of the older people's work.

Other examples were cited as to how infrastructure bodies can use their intelligence around local need, and their co-ordinating role, to attract additional resources into the communities in which they are based. The South Sheffield BME Project used its partnership status to bring together providers to gain an overview of the services delivered by the third sector. This has resulted in the 'selling' of some community based youth engagement services. SOAR has used its strategic development role to support the development of physical 'hubs' of activity in the six neighbourhoods it covers – based on the co-location of mainstream service provision, locally tailored services and community activities. This creates a critical mass and momentum which attracts new resources.

In addition, infrastructure bodies managing relatively large sums of money appear to have developed financial management expertise which provides the basis for further locally based resource management. An example given here was that of Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships which it is argued would not have secured its BASIS funding without being able to evidence its track record in fund management and project delivery.

There were also found to be examples of forums operating at different scales. For example, Parson Cross Forum is currently fundraising for a new cooking range so that a luncheon club can cater for more people, "*How would that need be filled if we weren't here?*"; whilst Lowedges Forum works closely with a range of different organisations to support locally based provision. For example it has levered in funding to support Sheffield Churches Council for Community Care in its work at the Terminus Café, with older people and with asylum seekers, and has also brought in the services of Woodseats Advice Centre and Adult Learning. Lowedges Forum has also worked with other forums to ensure that it can benefit from economies of scale where appropriate.

5.2. Adding Value to Mainstream Service Delivery

A common argument for investment in neighbourhood infrastructure is that it *adds value to the delivery of mainstream services*. We found some evidence that this might be the case.

SOAR's strategy is to develop clusters of activity focused on a natural neighbourhood centre. For example, LOCAL on Longley has led to services reaching people they did not have before and the Healthy Living Network is overseeing the PCT Enhanced Public Health Programme in the SOAR area. SOAR has a deliberately spatial model for area development: following from a masterplan for the physical development of the area which is a key part of its strategy for Housing Market Renewal funding. It is argued that collaborative implementation therefore becomes possible: for example a neighbourhood management pilot – ultimately contributing to 'successful neighbourhoods' – sought to ensure that services deliver services in line with resident needs. Indeed, the Area Panel is keen for joint working with the SOAR Board on the basis that it can contribute to community engagement.

ZEST also offered evidence for similarly impressive claims. The local library opening times have increased from 20 to 100 hours a week at no extra cost as a result of ZEST influencing the way that the library operates. This appears to have resulted in a doubling of library usage, with a 50 percent increase in users in who are from Black or Minority Ethnic groups. ZEST also suggests that this has led to an increase in local PCT contracts which have led to locally based cardiac rehabilitation – which is cheaper, more accessible and has greater take-up. The rationale for ZEST is that its starting point is to be an influencer of mainstream services for their improvement and only deliver services as a last resort.

5.3. Geographic Scale of Community Anchor Organisations

The Sheffield CAPs programme has funded infrastructure at different levels – though this requires clearly defined and differentiated functions. It has been suggested that neighbourhoods are a recognised community of around 5,000 people (2,000 households) but support services can be located on a larger basis if they are more 'light touch' (for example at a ward level).

In Barnsley, BACP believes that *"People want it on their own patch and in terms they can understand ... grassroots, close to the ground; working directly with people"*. And whilst the term neighbourhood infrastructure has been described as *"a basic skeleton that enables things to take shape and do what they need to do"* (SSP), investment in its formation has contributed to some highly strategic and broader based organisations.

This has raised questions as to where Community Anchor Organisations sit. Many community forums define themselves as holding the community anchor mantle – partly on the basis of identifying what would be lost if they were to disappear.

Definition of a Community Anchor Organisation

The use of Community Anchor Organisations in neighbourhood and communities policy in the United Kingdom dates from the Home Office *Firm Foundations* report (2004). This report noted that CAOs are: Strong, sustainable community-based organisations can provide a crucial focus and support for community development and change in their neighbourhood or community. We are calling them 'community anchor organisations' because of the solid foundation they give to a wide variety of self-help and capacity building activities in local communities, and because of their roots within their communities. We need to target our efforts better to enable more organisations to develop into the role of community 'anchor', and to promote a common understanding of what distinguishes the many thousands of groups and organisations operating at community level from those which can be said to play an anchor role in the way described here.

