

## **MEARNS AREA PARTNERSHIP**

### **Extracted notes and commentary**

*“It is a local project, with local people addressing local issues with a history of success.”* Comment on MAP

A detailed analysis of the work of the Mearns Area Partnership (MAP) has highlighted its achievements and underlined its valued place in the community.

The 19 year-old voluntary organisation has also been singled out as a role model for community planning and as an engine for rural regeneration in south Aberdeenshire.

The report by Dr Karen McArdle of Aberdeen University looks at the successes of MAP over the last 10 years and charts its contribution to the community since its inception as the Mearns Area Project in 1992 when it was established as a rural regeneration partnership in the wake of the closure of RAF Edzell.

In contrast to government funded schemes, the emphasis has remained in MAP on working on community-led, and identified priorities.

MAP has moved beyond the “empty ritual” of being asked to approve pre-determined plans and has initiated and achieved influence over centrally constructed plans, for example in the area of transport, through commissioning rigorous studies on local needs and seeking means of meeting these needs.

It is widely considered to be a successful partnership in terms of rural regeneration and has been effective in securing resources from a wide range of sources. It has been estimated that the value of its activities equate to a 6:1 pound value in facilitating new services and saving Government funding.

It has secured funding of over £870,000 over the almost 18 years of its life.

### **Roles**

MAP has several roles including strategic discussion particularly with local authority representatives, and in pooling resources for efficient and effective delivery of services to elderly people in Laurencekirk. It also contributed to a proactive, community-wide network which culminated in the re-opening of Laurencekirk rail station in 2008. This event attracted some 2,000 people over the weekend of opening.

The station is now regularly used by a large number of commuters, and in the first year of service passenger numbers exceeded forecasts by 80%.

## **Success**

The success of MAP can be summed up as follows:

- It has been sustainable for two decades;
- It levers in additional resources to the community;
- It has a track record of substantial and broad ranging service delivery;
- It has been used as a model for planning other partnerships in the region.
  
- In addition it has direct links with the Youth Forum; a track record of support for the elderly; initiated adult education programmes for women; and tackled rural isolation through the Food Project.

MAP has been widely viewed as a dynamic force in the community, referenced by a series of interviews given for the research.

It has been suggested that MAP has acted as a 'genesis' in the community and the fact that it facilitated action, 'unleashing local talent,' and allowing people to do action for themselves.

It has been seen as operating the 'bottom-up' approach, rather than 'top down.' In MAP, the community is at the top of the pile in terms of value. Inclusion was seen as a key aspect of success for the MAP partnership.

Another respondent referred to the 'chemistry' of MAP; the fact that people listen and engage with one another and that people are 'more important than the process.' He considered that changing chemistry could be the downfall of many community projects but felt that MAP people were focused, energetic, wanted to succeed and were interested in leaving a legacy to the community. In particular the dynamism, drive and enthusiasm of community development professionals were cited as key to the chemistry.

Effective community engagement and responsiveness to local issues lies at the heart of MAP's ethos.

As does its ability to help individuals and groups to help themselves by unlocking and facilitating the core capacity within the community.

MAP is viewed as an organisation with a shared set of ethos and values, highlighted by the fact that MAP members do not bring their own agenda to the table, rather they effectively represent the wider community.

## Public perceptions

The profile of MAP raises some important issues for the organisation. One respondent thought that MAP was largely invisible and that this was highly appropriate from the point of view that the community could see the products of community development, not necessarily the infrastructure of community development.

The community sees the community minibus but not the lobbying and research needed to be done to secure this service. The community sees MAP at the point of delivery and in the local paper. The new High Street office was considered to be important to MAP's profile. People call in and ask about MAP and it acts as a signpost to other opportunities.

Another respondent echoes this perception of the community, saying quite a lot of the community don't know about it but this does not matter as they see the value of its services and achievements such as training and childcare. Those who do know about it think of it highly, she suggests. Links with the community were unanimously considered to be important but the profile of MAP was not considered to be important from the point of view of its workings.

Another respondent referred to the recent appointment of MAP as the funding agent for community funds from a wind farm project and said this was a high point for MAP as it highlighted MAP's credibility in the community and outside the community and was an example of the practical implementation of community planning, which is most important for a community partnership project.

Another project that emerged as a high point was the Planning for Real project at Edzell Woods. The Steering Group is now 5 years old and is perceived to continue to make a difference. Once again the community development dimension of MAP is perceived to be a major strength. The community transport project was cited by another respondent; its contributions to the reopening of the station in Laurencekirk along with Villages in Control.

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