



**Bedfordshire  
Rural Social and Community Programme  
2007-8**

***April 2008***



## **Bedfordshire Rural Social and Community Programme 07/08**

**Final report – April 2008**

### **Contents**

<b>1. Detailed report on activities 2008</b>	
<b>Activity 1: Continuation and development of BRAAF</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Activity 2: Building Rural Community Capacity at Parish Level</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Activity 3 - Building the Capacity of the Rural Voluntary and Community Sector through Sustainable Volunteering and Targeted Development Support</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Activity 4:- Tackling Rural Disadvantage Through Improving Access in Rural Bedfordshire</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Activity 5 – Affordable Housing in Rural Bedfordshire</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2. Management of RSCP programme</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3. Budget report</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4. Concluding remarks</b>	<b>29</b>



<p>Improved mainstreaming of rural needs</p>	<p>Forum. The BRAF coordinator represents BRAF at network meetings for all the county rural partnerships in the East of England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation comments provided on draft Sustainable Community Strategy for Bedfordshire – revised version has greater recognition of rural and environmental needs.</li> <li>• Consultation comments provided on the Joint Economic Development Strategy for Beds &amp; Luton. It has now been acknowledged that the draft JEDS does not adequately recognize the potential of the county’s rural areas to economic development.</li> <li>• Following BRAF input, the Enterprise strand of the Investing in Communities programme in Bedfordshire and Luton now has specific reference to multi-use buildings in rural areas. This has led to funding for a feasibility study which is currently underway to look at the potential for the multi-use buildings model in rural Bedfordshire. There have also been encouraging discussions on strengthening the delivery of skills activities in rural areas.</li> <li>• BRAF was commissioned to rural-proof Mid-Bedfordshire’s Sustainable Community Plan. The report was well-received and the plan is being amended. It was particularly pleasing that Mid Beds have taken on board the most significant concern raised by the rural-proofing report by changing a key action that would have potentially stifled development in rural areas. There is also a commitment by MBDC to ongoing rural-proofing in monitoring delivery of the action plan.</li> <li>• Consultation response provided on the Mid Beds Core Strategy &amp; Development Control Policies – Preferred Options</li> <li>• Consultation response provided on the refresh of the Regional Economic Strategy</li> <li>• Participation in workshops to develop the Joint Economic Development Strategy for Beds &amp; Luton, the Local Area Agreement, and the Mid Beds Sustainable Communities Plan.</li> <li>• Parish Action Plans are now incorporated in the LAA.</li> </ul>
--	---

**Activity 2 – Building Rural Community Capacity at Parish Level**

**1. Support for parish action plans**

Support has been given to 9 parish and town plan steering groups over the year ( 8 at the time of writing: Lidlington, Woburn, Wootton, Bolnhurst and Keysoe, Stotfold, Henlow, Bromham and Streatley) in all aspects of producing their Parish or Town action plans. This includes attendance at individual meetings and events and email and telephone correspondence.



An Action Planning workshop was held in October to provide groups with advice on how to draw together the results of all of their consultation and how to start to put this into the form of an action plan. Representatives from 6 parish action plan steering groups are due to attend this workshop.

A 'consulting your community' workshop was held in December to provide information to groups on different ways to encourage a wide range of people from their community to become involved with the parish plan and look at some of the techniques that they can use to consult with the whole community. In order to further widen the range of consultation techniques being used by parish action plan groups when consulting with their communities we will soon be targeting 2 groups, initially, and encouraging them to work with a professional artist. HAPPEN (an arts focused consortium of Bedfordshire & Luton local authorities and the Arts Council) will provide funding to cover the costs and will arrange for an artist to work with these groups to carry out some art based consultation.

There have been discussions on greater integration of green infrastructure plans and carbon neutral work into the parish action plan process. However this is dependant on capacity and resources available.

Initial presentations were made to Sandy and Biggleswade Town Councils to discuss the possibility of them starting to produce a Town Plan. Another meeting is currently being sought with Sandy to discuss the project further as they did have some initial reservations. A meeting is being held shortly in Biggleswade with the three members of the Town Council who have been nominated as representatives to sit on the Town Plan steering group. As a result of this meeting the aim is to hold a community open meeting in April to attract members of the wider community to become members of Town Plan steering group.

Work has moved forward on using rural techniques in an urban environment. A key stakeholder group has been meeting regularly to work towards producing a community action plan for the Lakes Estate, Southfields and Chantry areas of Kempston. The group includes members from Kempston Town Council, Beds Police, Beds Borough Council, Country Council Youth Service, Neighborhood Watch, Future of Kempston Youth Forum and BPHA and Aldwyck housing associations. During February several consultation events were held in the project area to collect local people views on any problems and opportunities in their area, these findings will form the basis of the community action plan. Likes and dislikes exercises were held outside the Springfield Road local shops, outside Sainsburys on Market Day, at Kempston Gudwara during their Sunday service and in Daubeney Middle School playground at lunch time.

Planning for Real events were held at the Mulberry Bush Pub, Hastingbury School and The Kempston Fire Station. The times, venues and days of the events were varied to make the events accessible to a maximum number of people.

As a result of the events over 380 local residents have been consulted with, including approx 80 young people. An action planning meeting has been held, which was attended by approx 30 residents and 10 community stakeholders to discuss the results of the consultation and start to identify a way forward. As a result of this meeting 15 community members have put themselves forward to form a community action group, which will look at the results of the community consultation and formulate a community action plan.

### **Reflections / Conclusions:**

A number of new parish plan groups have recently applied for and received funding from DEFRA, this means there are quite a few groups at the early stages of their plan preparations where a lot of support is needed. As there is now no specific source of funding for parish plan groups, there may be a slowing down of the new groups that are coming forward to start producing plans.

The Kempston project has proved to be much larger than originally anticipated, mainly due to the willingness of various stakeholders to become involved and the high level of community participation and involvement that we have received. There will be a continued level of support required for the community action group but there is a hope that the community group can sit as a sub committee of the existing community safety forum and so can receive long term support from them.

This is a clear indicator that the experiment in using rural techniques has worked and this will be used in promoting and mainstreaming the methodology to strategic partners and seeking future funding for parish and other community-led plans.

## **2. Parish Plan action plans delivered that advise both strategic planning and improvements in local quality of life**

Action plan monitoring tables are being sent out to all parishes with completed parish action plans on an annual basis. This will enable a record to be kept of the progress that parishes have made and show any actions where they may need some additional support. This will continue to be done on an annual basis. It will enable a record to be kept of the progress that parishes have made and see if there are any actions that they may need some additional support with implementing.

