

Local people at the heart of Community Improvement



Leicestershire County Council

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Executive Summary

This project demonstrates how the County Council enables and supports local communities to develop their ideas, realise their ambitions and priorities through local planning and grant aid schemes. It is a holistic and integrated approach to community involvement and action determined by local priorities and needs against local and strategic sub regional plans and policies. In 2008/09:

- Over 30 community buildings have been improved to meet community needs
- Over 40 public open spaces have been improved with access, signage, seating, play areas,
- Over 30 grants to arts organisations and voluntary independent museums, have supported a diverse range of cultural activities,
- Over 600 groups have been helped with assistance with their running costs for community activities
- Over 30 historic buildings have been repaired or restored to enhance local setting and environment
- Support for local businesses to help ensure the sustainability of rural communities.

Three years ago the County Council managed a number of separate community grant and advisory schemes which operated in relative isolation and were 'top down'. A review was undertaken of community grants resulting in a fresh approach with the choice, decision making and leadership for community improvements placed firmly with communities themselves.

What difference have the grant and advisory schemes made to Leicestershire communities?

There are 237 market towns, parishes and communities in Leicestershire, ranging from larger towns such as Loughborough and Hinckley to tiny (smaller) rural settlements such as Bottesford and Cadeby. In all, a population of 600,000 live across rural and urban environments, with 19 priority neighbourhoods and areas of deprivation.

The initiatives brought together to support community improvement have been:

1. Community Forums
2. Grants schemes for a range of community improvements
3. Active programme of customer feedback and evaluation
4. Parish plans training and support
5. Achievements

An outline of the process of supporting communities to identify needs, agree priorities and implement projects is set out at appendix A.

1. Community Forums

Community Forums have been established throughout Leicestershire and a network of 27 Forums provide a focus for discussion on local issues and the development of recommendations for improved policies and delivery of local services. The Forums are an opportunity for parish councils, parish plan groups and other active community groups to share experiences, and also to collectively lobby service providers (including the County and District Councils, Police and NHS) and to work with them to develop solutions. This helps to ensure that services provided match the needs and requirements of the local community, supports and adds value to the parish plan process and helps sustain the efforts of the community.

The Sustainable Community Strategy lists the priorities for each forum area, the evidence for which came out of community consultation and survey information. All Forums have discussed the priorities for their area and are now being further involved and engaged in their delivery. Consequently Forums work in supporting community groups to identify and address their needs and aspirations through local implementation and grant funded projects. Details of forums are provided at www.leicestershireforums.org/

2. Local grants schemes – making a difference

Leicestershire County Council's SHIRE grant schemes (Appendix B) help achieve the shared community objectives in the Community Strategy and are a key mechanism for bringing about change in priority areas and themes for Leicestershire including increased access to arts, recreation and active pursuits, improved resource efficiency and improved local environment (Appendix C). Consequently the grants programme is very extensive and wide-ranging building capacity in communities through investment of c1m in 2008/09 (excluding commissioning agreements) and achieving leverage of c£3.5m into the county. This funding provides support for hundreds of community groups and organisations linked to village halls, environmental improvements, climate change initiatives, arts projects, rural business, museums development and repair and renovation of historic buildings. http://www.leics.gov.uk/community_services_grants_2008-2009.pdf

The programme enables community groups and organisations, and in some cases businesses and individuals, to be proactive and take the lead on making improvements that are most important for the local community. These improvements are likely to be in response to issues identified by the parish plan process but could also be highlighted by local groups and parish councils from other local surveys and community feedback. The objectives of improvement projects often centre on issues such as a lack of facilities for children and young people, poor quality open space and dilapidated, outdated and inaccessible community buildings. Grants are also sought and provided to support local heritage schemes, arts events which bring people together, or provide new wildlife habitats. It is essential that projects are initiated and developed by the community in order to build community ownership, sense of place and a commitment of the scheme's sustainability.

