

# Melksham Area Community Strategy (2004-2014)

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**December 2004**

*Melksham. Atworth. Beanacre. Berryfield. Bowerhill. Broughton Gifford.  
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Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> is a trade name of MACDT Ltd

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"I am delighted to present to you this Melksham Area Community Strategy. The document before you is the culmination of much work and consultation, and comes at both a critical and exciting time for the Melksham Community Area and the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership.

**Our Strategy aims to:**

- Build on what has been achieved to date by the Partnership and keep up the momentum to maximise future benefits for the Melksham area.
- Identify what isn't being done and look at ways to plug the gaps.
- Put people at the centre of the process, giving the community a stronger voice in decisions affecting them.
- Widen opportunities for participation in local decision-making, and encourage people to take them up.
- Take a long-term view while still meeting today's needs.
- Be a focal point for co-ordinating information and action across the community area.
- Encourage partnership working and joined up approaches by the public, private and voluntary sectors and by individuals.
- Provide an evidence base and be used to support bids to funding agencies.
- Help promote a positive image of the Community Area and raise its profile in the region.

**Structure of the document**

The document traces the development of the organisation, consultation and planning within the Melksham community area. It also examines the policy context within which local action is being planned and delivered and what has been achieved to date. From our analysis of the strategic issues affecting the area **4 Priority Themes have been identified**. These are:

- Town Centre
- Economic Regeneration
- Young People
- Transport

For each Priority Theme we have identified:

- **Priority Projects**, and
- **Intended Actions**.

Priority Projects have been prioritised for a number of reasons. They may be time critical (i.e. an opportunity will be lost if they are not implemented soon), or be seen to have a potentially significant impact. More details about our Priority Projects, and a number of additional projects which are in various stages of development, are included in our **Business Plan (2005-2008)**. If you would like a copy of our Business Plan please request a copy from the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> offices.

Melksham 1st looks forward to working with you to progress the ideas and aspirations contained within this Strategy Document, and invites every one who lives or works in the Melksham Area to join us in securing a prosperous future for Melksham and it's communities."

*Ian Bertram, Chair  
Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership  
December 2004*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### i) THE MELKSHAM 1<sup>ST</sup> PARTNERSHIP

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> is a Community Area Partnership; one of 20 now established across Wiltshire. The Partnership aims to improve the social, environmental, economic and cultural quality of life for residents, and to work towards providing equal opportunity for everyone. It aims to be the voice of the community sector, and believes that local communities have the capacity and the capability to determine their own future.

Membership of Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> is open to all, but core members include voluntary and statutory community organisations; town, parish, district and county councillors; officers from Melksham Town Council, Melksham Without Parish Council, West Wiltshire District Council and Wiltshire County Council; and members of the public.

Our vision for the Melksham Community Area is:

*We want our Community Area to be prosperous, harmonious, and safe.*

*We want our Community Area to support a vibrant and growing local economy, the needs of which must be balanced with the protection of our local environment and rural hinterland.*

*We want all the people of our Community Area to have equal access to opportunities, including employment, training and education.*

*We want all the people of our Community Area to be given opportunities to participate in local decision-making.*

### ii) MOVING AHEAD

In 2002 Melksham 1st published a Community Action Plan called 'Moving Ahead.' This outlined 11 themes and over 40 projects, many of which have now been implemented. The eleven themes were: Arts for All; Sports & Leisure; Communication & Information; Social Inclusion; Our Communities; Environmental Improvements; Community Safety; Economic Development; Travel & Transport; Children & Young People; and Town Centre Improvements.

The Partnership has now revisited the action plan in order to bring it up to date and to re-focus the strategy around a smaller number of key priorities. In identifying 4 priority themes for our 2004-2014 strategy, the Partnership has had regard to a number of factors:

- Progress made since the publication of the 'Moving Ahead' document;
- The issues and priorities outlined in Parish Plans, written by local residents in several villages in the Community Area;
- The issues and priorities highlighted in the course of on-going Working Group meetings and consultation events.
- Issues and priorities highlighted in relevant regional documents and policies, e.g. The Wiltshire Strategy.

The prioritisation process has also been informed by the consideration of issues such as demonstrable need, time-critical actions, resource availability and partner support. The **4 priority themes** identified are:

*To secure investment in the **Town Centre** to improve both its physical appearance and the economic potential for investment.*

*To develop and implement an Integrated **Economic Regeneration** Strategy, to include the promotion of Lifelong Learning for all.*

*To ensure that all **Young People** have access to the widest range of facilities, services, and opportunities.*

*To develop an **Integrated Transport Network** for the Community Area.*

The environment has not been identified as a stand-alone theme as it is inseparably linked to all other themes. The Partnership also recognises that Strategy Documents are flexible and will evolve with time. It is fully anticipated that other themes identified in the Moving Ahead document will be revisited, or indeed, new themes may emerge. The Partnership will actively provide support in the future to other groups who may wish to progress work under themes not yet identified as a priority. For example, through a new Working Group recently established with the Primary Care Trust, health is developing as a new priority issue. It is a clear example of how this Strategy will respond to issues that grow in momentum and urgency within the community.

### **iii) SETTING THE CONTEXT**

The Strategy document outlines a number of key linkages between Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> and community planning in Wiltshire, and provides information on the context in which the partnership must operate. The Introduction to the Strategy discusses a range of important influences, ranging from Local Strategic Partnerships, Parish Plans, planning policy, and the Market & Coastal Towns Initiative. Issues surrounding the development of a sustainable partnership organisation - such as the establishment of a Development Trust, and the securing of core funding and new staff - are introduced in the Strategy, and discussed in more detail in the Business Plan that has been published alongside this document.

The Introduction to the Strategy also outlines in detail the successes and work done to date by Melksham 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **iv) THE TOWN CENTRE**

#### **Key Objectives:**

- To improve the physical fabric and infrastructure of the town centre;
- To encourage greater investment in the town centre;
- To review the planning definition of the core shopping area;
- To improve pedestrian, visual and activity links between the retail centre and the riverside.

#### **Identified Problems:**

- The town centre gives bad first impression due to poor environmental quality;
- Dominated by through traffic;
- Townscape offers poor experience for pedestrians;
- Strong competition from nearby towns for retail spend - retail offer in Melksham weak in comparison;
- Inadequate attractions to draw people to the town centre - retail, tourist or leisure;
- Town centre 'turns its back' on the riverside.

#### **Projects:**

- Commission a Town Centre Enhancement Strategy. Aspects of the built environment that need to be included in the study are; public open spaces; areas of conservation; good examples of buildings of historical or architectural merit; quality of pavements, quality and placement of street furniture; lighting; planting, quality of the shop fronts; location of empty retail premises; locations of vandalism; pedestrian routes; cycle routes; vehicular traffic routes including congestion hot spots.
- Establish a Project Group, including commercial property agents, to investigate innovative ways to promote retail space and attract new uses to the town centre.

- Review the definition of the core shopping area and the primary retail frontage as defined in planning policy.
- Promote an annual spring festival, expanding on the Spring River Festival held in Spring 2004. This will promote the river in Melksham as a destination to enjoy a range of high quality recreational activities and this in turn will bring additional spending on goods and for services in the town centre.
- Work with existing organisations and agencies to develop and promote a Programme of Events, designed to increase numbers of visitors to the area.

**Support is also needed to:**

- Secure local transport plan investment in the town centre and investigate opportunities to lever in additional funding on the back of this.
- Investigate options for creating 'activity zones' that enhance pedestrian, activity and visual links between the town centre and the riverside.

## **v) ECONOMIC REGENERATION**

**Key Objectives:**

- To ensure sustainable economic growth in the area;
- To develop the potential of the waterways, within the limits of sustainable development, as an economic and social resource for Melksham.
- To ensure that unemployment remains low - at its current level of below 2%;
- To raise the skills level and aspirations of local residents, through increased access to and promotion of training and education opportunities, as well as attracting skilled in-comers;
- To strengthen collaboration with and involvement of the business sector in planning for the future;
- To increase visitor numbers to the area through better facilities, promotion and marketing;
- To attract and support business investment in the business parks and the town centre.

**Identified Problems:**

- Low skill and aspiration levels;
- Low spending power;
- Low confidence in town centre;
- Key local asset, the riverside, remains under-utilised;
- Competition from nearby towns.

**Projects:**

- Commission a Riverside Enhancement Strategy to give a spatial dimension to the ideas and issues that have arisen regarding development of the riverside.
- Develop a Learning Plan for the Community Area, which will:
  - review the fit between employer training needs and available training infrastructure
  - assess the provision and adequacy of training, particularly in the following priority areas: management development, 'skills for business success' (team working, managing change etc.), and customer service
  - improve community pride and raise aspirations within the workforce
- Undertake a 'Plugging the Leaks' project, with the assistance of the New Economics Foundation, to identify means of increasing the percentage of money spent locally that stays in the local economy.

**Support Is Also Needed To:**

- Work with relevant partners to bring the Wilts & Berks Canal to Melksham.
- Investigate and develop new activities and initiatives linking businesses with local schools, to help to address issues such as school leaver attitudes.

- Work with training providers to broaden community learning beyond its current apparent focus on basic skills and family learning – so learning can be linked more with employment opportunities and employer needs.
- Build upon the Free2Learn initiative to reduce barriers to learning.
- Strengthen collaboration amongst business sector organisations, local traders and the wider community, so that they develop shared priorities. This will ensure that the widest possible range of local stakeholders become involved in ensuring long term, sustainable economic growth, and that the right support is provided to traders and employers so they can contribute to future plans for promoting the local economy. Collaboration will be achieved through networking events and communication projects. The potential also exists for the establishment of a Business Forum.
- Working with the Economic Development Officers, promote the availability of land and premises for new business development and investment.
- Improve links with major local employers, so that in order to secure their future in the area the Partnership can help to address any issues affecting their operations, eg. planning, training and environmental issues.
- Undertake a 'Plugging the Leaks' project, with the assistance of the New Economics Foundation, to identify means of increasing the percentage of money spent locally that stays in the local economy.

## **vi) YOUNG PEOPLE**

### ***Key Objectives:***

- To increase the level of resources, especially staffing, available to support and increase the activities that young people can engage in.
- To provide more social and leisure events and facilities for young people - - in particular teenagers - through improved information and transport provision.
- To improve community perceptions and attitudes towards young people, through a programme of positive media reporting.
- To increase local awareness of opportunities that are available to young people, through improved publicity and networking between groups and agencies, so young people can make better-informed decisions.
- To promote 'citizenship' amongst young people by better engaging them in community and democratic processes.
- To engage with young people to help them recognise problems relating to Anti-Social Behaviour and how to cope or deal with them.

### ***Identified Problems:***

- A lack of Youth Workers and volunteer staff;
- Poor public transport links often prohibit youth from the villages from accessing venues and activities in Melksham;
- Continued or worsening Anti-social behaviour (within specific groups of the youth population only).

### ***Projects:***

- Establish a 'Youth Section' in Melksham Independent News – to provide regular details of youth activities on in the various parts of the Community Area.
- Improve positive reporting in all local media, relating to efforts of those working with young people, and the positive efforts of young people themselves.
- Host a Community Safety consultation/forum event for young people.

### ***Support Is Also Needed To:***

- Secure additional staffing for the Canberra Centre and Youth Cafe, so these existing facilities can be better utilised by local young people.

- Attract and train the volunteers required to offer a range of outdoor leisure pursuits to young people.
- Work with WCC to address the current shortage of Youth Workers in the Community Area, including meeting the need for a full-time Youth Worker for the parishes.
- Address the shortfall in youth venues and activities in the villages of the Community Area.
- Investigate opportunities to improve the frequency and quality of training for youth workers and volunteers.

## **vii) TRANSPORT**

### ***Key Objectives:***

- To encourage development of the local transport network, so it better meets and accommodates the needs of the local community.
- To strengthen linkages and collaboration between transport providers.
- To improve accessibility, especially for cyclists and pedestrians, throughout the Community Area.
- To map the existing provision for all transport systems and networks across the Community Area and use it to develop an integrated transport strategy for Melksham.
- To inform and influence regional decision-making about transport issues which affect the Community Area.

### ***Identified Problems:***

- Lack of an integrated transport network;
- Limited bus service, especially at night and to villages;
- Rail service could be reduced;
- Traffic congestion in town centre.

### ***Projects:***

- Commission research into transport usage, journey numbers, and other identified required data.
- Commission consultants to undertake an Integrated Transport Study for the Community Area.
- Improve signage to the railway station.
- Prepare Walking Maps for Schools.
- Secure funding for Quiet Lanes Project.

### ***Support Is Also Needed To:***

- Secure existing rail service provision (whilst looking to expand rail services and usage in the future).
- Improve the links (in the short term) between the town and surrounding villages.
- Represent the Community area's interests at strategic meetings and consultations, e.g. work on the Regional Spatial Strategy
- Continue active involvement in the Local Transport Plan process.
- Identify and deliver projects that will improve cycling facilities across the Community Area, e.g., the Beanacre to Melksham Cycleway.

## **viii) WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> will use this Strategy to actively seek the funding and other resources required to deliver the priority projects and meet identified objectives. The first step in this process will be a 'brokering meeting' in January 2005, held as part of Melksham's status as a pilot town in the Market & Coastal Town's Initiative. A range of regional agencies (e.g. The Countryside Agency, the Regional Development Agency, The Environment Agency), the district and county councils, and a number of local companies and other potential partners will be invited. From this meeting we hope to secure the commitment, and - eventually - the resources required to implement projects and achieve results on the ground.

Further project outlines are included in the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Business Plan (2004-2008), which is being published concurrently with this Strategy.

A further report, entitled 'Informing a Skills Audit and Learning Plan for Melksham' (November 2004), also forms part of the suite of policy documents being published ahead of the forthcoming brokering meeting.

Following this round of consultations with service providers, funding agencies and brokering discussions, the Melksham Area Community Strategy will be published in Spring 2005 in its final version.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MELKSHAM

Melksham, one of Wiltshire's oldest towns, developed at a ford across the River Avon. Its name is presumed to have derived from the Old English MEOLC for milk and HAM for village. At the time of the Norman Conquest it was a royal estate and was also named in the Domesday Book.