The report went on to set out four common features of CAOs:

- they are controlled by local residents and/or representatives of local groups
- they address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way
- they are committed to the involvement of all sections of their community, including marginalised groups
- they facilitate the development of the communities in their area

Home Office (2004), *Firm Foundations – the Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building*, p. 20

As one forum states, if an organisation has delivered a community action plan with community engagement in its governance arrangements, and the organisational development necessary for ensuring access to services, it deserves to be deemed a community anchor organisation. On the other hand, the South Sheffield BME Infrastructure project sees itself as a hub, under the umbrella of the South Sheffield Project.

SYSIP has been significant in that it provides learning about the different levels at which some infrastructure is required, and this is informing the Sheffield model of NEDAs, and future investment in economic and social development. In *North Sheffield* for example, Parson Cross Forum emphasises its independence and sees itself as a community anchor at neighbourhood level: "*Without Parson Cross Forum there would be no infrastructure dedicated to Parson Cross that does what we do. Things would become fragmented. Services would become ad hoc. We fill that gap ...[without funding] ... The Forum would stay visible but none of the other activities would happen; there would be no extra engagement. SOAR do not have the capacity to deliver this – they use the Forum's outputs.*" However the forum recognises that they would have struggled without SOARs capacity to draw in additional funding, pulling together five disparate neighbourhood strategies and seeking to develop an asset base for neighbourhood activities in the future.

In *South Sheffield* there is a different model of infrastructure support at the level above the neighbourhood and project bodies but it is nonetheless seen to be important. The BME Infrastructure Project tailors support to the needs of organisations, but aims to link them into a sub district partnership which can then help them to link to city wide and national agendas. The partnership infrastructure of SSP is used to coordinate involvement and can see its future role as encompassing area-based commissioning role. For example, it is bringing together training organisations based in its 12 neighbourhoods and making one approach to the 8 potential contractors for DWP Employability funding, used to promote the organisations who can reach the hardest to find at neighbourhood level, provide locally based facilities and job brokerage. SSP therefore can provide a single point

of contact regarding the commissioning of services. SSP has a legitimate role in co-ordinating activities across the member neighbourhoods 'as an honest broker and keeping it simple' and ensuring that 'voice' is matched with influence.

The Barnsley picture is similar: "*The growth of Community Partnerships in Barnsley has been mirrored by the development and evolving role of the Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships (BACP). BACP has played a key role in the development of the Community Partnerships in providing a structure, assisting them to become more professional and to act on a more strategic level.*" (ERS/BACP, 2006).

These 'second tier' partnerships and strategic co-ordinating bodies are significant and have a particular strategic research and development function which isn't always necessary or appropriate at the neighbourhood level. But, as one project manager remarked, *infrastructure is about the building blocks / the connecting threads* and as such this is as vital at the very local level as much as at a sub-district one. Indeed, it is the neighbourhood membership of the larger bodies that keeps them relevant and purposeful – a threat to their sustainability highlighted across our interviews. Such sustainability is more straight forward when there is a clearer role in managing funding and a focus for accountability and discussion.

6. Plausibility and Sustainability

6.1. Introduction

A separate report is concerned with output target achievement. An examination of the project documentation for our case study projects suggests that outputs have been exceeded. However, one project manager did comment that within the framework of SYSIP and Sheffield CAPs, there should have been greater flexibility to share targets. For example, rather outputs could have been pooled across neighbourhood action plans.

6.2. Target Achievement

The monitoring returns show that across most output categories, outputs have exceeded those anticipated. In addition, the BME Infrastructure Project has identified outputs achieved which were not part of the original agreement. There are some targets however – particularly in relation to employment and educational improvements which are difficult to assess. SOAR would like to see more regular Quality of Life surveys in order that it can evidence the change and improvement it believes has taken place.