Contacts established with County Council officers through the parish plan process provide the basis for partnership training and development via more focused support and assistance for project implementation and community project management skills. Specialist advice on project design and development, business planning and management can also be given. Groups are also assisted with the application process and sourcing other match funding by officers with specialist expertise and by access to the Leicestershire Funding Toolkit, a free one-stop website for voluntary and community sector funding information and advice. The site includes a searchable database of over 4000 funding streams - www.fundingtoolkit.org

Advice and information of a more general nature is provided to communities at Service Provider Events which are organised by the Rural Community Council (Leicestershire & Rutland) and Leicestershire Rural Partnership. These events are held at local community buildings and provide a forum for groups and individuals to raise issues and questions on actions that are underway or proposed.

3. Customer feedback and evaluation

Customer feedback on the grants programmes is sought via customer satisfaction surveys that have focused on two of the flagship grants programmes, Shire Environmental Improvement grants and FLAG (Forward with Leicestershire Aggregates Grants) grants. The very positive results of the surveys are outlined below and are complemented by community comment on schemes with examples highlighted at Appendix D along with confirmation of support for the process from partner organisations.

- An annual survey has been carried out to assess customer satisfaction with Shire Environmental Improvement Grants. Over a period of six years the survey has recorded high levels of satisfaction with both the administration process and the technical advice given by officers. For the most recent survey (2008-09) 92% of respondents thought the service they were receiving was excellent or very good. The results of the survey are available at www.leics.gov.uk/environmental_grants
- A FLAG customer satisfaction survey was carried out in April and May 2009 which showed a very high level of satisfaction with the grant programme. The survey showed that 95% of applicants found the application forms very or fairly easy to complete, 100% found the quality of written information received excellent or good, 95% thought the speed of processing the application was excellent or good. Almost all (95%) of grant applicants sought assistance from County Council staff and 100% thought the support given by FLAG/County staff was excellent or good. The results of the survey were similar to an earlier survey for the period 2003 – 06 but showed an even higher level of satisfaction with the operation of the programme. The results of the survey are available at www.leics.gov.uk/flag

4. Parish Plans

Parish plans are the principal mechanism for local people to take a proactive approach to the development of their community. Through parish plans communities themselves identify issues, opportunities and needs and prepare action plans including proposed projects to address them. Training and support for parish plan volunteers is provided by the Rural Community Council in partnership with the County Council. There are currently more than 100 parishes where a parish plan or similar has been undertaken or is in progress. This equates to around 50% of the parishes in Leicestershire. The parish plan process is promoted by the Leicestershire Villages web site (www.leicestershirevillages.com) which encourages local awareness and engagement and includes links to parish councils and community forums.

The key issues and priorities for parishes identified in parish plans help provide the evidence base for the community strategy planning process and also provide the context to support local decision making on the Leicestershire grants programme.

The grants application process prompts applicants to demonstrate the links between proposals and parish plans or, in areas where there is currently no plan in place, to identify links with alternative community consultation processes.

5. Achievements

The results of the process of community led planning, development and implementation are a strong culture of participative democracy, social responsibility and community driven solutions. The outputs are grant supported projects throughout Leicestershire from urban town centres to rural settlements that have made places more accessible, useable and enjoyable by all. The key outcomes are stronger more integrated communities and improved quality of life (Appendix A). In terms of practical projects, those completed in 2008/09 include;

