

## **LESSONS FROM THE MARKET TOWN INITIATIVE PROGRAMMES IN EGREMONT AND MILLOM**

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### **Summary and Recommendation:**

This report presents the key outputs and outcomes from the Market Town Initiatives in Millom and Egremont which were completed during 2008/09. The report seeks to draw out the lessons that can be learned by the Council for future regeneration of our towns and rural communities and for working with external funding. The report also looks to celebrate some of the achievements that have been made.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The Market Town Initiative was initiated by the Countryside Agency in 2002, when Market Town Status was awarded to towns throughout the country. Each town then underwent a 'healthcheck' which involved the community in identifying ways in which their towns could be improved.
- 1.2. In Millom the Millom and Haverigg Economic Development Group (MHEDG) took on the responsibility of overseeing the healthcheck process, in Egremont, a new Partnership (EARP) was formed to do this. Copeland Borough Council's Community Development team led the application process with the funding coming from the North West Regional Development Agency (NWDA), which took on the role of the Countryside Agency.
- 1.3. Funding was agreed in April 2005, with Market Town Initiative programme managers being appointed for Egremont and Millom in May 2005 and part time administrative assistants being appointed later in the Summer. The first projects in both towns were appraised
- 1.4. The programmes were due to run for three years until March 2008. In the case of Egremont, an additional 12 months was agreed with some additional funding. In both cases, the Council agreed extensions to the contract of officers, to provide the best opportunity for the programmes to leave a lasting legacy by continuing to develop regeneration work and to wind up all of the reporting necessary for the NWDA. This funding was made available from the LABGI fund (Local Authority Business Growth Initiative).

- 1.5. The programmes in both towns have now been completed, with the respective Partnerships having forward plan programmes in place to continue the regeneration effort.

## **2. Process**

- 2.1. Funding for the Market Town Initiatives was through the North west Development Agency, with a need in each case to find matching funding of almost 50%. In both cases this funding was found and exceeded.
- 2.2. Being a Regional Development Agency project, the process for appraising and approving projects was quite involved, and this was a significant factor in the complications of delivery, which will be considered within the lessons below.
- 2.3. Prior to projects being progressed, the Programme Managers first had to complete a 'Performance Plan' for the overall programme which required NWDA sign off prior to commencement. This process was completed by the end of August and the first project applications could commence.
- 2.4. To contribute to the ownership of projects, members of the respective governing boards were trained in NWDA appraisal techniques and processes. Quite complex application forms were completed for each project within the programme, and these were then appraised by people not involved in their writing. This would often involve people from the other MTI and always involved a representative from CBC finance and often from CBC regeneration. Finally, the appraisal group would make a representation to the appropriate board (EARP or MHEDG) and the project would receive an offer letter.
- 2.5. The first projects were cleared to begin through this process by the beginning of October in both towns, leaving two and a half years (30 months) for actual delivery.
- 2.6. The 'Performance Plan' process was repeated annually and the appraisal and approval process repeated for every project.
- 2.7. Each year of each programme was subject to an audit 'Statement of Grant Expenditure'. Regular 'health checks' were carried out by the NWDA, using staff independent of the project champion to ensure objectivity.

2.8. An Exit Report was completed, signed off and submitted for the Millom programme and one is currently being prepared for the Egremont Programme.

### **3. MILLOM – Summary**

3.1. Millom was the first of the two programmes to be completed, with the Final Claim being made in March 2008.

3.2. The Millom and Haverigg Economic Development Group has been operating for a number of years and was well established before the Market Town Initiative began. Several projects were also in development, most notably the Network Centre, and the MTI was able to support this.

3.3. The Market Town Initiative levered 98% of predicted funding into Millom, with a total spend of £2.2million. Of this £315,000 came from the European Regional Development Fund, £161,000 from private sources, with the NWDA programme expenditure of around £920,000.

3.4. The Market Town Initiative in Millom focused on the Network Centre, with one third of NWDA allocated funds and half of the overall spend funding this project. The Network Centre is a new building adjoining the school to encourage the development of entrepreneurial culture, stimulate and support new businesses start-ups and allow new skills formation. The Millom Network Centre has become an important community hub for training and initiatives. It has its own management group and business plan.

3.5. The Millom Network Centre (MNC) has begun in the year following the MTI to deliver significant outputs, with all offices let and an increasingly busy timetable of business meetings and conferences and community events and consultations.

