

THREE RIVERS
A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

“..... for the benefit of all who live and work in and around Gillingham.....”

**COMMUNITY ACTION
PLAN**

2007

SETTING THE SCENE

The Three Rivers Partnership was established in 2003, with the invaluable help of Dorset Community Action and our Community Development Worker. It is a company limited by guarantee, a member of the Development Trust Association and has charitable status.

Three Rivers is run by an elected Board of Trustees, representing a wide range of community organisations, Town and County Councils and the parishes within our area of benefit. Essential to its success are the energy and enthusiasm of a large number of volunteers who have given time and expertise unstintingly to the four working parties initially established:

- Community & Leisure Facilities
- Open Spaces
- Children and Young People
- Meeting Places

Gillingham is a rapidly growing town (population close to 11,000, with another 5,000 living in the villages within the area of benefit) whose amenities and infrastructure do not match its size. A major thrust from the outset has been to secure appropriate community and leisure facilities. In constructive partnership with Gillingham Town Council and North Dorset District Council, positive progress has been made and, currently, business plans are being produced and additional sources of funding being actively researched.

Local people have consistently expressed concern at the rapidity with which green spaces have been swallowed up by residential developments. The Open Spaces group have been active in identifying land which merits protection and conservation and recommending ways in which amenity land can be expanded, enhanced, accessed and enjoyed.

The formation of the four working parties reflects community priorities which have been established by various consultation exercises over the last few years.

During its first year the Partnership went through a systematic visioning exercise in order to establish its own priorities and to inform strategic planning for the future. We felt it was essential to do an independent and thorough-going assessment ourselves of the needs and aspirations of the community so that we could develop a progressive strategy for the future which will drive our subsequent agenda. Already, some of this strategic thinking has been incorporated into the charitable objects presented to the Charity Commission.

To focus discussion we identified key areas for potential development:

- Economic generation
- Culture, Arts & Sport
- Transport
- Our Environment
- Skills & Learning
- Social Well-being

These headings are similar to the major areas of concern identified in the vision statements of other partnerships and conform closely to key issues established by Dorset Strategic Partnership.

For each topic we analysed strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities and highlighted action points which would potentially contribute to the achievement of the vision.

To achieve its ambitions, the Partnership will have to secure considerable capital funding to finance projects and reliable revenue funding to ensure effective administration and management. A Funding Group has been set up and is in the process of developing a business plan for the Partnership.

Since the formation of the partnership excellent relationships have been established with Town and District Councils and exciting projects are being undertaken which increasingly seem realistic and realisable. The Partnership is totally committed to serving the community, by making good serious deficits in provision, enhancing the environment, and promoting the cohesion and community spirit of Gillingham and its hinterland.

The formulation of the original Action Plan took into account the following consultations in Gillingham:

<i>Consultation</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>
The Gillingham Community Profile	Healthworks	1998
The Gillingham Regeneration Study	Driver Jonas	1998
Gillingham Community and Leisure Facilities	Atlantic Consultants	1998
Three Rivers Project	Gillingham Civic Society	1999
Gillingham Community Priorities	DCA	2002
Community Facilities	North Dorset District Council	2002
Leisure/Community Facilities	Three Rivers Partnership	2003

During the period the Partnership was becoming established, the context within which we operate changed radically, generating new responsibilities, challenges and opportunities.

- **Liveability:** North Dorset’s successful bid for Liveability funding has ensured that many of the aspirations set out in our Open Spaces Report have become more achievable. Part of Gillingham’s share of this funding is currently being used to progress key elements of the Open Spaces Five Year Plan and accelerate the project to provide a new Community Facility for Gillingham.
- **LDF:** The Partnership has been actively engaged in the early stages of the development of the new Local Development Framework. The Open Spaces Report represents a critical attempt to ensure that local needs and aspirations provide the context for emerging Planning Strategy.
- **Community Planning Policy:** North Dorset has committed itself to a bottom up model of community planning which has been commended by Defra and is increasingly being seen as a pioneering way for local communities to be given a real voice and support in achieving their aspirations. Local Action Plans are a core element in the strategy.
- **Parish plans:** Parish Plans are also a key component of the Community Planning Strategy. A major challenge for the Market Town based partnerships and Parish Planning groups is to generate a consensus across the district, exploring synergies and ways of working together to avoid parochialism and ensure that resources are fairly distributed.
- **Team North Dorset:** Not only do we have an increasingly listened to voice in establishing policy, we have been given a rôle in monitoring progress towards the successful implementation of policy. NDDC has embarked on an ambitious improvement programme which prioritises and

focuses the Council's activities over the next three years. Responsibility for monitoring the programme will rest with the Team North Dorset Programme Board which includes representation from the town partnerships.