During the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Melksham became a centre for a range of agricultural activities until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. By 1219 the town was significant enough to be granted a Charter for a market. By the mid 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Melksham had developed as a wool-based cloth weaving centre which prospered, despite disruption during the civil war of the middle 17<sup>th</sup> century. Only when the cloth prices fell to a level that the weavers were unable to make a living, causing some serious riots, did the industry fall into decline. Most of the cloth mills have consequently been demolished or incorporated into the buildings of modern industry.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Melksham prospered as a stop on the stagecoach route between London and Bath, Bristol, Devonport and Exeter, with two of the present day public houses acting as stopovers for travellers. This busy stagecoach route provided, through a toll system, a significant level of revenue to assist with maintaining the local road system.

A number of families invested in a natural spring in the town in 1813, creating a Spa, intended to rival Bath, but after a short period of prosperity, this rapidly declined.

The 1840s saw the rapid growth of the railway industry. One of the first of these major lines, designed by Brunel, was The Great Western which linked London and Bristol, via Chippenham and Swindon. This was such a profitable line that the funds were raised to build a line to connect Chippenham and Salisbury, via Melksham, Trowbridge, Westbury and Warminster. This was to be known as The Wilts and Somerset Railway, which was later amalgamated with The Great Western. Melksham proved to be a popular attraction for train passengers for its Cheese Market.

A range of industries sprang up in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, for example, with the return of fabric in the form of rope making, matting and tarpaulins. In its heyday, the factory - a former cloth mill - received two ship-loads of matting coir from India every month. These industries declined after World War II.

In 1900 the North Wilts Dairy Company moved to a three-acre site at the West End Farm on Semington Road. The dairy industry continued as an economic generator for much of the century. The North Wilts Dairy Company was eventually amalgamated with the Unigate Group, and activities were transferred to Wootton Bassett in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, a local industrial and agricultural engineering firm expanded to the point that it moved out of the town centre in 1903, to the Beanacre Road. Through various takeovers and purchases this firm eventually became GEC Mechanical Handling. GEC closed in 1990, but its architectural skeleton remains as a reminder to an industrial heritage.

In 1885 a rubber factory started in neighbouring Limpley Stoke. In 1890 the company moved to Melksham. The factory - Cooper Avon Tyres - now covers more than 28 acres and is Melksham's largest employer.

# INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1) THE MELKSHAM 1<sup>ST</sup> PARTNERSHIP

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> is a Community Area Partnership; one of 20 now established across Wiltshire. The Melksham Community Area is defined as the town of Melksham, the communities of and rural areas surrounding Atworth, Beanacre, Berryfield, Bowerhill, Broughton Gifford, Shaw and Whitley. The population of the Melksham Community area at the 2001 census was 22,532. (The town has further land allocated for housing and the population is set to continue growing.)

Melksham 1st has two main objectives:

- To improve the social, environmental, economic and cultural quality of life for residents in the Melksham Community Area.
- To work towards providing equal opportunity for everyone.

The Partnership aims to achieve its objectives by:

- Developing a local strategy and action plan for the future of the Community Area;
- Supporting the community in identifying their hopes, needs and priorities;
- Widening opportunities for all people to participate in local decision-making;
- Encouraging and co-ordinating action by local councils, other statutory and voluntary organisations and the private sector;
- Providing support to those who need it to enable them to meet the community's aspirations and needs effectively;
- Collating and distributing relevant information necessary to develop and implement strategies; and
- Researching opportunities, and accessing funding to achieve these objectives.

A wide range of organisations constitute the partnership, namely:

- voluntary and community sector organisations;
- town, parish, district and county councillors;
- officers from Melksham Town Council, Melksham Without Parish Council, West Wiltshire District Council and Wiltshire County Council;
- businesses from the Community Area; and
- individuals from the Community Area;

For Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> to operate as an effective community based organisation, it has needed to widen its membership base. Particular efforts have been made to strengthen links between the town and the rural parishes in its hinterland. Specialist interests, such as town centre traders, are engaged on a project specific basis.

The full Partnership meets regularly to update all members on progress and developments relating to the community action plan. It takes direction from the Steering Group, which meets every three weeks. The Steering Committee consists of ten members of the partnership and has been supported by a Community Planning Co-ordinator.

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> takes its lead from the community and its members, and as such it has a considerable history of community based and driven consultation. Much of the impetus stems from the town councillors who have put aside party politics to work jointly to further the aims of the entire Community Area. The partnership is fortunate to be well supported by the local, district and regional statutory bodies.

## Our Vision for the Melksham Community Area

***We want our Community Area to be prosperous, harmonious, and safe.***

***We want our Community Area to support a vibrant and growing local economy, the needs of which must be balanced with the protection of our local environment and rural hinterland.***

***We want all the people of our Community Area to have equal access to opportunities, including employment, training and education.***

***We want all the people of our Community Area to be given opportunities to participate in local decision-making.***

A community action group named Action for Melksham was established in 1997 to develop a vision of how the people of Melksham wanted to see their town improve. Action for Melksham was later renamed Melksham 1<sup>st</sup>.

'Melksham 2000 and beyond', which had links to Local Agenda 21, was established with the aim of organising a major community planning event. An event was held over the weekend of 25/26 November 2000. It used the techniques of 'Future Search' and built on the work already carried out. This process identified the pressing need to offer a greater range of facilities for young people and build on the existing economic regeneration initiatives.

At a meeting in January 2001 it was agreed to merge Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> and Melksham 2000. A copy of the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Terms of reference is attached as Appendix One.

One of the outcomes from the Visioning Day at George Ward in November 2000 was the following vision statement:

*"I had such a wonderful day yesterday. Can you imagine waking to the mellow strains of music of our own radio Melksham? What a delightful way to start the day. It certainly keeps the kids moving along when getting ready for school. After putting them on the local free bus service to school, I was able to do the weekly shopping, online; made so much faster by the broadband internet speeds that we have in our town.*

*With this accomplished I was able to hop on the local shuttle service and get the little one off to nursery. As I got home, my wife left for work and I set all the appliances on to clean mode. Aaaahhhh!! Technology! Having worked the rest of the morning I felt in need a bit of exercise so took a jog to the local gym and had a great workout. As I was running home, I saw that the Lion King 54 was released, so bought the family some tickets for the evening show.*

*We are fortunate to have a regular Citizen's Advice Bureau in the town and went through to follow up on a bad holiday deal we had last summer. They are so committed to our town's people. Because they are open to the public so regularly, I didn't have to wait long and had some time to wonder round the local shopping precinct for the new range of clothing and some climbing gear. As I was walking through the precinct I saw on the public notice board that there was a new exhibition by one of our local sculptors. Knowing how talented he is, I decided to take a stroll over to the gallery and have a look at his work. The gallery is a wonderful place to be; architecturally designed to make the most of the light and of the site. This is a delightful new building that sits so comfortably in its historical setting.*

*After this it was time to return home. The kids would be returning from the Youth Café on the local free shuttle service. This really is a town that takes care of its youngsters. With so much for them to do, we have so little trouble in town and a very high level of young people achieving so many good things. Having done their homework at the Youth Café, we were able to take the dog for some fresh air and exercise along the riverside walk. This has come a long way over the years. I remember in its early years the walk ended at Murray Walk, but now has been extended all the way through to Lacock.*

*By the time we got back home our tea was ready, which was great as we were all so hungry. After eating we popped back into town to attend the people's forum. We arranged to meet back at home as their youth forum would go on longer than my meeting. This left me sufficient time to have a*

*quick pint in the pub before closing time. Since we changed closing hours till 4.00 pm, there has been a huge reduction in night time crime and disturbance.*

*When I got home, my wife was already home. Her office is very supportive of her need to balance work with her family life and she had time to collect the little one from nursery. When the older children got back, we all sat in our lounge over a cup of tea and had a discussion on our day. The older kids really have a very good insight into local issues. This might not have been the case if there was not such an active youth forum in the town. Finally we all get ready to go to the cinema and went out for the evening. It was such a pleasant evening that we decided to walk home via the Russian Takeaway and get a late supper. Their food is superb and so healthy and the interior décor of the shop is really from the top shelf. As we were strolling home, we saw two of the local constables on the beat. I jokingly said that there was no need for them to be on the streets as we had such low levels of crime and vandalism. They laughed and said their regular presence was one of the issues that helped maintain our personal safety in the town.*

*We are so fortunate to live in Melksham. It is a beautiful town that acknowledges its rich heritage, yet has been able to make the paradigm leap to modern living and cater for all the diverse needs of its residents. When I think about it, I have a fabulous day nearly every day. Our progressive town wants for very little."*

These are some of the visionary aspirations which underpin the work of the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership.

### **1.1.2) 'MOVING AHEAD'**

In 2002 Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> published a Community Action Plan entitled 'Moving Ahead.' It identified 11 themes for future action in Melksham and the surrounding villages and parishes. The 11 themes were: Arts for All; Sports & Leisure; Communication & Information; Social Inclusion; Our Communities; Environmental Improvements; Community Safety; Economic Development; Travel & Transport; Children & Young People; and Town Centre Improvements. Under each theme a range of project priorities were identified, totaling over 40 projects in all.

Since 2002 the partnership has acted on many of the action points outlined in the Moving Ahead document. A summary of activity and expenditure is included in Appendix Two.

Some of the more significant achievements have included: securing the development of 2 neighbourhood nursery projects within deprived wards in the town; securing £20,000 from the Local Government Online pathfinder programme for an ICT Suite at Lowbourn Infants School; sourcing funding and project managing the building of a skate park for local youngsters; holding a major conference on the potential of the waterways for the future regeneration of the area; investigating options and commissioning a study of the urban design potential of the town centre; securing local transport plan investment for the area;

commissioning and managing a skills audit of the community area; securing 'Smartplace' funding of £36,000 to improve ICT and Broadband facilities and take-up by the community; and investigating future models and sources of funding for the Partnership to enable it to take forward its work.

The results of a review undertaken of the Community Action Plan are included as Appendix Three.

### 1.1.3) PRIORITISATION OF ISSUES

Following on from the 'Moving Ahead' document, the Partnership has revisited the 11 identified themes and has sought to 'boil down' the key priorities for the future of the community area. This process has helped to give strategic direction to the work of Melksham 1st and has helped to focus its limited resources on key activities.

Prioritisation has been achieved through a mixture of analysis, consultation and agreement. The areas for focus reflect the big issues facing the Melksham community area. They are widely acknowledged within the local community, by local businesses, investors and the public bodies responsible for delivering service to local communities. They represent some of the key infrastructure improvements which will be needed if Melksham as a town, and the people of the Melksham area, are to move forward successfully to become a prosperous and sustainable community.

The prioritisation process has been informed by the consideration of issues such as demonstrable need, time-critical actions, resource availability and partner support.

The 4 priority themes for the immediate future are:

To secure investment in the **Town Centre** to improve both its physical appearance and the economic potential for investment.

To develop and implement an Integrated **Economic Regeneration** Strategy, to include the promotion of Lifelong Learning for all.

To ensure that all **Young People** have access to the widest range of facilities, services, and opportunities.

To develop an Integrated **Transport** Network for the Community Area.

The environment has not been identified as a stand-alone theme as it is inseparably linked to all other themes. It is understood that any opportunities for improvement and development cannot succeed without ensuring that the local environment is improved as a result.

The Partnership also recognises that Strategy Documents are flexible and will evolve with time. It is fully anticipated that the remaining themes identified in the Moving Ahead document will be revisited in response to changing situations and priorities in the future. Or indeed new themes may emerge. For example, through a new Working Group recently established with the Primary Care Trust, health is developing as a new priority issue. It is a clear example of how this Strategy will respond to issues that grow in momentum and urgency within the community.

## 1.2) COMMUNITY PLANNING IN WILTSHIRE

Following local government re-organisation in 1997 the County Council, with the four District Councils, commissioned research by a local historian<sup>1</sup> to understand in greater detail the nature of the communities it now serves. The research led to the identification of 20 'community areas', defined by history, economics, geography, geology and other factors. These community areas form the basis for planning and organising the services provided by a range of public agencies. The County Council, 4 District Councils, Primary Care Trusts, Police, Probation, Magistrates and others all use the community areas as the building blocks for their services. Hence the organisation of public services is coterminous and reflects the natural communities in the county.

In response to the statutory duty given to local authorities and others to prepare community strategies, the Wiltshire Strategic Board has adopted an approach towards a countywide community strategy which is distinct to this county. It is an inclusive approach promoting the idea of subsidiarity, where issues are always dealt with at the most appropriate local level. Recognition is given to the impact that 5 geographical levels have on Wiltshire (region, county, district, community area, neighbourhood). Wiltshire's Community Strategy is the outcome of partnerships operating at all five levels as a chord not as a pyramid; in harmony rather than hierarchy. Partnership issues are grouped under 8 interconnected primary themes (education and lifelong learning; transport; social care and health; economy; housing and built environment; crime and community safety; land-based and countryside; and culture).

The concept is that in the longer term the community strategy will develop as an authority-wide interactive and dynamic process, linking top down policies, targets and constraints with bottom up community aspirations, needs and energy. Local strategic partnerships are being developed at the district level as the primary partnerships for the co-ordination of these 8 themes (and these bodies are likely to take on brokering roles with funding agencies in due course).

Community planning processes have been established in each of Wiltshire's 20 community areas, led by local partnerships and supported by local authority and rural community council staff. As part of the process, community aspirations for quality of life improvements are being gathered through local consultations and needs assessments; this is backed up by socio-economic profiling and other data services provided through the Wiltshire and Swindon Intelligence Network. The impact of this work is monitored against an evaluation model, jointly developed by partners in the county to measure progress made.

In recognition of the finite resources available to public agencies to lead the process, a 'Community Planning Toolkit' has been developed by agencies within Wiltshire. This self-help package is now being rolled out with accompanying professional guidance for use by local communities, particularly at parish and neighbourhood level, to enable them to engage with and take ownership of the community planning process.

### 1.2.2) LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Within Wiltshire a 'cascade' of local strategic partnership working has been established. The 20 Community Area Partnerships feed into four district wide partnerships, which in turn feed into the Wiltshire Strategic Board. Both the Wiltshire and West Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnerships have recently published strategy documents outlining their strategic priorities. The priority themes of young people, market town regeneration, improved street scene, and improved adult basic skills have a particularly good fit with the emerging priorities for the Melksham area. The Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership is represented on the West Wiltshire LSP and will seek to raise issues of local concern through these strategic channels.

