

Market Towns Healthcheck Handbook

Revised January 2002

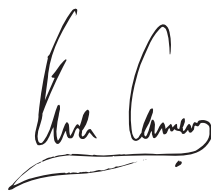
Foreword

Market towns are at the heart of life in rural England. For centuries, these towns have been the focal point for commercial and social activity. They have been places in which to find work, to buy and sell goods, and to find valued specialist services. But in recent years many of these functions have been undermined by social, industrial and agricultural change. Some towns are adapting to these changing demands and are thriving, but many are in decline.

The Countryside Agency sees a new role for market towns in the 21st century. We want revitalised towns which meet the needs of local people and which provide access to a wide range of retail, leisure, professional and public services. Most importantly, we want towns whose futures are shaped by the people and communities who live in and around them.

This healthcheck will help local people appraise the strengths, weaknesses, future demands and opportunities of market towns. It's part of a much bigger toolkit which gives people access to the funding and advice needed to take action to revitalise towns. We are delighted to be working in partnership with regional development agencies and Action for Market Towns on applying the toolkit to revitalise market towns.

I urge you to create an exciting new future for your town by getting involved in a local partnership and doing a healthcheck.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ewen Cameron', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Ewen Cameron
Chairman

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Introduction

What is in this handbook?

This handbook is a practical guide to doing a market town healthcheck. It has been written for people in market towns and the surrounding countryside who want to take action to revitalise their town.

The handbook is:

- a guide to the stages involved in setting up a market town partnership, doing a healthcheck, drawing up an action plan and putting the plan into action
- part of a web-based toolkit promoted by the Countryside Agency which offers advice and financial support for market town improvements
- not a prescribed set of rules but a source book that can be adapted to local circumstances.

What is a market town?

The term 'market town' covers towns in rural England with a variety of backgrounds including those which have traditionally hosted an agricultural market, as well as seaside resorts, fishing ports, mining and manufacturing towns. Populations range roughly from 2,000 to 20,000, but the ability to serve people in both the town and its surrounding countryside is more important than the town's size.

The way a town functions depends on how it is used by people living in the town itself and by outlying rural communities. Any approach to market town revitalisation needs to consider people in both the town and the surrounding countryside. 'Market town' is used here as a shorthand for both the town and the surrounding countryside.

Some market towns are in good health. Some are experiencing decline. All market towns have the potential to be:

- comprehensive local service centres where people can access professional services,

such as solicitors, surveyors, opticians and travel agencies

- distinctive places where development for housing and jobs is welcomed because it reinforces the character of the place while meeting the needs of rural society
- centres for the processing of local products, especially food, and places where the range of shops meets the needs of people from the rural hinterland, and locations for farmers' markets
- focal points for properly planned and co-ordinated local transport networks
- centres for culture - art, music, theatre or cinema
- hubs or gateways for tourism capitalising on the assets of the place and the nearby countryside
- access points for a wide range of training, education and employment opportunities.

What is a market town healthcheck?

The market town healthcheck:

- allows local people to identify the economic, environmental and social strengths and

weaknesses of a market town and its surrounding countryside

- helps people identify the impact of changing local circumstances
- is a sound basis for creating an action plan for revitalisation.

It differs significantly from healthchecks that focus on town centre activities, typically on a narrow range of retail and related services. This healthcheck not only covers the whole town and its surrounding countryside, but enables people to look at a wide range of connected issues that affect the quality of life. It can be used by people in market towns of any size (see Box 1). The healthcheck, leading to a rejuvenated and healthy market town, will benefit residents and visitors alike (see Box 2).

The healthcheck consists of a series of worksheets which contain questions about environmental, social and economic issues. Answering the worksheets can lead to a vision for the future of the town, from which a plan of action can be prepared. Carrying out a

Box 1**Community participation in the market towns healthcheck****What is it and what can be achieved?**

- Mutually supportive working links between different sections of the community, including businesses, service providers, voluntary groups, the public sector and the community at large.
- Creating a shared vision of the future identity, function and quality of life in the town which meets the needs of its residents and the people it serves in the surrounding area.
- A means to unlock the ideas, resources and commitment that exists in all communities and to direct that to managing change and delivering that shared vision.
- A practical and democratic way to involve the community as widely as possible in the future of the town and its surrounding countryside.
- A means to devise and deliver an action plan and specific projects which has widespread support to help achieve the vision over the short, medium and longer terms.
- A sustainable future for the town and its hinterland embracing business, transport, the environment, social and community facilities.
- The reinforcement of civic pride and identity, strengthening existing community groups, and the resolution of long standing differences of view between different groups in the community.

Box 2**The benefits of market towns healthchecks**

- A way to bring residents of the town and the surrounding countryside together.
- An inclusive approach to regeneration which involves all ages and sections of the community.
- A tool for communities to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and devise a shared but achievable vision for regeneration and revitalisation.
- A way to set standards and learn from what is happening in other successful community development and regeneration projects.
- Practical action plans which direct resources and effort to achieving real improvements and projects.
- Robust action plans which have widespread community support are a key tool in securing funding and support from national, regional and local programmes for revitalising rural and urban communities.
- A properly researched action plan is influential in the decisions that public authorities have to make, for instance, in local plans, transport and health service investment programmes.

healthcheck requires commitment from all members of the community. It is a process that is led by a partnership of market town interests, supported by a market town co-ordinator.

What is an action plan?

An action plan is a tried and tested way of setting out projects that will assist in revitalising a town. A successful action plan will demonstrate that the pressures and opportunities identified during the healthcheck are being addressed, and that the projects that are taken forward complement rather than duplicate initiatives already in place.

Putting the plan into action usually requires a project manager who supports the market town partnership and helps acquire funding and advice.

What is involved in doing a healthcheck?

The stages of carrying out a healthcheck and preparing an action plan are illustrated in Figure 1. They are:

FIGURE 1 - Market towns healthcheck

1 Setting up a market town partnership

Purpose:

- to set up a partnership that represents the main interests of people in the town and surrounding countryside.
- to organise the partnership to carry out a healthcheck, set a vision for the town and its rural area, prepare an action plan and put the plan into action.

Main elements:

- the membership and size of the partnership should reflect both its aims and the breadth of issues that affect a particular town.
- the partnership may need someone to act as a co-ordinator to work closely with the partnership to carry out the healthcheck.
- the partnership will need a steering group with members and a chairman.
- working groups will take on responsibility for tackling specific worksheets.
- the partnership should seek specialist advice from professionals working for organisations in the town or who provide specific services, such as the district, unitary or county council.
- involve the community market town and surrounding.

2 Gaining community commitment

Purpose:

- to get a full understanding of the healthcheck and involvement from people in the town and surrounding countryside.
- to map out the main issues of concern to the community.

Main elements:

- arrange a community event to establish the issues.
- identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the town.

3 Completing a healthcheck

Purpose:

- to draw together a 'snapshot' of the town and surrounding countryside.
- to tackle the questions in the worksheets which help identify strengths and weaknesses.
- to draw together the results in a report, in preparation for creating a vision and drawing up an action plan.

Main elements:

- do a factual 'snapshot' of the market town to provide a background that can be balanced with the community's aspirations.
- answer worksheets covering four main topic areas: environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility.
- draw the results together to highlight problems or opportunities that should be acted upon.
- hold an event to which all members of the partnership and invited members of the community attend to agree the healthcheck.

4 Creating a vision

Purpose:

- to work with the community to create a vision for the town and surrounding countryside based on the healthcheck.

Main elements:

- hold a community event to establish a vision.
- prepare a report on the vision containing terms of practical objectives.

5 Preparing an action plan

Purpose:

- to prepare an action plan to achieve the objectives agreed in the vision.
- to secure community support for the action plan.

Main elements:

- take the vision into account.
- identify available resources.
- identify priorities for action.
- establish monitoring and evaluation criteria.

6 Putting the plan into action

Purpose:

- to put the plan into action and achieve results.
- to monitor and evaluate progress.
- to review the vision and action plan.

Main elements:

- restructure a partnership to take on a legal structure and appoint a project manager.
- set out a clear programme of action.
- clearly identify the roles and responsibilities for those in the partnership.
- demonstrate achievements to the partnership, wider community and funding partners.
- monitor and evaluate results.
- review the vision and action plan.

How long will it take?

Completing a healthcheck and preparing an action plan from scratch following the guidance in this handbook may take six months. This will allow time to arrange workshops, and to

involve the community widely. For market towns which have already established a local partnership, this time may be reduced.

Putting the plan into action will take a varying amount of

time depending on the market town. Straightforward projects might be able to get under way immediately. A project manager may need to be in place for up to three years to get major projects underway.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Guisborough - the healthcheck in action in the Tees Valley

Guisborough, an historic market town of 18,000 people in East Cleveland, sits at the gateway to the North York Moors National Park. Despite significant pockets of deprivation both within the town and the neighbouring Rural Priority Area, Guisborough has missed out on many of the funding opportunities which have helped to regenerate nearby communities.