Although not popular at the start, several organisations now value the ‘entry qualifications’ to SYSIP. The Community Action Plans formed an integral management tool for the funders but they also encouraged organisations to plan their futures in an intelligent and strategic manner. For some, this was the first time that they had set out clear list of priorities and a thorough project development plan with timescales and outcomes. It has proved a useful learning exercise and enabled robust assessment on progress. Allied to this is the impact that the programme has had on governance and probity – staff, trustees and management committee members have recognised the importance of well managed organisations in order to maximise the benefits of the funding. SOAR for example, uses its SLAs with neighbourhood bodies to influence good governance and quality assurance systems.

SYSIP has enabled tailored support to meet the specific needs of BME organisations. The BME infrastructure Trendsetter project has worked at a micro level to identify the training needs of BME organisations, and then to identify the necessary training and support required. This has included disability awareness, policy knowledge, enterprise development, business planning, quality assurance, marketing and legal knowledge. The first year of the project was seen as about the ‘development journey’ with the second (the current year) providing an opportunity to put the learning into practice within a supported environment.

Disentangling the net impact of the projects is a complex task and one which we discuss in more detail in section 10. The task is made more complex for the array of funding introduced to support activities at different levels: from accountable body down to the project. Moreover, projects often address the aims of other programmes, for example *ChangeUp*, and finally the introduction of public service funding makes it difficult to attribute neighbourhood change to the SYSIP funding.

Recent research by CRESR as part of the New Deal for Communities programme suggests that total public expenditure per resident in deprived communities is between £5,000 and £5,500. In comparison to NDC, which provides around £500 per resident per year, funding from SYSIP is much smaller, amounting to perhaps as little as £35 per resident per year. The areas of greatest public expenditure in deprived communities tends to be around social welfare benefits (unemployment, sickness, income and housing related benefits) followed by expenditure of health (including social care), education and policing.

6.3. Sustainability

Results appear to be mixed in terms of the sustainability of the activities and organisations funded by SYSIP. It was noted that some community forums have now ceased to exist (for example Arbourthorne and Norfolk Park in Sheffield) whilst others appear to continue to require substantial assistance and support. This is not necessarily a criticism of these forums, but rather reflects our earlier argument that organisational and individual capacities vary, along with their capacity to draw down further funding, in the form of service income or grants.

With regard to financial sustainability however, the picture is more complex. Certainly, some organisations have used SYSIP investment to develop social enterprises, to better prepare for the procurement agenda, and to be able to more effectively apply for future funds and deliver successful projects. For example, Lowedges Community and Safety Forum is in a much better position than it was five years ago to understand its current strengths and weaknesses, and develop a diverse funding base, which is less reliant on a small number of funders. This is illustrated by its use of a tendering readiness toolkit, outlined below.

Table 6.1: Lowedges Community and Safety Forum – tendering readiness

| Issue Identified by using the Tendering Toolkit | Action to address the Issue Identified |
|--|---|
| Existing systems used to measure results of our work, encouraged by our current funders, focus on numbers/outputs rather than wider outcomes for beneficiaries. | Develop and implement systems to measure outcomes and wider benefits of our work (links to social audit above) |
| The size of the organisation and the geographical area we cover may limit the number of tendering opportunities and make us less attractive to organisations aiming to contract with larger organisations. | Where appropriate work in partnership with other local providers e.g. B&J Forum and Gleadless Valley Forum to deliver services at a district level. Increase involvement and representation within the South Sheffield Partnership to enable us to become a potential sub contractor for services delivered at area level. |

The SYSIP support for development of the larger community based organisations such as BACP, SOAR, ZEST and SSP alongside the neighbourhood forums, also gives greater likelihood of sustainability. These organisations, although covering large areas, have relatively small delivery teams and to a large extent enable an array of other activities.