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<sup>1</sup> Chandler J (1998) , 'A Sense of Belonging: History, Community and the New Wiltshire'

### 1.2.3) PARISH PLANS

As an important means of encouraging parish involvement in the formulation of a community area-wide strategy, parishes have been given assistance to enable the formulation and publication of individual Parish Plans.

The Beanacre Parish Plan was published in May 2003. Identified priorities included: traffic (renew islands); environment (cycle lane); safety (neighbourhood watch scheme); community park; web page

The Berryfield and Semington Parish Plan was published in November 2003. Local people wanted to see: a new play group, improved play areas; more trees; grass cuttings; cycle ways; luncheon club; regular newsletter; dod/waste bins; better bus services; community building; co-op shopping; formation of new groups

The Atworth Parish Plan was published in May 2003. It identified key issues under the headings of: traffic and highways, recreation, young people, local amenities, environment, community.

The Shaw and Whitley Parish Plan was published in February 2002. Priorities for action were: Inclusive consultation including local businesses; footways; safe routes to school; speed reductions; reduced noise and air pollution; recycling and composting; improvements to Reading Rooms and Shaw Village Hall; road hazards; poor maintenance of hedges and verges; creation of play area.

The Bowerhill Parish Plan is still in-progress. In Forest and Sandridge the parishes are focussing on individual projects rather than on an overall plan.

The outcomes from parish planning are being fed into the wider community area planning process and issues are being taken up by Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> for action where appropriate. The parishes are represented on the Partnership and regular community consultation events are held in local villages.

To expand on the important contributions of the Parishes, the Partnership has adopted the Countryside Agency's Rural Proofing guidance, which is a checklist screening tool, designed to help policy makers consider how their policies will impact on rural areas. Rural Proofing seeks to determine whether policies will impact adversely on rural areas - as opposed to urban areas - due to the particular circumstances or needs found in rural areas. A summary of the Countryside Agency's Rural Proofing Guidance is included as Appendix Five.

### 1.2.4) PLANNING POLICY AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> has played an active role in consultations relating to the revision of statutory planning policies for the area. The policies and priorities of Wiltshire County Council and West Wiltshire District Council will continue to guide and influence the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership as it strives to meet the objectives outlined in this strategy. Proposals for new housing to the east of the town and industrial development at Hampton Park at Bowerhill are particularly crucial to future growth and investment in the area.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchases Bill came into force in July 2004. It paves the way for radical changes to the UK's planning systems. West Wiltshire District Council, as the Local Planning Authority, is required to produce by 2007 a portfolio of **Local Development Documents** (LDDs), that will form its **Local Development Framework** (LDF).

Local Development Documents will set out a spatial planning strategy for an area, and will comprise two elements:

- Development Plan Documents, and
- Supplementary Planning Documents.

The Development Plan Documents will progressively replace all existing adopted Local Plans, and hence will form the basis on which all planning decisions will be made. (Existing Structure Plans will be replaced by Regional Spatial Strategies, which will be prepared by the new Regional Assemblies.)

WWDC is required to publish a **Local Development Scheme** (LDS), which will set out its programme for the preparation of Local Development Documents leading to the 2007 deadline. The three year programme is required to include consultation milestones, and must specify the Council's approach to managing the evidence base for its policies. The Council's approach to consultation will be outlined in a Statement of Community Involvement, that is a formal requirement of the new Act.

West Wiltshire District Council is required to publish its Local Development Scheme, including its Statement of Community Involvement, by March 2005.

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> will be in a good position to inform the Local Development Framework Process and will seek to be actively involved in all aspects of it.

The new planning legislation requires closer alignment between land use strategy and community strategy in a given locality, and the streamlining of consultation processes where appropriate.

In June 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) began widespread consultations on ideas for the future of local government over the next ten years, under the heading 'Local Vision.' The Countryside Agency's response:

- Promotes the valuable role of community action planning;
- Stresses that community action planning - and linkages between community action planning and Local Strategic Partnerships - will be an essential component of local government in the future;
- Seeks the continued active support of local authorities for community action planning, and *improved links* between local plans (parish plans and market town action plans) with a local authority's Community Strategy and the work of their Local Strategic Partnerships.

The Countryside Agency has published practical guidance on improving links between community action planning and Local Strategic Partnerships. 'Planning for vital communities – good practice in linking parish plans, market town plans and community plans' provides a best practice guide to linking up processes and activities. Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> will engage with and disseminate this good practice to the benefit of all participating in the community planning process locally. It is natural to anticipate that the Wiltshire and West Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnerships will be doing the same.

### **1.3.) THE MARKET & COASTAL TOWNS INITIATIVE (MCTi)**

The MCTi programme was instigated in 2001 by the newly formed South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and its partner agencies, in response to Government policies. The Rural White Paper, 'Our Countryside the Future' of November 2000, emphasised the importance of community based regeneration, and the role it could play in securing a brighter future for market towns. To further the priorities and ambitions outlined in the White Paper, SWRDA adopted an approach called 'Community Futures'. The key elements of the 'Community Futures' approach were to:

- i) Provide funding to support community development;
- ii) Encourage community planning that provides a framework for long-term strategic planning;
- iii) The concept of a brokering table, whereby representatives of a range of agencies with power to allocate their mainstream money, or lever other money in, will respond to a community's strategy. The Brokering Table was seen to be a more constructive approach to finding funding, compared to the process of competitive bidding for a limited pot of funding, which has typified regeneration initiatives in the past decade.

## Pilot Status

Melksham, like many small market towns across the country, has a strong sense of local community. It is fortunate to have a diverse economic base and relatively low unemployment, but the town is not affluent. The town centre is struggling against competition from nearby towns and it is difficult to secure inward investment at a level that would allow the town as a whole to meet the challenge of changes in the regional and national economy. A number of wards within the town exhibit demonstrable socio-economic problems and register highly against national indices of deprivation.

In recognition of these problems, Melksham was successfully nominated as a 'pilot town' within the fledgling MCTi and was given priority access to regeneration funding through the initiative. A proposal was prepared for funding support to enable the Partnership to take forward its consultations, to prepare and publish its Community Plan, and to take forward some early win projects. A total of £ 47,000 was secured and a range of activities - as summarised in Appendix Four - were funded by MCTI monies. A further £39,000 was secured from The Countryside Agency towards the post of Community Planning Coordinator.

## Review of MCTi Pilot Status

The South West Regional Development agency employed researchers from the University of Bristol to monitor the new MCTi initiative, with an 'audit of community participation'. The work was jointly funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who had helped to develop some techniques for doing this, and was carried out between January 2001 and March 2002. **The purpose of the audit was**

- To measure how well the objectives of the initiative that related to community participation were being met.
- To take part in the initiative as an involved participant and use the audit tools to facilitate discussion of the relevant issues at a variety of levels
- To put forward constructive proposals emerging from the audit.

Of the nine pilot areas, Melksham was one of the three audited. A summary of the results is included as Appendix Six.

## 1.4.) THE 5 TOWNS INITIATIVE

During the mid-1990s the communities along the A350 corridor were identified as a regeneration priority for integrated transport improvements, and out of this the 5 Towns Initiative (5TI) was established in 1997. The Initiative aimed to help deliver an investment strategy for the corridor, and to dispel the "5 Towns Syndrome", where historic rivalries between Bradford on Avon, Melksham, Trowbridge, Westbury and Warminster led to the towns attempting to duplicate each other rather than work together. With the formation of the 5TI, the partners identified short medium and longer-term projects and these formed the basis of a 3-year action plan launched in 1998 and renewed in 2001. The District and town councils have contributed to a regeneration fund totalling £1.2 million since 1998, and within this a whole host of improvements have been completed.

The 5TI aims to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors through the creation of projects that will enhance social, cultural, economic and environmental aspects of the towns. The towns aim to work together in partnership to exchange ideas, experiences and best practice.

The 5TI began very clearly as an economic measure in order to maximise town centre vitality and has achieved a large measure of success. Now the 5TI supports projects in and around towns as well as undertaking social, cultural and environmental projects that have been formally adopted within the town action plans. In the future, projects of a social, cultural and environmental nature will need to be identified through the community planning process, and be published in community plans if they are to receive 5Ti funding.

It is interesting that the SWOT analysis undertaken by the consultants URBED and Donaldsons- as part of the study that provided the impetus for the 5TI - is still, by and large, an accurate representation of the town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats today, despite the time that has since passed.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantial centre for top up shopping</li> <li>• Good choice of food stores in town</li> <li>• Convivial atmosphere</li> <li>• Sports and leisure facilities</li> <li>• Some major local employers</li> <li>• One of the few business centres in former Unigate building</li> <li>• Historic core with fine market place and buildings generally in good order</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few national multiples or well known names</li> <li>• High footfall but low spending power</li> <li>• Relatively small retail units and shops that have not adapted to change</li> <li>• Not enough attractions</li> <li>• Difficult for new businesses to find the space to start</li> <li>• Short prime area with narrow pavements</li> <li>• Little for young people to do</li> <li>• Long walk between both ends</li> <li>• Bad first impressions and no attempt to provide a welcome</li> <li>• Ugly modern shops in the town centre</li> <li>• Dominated by through traffic</li> <li>• Poor pavement surfaces</li> <li>• Infrequent and unreliable buses</li> <li>• No cinema</li> <li>• Over-stretched group of volunteers</li> <li>• Lack of town centre development sites</li> <li>• Shortage of visitor accommodation</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of Sainsbury's first country stores</li> <li>• Pleasant walks e.g. Riverside, through churchyard</li> <li>• Hi-Tec companies opening up</li> <li>• Town is cabled and has broadband</li> <li>• Dynamic community with IT focus</li> <li>• Project to provide venue for young people</li> <li>• Reopened railway station and scope to increase services and integrate uses</li> <li>• Potential to make more of the market place</li> <li>• Melksham trust looking for a project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong competition from nearby towns</li> <li>• Some local initiatives have run out of steam</li> <li>• New housing could split town unless integrated</li> <li>• Inappropriate development of empty GEC site</li> </ul>

Table 1.

Amended from *The Five Towns Initiative. Making the Most of Wiltshire's Town Centres.* URBED & Donaldson's. (1997)

## 1.5) EVIDENCE BASE

Over the years the Partnership has carried out a number of consultation exercises and engaged with a range of local stakeholders. This has included the business community, young people, retailers, voluntary and community groups, villagers and other interested groups. A range of data has been gathered of the socio-economic needs of the Melksham area. This has been gathered from sources such as the 2001 Census, neighbourhood statistics, the Countryside Agency Snapshot and Indices of Multiple Deprivation. A number of Citizen Panels also operate in the county, including The people's Voice and Tomorrow's Voice (for young people.) Together these datasets and opinions have provided a base of quantitative and qualitative evidence which underpins the strategic priorities identified for the future of the area. A summary of this evidence can be found in the following appendices:

- Appendix Five - Exerts from the Healthcheck Snapshot
- Appendix Six - Indices of Deprivation (2000) information
- Appendix Seven - Data to Support 'Identified Problems' within the Strategy
- Appendix Eight - Exert from the 2004 Skills Audit.

Additional statistical information can be easily accessed via the Swindon & Wiltshire Intelligence Network ([www.intelligencenetowrk.org.uk](http://www.intelligencenetowrk.org.uk)).

## 1.6) CREATING A SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> is currently a partnership organisation without executive powers. It has reached a critical stage in its evolution and it is widely agreed that, in order to move forward, a more formal structure is required for the partnership. The Partnership is also facing a critical period with regard to:

- securing core funding
- appointing new staff
- raising its profile within the community
- identifying new business premises that will provide capacity for growth.

A Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Business Plan (2005-2008) has been published alongside this Strategy Document. It addresses how the Partnership can develop as a viable and sustainable organisation, and outlines how it intends to address the issues outlined above.

### Towards a Development Trust

The Steering Group has spent considerable time investigating options, and has recommended that Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> become a Development Trust. A Development Trust is a locally owned, not-for-profit organisation that works towards the social and economic regeneration of an area. It is owned by its members, but the members do not personally have any access to the organisation's income or assets. The Development Trust will:

- be democratic
- be politically neutral
- have high levels of community involvement
- allow community ownership of projects, activities and assets
- be accountable to the community at large
- be a membership organisation.

The Development Trust will have the ability and legal power to:

- engage with the community
- initiate and manage projects and programmes
- raise funds
- employ staff
- employ consultants
- own assets.

The Steering Group have recommended that the most appropriate legal form for the Development Trust is an Industrial and Provident Society. This legal structure is used commonly in the voluntary and community sector.

At a full partnership meeting of Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> in November 2004, the Steering Group was given authority to proceed with establishing a Development Trust, structured as an Industrial and Provident Society. This process will take some time (six months minimum).

### The Vision

The Melksham Area Community Development Trust will take on the present work of the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership. It is anticipated that the Vision of the Development Trust will replicate that of Melksham 1st:

***We want our Community Area to be prosperous, harmonious, and safe.***

***We want our Community Area to support a vibrant and growing local economy, the needs of which must be balanced with the protection of our local environment and rural hinterland.***

***We want all the people of our Community Area to have equal access to opportunities, including employment, training and education.***

***We want all the people of our Community Area to be given opportunities to participate in local decision-making.***

## The Operational Structure

The following diagram outlines the likely future structure of working relationships between Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> and its various partners and sub-groups, operating as a Development Trust.

The work of the Trust would be carried out via its permanent staff and through two forms of Project Group.