For Guisborough and its hinterland, the Market Towns Initiative represents an exciting opportunity - a chance to attract significant funding to revitalise the town as a key service centre for both East Cleveland and parts of neighbouring North Yorkshire.

The town was selected as one of six towns nationwide to pilot the Countryside Agency's market towns healthcheck in January 2001. As a pilot town, the process was bound to be a challenge, and the lack of a paid co-ordinator to assist the process until midway through the healthcheck undoubtedly added to the pressure on townspeople. Happily describing themselves as a group of 'enthusiastic amateurs', local people have risen admirably to the challenge. Even longstanding residents admit that they have learnt much about their own community whilst gathering information and talking to local people.

Work to finalise the vision and develop an action plan of priority projects is still underway. There are, however, already useful lessons to be learned by other towns embarking on the process:

- Develop a small steering group representing a wide cross-section of interests covering all aspects of the healthcheck.
- Be prepared to embrace unconventional ideas. Joint-chairs of a fledgling steering group may appear to be a recipe for conflict; in Guisborough the process worked admirably with one individual chairing meetings and acting as the public face of the partnership, while the other handled the administrative aspects of the process. The fact that the joint-chairs were independent of political interests and widely respected in the town undoubtedly assisted the process.
- Put the interests of the town and its hinterland first. The Guisborough Partnership Steering Group includes a number of elected District and Town Councillors representing different political parties; however disagreements and prejudices have been set aside to work for the greater benefit of the town.
- Be clear about the time commitment which the process will require from the outset, but remember the potential rewards for success.
- Be outward facing and receptive to other ideas. Despite the significant time commitment required of steering group members, they have still found time to share their ideas and experiences with other towns embarking on the process, both within the north east region and beyond.
- Try different forms of consultation, e.g. public meetings, discussions with Parish Councils, questionnaires handed out at a WI coffee morning or in the supermarket.

Finally, but most importantly, don't allow the healthcheck to become a chore! Enjoy the challenge and the opportunity to meet new people.

1 Setting up a market towns partnership

Purpose:

- to set up a partnership that represents the main interests of people in the town and surrounding countryside.
- to organise the partnership to carry out a healthcheck, set a vision for the town and its rural area, prepare an action plan and put the plan into action.

The best way to undertake a market town healthcheck and prepare an action plan is to set up a partnership that represents the main interests of people living in the town and surrounding area. Healthchecks in market towns have not always been done by community partnerships. Some have been completed by local authorities, tourist boards, town centre managers or business groups. Where these already exist they will provide useful information for answering the worksheets contained in this handbook. However, the approach recommended in this handbook is community-based. The healthcheck and action plan should represent the views of those living and working in the area.

1.1 Role of a partnership

If the healthcheck and action plan are to be properly based on the community's needs and aspirations, and owned by those people, then a partnership must draw its membership widely from the town and immediate surrounds. Ownership and involvement of the wider community are essential to address issues which require:

- detailed local knowledge and skills
- people to make choices about the future they want to experience
- the commitment of businesses and individuals, alongside public agencies, to deliver results.

A partnership can be defined as 'a coalition of organisations and individuals who agree to work together for a common aim, or a set of compatible aims' (Civic Trust). The key to partnership working is the sharing of

resources and responsibilities between members, who should ideally work together in a co-operative and mutually supportive way. It should be 'transparent', i.e. everyone must be clear about the aims of the partnership, there should be no 'secrets' but there should be mutual trust. Regular checks to ensure that all the partners are content should take place. No-one who has been involved, even in successful community partnerships, will deny that they can be demanding, difficult and complicated, particularly when trying to agree a course of action involving groups and individuals with very different perspectives. Community partnerships do, however, ensure that everyone is involved and everyone takes 'ownership' of the process.

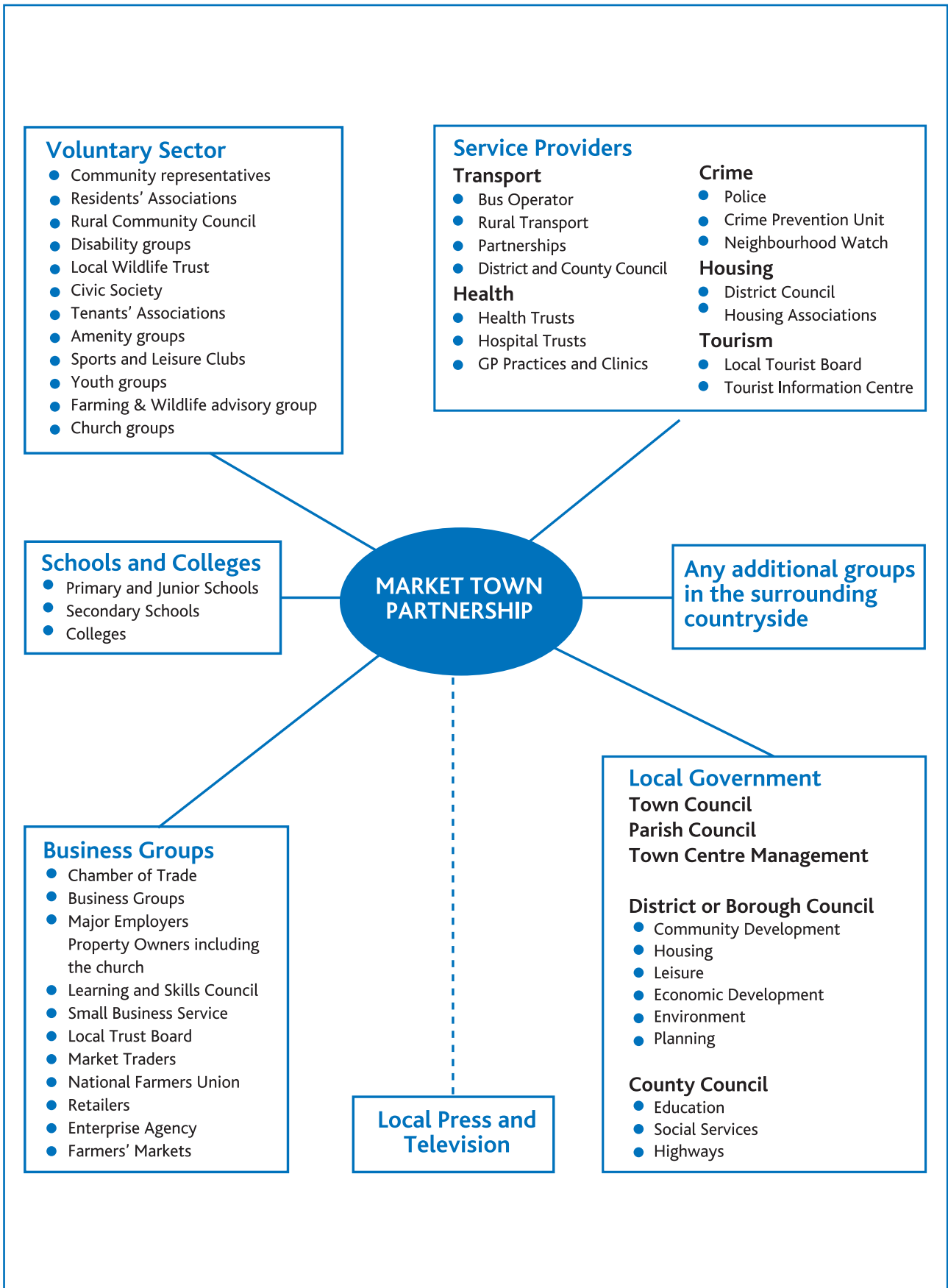
1.2 Organising a partnership

There is no 'right' or single way in which a local partnership

should be structured. Equally, there is no given set of organisations that must be represented or a standard way in which the partnership should operate. This is a matter for each community to decide. The membership and size of the partnership should reflect both its aims and the breadth of issues that affect a particular town. The membership should be as inclusive as possible and reflect the interests of communities in the rural areas around the market town as well as in the town itself. Members can be drawn from interest groups and agencies. The town or parish council is a good place to start. Suggested members are given in Figure 2.

Many small towns have numerous voluntary groups. For example, Burnham-on-Crouch, an Essex town of less than 8,000 people, has over 80 registered groups. There will also be individuals locally, not necessarily members of organised groups,

FIGURE 2 - Suggested organisations to involve in a market town partnership



who could have an important role to play in developing local initiatives.

The decision to bring people together could be taken by an individual or group of people, by the district, unitary or town or parish council, or by a pre-existing partnership or initiative in the town. The local newspapers (including any community newsletter), and television may be interested. These can widen attention and keep local people informed.

A number of organisations have experience in establishing and working with local partnerships. Those that may be able to provide help and advice in setting up a local partnership include:

- the local rural community council
- the local district, unitary or

borough council

- Action for Market Towns
- Civic Trust Regeneration Unit
- established market town revitalisation partnerships elsewhere in the region or further afield.