However, it was noted that there are limits to the extent which activities can be self financing – especially in poorer, perhaps less attractive and peripheral neighbourhoods. Some consideration needs to be given in making such an assessment of sustainability and future funding: *Large buildings will always require*

investment –but if this programme has got them to be 50 per cent (self sustaining financially, then this can be viewed as) successful.

Critical to the BACP BASIS bid and its success was that it is part of a bigger programme alongside BMBC and VAB. In addition, BACP has developed the systems to be an accountable body. The SYSIP investment in partnership development then has played a significant role in providing some sustainability for the neighbourhood partnerships and their development in Barnsley.

More generally it was noted that the sustainability and impact of SYSIP is in terms of the way it has changed the neighbourhood agenda. For instance, it was noted that many neighbourhoods are sustainable in that the confidence has been generated that local people can make a difference – and people are therefore more likely to stay and become involved. Equally, it was noted that partnership development has brought positive and perhaps irreversible effects on mainstream agencies, *“Health and library services will never go back to how they were”*.

6.4. Conclusion: a legacy of SYSIP?

In addition to the negative perceptions on the value of CAOs and neighbourhood infrastructure, there has not been any policy follow through from the SYSIP programme into the development of the Community Assemblies or the Community Involvement strategy. This could be due in part to turnover in key members of staff in the Council. It could also reflect the fact that SYSIP did not have a profile or identity as a programme and did not link to recognisable Council policies around economic development or neighbourhoods at the time.

The level of resources coming into Sheffield has reduced with the end of SRB and the Objective 1 Programme. Alongside this, the distribution of resources within the city has been changed in order to pick up smaller pockets of deprivation, previously hidden within larger areas. This has had the effect of spreading resources more widely. For example, the North East Assembly area has experienced a reduction of 40 percent in the move from WNF to Area Based Grant.

The ABG process has been a source of tension both within the VCS and between the VCS and the City Council. A number of neighbourhood infrastructure organisations were not successful and this has placed their continuing existence under threat. There are differing views as to whether the ABG process was clear and transparent or whether VCS organisations did not have the outcome based evidence or the capacity needed to prepare successful applications.

The funding ‘cliff’ has been a long time coming and is not unexpected. The larger VCS organisations have been better placed to position themselves but the sector as a whole could have done more to prepare. Area Based Grant allocations have provided some transitional funding for some organisations and other organisations have ceased to function or are moribund. Sheffield City Council through its *Review of Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Review* in 2009 has started a process to explore how the sector should be funded in the future and what it could deliver against local public policy agendas.

The understanding amongst officers and VCS organisations is that the sector will never be sustainable solely from contract income. It requires a diversity of support. Organisational needs vary considerably: some have limited opportunities to secure contract income, whilst others are better placed. In the context of neighbourhood organisations, the latter are often larger organisations with a clearer role vis-à-vis service delivery. Smaller community organisations may be able to access funds to

deliver services and activities, but without funding for core costs they will not be in a position to do this. There is no commitment to identify resources within the City Council to support core costs.

The requirement from Community Assemblies to work across larger areas and to cover the whole of that area maybe a driver for greater coordination from neighbourhood organisations. A concern in Sheffield around is that the Community Assembly areas are large and do not coincide with 'natural commuties'.

Capacity building is a long term activity and often requires successive rounds of funding. For instance the community hubs in the SOAR area were only completed and up and running two years ago. This has placed extensive demands on the local forums to manage the buildings and start to generate income. This has had mixed results. In Shirecliffe, where the hub is shared with the Children's Centre, enough income is generated to pay for the staffing. There is no surplus that could be invested in community development. A more planned approach is necessary to supporting organisations and preparing them to take on the management of buildings and staff.

The difficulties in evidencing the impact of capacity building and particularly community development mean that these activities are often the first to go as resources become tighter. In SOAR, the community engagement posts attached to the forums have gone; this is reflected at Gleadless Valley Forum. When Norfolk Park Forum folded a member of staff was transferred to Gleadless Valley Forum to continue the work on community engagement, sustaining the function rather than the organisation that had hosted it. Nonetheless, these activities did provide the basis for local involvement, critical to the achievement of key LAA targets (notably NI 6 and NI 7).

