



Harrietsham

Introduction

Harrietsham is an expanding village situated midway between Maidstone and Ashford, close to both the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the M20. It was listed in the Domesday Book as Heriagierdeshamme, "Heriagierde's water meadow" due to the proximity of the River Len. Today Harrietsham's heritage can still be seen in its Saxon Church and historic buildings but it is in all other senses a modern community facing change.

The majority of the community commute to work and some of the shops and amenities that previously existed have been redeveloped for housing. Harrietsham's Community Hall is the hub of the village and it has a new school which opened in 2007, a Doctors Surgery, Shop, Post Office, Veterinary Practice and a Pub plus a number of small industrial sites. The village is served by a railway station and a regular bus service.



Key Facts

County:	Kent
District:	Maidstone
Population:	1700
Plan Complete:	2004



The Process

In 2001 Action with Communities in Rural Kent held a Community Led Planning workshop which was attended by several newly elected Harrietsham Parish Councillors. The need to build a new school had caused a rift in the community and

the Councillors felt that this would be an excellent vehicle to consult with the community to address this and other outstanding issues.

A consultation event was held in the autumn, attended by 200 residents and highlighted that the young people of Harrietsham wished to be involved in the process.

The following spring a "Planning for Real" Day was held with 300 attendees of all ages. A model of the village was built by the primary school children and this visual motivation proved extremely successful in identifying issues and engaging with a wide section of the community.

A Steering Group was set up, supported by Action with Communities in Rural Kent, which met every couple of weeks to identify the key issues and prepare the questionnaire. This was a lengthy process of continual consultation. 770 questionnaires were hand delivered to every household and a response rate of just over 50% was achieved.

Once the data analysis was complete a local printer worked with the group to design the final Action Plan which was published in 2004 and delivered to every household.

What is a Community Led Plan?

A Community Led Plan is a process that underpins a community's vision for itself across all aspects of social, environmental and economic life. It celebrates positive features and activities, highlights local needs and contains a detailed action plan to help meet those needs.

These plans are produced by and for communities, based on a detailed survey and consultation which is widely inclusive, prompts action and influences others. Good plans; use the Community Led Planning Toolkit framework, are supported by external facilitators from the Rural Community Action Network and include a robust evaluation process that ensures their quality.



Community Led

Achievements to date



Young People

▶ The first Youth Parish Council in Kent was established. This group proved to be key in engaging with the young people and encouraging their participation in wider activities.

▶ Supported by the Parish Council the young people run the “Remix” music and arts group. This group supports three youth clubs to encompass the different age ranges and makes use of the recording and performing facilities at the Community Hall.

Several of the young people who were involved in the project from the beginning have become tutors and run the group for the primary school children. They also produce three shows a year involving the wider community including a disability group.



Policing

▶ An increased Police presence has reduced the crime rate and improved the accountability of the Police to the community.

▶ A “Partners And Community working Together” Group (PACT) has been established to address the community safety issues highlighted in the plan and to identify measures to combat the anti-social behaviour of a small minority within the community.

The PACT partners include representatives from the Police, Community Warden, Community Hall Trust, Neighbourhood Watch, the Church and the District and Parish Councils.



Health

▶ A Community user group has been set up which meets regularly with health providers at the Doctors Surgery to promote discussion on health issues.



Community Facilities

▶ The Plan has been used to evidence need and has generated £140,000 of funding to build and furnish a purpose-built recording studio and improve performance space in the Community Hall.

The Hall has been extended to provide an Office for the Parish Council, Community Warden and Police Community Support Officer.

▶ Films are regularly shown in the Community Hall with an evening for young people and separate sessions for older residents.

▶ A phased lighting Scheme has been introduced.

Traffic

▶ Vehicle Activated Signs have been installed and a 40mph speed limit has been enforced on the main road through the village, which has dramatically reduced the speed of traffic.

▶ Pavements in the main part of the village have been upgraded and dropped kerbs installed to make the area accessible to all.

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Communication

- ▶ The "Network Magazine" promotes interaction between the Parish Council and the community and provides updates on the actions from the Plan.
- ▶ New Parish Notice Boards have been installed around the village.



In the Works...

- ▶ Supported by Action with Communities in Rural Kent, a Housing Needs survey has been completed and ongoing efforts are underway to encourage more affordable housing for the community.
- ▶ Land has been purchased to provide more green space for community use and the Parish Council are consulting with the community on the choice of play equipment.
- ▶ A questionnaire from the PACT group highlighted the need for additional street lighting which will include provision for the installation of CCTV.
- ▶ The introduction of a Community Speedwatch Programme is being discussed and evaluated.

Community Benefits

- ▶ The Parish Council and the community have developed their relationship to the mutual benefit of both.
- ▶ The inclusive process and the projects that have resulted from the Plan have healed rifts caused by the building of the new school.
- ▶ The young people of Harrietsham play a key role in the decision making process and in reaching out to the more vulnerable members of the community through the production of the "Remix Shows".
- ▶ The results from the process have empowered the community and encouraged a belief in change.



Local Authority Engagement

The plan process has strengthened Harrietsham's negotiating skills when dealing with their local authorities. The Parish Council worked in partnership with both County and Borough Councils to purchase/lease land to be used as open green space and the local authorities have also advised on funding. Maidstone Borough Council has agreed to re-establish a recycling site in Harrietsham. The Plan provides evidence for section 106 agreements.



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Going Forward

The Plan has been endorsed by Maidstone Borough Council and Harrietsham Parish Council use the plan to inform and direct their activities. The action plan is a living document with progress regularly reviewed by the Parish Council.

Motivated by their success so far, there are many continuing initiatives in Harrietsham; the PACT group continues to address community safety, the Youth Parish Council and the "Remix Group" continue to tap into the hidden talents of the community.

The wider community is kept informed through various sources including the "Network" Magazine, the website and the new Parish notice boards.



Key Advice for Others
Enjoy yourselves, make the process fun for everyone, and above all ensure you celebrate your successes. "Planning for Real" is an excellent vehicle to identify the key issues, and engage with the wider community.

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The Plan is really a focus point that has allowed us to crystallise the needs and desires of the community as identified by the Parishioners themselves. It continues to be revisited as a dynamic document and provides a pathway plan for the future.
Dennis Clifton, Chairman Harrietsham Parish Council
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This case study forms part of a series evaluating the impacts and benefits of Community Led Plans across the South East. It has been funded and produced by the South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC) in partnership with Action with Communities in Rural Kent. Both are members of the national Rural Community Action Network. www.acre.org.uk

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Support from your Rural Community Council is invaluable.
- ▶ Tap into hidden talents and skills within the community.
- ▶ Recruit as many volunteers as possible from a wide cross section of the community.
- ▶ Accept all offers of help no matter how small they may seem.

- ▶ Quick wins are vital and celebrating their success is even more important.
- ▶ Data analysis is the cornerstone of the plan and a strategy for analysis should be in place before the questionnaire is produced.
- ▶ The Plan is a living document which should be revisited regularly.



Further Information
www.harrietsham.net www.ruralkent.org.uk www.sercc.org.uk

Action with Communities in Rural Kent