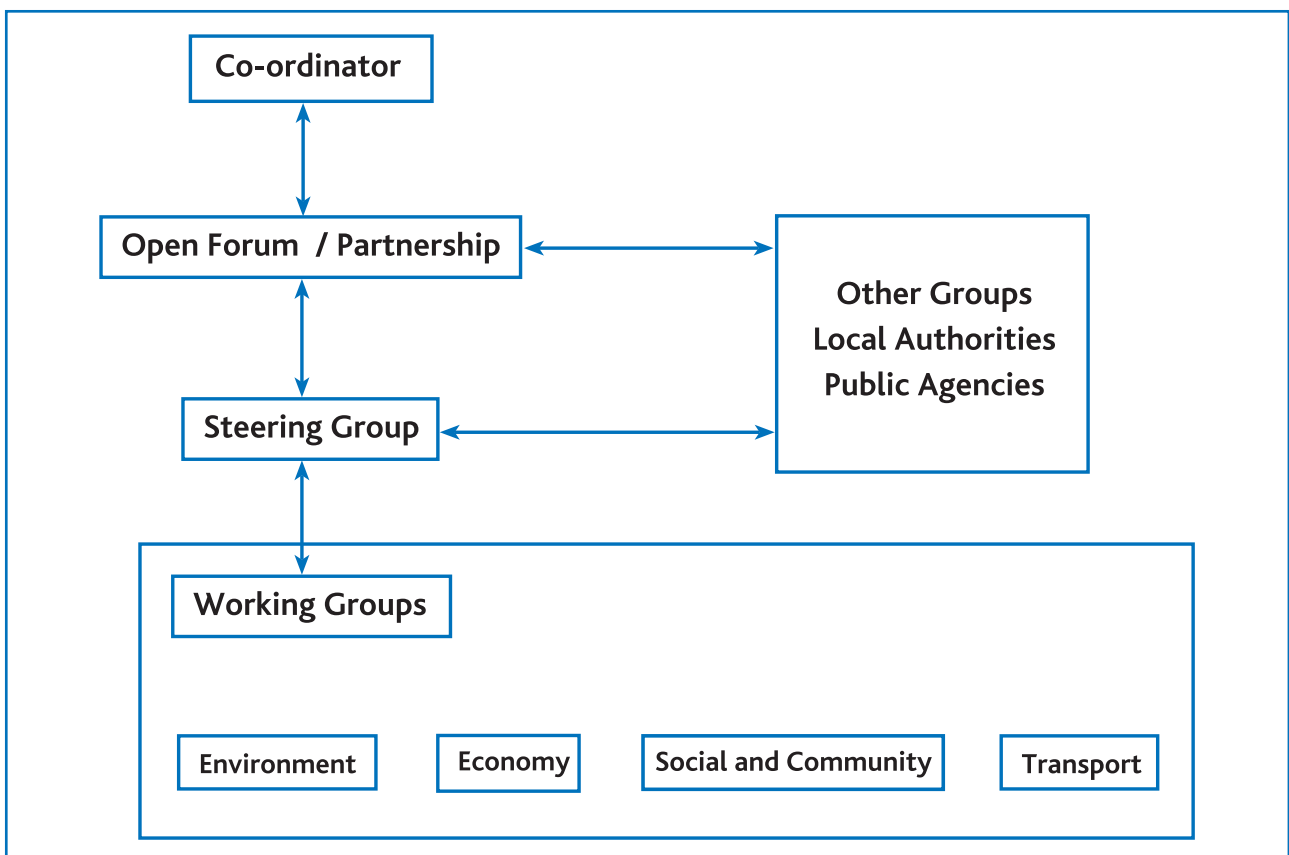
Communities that already have a partnership or some other locally based initiative such a health action zone, will be able to draw on the advice given later in this section on how the partnership can be widened to do a healthcheck and action plan.

It is important to give the partnership a structure that enables it to complete the healthcheck and implement the action plan. Since its resources are the skills and energies of its members, the partnership, at this stage, does not need to be a legal entity. This will, however, become

more important once the partnership takes on managerial and administrative responsibilities such as employing a project manager.

An open forum or community partnership structure is suitable for the early stages of market town revitalisation. This is shown in Figure 3. Some of the main principles for successful community partnerships are set out in Box 3. These flexible arrangements can work for every scale of town and community. They can be expanded or contracted as appropriate. It is not a hierarchy or 'pecking order', but each of the components has a complementary role to play in achieving results. Rather like a jigsaw, the pieces should fit together so that the sum is greater than the parts.

FIGURE 3 - Structuring the market town partnership



Box 3**Principles of successful community partnerships**

- They are not hierarchies, just an effective way of working together.
- The forum should meet regularly, embrace new members and act mainly as an endorsing and consultative group.
- As the initiative evolves, alter the membership of the steering group but keep it to no more than 10-12 people.
- The steering group should have clear but flexible terms of reference to co-ordinate and, in due course, manage the action plan, staff and budgets.
- Look inside the partnership for a suitable co-ordinator, who should become a member of the steering group. Appoint a full or part-time paid co-ordinator as the initiative evolves and funding permits.
- Set up working groups to address key issues and interests. They should have equal status to the steering group and have at least one steering group member. Limit the number of working groups. Give them clear and preferably non-overlapping terms of reference. The role of working groups is to focus on particular issues, work through the healthcheck worksheets and report back to the steering group and the partnership as a whole.
- In due course, working groups can be used to devise and implement specific projects and initiatives. When they have done their job, bring their members back into the main partnership.
- Create close links to other community groups and initiatives. Do not try to take them over or ignore them.
- Involve staff and members of local authorities and other relevant agencies as observers and advisors. In time, key individuals should be invited to join the steering group.

1.3 Role of a healthcheck co-ordinator

Carrying out a healthcheck and preparing an action plan are activities that need to be co-ordinated. The partnership will need someone to act as a co-ordinator to:

- work closely with the partnership, its steering group and chairman. He or she will oversee all activities involved in doing a healthcheck and preparing an action plan.
- organise the community event which gains commitment and identifies the main issues of concern.
- work closely with the

working groups which answer the healthcheck worksheets.

- report back on results and work with the partnership to create a vision.
- prepare an action plan based on the vision.
- agree an action plan with the wider community.

The ideal candidate will have a broad understanding of market towns and rural revitalisation plus:

- good local knowledge
- community participation skills
- organisational ability.

The co-ordinator must also be a good communicator.

The district, unitary or county council, or the local rural community council may already employ someone who could take on the co-ordinator role. There may be another community or town centre management project in the vicinity that might spare someone on a part time basis. In addition, there could be a resident who has the skills, time and enthusiasm to take on the task as a volunteer. A co-ordinator could be employed by the partnership through financial contributions from its members. Support could be available from the Countryside Agency or regional development agencies for co-ordinators in specific towns.

In the words of a town councillor who has enthusiastically been involved in a healthcheck, a co-ordinator needs to have good 'circus skills'!

1.4 Steering a partnership

The partnership will need a steering group comprising members and a chairman.

The role of the steering group is to:

- direct the work of the co-ordinator if he or she is answerable to the partnership as an employer
- help the co-ordinator to arrange the events which identify the main issues and report back to the community on the results of the healthcheck
- assist in the preparation of the action plan.

The chairman should:

- work closely with the co-ordinator on all aspects of the

healthcheck

- make sure that partnership members are clear about their individual and collective roles
- make sure that any working groups have defined responsibilities and roles
- build consensus among different interest groups
- oversee regular progress reports.

1.5 Role of working groups

These will take on responsibility for tackling specific worksheets. The number of working groups and their terms of reference will need to flow from the first community event which identifies the issues, and the interests and concerns of the partnership members. Most members will have a strong interest in a particular topic and are likely to gravitate to working groups which reflect these.

The role of a working group is to:

- address specific issues
- generate community involvement in the healthcheck
- complete the worksheets
- help report the healthcheck results back to the wider community
- generate ideas for future action
- research and evaluate those ideas.

1.6 Obtaining specialist advice

Most towns have people with the relevant skills and experience needed to support the healthcheck. Members of the partnership or people they know can fill most of the gaps. Partnerships should look to secure support from

professionals working for organisations in the town or in providing specific services to the town, such as the district, unitary or county council, tourist board, or skills and learning council. Potential sources of advice are illustrated in Figure 4. Ideally this should be sought as an 'in-kind' contribution from these organisations as a sign of commitment to the revitalisation programme. However, the reality is that public sector organisations face constraints on their staff time and budgets, and market town partnerships may need to secure funding to 'buy in' some professional advice. Support could be available from the Countryside Agency or regional development agencies in specific towns.

1.7 Ensuring full community involvement

The partnership will need to consult and involve the wider community of the market town and surrounding countryside in doing the healthcheck and preparing an action plan.

There are at least four occasions on which the community has an important role:

- at a community event to establish the main concerns and opportunities
- taking part in workshops
- taking part in an event to set and agree a vision
- support in translating the resulting plan into action.