- DSP: Contemporaneously, the Dorset Strategic Partnership has been developing its own Community Strategy, involving all major service providers and representatives from local communities. Three Rivers is directly involved through the DSP's newly established Bridging Group, whose remit is to provide a link between the local and strategic levels of community planning and to feed local concerns and issues into the DSP Board, championing priorities identified by local community planning partnerships and parish plans. The group will act as a link between local community partnerships across Dorset enabling best practice to be shared. The group has the authority to commission and direct work on shared community planning tasks.
- Local Delivery: As a consequence of having its Community Charge capped, North Dorset has been obliged to accelerate the process of devolution of resources and responsibilities to town and village level which is implicit in its Community Planning Strategy. Core non-statutory services are likely to be taken over by towns and villages or disappear entirely. Crucially for Gillingham and its area of benefit, responsibility for Leisure Service is likely to be devolved as a priority.

This rapidly changing situation clearly necessitates changes in the way in which we operate. We have to be geared up to delivering projects and services and proactive in collaborating with neighboring communities, identifying economies of scale and avoiding unnecessary duplication and competition.

The implementation of the vision set out in this document is not, and cannot be, wholly the responsibility of Three Rivers. We are committed to working energetically and pragmatically in partnership with all relevant statutory and voluntary bodies and increasingly we expect the articulation of a Strategic Overview, a collective vision across the District and an agreed distribution of responsibility for realising it.

ECONOMIC GENERATION

From the mid nineteenth century, following the arrival of the railway connecting Gillingham to Salisbury and London, a strong industrial base developed in the town associated with food, agriculture and the building trade. Large scale production and distribution provided considerable employment in the town and the surrounding villages. As a consequence, despite or perhaps even as a consequence of the reduction in agricultural activity, there is a large and skilled workforce, many now self-employed. The skilled artisans of Gillingham go far and wide to ply their trades. Bath, Bristol, Taunton, Poole, Bournemouth, Southampton and Winchester are all within an hour's travel of Gillingham thanks to the motor car. London is less than 2 hours by train.

The tradition of the Free School dating from 1516, its successors the Grammar School and the Secondary Modern are now combined into one of the finest 11-18 Schools in the country, ranked in the top 100 nationally, supported by an outstanding pyramid of town and village primary schools which together provide a well educated and motivated workforce. Low crime levels and "old fashioned" values are combined with quality housing available at relatively affordable prices. Gillingham also offers opportunities for commercial development on land already zoned for it and there are other areas available for redevelopment.

The 50% growth in population in the last fifteen years makes the Gillingham area and North Dorset District one of the fastest growing in the South West. This continuing growth provides excellent opportunities for the retail and service industries.

These advantages have been recognised by discerning international and national organisations. Sigma Aldrich Chemicals led the way on the Brickfields Estate where Dextra Lighting has proved that one can grow a national business from a local beginning. Sherman Chemicals re-located there too when national DIY chain Focus took over and re-developed their site. South West Packaging has grown to meet the needs of many other producers in Southern Britain. Waitrose took the risk, developed a green field site and found that this corner of England filled their store seven days a week. Somerfield raised their game and reinvested in their future. Lidl have recently added to the challenge on the High Street. Many other businesses have grown up around Gillingham. Small ones have grown into larger ones and joined those family run businesses who can trace their roots back into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Traditional and high tech industries co-exist in a rural and yet urban environment which mixes the old and the new very successfully. This is exemplified by the re-location of Neal's Yard Remedies from its former inner city site to the outskirts of Gillingham.

Economic generation is an important part of a vibrant community. Three Rivers will be encouraging its partners and other relevant organisations (e.g. Gillingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry, NDDC) to take up the challenge of these aspects of the vision.

Vision: A thriving local economy providing a range of employment opportunities appropriate to the skills and education of a growing population.