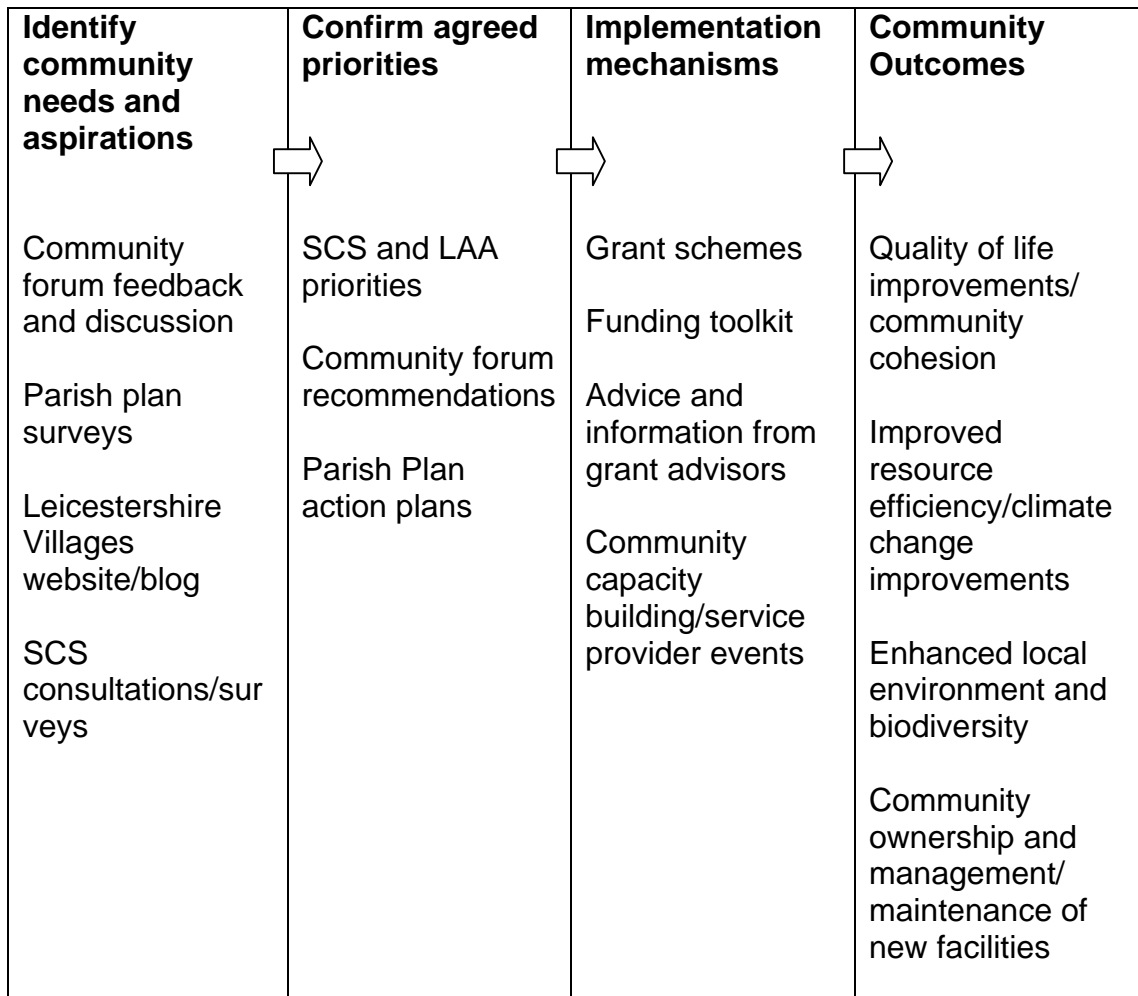
- Over 30 community buildings that have been helped to extend or improve; kitchens, toilets, windows, heating, insulation, access etc. The work will secure the continued use of these buildings at the heart of local communities providing places for people to meet and take part in activities ranging from playgroups to elderly peoples clubs.
- Over 40 public open spaces that have been improved with access, signage, seating, play areas, skate parks or biodiversity.
- Over 30 community arts and museums projects including theatre, chorale and popular music, opera, dance, film, public art, community heritage developments, activities with young people .
- Over 600 groups that have been helped with assistance with their running costs.
- Over 30 historic buildings that have been repaired or restored to help safeguard them from decay and retain them as an important part of our town and village heritage for future generations.
- Support for local businesses to help ensure the sustainability of rural communities.

Some examples of projects are set out at Appendix E and a typical application form is at Appendix F.

Outputs

- Investment has been made in c750 community schemes in 2008/9
- Training and support has been given to c260 communities / people in 2008/9
- 81 community forums have been held in 2008/9

Community Planning and Action Process



Leicestershire County Council Grant Schemes

Community Environmental Improvement Grants are offered to community applicants for a wide range of work including new play areas, public open spaces, public art, planting, landscape management and habitat creation on public or community owned sites. There is a grant budget of £116,000pa.

Arts Development Grants are for the promotion of arts activities in Leicestershire e.g. theatre, music, dance, art, film etc. There is a grant budget of £29,000pa.

Historic Buildings Grants are for assistance and specialist technical advice for essential repairs or the restoration of original architectural features to certain historic buildings and structures. The grant budget is £20,180pa.