Widening the partnership offers an opportunity to bring in a broad range of groups and individuals to the process. It also provides a way of involving certain organisations that may not wish, or should not be

involved in the steering arrangements. For example, the district/unitary and county council may consider that they are better represented through membership of the wider partnership rather than taking a lead role in the steering group, which should have a strong community focus. Major employers and landowners may also be better placed as members of the wider partnership rather than being part of the steering group, but this depends on local circumstances. Box 4 gives some advice on ways to make the partnership as inclusive as possible.

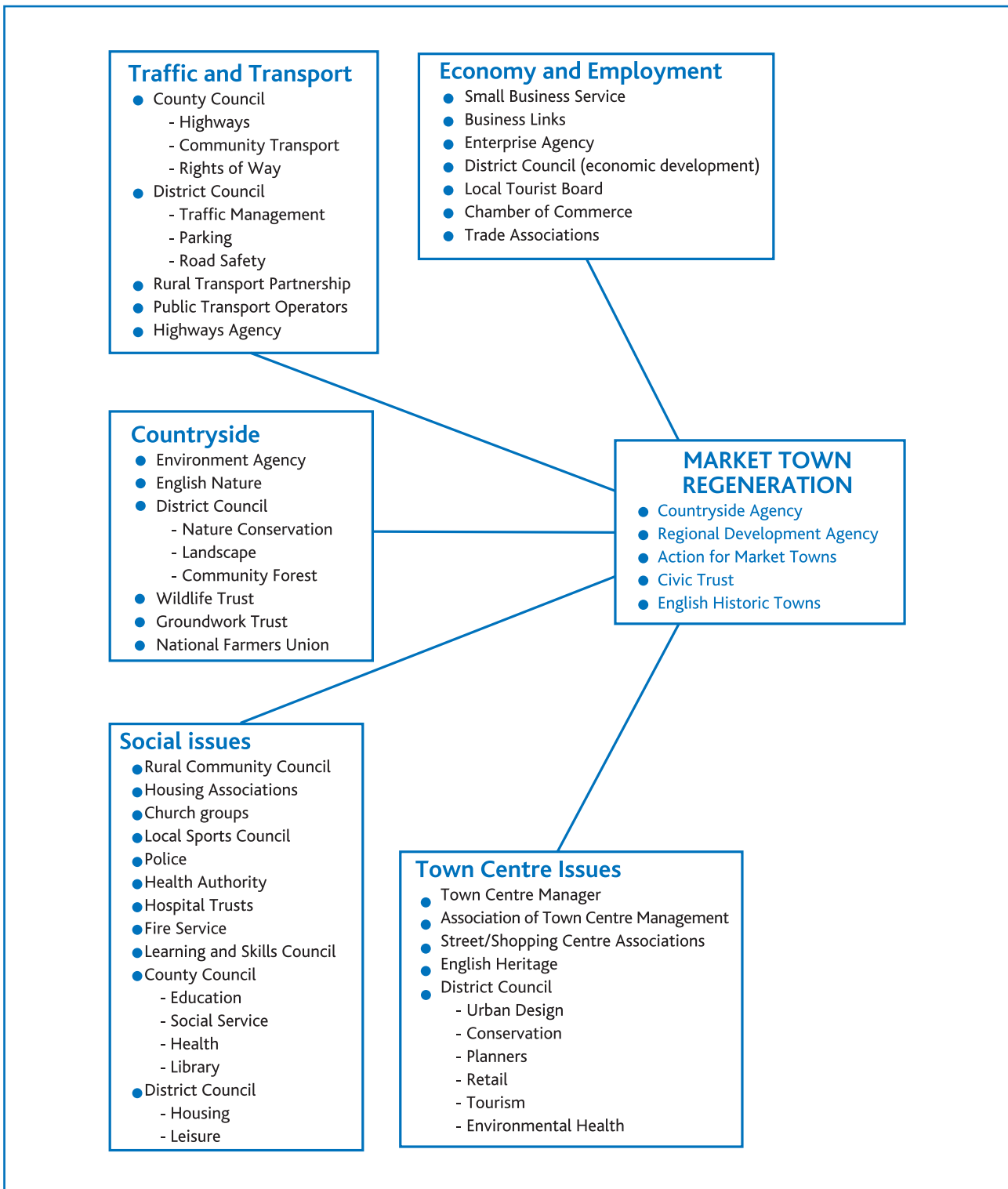
When widening the partnership, it will be useful to decide how wide to draw the boundary of the town's catchment area. Box 5 suggests ways in which this can be assessed and a decision made about the partnership boundary. There will be no single obvious boundary except where the coast or other physical features create one. Many rural residents will use different towns for different services, or may well shop in one town for food but in another, larger settlement, for clothes or furniture. A sensible boundary will include all those places where residents naturally look to the town for jobs, goods and services. It should not be drawn, however, so widely as to include villages where only a few people are likely to have any real concern for the future of the town itself. The interests of people from further afield, who visit or work in town, can be represented through surveys, e.g. tourism surveys, or by the involvement of major employers and schools in the partnership.

It can be difficult to establish a single catchment area around the town where it overlaps or includes other market towns. This may be a case for considering a

wider partnership to include several towns. Box 6 gives some advice on how to develop a partnership to carry out the healthcheck for more than one

town. There are already successful multi-town or area-based partnerships.

FIGURE 4 - Sources of specialist advice



Box 4**Making the partnership inclusive and representative**

- Invite groups from all ages and sections of the community to join the partnership, making sure you involve 'hard to reach' groups such as the elderly, young people and those with disabilities.
- Seek to involve children and young adults through:
 - schools, colleges and youth clubs
 - inviting them to undertake information collation or vision projects
 - separate workshops or special events.
- Use surveys and questionnaires to canvass opinion from across the community including those who may not otherwise participate.
- Consult widely, using the local press and through the members of the partnership.
- Make sure you specifically engage communities in the countryside around the town.

Box 5**Deciding on the town's hinterland or catchment area**

- There will be no single boundary which fits all services but you need to decide how widely to set the limits of the partnership.
- Review any shopping, visitor or employment surveys done by the district county council or others. Do your own survey of shoppers and visitors, if necessary.
- Ask local employers, shop and leisure facility operators where their workforce or customers live.
- Consult the district and county council planning department, the rural community council, and town and parish councils.
- Consult local bus and rail operators.
- Talk to head teachers, college principals and the education department.
- Consult the local health authority and GPs.
- Decide on a sensible outer boundary for the partnership, including those rural communities who should have a real interest in the future of the town.

Box 6**Widening the partnership to include several towns**

- If the town's catchment as a shopping or other service centre clearly overlaps with other nearby towns, there is a good case for a wider partnership.
- Similarly, if these are other close links, through jobs, sports, health or education facilities, there is a good case for a wider partnership.
- If one or more nearby towns face the same problems, you may decide that a joint partnership offers advantages.
- Consult the town and parish councils, district and county councils, the rural community council, the Countryside Agency and the regional development agency to see if there are other practical reasons for a joint partnership.
- Consult nearby towns' parish or town councils to see if they are interested in a joint partnership.

But note, an effective single town partnership will be better than a multi-town partnership whose interests or concerns are too different.

They Did It - You Can Too!

The Mendips - comprehensive five towns approach

Mendip District Council has been leading and supporting town action plans for over five years in five towns:

- Frome
- Glastonbury
- Shepton Mallet
- Wells
- Street

These market towns have faced a variety of problems, including a declining retail sector in Shepton Mallet and Frome, and competing challenges related to tourism and amenity in Street, Glastonbury and Wells. A new relief road for Wells and bypasses for Frome and Glastonbury have improved environmental quality of these centres while diverting some trade away. In response, the district council has appointed five town centre officers to assist and lead with projects to improve the vitality and viability of the towns.

Most of the towns have established task forces or partnerships to bring together the three tiers of local government, chambers of commerce, police, schools and businesses to address issues comprehensively. These bodies contribute ideas and strategy for the action plans, which receive an annual budget of £17,000 from the district council. This budget is supplemented from revenue sources, legal agreements and ringfenced car parking charges across the district.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Maldon - economic and tourism initiatives

The Maldon initiative has a partnership which includes representatives from several companies within the town including Tesco, Boots and a local property developer, the West Station Group. A business plan has been prepared, along with a town centre action plan. The focus of the plan is:

- economic development
- promotion and marketing
- cultural development
- physical environment
- community involvement.

The partnership has enough funding in place to support a part-time town centre manager. Initiatives to date include a website (www.maldon.co.uk), a focus on tourism including shopkeepers who act as town stewards to provide information to visitors, Sea Salt recipe cards, a town trail, local art, and the involvement of New Deal volunteers helping with administration. Many of these volunteers have gone on to full-time work.

2 Gaining community commitment

Purpose:

- to get a full understanding of the healthcheck and involvement from people in the town and surrounding countryside.
- to map out the main issues of concern to the community.

The partnership needs to embrace the concerns of the community. These concerns will guide the way in which the healthcheck worksheets are answered and may form the priorities for the vision and action plan. Answering the worksheets will help confirm or challenge the issues.