Actions:

- Encourage attractive business parks
- Promote our area, through, for example, Business Fairs
- Encourage inward investment
- Support the establishment of a One Stop Shop for businesses
- Support the increasing trend towards home-working
- Encourage creative & imaginative industries to locate in the area
- Retain well-qualified young people through appropriate job opportunities
- Influence the local development framework

- Support and encourage the establishment of a Credit Union
- Create an environment where SMEs can flourish
- Encourage tourism and promote the Gillingham area as a Gateway to better known tourist destinations
- Encourage the provision of tourist accommodation
- Encourage the provision of more extensive pre-school child care facilities to enable parents to work
- Provide facilities and amenities for young people to encourage retention
- Support initiatives to provide affordable housing in the area
- Incorporate workshop/office/social enterprise units into new Community Facility

CULTURE, ARTS & SPORT

We take it as self-evident that a community's fundamental well-being is critically dependent on adequate opportunities to participate in appropriate cultural, artistic and sporting activities. Such activities are central to a rich community life and fundamental to individuals' physical and mental health, personal fulfilment and sense of self-worth.

There is much to be positive about. Gillingham and its rural hinterland has thriving sports clubs, established performing groups, a film society, an extensive Artsreach programme operating at Gillingham School, an ambitious and highly successful Community Festival, a number of creative businesses. There are nearly 150 organisations serving the varied needs of the local community.

However, facilities generally have not kept up with growth in population. The Leisure Centre has to be replaced and Gillingham has never had a dedicated community facility.

Clearly, there is considerable unmet need but huge potential for development and Three Rivers is playing an energetic and integral role in procuring appropriate Leisure and Community facilities which, as a result of North Dorset District Council's Local Delivery Policy, will be community owned and managed, with responsibility for the current facilities passing to our community prior to the proposed new build.

While, inevitably, we are somewhat preoccupied by this task, we must not become wholly focused on Gillingham. The villages within our area of benefit have deficits, too: lack of sports facilities and village halls urgently needing upgrading, for example.

Vision: Suitable opportunities for all members of our community to be fully engaged in cultural, sporting and artistic activities, underpinned by high quality, accessible facilities appropriate to the diversity of needs of local residents.

Actions:

- Work with Gillingham Town Council and NDDC to provide Leisure & Community facilities to match the needs and aspirations of a rapidly growing population
- Support the villages within the area of benefit in developing and maintaining community facilities
- Encourage affordable access to facilities
- Be proactive in encouraging and promoting the performing and visual arts and community arts projects
- Improve opportunities to enjoy cinema by supporting Moveola/Cinemamobile
- Develop an Arts Forum
- Encourage and support the Gillingham Festival
- Develop a Gillingham & District Sports Forum
- Support all efforts to improve provision for sport and to encourage participation
- Support schemes to extend and improve sports coaching
- Develop schemes to preserve and enhance Gillingham's heritage sites: the Town Bridge and its environs and Kings Court Palace
- Support the replanting of the Royal Forest
- Support the 'Hidden Dorset' project

OUR ENVIRONMENT

The natural beauty of the waterways, countryside and heritage of the area is recognised as a major asset of Gillingham and the surrounding area and a critical factor in its future prosperity. It is essential that future developments, residential, commercial or industrial, do not jeopardize those features of the area which attract people to live here. The loss of open spaces is a major concern to local residents.

It is important to recognise the crucial relationship between the town and its rural hinterland by protecting what is unique in the built and natural environment and heritage, which is highly valued, and enhancing the quality of life of residents by the sensitive management of existing open spaces and the acquisition and development of new ones.

Vision: A thriving, healthy and attractive town sensitively blended into its rural hinterland, cherishing and managing its built and natural environment and valuing and conserving its unique heritage.

Actions:

- Enhance Gillingham town centre
- Ensure that Gillingham satisfies the 'dog-walking test', all resident having close and convenient access to an open space suitable for walking a dog.
- Ensure that pedestrian and cycle access to key amenities is improved so that dependency on cars is reduced, cutting pollution and improving health.
- Encourage access without invasion
- Develop a Design Statement for the town
- Improve pedestrian/ wheelchair access
- Develop a network of river walks/paths which are interconnected and separated from traffic
- Develop or re-develop local forests or tree areas
- Develop proactive planning strategies
- Link open spaces through Local Nature Reserve scheme
- Audit open spaces
- Produce management plans for open spaces designated as public amenities
- Seek to bring key open spaces into community ownership
- Promote Gateway concept
- Develop Community Orchard
- Support Neals Yard in the provision of a Community Herb Garden
- Encourage recycling (working with NDDC)
- Encourage sustainable buildings (design, materials, energy efficiency)

TRANSPORT

The basis for any vision for the future must be the present. Good transport links form part of the attraction of Gillingham to both individuals and businesses wishing to relocate: the town is close to the A303 and benefits from a station on the main line between London Waterloo and the far South West. But the present transport situation also threatens business growth in the town and has an adverse effect on the quality of life of many residents.