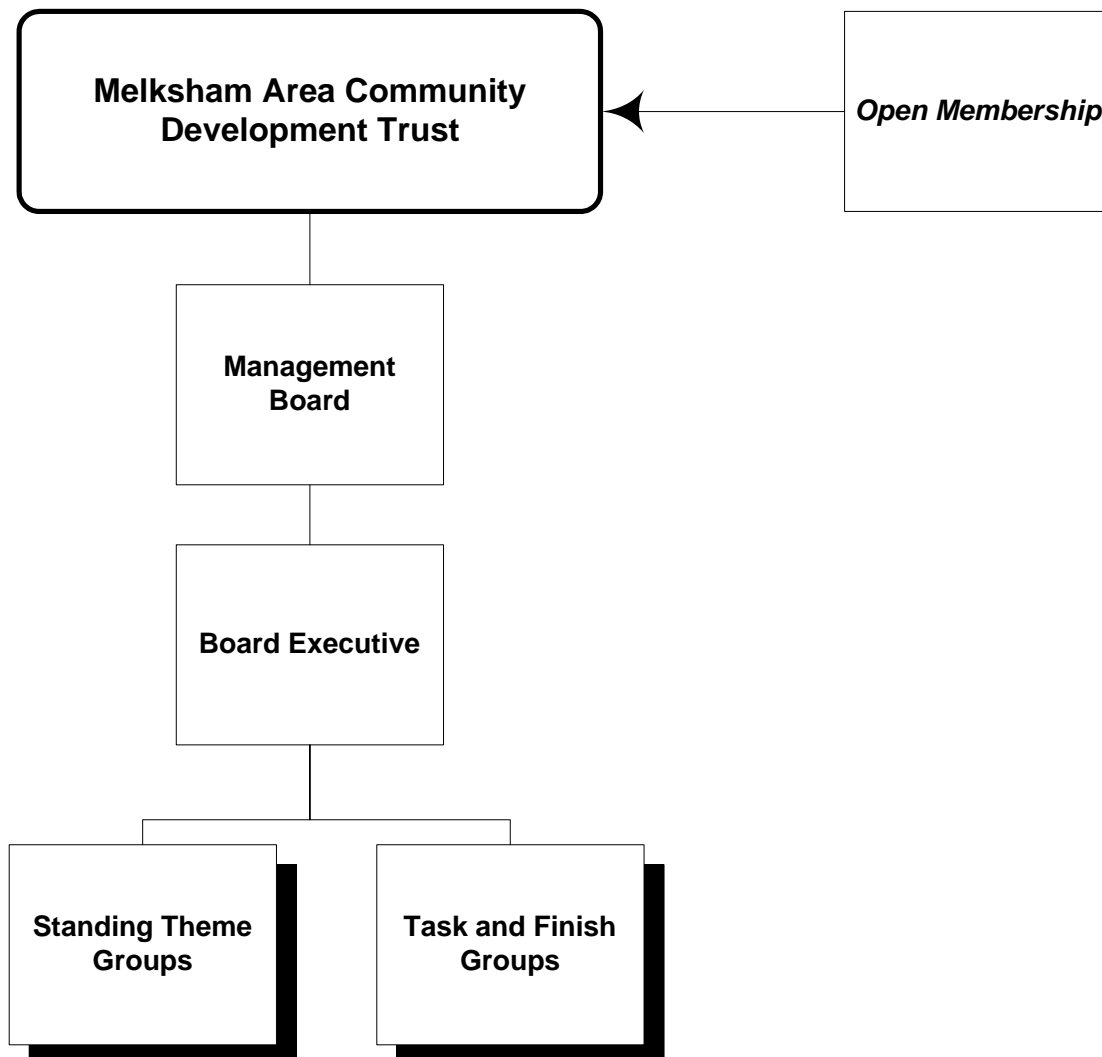
### *Standing Theme Groups*

Standing Theme Groups will be established to oversee work on each of the main themes in the strategy, currently Town Centre, Economic Regeneration, Young People and Transport. Membership will be normally be drawn from the Board although in some cases it may be useful to involve other partners.

### *Task and Finish Groups*

Task and Finish Groups will be established by the Board specifically to carry out a specific task. Once that task is completed the group will dissolve. An example would be the work to establish the Trust as an Industrial and Provident Society.

Both Standing Theme and Task and Finish Groups would be responsible to the Board for their work, although in practice detailed oversight is likely to be by the Executive.



## Membership

Membership of the proposed Trust will be open to:

- Individuals living or working in the Community Area
- Businesses based in or serving the Community Area
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations based in or serving the Community Area (including schools and colleges)
- Local Government and Public Sector bodies serving the Community Area.

## Governance

The Trust will be managed by a Board drawn from the membership as a whole. Election/nomination would be in four sectors:

- **Individual members** (3 members – elected by individual members)
- **Community and Voluntary Sector** (3 members – discussions needed with the sector to decide if nomination, selection or election the best route)
- **Public Sector** (6 members – nominated as below)
  - Wiltshire CC
  - West Wilts DC
  - Melksham Town Council
  - Parish Cluster (Melksham Without, Atworth and Broughton Gifford Parish Councils)
  - West Wilts PCT (or successor)
  - Police Authority
- **Private Sector** (3 members – elected).

## 1.7) FUNDING STRATEGY

The Business Plan for the Wiltshire Market Towns' Partnership includes a commitment that the Wiltshire County Council Central Bidding Unit will assist community partnerships, development trusts and others in the preparation of community area funding strategies. This was part of the match funding commitment to the programme by WCC.

The Central Bidding Unit is preparing a Funding Strategy for Melksham 1st, as a pilot of its commitment to all community areas. The Funding Strategy will:

- Provide a funding strategy that can underpin the priorities and projects identified within community area strategies and action plans.
- Provide a 'reality check' on the scale and availability of financial resources for the delivery of identified community priorities.
- Signpost local partnerships to sources of funding advice and support.

The Funding Strategy will include:

- A summary of the key local funding opportunities, including those delegated to Wiltshire for management, as a generic base of information.
- A tailored funding search in support of the major project priorities identified within the local strategy for the given locality.
- A diagrammatic representation of the projects and funding opportunities.
- A briefing pack on the services of the WCC Central Bidding Unit, Wiltshire Charities Information Bureau and other funding specialists.

The Funding Strategy for Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> will be developed as part of preparations for the brokering meeting in January 2005.

### **Finalisation of the Strategy**

Following this round of consultation with service providers, funding agencies and brokering discussions, the Melksham Area Community Strategy will be published in Spring 2005 in its final version.

# PRIORITY AREA ONE: THE TOWN CENTRE

## Key Objectives:

- To improve the physical fabric and infrastructure of the town centre;
- To encourage greater investment in the town centre;
- To review the planning definition of the core shopping area;
- To improve pedestrian, visual and activity links between the retail centre and the riverside.

## 2.1) INTRODUCTION

The town centre is the economic and community hub for the people of the community area, forming a focal point for businesses, services, leisure and civic events. The regeneration of the centre is vital to ensure the long-term growth and development of the town, because the appearance and vitality of the centre of a town is usually taken as an indicator of its standing as a whole. In order to secure a thriving and viable town centre, the town centre needs to be clearly identified and marketed to visitors. The 'Unique Selling Point' for Melksham, which would form the kernel of this activity, has not yet been clearly determined or agreed upon, but it is a critical step along the path to future growth and development.

### Physical Appearance

The prevailing view on the community appears to be that the town centre is declining. Some of the early results from the Skills Audit indicate that employers also see the physical appearance of the town and the poor retail offer as factors in their own recruitment and retention problems.

This is not to say there has been no improvement in recent years. The Conservation Area Partnership (CAP) and the Heritage Regeneration Scheme (HERS) have both enabled the improvement of individual buildings. However the broader environment of the centre remains poor, with pavements in poor condition, badly maintained street furniture and general clutter. The impression gained by visitors is one of a town that is at best 'ticking over,' despite the best efforts of traders. The range of business activity is narrow, with few national retailers. Conversely, of course, this means that a high proportion of businesses in the centre are locally owned and committed to the town.

## 2.2) TOWN CENTRE SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantial centre for top up shopping</li> <li>• Good choice of food stores in town</li> <li>• Convivial atmosphere</li> <li>• Some substantial local employers</li> <li>• One of few business centres in former Unigate building</li> <li>• Historic core with buildings generally in good order</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few national multiples or well-known names</li> <li>• High footfall but low spending power</li> <li>• Relatively small retail units</li> <li>• Retailers have not adapted to change</li> <li>• Not enough attractions</li> <li>• Shortage of start-up business space</li> <li>• Short prime area with narrow pavements</li> <li>• Little for young people to do outside of alcohol related activities</li> <li>• Long walk between both ends</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bad first impressions</li> <li>• Ugly modern shops in the centre</li> <li>• Dominated by through traffic</li> <li>• Cluttered and unco-ordinated street furniture.</li> <li>• Poor pavement surfaces</li> <li>• Infrequent/unreliable bus services after hours</li> <li>• No cinema</li> <li>• Lack of town centre development sites</li> <li>• Shortage of visitor accommodation</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of Sainsbury's first Country Stores – recently improved</li> <li>• Pleasant walks</li> <li>• Broadband enabled</li> <li>• Hi-tec companies opening up</li> <li>• Venues for young people</li> <li>• Reopened railway with scope to increase services</li> <li>• Conservation area partnership</li> <li>• Potential to increase market size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong competition from nearby towns</li> <li>• Some local initiatives have run out of steam</li> <li>• Lack of integrated transport network</li> </ul>

### 2.3) RETAILING

There appears to be a feeling that the arrival of Leekes and Sainsbury's has failed to bring the hoped for improvements, and that the centre is increasingly failing to meet the needs of local people. However, the town has good provision of local shopping in numerous supermarkets and other food stores, although the dominance of Chippenham and Trowbridge, and to a lesser degree Devizes, makes it unlikely that Melksham will be able to compete in straight retail terms. Further developments in the area, such as at Hampton Park or housing at the GEC site and to the east of Melksham, could also have a beneficial impact on the town centre - provided that sufficient work is done to make the centre more attractive in both a visual and economic sense. Accordingly, as the population of the town grows and assuming existing businesses respond effectively, the future should become more stable.

Previous planning decisions have allowed non-retail uses to creep in to the shopping core, especially take-away outlets. This is in part due to a poor definition of the core retail area. An urgent review is required of planning policy for the town centre, so a realistic retail core can be identified and defended, if necessary, at planning appeal. If this is not done, the District Council will be unable to defend its decisions in the future and the town centre will be at further risk.

Coupled with that should be a determined effort to find and attract alternative uses for retail premises outside the core area, that are not alcohol related (including take-aways), but which extend the range of activities in the centre. This approach has been recognised by numerous studies internationally.

The Avonside Centre is a major asset, providing easy access to premises for small businesses. Some of these businesses could no doubt transfer to the town centre as they grow and become established, if the planning regime was flexible enough.

The types of uses that would be especially valuable include:

- Service uses that would attract new people to the centre as well as providing employment;

- Uses that extend the hours of operation of the centre, providing reasons for people to be there outside of basic shopping hours, so diluting at least in part the impact of pubs and drinking.

What those uses might be is of course unknown, and will depend on commercial factors not under anybody's control - and certainly not Melksham Ist's. Even so, good marketing through commercial agents has the potential to generate a change in attitudes at least.

## **2.4) STREETSCENE & TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT**

The town centre remains dominated by the motor car and consequently the shopping environment for the pedestrian is poor. Far more attention needs to be paid to the quality of historic buildings, public open space, pavements, street furniture, lighting, planting, and cycle routes, for example, in order to develop a coherent urban design framework or enhancement strategy for the town centre.

Despite considerable consultation work by the County Council on the Local Transport Plan, no clear consensus has emerged on the way forward regarding traffic issues in the town centre. The consultation carried out only related to a part of the town, and so far no overall assessment of conditions has been carried out. It is clear however that the biggest impact on the quality of the town centre is from traffic. The physical layout of buildings in the centre reduces road capacity for vehicles and whilst they are given priority the space available for pedestrians is limited and often controlled behind barriers. As a consequence, even simple acts like crossing the street can be a problem, making it difficult for the town centre to cohere either visually or economically.

The Town Centre Working Group of Melksham Ist has indicated that it is unhappy with this position, and stressed its desire to push the issue forward. Melksham Town Council has shared this view, and recently agreed to allocate funding for a study in order that progress can be made sooner rather than later. A draft brief for a Townscape Enhancement Study has been drawn up, and, once the scope and extent of the study has been confirmed, consultants will commence work in early 2005. Concurrently, the County Council has instructed consultants MouchelParkman to carry out a further stage of Local Transport Plan consultation. The Wiltshire Strategic Board has also commissioned a study of streetscape issues in town centres, as a part of one of the four strategic priorities it has adopted: Improve Wiltshire's Street Scene. Consultants are being asked to audit and benchmark the quality of town centre environments, to consult with the public to determine how they judge and experience town centres, and to develop Action Plans to find the best practical fit between the audit results and community aspirations. Work is underway to ensure that cross-links are established between these different studies and consultation exercises where possible.

## **2.5) THE RIVERSIDE**

At present the River Avon is divorced from the town centre and of itself does not generate any economic return to the town. However, even without the possible use of the river to bring a restored Wilts & Berks Canal through Melksham, the riverside has real potential. The spring Festival in 2004 and the gradual development of the Party in the Park show that the riverside could be used much more. The skate park is the first step in the development of what could become a substantial zone of recreational activity, which, given encouragement, could grow into a substantial asset and give the town the Unique Selling Point it is so far lacking. The Farmers' Market - while it was located by the Riverside club - was an attraction that brought shoppers to the riverside. Unfortunately, the market was insufficiently profitable in that location.

A zone of recreational activity would complement the concentration of leisure and sports facilities around Melksham House (including the Blue Pool and Melksham Football Club),

and offer the opportunity to develop a unique identity for the town based on leisure and recreation, which could then impact on the town's retail offer.

## **2.6) MARKETS, FAIRS AND FESTIVALS**

A thriving general market is a key indicator of a thriving town. Both Melksham's regular and Farmers' Markets have now closed down. Vendors from both markets believe that the lack of support for the markets is directly linked to their location in the Church St car park, away from the view of the general public. (Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people in the area are unaware of the market.)

Other towns across the UK appear to have improved their economic standing through specialist festivals or events that bring people to the town, and this is supported by research. Events like the Christmas Market, the Party in the Park and the carnival, bring people to the town centre - though these events have been seen as events for local people and have not impacted largely on enticing visitors to Melksham.

In Autumn 2005, a new Arts project, the Cloth Road Arts Week will be launched. This will be a combination of open studios and other exhibitions. Melksham 1st will be supporting this project, which covers Trowbridge, Bradford on Avon and the surrounding villages in addition to Melksham, both for its own sake and as a good example of the sort of activity that could be included in an Events Programme. Supporting and developing events such as this, and launching new ones (like the 2004 Spring Festival), and making them more visible to a wider market, would increase visitor numbers. Pursuing a thriving events calendar could be critical in addressing the problem of Melksham's geographical position between Trowbridge, Chippenham and Devizes.