Museums Grants are for improving and caring for museum collections and also for improving public access to museums e.g. display, documentation, collections management, conservation, education and learning initiatives and audience development projects. There is a grant budget of £10,000pa.

Village Hall Grants are for works to extend, refurbish or carry out major improvements and repairs to existing village halls or to create new halls. Church halls that act as community centers may also be eligible for a grant. The grant budget is £42,170pa and is administered in association with the Rural Community Council.

Community Plus Grants are to assist community groups with the cost of using premises and facilities for their activities. The grant budget is £100,000pa.

Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas Grants are available in the historic market town of Melton Mowbray and the scheme is promoted to building owners within Conservation Areas. The grants budget is £100,000pa including funding contributions from English Heritage and Melton Borough Council.

Climate Change Grants are to offer communities the opportunity to plan and implement a range of projects that will improve their energy efficiency performance and make local environmental changes to help offset some of the anticipated impacts which Climate Change could bring. The grant budget is £30,000pa.

FLAG (Forward with Leicestershire Aggregates Grants) are for community environmental improvements, community building improvements and private environmental improvements. The grant budget is £330,000pa.

Voluntary Youth Organisation Grants are available to youth organisations to contribute towards premises running costs/rental costs or towards the provision of

equipment to support and develop youth work within voluntary youth groups/clubs. The grant budget is £44,130pa.

Vibrant Villages grants aim to minimise the impact of post office closures by helping remaining post offices to enhance their services, while also supporting mobile and community-run services. Support, including free retail advice, is available for local shops, especially where they provide the only service in the village. A priority is to assist shops affected by closure of post offices and the scheme encourages shops to sell fresh local produce. The grant budget is c£80,000pa.

Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy sub outcomes to which grant schemes contribute

- 1 Improved access to employment, education, housing, sport leisure, recreation and culture, health and social care, community facilities and food shopping specifically for vulnerable individuals/groups/communities for whom access is a particular challenge.
- 2 Improvements to market town centres, shopping centres and rural centres to enable more effective access to services.
- 3 Broader access to visitor sites and the wider countryside.
- 4 Increased high quality access to arts, recreation and active pursuits, including through the provision of appropriate accessible facilities.
- 5 Everyone is able to participate in the cultural life of the county and this provision addresses issues of equality and access.
- 6 To strive for everyone to participate in the cultural life of the county and for cultural provision to embrace issues of equality and access.
- 7 To support learning through the provision of opportunities for people to value heritage and the diversity of cultures.
- 8 CO2 emissions will be reduced across the county including public sector operations and estates.
- 9 Enhanced energy efficiency of buildings.
- 10 Improved resource efficiency.
- 11 Increased renewable energy generation and use of alternative fuel sources.
- 12 People have equality of access to life opportunities, employment, learning and services that meet individual needs.
- 13 Social capital is enhanced particularly through work benefiting the priority neighbourhoods.
- 14 The voluntary and community sector is vibrant and Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Forums, Local Development Groups, Local Voluntary and Community Groups, Faith Groups, School organisations, local business and social enterprise are frontline delivery organisations for strong communities.
- 15 Local communities are assisted to find local solutions to local problems.
- 16 Children and young people play a positive role in their communities and use their time for constructive activities.
- 17 Increased levels of financial and social inclusion in deprived areas.
- 18 We understand, embrace, celebrate and value the culture of others.
- 19 The contribution of people with disabilities is valued and enabled.
- 20 An enhanced, better maintained and protected environment, and better access to this.
- 21 Improved local biodiversity, geodiversity and natural habitats.
- 22 Enhanced local access to the natural environment.
- 23 Increased visitor economy and cultural tourism.
- 24 Increased participation in physical and positive activities by children and young people.

- 25 Children and young people are involved and engaged, have places to go and things to do.
- 26 Older people have access to a wide range of cultural and learning activities.
- 27 Improved and more accessible facilities and opportunities for physical activity.
- 28 Vulnerable people and places experience less health disadvantage.
- 29 Social justice and mutual respect is promoted through all our services and in employment practices.
- 30 No individual experiences disadvantage because of their race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

Community comment on grant schemes

“The help and the grant we received enabled our project to be completed in a way which we could not have imagined. We now have premises second to none and all users are delighted with the results.”