7. Strategic Added Value

The evaluation is required to make a qualitative assessment of the contribution to Strategic Added Value by Yorkshire Forward's role. The following table summarises the findings from the previous sections.

Table 7.1: Neighbourhood infrastructure and the Strategic Added Value of Yorkshire Forward

| Dimension of Strategic Added Value | Assessment |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Strategic leadership and catalyst | <p>Continued funding from Yorkshire Forward has provided more time for BACP and some of the Community Forums in Sheffield to adjust to new funding regimes and identify opportunities for service income. This is not necessarily the case in all areas – and often the poorest neighbourhoods, where some community forums have ceased.</p> <p>However, insufficient collective leadership appears to have been shown by Yorkshire Forward, key funders (notably the local authorities) and the voluntary and community sector in charting a more sustainable future for neighbourhood infrastructure - at whether at the same or smaller scale. There are important lessons here for future planning.</p> |
| Strategic influence | <p>The main influence YF appear to have exerted (beyond its funding) appears to be around its requirement that programmes such as SYSIP would not be funded again – prompting responses from infrastructure organisations and statutory partners to seek alternative approaches. It is arguable however as to the extent of this influence: many of these agendas were already being set nationally and taken up by local government.</p> |
| Leverage | <p>The success of neighbourhood infrastructure investment has been inconsistent. Additional leverage has been achieved where organisations' had a clear vision for growth and sufficient capacity to realise that vision.</p> |
| Synergy | <p>YF funding sustained a model and to a large extent a scale of infrastructure beyond previous Objective 1 funding. To some extent this scale of infrastructure may have been inappropriate – in particular around the multiple levels of administration and partnership required to coordinate a relatively small number of projects. Implementation alongside Objective 1 also led to additional levels of monitoring which do not appeared to have added value to programme implementation.</p> |
| Engagement | <p>Central to the Sheffield CAPs and BACP has been engagement of residents in regeneration. The funding has enabled this and should be seen as a major success of the programme.</p> |

8. Conclusion, Good Practice and Recommendations

8.1. Introduction: The future of neighbourhood infrastructure

SYSIP has had mixed success in terms of its key objectives around sustainability. This is especially the case for neighbourhood infrastructure. Where there has been a commitment to support infrastructure organisations and where those organisations have had sufficient scale, it has worked well. It has also been recognised that neighbourhood infrastructure requires a mix of funding. Moreover in the transitional period to Community Assemblies in Sheffield, transition funding has been provided to certain organisations - both at a City level through ABG allocations and at a local level through the CAs themselves. But this has to some extent been ad hoc and dependent on the emergence of a city-wide strategy. In the interim it appears to have been driven by the knowledge and understanding of the VCS amongst the CA managers who also have an understanding of the value of neighbourhood infrastructure in providing access to smaller groups, particularly those where residents come together over specific issues such as mother and toddler or 'Friends of...' groups.

There is the possibility that Community Involvement may be an activity that Community Assemblies commission from neighbourhood infrastructure. It could be defined as a generic activity and partner resources pooled to commission it from community forums. Neighbourhood organisations could come together in 'empowerment' consortia. There is tension around this from some elected members with the perception that the role of neighbourhood infrastructure as a means of 'voice' will diminish as local Councillors develop and reclaim their role as community leaders. There is also an emphasis on embedding community involvement in to the DNA of the Council. This is long term and challenging culture change. It also assumes a diminishing role for neighbourhood organisations as engagement between council services and individuals improves.

CA officers recognise the need for a hierarchy of neighbourhood infrastructure that will provide the links from the grass roots through to the Community Assembly. Community Forums are too small to operate in isolation and there are too many community organisations (such as tenant and resident associations) for the CA teams to engage directly with all of them, let alone reach the individuals that they engage with. On the one hand, the CA Assembly teams want organisations to come together in order to streamline their routes into the community. Where neighbourhood infrastructure does not exist they are trying to encourage the development of structures. On the other hand, community organisations are starting to meet and collaborate with each other in order to position themselves with regard to the Community Assembly, form consortia around adult learning contracts and advice services.

