

July 2010

Countybeacon

CCN at the LGA Group Annual Conference



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CCN
County Councils Network

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Cover image:
Buckinghamshire Preparing to Host 2012 with Olympic athletes Ben Farrell, Paul Wycherley, Stuart Hastings and Andrew Daniels.

(Photo: Buckinghamshire County Council)

CCN news

CCN at the LGA Group Annual Conference

The LGA Group Annual Conference is taking place in Bournemouth between 6 and 8 July, and CCN will once again have a stand in the exhibition. Come and visit us on **Stand P58a in the Purbeck Hall**, where you will find a warm welcome and opportunities to meet the team, enjoy refreshments and take part in our interactive challenge.



On the evening of **Wednesday 7 July**, join us between **6.15 and 7.30pm** for our **informal evening reception** in the **Key West Café at the end of Bournemouth Pier**.

This year CCN and the new District Councils Network will also jointly be hosting a **fringe session**, looking at the work of Hertfordshire County and Stevenage Borough Councils and their partners on the **Think Family initiative** - a piece of work that brings organisations together to identify and promote best practice in supporting families. It promises to be an interesting session, with learning for multi-tier and unitary members alike. Join us for this between **1.30 and 2.15pm on Thursday 8 July**.



CCN – Working Closely with NALC

CCN will have a presence and fringe stand at the **NALC Localism in Action Conference** in Bristol on 2 July, continuing the strong relationship nationally between CCN and Parish Councils.

Look out for a special joint **CCN / NALC** publication, containing a number of examples of how parish/town councils and CCN member authorities work closely and effectively together – on devolution of services, grants schemes, building resilience, and much more.

Local Place

Alongside this edition of County Beacon appears a special supplementary edition looking at the work of CCN members in developing a local place-based approach to the delivery of public services. The publication considers members' achievements in this field to date (including feedback from the recent Total Place pilots), and sets out their vision for the future delivery of efficient and effective public services.

Buckinghamshire: Preparing to Host 2012

Buckinghamshire may have a reputation as a quiet leafy shire, a guardian of rolling hills and areas of outstanding natural beauty, but under the surface it is a hotbed of activity as we prepare for the 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games.



Above and Right: Double Olympic Gold Medalist James Cracknell with Buckinghamshire schoolchildren

Sporting talent, business acumen and community enthusiasm are in abundance with the world-class rowing and canoeing centre at Dorney, health & education programmes firing imaginations in our schools, and in our communities more than 3,000 residents have already registered for jobs as Games-time volunteers.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join in and be active in the approach to the games," said Bill Chapple, Buckinghamshire County Council's Deputy Leader. *"We're encouraging people of all ages in our communities to work together and I'm delighted they're responding with such enthusiasm and commitment."*

While track and field events command global attention in London's Olympic Park, it is here in 450 acres of attractive Buckinghamshire parkland that up to 30,000 spectators will daily watch the best in the world compete for gold, silver and bronze in the rowing and sprint-canoeing regattas at Dorney Lake. Its eight-lane

2,200 metre course won international acclaim when it hosted the Rowing World Championships four years ago making it the natural choice as venue for Olympic and Paralympic competitions.

Keeping a watchful oversight on this and other preparations is the Buckinghamshire 2012 Partnership, chaired by Olympic gold medallist Adrian Moorhouse, and set up two years ago to ensure as many as possible had the chance to get involved. *"We knew we'd have to work hard to make the most of our opportunities, but that the rewards could be enormous in enhancing corporate reputations, inspiring young people and developing civic pride"*, he said.

As ambassadors for Buckinghamshire, partnership members have supported 23 sites in the county becoming official pre-games training camp venues and already athletes from Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, Finland and Papua New Guinea have chosen Buckinghamshire venues to train and prepare for the games.

They have inspired Buckinghamshire schools, too, and more than twice times the national average have registered with the 2012 Get Set Education Programme, which promotes the Olympic & Paralympic values of determination, inspiration, courage, respect, equality, friendship and excellence. Students at the two secondary schools in Burnham, a stone's throw from Dorney Lake, had a visit from double Olympic gold medallist James Cracknell to kickstart their Get Set challenge – to design a new rowing glove for the 2012 games.