“FLAG has provided tremendous support for the work of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust in protecting wildlife and wild places in the Soar Valley and Charnwood Forest for everyone. The administrative support plus help and guidance from FLAG is excellent....”

“Shire grants have been the deciding factor to carry out environmental schemes. Many good projects will not happen.....without some assistance.”

“The management committee express their thanks to you for your help and support during the refurbishment. This has been greatly appreciated”.

“We are all very grateful for the help and support Leicestershire CC have provided in our project to modernise the village hall. It is very much appreciated by everyone in the Village”.

Partnership endorsement

Rural Community Council – “The RCC is delighted to be a partner in delivering the community priorities of Parish Plans which are facilitated by the RCC as well as supporting other community groups such as Village hall committees and sports groups. The grant schemes have continued to make a real difference to community cohesion in rural Leicestershire. They have gone a long way to ensuring the survival of amenities both community and economic in the face of pressures to close essential rural features such as the village pub, shop and church.”

John Moore

Deputy Director, Rural Community Council, Leicestershire and Rutland

Leicestershire Rural Partnership – “As Chairman of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership I am very pleased to be able to endorse Leicestershire County Council’s submission within the Community Involvement category of the LGC Awards 2010.

Over the last 11 years we have supported the community-led planning process – delivered by the Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland). This has been a highly effective project which has supported about 50% of Leicestershire parishes to undertake community consultation activities, including parish plans, village appraisals, or Planning for Real[®]. The Parish Plan Protocol has established

agreed procedures to ensure that issues are reported to the correct service providers for a response.

The LRP has been able to demonstrate its commitment to delivering local priorities through our grant schemes (e.g. Vibrant Villages), establishing a network of community and parish council websites, and through encouraging the delivery of affordable rural housing where there is identified local need.

To enable all of this requires commitment from all service providers working in partnership. We have a shared objective to ensure that local priorities are delivered effectively and that rural communities are not disadvantaged.”

Mrs Lesley Pendleton
Chairman, Leicestershire Rural Partnership

Grant Funded Projects

- An ambitious refurbishment and extension at Packington Memorial Hall was grant aided with £10,000. The scheme will maintain the hall facilities to meet the existing and future needs and was highlighted in the Parish Plan. The project costs exceed £378,000 and following completion will enable an increase in community use at the hall.
- Stoke Golding Village Hall received a grant of £3,000 for the internal replacement of the ceiling and new efficient lighting. The cost of the scheme was £12,638 and has improved the internal appearance of the hall together with helping to reduce their power consumption. The hall is undergoing a refurbishment programme following comments in the Parish Plan.
- Following the Parish Plan the Woodhouse Community Hall Trust secured a site for a new village hall. The new hall costing £260,000 received a SHIRE Village Hall Grant of £5,000. Following completion of the building a £7,000 SHIRE Community Environmental Grant contributed to the £17,000 external landscaping.
- Sapcote Pavilion is on the Recreation Ground in the centre of the village and serves as a village hall. The old wooden building was in a dilapidated state, underwent repeated vandalism and was uninsurable. It was demolished during phase 1 of the project and purpose-built and sustainable brick building was erected during phase 2. FLAG (Forward with Leicestershire Aggregates Grants) funding (phase 1 £24,000 in 2008/9 for demolition of old building and phase 2 £50,000 in 2009/10 for new build) was critical to meeting the total cost of £163,000. This scheme links with the results of Sapcote Parish Plan which shows support for refurbishment or re-building of the Pavilion and the need for more community buildings facilities in the village.



Sapcote pavilion – before and after



Fleckney skate bmx park opening



Belton play area – before and after



Hoton recreation ground – before and after



Community forum workshop

Appendix F

Form: EN2 April 2009



Application Form

Community Environmental Improvement Grants

Please read the guidance notes (Form EN1) before completing this application form

1. Applicant details (please complete all questions)

1.1 Title of your scheme:

Total Eligible Cost of your Scheme:

(Please also complete attached breakdown of costings – section 8)

Please give brief details of your project:

1.2 Details of your organisation/group:

Name:

Address:

Post Code:

Fax:

Telephone:

E-mail:

1.3 Person to contact:

Name:

Position in your organisation:

1.4 Address for correspondence (If different to above)

Address:

Yes No (Please advise when you expect to send these in)

3.2 Other than Project Management please list those parts of the scheme, if any, which you are intending to carry out yourselves.