## **SUMMARY OF ACTION REQUIRED**

### **PROJECTS**

- Commission a Town Centre Enhancement Study. Aspects of the built environment that need to be included in the study are; public open spaces; areas of conservation; good examples of buildings of historical or architectural merit; quality of pavements, quality and placement of street furniture; lighting; planting, quality of the shop fronts; location of empty retail premises; locations of vandalism; pedestrian routes; cycle routes; vehicular traffic routes including congestion hot spots.
- Establish a Project Group to review the definition of the core shopping area and the primary retail frontage as defined in planning policy, and to investigate innovative ways to promote retail space and attract new uses to the town centre.
- Promote an annual festival, expanding on the Spring River Festival held in Spring 2004. This will promote the river in Melksham as a destination to enjoy a range of high quality recreational activities and this in turn will bring additional spending on goods and for services in the town centre.
- Work with existing organisations and agencies to develop and promote a Programme of Events, designed to increase numbers of visitors to the area.

### **SUPPORT IS ALSO NEEDED TO:**

- Secure local transport plan investment in the town centre and investigate opportunities to lever in additional funding on the back of this.
- Investigate options for creating 'activity zones' that enhance pedestrian, activity and visual links between the town centre and the riverside.

## PROJECT OUTLINE: TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT STUDY

### Background

Melksham Town Council seeks improvements to the management and control of the flow of traffic through the town centre, and improvements to conditions for shoppers and other pedestrian users of the town. They consider that approaches adopted so far, based on the conventional armoury of signs and the rigid separation of people and motor vehicles seem unlikely to succeed without severe compromise to one or the other. The Town Council is therefore keen to explore more innovative approaches.

### Project Objective

To generate a number of innovative, viable and effective design ideas that will assist the improvement of the town centre streetscape, and the creation of a street environment that is more pleasant, safe and accessible for pedestrians.

### Intended Outputs

- The design of three alternative schemes.
- Public exhibition and consultation on the three schemes.
- Advice on implementation and funding.
- Final report.

### Intended Outcomes

- A design framework for the town centre that can be used to inform and influence Local Transport Plan spending.
- A design framework that will provide innovative guidance and ideas, and set achievable goals for the future development of the town centre streetscape.

### Key Tasks & Deadlines

- December 2004: The Town Council has invited expressions of interest from consultants, who will be asked to meet with the Town Council, Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> and other interested parties, to refine the scope and extent of the study.
- January 2005: Scope and extent of study brief agreed.
- January 2005: Consultant's appointed.
- February 2005: Consultant's commence work.
- April 2005: Public exhibition and consultation (this will be undertaken by Melksham 1<sup>st</sup>)
- May 2005: Final Report.

### Costings

Melksham Town Council has committed the following funding:

2004/05	£25,000 Town Council funding
	£20,000 5Ti funding allocation
2005/06	£20,000 Town Council funding
	£20,000 5Ti funding allocation.

The likely cost of the consultant's study has been estimated at £10,000. The remainder of the £85,000 secured funding will be allocated towards project implementation. Supplementary monies will be required from Local Transport Plan funding.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: REDEFINING THE CORE SHOPPING AREA**

### **Background**

In recent years prime retail sites in the town centre have been lost to non-retail uses. Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> wish to review planning policy, in particular the definition of primary retail frontage in the town centre.

### **Project Objectives**

- To ensure planning policy is adequately protecting prime retail sites in the town centre.

### **Intended Outputs**

- A brief report
- A review of primary retail frontage and planning policy.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Planning policy that reflects the retail needs of the town centre.

### **Key Tasks and Deadlines**

- Establish project group - April 2005
- Liaise with WWDC (with the Local Development Framework process) - May/June 2005.
- Complete review report, to include recommendations for consideration by WWDC - summer 2005.

### **Costings**

Admin. support and publication of report - £500.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: PROGRAMME OF FESTIVALS & EVENTS**

### **Background**

A Programme of Festivals and Events has been identified as a simple but effective aid to help attract more visitors to the community area.

### **Project Objectives**

- To provide detailed, co-ordinated information on festivals and events being held in the community area.
- To attract more visitors to the community area.

### **Intended Outputs**

An annual printed leaflet

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Improved publication and distribution of information relating to local festivals and events
- Increased visitor numbers to local festivals and events
- Increased partnership working between groups/agencies/businesses running local festivals and events

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- Establish Project Group - summer 2005
- Research/collect necessary information - summer/autumn 2004
- Secure funding - summer/autumn 2004
- Print 2006 leaflet - December 2004

### **Costings**

- Design, print, distribution - estimate of £4000
- Admin. support to Project Group - £500

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: SPRING FESTIVAL**

### **Background**

In 2004 a successful, inaugural Spring Festival was held. Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> wishes to build on the success of this inaugural event, and make it an annual feature in the Community Area's civic calendar. The Festival was a mix of stall holders, and supporting entertainment (e.g. fair rides, falconry displays, boat trips on the River Avon.)

Due to looming deadlines, a 2005 Festival may have to be held in summer rather than spring. It is anticipated that an optimum time of the year will be agreed for the festival, so that in the future it can be held at the same time each year.

### **Project Objectives**

- Through the publicity and branding associated with being the event organiser, to raise the profile of the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership.
- To provide an event at which local craft groups, societies and clubs, and other relevant organisations, can showcase what they do and how the local community can become involved in their activities.
- To provide an opportunity to undertake any public consultation required by the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership.
- To provide a fun and appealing local day out for local residents, that will promote the potential of the Riverside as a venue for community events and recreation.

### **Intended Outputs**

- Showcasing of local groups, clubs, societies and other organisations.
- Provision of a fun, appealing community event.
- Increased publicity of Melksham 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- The staging of a Spring Festival, that will build on the success of the inaugural event and establish the event as an annual fixture in the Community Area.

### **Future Actions**

- Agree date for 2005 event - necessary to do so imminently
- Secure funding
- Appoint co-ordinator (possibly existing Community Agent)

### **Costs**

- Project Co-ordinator. Estimate of 20 days @ £70 per day.
- Publicity @ £500
- Hire charges, licenses, entertainment, and other miscellaneous costs @£500

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

### **Background**

Planning Authorities are commencing a three-year phased transition towards a new planning framework, to supercede existing Local Plans and Structure Plans. This process presents a significant opportunity to Melksham 1st to both influence and inform decision-making relating to planning policy the Community Area, particularly as a key element to underpin the new approach is strengthened community participation in the planning process.

### **Project Objectives**

- To ensure that Melksham 1st identifies key opportunities and milestones for informing and influencing West Wiltshire District Council's drafting of a Local Development Framework.
- To ensure that Melksham 1st has the information, evidence and resources to hand to effectively inform and influence planning policy-making whenever it can.

### **Intended Outputs**

- Establishment of a Project Group
- Identification of key milestones in WWDC's Local Development Framework process
- The advance identification of work to be done, and allocation of work to be done,

### **Intended Outcomes**

- To ensure that all opportunities for Melksham 1st to inform and influence the Local Development Framework process are maximised.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

Establish Project Group - spring 2005

Establish opportunities for involvement - spring 2005

Identify work to be done and who will do it – spring/summer 2005

### **Costings**

Admin support - £500

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: IMPROVING TOWN CENTRE VITALITY**

### **Background**

Melksham's retail offer is weak in comparison to the neighbouring centres of Trowbridge, Chippenham and Devizes. Nevertheless, the town centre does offer some key retail brands (e.g. Boots, Woolworths, Icelands) that should act as a solid base from which the retail mix in the town can be expanded, and other non-retail - but nevertheless complimentary - uses can be attracted to the town.

A drive to promote new uses in the town will be coupled with the Townscape Enhancement Study, so that both commercial agents and potential new uses/businesses can be made aware of plans to significantly improve the shopping environment in the town centre.

### **Project Objectives**

- To widen and strengthen the mix of vital uses (shopping/business activities) in the town centre.

### **Intended Outputs**

- The establishment of a pro-active Project Group, to include commercial agents and landlords.
- The identification of key premises and key marketing and promotional opportunities.
- The identification of key businesses/activities who we believe would find the demographics and market positioning of Melksham relevant to their business profile.
- The establishment of some key indicators (e.g. footfall) that can be used to promote Melksham as a location for businesses.
- The establishment of links with targetted businesses' property agents.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- A situation where Melksham town centre is pro-actively marketed as a growing, promising location for shopping and business uses.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

Establishment of Project Group - summer 2005

Brief report, to include identification of key retail indicators, key premises, and key retail businesses to target - autumn 2005.

### **Costings**

Admin. support and publication of report - £500

## **PRIORITY AREA TWO: ECONOMIC REGENERATION**

### **Key Objectives:**

- To ensure sustainable economic growth in the area;
- To develop the potential of the waterways, within the limits of sustainable development, as an economic and social resource for Melksham.
- To ensure that unemployment remains low - at its current level of below 2%;
- To raise the skills level and aspirations of local residents, through increased access to and promotion of training and education opportunities, as well as attracting skilled in-comers;
- To strengthen collaboration with and involvement of the business sector in planning for the future;
- To increase visitor numbers to the area through better facilities, promotion and marketing;
- To attract and support business investment in the business parks and the town centre.

### **3.1) INTRODUCTION**

Melksham is located equidistant to three larger economic and retail centres, Chippenham, Devizes and Trowbridge, with a regional centre, Bath, only 12 miles away. This has affected the potential for investment in the area by retail and commercial companies. However, Melksham does contain excellent sites for potential investors as recently recognised by Westinghouse Brakes, which is in the process of relocating to Melksham. The recently opened Melksham- Semington diversion road provides new access to industrial land at Hampton Business Park. The business park is already home to the Divisional Police Head Quarters, Avon Rubber and G Plan and has more green-field expansion land.

There are a number of large employers in the area and a degree of over-reliance on these companies for local jobs. There are few significant employers in the villages within the community area.

### **3.2) EXISTING LAND-USE ISSUES**

Melksham benefits from generally good road links, enabling good access for employers and employees alike. However, the need to build a physical link between Hampton Park and Bowerhill is of paramount importance. This would provide an important new access corridor between these two industrial estates. A significant area has been allocated at Bowerhill for the expansion of Hampton Business Park.

Sites for an additional 750 houses have been allocated for future housing in the West Wiltshire Local Plan, predominantly to the east and the south of the town. A brief for the development of this site has been prepared.

Planning permission has been given for a housing development of over 150 dwellings on the former GEC site in Beanacre Road.

### 3.3) ECONOMIC REGENERATION SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good geographical spread of investment areas</li> <li>• Good access to A350</li> <li>• Good access to M4 and South Coast</li> <li>• Low unemployment</li> <li>• Good “top – up” shopping</li> <li>• Weekly market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low skill levels</li> <li>• Small retail centre</li> <li>• Lack of retail variety</li> <li>• Unimpressive physical appearance to area.</li> <li>• Unsightly gateways into town.</li> <li>• Low spending power</li> <li>• Dominated by through traffic</li> <li>• Low skills and aspiration levels amongst local population</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good availability of a range of unit sizes</li> <li>• Incubator units available at Avon Enterprise Park</li> <li>• Potential to develop tourist development.</li> <li>• Planning approval for development of GEC site.</li> <li>• Town is cabled and has broadband</li> <li>• Increased leisure activities in the town centre to increase vitality and footfall</li> <li>• Excellent potential for development of the River Avon to increase tourism and leisure.</li> <li>• Free2Learn and Smartplace pilot status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community planning process has not been able to influence district wide planning processes.</li> <li>• Low confidence in the town centre</li> <li>• Strong competition by nearby larger towns</li> <li>• Lack of flexible funding for capacity building of local population</li> </ul>

(NOTE: Although there are obvious cross-linkages, the particular economic regeneration issues relating to the town centre are considered in Priority Area One.)

### 3.4 ) THE RIVER AVON

The importance of the River Avon to the economic regeneration of the Community Areas has long been recognised. A conference in Spring 2004 confirmed that the River Avon has the potential to act as an economic generator, since it holds the potential to create a range of small and medium enterprises in activities relating to health, leisure and tourism. In addition to this, the possibility exists of bringing the Wilts & Berks Canal through a part of the river, where it runs through the town centre. If this happens, it will undoubtedly boost other existing activities and economic opportunities that arise from the restoration and improvement of the river. In some respects Melksham is fortunate to have been sidelined for major development, as the river remains largely undeveloped. Current legislation prevents any permanent development on flood plain land adjacent to the river, which in turn enhances the excellent potential for the development of leisure and tourism activities. This could contribute to the economic regeneration of the Community Area if developed in a sensitive and cohesive manner.

### 3.5) LIFELONG LEARNING

Despite Melksham officially having a low unemployment rate, there are still a range of issues and gaps in certain employment sectors that will affect the long-term economic viability of the town. For instance, current perception indicates that low skill levels combine with low

aspirations, which together combine to form a threat to the long-term prosperity of the area. This will also affect employment prospects for residents. Childcare costs affect the employability of many women who are not highly skilled. (Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> has helped to provide affordable childcare to release women to the work force or to develop skills through the development of two Neighbourhood Nurseries.) It has also been suggested that employers should adopt more flexible working practices, particularly for women, the elderly and the disabled, to enable a wider range of people to access work and contribute to the local economy.

Of the working population of Melksham, only 22.26% have education to NVQ Level 3 or above, compared to a county average of nearly 29% (source, Census 2001).

### **Skills Audit & Learning Plan**

Supported by extensive demographic analysis, Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> has prioritised the issue of skills development and the problem of skills shortages within the labour market and the wider community. With financial support from Melksham Town Council, Wiltshire County Council and the South West Regional Development Agency, a Skills Audit was commissioned as a means to identify learning needs in the Community Area.

This research was designed to provide the following information:

- An assessment of the current and future skills needs of employers
- An assessment of recruitment issues including specifically hard to fill vacancies, historic trends and underpinning causes.
- An assessment of barriers to take-up of training, and
- Views regarding the availability of local training

The research findings will provide a framework for the development of a Learning Plan for the Melksham area and for the engagement of key agencies such as Wiltshire and Swindon Learning and Skills Council, Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire, Wiltshire County Council, Wiltshire College and West Wiltshire District Council. Other key organisations to directly involve in producing the Learning Plan are West Wiltshire Economic Partnership and North and West Wiltshire Learning Partnership.