3.6. Another notable success was MTI support for the Millom Outreach Team for 3 years, to provide a dedicated team of youth workers to implement a range of initiatives to meet the needs of young people. The local Action for Children initiative with its own centre has now incorporated the youth outreach and support activities from the MTI. The services continue to be delivered through a partnership approach of public and voluntary service providers.

3.7. The Market Town Initiative supported the continuation of a dedicated Tourism Officer who worked with local people and partners and assisted implementation of a Millom Tourism Action Plan (also funded through the programme). The Millom Tourism Group was formed as a

- 3.8. Funded by the MTI a feasibility study into potential for a replacement swimming pool in Millom has resulted in a further £100,000 NWDA grant resource to develop the business plan and develop the design for a community facility with a focus on young people's fitness needs.
- 3.9. The MTI funded feasibility study into the refurbishment and regeneration of the Palladium was subject to a number of delays. This resulted in a report at the end of the programme and no opportunity to add any development in to spend within the programme timetable. Ownership of the Palladium has now passed back to the Millom Amateur Operatic Society.
- 3.10. A Transport Forum was established to address the isolation felt by Millom people in accessing services, recreation and work and skills. The offered a platform that would champion the development of local transport infrastructure, including the Coastal Rail Network. The forum became the catalyst for a disability forum in Millom able to look at a range of issues, specifically access.
- 3.11. A Community Pot fund supported fifteen projects brought forward or developed with community organisations, helping for example, St George's Hall with a new heating system and Haverigg Nursery to sustain jobs.
- 3.12. Outputs in Millom will mostly be achieved in later years, with the Network Centre now starting to fulfil its potential.
- 3.13. The Exit Report for Millom was signed off by the MHEDG and submitted in December 2008.

#### **4. EGREMONT Summary**

- 4.1. Egremont's Market Town Initiative programme benefited from an additional master-planning exercise prior to the funding bid being submitted and this helped to prioritise a number of projects. The plan considered a range of interventions by a number of delivery partners, from public realm improvements to youth projects.

- 4.2. With an agreed master-plan in place, Egremont was able to take advantage of European Regional Development Funds of £492,000 available for tourism development to match £498,000 awarded by West Lakes Renaissance and public realm elements of the Market Town Initiative, to implement further projects identified within the Master-plan.
- 4.3. The Market Town Initiative in Egremont achieved the following exceeding the targets agreed in the contract:
- 49 jobs created or safeguarded
  - 271 people assisted to get a job
  - 27 businesses created
  - £173,000 private investment levered
  - 348sqm of new/upgraded business space
  - 508 training outputs across all indicators
- 4.4. In addition to these, official figures indicate that Egremont over the period of the Market Town Initiative and Gateways Project has had significantly higher business start up enquiries than other areas in Copeland and Allerdale.
- 4.5. Before the Gateways Project commenced (in 2006), a baseline visitor assessment was carried out as part of the MTI funded Tourism Study. This was revisited during 2008/09 to assess what effect the improved physical aspect of the town has had on visitor numbers and spend in the town. Based on actual figures collected by the Tourist Information Centre and a tourism and business survey, the report concludes that at this early stage following completion of the works visitor numbers are up 40% over the period. Additional visitors and spend have supported the creation of up to 16 new jobs in this time and business confidence is high.
- 4.6. Within the programme, there were several funding pots for grants to be awarded to businesses and community groups. Six large grants for building re-use were awarded and projects completed, with a further three awarded from the successor programme supported by West Lakes Renaissance and currently being implemented. Twelve shop-front facelifts were funded with a further six to be completed by September 2009. Additionally ten businesses were awarded development grants of up to £5,000 and thirteen community projects were assisted through the Community Pot.
- 4.7. The MTI brought six disused buildings back into use, many of which had been out of use for well over five years. As the tourism report

- 4.8. The MTI Programme Office was also responsible for bringing in Arts Council England Funding for the Creative Egremont project which is now giving rise to new projects for future development including the castle pavilion and Florence Mine cultural industries hub which has Arts Council England and West Lakes Renaissance backing, with Northern Rock currently considering an application for funding.
- 4.9. The Market Town Initiative office worked closely with Community Action for Egremont, which it is now planned will merge with the Regeneration Partnership) on plans for a Community Resource Centre, which was supported by West Lakes Renaissance. After initial plans fell through, a partnership with Age Concern Northwest Cumbria was formed and the centre opened at 15 Market Place (transforming the former Walter Wilson supermarket) in February 2009. The centre has a café and drop in area, printing facilities (funded through the Market Town Initiative), a meeting room for 14 people and computer training suite for 12, with three offices available for let. The Regeneration Partnership office is now in one of these.
- 4.10. Another key aspect of the Market Town Initiative was the Employment Access project, delivered by Phoenix Enterprise Centre. Starting initially in the library, this service now operates from the De Lucy Centre.
- 4.11. The MTI Exit Report for Egremont has now been completed and agreed by the NWDA.