2.1 Arranging a community event to establish the issues

The best way is for the co-ordinator to arrange an evening or half-day event on behalf of the partnership. This should involve the whole community, including the interested organisations and the general public of the town and surrounding countryside. A number of models for running a community event are given in the Community Participation Directory. If the partnership has not yet appointed a co-ordinator, it can select one or a number of its members to arrange the event. The partnership will need to pool resources in terms of administrative support, advertising, printing and providing a venue for the event.

The partnership should seek a facilitator with relevant experience and skills to help run the event (see Box 7). It is important that the facilitator is someone who is, and is seen to be, objective. There are a number of professional facilitators who could be employed directly by one or a group of partnerships. The district, unitary or rural community council may have in-house community development

workers who could fulfil this role.

An event to establish the community's concerns also allows existing groups and projects to explain what they have been doing to a wider audience. It can highlight specific concerns that should be given particular attention during the healthcheck. Long-standing issues and disagreements will inevitably be raised, but it is important to hold an event

Box 7

Key skills of a facilitator

An effective facilitator needs to be:

- independent and trusted by the participants
- familiar with the issues facing market towns regeneration
- experienced in managing community events
- a good communicator
- able to ask and answer difficult questions
- able to diffuse potential conflicts between participants
- able to draw conclusions
- able to secure consensus or at least clear agreement.

which draws people and organisations into the partnership and helps them to recognise the potential benefits of examining a wide range of topics in the healthcheck.

2.2 Holding a community event

At the start of the event the co-ordinator or chairman of the steering group should:

- set out what the town can gain from doing a healthcheck and preparing an action plan, and also explain the main stages in the process
- give a brief description of the town and surrounding rural area
- discuss what initiatives are already underway.

The independent facilitator should:

- lead a discussion on the main problems and opportunities facing the area
- sum up the areas of agreement and highlight the issues.

During the event the facilitator can open up the discussion to involve everyone in a 'brainstorming' session on what

people's aspirations are for their community in the short, medium and long term. It can help to relate this discussion to a specific time in the future, e.g. what do you want this town to be like in ten or fifteen years' time?; what is standing in the way of success? This can either be done as an 'open floor' exercise or as smaller workshops that then report back to the whole meeting. It should allow people to identify the strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the town (called a SWOT analysis) and to voice their opinions on how they would like the town to evolve. Workshops can also be arranged to tease out the main issues for the healthcheck and action plan. These workshops could be organised around the four main worksheet headings: environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility.

The main findings of each workshop should be fed back to the whole community for agreement on what are the main issues for the action plan. The recorded outcomes of the event will assist in deciding the scope of the work to be undertaken on the healthcheck. The partnership may also wish to review whether it needs to bring in any new partners to cover new issues that have emerged during the event.

They Did It - You Can Too!

South Molton - Molton 2000 community initiative

South Molton, in North Devon, is a partnership in the process of preparing an action plan. The initiative began in 1995 but experienced problems after a consultant prepared a strategy for them which did not focus on the community development and capacity building issues that were crucial to the partnership. However, having appointed a Community Development Worker for the town funded by the Rural Development Partnership, the county and district councils and the LEADER programme, a successful series of seminars was carried out in the community and five working groups were set up to consider the following issues:

- clean-up/environmental enhancement
- community building/community hall
- transport/traffic
- town centre issues
- general community issues.

The partnership has now applied for funding through the Devon Key Fund and is in the process of preparing its action plan, expected in 2002.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Wareham - planning for real in Dorset

Wareham Ahead is a community project which has been running since 1996. It has produced an action plan to the year 2005, through a Planning for Real exercise and public workshops, which focuses on the problems facing the town:

- Shopping - need for improved accessible town centre facilities
- Access - ease of access and parking without harm to pedestrians
- Tourism - how best to attract tourists into the town to help to support the services
- Environment - improving the attractiveness of public areas.

Achievements to date include a Community Learning Centre, two Saxon Festivals, a French Street Market, additional signage for the Thursday markets, and increased youth activities for 9-14 year olds. A town centre healthcheck has now been undertaken. The partnership gets funding from a variety of sources including the county and district councils, the Single Regeneration Budget and the Dorset County Towns Partnership.

3 Completing a healthcheck

Purpose:

- to draw together a 'snapshot' of the town and surrounding countryside.
- to tackle the questions in the worksheets which help identify strengths and weaknesses.
- to draw together the results in a report, in preparation for creating a vision and drawing up an action plan.

The healthcheck consists of questions that cover all aspects that affect peoples' quality of life in a market town and surrounding countryside. It starts with a factual 'snapshot' of the market town and continues with worksheets covering four main topic areas: environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility. A full list of the 18 worksheets and their structure is shown in Figure 5.

3.1 'Snapshot' of the town and surrounding countryside

The purpose of this exercise is to provide a 'snapshot' of the town and surrounding countryside which will help answer the questions in the worksheets. Factual information about existing services, facilities etc. will provide a background that can be balanced with the community's aspirations which emerge from the worksheets.

The co-ordinator should be able to collect and collate the basic information about the town and surrounding countryside from published information, reports and other studies compiled by the district council and other organisations. The working groups may also play a part in gathering the information. Advice on existing information and data sources is given in the Data Sources and Survey Methods Directory. A table with examples of information in the snapshot is in Figure 6.

FIGURE 5 - List of worksheets

Environment

- EN1 Character and vitality of the town
- EN2 The countryside
- EN3 Links between town and country

Economy

- EC1 Employment
- EC2 Retail and town centre services
- EC3 Training and education
- EC4 Commercial and industrial property needs
- EC5 Tourism and visitor services
- EC6 Business support

Social and community

- S1 Population
- S Housing
- S3 Health and public safety
- S4 Local government and community organisations
- S5 Sport, leisure and open space
- S6 Culture and heritage

Transport and accessibility

- T1 Ease of travel to and from the local areas
- T2 Ease of access to services
- T3 Ease of movement around the town

FIGURE 6: Examples of snapshot information

Environment

- Areas important for conservation
- Number of listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Number of footpaths and bridleways linking town with adjoining countryside

Economy

- Change in number of jobs in last three years
- Jobs to economically active residents ratio
- Unemployment rate
- Number of comparison goods shops in the town centre
- Shop vacancy rate in town centre

Social and Community

- Rank in Indices of Deprivation
- Change in population since 1991
- % of population aged over 65/60
- Change in average house price
- Number of banks and building societies
- Number of hotel bedspaces

Transport and Accessibility

- Journey time by car/public transport to nearest large town
- % of households without a car
- Number of parking spaces serving the town centre
- Number of bus routes serving the town and hinterland

Most of the facts are easily available or can be collected for individual market towns. They may be less easy to obtain for the rural hinterland or catchment area. The priority should be to collect them for the town itself.

3.2 Answering the worksheets

The worksheets have been designed to act as a practical checklist. They are intended to be as objective as possible but will reflect the extent of community aspirations, concerns and priorities. They are not meant to be prescriptive or onerous. They are merely guides to establishing objective and factual information about the area. What is most important is that the evaluation of the worksheets will reflect people's aspirations, concerns and priorities. The results should

be drawn together in a vision for the market town and surrounding countryside to form the basis for an action plan.

The steering group, aided by the co-ordinator, will need to decide who takes on the responsibility for answering the worksheets. The topic-based working groups would be recommended. Priorities and a timetable for the healthcheck will need to be agreed, based on the concerns identified at the event.

It is important to secure a broad and representative understanding of the issues and

concerns of the community. The district or unitary council, or a local group, may have recently carried out a community attitudes or shopping survey. These can give a representative picture of how people use the town and its facilities, and perhaps more importantly, their attitudes to existing problems and future opportunities. Take into account the implications of any special attributes of the town, for example, a coastal town.

The worksheets are given as individual sheets for each topic area that can be copied and used by individuals and groups in the community. Each worksheet has:

- core questions which represent the bare minimum to be covered in each topic area. It is important that the core questions from each of the four main worksheet topics are answered so that connections between issues can be made.
- supplementary questions which explore particular interests or concerns in greater detail. The worksheets are designed to be flexible, allowing people to select from the supplementary questions available. For example, if fear of crime is a priority for the community, there are supplementary questions in the Health and Public Safety Worksheet which will produce a greater depth of understanding and elicit more information than the core questions.

Basic information is likely to be available from published sources, reports and other studies. The district or unitary council may

FIGURE 7: Example of a structure for completing worksheets - 1

Worksheet question	Available information	Information needed	Source of information required	Who to complete	Timetable for completing
for example EN1					
Core Q1					
Core Q2					
Core Q3					
Core Q4					
Core Q5					
Core Q6					
Core Q7					
Core Q8					
Core Q9					
Supplementary Q1					
Supplementary Q2					
Supplementary Q3					
Supplementary Q4					

have already undertaken studies on one or more of the main issues, and may be able to provide assistance to working groups. In some instances, new surveys may be necessary. Advice on existing information and data sources, and on survey methods, ranging from traffic counts to townscape appraisals, is given in the Data Sources and Survey Methods Directory.

The emphasis, however, is on the community's aspirations for the town and its surrounding countryside. It is this which will help form the vision.