This Skills Audit has dovetailed with the launch of programmes for local employers and employees called “Free2Learn” and “Skills4Business”. The aims of these programmes is to provide opportunities for employees to upgrade skills to at least an NVQ Level 2, with compensation being provided, where appropriate to the employer, to make it affordable to enable the up-skilling of staff.

### **Existing Lifelong Learning Initiatives**

There are both existing and future initiatives to encourage members of the community to continue to develop their skill and knowledge base. The local high school frequently runs a Saturday academy and is working closely with other schools to develop extended schools programmes across the community. Some of the infant, junior and primary schools have already implemented outreach programmes to try and encourage parents to improve IT and other skills.

A number of learning establishments and ICT suites exist in the community. Some of these are not as well utilised as they could be, but with a range of new initiatives and programmes such as Free2Learn and Smartplace, this situation could be resolved. Funding from the Smartplace Programme will build capacity within the community to use ICT and broadband through training opportunities. In Melksham, the funding will support the post of a co-ordinator to provide joined up marketing of the existing facilities. The Free2Learn programme will provide access to a number of course for basic skills and vocational qualifications for people already working in local companies.

### **3.6) ENABLING**

The phrase 'enabling' refers to:

- supporting existing businesses and their attempts to expand,
- encouraging new business investment,
- researching new ways of securing investment in the Community Area.

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> has a role in enabling and facilitating investments in the Community Area through its joint work with the local authorities and other agencies. This will include influencing policies, improving networking opportunities and co-ordinating better marketing efforts.

## **SUMMARY OF ACTION REQUIRED PROJECTS**

- Commission a Riverside Enhancement Strategy to give a spatial dimension to the ideas and issues that have arisen regarding development of the riverside.
- Develop a learning Plan for the Community Area, which will:
  - review the fit between employer training needs and available training infrastructure
  - assess the provision and adequacy of training, particularly in the following priority areas: management development, 'skills for business success' (team working, managing change etc.), and customer service
  - improve community pride and raise aspirations within the workforce
- Undertake a 'Plugging the leaks' project, with the assistance of the New Economics Foundation, to identify means of increasing the percentage of money spent locally that stays in the local economy.

### **SUPPORT IS ALSO NEEDED TO:**

- Work with relevant partners to bring the Wilts & Berks Canal to Melksham.
- Investigate and develop new activities and initiatives linking businesses with local schools, to help to address issues such as school leaver attitudes.
- Work with training providers to broaden community learning beyond its current apparent focus on basic skills and family learning – so learning can be linked more with employment opportunities and employer needs.
- Build upon the Free2Learn initiative to reduce barriers to learning.
- Strengthen collaboration amongst business sector organisations, local traders and the wider community, so that they develop shared priorities. This will ensure that the widest possible range of local stakeholders become involved in ensuring long term, sustainable economic growth, and that the right support is provided to traders and employers so they can contribute to future plans for promoting the local economy. Collaboration will be achieved through networking events and communication projects. The potential also exists for the establishment of a Business Forum.
- Working with the Economic Development Officers, promote the availability of land and premises for new business development and investment.
- Improve links with major local employers, so that in order to secure their future in the area the Partnership can help to address any issues affecting their operations, eg. planning, training and environmental issues.

## PROJECT OUTLINE: THE RIVER AVON RIVERSIDE ENHANCEMENT STUDY

### Background

In April 2004 Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> hosted a Waterways Conference, which was attended by key regional agencies and potential project partners. It was agreed at this conference that Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> would develop a strategy to assist the development of suitable uses along the river basin.

The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is seeking to re-establish an historic canal route through the Community Area, for which a stretch of river navigation is proposed through Melksham town centre. The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust agree that there is considerable synergy between the canal project and the wider riverside enhancement opportunities Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> wish to stimulate. In November 2004 it was agreed to combine the River Avon Enhancement Study as a distinct section of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust's second Feasibility Study into the creation of a new canal, to include the stretch of river navigation on the River Avon.

The bulk of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust's second Feasibility Study will address related but separate issues:

- River geomorphology
- River hydrology
- Impacts on tributaries and river discharges
- River structures.

The final section of their feasibility document, Environmental & Recreational Considerations will include the Riverside Enhancement Study and highlight the integral links between the two projects.

### Project Objective

To bring about the regeneration of the riverside, to include the development of new leisure activities and visitor attractions on the riverside, and enhanced links between the riverside and the town centre.

### Intended Outputs

- A study that will:
  - Develop existing sketch landscape design ideas and propose a co-ordinated framework which will guide all future development;
  - Develop proposed activities and projects, and suggest relevant new activities and projects appropriate to the riverside environment;
  - Consult with relevant landowners, business owners, statutory authorities and regional agencies, and local groups who may organise and administer land-use activities;
  - Identify and cost clear phases of development which would release distinct areas of the riverside for the implementation of specific projects;
  - Identify key milestones and associated risks in achieving them;
  - Identify sources of potential funding;
  - Identify and provide design ideas for new visual and physical links between the riverside and the town centre;
  - Identify locations and provide design ideas for opportunities where the river can be used as a 'Gateway' feature into Melksham;
  - Ensure that all suggestions will enhance the benefits attached to the new Wilts & Berks Canal, but would nevertheless *stand alone as a valuable project without the new canal*, should for any reason the canal project be delayed or abandoned.
- An associated exhibition and public consultation.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- The Riverside Enhancement Study will identify distinct projects that can be progressed individually within a co-ordinated development framework.
- It will enable negotiations with land-owners, interested business investors, relevant agencies and potential funders to progress, so that detailed project development work can commence.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust will continue the work required to bring the new canal to Melksham. This includes negotiations with British Waterways, the Environment Agency, landowners, and statutory authorities.
- A brief for the Riverside Enhancement Study will be confirmed imminently (December 2004). It will be tabled as a supplementary brief within the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust's Second Feasibility Study, and will be costed for the purposes of making joint grant applications.
- Funding requests: January/February 2005.
- Appoint consultants and commence work on the Riverside Enhancement Study: summer 2005.

### **Costings**

TBC (Indicative estimate: £10,000)

## PROJECT OUTLINE: MELKSHAM SMARTPLACE INITIATIVE

### Background

The Wiltshire & Swindon Smartplace Programme developed from the decision in June 2002 by a range of public and voluntary sector partners in Wiltshire and Swindon to work together with BT to secure the benefits of broadband and related technology for the people and organisations of Wiltshire and Swindon. The programme aims to maximise the benefits from ICT and broadband technology for businesses, learners and communities across Wiltshire and Swindon. It will bring benefits for all sectors, both public and private, voluntary and community, in a holistic way, with particular focus on delivering long-term employability.

The programme comprises five themes: Business Development, Learning & Skills, Community Capacity Building, Broadband Infrastructure, and Marketing. Each of these themes will be implemented by means of a series of individual projects which, when taken as a whole, will realise the aims and objectives of the programme.

### Project Objectives

- To provide support to existing voluntary and community organisations in the Melksham Community Area in developing the use of ICT to support their own organisational objectives;
- To develop a sustainable group of volunteers who can offer ICT support and mentoring to local voluntary and community sector organisations via a self organised network of skills in the community area;
- To develop models of good practice for mutual exchange and support between voluntary and community organisations in the Community Area, including use of ICT where appropriate, that can be replicated in other parts of the County and elsewhere.

### Intended Outputs

Possible outputs are dependent on the scale of the project. Two sets are described below, based on 'base level funding' and an enhanced budget assuming other sources can be identified.

#### *Base level funding*

In the first year of the project it is proposed to hold at least 2 introductory workshops to introduce the project and invite involvement in the project in more detail. Groups signing up will be invited to sign up to a simplified version of the agreement in Appendix 3. They will then be offered an assessment visit or meeting, in order to go through the IT Healthcheck process. If take up of the Healthcheck is low, more detailed working sessions may be possible that would look at specific IT problems, the development of individual recommendations and action plans and periodic follow up visits.

Training sessions and group events will be organised, bringing together staff and volunteers from the groups involved with others who may be unable to take up the full package of support.

In years 2 and 3 it is anticipated that further workshops may be required, to maintain the momentum of the project, but the main focus will shift to closer work with groups.

A cadre of volunteers will be established over the three years of the project, supported initially by the project worker, but evolving into a self organised network. Support for these volunteers will be sought from local businesses.

A mailing list will be set up for local groups, through which they will be able to ask for advice, share experience etc. It is hoped that this will be established via a local university, but failing that a commercial service will be used. There is also scope to utilise email and web-forum technology, being developed as part of an E-Democracy nation-wide project. (The E-

Democracy, which is still in pre-pilot stage, aims to use email and web technology to provide community forums, in the hope they will become part of daily community discourse and compliment other (e.g. in person) forms of participation in local democratic processes.)

Task	Outcomes		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
IT Healthcheck	10 groups	10 groups	10 groups
Volunteer hours	30	30	60
Seconded hours	20	90	60
Training Events	2	3	3

#### *Enhanced funding*

With enhanced funding available, it would be possible to offer higher levels of support, extending into resolving specific IT problems, development of ICT strategy for a given group and periodic support visits and 'clinics'. Even if additional funding is not available for Year 1 it may be possible to access funds in later years, or for specific elements.

Task	Outcomes		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
IT Healthcheck	10 groups	10 groups	10 groups
In depth support	7 groups	7 groups	7 groups
Volunteer hours	30	120	120
Training Events	3	5	5

### **Intended Outcomes**

Community and Voluntary sector organisations in the Melksham Community will have the skills to:

- plan effectively for the delivery and maintenance of systems to meet their needs;
- use or manage the available resources strategically;
- update plans over time as needs or circumstances change.

A cadre of skilled people will be available to maintain support after the life of the project, drawn from volunteers or seconded staff from local businesses.

A support mailing list will be in place allowing the sharing of experiences and seeking advice.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

Application for supplementary funding	mid January 2005
Decision	mid March 2005
Appointment of project officer	June 2005
First contact with groups in the Community Area	May 2005 (using Melksham 1 <sup>st</sup> resources)
First workshop session	September 2005
Training Events	September 2005

### **Costings**

#### **INCOME:**

##### *Base level funding*

Source	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Smartplace	12000	12000	12000	36000

Support in kind	500 (50 hrs)	1200 (120 hours)	1200	2900
Total	12500	13200	13200	38900

*Enhanced funding*

Source	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Smartplace	12000	12000	12000	36000
Other grant aid	12000	12000	12000	36000
Support in kind	500 (50 hrs)	1200 (120 hours)	1200	2900
Total	24500	25200	25200	74900

**EXPENDITURE***Base level funding*

Expenditure Head	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Staff (including on costs)	9000	9000	9000	27000
Admin, travel, postage, meetings, volunteer support etc	2500	2500	2500	7500
Management (@10%)	500	500	500	1500
Total	12000	12000	12000	36000

*Enhanced funding*

Expenditure Head	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Staff (including on costs)	20000	20000	20000	60000
Admin, travel, postage, meetings etc	3200	3200	3200	9600
Management (@15%)	3000	3000	3000	9000
Total	26200	26200	26200	78600

## PROJECT OUTLINE: LEARNING PLAN FOR MELKSHAM

### Background

Supported by extensive demographic analysis, Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> has prioritised the issue of skills development and the problem of skills shortages within the labour market and the wider community. With financial support from Melksham Town Council, Wiltshire County Council and the South West Regional Development Agency, a Skills Audit was commissioned as a means to identify learning needs in the Community Area.

### Project Objective

The brief for the study called for the undertaking a skills audit of, and the development of a learning plan for, the Melksham area. The objective of the study being to:

- Take forward one of the key economic priorities identified within the Melksham Area Community Plan
- Address issues of skills shortages and gaps which may be hindering the performance of the local economy
- Set out a plan of action to address identified learning needs.

This research was designed to provide information regarding the following:

- An assessment of the current and future skills needs of employers
- An assessment of recruitment issues including specifically hard to fill vacancies, historic trends and underpinning causes.
- An assessment of barriers to take-up of training, and
- Views regarding the availability of local training

### Intended Outputs

- Findings from interviews with key stakeholder organisations.
- A detailed analysis of the survey activity undertaken with local businesses.
- Results of desk research - reviewing and analysing of existing data sets and reports regarding issues regarding skills within Melksham and the surrounding areas and wider issues relevant for developing a learning plan for Melksham.
- An assessment of the key issues relevant for the development of a learning plan for Melksham. This assessment is based upon the findings and analysis contained within the preceding three chapters.
- Suggested content of a learning plan for Melksham, and the action required to ensure its robustness and its implementation.

(N.B. The study majored on consultation with businesses but did not include direct consultation on community learning needs. This research will need to be carried out if a holistic learning plan is to be developed).

### Intended Outcomes

- Clear evidence base of identified local needs relating to skills and learning issues in the Melksham community area
- Improved co-ordination and multi-agency working between organisations responsible for delivering on this agenda
- Agreement on a framework and detailed plan of action to address skills and learning issues
- In the Melksham community area

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- Multi agency forum to discuss findings from commissioned study (Spring 2005)
- Consultation on Community Learning needs (Spring 2005)
- Development of Learning Plan for the Melksham Community Area (Summer 2005)
- Implementation of agreed Action Plan (Summer 2005 onwards)

### **Costings**

- Multi-agency event- £ 1,000
- Community event- £ 500
- Learning Plan publication and dissemination- £ 500
- Delivery of Action Plan £ 3,000

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: 'PLUGGING THE LEAKS'**

### **Background**

The New Economics Foundation has developed the 'Plugging the Leaks' projects to help maximise the benefits of every pound that enters a local economy. It is common for money spent in a defined local economy (e.g. Melksham's) to immediately leave the local economy. Plugging the Leaks aims to increase re-circulation of money in a local economy, so the local area benefits more from it. For example, in Cornwall it was found that for every pound spent on a local organic box scheme, £2.58 was generated for, and re-circulated in the local economy. By comparison, the same pound spent in the local supermarket generated just £1.40 for the local economy.

### **Project Objective**

To encourage local residents and businesses to support the local economy of the Community Area so that the percentage of money re-circulated within the local economy increases.