## **5. LESSONS**

- 5.1. The starting date of the Initiatives in both towns (as with the majority of others in Cumbria were delayed from the outset for a number of reasons. There were clear advantages in other towns, for example Ulverston, where an officer was already in place prior to the Market Town Initiative coming on stream. Although Egremont had previously had regeneration officers, these had not been retained and in both towns, responsibility for the applications passed to the Community Development Manager at CBC. These applications were made effectively and efficiently and were ultimately successful. However, delays at the NWDA, having taken on the work of the Countryside Agency, led to the programme being reduced to three years and by

- 5.2. The Market Town Initiatives have demonstrated the importance of having fully consulted plans in place in order that funding opportunities can be taken. The value of having structures of ownership for these plans that are able to mobilise to implement plans or parts of plans when opportunities arise is also shown.
- 5.3. The MTIs also demonstrated the value of mixed programmes of activity, encompassing for example environmental, public realm, business development, employment, training, community or youth projects.
- 5.4. Egremont has shown the potential for building teams around programmes. A Tourism and Marketing Officer and a freelance Arts Coordinator were employed to extend the team to assist in delivery. This team could have been put in place earlier in the programme to capitalise further on successful fund-raising.
- 5.5. There has been a clear issue around the continuation of work after programme completion, with neither partnership able to raise sufficient funds to maintain the work. Initial support from the Council through LABGI supported the ongoing core staffing, with this being topped up in Egremont with project delivery fees for the Gateways project. However, with the availability of capital project funding from West Lakes Renaissance diminishing, this income stream which might have maintained work in the Market Towns was removed. In Millom, attempts to diversify the work of the Economic Development Group by taking on property assets (a route advocated by many and supported by the Development Trusts Association) failed to bring the necessary income. In part this was because of the insufficient quality of property available.
- 5.6. The importance of the Council being fully engaged with the Market Town Initiative was clear, with significant opportunities for the Council to pursue some of its goals through delivery or such programmes. In the second and third years there was insufficient capacity in regeneration, finance and at times legal teams to fully support and to capitalise on the opportunities arising from external funding available.

- 5.7. The importance for the Council of being fully involved in creating integrated delivery plans which might in future take the form of locality master-plans is also clear. The Egremont Mini Master-plan can inform this. This process will mean that the localities are well placed to draw on funding opportunities for future project work.
- 5.8. Both Partnerships sought to find sustainability following the initial funding, with the Council providing £50,000 support through the LABGI income in 2008/09. In Millom attempts were made to follow the Development Trust route of acquiring property assets. In Egremont, the approach was to pursue West Lakes Renaissance funding for on-going projects and to build project management costs into those bids. Neither has led to income sufficient to sustain the staffing costs of officers. The former due to the complexity of acquiring property assets and in part due to the Palladium project not going forward. The latter due to changes in West Lakes Renaissance's business plan and a steep reduction in the funding available for projects. Finding ways to support locality based regeneration work, in order that teams are in place to take advantage of funds that are available will continue to be important.
- 5.9. The benefit of having staff teams dedicated to the towns has been shown by the ongoing projects that have emerged from the programmes. Communities require support if projects are to get off the ground to meet local needs.

## **6. Summary and Key Priorities**

- 6.1. The Market Town Initiatives brought essential capital and revenue funding to Millom and Egremont, helping to achieve vital projects in support of economic and community development in both areas. Whilst not all aspirations were met, valuable lessons have been learned and should be taken forward to ensure that as future funding becomes available, Copeland's towns are in a strong position to take advantage.
- 6.2. Working with partners to continue to develop locality based delivery bodies able to continuously update regeneration priorities and to engage with the community and stakeholder groups is key to ensuring structures are in place for future work to take place.

- 6.3. Ensuring that the Council's regeneration, legal and finance teams have the resources, relevant structures and systems in place to facilitate and support community led regeneration work, and to undertake all Accountable Body functions is essential.
- 6.4. Putting in place protocols for the way the Council works with partners both from the community and from other statutory agencies should be a priority in developing the locality working process.

### **List of Appendices**

None

**List of Consultees: Julie Betteridge, Councillor Robin Pitt**