It is essential that the core questions from each of the four main sections are answered. The healthcheck is designed to join up economic, social and environmental matters. It should not focus on one issue at the expense of others.

It is also important that communities in the surrounding

countryside have their say. Make sure that the surrounding countryside is considered in relation to each topic and question and consider establishing a separate working group to look at the links between the town and its rural hinterland.

Some examples of structures to use when answering the worksheets are in Figures 7 & 8.

3.3 Drawing the results together

The co-ordinator or a small number of steering group members will need draw together the answers to the worksheets in a report.

The results of the healthcheck will include different types of information:

- basic facts, for example, changes in numbers of local jobs, the availability and use of particular services

- information collected through organised surveys, for example, the condition of buildings
- qualitative information about the communities attitudes and aspirations
- other interpretation and assessments by individual working groups.

The results should highlight problems or opportunities that should be acted upon. For example, the results of the work on housing may show that there is insufficient existing information and that a more detailed survey of future housing requirements needs to be undertaken. Alternatively, the analysis related to education and training may indicate a need for locally-based information technology provision so that residents can gain jobs in town.

There will inevitably be inconsistencies and differences of

FIGURE 8: Example of a structure for completing worksheets - 2

Worksheet question	Answer	Main issues	Strength/weakness opportunity or threat
for example EN1			
Core Q1			
Core Q2			
Core Q3			
Core Q4			
Core Q5			
Core Q6			
Core Q7			
Core Q8			
Core Q9			
Supplementary Q1			
Supplementary Q2			
Supplementary Q3			
Supplementary Q4			

opinion. These may well be addressing related or overlapping issues, but from different perspectives. To give two obvious examples:

- the recorded incidence of crime may be very low, but this rarely matches residents’ fear of crime particularly articulated through community appraisals. Both the actual statistics and residents’ perceptions are legitimate measures which may need to be explored further in the action plan.
- the town centre working group may conclude that free parking is crucial to the future of local shops, while the transport group advocates stringent parking controls to ease congestion and traffic flow.

Differences of opinion will need to be explored and resolved as

part of the process of completing the healthcheck. This can be done by:

- distributing a draft of the results to all members of the partnership and to individuals in the community requesting written responses for their comments.
- holding an event to which all members of the partnership and invited members of the community attend. An independent facilitator will be able to work through conflicting issues, and the specialist advisors can provide advice on appropriate action which resolves inconsistencies and differences.

The results of the healthcheck should be written up in a report to provide:

- information from which to develop the vision and action plan

- information for any future funding bid
- a record of what has been found out
- a basis for monitoring and comparing towns with other towns, a process called ‘benchmarking’.

A suggested format for reporting the results is shown in Figure 9.

The healthcheck report should be made widely available and preferably at no cost to the community. It should form the basis of establishing a vision for the town and surrounding countryside.

FIGURE 9: Healthcheck report format

Partners:				
Town/communities involved:				
Events/surveys undertaken:				
Key statistics about the towns and its surrounding countryside:				
Healthcheck SWOT:				
	Threats	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities
Environmental				
Economic				
Social and community				
Transport and accessibility				
Healthcheck links structure:				
	Environmental	Economic	Social and community	Transport and accessibility
Environmental				
Economic				
Social and community				
Transport and accessibility				
Key findings and gaps in available information:				

They Did It - You Can Too!

Wigton - the regeneration partnership

The Wigton Regeneration Partnership was formed in March 2000 with support from Allerdale Borough Council and Cumbria County Council. Initial work identified common areas of concern amongst the community:

- traffic and the environment
- business and tourism
- youth issues
- health
- sport and leisure
- crime and disorder

A partnership committee was formed and six focus groups were established to consider these issues. Separate reports on each issue were brought together in a draft action plan in January 2001. Wigton was then in an ideal position to help pilot the market town healthcheck. Through workshops and further consultation exercises, the draft plan was modified and a vision prepared for the town and its surrounding countryside. The partnership is now actively implementing the plan as part of the Countryside Agency and North West Development Agency's Market Towns Initiative.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Penistone - "charette" in action

A 'charette' is an effective, highly interactive, community-based planning tool. By working through an impartial team of experts which listens to the views of the community, it has the unique advantage of giving both immediate feedback and ownership to all participants. Within an accelerated timeframe, a full range of issues, community concerns and alternatives can be researched and discussed.

In Penistone near Barnsley in South Yorkshire, six 'experts in their field' were invited to run a charette as part of the Countryside Agency and regional development agency's support for the town through the Market Towns Initiative. The experts came from organisations such as the Countryside Agency and the Rural Community Council, and included a consultant with rural experience and a qualified planner.

The team worked in Penistone for three days. Its purpose was to provide the community with new ideas, reflections and insights on three key themes identified by the local community in preparation for carrying out a healthcheck and preparing an action plan. An intensive schedule, which included tours of the town and meetings with local groups, was drawn up.

The three key themes were:

1. What role does the rural hinterland of Penistone have to play in the future of the town? What are the issues facing agriculture and tourism in particular, and how can rural communities be effectively engaged in planning for the future development of Penistone as a service centre?
2. How can the young people of Penistone have their say in developing the town? What are the barriers to effective participation at present and how may they be overcome?
3. How can the town centre be made a more attractive and vibrant place for visitors and residents alike? What are the major structural issues currently restricting the town from being a vital centre for the western wards of Barnsley Borough?

The charette provided an opportunity for a team of people unfamiliar with the area to cast an educated, experienced eye over 'old problems', without 'baggage', and to draw upon their expertise to identify new ways forward. It reached out to many people in a short space of time and helped raise the profile of the town. The charette team produced a report of their visit which, along with the results of a local Planning for Real exercise, will feed into the healthcheck and action plan.

The experience in Penistone demonstrates that a charette team works best where it has:

- an agenda which allows its members to meet and talk with as many people as possible, while familiarising themselves with the town
- an ability to change the agenda within reason as it sees fit
- a dedicated local co-ordinating/steering committee to make local arrangements
- time to think, reflect and discuss as a team what has been seen and heard
- sufficient information in advance, sufficient team members and enough time to tackle the issues - it is recommended that prior planning of 3 months minimum will achieve the best results.

4 Creating a vision

Purpose:

- to work with the community to create a vision for the town and surrounding countryside based on the healthcheck.

The results of the healthcheck need to be evaluated to create a vision for the town and surrounding countryside. It is important to set out clearly what the community wants, based soundly on the knowledge obtained from the worksheets. This should be expressed clearly to describe what is needed and what will be done. From this vision, ideas will flow which will develop into an action plan that will be used to guide and plot progress.

4.1 Holding a community event to establish the vision

An event should be arranged by the co-ordinator on behalf of the steering group with the help of an independent facilitator. The event should be run in a way which people of different abilities and backgrounds will find easy and enjoyable to take part. It should aim to unite the partnership and encourage them to work towards the shared vision. It will reflect the ambition of the partnership.

Inconsistencies and differences of opinion may remain, but it will be important to share the vision with all the interested parties and to ensure that it accurately represents agreed aspirations, aims and objectives.

At the event the following should be considered:

- issues identified in the first community event including the links between issues identified both for the town and its surrounding countryside
- the results of the healthcheck
- the objectives and priorities of partnership members

- the capabilities and resources available to and through the partnership
- how agreement can be reached.

There is a positive role for all, be they professionals, specialists or the generally interested, to help to provide advice on action to deal with specific issues and to explore links between issues.

4.2 Reporting on the vision

The co-ordinator should draw together the vision as a written statement. This should be ambitious, but practical and realistic. Ideally the vision needs to inspire people, both local and those from other organisations. It should set out strategic objectives. This is often necessary because success may depend on any number of economic, social and environmental factors. Expressing the vision in terms of practical objectives will enable it to be understood by all involved. This in turn, will make it easier to identify what needs to be done to achieve the vision.

5 Preparing an action plan

Purpose:

- to prepare an action plan to achieve the objectives agreed in the vision.
- to secure community support for the action plan.

The action plan demonstrates how the vision can be achieved. It may be used to:

- market the town
- disseminate information to local people, organisations and visitors
- attract funding and support
- set out the aims, objectives and actions of the partnership
- co-ordinate specific actions, and feed into other existing or proposed ventures
- provide a detailed framework for monitoring and review by funding bodies, ensuring that assistance is being targeted to meet the strategic objectives.

Some principles for preparing the plan are given in Box 8.

5.1 Format of an action plan

The action plan may be drawn together by the co-ordinator on behalf of the partnership and its steering group. Parts may be produced by the working groups. There is no 'correct' way to prepare an action plan. Each one will be different, in terms of the problems, issues, aspirations and remedial measures relevant to a town and surrounding countryside. The advice set out here is not meant to be prescriptive. It is intended as a guide to elements that an action plan could contain. The suggested components of an action plan are shown in Figure 10.

Equally, there is no standard way in which to structure an action plan. However, it should give information on the vision, objectives and actions and be:

- clear and concise
- easy to read and understand

Box 8

Principles of preparing the action plan

The action plan is the key tool in achieving the market towns vision which has been developed from the healthcheck.

