

Notes from the VCF Meeting of 2011-01-26 18:30 at “The Venue”, Stocksbridge

This document notes things said at the meeting which occurred to the Author as being of interest to the “[Ecclesfield Conservation](#)”, and “[Ecclesfield-in-Bloom](#)” groups. *[The notes and references in brackets were not mentioned, but are the note-taker, Jim Percival’s added comments]*

[This version was written on 2011-01-28].

- A) Successes reported by the groups included a diverse range of activities and events, including a fun day attended by 1000 people, a “1940’s WWII” event which 70 people attended, a drama group for 6 – 16 year olds, health walks, and a “four publication a year” newsletter. Successes concerning in bloom groups in particular, included...
1. A partnership with Ecclesfield School, resulting in the school making planters.
 2. School children keeping the ground in front of the library tidy.
 3. People from McDonalds working in the park [<http://www.chapeltownpark.co.uk/page1003.html>]
 4. A group, which continuing to enjoy working even though they no longer entered the formal “Yorkshire In Bloom” competition.
- B) Problems reported included the small number of dedicated members in some groups, the difficulties in attracting new members, especially from a new, younger generation, and instances where even beneficiaries of the service refused to get involved when asked. Also mentioned was the difficulty of letting other groups know what is going on, and so preventing clashing dates. The results of such problems were said to include a play group which folded because of lack of support, and a community building which was underused in the mornings. Difficulties reported by in-bloom groups in particular included...
1. The difficulty of getting permission to put hanging baskets on rented property since landlords objected.
 2. The “health & safety” problems quoted as the reason why the Council could not put hanging baskets on concrete lamp posts [*We have metal posts in Ecclesfield, but the cost is still a problem*]
- C) Solutions suggested included asking people face-to-face “will you do this”, being introduced to other groups, forum meetings to talk over ideas, holding get-togethers, including coffee mornings, a “bring and share” event with food and games, a “pie and peas” supper. Things that could be tried included “social networking”, such as Facebook and twitter, and the forthcoming “Big Lunch” event [<http://www.thebiglunch.com/>]. The Council was said to be prepared to accept requests for particular roads to be closed for the event.
- D) Problems on the funding side were also discussed. Councillor Jack Clarkson agreed that cuts were expected, and gave as a typical example, a previous year’s £500 grant which may turn into a £350 grant in the coming year [*we need to keep an eye on this perhaps*]. The difficulty of filling in complex grant forms was mentioned, as well as grants which require groups to spend the money before they can claim it back. There was also a suggestion that the money to enable something to be put on would last so long, and the service would cease because of the difficulty of making things self funding.
- E) Possible solutions mentioned, included the possibility of some groups jointly funding a worker to handle grant application forms etc. “meet the funder” events, and links to Councillors and Street

force. Funding sources mentioned were the “Small grants” fund, “Kids can do”, and the “Climate Change fund”, [<http://syfab.org.uk/fundingnews/2010/07/27/funds-for-sheffield-groups-from-the-community-assemblies/>]. Also mentioned were the Councillor’s “Ward Pots”, and lottery funding.

- F) The Chair [*Marika Puglisi* <http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/in-your-area/community-assemblies/northern> *if I heard her name correctly*] told us that the Northern Community Assembly (NCA) was consulting with voluntary sub-groups to find out whether the current system was the most effective way of working together. This system, which included having 4 meetings per year had been in operation for 1 ½ years, but there was a feeling that it may not be the most effective way of working. Examples were given where some meetings had little attendance, and of other meetings where information had to be repeated because groups sent new people to represent them.
- G) The Chair said that the NCA wanted the voluntary sector to be more involved or empowered. They are therefore considering other options as well as a continuation of the quarterly meetings. These other options included thematic meetings dedicated to particular types of group, and a “commissioning” relationship with the voluntary groups where the NCA asks particular groups if they are prepared to fulfil certain of the Assembly priorities – E.g. those listed below. [*I shall go through and check that we are still properly registered with Sheffield’s voluntary groups database*]
- H) In addition to these meetings, other methods of involvement mentioned included NCA officers who were on hand to give general advice, the “You choose” grant events, and “Together for Regeneration” [<http://www.tfr.org.uk/>]. Also discussed were “Walk-about” where decision makers are invited to see the problems on the ground, such as the one arranged recently for Chapeltown.
- I) We were also shown an Assembly “priorities” chart which numbered items as follows...
1. Supporting local communities
 2. Activities for children & young people
 3. Better parks & open spaces
 4. Safer roads
 5. Clean & tidy streets
 6. Supporting the rural communities
 7. Safer communities
 8. Reduced environmental impact
 9. Supporting the local economy

Representatives of each group then submitted their first (and sometimes second and third priority) on “Post-it-notes for the NCA to collate and so sample the group’s opinions.