### **Intended Outputs**

- A 'Plugging the Leaks' workshop
- A report, to include a series of suggested projects for implementation.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Increased awareness of the importance of, and potential benefits to be gained from supporting the local economy.
- The development of potential projects for implementation, that will facilitate the increase of re-circulation of money within the local economy.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- The gathering of information, case studies, and guidance from the NEF Handbook on how to undertake a Plugging the Leak project has been done.
- Establish a Project Group: February 2005
- Identify willing partners to participate in the project: spring 2005
- Run workshop: late spring 2005

### **Costings**

- Workshop facilitators - £800
- Publicity and promotional material - £200
- Cost of implementing projects that arise from the workshop – not yet determined.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: BUSINESS FORUM PROJECT**

### **Background**

A need has been identified for increased opportunities for business networking within the community area. Although existing forums exist (e.g. The Chamber of Commerce), not all businesses participate in them. A Business Forum would be an informal, free-to-join forum, which would encourage networking based around events that are predominantly social, but nevertheless provide consultation and relationship-building opportunities.

### **Project Objectives**

To establish a Business Forum for the Community Area.

### **Intended Outputs**

Six-monthly Business Forum meetings

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Increase networking between local businesses
- Increased partnership working between local businesses and Melksham 1st

### **Key Tasks and Deadlines**

Recruit founding members - spring 2005

Publicity and membership drive - summer 2005

Secure event sponsorship - summer 2005

Hold first event - autumn 2005

### **Costings**

It is anticipated that the catering costs of individual events will be sponsored.

Admin support to Business Forum - £500

Publicity & promotion - £500

## **PRIORITY AREA THREE: YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Key Objectives:**

- To increase the level of resources, especially staffing, available to support and increase the activities that young people can engage in.
- To provide more social and leisure events and facilities for young people - in particular teenagers - through improved information and transport provision.
- To improve community perceptions and attitudes towards young people, through a programme of positive media reporting.
- To increase local awareness of opportunities that are available to young people, through improved publicity and networking between groups and agencies, so young people can make better-informed decisions.
- To promote 'citizenship' amongst young people by better engaging them in community and democratic processes.
- To engage with young people to help them recognise problems relating to Anti-Social Behaviour and how to cope or deal with them.

### **4.1) INTRODUCTION**

During the community consultations for the action plan, the issue of a lack of facilities for young people was raised. Some of the facilities that are available in the town or the surrounding parishes are not accessible in the evening as there is limited public transport throughout the community. Added to this is the fact that some of the young people are territorial and are not comfortable with the idea of moving beyond their own neighbourhood. These young people feel that they should have some form of facility in their own residential area. There are distinct geographical populations amongst the young people of Melksham and they tend to avoid contact with each other. Some of the young people who are from an area that has high indices of deprivation feel intimidated by venturing out of their own community.

A key issue that has recently emerged is that Melksham has an exceptionally high rate of teenage pregnancies, which is something that requires addressing with real urgency through developing life skills and capacity with vulnerable teenagers.

Various projects have been implemented in an attempt to increase young people's involvement in the wider community and to engage them in the democracy process. To date, it has proven difficult to engage with some key groups of young people. At the time of writing, there appears to be little communication between the various groups working with young people and there is no strategy that has been developed in an attempt to ensure that young people gain adequate access to appropriate facilities and training. Despite this there are some commendable efforts being made by both statutory and voluntary groups to redress the current lack of opportunity.

This lack of a co-ordinated approach may change with the development of a youth forum, or the strengthening and re-establishment of a previous youth council structure. Participants at an event held in April 2004, where a range of role-players and stakeholders met to discuss

how provision for young people could be improved through partnership working, supported this idea.

Many of the issues relating to young people have been raised in the community safety forum; so much of the work of these two theme groups will be intertwined. For further issues relating to community safety and young people, refer to reports in the community safety reports and strategy.

One major issue determining the situation regarding young people is the community's perception of young people in general. There is currently a negative response to young people gathering in large groups, a natural state of affairs for humans of this age group. Some of these negative perceptions have been fuelled by a few individuals who opt to commit acts of vandalism and by the general use of bad language and litter dropping.

#### 4.2) YOUTH SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a number of existing youth facilities with the space and capacity for increased activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of Youth Workers and volunteer staff to develop and supervise youth activities.</li> <li>• Poor public transport links often prohibit youth from the villages from accessing venues and activities in Melksham.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop new youth facilities in the villages.</li> <li>• To develop new outdoor/leisure activities relating to the Adventure Centre, and linked to plans to redevelop the Riverside.</li> <li>• With adequate staffing, the benefit derived from the existing facilities of the Canberra Centre and the Youth Café could be greatly enhanced.</li> <li>• The SmartPlace Scheme could provide staff support for the Youth Café's IT Suite.</li> <li>• To develop citizenship amongst young population and to engage more young people in democratic processes (eg. community planning.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued staff shortages will hinder the implementation of good ideas, and restrict the ability of local facilities to respond to young peoples' needs.</li> <li>• Continued or worsening Anti-social behaviour (within specific groups of the youth population)</li> </ul>

#### 4.3) CANBERRA

A main centre of activity in the town centre is Canberra Youth Development Centre, which is run by Wiltshire County Council Youth Development Services. The Youth Development service is currently undergoing a re-organization, which has severely impacted on the level of trained youth workers for the community area, and the Canberra Centre is currently open only two evenings per week (with an additional evening opening expected after Christmas). The Partnership will work with the newly formed Youth Locality Team, and the Canberra Centre to identify projects that will benefit from partnership working. The other critical need is to work with relevant partners to secure additional staff resources at the Canberra.

#### 4.4) YOUTH CAFE

The Melksham Youth Café was identified as an idea in 1998. Funds were made available through Melksham's status as a pilot of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative. The Café occupies a disused fire station in the market place and aims to provide a venue where young people can:

- relax in a warm and secure environment/ access a café facility
- gain access to a range of information
- use an IT suite
- have music practice sessions and host live band evenings.

Wiltshire County Council has historically supported the Youth Café through the provision of trained youth workers, who are paid for by Melksham Town Council. The youth worker (based at Canberra) provides advice and information to the trustees and the members' committee, attends AGMS and meetings, recruits, trains and line manages youth workers and volunteers to work at the youth café.

It used to be open Wednesday afternoons, Monday and Friday evenings. However, there is a shortage of available staff to regularly open at the moment, which has led recently to a drop in the number of young people utilising the facility, although WCC Youth Development Services are in the process of recruiting more staff to alleviate the problem. Other sources are also being explored to resolve that lack of youth workers.

The trustees and members have recently acknowledged that considerable internal training and capacity building is required to enable both parties to form a strong and sustainable management system that can help the youth café to develop to its full potential. This process that is currently underway is critical for the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation.

Despite the Youth Café having a suite of computers, the lack of staff or volunteers has made it difficult for young people to use these on a consistent basis. However, with Melksham becoming a pilot town for the community capacity building strand of the Smartplace Programme, this matter could be resolved.

One area of potential the group hopes to exploit is the development of a kitchen which should assist with encouraging use of the facility as a genuine café.

#### 4.5) ADVENTURE CENTRE

The Adventure Centre has long been a venue for activities for young people. However over recent years, changes in policy and legislation together with a decrease in the volunteer level, have impacted severely on the venue as a place for training young people in outdoor leisure pursuits. The committee is exploring ways for the centre to undergo improvements and to access more trained volunteers to increase the range of activities.

#### 4.6) YOUTH ACTIVITIES

A number of venues and activities exist for youth throughout the Community Area. The priority is to help support, co-ordinate and publicise existing youth activities, and work with youth groups to expand their range of activities and/or improve premises.

##### **Atworth Youth Club**

This is a long-standing and active youth club that meets regularly.

### **Bowerhill Youth Group**

There has been considerable activity recently to ensure the success of the youth group in Bowerhill. This has been supported by Melksham Without Parish Council and Wiltshire County Council. However, existing premises are viewed as inadequate, in both the size and location. (Parents have especially noted they feel unhappy letting children walk to and from the venue due its location on the trading estate.)

### **Broughton Gifford Youth Group**

The parish council runs the youth group, with some County Council support. The youth club runs on a Thursday evening from 7:30-9:30pm for young people aged 12-18yrs old.

## **S U M M A R Y O F A C T I O N S**

### **PROJECTS**

- Establish a 'Youth Section' in Melksham Independent News – to provide regular details of youth activities on in the various parts of the Community Area.
- Improve positive reporting in all local media, relating to efforts of those working with young people, and the positive efforts of young people themselves.
- Host a Community Safety consultation/forum event for young people.

### **SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO**

- Secure additional staffing for the Canberra Centre and Youth Cafe, so these existing facilities can be better utilised by local young people.
- Attract and train the volunteers required to offer a range of outdoor leisure pursuits to young people.
- Work with WCC to address the current shortage of Youth Workers in the Community Area, including meeting the need for a full-time Youth Worker for the parishes.
- Address the shortfall in youth venues and activities in the villages of the Community Area.
- Investigate opportunities to improve the frequency and quality of training for youth workers and volunteers.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: 'MELKSHAM NEWS' YOUTH SECTION**

### **Background**

A need identified in previous consultation is for more effective publicity of 'what's on' for young people in the Community Area.

### **Project Objectives**

- To advertise and promote events and activities being held for young people in a regular Youth Section in the Melksham News.
- To have the Youth Section become the defining place in which to promote youth events, and for young people to look for event and activity information.

### **Intended Outputs**

- A regular (fortnightly) Youth Section in the Melksham News newspaper.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Improved communication of what is on for young people in the Community Area
- Improved participation in events and activities by a wider cross-section of young people in the Community Area.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- Discuss the potential for, and cost of a Youth Section with Melksham News - spring/summer 2005.
- Promote new Youth Section to relevant groups, clubs, and agencies - spring/summer 2005.
- Find sponsor for Youth Section - spring/summer 2005.

### **Costings**

TBC

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: POSITIVE REPORTING PROJECT**

### **Background**

An identified problem is the unfair and unjustified perception many people in the Community Area have of local youth. It is true that a very minor percentage of local youth 'tarnish' the perception people have of youth generally. This is perpetuated in part by the tendency of the media to often focus on 'bad news' stories. Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> seeks to support a 'Positive Reporting' project, so that 'good news' stories relating to local youth are reported in the media regularly.

### **Project Objectives**

- To improve positive reporting in all local media, relating to efforts of those working with young people, and the positive efforts of young people themselves.
- To improve the perceptions held by the wider community of young people.

### **Intended Outputs**

- Establishment of a Project Group, to include local journalists, local youth workers, the Police, and other identified relevant people.
- Regular reporting of youth 'good news' stories in the media.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Increased instances of positive news stories relating to local youth.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- Establish Project Group - spring/summer 2005
- Identify regular networking opportunities, to support the regular release of press releases of good news stories to local journalists - spring/summer 2005.

### **Costings**

Admin support (per annum) £500.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: A COMMUNITY SAFETY FORUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Background**

A Community Safety event was held by Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> in 2004. A recommended action point from this event was the staging of a Community Safety Forum specifically for young people.

### **Project Objectives**

- To provide a forum in which young people can discuss issues relating to community safety, to include anti-social behaviour and how to cope with the affects of anti-social behaviour.
- To engage with young people on the important issue of community safety, and to secure the on-going participation of some young people in future group work of Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> relating to community safety.
- To take first steps towards 'bridging the gap' between generations, by encouraging young and old alike to work together to solve identified community safety problems.

### **Intended Outputs**

- A community safety forum event for young people.
- Associated publicity of issues that arise from the event.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Engaging young people in a constructive debate about community safety.
- Providing a forum in which young people can identify issues, problems, and potential solutions relating to community safety.
- Partnership working between people of all ages.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- Draw up list of participants - spring 2005
- Hold Forum Event - summer 2005

### **Costings**

Admin support - £500

Forum Event - hall hire, refreshments and publicity - £500.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: BUSINESS IN SCHOOLS PROJECT**

### **Background**

52% of the businesses that participated in the 2004 Skills Audit project stated a desire to become more involved with local schools, to help where possible to address issues surrounding school leaver attitudes to work, skills and training.

### **Project Objectives**

To develop an effective means for local businesses to engage with young people in schools and help to encourage positive attitudes to work, skills and training.

### **Intended Outputs**

- Establishment of a Project Group, to identify participants and methods.
- A defined programme of outreach work, or similar, in local schools.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Increased interaction between local businesses and local school children.
- Increased understanding amongst young people of the importance of having a positive attitude to work, skills and training.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

- Establish Project Group - summer 2005
- Agree further milestones and a programme of activity - autumn 2005

### **Costings**

Project Group admin. support - £500

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: GROWING EXISTING YOUTH FACILITIES**

### **Background**

There are a number of existing youth facilities in the community area that operate below capacity, primarily due to staffing shortages.

### **Project Objectives**

- To achieve greater benefits (and value for money) from existing youth facilities
- To provide a greater variety of activities and sessions at existing youth facilities

### **Intended Outputs**

- Establish a Project Group, to include representatives from all existing youth facilities throughout the community area
- Establish effective communication/lobbying links with youth service providers and funders
- Identify other potential sources of funding for youth workers
- Identify means of encouraging more people to participate in youth volunteer work

### **Intended Outcomes**

The provision of more activities and sessions at existing youth facilities.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

Establish Project Group - summer 2005

Work will be on-going thereafter

### **Costings**

Project Group support - £500

Costs of growing existing facilities - TBC

## PRIORITY AREA FOUR: TRANSPORT

### Key Objectives:

- To encourage development of the local transport network, so it better meets and accommodates the needs of the local community.
- To strengthen linkages and collaboration between transport providers.
- To improve accessibility, especially for cyclists and pedestrians, throughout the Community Area.
- To map the existing provision for all transport systems and networks across the Community Area and use it to develop an integrated transport strategy for Melksham.
- To inform and influence regional decision-making about transport issues which affect the Community Area.

### 5.1) INTRODUCTION

A Transport Working Group of the Partnership was established to identify and develop means of improving transport generally in the Community Transport Area. It is recognised that the group will, for the most part, play a lobbying and enabling role. Wiltshire County Council, as the Highways Authority, has primary responsibility for transport planning, although rail and bus deregulation has led to a plethora of private transport operators. The Partnership's Transport Working Group brings together a number of existing interest groups: for example, the Melksham Railway Development Group, and Transport 2000. The priority aim of the Transport Working Group is to commission an Integrated Transport Study for the Community Area.