- The process of preparing the action plan should be as open and transparent as possible.
- It should be proactive in seeking to involve as many local people and relevant organisations as possible.
- Meetings should all be open to the public, and the information generated be publicly available.
- Make fullest use of locally available expertise, facilities and support wherever possible.
- Be respectful (yet pragmatic) to existing regeneration projects and initiatives in the area and how the action plan could complement these.
- Make use of existing relevant studies and information wherever possible.
- Nurture the interest and vitality already present in the area and build upon it with a long term perspective.
- The action plan should not be rigid, it should be flexible enough to respond to changing requirements.
- Be innovative yet practical.
- Set out clear goals, objectives and steps or actions to achieve the vision.

FIGURE 10: Suggested contents for an action plan

Not every plan will look the same or contain the same information in the same level of detail but a good action plan will contain all or most of the following:

Description of the market town and its surrounding countryside

The action plan should contain a description of:

- the geographical area involved
- the main characteristics and features of both the town and its surrounding countryside (these should be in the snapshot)
- details of existing projects and initiatives which contribute to the regeneration of the area.

The partnership

The action plan should identify:

- who 'owns' the plan, i.e. did the partnership write the plan and does it represent the agreed views of communities in the town and surrounding countryside?
- the membership of the partnership, including the chair and steering group
- working groups with their membership and remit
- the general composition of the wider consultation group and how they were involved
- how the partnership and working groups operate, e.g. accountabilities, remit, reporting and communication methods
- details of the employing body for any staff
- contact details for the main contact(s) in the partnership.

The healthcheck

The action plan should contain:

- reference to the healthcheck report in the main body of the plan plus the report attached as an annex or details of where it can be obtained
- details of how the healthcheck was carried out including community participation, data gathering and how the vision was agreed.

The vision

The action plan should:

- describe the vision for the market town and its hinterland, e.g. as a SWOT analysis
- set out long, medium and short term aims
- be a coherent and guiding feature of the plan.

Aims and objectives

The action plan should clearly state what the partnership will do to achieve the vision including:

- how the partnership will the identified local challenges, needs and problems
- how the aims of the partnership link in with other strategic statements and policy documents for the local and regional area, e.g. development plan, regional economic strategy.

Activities

The action plan should specify activities to deliver each objective. These activities should include:

- actions or tasks
- milestones, timescales and targets
- outputs (i.e. what the physical or immediate result is) and outcomes (i.e. what affect this result will have) e.g. improving the bus service between a village and the town is an output; making it easier for more people to visit the town to shop or access services such as banks and the post office, is an outcome
- estimated/accurate costs for each activity proposed
- the lead body for each activity
- match funding sources
- priorities, especially in relation to existing or competing demands on local resources, and in the short, medium and long term.

Threats, risks and realism

The action plan should:

- think ahead to any factors that might threaten the delivery of the plan and suggest how these might be overcome.

Judging success

The action plan should be reviewed at appropriate intervals. Consider:

- who will ensure that the aims and objectives are achieved
- how will communities in the town and surrounding hinterland consider the plan has successfully improved the quality of life
- are there towns nearby with which to compare progress
- what plans are there for ongoing community involvement in the delivery of the plan
- when will the plan be reviewed again.

- widely available
- illustrated and not overburdened with text
- easy to update.

As the action plan may have to serve a number of purposes for a variety of audiences, it may be best to prepare a full document plus a brief summary. The full document should set out the vision, strategic objectives and project details, along with relevant data, in sufficient detail for funding bodies to review and monitor progress on a regular basis. The summary should give the main information and can be used for general distribution and promotion.

Overall, the action plan should set out who is responsible for taking action and the timescales for achieving action. Identifying targets provides a means of reviewing progress and determining whether objectives are being achieved.

A structure for listing actions is in Figure 11.

Preparing an action plan involves:

- taking the vision into account
- identifying available resources
- identifying priorities for action
- monitoring and evaluation.

5.2 Taking the vision into account

The action plan should start with the statement of the vision and strategic objectives. All actions and projects should relate to these needs.

5.3 Identifying available resources

There is a need to explore possible sources of funding. It will be important to examine:

- the resources available

amongst the partners to help with the production and implementation of the action plan

- the resources available from national, regional and local bodies
- potential revitalisation projects
- potential resources attainable through other means of fund-raising or alternative sources of help in the form of equipment or specialist advice.

The town and surrounding countryside may also have resources which are not used to their fullest extent, or have opportunities to provide new resources. For example: vacant land or buildings, areas of high landscape or wildlife value which are currently little visited, business groups not used to full advantage, or untapped potential in the form of voluntary groups or unemployed and retired people with skills.

5.4 Identifying priorities for action

The partnership should decide on the main areas it intends to address through the action plan, e.g. physical or environmental quality, tourism, business, leisure, and if appropriate, the geographical areas to target. A programme of actions for each geographical area could be established. Such a programme should tie in with the overall strategic objectives.

Given that resources are unlikely to be sufficient to cover each issue or area in an equitable way, and that it will be important to address some earlier than others, the partnership should give each action a priority. It will

be necessary to rank these according to the extent to which each is required, supported by local people, and in terms of the resources available to achieve them. It may be necessary to focus on only two or three topics or geographical areas in the short term. Such decisions should receive the full support of the partnership.

The partnership should generate and review suggestions for projects which will deliver the overall vision and strategic objectives. These will be expressed as a series of actions and could include long term activities as well as short to medium term measures that will contribute to meeting the overall aims. These may be 'bricks-and-mortar' projects or others that relate to 'softer' ventures such as training.

Each project will need to be fully explored and worked up into a viable proposition which relates to the strategic objectives in the vision. It is especially important to identify initiatives which offer the prospect of providing the partnership with some 'quick wins'. Each proposal should be clearly identified in terms of its nature, expected outputs, costs, who is responsible for implementation, and the timescale for completion.

The level of detail given in the action plan depends on local circumstances. The partnership may be asked to work up detailed bids or action plans for specific partners or specific projects which are mentioned in the action plan. The action plan can be an umbrella document for these. However, a specific bid document or plan, such as a delivery plan for a regional

development agency, does not replace a market town action plan.

Other programmes, plans and initiatives which may have a positive relationship with the action plan should be clearly identified and arrangements for co-ordination established to

achieve common goals. How the action plan relates to other strategies and plans, for example, the development plan, needs to be clear and will save duplication of effort. The partnership should seek to sign up the organisations responsible for specific projects to the action plan.

It will be important to monitor the impact and effectiveness of actions to determine the extent to which objectives are being met and to review the vision and action plan accordingly. This is addressed more fully in the next section.

FIGURE 11: Action plan structure

Topic	Action	Strategic Objectives	Priority	Who's Responsible	How	When	Target to be monitored	Progress
Environment								
	1							
	2							
	3							
	4 etc							
Economic								
	1							
	2							
	3							
	4 etc							
Social and Community								
	1							
	2							
	3							
	4 etc							
Transport and Accessibility								
	1							
	2							
	3							
	4 etc							

They Did It - You Can Too!

West Devon - two action plans underway

Tavistock (10,000 population) and Okehampton (5,000) are the main focus of efforts for market towns regeneration in West Devon. Tavistock has an initiative called Tavistock Forward which focuses on improving business and promoting trade in the town through a series of business workshops. The business group will sift through the ideas and issues raised, and form an action plan for the town to be approved by the county and town councils. The Okehampton initiative, Okehampton 2000, is more established. The steering group includes the county, district and town councils, the Chamber of Trade and other community groups. A strategy has been prepared by consultants and a survey undertaken. These have been discussed at three public meetings. A secondary initiative, Okehampton OK, focuses on the business life in the town. Both are funded through the European Commission and by the county and district councils. A new wider action plan for towns in West Devon is being developed which will encompass the work in both towns.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Ulverston - community revitalisation in the Lake District

Ulverston 2000+ is the Ulverston action plan produced by a local partnership including the county, district and town councils, along with advisory groups representing the interest areas of traffic, environment, business and tourism. The process involved carrying out a SWOT analysis, seminars, workshops and community surveys to produce a detailed plan for initiatives related to the environment, transport and traffic, business support and training, and promotion, tourism and marketing. The partnership has received a total of £2.5 million funding to date and its achievements include:

- development of the Festival Town concept
- environmental improvements
- development of a range of Business Support packages
- reduction in the number of empty shops from 31 to five in three years
- production of high quality promotional material for the town.

6 Putting the plan into action

Purpose:

- to put the plan into action and achieve results.
- to monitor and evaluate progress.
- to review the vision and action plan.

The market town partnership may now wish to appoint a project manager and develop a legal structure to make sure that actions identified in the plan are carried out. The order of events involved with implementing the action plan is shown in Figure 12.