While the A303 provides good and fast links to other parts of the country, the roads connecting Gillingham to this major trunk road are all B roads. The local road network is unsuitable for through traffic and heavy goods vehicles can cause major disruption when they reach the town centre, disruption exacerbated by the increase in traffic as the town's population increases.

Trains are not as frequent as many would wish. However, there have been recent improvements in scheduling, several trains have increased capacity and there are later services.

Bus services are generally inadequate, particularly those linking Gillingham with surrounding villages. In the context of global warming and the imperative to reduce carbon emissions, a more highly developed public transport network is desirable. In its absence the enhancement of local amenities to reduce the need to travel is essential.

Additionally, footpaths and cycleways, particularly to and from schools, could be improved.

There is a shortage of long term parking for those working in the town.

Vision: Enhanced transport links into Gillingham, improved management of traffic through Gillingham and better access to schools, work places and community facilities.

Actions:

- Develop a more extensive network of footpaths & cycleways
- Support initiatives to reduce dependency on private cars
- Support the establishment of a voluntary car scheme
- Lobby for flexible, integrated and affordable public transport
- Support improvements in traffic management in Gillingham
- Lobby train companies to recognise Gillingham's importance as a Gateway
- Support the development of a double track on the Waterloo-Exeter line
- Promote the concept of a Gillingham transport hub
- Develop a combined transport timetable for Town and Parishes
- Encourage adequate and appropriate car parking
- Support strategies for reducing food miles
- Investigate potential of a freight redistribution system
- Seek ways to influence future town plans

SKILLS & LEARNING

Gillingham and the surrounding villages are fortunate to have excellent Primary Schools and a very successful Comprehensive School with first class facilities. The numbers of young people staying on at school post-16 is rapidly increasing.

The Adult Education Service locally has been subject to damaging cutbacks and Gillingham has lost its enterprising and popular Community Learning initiative (Community Learning in Gillingham, CLIG), which had been dedicated to developing ICT skills. The WEA is active locally, as is the University of the Third Age, but neither has a presence in Gillingham itself. Opportunities locally for training in craft and technical skills are limited.

Gillingham has an excellent museum and a first-rate library with a well used computer suite.

Vision: A well-educated community, benefiting from high quality learning provision, guaranteeing a capable, adaptable workforce to meet the needs of the local economy and providing extensive opportunities for personal growth and enrichment.

Actions:

- Work towards establishing a Community College for North Dorset, embracing training provision and extensive opportunities for life-long learning
- Encourage learning cradle to grave
- Investigate the extent of a skills gap locally
- Support CLIG and provide suitable premises for its operations to expand
- Encourage pre-school provision
- Encourage maintenance of Village Halls as a key resource in Community Learning
- Support and promote the Library and Museum in Gillingham
- Encourage the use and expansion of Mobile Libraries in the Parishes

SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Every project or initiative undertaken or supported by the Partnership is intended to enhance social well-being.

Gillingham and the surrounding villages are pleasant and friendly places to live but there are individuals and groups who are isolated or who have genuine needs which are not fully met by the services and amenities currently available.

We believe in the intrinsic value of a vigorous community life. We also recognise that opportunities to participate in community activities are essential to self-esteem, personal satisfaction and physical and mental health. By promoting involvement in the community, we increase the social capital which contributes significantly to health, happiness and prosperity.

We are also committed to the principle that to effect positive, beneficial changes, individuals, groups, organisations, voluntary and statutory bodies must all work together for the common good, taking the initiative locally and accepting collective responsibility for the development of the communities they belong to.

Vision: A living, thriving, healthy community where everyone has a part to play in creating a better quality of life.

Actions:

- Develop strategies to ensure stronger community involvement in planning
- Support further, mutually beneficial, collaboration between schools and the wider community
- Facilitate improved access to schools
- Support the establishment of a new Community Hospital
- Support and promote strategies to enhance community safety
- Support initiatives to improve the provision of day care and services for the elderly and other vulnerable groups
- Support the establishment of a voluntary car scheme to improve access to health care for vulnerable members of the community
- Engage in an ongoing constructive business / community partnership
- Encourage young people's engagement in the development of services and amenities relevant to their needs
- Improve provision for children and young people
- Investigate the potential for setting up Holiday Clubs for school age children.
- Develop a network of Healthy Walks
- Identify deficits which could be remedied by provision planned into the new community facilities
- Plan for a cohesive, inclusive community
- Support initiatives to provide affordable housing in the area
- Encourage volunteering and support volunteers