Almost 2,000 Buckinghamshire businesses have registered with the CompeteFor London 2012 Games Business network and more than 40 businesses have already won contracts. Adrian said: *"Our location, with its great international communication links and proximity to London, is helping businesses in the county grasp this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."*

A fact not lost on the Buckingham Group, which fought stiff competition from multi-national companies to win a multi-million pound contract to build the

2012 Olympic and Paralympic Handball Arena in the Olympic Park. Bill Chapple added: *"The Games are shining a light on Buckinghamshire and it is a wonderful opportunity for the County's businesses, schools, and residents to engage with and learn from each other."*

And at Stoke Mandeville Stadium, one of the 2012 training venues, competitors will be rekindling the spirit of the original Paralympic pioneers. It was here that neurologist Dr Ludwig Guttmann organised the first ever sports competition for 19 disabled athletes to coincide with the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games in 1948.

The Paralympic Games is now the second largest international sport event. BCC is proud to be leading on 'Paralympic Region', a major part of the Accentuate Legacy Trust Programme. Our project will try to ensure that the role of Stoke Mandeville as the birthplace of the Paralympic movement is widely recognised through archive collections, athletes' stories, and creative projects with schools and community groups, all contributing to a celebratory exhibition for 2012.

For one particular Buckinghamshire man, 2012 will evoke childhood memories of the 1948 Olympiad. As a seven-year-old, Buckinghamshire County Councillor Bruce Allen was one of the Scouts who released doves at the opening ceremony.



Above: Olympic Athletes Ben Farrell, Paul Wycherley, Stuart Hastings and Andrew Daniels

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Northamptonshire County Council Instigates Major Debate into Public Spending

Cllr Jim Harker, Leader of Northamptonshire County Council, explains why it is important to engage with local residents about spending cuts within council services.

It comes as no surprise to learn that, in line with other Councils across the UK, Northamptonshire County Council is facing major spending cuts during the next four years.

It is no secret that we are facing unprecedented financial challenges, with estimates that by 2014 we will need to save well over £100 million. This challenge is a very real opportunity for us to reshape our services, based around the principle of helping people help themselves.

In the face of these budget cuts, the Council has run a major engagement programme with its local residents. Launched as 'You Choose', the campaign is liaising with residents throughout the county to gain their views on the future of council services, which will in turn impact on decisions made about council spending in the future.

It is extremely important that we consult people from across the county to find out what they want from the services we provide. It is their council tax, and it is the residents of Northamptonshire who use these services, so it is only right that they should help decide what we prioritise and focus on. We want to ensure that the residents of Northamptonshire receive the great value services they want and deserve – and we welcome as much feedback as possible.

To launch You Choose, the Council took photos of members of the public, with their agreement, from across Northamptonshire, which were used by local artist Daxa Parmar to create a photomosaic of a hero, inspired by local graphic novelist Alan Moore, the creator of Watchmen and V for Vendetta. The photomosaic was hung at the Royal & Derngate

Theatre in Northampton in February for the public to view. It highlighted that decisions made about the county should be made by the people who live in Northamptonshire; focusing on a hero shows how, by working together, we all have the strength and abilities to take the county forward.



Images of the public also featured on an A-board lorry that toured all seven district and boroughs in Northamptonshire in March, with councillors and members of staff from the council. It enabled members of the public to share their opinions with the county council face-to-face, or by filling in comment cards, providing their views on 'writing walls' or filming comments in video cubes. The events were held in the market squares of Northampton and all the major towns in the County, and formed part of the BBC Panorama programme on how local authorities were tackling the challenges of reduced resources.

The Council also created a microsite www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/youchoose where members of the public can upload their comments and photos. Answering the question, "This is your county: what is most important to you?" local residents have been able to feedback on which council services are most valuable to them. The microsite also has a breakdown of council funding, useful information about council services, videos of interviews with local people from the You Choose roadshow and additional questions for visitors, to stimulate debate.

Because it is vital to engage with as many members of the community as possible, including key digital influencers, the microsite is also linked to popular online channels such as Twitter, regional blogs and forums, YouTube and Facebook, ensuring that You Choose has been accessible on all major social networks. From launch to date the microsite has attracted more than 34,000 page views.

To highlight the campaign to existing organisations and communities, the Council has produced a free downloadable toolkit so that organisations of all sizes can participate in the project by holding their own mini

debate. Having issued more than 500 DIY consultation toolkits to different groups, we have since received a further 150 requests for them.

Every council across the UK needs to face up to the reality of major spending cuts, which will greatly affect the services they provide. We want to involve the public in these difficult decisions, to ensure that their voices are heard – it means that we are truly consulting with our residents, not simply confronting them with reduced services or cutbacks. Our consultation period runs until the end of May; from June onwards we will be collating the information to help influence our budget decisions.