### 5.2) TRANSPORT SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 trains in either direction on rail services during the week</li> <li>• committed and active railway development group</li> <li>• well used link scheme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of integrated transport network</li> <li>• limited evening bus provision both in an around the town and between towns, especially from surrounding villages to the town. For further information, see appendix ?</li> <li>• unidentifiable local bus link service</li> <li>• limited parking at station, and no bus turning circle.</li> <li>• unlinked urban cycle networks</li> <li>• insufficient rural/urban cycle links</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrated transport committee</li> <li>• safe routes to school</li> <li>• link along the A350 corridor</li> <li>• housing scheme close to railway station</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rail service is above regulation, so this could be lost at the will of the operator</li> <li>• continued congestion in town centre</li> </ul>

### 5.3) RESEARCH

Whilst data exists for some aspects of transport provision and transport usage, the Partnership is keen to undertake specific research to address the gaps in existing information. A wider, more co-ordinated data set is required to inform a brief for an Integrated Transport Study, and as such the need to undertake required research, and analyse existing data, is urgent.

### 5.4) INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STUDY

An Integrated Transport Study will encompass the Action Areas outlined below and as such will be an over-arching project for the Transport Priority Theme. The scope of the study is outlined in the Priority Project Outline that follows on page **xx**.

### 5.5) RAILWAYS

The railway station is set apart from the town centre, though this is not an unusual situation. Other towns have managed to establish the necessary perceived and real links between the town centre and the railway station. Such links have not been successfully made in Melksham. It would appear that one of the primary challenges previously facing users of the railway is the ability to find the place. The signage to the rail station has recently been upgraded. Melksham is on the line between Chippenham and Trowbridge, with most services running between Swindon and Southampton. The present timetable allows for 5 journeys in each direction on a daily basis during the week. The early morning services do not run on Saturdays and there is no service before midday on Sundays. Despite being considered by many residents as being insufficient for commuter needs (because it does not easily link with trains to Bath and Bristol), demand for more regular services does exist.

Because of predicted population growth, the potential exists for increased regular travelling between Melksham and Bristol, Bath and Swindon. If this projected growth is significant, then the current rail provision may prove to be inadequate. The projected growth needs to be quantified and imposed on future strategic travel planning. In the interim, the challenge is to ensure the retention of all existing services.

The lack of rail services throughout the southwest region is a matter of regional concern and to date no agency has tackled the matter at the strategic level. Many areas of the southwest have lost their services over the last few years due to cost saving measures. This issue of transport as a whole, throughout the southwest is matter to be raised at the highest levels of debate, as the potential for economic development of the region cannot be unleashed with inadequate transport networks.

The Railway Development Group exists to ensure the best representation for Melksham station and has endeavored to increase public awareness by organising outings by train in summer and at Christmas. The group has undertaken to establish what opportunities exist to increase the usage of rail services to and from Melksham Station. Working with Wessex Trains, the current service provider, the group has ascertained some baseline data for the use of the station.

Under the Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan, the concept of relocating Melksham Station is included, but this is being challenged by SRA and Network rail, who wish to have this possibility removed from the transport policy in the plan. If this objection were successful, it could impact negatively on opportunities for improving the existing station to accommodate better facilities.

The Railway Development Group is in contact with Wessex Trains to explore how the train service can be improved. The possibility of the Trowbridge to Chippenham line becoming a Community Rail Service has been mooted, but this would undoubtedly have to link in with the "main line" service, limiting the potential of influencing service provision.

## **Some Facts**

- Wessex Trains has informed us that in the last year 19,136 'journeys' (a return = 2 journeys) were made to or from Melksham.
- Peak usage is on the morning and early evening services.
- There is no late night usage of trains at weekends because they run before social events finish in the main towns served by rail.
- WWDC will fund senior railcards. WWDC is the only authority to invest in this type of scheme and do so in an attempt to encourage rail use.
- Of 2772 senior rail cards issued by WWDC, 1681 were issued at Melksham (not staffed!)

## **Access to the Railway**

The railway station is located away from the centre of town, necessitating an integrated public transport system, which is currently lacking. This issue has been raised in the inspector's report of the Local Plan, where it is recommended that the area of land near the station should be enlarged to accommodate an integrated service node.

## **5.6) BUSES**

In general, there are few problems in the daily bus service in the community area and between the surrounding towns, though it would be beneficial to provide additional dry and safe bus shelters together with a real-time bus information system. Currently the public is not well informed about which buses available. A subsidised fare system would also be of enormous benefit to those in financial need.

However the situation regarding transport provision changes after about 6.30 in the evenings, when most operators end their daily service. Those evening services that do operate do not meet residents' needs, particularly young people and those living in the surrounding villages and parishes.

The lack of a comprehensive evening transport service acts as a barrier to the young people and parish residents accessing evening facilities available to them, both in Melksham itself and the surrounding towns. For example, return services from the towns of Devizes and Chippenham are limited to just after 10pm. This is especially significant for the young people having access to facilities such as a cinema. Other towns in the region are developing creative ways of addressing this issue through bringing mobile services to the towns.

In addition to the daily bus operators, there is also a Link scheme, which is a volunteer service that transports people to the hospital and doctors' surgeries and the Wiltshire Hopper that transports patients to and from the Royal United Hospital in Bath. There is also a volunteer transport service available for those who require shopping. In the Pewsey and Calne areas the Wiggly Bus offers another, flexible means of providing 'demand responsive' public transport in rural areas.

Prior to expanding this service it is necessary to establish the exact demand base through public consultation. This consultation still requires formulating.

## **Integration**

At present, the Rail and Bus timetables are not integrated, which has been identified as a threat to increasing user levels of public transport throughout the community area. If Melksham is to develop an integrated transport node for the town, then the issue of correlating timetables will take on increased significance. Whilst the bus services contracted to WCC may be rerouted via any transport node, the principal services are run commercially and the operators will need to be convinced that any alteration to their route is justified. The advent of the East of Melksham Development should be linked with a whole new town service linking to the station to drop off and pick up from arriving trains. WCC public transport team have indicated that the rail service is too irregular to enable the bus timetables to coincide with the train timetables.

## 5.7) PEDESTRIANS

Improving pedestrian routes and encouraging walking as a mode of transport is a key target for all groups and agencies involved in transport planning today. Clear links exist between this objective and projects outlined elsewhere in the Strategy - improving the public realm in the town centre, improving pedestrian links between the town centre and the riverside, for example. Safe Routes to School are also to be encouraged.

## 5.8) STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PLANNING

The Semington Bypass has been constructed to alleviate congestion in and around the Semington area and by doing so, pump priming business investment at Hampton Park. There are also calls from interested parties for the construction of a bypass around Beanacre. Whilst these measures may remove congestion from the designated place, it would appear, supported by a level of evidence, that the problem is actually only transferred to a different location. As an alteration to the WCC Structure Plan of 2016, the council has proposed an amendment, which deletes the Melksham Bypass and instead proposes studies into the whole requirement, which could lead to improvements on-line, minor alterations to route, or a Bypass. This approach will look at the environmental impact of traffic resulting from any improvement to the A350, from the M4 to the A303 and the likely impact of an A46/A36 link across the River Avon to the East of Bath, as recommended in the Bristol Bath to South Coast Study.

It is also important that any new road schemes integrate with the existing infrastructure such as the existing bypass, to safeguard existing businesses. Alongside new road schemes, it would be beneficial to the rural community to establish "Quiet-Lane" areas in the adjacent country lanes.

### Local Transport Plan

The LTP is the key document which guides policy and expenditure relating to transport infrastructure and passenger transport provision in Wiltshire. The programme includes investment in town centre traffic calming and pedestrian improvements with the aim of reducing the intrusion of the motor car and improving opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport. The Partnership will continue to both lobby and support the County Council in its Local Transport Plan process, and seek to maximise the impact of LTP funding spent in the Community Area. For example, County Council officers are currently engaged in the design and consultation for improved transport systems in the town centre. The first phase of consultation has been completed and the decision to implement changes has been postponed till the second phase of consultation is complete. The Partnership will aim to ensure that objectives outlined in this Strategy - e.g. actions that arise from the proposed Townscape Enhancement Study - are considered as a part of Local Transport Plan consultation.

## 5.9) CYCLING

Although a network of urban cycle routes has been established, including "safe routes to schools", in and around the community area; there are gaps in some of the routes. Some of the most notable gaps in these links are between the neighbouring West Wiltshire towns and villages, forcing cyclists to use main roads, which are not considered safe by many.

Whilst some of these gaps have been highlighted as priority action areas, it is currently unknown as to when the implementation of changes will occur.

## **S U M M A R Y   O F   A C T I O N S**

### **PROJECTS**

- Commission research into transport usage, journey numbers, and other identified required data.
- Commission consultants to undertake an Integrated Transport Study for the Community Area.
- Improve signage to the railway station.
- Prepare Walking Maps for Schools.
- Secure funding for Quiet Lanes Project.

### **SUPPORT IS ALSO NEEDED TO:**

- Secure existing rail service provision (whilst looking to expand rail services and usage in the future).
- Improve the links (in the short term) between the town and surrounding villages.
- Represent the Community area's interests at strategic meetings and consultations, e.g. work on the Regional Spatial Strategy
- Continue active involvement in the Local Transport Plan process.
- Identify and deliver projects that will improve cycling facilities across the Community Area, e.g., the Beanacre to Melksham Cycleway.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: TRANSPORT USAGE RESEARCH**

### **Background**

A need has been identified for more statistical information regarding local transport usage patterns and demands, as set against local provision. Research will provide a more substantial evidence base that will inform the writing of a brief for the Integrated Transport Study (see following project outline).

### **Project Objective**

- To provide quantitative and qualitative information that can be used to inform the brief of the Integrated Transport Study.

### **Intended Outputs**

- Distribution of questionnaires
- Interview survey work
- Report
- Assessment and presentation of relevant desk-top research.

### **Intended Outcomes**

The collation of a body of research work that will ensure Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> is fully aware of local transport usage patterns and the community's aspirations for future transport provision.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

Secure funding - as soon as possible

Commence work - as soon as funding is secured

### **Costings**

Estimate of £3000.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STUDY**

### **Background**

Project details will be made available at the Brokering meeting in January 2005.

### **Project Objectives**

### **Intended Outputs**

### **Intended Outcomes**

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

### **Costings**

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: QUIET LANES PROJECT**

### **Background**

Quiet Lanes are minor rural roads designated by the local authority to make them safer and more attractive to walkers, cyclists, horse riders and all who use them, by encouraging drivers, through subtle design measures, to drive more considerately and safely.

### **Project Objectives**

To provide a network of designated country lanes, that will link areas where people live, work, shop, and go to school, which will encourage walking, cycling, and horse riding.

By introducing design measures that will encourage drivers to drive more slowly and considerately, to reduce the number of unnecessary vehicle trips along key country lanes.

### **Intended Outputs**

- A research questionnaire to be sent to local residents.
- Publicity in the local press will publicise the aims of the project.
- Development of design plans.
- Securing of funding to implement two designated Quiet Lanes in the Melksham Community Area.

### **Intended Outcomes**

- Increased use of the designated country lanes by walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- Reduced incidents of speeding and dangerous driving in the country .
- Reduced unnecessary vehicle trips made on country lanes.

### **Key Tasks and Deadlines**

- The Quiet Lanes Project has received the support of the Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership.
- Two potential locations for Quiet Lanes have been identified.
- The Partnership is actively seeking funding for a research questionnaire that will be sent to relevant residents. This research is necessary to determine that local people support the introduction of designated Quiet Lanes.
- Research Questionnaire - will occur immediately that funding is secured.
- Securing stakeholder agreement (Parish, District and County Councils)
- Development of designs and implementation will be reliant on the securing of necessary funding. (Bids will be made for Local Transport Plans funding once stakeholder agreement is confirmed.)

### **Costings**

Research Questionnaire - £3000

Development of designs - TBC

Implementation - TBC

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: COMMUNITY BUS**

### **Background**

The Partnership has identified a need for improved public transport links between the villages and Melksham town.

### **Project Objectives**

- To provide additional public transport between Melksham town and the villages and rural hinterland.
- To provide additional public transport for young people who wish to access youth facilities in Melksham town.

### **Intended Outputs**

The provision of a community bus service.

### **Intended Outcomes**

Improved access to public transport between the villages and Melksham town.

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

An operator (i.e. bus and driver) has been identified.

Apply for funding - spring 2005

Secure necessary route permit from Wiltshire County Council - spring 2005

Promotion and publicity - spring 2005

Launch service - summer 2005.

### **Costings**

TBC

## **PROJECT OUTLINE: WALKING TO SCHOOL MAP**

### **Background**

The Partnership wishes to promote healthier lifestyles and the personal health and environmental benefits to be gained by walking to school (as opposed to driving short distances).

Using a Walking to School map produced in Salisbury, the Partnership has developed a Melksham version. The map promotes existing public footpaths and designated cycle-ways.

### **Project Objectives**

To encourage walking to school

### **Intended Outputs**

1500 leaflets

### **Intended Outcomes**

Increased occurrence of children and parents walking to school

### **Key Tasks & Deadlines**

Secure funding - as soon as possible

Print and distribute maps - as soon as funding is secured

### **Costings**

£3500 for 1500 leaflets

## 6. MONITORING & REVIEW

### 6.1) PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> will continue to adopt standard project evaluation criteria when considering which projects to support. These are:

- Do project champions exist to develop the project?
- Does it promote partnership working?
- Does it address an identified need?
- Can achievements be measured?
- Does it provide economic benefit?
- Does it provide environmental benefit?
- Does it promote accessibility?
- Does it promote life-long learning?
- Have potential funding sources been identified?
- Does it provide a tangible community benefit?
- Can the community be involved/feel ownership?
- Does it have a clear time frame with key milestones?
- Is there clear accountability for financial management and progress against set deadlines?

### 6.2) PROJECT MONITORING TIMEFRAMES

- Monitoring of projects will occur **quarterly**. A pro-forma Project Monitoring Form is included as Appendix Nine.
- Quarterly Monitoring Reports will be presented to the Steering Group, and progress reports given to relevant full Partnership meetings.

### 6.3) COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- A bi-annual Melksham 1<sup>st</sup> Partnership insert newsletter will be included in the Melksham News.
- Bi-annual presentations will be made to the town and parish councils.

### 6.4) STRATEGY MONITORING & REVIEW

The Partnership will monitor progress made against the objectives outlined in this document, on an **annual** basis.

The Partnership will review the priorities and future direction of this strategy every **three years**, or as it is felt necessary.