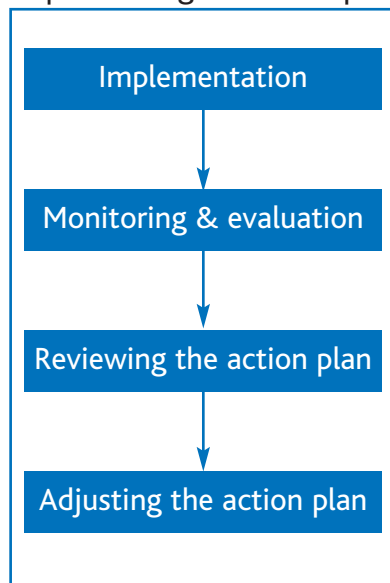
6.1 Restructuring a partnership

The project manager works with the steering group to implement the projects and initiatives contained within the action plan. He/she will also keep the community informed of progress. An effective project manager needs to:

- have urban or community regeneration experience
- understand public sector and business interests
- have the ability to mobilise voluntary efforts
- have financial and physical project management experience.

A minimum two to three year commitment is likely to be needed to achieve results. The need for a full or part-time appointment will depend on the scope of the action plan and on the amount of community participation that has been developed during the healthcheck. The skills required are similar to, but more

FIGURE 12:
Implementing the action plan



practically orientated, than those for the healthcheck co-ordinator. Some co-ordinators will be able to carry the action plan forward as project managers, but any decision depends on an assessment of the skills and expertise of the individual concerned and the needs of the partnership. Support for a project manager could be available from the Countryside Agency or regional development agencies in specific towns.

Informal partnerships can work efficiently as the manager of co-ordinators and project managers, usually relying on one of the partners, e.g. a local authority, to act as employer. As the plan is put into action it may

be necessary for the partnership to take on a legal structure which is required to receive public funding. Three options are:

- a partnership company, managed by a board of directors
- a partnership consortium, governed by a memorandum of agreement where a limited number of partners, which are themselves corporate bodies, take responsibility for particular strands of work
- a charitable trust.

It is advisable to take legal advice before making a decision on which is most appropriate.

6.2 Carrying out actions

One of the challenges lies in achieving and maintaining a sufficient level of enthusiasm and momentum to make things happen. Once the action plan has been prepared, it is important that any momentum gained is not lost during its implementation. The project manager should:

- set out a clear programme of action and keep to it
- clearly identify the roles and responsibilities for those in the partnership
- demonstrate the achievement of targets to the partnership, wider community and funding partners so that a sense of progress and

accomplishment is maintained

- draw on specialist assistance where necessary
- seek new sources of funding wherever possible
- be flexible, willing to adapt, and receptive to new ideas
- be pragmatic about what is realistic, viable and achievable.

6.3 Monitoring and evaluating results

The project manager and steering group should consider in detail how and when monitoring is to be undertaken. Monitoring will determine:

- the outputs from each project
- whether targets are being achieved on time

- whether the strategic objectives of the vision are being met.

It will need to be undertaken regularly. Evaluation reports on the projects and key targets could be prepared on a yearly or half-yearly basis for distribution to the partnership and funding bodies.

6.4 Reviewing the vision and action plan

The evaluation can be used to review the vision and update the action plan. To review the vision it may be necessary for the partnership and project manager to run a community event similar to that held to gain community commitment. At this,

the vision should be considered in the light of the evaluation and adjusted accordingly.

In reviewing the action plan, projects which are not contributing adequately to the partnership's strategic objectives could be adapted or replaced with other initiatives. Any adjustments to the action plan which are necessary as a result of the monitoring, or as projects are completed, will need to be agreed by the steering group. The project manager and steering group can then seek to address other issues through new projects. These refinements will help to introduce fresh ideas and keep the partnership from becoming stale.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Ibstock - Ibstock Community Enterprise (ICE)

Ibstock is located in the old coalmining area of north Leicestershire. The pits began to close in the late 1980's and the area was designated a Rural Development Area. The ICE was formed in 1996 after a Civic Trust Regeneration Unit study identified the problems in the town. The ICE entered the Business in the Community Better Towns Competition and won £50,000 for their proposal to buy the old bank, recently closed down, and install a cashpoint machine and open a community information centre. The ICE went on to win European funding and the town is in the process of establishing a community woodland, organising and running Festivals in the town, and most recently, buying an old factory in the town for use as a managed workspace and training centre. Education and training are key to the ICE programme. Although the ICE organised focus groups and questionnaires in the early days, it now relies on the quarterly newsletter and the strong community network in the town to spread information and gauge the community's ideas and concerns.

They Did It - You Can Too!

Bakewell - community development in the Peak District

The achievements in Bakewell have been acknowledged by the award of the RTPI/CA Special Award for the Regeneration of Bakewell. The town suffered poor infrastructure, decline in the farming industry and was highly dependant on its tourist trade. Through a process of community participation a planning brief was prepared proposing a:

- new agricultural business centre with 'business link' office
- replacement library
- main centre redevelopment including a supermarket, offices, hotel and 30 dwellings
- training and business support initiatives
- town centre social housing
- River Wye biodiversity and education project.

Planning permission was granted and Rural Challenge and EU funding put in place. The proposed developments are now complete. The town has a budding Farmers Market and the £18m investment has created 700 jobs and 85 businesses.

Glossary of terms

Action plan

A practical plan for implementing the agreed objectives of the healthcheck. It will include a vision, objectives and a programme of specific projects usually over a two to three year time period. It should be updated annually.

Benchmarking

A method for comparing characteristics of a town with other market towns throughout the country. It is both a statistical comparison and an approach to looking in a qualitative way at comparable towns.

Co-ordinator

Person appointed to manage the healthcheck process. Their role is to provide liaison between the partnership and local community and provide administrative support.

Community event

An event organised by the co-ordinator or project manager on behalf of the market town partnership and its steering group, to engage the community of a market town and its surrounding countryside. Events are carried out to gain commitment to the healthcheck, to set a vision and to agree an action plan. Events may contain 'brainstorming' sessions to gather ideas and/or a series of workshops arranged around issues or topics.

Evaluation

Analysing the monitoring of progress against the action plan.

Facilitator

Person responsible for managing community involvement and running community events.

Healthcheck

The audit of the economy, environment, social and community assets and transport and accessibility of a market town and its surrounding countryside.

Healthcheck handbook

Practical guide to doing a market town healthcheck.

Hinterland/Catchment area

Rural area surrounding a town which includes communities that 'use' a town for a number of reasons, e.g. where they go to work, where they go shopping or where they go to use services such as the library, bank, job centre, hospital, health clinic, school etc.

Market town

Towns in rural areas with roughly between 2,000 to 20,000 population that have the history, or potential, of supporting and servicing its surrounding rural area.

Market town partnership

A partnership can be defined as a coalition of organisation and individuals who agree to work together for a common aim, or a compatible set of aims. Members of a partnership share resources and responsibilities and agree to work together in a co-operative and mutually supportive fashion to achieve partnership aims. Multi-town or area-based partnerships consist of people from more than one market town who share enough common issues to carry out joint healthchecks.

Monitoring

Checking the progress of the action plan at regular intervals. Leads to an evaluation.

Outputs

The effects of particular projects implemented through the action plan, e.g. installation of a certain number of CCTV cameras.

Participation

The process of involving the community in carrying out tasks such as the healthcheck. Good participation should be as inclusive as possible and should allow people to gain ownership of the process for themselves. It is more than consultation.

Performance indicators

Benchmarks to measure how the market town changes over time in response to specific programmes and initiatives.

Programme of actions

A programme of projects on a particular theme, e.g. transport, designed to achieve a particular strategic objective and stated in the action plan.

Project manager

Person appointed to implement action plan.

Quick win

A project identified in the action plan that can be implemented quickly.

Report

A written summary of the findings of the healthcheck.

Revitalisation

Improvements to the environmental, economic and social conditions of market towns and the surrounding countryside.

Single Regeneration Budget

The Single Regeneration Budget provides funding to support regeneration initiatives in England carried out by local partnerships.

Snapshot

Basic factual information about a market town and surrounding countryside prepared in advance of answering the worksheets.

Specialist advice

Members of a market town partnership with particular skills and expertise, or local and regional experts who work with the partnership. Provide advice on how to tackle the issues of concern to local communities which are identified from the healthcheck and on the feasibility of the vision and action plan.

Steering group

The core group of a market town partnership which directs the work of the co-ordinator and oversees the preparation of the healthcheck and action plan, led by an elected chairman.

Strategic objective

A statement for a particular aspect of revitalisation, e.g. environment or transport, which supports the vision.

Surrounding countryside

An area around a market town defined by the local community as being of importance to them.

SWOT

The process of identifying and analysing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Toolkit

The Countryside Agency's web-based guidance on market town revitalisation. Contains the market town healthcheck handbook and information on sources of advice and funding.

Vision

This establishes the overall aims of the market town partnership and the wider community to be achieved over a five to ten year period. It is expressed as strategic objectives.

Working groups

Members of the steering group and wider partnership grouped around the topics headings in the worksheets who help to answer the questions.

Worksheets

The main part of the healthcheck consisting of questions covering four main topic areas: environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility. Divided into core and supplementary questions. Used to the development of the healthcheck, especially

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