To find out more about You Choose, please visit: www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/youchoose

This article also appears in Public Service magazine: www.publicservice.co.uk

Cumbria

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Cumbria: Recovering from the Floods

By Marie Fallon, Chair of the Cumbria Strategic Flood Recovery Group and Corporate Director for Environment at Cumbria County Council



Marie Fallon

The recent mass shootings in Whitehaven and Copeland have dominated the national and international headlines, disguising the fact that Cumbria was already recovering from a very different sort of tragedy – the floods of November 2009.

Cumbria County Council has been the lead agency on the flood recovery efforts and in May, exactly six months after the floods, we took the opportunity to

take stock of all that has been achieved in the multi-agency recovery effort. The six-month anniversary has also been an opportunity to gauge some of the early lessons learned and share best practice with other authorities:

- Engaging with strategic funders at an early stage is essential. Offers of government funding came in after every minister's visit – each had a different criteria and method of access, which can be complicated processes for local agencies to navigate. Technical support from central Government was essential in ensuring funding was secured. For example, the Department for Transport appointed consultants and embedded them in the recovery process from the outset to help negotiate the processes of accessing funding for emergency infrastructure works – a first for government and extremely beneficial in creating a single team approach between local and central government.



Above: Northside bridge in Workington collapsed at the height of the floods, killing PC Bill Barker and cutting off communities either side of the river.

- A particular concern for local agencies was the very short timescales for assessing the scale of the damage and submitting claims for assistance under schemes such as Belwin. For a significant period after the floods much of the infrastructure was submerged beneath the floodwaters, making detailed assessment very difficult. At the point when the water began to subside Cumbria was hit by severe winter weather, blanketing much of the county in snow and ice and again making it difficult to assess the damage. These difficulties, combined with the size and rurality of Cumbria made it difficult to hit government deadlines.
- A Crisis Assistance Package could be developed nationally to improve the speed of response locally. Identifying the likely crisis issues facing local agencies in advance would improve preparedness and greatly assist future joint working between central and local government in times of crisis. The package should include an emergency procurement package which simplifies the contact between local agencies and with central government and also could include well maintained lists of indemnified structural engineers and other specialists willing to

volunteer their expertise in times of crisis. In Cumbria this would have greatly helped speed up the structural inspection of bridges. Many professionals volunteered their services but the local authority was unable to quickly ensure that their work would be indemnified.

- Emergency plans had been well tested; however, the scale of the flooding was beyond what was predicted. Emergency plans now need to be revisited to take account of climate change and severity of the flooding. For example, access routes to some identified emergency reception centres flooded and a local firm did not have flooding as a risk for its emergency plan as it was on a hill, but such was the severity of the flooding, it was badly affected.
- Communities were resilient and where they were organised prior to the flooding there were able to respond quickly and efficiently. Keswick Flood Action Group staffed by volunteers were able to check on the welfare of local people, move furniture upstairs and deal with all kinds of trauma. The county council's emergency plan needs to dovetail in a way that supports this community resilience. Prior to the flooding there were 12 flood action groups in Cumbria, now there are 30, providing an enormous opportunity to maximise the community's contribution alongside the public sector.



Above: A new two-lane temporary road bridge capable of taking HGVs was opened in Workington on April 21st. It took contractor Morgan Est just 72 days to build.

- Offers of help came in thick and fast in the form of expertise, food, money, clothing, tents, portable bridges, volunteers etc. Fortunately having learnt from the 2005 floods the Cumbria Community Foundation moved quickly to set up a flood recovery fund to manage donations. This allowed the recovery groups to concentrate on other offers of help.

To find out more about Cumbria's flood recovery operation visit:

www.cumbria.gov.uk/floods

Meeting the pothole challenge in Gloucestershire

Like so many other authorities across the UK, Gloucestershire County Council found itself in the midst of a serious roads crisis at the end of the winter.

After suffering the worst freeze in 30 years, the county's roads were badly damaged with potholes forming all over the network. Once the thaw was over, the public quickly turned to the state of the roads with people calling for the damage to be fixed immediately. Out on the ground highway teams were working around the clock to repair the roads, but the council was concerned the message wasn't getting across to the public.

On January 25th 2010, the council's communications team launched Operation Road Rescue to inform people just how much was being done. The campaign needed to be high-impact and low cost to ensure the council did not face accusations of money wasting - especially as the damage on the roads is estimated to cost more than £5million to repair.