A regular slot has been allocated at community development team meetings to liaise with RCC field staff on the support that they each can offer to parishes with completed parish action plans, in order to assist them with implementing some of their actions. These regular updates enable the progress to be monitored that individual staff members have been making within each parish and identify if there are any areas where additional support may be required. As soon as responses begin to come back from the second batch of monitoring tables individual meetings will be arranged with relevant staff members to discuss any particular actions.

Presentations on parish plans and their benefits have been given to Mid and South Beds LSP's and the Bedford Borough Partnership Board.

Following the presentation to Mid Beds LSP, meetings have been held with the following partners to discuss partnership working and the mutual benefits of parish action plans: Mid Beds Citizens Advice

Bureau, Bedfordshire Police, PCT, Mid Beds Community Safety Officer, Aragon Housing and the Fire Service.

As part of the refresh of the Community strategies, Mid and South Beds LSP's have taken into consideration the outcomes highlighted in the completed parish action plans as part of their baseline data.

A community involvement template has been developed in partnership with Mid Beds District Council which all Mid Beds parishes are being asked to include in their completed parish action plan to show how the community has been involved and consulted with throughout the process and highlight the value of the plan when using it as reference material

**Reflections / Conclusions:**

The first set of monitoring tables that were sent out last year provided good baseline information on the work that the parishes were doing on implementing the action identified in their plans. Once the results of the second table have been received it will enable the RCC to have a clearer idea of the progress the parishes have made themselves within a year and the level of impact that the work that has been done by various RCC staff has had.

**3. Parish Action Plan Pot**

In total £23,662 of grant funding has been awarded to thirteen parishes this year to support them in developing parish action plans. Workshops were held in the course of the year to support parishes in applying for funding.

**July 07 panel**

Clophill	1,875.00
Biddenham	1,308.00
Sub total	3,183.00

**Oct 07 panel**

Bolnhurst & Keysoe	1,446.00
Potton	1,956.00
Shillington	1,747.00
Stotfold	2,000.00
Sub total	7,149.00

**Feb 08 panel**

Bromham	2000
Great Barford	1917
Henlow	2000
Milton Ernest	2000
streatley	1845.5
Tempsford	1567.5
Wootton	2000
Sub total	13,330.00

Total applications £23,662.00

Decisions on funding were taken by a sub-group of BRAF members representing:  
 Bedford Borough Council  
 Bedfordshire County Council  
 Mid-Beds District Council  
 South Beds District Council  
 Beds Association of Town and Parish Councils  
 The Wildlife Trust.

#### **4. Encouraging Participation in the Democratic Processes**

##### **Supporting attainment of Quality Parish Council Status**

Contact was made with all councils following the May 2007 elections. All councils that met the electoral mandate test criteria were offered support to complete the remaining tests.

Presentations or meetings have been held with Parish and Town Councils to give advice on the benefits of applying for quality status, outline what it involves and support has been offered with submitting their applications.

A display promoting the Quality Council scheme was put up at the Beds Association of Town and Parish Councils AGM to attempt to promote further interest.

It takes a considerable amount of time for parishes that have shown an interest in the scheme to put together and actually submit an application. Maintaining continued contact and offering support to councils who are putting together their applications or considering applying is vital.

At the end of RSCP, 9 new councils had achieved Quality council status, taking the total number of Quality Council in Bedfordshire up to 14. Bedfordshire is now the second highest county in the region for numbers of Quality Councils, in proportion to size of county (see below table)

	<b>No. of council and parish meetings in county</b>	<b>Total no. councils in CALC</b>	<b>No. Quality Councils as at 20 Sept 2007</b>	<b>% of total councils in county as at 20 Sept 2007</b>
<b>Beds</b>	122	108	14	12%
<b>Cambs</b>	262	230	24	10%
<b>Essex</b>	280	274	42	16%
<b>Herts</b>	125	84	3	3%
<b>Norfolk</b>	531	410	12	3%
<b>Suffolk</b>	424	358	8	2%

**Reflections / Conclusions:** It seems to take a considerable amount of time from parishes showing an interest in the scheme to putting together an application and to actually submitting their application, this will hopefully lead to some future applications as a result of the support given under RSCP.

The local democracy presentations that were delivered in advance of the 2007 elections were very popular and were due to be delivered again in advance of the May 2008 elections. Due to the unitary status bids it had not been confirmed if elections at the parish level would still be going ahead in 2008, as a result it was not possible to deliver any further presentations. The slides and the resources for this presentation are available should the BATPC want to deliver this in the future.

It should be noted that Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils is not in the position to fund the continuation of this work beyond the end of RSCP.

### Youth Participation

A comprehensive youth engagement handbook entitled 'Participate' has been produced to provide information to Parish and Town Councils and community groups about working with young people in their communities. The aim is to provide councils with a tool kit for working with young people in their parishes. This was produced in conjunction with Beds Borough Councils and Mid Beds District councils youth participation workers. The handbook has now been distributed to all parish and town councils. A launch event was held in November for this booklet which was combined with a 'youth engagement' workshop. The event was attended by representatives from 23 parish and town councils.

A workshop based around 'Participate' aimed at providing information to community volunteers on working with young people is being planned for later in the year.

**Reflections / Conclusions:** By producing a handbook for local councils on all the things they need to consider when working with their young people, this will enable the individual councils to work independently towards including their young people more and implementing projects that suit their own communities needs after the end of RSCP.

The work being carried out in Silsoe will act as good pilot scheme to see if this method of involving young people works effectively and could be replicated elsewhere.

### Case Study- Youth Participation

The RAVE bus visited Silsoe in October as part of the youth consultation that will feed into their parish action plan. Graffiti walls and flash card questionnaires were used to capture the views of young people on things that they like, don't like and would like to change about their village. The event was publicised in advance by flyers being distributed at the school bus stops and posters being placed around the village in key locations which ensured a good attendance.

Following the event a meeting has been held with members of the parish plan steering group and the parish council to plan the setting up of a youth action group in Silsoe. The aim of the group will be to meet regularly to discuss their ideas and represent the views of young people living in Silsoe. They will feed these back to the parish council and other service providers. The parish plan group has a very small amount of money that they can use to pay for start up costs such as venue hire and refreshments for meetings. As a result of this a meeting was held with over 25 young people to discuss the possibility of setting up a youth forum in Silsoe. The aim of the group is to represent the views of young people in the community and feed these back to the parish council and other service providers. 10 young people have put themselves forward to sit on the youth forum as a result of this meeting. The group will meet for the first time in April.



