

Swindon Forum
Steam, Museum of the Great Western Railway
25th November 2008

Service Delivery at the Local Level

Group Facilitator: Jennie Reynolds

Local Infrastructure Provision

The group considered that service and infrastructure provision should not just relate to new developments. The point was made that gaps in provision in existing areas are being ignored, particularly in the more deprived locations. Shortages are being exacerbated by the loss of existing facilities.

Concerns were raised regarding the economic crisis and the impact this will have on development schemes across the city i.e. Cavendish Square being halted.

The point was made that to prevent further service provision shortages; construction of supporting infrastructure should be closely linked to any planning permission that is granted. Specific reference was made to the provision of local shops and street furniture. To ensure this would be achieved it was felt that specific conditions should be attached to the permission with explicit water tight triggers, which determine when supporting infrastructure and services should be constructed.

The group considered that transport was a key area that is experiencing shortages in service delivery. A primary concern of the group was the existing Bus station, which is considered to be unclean and unsafe. It was acknowledge that the council have limited financial resources, however investment in these facilities was seen as crucial because they are the access points into the city and will be a key factor in attracting visitors to Swindon. Connection between hubs within the borough is also insufficient and needs to be addressed.

It was evident from the discussions that the key approach to tackling shortages in provision is to ask the communities themselves what services and facilities they require and where they are most needed.

Connecting People, Connecting Places

The point was made that Parishes should get funding to run their own facilities to ensure the specific needs of the community are met. The establishment of a community bus was cited as an example, which could provide a much more flexible service.

The group agreed that the development of a University at North Star was a positive addition to Swindon. It was considered that the facility would bring interest, vitality and wealth to the borough and would also provide a training facility for local employers. David Dewart (Swindon Borough Council Officer) confirmed that the scheme has funding from central and regional govt.

The idea of the co-location of services was supported within the group and there was general agreement that they should be focused at existing facilities. Pinehurst was

cited as an example where this approach is not working, the of a lack of a community centre was highlighted as an issue.

It was felt that shops within existing centres offer a good opportunity. Additionally services could include Post Office facilities and sites could also act as information points for healthcare leaflets and transport timetables. It was also felt that providing sufficient facilities within communities to enable residents to do their necessity shopping without going into the centre was a positive outcome. It was considered that this may also make the centre of Swindon more of a destination.

The group disagreed over whether schools are appropriate sites for the co-location of services. Although they experience a high level of foot traffic, this is likely to be a specific section of society and may not include those that are most vulnerable. Schools also pose specific issues of access and for obvious reasons are not generally open to the public. The point was made that in order to overcome this issue sites in the vicinity of schools could be utilised.

A representative from the NHS Trust stated that one of their strategic priorities is to improve accessibility to services, including the development of drop in centres and extending opening hours. The group responded positively to these suggestions. There was a general feeling within the group that local knowledge has been lost and the reinstatement of local clinics would address this.

The group acknowledged that funding for such co-location schemes maybe an issue. DEFRA and urban renewal corporations were suggested as potential funding sources for rural areas and urban areas respectively. Partnership funding through community groups or social enterprise schemes were also identified as means to secure finance. The point was made that communities are likely to respond better if they have a direct interest and involvement in the issue.

It was evident from the discussions that local input is key to establishing what the community needs i.e. what services are needed and where. It was felt that local groups such as 'The Neighbourhood Renewal Task Group' provide access to levels of community involvement that are not being capitalised on at the moment.

Key Issues

The group decided that the following three points were the key issues raised in their discussions.

- Accessing Local Views - Ensuring that local people are involved in making the decisions for their community.
- Maximising the use of existing facilities by combining their functions i.e. the use of Post Buses as modes of transport and the co-location of services.
- Promoting partnership working and the use of local contact points.

Blue Group Members:

David Dewart

Norma Thompson

Mark Bagnall

Anne Henshaw

Revd Angela Overton-Benge

Allan Webb

Swindon Borough Council

Women's Coalition

NHS Trust

CPRE

Chaplain to Economic Life in Swindon

Local Stakeholder