Operation Road Rescue: 3 Steps to Road Rescue: Worst First, Patch and Resurface – is the strap line we devised and a comprehensive programme of press, online and direct communications was drawn up. We targeted:

- **Press:** press releases and case studies, TV and radio interviews and arranged for media to go 'out and about' with the gangs on the streets.
- **Web:** Microsite giving weekly updates and a photo gallery
- **Direct mail:** a targeted letter mail out was sent to local politicians, transport and road user groups to launch the campaign and signpost to website and video.
- **Outdoor:** Design of highway information signs to badge road works as Operation Road Rescue.
- **Social media:** YouTube video visually demonstrating the three-steps to repair approach so people can watch what they can expect to see on the streets.
- **Grass roots:** Information posters on community notice boards, in libraries and GP surgeries.

- **Advertising:** Advert in local media and advertorial in council tax booklet.
- **Internal communications:** Harnessing staff as campaign ambassadors by asking them to share the approach when talking with family, friends or partners
- **Operational communications:** Briefing highway call centre call handlers to educate callers and manage expectations.



Above: Gloucestershire's 3 Steps to Road Rescue: Worst First, Patch and Resurface



A key element of the campaign was the creation of the YouTube video, which showed our cabinet member for roads out with the gangs explaining to people exactly what we were doing. This generated huge interest from both local and national media, and received more than 3,000 online views within the first two weeks of the launch. Feedback we received said that people liked 'seeing for themselves' exactly what was happening on our roads.

The rest of the campaign focussed on giving people as much information as possible so we sent out, and continue to send out, weekly media updates giving the total number of potholes repaired and details of where patching and resurfacing works have been carried out. We also send these updates to parish and town councils to enable them to cascade this information directly into their communities.

To date, we have repaired almost 45,000 potholes in the past 17 weeks – that's more than the 38,000 we repaired in the whole of 2009! Coverage in the media has been fantastic with Operation Road Rescue receiving more headlines than any other council issue this year with more than 100 mentions in press, radio, TV and internet in the first eight weeks of the campaign. Since March, coverage has decreased but continues to be fairly balanced with many positive pieces each week when we issue the running total for pothole repairs.

In July, we will be launching the next stage of our campaign which will focus on utility company work and enhancing the council's commitment to bringing our roads up to standard for the long term.

For more information visit:

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/roadrescue

Planning for the huge infrastructure costs of further housing development in Hertfordshire

The need to provide good quality, sustainable housing for an ever-expanding population, while ensuring that the infrastructure can cope with demand, is an all too familiar problem facing many councils. In Hertfordshire, it is estimated that over £5 billion could be needed to bring the existing infrastructure – from roads and schools to water supplies and hospitals – up-to-date and meet demands created by future housing growth.



Derrick Ashley,
Executive Member
for Planning
Hertfordshire
County Council

Derrick Ashley, Executive Member for Planning at Hertfordshire County Council, said: *“While the recent news that unrealistic housing targets in the Regional Spatial Strategy are to be scrapped is most welcome, the fact remains that there is a growing need for housing and that the necessary infrastructure needs to be in place to support these new households.”*

To help support future development in Hertfordshire, in April 2008 the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Investment Strategy (HIIS) study was commissioned by the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP). This partnership is made up of the eleven local authorities in Hertfordshire, with the support of other key partners including the county’s Local Strategic Partnership, the Police, the Primary Care Trust, EEDA and the Environment Agency.

The study concluded that there is an existing infrastructure deficit of £2.4 billion. Further growth would push up infrastructure costs – for example around 100,000 new homes over the next twenty years would require funding of at least £2.7 billion.

As well as determining how much investment is needed in Hertfordshire’s infrastructure, the study is important in ensuring that resources are deployed effectively and that planning throughout the county is strategic.

A delicate balance must be struck between setting local development tariffs high enough in order to fund changes to infrastructure, while not making development impossibly expensive. The study has assessed viability in the county and has concluded that a contribution of approximately £23,000 is needed from each unit of new development to meet infrastructure needs. However despite having a very strong housing market, the maximum tariff that can be borne by developers is about £20,000 per unit. So even with support from developers, there will still be a funding gap.

Derrick continued: *“The Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Investment Strategy is proving a useful tool to help us and our partners to examine how to maximise resources in this time of economic constraint.”*

“HIIS is helping us understand the implications of growth and identify what funding is required for the delivery of changes to infrastructure. While it was based on the Community Infrastructure Levy model, it gives us an insight into the challenges of creating an effective and efficient system of collecting contributions to infrastructure and prioritising expenditure.”

“While housing development figures will now be decided at the local level, it will be even more important to ensure that we have a joined up approach to funding and delivering the infrastructure required.”

“We will continue to work hard with all our partners in the the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership to maintain the quality of life that residents in Hertfordshire currently enjoy.”

For more information on forward planning in Hertfordshire please contact:

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