There is an assumption that neighbourhood organisations will need to justify their existence in terms of outcomes; to come together to avoid duplication and to address needs across a Community Assembly area; to become more innovative and democratic; to operate with less resources and with more volunteers. There is a continuing need and use for neighbourhood infrastructure. There is no city-wide strategy yet that addresses this and no resources allocated to ensure it. This a short sighted approach. If the infrastructure crumbles, then over time it will have to be re-

built in order to address the compounding of problems that will occur in the neighbourhoods, particularly the more deprived neighbourhoods. There is likely to be a move towards a focus on local economic development over the next 12 months – a field where neighbourhood organisations have generally claimed to be their own through employment and skills projects and also through volunteering opportunities. The Assemblies and partner agencies are developing their approach to commissioning services locally, but they may find that by the time they are ready to do this the neighbourhood infrastructure may have collapsed.

At the same time, the VCS needs to respond more strategically and quickly to the changing environment of reduced resources, outcome-based performance management, wider area working. Neighbourhood infrastructure needs to evidence and promote the value of what they deliver and seek to widen their involvement and engagement with communities.

8.2. Good Practice

Reflecting other sections of this report, we tended to find evidence of good practice where there appeared to be certain key factors in place:

- effective partnership working between infrastructure bodies and statutory agencies, in particular the local authority
- organisational and individual capacity to coordinate and deliver activities
- a coherent approach for sustaining community engagement.

It was noticeable that an emphasis on physical development, particularly around services such as health and education, as well as retail, often provided a focus for such engagement.

Sustainability was difficult where these factors were not in place. However, it was often in the poorest communities, sometimes with little tradition of engagement, and without sufficient activists, where neighbourhood forums struggled and projects were not sustained beyond initial funding periods.

These factors were raised as causal factors for the demise of the Norfolk Park and Arbourthorne forums, but also as a long term weakness to other forums where community engagement was weak despite a strong delivery organisation. The MCDT was cited as an example here.

Other neighbourhood forums appeared to struggle and be reliant on key individuals who were some cases faced with conflicting and unreconcilable community tensions. In such cases, local authorities played an important role in ensuring projects were delivered and attempting to broker partnership agreement.

8.3. Recommendations

A conclusion from our evaluation of neighbourhood infrastructure is that infrastructure needs to be configured to local circumstances, have community ownership but should not alone be seen as a panacea for social and economic problems facing neighbourhoods. Statutory agencies need to be responsive to this.

The development of BME infrastructure organisations was found to be important in engaging BME groups, something which general neighbourhood infrastructure alone

would not necessarily do. However, infrastructure development takes time and this is also true for the support of BME groups at a neighbourhood level.

The rationale for community anchor organisations was found to have strong support and certainly evidence of good practice. Key requisites of CAOs appeared to be around a core staff, having local knowledge and being accessible to residents, notably through visible/tangible activities. As such they could provide links to service providers.

Although Sheffield has developed a model of community forums with larger and more strategic bodies operating above them (e.g. SOAR, MCDT or South Sheffield Partnership), even here these were found to operate in different ways. Attempting to impose a common model is unlikely to work in the short term, not least because of the sunk organisational capital and skills involved.

Finally, neighbourhood infrastructure developments under SYSIP stem from community action planning and community economic development supported under successive Structural Funds programmes from the 1990s. Action planning played an important symbolic part of community economic development and a vehicle which stimulated community participation and engagement. What was striking from the research, however, was that in some areas these had become moribund documents as 'events', 'conflicts' and 'opportunities' had overtaken and displaced community action plans – the documents were seldom consulted or even remembered. Elsewhere, however, especially where documents had a strong spatial component combined to an organisation linked to its delivery, they remained a useful focal point to refer to, to engage with residents on, and to develop.