**Activity 3 - Building the Capacity of the Rural Voluntary and Community Sector through Sustainable Volunteering and Targeted Development Support**

Intended outcomes	Evidence of progress
<p>Work with rural communities and rural based volunteer-involving organisations identifies local volunteering needs and opportunities in rural areas.</p>	<p>During 2007/2008 379 new volunteering opportunities have been identified as a result of work with rural communities and rural based volunteer-involving organisations. Total opportunities currently available 400.</p> <p>40 market towns and parishes have been visited with field work undertaken to promote services of Volunteer Centres to rural based volunteer-involving organisations, with follow up work/contacts undertaken.</p>
<p>An increase in the numbers of potential volunteers from rural localities seeking, choosing and taking up volunteering opportunities.</p>	<p>457 potential volunteers from rural localities have used the Volunteer Centres for seeking, choosing and/or taking up volunteering opportunities.</p> <p>Information update request sent out to 98 Parish Councils with responses received from 49 Councils. Follow-up work undertaken with 24 Councils. Attended Mid Beds LSP Reaching Communities sub-Group and Mid Beds District Council's Community Safety Conference where contacts were made with rural based organisations and Parish Councils.</p> <p>Articles included in <i>Schools First</i> newsletter distributed to 220 schools and in <i>Article</i> newsletter to 50 arts venues/libraries. Regular articles in Flitwick newspaper sent to all residents and in Country Properties newsletter sent to residents in the Shefford area.</p> <p>Rural surgeries held at four locations across Mid Bedfordshire during December 2007 to March 2008, where individuals could drop in to find out more about volunteering, look through the opportunities available and chat to a Volunteering Adviser. Volunteer-involving organisations were also able to register and update their opportunities.</p> <p>Fieldwork undertaken in the parishes of Clapham, Wootton, Marston Mortain, Chicksands, Shefford, Biggleswade, Moggerhanger, Oakley, Sandy, Flitwick, Putnoe and Northhill &amp; Ickwell.</p> <p>55 pubs have been visited or had beer mats sent to them as part of our beer mat campaign in rural pubs to promote volunteering.</p> <p>Information on the work of Volunteer Centre South Bedfordshire has been sent to 51 rural based organisations.</p> <p>Articles to promote volunteering, opportunities etc</p>

	<p>included in ten village/parish newsletters.</p> <p>Fieldwork, to promote services of the Volunteer Centre to local communities, undertaken in Barton le Clay, Billington, Caddington and Slip End, Chalgrave, Eaton Bray, Eggington, Heath and Reach, Hockliffe, Kensworth, Stanbridge, Streatley, Studham, Sundon, Tebworth, Toddington, Totternhoe, Tilsworth and Whipsnade. This included visits to schools, shops, surgeries and other public places. Literature and laminated posters distributed.</p> <p>33 pubs have been visited and have agreed to use beer mats provided to them as part of our beer mat campaign in rural pubs to promote volunteering.</p>
Support to rural-based volunteer-involving organisations enables them to develop their recruitment, retention and management of volunteers.	526 rural-based volunteer-involving organisations have been contacted and 78 of these have been directly supported in relation to their recruitment, retention and management of volunteers.
Support to rural-based voluntary and community organisations enables them to develop good practice and improve service delivery.	<p>Mailing prepared and sent to 108 rural organisations on the CVS Mid and North Beds mailing list, but not members. Responses received and appropriate follow up taken place.</p> <p>40 groups given funding and development advice over period April 2007 to March 2008. Types of advice given included advice on constitutions; Child Protection, Equalities and Diversity Policies; disability discrimination issues; quality standards; charter standards for sports groups; business planning; and funding advice.</p> <p>Attendance at outreach sessions in Sandy and Sharnbrook undertaken to advise sports groups on funding &amp; development issues in collaboration with Team Bedfordshire &amp; Luton.</p> <p>Delivery of regular (monthly) workshops covering everything groups need to know about governance and preparing to apply for funding. Groups were able to network and share good practice.</p>

### Examples of Good Practice

– Volunteer Centres are running a beer mat campaign in rural pubs to promote volunteering. We hope this will increase awareness of volunteering and encourage people to contact the Volunteer Centres.

– Volunteer Centre Bedford is running a photography project to recruit local professional and amateur photographers to take picture of rural Bedfordshire so that these can be included in an image bank and used to promote (voluntary work in) rural areas.

– Volunteer Centre South Bedfordshire is preparing and submitting articles on local volunteering opportunities for village newsletters, including *Outlook* (Barton-le-Clay), *Meeting Point* (Tottenhoe, Tilsworth and Stanbridge), *Parish Link*, Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade) and *Hockliffe Herald*.

– CVS Mid and North Bedfordshire attended Biggleswade and District Scout AGM to target rural Scout Groups in that area, giving a presentation on funding and development advice.

– Volunteer Centre South Bedfordshire contacted rural schools to promote their services and this has resulted in many of them identifying a range of volunteering opportunities suitable for people living in rural communities.

Example of Good Practice – Rural surgeries held at four locations across Mid Bedfordshire during December 2007 to March 2008, where individuals could drop in to find out more about volunteering, look through the opportunities available and chat to a Volunteering Adviser. Volunteer-involving organisations were also able to register and update their opportunities. This raised the profile of volunteering and Volunteer Centre Bedford. 17 enquires received, including 11 potential volunteers who were advised and signposted to volunteer-involving organisations. Four organisations received advice on developing new opportunities and/or managing volunteers.

Feedback/comments from beneficiaries:

- *I have found the information provided by yourselves very informative and am pleased to have found a volunteer role which I am sure I (will) find satisfying and rewarding. I have been interviewed .... for the role of volunteer administrator (and) I am looking forward to taking up my new role! – Maureen of Eaton Bray.*
- *You have all been very good and I particularly liked the fact that you kept me updated on progress all along the way. Thank you for all your help. Teresa of Eggington*

### **Reflections/conclusions on the two year programme**

- Significant increase in the profile of volunteering, rural based volunteering opportunities and the Volunteer Centres.
- 591 new volunteering opportunities identified in rural areas.
- 757 potential volunteers from rural localities used the Volunteer Centres to seek, choose and/or take up volunteering opportunities.
- Extensive field work undertaken in rural parishes to make contacts with local volunteer-involving organizations and potential sites for promoting volunteering (through posters, leaflets, beer mats and directories of volunteering opportunities). Most people contacted were willing to display or distribute promotional material.
- Parish/Village newsletter editors have been helpful in including material about local volunteering opportunities in their newsletters
- 679 rural based volunteer-involving organizations have been contacted and 110 of these have been directly supported in their recruitment, retention and management of volunteers.
- Significant numbers of volunteer-involving organizations were reluctant to have their opportunities promoted through our database, websites and other media as they *did not want people from outside the village coming in to volunteer*. They were cautious of engaging with the Volunteer Centres for fear of them bringing in outsiders. The exceptions to this were schools and youth clubs who were more prepared to take on volunteers from outside the village/parish.
- While most people wanted to volunteer in their own village/parish there were also many that wanted to volunteer outside their immediate community, with schools and youth clubs benefiting the most.

- Running surgeries in rural locations was resource intensive with, at times, little engagement from the public or volunteer-involving organizations. They were, however, successful in raising the profile of the Volunteer Centre and will be continued in three of the four locations until August 2008.
- 54 rural based voluntary and community organizations were worked with on a range of organizational development issues.
- DEFRA funding has been extremely beneficial in developing volunteering and supporting volunteer-involving, voluntary and community organizations in rural areas and provided much needed focus and resources to enable this to happen.

#### Activity 4 – Tackling Rural Disadvantage Through Improving Access in Rural Bedfordshire

##### 1. Access to Training Using the E-Rural IT Bus

The total number of students enrolled on e-rural courses during this period is 123 broken down as follows, some learners were enrolled on more than one course:

➤	Using the internet and email.....	34
➤	PowerPoint level 1.....	3
➤	Return to work introduction to database.....	30
➤	Spreadsheets level 1.....	4
➤	Basic computing skills entry level.....	39
➤	Level 2 Word.....	10
➤	Computing and work skills.....	4
➤	Desk top publishing.....	3

A total of 68 students achieved OCN accreditation each receiving an award of 3, attaining a success rate of 100 per cent of those registered. Due to financial implications, students are not registered with OCN as a matter of course, only where the student wishes to gain accreditation. The option to register for OCN accreditation is offered to all E-rural students.

##### ***Age range of students where specified***

The majority of learners are over 65 years of age. There are no learners under the age of 35 years.

##### ***Ethnicity of students***

For this reporting period ethnicity data was not available for the first three quarters. In quarter 4, students were all White British.

##### **The following locations were / are being used to deliver courses for this reporting period.**

Three sessions are run per day: 09:30 to 11:00, 11:30 to 13:00, 14:00 to 15:30

Locations are selected on a demand led basis. In this period: Bromham, Blunham, Cople, Cranfield, Clifton Pulloxhill.

##### ***Case Study One***

An elderly lady living in a village on the outskirts of Bedford had never used a computer before. She wished to gain basic computing, word processing and internet/email skills in order to communicate with her family. The lady in question has hearing difficulties and finds it extremely difficult to participate fully in large classroom situations. E-Rural has enabled her to receive a quality learning

experience within an environment that suits her particular needs, whilst increasing her skills and enabling her to gain more confidence. The danger of her becoming socially excluded was also addressed.

### **Case Study Two**

A retired lady living in Pulloxhill is currently enrolled on the basic computing course. Her daughter has recently emigrated to Australia and gave her a computer with the intention of that they would be able to communicate with each other via email. Having never used a computer before, this is the first experience of computing this learner has had. She finds the 'small group' learning environment an excellent way for her to learn and engage with other learners whilst benefiting from the individual attention the tutor is able to give. She has found the tutor to be extremely patient and this has helped to dispel her initial fears about taking a computing course and the perception of it being difficult.

Her new skills will now enable her to have regular and instant dialogue with her daughter, which in the past would have meant either expensive telephone calls or having to rely on the postal service. Enjoying the benefit of almost instant communication via email has helped reduce the feelings of isolation and has given her the security of knowing that her daughter is easily contactable should an emergency or other situation arise.

Following on from this current learning experience, she has decided to go on to take a second level course using the E-rural facility, and recommends the experience to other people within her community.

### **Case Study Three**

A young single mother living in Mid Bedfordshire, who has difficulty accessing local childcare, has enrolled onto E-Rural to refresh her IT skills, with a view to returning to work. Her aunt who is retired has also enrolled on an E-Rural course. The flexibility of these courses has enabled both of them to participate in learning while the aunt provides childcare during the times her niece is attending her E-Rural classes. However the aunt has still been able to access learning at a time and location to suit her needs

### **Reflections and Conclusions**

This report illustrates the added value that E-rural has brought to the communities the RCC serves, both in terms of access to services that would otherwise be difficult and to the quality of life and the contribution to social inclusion that E-Rural provides.

The range of learners who have enrolled highlights the demand for ICT training at community level and continuing demand shows the regard which communities place on this valuable resource and the E-Rural tutors themselves.

The flexibility of E-rural enables the RCC to meet the needs of a wide range of users. Courses have been run concurrently with school terms; on a weekly basis, thus allowing users with children the opportunity to access learning and gain valuable IT skills.

Unfortunately both the equipment and the vehicle need to be replaced, being no longer fit for purpose. Despite many efforts by the RCC, funding to do this has not been obtained. The RCC is currently looking at other ways of delivering the service without using a designated vehicle.

## 2. Access to services in community buildings

Providing guidance for community groups on where and how to apply for funding is key to ensuring access to services in rural areas. The following report illustrates the achievements of providing this support. In addition, in order to access funding, community groups will often need guidance on governance which has the added benefit of empowering them to take their groups forward.

Renhold Village Hall and Sandy Village Hall both required funding for new heating systems. Both have received support to achieve the necessary funding, Renhold £8,000 and Sandy £8,500. The halls can now be used by the whole community, including the very young and elderly who could not use the facilities in the colder months.

Six village hall committees in this period were assisted with Awards for All applications which were successful and totalled £13,000. All applications were for items that would extend the use of their facilities.

The National Village Halls Forum, the only national body representing those managing community buildings, held a lobbying event at Westminster in March 2008 which the RCC's Field Officer attended. This lobby was for future funding for community facilities – the previous lobby achieved the Community Building lottery fund. Two Bedfordshire MPs also attended and offered their support. It is hoped that following this event major funding will be made available to those managing community buildings. A recent survey undertaken in Southwest England showed a 268% monthly increase in hall usage following capital investment.

A total of £803,017 has been received in Bedfordshire thanks to work on three play strategies, one for each district. The RCC has worked with all three districts to ensure that children living in rural areas were represented and able to take advantage of the funding on offer. The three play strategies are now in place in and will ensure that children in the county are considered on all planning applications and other strategies that involve provision for children and young people.

During the period under review several village halls have started to provide additional services on their premises. For example, in **Barton** the Primary Care Trust has established a baby clinic. Also, twice yearly blood donor sessions are being held and the mobile breast screening unit is using the car park. The new, Lottery funded, village hall at **Stanbridge & Tilsworth** is being used regularly to deliver Home Start training to parent volunteers. More examples and case studies are shown below

BRCC support for funding bids to make improvements to village halls has also resulted in an increase in service provision, as illustrated in the following case studies.

### Case studies

**Steppingley Village Hall** was the Old School in this small rural parish of 300 people and is the only community building. The committee was advised to apply to WREN Landfill Tax Credit fund for the necessary money to completely refurbish the hall and convert a store room into a small meeting room so the use of the building could be widened. They made a successful bid for £32,647. The work is completed and the building can now accommodate a larger group in the main hall whilst a meeting is taking place in the small hall. It is also used at elections as a Polling Station.

**Moggerhanger Village Hall** committee made a successful bid to the Biffa Landfill Tax Credit fund and was awarded £45,000. The hall was extended down one side, the kitchen doubled in size, new toilets for all including an accessible toilet were installed and the hallway was extended to accommodate a meeting space.

The smaller meeting space has been used recently for workshops to assist people within the village to fill in benefit forms.

The main hall has been registered with the OCR (Oxford, Cambridge & RSA) Exam Board as an exam centre. A local company hires the hall quite regularly to run Certificate of Professional Competence training for Transport Managers during the week and for exam sitting at weekends. This use fits in around other community uses of the hall and brings in an added income for the charity.

**Cople – All Saints Church Extension** Cople is a rural village about four miles east of Bedford but because of transport issues many in the community do not find accessing the town very easy to get their shopping and there is no shop in the village.

The Church had previously looked at building a small kitchen inside the building but after consultation with various people, including that with English Heritage, it was agreed that the Church was too small and that an extension was the only way forward. Tiny Tots use the church as do other village groups for one off or regular meetings and smaller events but the lack of facilities has limited this use up to now. The issue of no shop in the village was also taken into consideration and it was felt that a Community Shop could be started in the proposed extension.

The group was supported by BRCC in making a funding application to WREN Landfill Tax Credit for their £25,000 shortfall in on an £80,000 project. This application was successful so the work to add an extension to the hall has commenced.

This extension to the Church will make a big difference to the community in Cople, they will have an additional meeting room with full facilities and the committee will shortly be looking at the proposal to open up a Community Shop.

### ***Kensworth Village Hall***

Kensworth, a village in South Beds, suffers from vandalism and has some areas of deprivation. Support has been given to the village hall management committee to access funding for a large extension to the hall – total project cost over £50,000. Their application for Landfill Tax Credit funding was successful and the newly extended hall, which is now fully accessible with all new toilet facilities, was opened recently. The plan now is to start up a youth club and other activities for the young people. These are services which have not been available locally before.

### ***St Andrew's Church Hall, Biggleswade***

Meetings have been held with the committee at this much used Church Hall to discuss their plans to double the size of their community hall. Discussions have taken place with their user groups and other interested parties in the community to ensure that this is what is needed. The new extension will create one large hall or two smaller halls which will allow two groups to use the building at the same, thus satisfying the needs of this community. Biggleswade is a market town with very little community space; this hall is very well used by everyone from Mum and Tots to the Older People's Club but they cannot all use it when they want to because of the lack of a second hall. The committee also wants to make the hall fully accessible and advice has been given on funding sources for an accessible toilet.

**Tingrith Church** – BRCC is working with the Parochial Church Council and Parish Council at Tingrith to explore the feasibility of using the rear of the parish church as a community area. Tingrith, a small community which sits under the M1, does not have a village hall and is quite remote from any community facilities. Support is being given in designing the layout of such a facility and also with potential sources of funding.

### ***Stanbridge and Tilsworth***

During the RSCP a major piece of work has resulted in two rural communities, Stanbridge & Tilsworth, achieving a new village hall plus assistance in purchasing a playing field. Funding totalling £400,000 has been raised and the new hall is open and offering a variety of activities for the local communities, including a Mum and Toddler Group, Youth Group, Luncheon Club, Amateur Dramatics, Yoga, Karate and other keep fit classes. Many meetings and conferences have also taken place in this hall which is only 6 months old. It has brought “community” back into these two villages, enabling residents to access services previously unavailable.

### ***Cardington***

Following the opening of a farm shop in the village, Cardington Village Hall Committee, which has successfully run a community shop for almost 8 years, is now going to run a “drop in” café. The idea is that people can just drop in to the hall for a drink and a chat, or to read the paper and just have some company. Initially the café will be open on a Monday morning and it is hoped then to open at least three mornings a week. Cardington has no post office, school or village pub – just a restaurant in what was the village pub. People have nowhere to meet and have a chat. This project will be open to everyone, young and old but will probably benefit most the older people who do not have cars so are mostly stuck in their homes.

## **3. Wheels to Work**

Under RSCP, work has continued on the development of Wheels to Work schemes in the county.

The first pilot scheme, NOW in Beds, involves the expansion of the operating area of Northamptonshire on Wheels to communities within a five mile radius of the Northamptonshire border. Connexions and JobCentre Plus are signposting clients to the scheme. However, at the end of the year, the future of NOW in Beds is uncertain due to funding difficulties experienced by the hosting scheme, Northamptonshire on Wheels, which is based at Northamptonshire ACRE. The scheme is currently awaiting the result of funding applications submitted to the Big Lottery and Connexions.

Much of the year involved negotiations in relation to a South Bedfordshire Scheme. A substantial amount of funding has now been awarded to scheme in South Bedfordshire in the form of grants of £15,000 from the Learning & Skill's Council's Local Initiative Development (LID) programme and £107,000 from various budgets at Bedfordshire County Council, including Local Transport Plan 2 and the Local Area Agreement. This will enable BRCC to employ a co-ordinator later in the year.

The Bedfordshire Motorcycle Forum has given their full backing to the scheme.

Whilst there was also work to develop a pilot scheme in the east of the county via the expansion of the Scooter & Cycle Transport Solutions (SCooTS) scheme in North Hertfordshire to the Stotfold area, it has now been agreed to concentrate solely on South Bedfordshire in the first instance, rather than pursuing SCooTS at this point.

Attendance at the first National Wheels to Work Conference in partnership with the Community Transport Association (CTA) proved extremely useful. The Conference agreed to pursue a formal partnership with the CTA, an element of which could potentially include the development of funding bids for a National Wheels to Work Co-ordinator. Workshops at the Conference provided a step by

step overview of the process of setting up a new Wheels to Work scheme, and an insight into the social enterprise model.

After a lengthy gap the East of England Regional Wheels to Work Forum met in Newmarket on 6<sup>th</sup> February. It was a productive meeting with all but one of the schemes represented. It was agreed to update the regional database and continue with an approach to the East of England Development Agency.

### **Reflections and Conclusions**

It is extremely pleasing that funding for Wheels to Work has been secured following almost two years of work, a major step forward from the 2005 baseline.

The East of England Regional Wheels to Work Forum will have an instrumental role in the development of the Bedfordshire scheme, particularly in sharing good practice.

## **4. Rural Transport Partnership Delegated Fund**

The Delegated Fund continues to be used to support access to services and has been promoted via the membership of the RTP Forum, and other contacts.

Funded projects have included:

- Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) for the East Beds Community Bus Ltd. which will enable a large proportion of the organisation's drivers to be trained to MiDAS standard, thereby giving passengers a safer and more sooth journey.
- A walks leaflet in Northill for which the need was identified from the Northill and Ickwell Parish Plan. This will enable local residents to participate in circular walks around the village and will also encourage residents from other parts of the county to visit the village with consequent benefits for the local economy and bus services.
- Two new bus shelters in Turvey which will provide better protection from the elements and a higher standard of information for existing passengers and make bus use a more attractive proposition for non-bus users.
- Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) Driver Assessor Training for Buzzer Buses (Dial-a-Ride) Ltd., which will enable MiDAS training to continue to be cascaded to community groups in the south of the county.
- MiDAS training for Bedfordshire & Luton Mind which will enable the organisation to provide transport to a community drop-in centre for people suffering and recovering from mental illness.
- A high quality bus shelter in Caddington, which will not only be in keeping with the Conservation Area around the Village Green, but will also be developed in partnership with the Caddington Young People's Forum, a rare occurrence for such projects.

Outcomes of recent grants include:

- Milton Ernest P3 Group – a grant for the production of a Milton Ernest Heritage Trail Guide has enabled residents to both have a greater understanding of the rich heritage of their village and an opportunity for a circular walk. The route has also attracted visitors to Milton Ernest from as far afield as Derbyshire with ensuing benefits for the local economy and encouraged residents from nearby town and villages to visit Milton Ernest by public transport. The success of the booklet is evident from the fact that only 70 of the 2,000 original copies remain. A reprint is to be arranged.

Quote from Milton Ernest:

*"To conclude I would say that the 'Importance of Milton Ernest Heritage Trail' has been a success taking into account the number of leaflets taken by the general public, the number of people seen walking the route and the favourable comments made to myself and the manage of the Queen's Head".*

- Clapham Methodist Church – a grant for the installation of cycle stands has enabled users of the church premises to lock their cycles securely, and encouraged car users to cycle rather than drive.  
*'We are very pleased to encourage this environmentally friendly way of getting around and will continue to do this through reminders in the local newsletters and church notices.'*
- Toddington Area Helping Hands – a grant for a Village Care Scheme Start-up grant has enabled the promote its services through fridge magnets

The Delegated Fund will continue to be available until the re-organisation of local government in Bedfordshire in April 2009.

## **5. Rural Transport Brokerage**

The Rural Transport brokerage has had its most successful year to date with over 243 journeys brokered.

There are currently 150 user members, 28 owner members (including the County Council Social Services fleet), 45 general drivers available to any group and a further 9 drivers available to their own group only.

The scheme is very much a 'one stop shop' for community groups seeking access to services. It has been used by a variety of disadvantaged groups to access essential services and leisure facilities, which would not otherwise be available to them.

The scheme has been cited as an example of good practice in the Cambridgeshire County Council Environment and Scrutiny Service's Committee's Review of Passenger Transport. The report recommends the introduction of a scheme in the county based on the Bedfordshire model. This has since been endorsed by the Community Transport Operator's Forum.

A review of the service has been conducted by the RCC, which acknowledged the value of service, and recommended that the scheme be offered to RCC members as a benefit of membership. The County Council's Extended Services Team has signed up all the schools in the county on this basis.

All existing users of the brokerage will be asked to join the RCC to continue to access the service. This will have the dual benefit of generating additional revenue to meet running costs, and place added value on the service, thereby tackling the problems of short notice cancellations.

A celebration buffet evening has been arranged in April to thank all the owner members and volunteer drivers.

Journeys have included:

- A group from Marsh Farm in Luton traveling to the Chilterns Gateway Visitor Centre at Dunstable Downs for an activity afternoon as part of the County Councils' Audience Development Plan for the site.

- The Bedford Branch of the Royal Signals Association traveling to the Peterborough Greyhound Stadium.
- The Gudwara in Ashburnham Road travelling to the Eastern Region black & ethnic minority network (Menter) AGM in Cambridge.
- Northfields Friends & Neighbours traveling to Dobbie's Garden Centre in Milton Keynes for Christmas lunch.
- Keysoe WI traveling to Milton Keynes.
- Groups from across South Bedfordshire traveling to the inaugural Sheltered Tenants Action Group conference in Toddington.
- A shuttle service from Biggleswade Market Square to the Festival of Older People at the Weatherly Centre
- Carers from across Bedfordshire traveling to the Autumn Afternoon event in Shortstown, a social and support event for carers who very rarely have opportunities to meet one another and share experiences.
- Young people in the Goldington and Queens Park wards of Bedford traveling to Biggleswade for a unique event organised by Woodenhill UK celebrating diversity and examining the causes and consequences of hate crime (copy of flyer attached)

*'Thanks very much for the effort that you put into the Diversity event project. We had two excellent drivers who managed to communicate and work out that less people would require the buses and adapt the itinerary successfully.'*

*Many thanks to you and this project for providing the minibuses and contributing to the day'.*

- The Gale Court Residents' Association in Barton-le-Clay traveling to the Grove Place Theatre in Dunstable for a matinee
- The 'Golden Oldies' Club in Dunstable traveling to the Cross Keys Public House in Dunstable for lunch
- Volunteers from the Forest of Marston Vale travelling to the new community woodland at Shocott Spring near Cotton End for tree planting
- A group from the Sikh community in Bedford traveling to Houghton Regis and Sandy to visit sheltered housing schemes
- A group from the Dosti Care Club in Luton traveling to Wrest Park in Silsoe to give their input to the Audience Development Plan element of a Big Lottery application for the site.
- A group from the Unilver Pensioner's Association in Sharnbrook traveling to Peterborough for an evening at the Greyhound Stadium
- Lidlington Church Youth Club traveling to the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff for the EDF Energy final between Northampton and Swansea.

*'Thanks for all your help, you have saved the day, and made a group of teenage boys very happy!'*

### **Case study**

A joint new venture with the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership was undertaken in September for the Woodworks! Festival at the Forest of Marston Vale. The brokerage was used to provide a shuttle bus service from Millbrook station to the Forest Centre. The service was well patronised with both vehicles full to a capacity on a number of occasions over the weekend. It is hoped this will be the first of many such links.



The brokerage was used by a group from Marsh Farm in Luton travelling to the Chilterns Gateway Visitor Centre at Dunstable Downs for an activity afternoon as part of the County Councils' Audience Development Plan for the site.



Volunteers from the Forest of Marston Vale travelled to the new community woodland at Shocott Spring near Cotton End for tree planting

### **Activity 5 - Affordable Housing in Rural Bedfordshire**

#### **1. Social Housing needs addressed through Parish Plan Actions**

The Parish Plan team and the RHE co-ordinate activity to ensure that issues raised in both areas of work are addressed and carried out in concert with each other.

#### **2. Working with other interested parties.**

The Bedfordshire Parish Councils Planning Consortium has been supported by the RHE at meetings with two Local Authorities and one Housing Association. The RHE is seen as independent of the group but can provide evidence at such meetings that would not otherwise be available to the group.

There are widely differing views held by both elected members and officers concerning rural affordable housing / exception sites in the three local authorities in the county that have significant rural areas within their respective districts. There is general recognition that delivery of affordable rural housing in each local authority area is below the level required. However the approach being taken to address the requirement in each area differs widely.

### **3. Number of units started**

Work started on delivering 9 units in Clophill in May.

### **4. Rural Exception Sites and Identification of Need for Affordable Housing**

#### **1. (Network article provided for Clophill initiative)**

During the period under review, work has been carried out with 14 parishes. The following progress has been made towards achieving housing units on exception sites:

#### **Aspley Guise**

The parish council has been approached to determine views on a housing needs survey, a response is awaited.

#### **Blunham**

The report on the Housing Needs Survey completed in June – July 2007 was finalised in October following a delay in response to the Draft report by the Local Authority. Copies were then supplied to the RSL and to the Parish Clerk for circulation among the councillors.

The report was presented and discussed at PC meeting on 27 November, the PC remains enthusiastic. The RSL was due to attend the January PC meeting to offer initial proposals for the exception site, but this was delayed until March at the parish council's request. It is hoped that the outline plans will be accepted for the identified exception site for which discussion with the land owner continues.

#### **Chalgrave**

An affordable housing presentation was made by the RHE to the Parish Council in February; there was a mixed reception based on past experience. A model housing needs survey form has been provided for discussion at next parish council meeting.

#### **Clophill**

Development completed in November 2007; the RHE interviewed a selection of residents in February to gain views on acceptability and process. All are very happy with their homes and the way RSL / LA handled their selection. (Network article provided for Clophill initiative)

#### **Cople**

A PC meeting was attended together with representatives from Bedford BC. A possible site had been discounted due to the cost of extensive highway work that would be required to gain safe access. The PC was asked to review possible alternative sites within the village. Information from the parish council on site availability is still awaited following meeting with PC in 2007.

### **Flitton & Greenfield**

Considerable legal delays to securing the site have been experienced, but is expected that these will be resolved early in the 2008 and development will commence later in the year.

### **Gravenhurst**

Contact has been maintained with the parish council following the housing needs survey, presentation and discussion. Land price offered by RSL is a significant issue for the parish council owned exception site. The parish council is in discussion with alternative RSLs in effort to obtain higher price, though this is delaying progress on meeting the needs identified in the housing needs survey.

### **Houghton Conquest**

Information has been provided to the parish council on the housing needs survey process as the local authority has identified local needs. Significant development planned in and around the village and discussion opened with major landowner on provision of exception site.

### **Old Warden**

The development of the exception site to provide six dwellings was due to start in early 2008. Site acquisition was delayed by need to provide tenant with notice indicated within the lease; resolution with the parish council on the mix of properties to be provided has proved lengthy; it is hoped that these issues are nearing resolution with site work starting later in the year.

### **Ridgmont**

A presentation was made to the parish council in January on role of RHE and process for carrying out a housing needs survey. Additional information subsequently supplied for discussion at a later PC meeting.

### **Shillington**

Housing Needs Survey (HNS) was completed. The Registered Social Landlord (RSL) and RHE attended the PC meeting on 2 October. The HNS was presented and clarification provided where required. Initial plans for the site were then offered by the RSL whose intention it is for the development to be provided to highest possible environmental standards, a proposal fully supported by the PC. It is believed that additional grant would be available from the Housing Corporation to enable an extension of the current acceptable environmental level to be achieved. The RSL has been working up the proposals that were viewed favourably by the parish council; land acquisition is advancing and site work planned for later this year.

### **Thurleigh**

A recent Parish Plan, created with the support of BRCC staff, had indicated that there was a possible need for affordable housing in the village. The PC meeting was attended on 12 November and the process of a HNS explained, confirming that the information collected would enable a fuller assessment of indicated need to be determined. Sample HNS forms and a report for a 'mythical' village were left with the PC for them to consider how they wish to proceed. The presentation has been followed up, though a formal request to carry out a housing needs survey has yet to be received. Local discussions to secure an exception site have continued.

### **Westoning**

The RHE highlighted the delay by the parish council of discussion of the housing needs survey, this is now on the agenda for the March 2008 parish council meeting. Work is in concert with parish plan activity.

### **Whipsnade**

Contact was established with PC Chairman and much background information concerning HNSs, the role of the RHE and the process of exception site housing provided. The November PC meeting was attended and the HNS process outlined. The PC wishes to carry out a HNS and a RSL has agreed to become involved even though the village is outside their normal area of operation. Drafting of the housing needs survey form is almost complete, there are plans to circulate it in March; a major employer in area wishes to involve their employees as some could be eligible for exception housing allocation. The parish council has kept the local population advised and the RSL is evaluating three possible exception site locations; a landowning Trust is researching how an optimum site could be made available.

### **Additional information**

#### **Local Authority relationships with RHE**

Three LAs operate within Bedfordshire, two of which have provided funding contributions to support the work of the RHE. MBDC has an excellent record of supporting RHE activity and most recent exception developments have taken place / are being progressed within this district. Bedford Borough Council has an ambivalent approach, providing information on request, but is less inclined to be supportive of exception site developments. SBDC has always resisted consideration of exception site development and has not contributed to RHE funding. However, very recently a change in approach has been noted with a willingness to acknowledge Parish Plan generation and RHE activity. It is to be hoped that when MBDC & SBDC become one Unitary authority in 2009 the MBDC 'best practice' will support and develop the changing emphasis at SBDC with a common approach being adopted across the whole of Central Bedfordshire.

#### **Registered Social Landlord relationship with RHE**

Eight RSLs have financially supported the work of the RHE in Bedfordshire in recent years even though the number of exception sites delivered has not been evenly spread among them. Those with whom the RHE has worked more closely have established good working relationships.

#### **Ongoing funding April 2008 onwards**

The RSLs noted above together with the two current local authorities have been approached to increase their previous level of contributions. In addition the third LA has been asked to contribute in view of current RHE activity in their area and the seeming change in 'rural' policy in the authority. In combination the funding requested would allow the current level of RHE activity to be maintained.

#### **Reflections on the past two years**

The independence of the RHE is seen as a valuable asset in the creation of affordable rural housing on exception sites in small villages. However, the lack of continuity as staff moved on to new positions, coupled with periods in which the post was not filled and the 'learning curve' of new post holders could well have reduced the overall impact of the RHE post in the county. In addition staff changes at both local authorities and RSL and thus the need for new relationships to be built has impacted both role of the RHE and the parish councils with whom they work. That said; a number of exception site projects have been or are in the process of being delivered that are unlikely to have been progressed without RHE involvement.

The approach of parish councils or influential individuals to the topic of affordable homes for people with strong local connections varies widely. These are indicated in the reception to housing needs

survey presentations to parish councils by the RHE, some embrace the project and provide full support, while others seem unable to accept that a housing need might exist in their community.

The timescale from initial housing needs survey presentation to the delivery of a occupied exception project varies enormously for many and varied reasons. In a significant number of cases, having identified a suitable site, the acquisition process can be long and cumbersome. Some private landowners, while recognising the need for exception site affordable homes and in principle are willing to provide land for that purpose are unable so to do due to the impact this may have on their future inheritance, capital gains or income tax liability. The fact that some proposed exception site developments fail to be delivered for such reasons, when the government wishes to see more affordable rural homes provided, seems difficult to reconcile.

### **What has worked Well**

There seems general recognition by all parties that the role of RHE has proved to be important in assisting with the provision of affordable rural housing. Organisational and individual relationships have been brokered that have developed into partnerships that have worked well together to deliver projects that meet an identified need.

It is possible that the work of the RHE with both officers and elected representatives assisted with the change in policy of a local authority towards the provision of rural housing, though quantifying this would prove difficult.

Discussion with the occupants of new exception site developments shows that they are extremely pleased with both the accommodation they now have and with the selection process of which they were a part. In the majority of cases, the new homes were the only reason the individuals were able to either stay in or return to their 'home' village.

### 3. Management of RSCP programme

The BRAF Steering Group has reviewed progress of activities and the budget on a quarterly basis.

An underspend of £13,647 was brought forward from 2006/7 (the reported 06/07 underspend was £13,818 but a late invoice for £171 for Activity 4 in 06/07 was paid in 2007/8). This had arisen principally from reduced salary costs due to the late start of some activities. At its meeting on 8 May 2007, in considering the provisional out-turn figures for 06/07 the BRAF Steering Group agreed that the forecast underspend should be used to meet a likely shortfall in match-funding for the Rural Housing Enabler post (Activity 5) so that this activity could carry on to the end of 07/08.

The BRAF Steering Group subsequently agreed that in the event that the match funding for Activity 5 was secured, the underspend should be reallocated towards existing activities:-

Activity 1 (BRAAF) – some additional funding to contribute to costs of additional meetings and workshops, including a proposed workshop to facilitate links between parish action plans and Local Development Frameworks/Sustainable Community Plans; and a small amount for pulling together a good practice guide on climate change for rural communities (an action arising from the BRAAF conference in March 2007);

Activity 2(parish plans) – increase the size of the parish plan pot since demand for the final panel in February is expected to outstrip the funding available. 6-7 parishes are expected to apply for grants up to a maximum of £2k each;

Activity 3 (Access) – funding towards costs of E-Rural bus.

This approach was endorsed by the full BRAAF at its meeting in November.

We are very pleased to report that match funding for Activity 5 was obtained and at £10k in fact exceeded expectations by £2,444. This meant that some Defra RSCP funding allocated for Activity 5 could be released and reallocated towards the other activities. The adjustments to budgets for each activity is shown below.

<u>Adjustments between activities</u>	£	Purpose
Activity 1	2649	add to BRAAF meetings budget - RDPE meetings, activities from conference
Activity 2	2809	supplement budget for parish plan pot (had already added 633 into his budget at start of year)
Activity 3	633	
Activity 4	10000	allocation for E-Rural
Activity 5	-2444	substituted by extra match funding obtained

### 3. RSCP Budget final report 2007/8

	Budget	Adjusted budget	Q1 Actual	Q2 Actual	Q3Actual	Q4 Actual	Acutal Q1-4	Var Q1-Q4 of expdnsiture compared to adjusted budget
2007/8 RSCP budget	£203,014.00							
Underspend brought forward from 06/07*	13647							
Grand total RSCP budget	£216,661.00							
Activity 1 - BRAF	£40,000.00	£42,649.00	£9,492.00	£10,623.00	£10,898.00	£11,535.00	£42,548.00	-\$101.00
Activity 2 - parishes	£57,014.00	£59,823.00	£8,584.00	£11,800.00	£15,750.00	£23,689.00	£59,823.00	£0
Activity 3 - volunteering	£44,000.00	£44,633.00	£11,164.87	£10,814.00	£11,039.31	£11,614.84	£44,633.02	£0.00
Activity 4 - access	£40,000.00	£50,000.00	£9,634.00	£9,410.00	£10,300.00	£10,181.00	£49,525.00	-\$475.00
Activity 5 - housing	£22,000.00	£19,556.00	£4,646.98	£4,846.46	£4,882.19	£5,589.32	£17,257.00	-\$2,299.00
RSCP Total expenditure		£216,661.00	£43,521.85	£47,493.46	£52,869.50	£62,609.16	£213,786.02	-\$2,875.00

There was a small underspend of £2875. Over the two year period, this represents an overall underspend on the total RSCP programme of just 0.7%

#### Notes:

1. The reported 06/07 underspend was £13,818 but a late invoice for £171 for Activity 4 in 06/07 needs to be paid from 07/08 budget so has been deducted from this figure.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

RSCP has played a very important role in the county, both as a negotiating tool and in terms of value for money. It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract resources to tackle issues in rural Bedfordshire, yet there are some issues that are important across the country, regardless of whether a place is defined as remote/lagging or not - for example, parish plans; access to services; involving young people.

RSCP has been an invaluable resource when advocating rural needs as it means at least that we are able to offer *some* resource into the LAA negotiating process. With the move to unitary authorities, Multi Area Agreements and the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, as well as reviews of the regional and sub-regional economic strategies, we are entering a period of significant change. From 1 April 2009 there will be two unitary authorities for Bedfordshire - one for Bedford Borough and a second for the rest of the County area.

This raises important questions about how the rural parts of the county will be served in future. It is important that there is a rural voice, preferably with some resource behind it, to advocate the needs of rural areas as the new authorities are formed and a multi area agreement is negotiated. Following the end of RSCP, there is no alternative funding source for BRAF and it is likely to continue only in a severely contracted form. Members are being asked to identify priority activities.

It was confirmed nationally in the autumn that the RSCP will not continue beyond March 2007. Other avenues for funding all of the RSCP activities have been explored, e.g. Lottery, Investing in Communities, Rural Development Programme for England, funding from local partners. There is no immediate alternative source of funding.

Improved recognition of some of the rural issues in the community plans is encouraging, but it remains to be seen how much translates into actions (and funding) delivered through the LAA and other local action plans.