3.3 How will you provide the 50% contribution to the scheme? See options below in 3.31 and 3.32

3.31 What percentage of the **total eligible** scheme cost will you be providing from your own funds?

3.32 What percentage of the **total eligible** scheme cost will be provided by other sources of grant aid? (Please list the other organisations you have or may be approaching, and the sums requested or grant offers confirmed).

3.33 What percentage of the **total estimated cost** will be covered by “in kind” works? This can be by volunteer time or use of own machinery and materials.

3.4 How much funding are you seeking from the SHIRE Grant scheme?

4. Design and Maintenance

4.1 Please tell us what steps you have taken, when designing your scheme, to ensure that it will still be in good condition in 10 years time (Please use additional sheets if necessary)

4.2 Please set out how you have taken sustainability matters into consideration in your scheme. e.g local contractors, local/recycled materials, source of timber products, source of plants

4.3 Please provide full details of the maintenance plan you have produced for the first 10 years of your scheme's life. **What will be carried out, how often and by who?** (Please use additional sheets if necessary)

4.4 How have you designed this project so that,(where appropriate), it complies with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995? See page 7 of Guidelines.

5. Timing

5.1 Can your scheme be completed within 12 months of being offered a SHIRE grant?

Yes No Not sure

If you can't answer Yes, please explain on a separate sheet why it might be longer than 12 months

6. Community benefit

6.1 Have you contacted your local County Councillor?

Yes No

(You are strongly recommended to contact them to assist your application.)

6.11 Are they supportive of your scheme?

Yes No

6.2 Has your local Parish/Town Council/Meeting been involved in the development of the scheme? If yes please give details of their involvement

6.3 Have local schools/other community groups been involved in the development of the scheme?

If yes, please give details of their involvement

6.4 Is your application linked to the results of a village appraisal or a village design statement?

Yes No If Yes, please enclose a copy

6.5 If not linked to a village appraisal or village design statement, is your application linked to survey or similar works done by a village/community group?

Yes No If Yes, please enclose details.

6.6 Is your scheme physically accessible to all within reasonable hours?

Yes No

If your scheme can only be accessed between certain hours please state below what they are and the reasons why.

6.7 Please set out how you intend to promote and publicise your scheme, (press releases, opening event etc).

6.8 Please identify how your project will contribute to the promotion of equality and diversity

7. **Payment details**

7.1 To whom should your grant cheque be made payable?
Please enter the details as they should appear on the cheque

7.2 Can you reclaim VAT? Yes No

8. Breakdown of Costings

The table below should be completed in full (not acceptable to put "as per quotations) and used to provide a breakdown of your eligible estimated costings, (which must equal the cost of your scheme under 1.1). It has been provided to assist in assessing the works, fees, etc. to ensure that all items are covered when calculating the estimated eligible costs for the amount of grant aid required.

Work Area	Description	Total Cost/Value
Project Costs (materials , labour etc. please provide a breakdown)		
Consultancy fees (including architects, surveyors, designers, artists, etc. please provide a breakdown)		
Planning Fees		
Building and Regulation Fees		
Artwork (sculptures etc.)		
Land purchase (District Valuer's report or valuation by member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)		
Solicitors Costs		
Other (please list all other miscellaneous items)		
Total of eligible costs for grant aid		
"In Kind" Works (total estimated value of volunteer; labour, machinery, materials, etc)		
Total Estimated Costs (to assist you with your assessment process only)		

9. Application confirmation

9.1 Please sign below to confirm that this application has been prepared in accordance with the SHIRE grant guidelines.

Signed:

Date:

Position:

For further information please contact:

The Community Projects Officer on 0116 305 7269, or e-mail: shiregrants@leics.gov.uk

Please return this application to:

Shire Grants, Environmental Management, Community Services Department, Leicestershire County Council, Rutland Building, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8TE.



Issued by:



