

THE BEACON SCHEME 2006 APPLICATION FORM

PART 1 - AUTHORITY INFORMATION	
Authority Name	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Beacon Theme	Promoting sustainable communities through the planning process
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This application can be made available on the IDeA web site once Beacon awards have been made	Yes
Application Number	2122
Application Status	Submitted

2.1 Please summarise the excellent practice for which you are seeking Beacon Status.

Creating places where people want to live and work, both now and in the future is a key ambition of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. The Council has a long and successful history of using innovative approaches to identify community needs and to establish effective partnerships to both identify and deliver those needs.

Our Beacon status bid covers how we have worked with the communities of the borough to identify and deliver their vision for the places in which they live and work. It demonstrates our approach to the planning process in which we have worked proactively to create a sense of place which local communities identify with and feel a sense of ownership for.

Our Beacon Status bid will:

- Demonstrate how our values and strategies embrace the principles of sustainable development
- Demonstrate how we have adopted an innovative and successful approach to delivering sustainable communities through the planning process
- Show how a design focus can create neighbourhoods with a strong sense of pride and community whilst achieving urban regeneration, support economic objectives and improve the overall Quality of Life within the borough
- Create a major opportunity for shared learning through proactive and innovative engagement with the local community
- Share experience of successful negotiations with developers on Section 106 agreements for the benefit of local communities
- Demonstrate effective joint working in the development and delivery of Local Plan and Community Strategy objectives
- Provide a case study of best practice that illustrates the potential to create high quality developments which the local community welcome.

2.2 Leadership, Vision and Strategy.

The delivery of planned sustainable communities is not a new priority for the Council. The Council developed a clear vision for delivering sustainable communities in its Sustainability Policy which was adopted in 2002 and is an integral part of our corporate approach to delivery:

"A Sustainable Community is a community dependent on people acting together to create healthy, safe places in which to live, work and play".

In preparing the Council Plan for 2006-2009, consideration of priorities was introduced at an early stage to enable meaningful consultation with stakeholders. This included the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), Borough Business Partnership, Youth Council, Diversity Forum and Housing Associations. As a result one of the four priority areas forming the Council vision for the next 3 years is:

"To provide people with affordable decent homes within planned sustainable communities".

This has a particular focus on social inclusion, economic development and environmental quality. Actions are set out within the Council Plan to help achieve this priority, and these are reflected through the service plans of the Council's business units. Service plans are monitored regularly to assess progress and impact and all reports to Council Members set out the contributions that have been made against both the Council priorities and Community Strategy objectives.

In 2003 we undertook a comprehensive internal restructuring which has ensured that the delivery of sustainable

communities is achieved through a cross cutting approach across the Council. In their feedback on the successful Affordable Housing Beacon Status bid, the Beacon Advisory Panel stated that the Council's *'Management structures have been re-organised to support the improved delivery of affordable housing in ways that support the creation of sustainable communities and tackle social exclusion'*. The restructuring has strengthened our ability to ensure that we create strong internal partnerships to tackle cross cutting issues and maximise opportunities in support of the sustainable communities agenda. Support for this has been established by the creation of a Policy and Partnerships Team, which provides the evidence base approach to support our decision making and takes the lead on establishing many joint working initiatives.

Key to the delivery of sustainable communities is a close working relationship between the Council and the LSP. This has resulted in a Community Strategy and Council Plan that have been prepared concurrently and successfully reflect the aims and objectives of one another. This has also brought together a range of expertise, experience, information and resources to plan and deliver highly effective outcomes, for the benefit of the local community. It has also enabled stakeholders and members of the community to have a good understanding of why a decision has been made and how they were able to influence the outcome. The LSP has recently produced a Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy with the vision that *'by 2025 no one in the borough will be disadvantaged as a result of where they live'*. This vision compliments both the Council's vision for sustainable communities and the objectives of the Council Plan.

Both officers and elected members have played an active role in the preparation of the emerging South East Plan. This has included regular input as part of the activities undertaken by the local authorities within the two geographical areas of the region within which the borough sits. The Council has clearly put forward its vision for the borough and has maintained input throughout the process, ensuring that the important role that the borough has to play is carefully considered at a regional level. In some areas, such as transport, co-operation between ourselves and the County Council has added weight to the importance of infrastructure in supporting our longer term aspirations of creating a truly sustainable borough.

Our Local Plan involved a high level of consultation and incorporates targeted actions that successfully address the priority issues identified by the local community. An example of this is in Tadley, a settlement to the north of the borough. Two sites were originally allocated in Tadley as part of the Local Plan, as they were considered appropriate for development. After further consultation, the evidence submitted by local residents in Tadley demonstrated that the sites should not be brought forward after all. The residents identified a number of concerns and issues which had not been identified at the initial site appraisal stage. As a result, the Council proposed that the sites should be removed from the Plan, and, successfully defended this decision at the Local Plan Inquiry

We are aware of local needs and have tailored our planning policies accordingly. In November 2000, we adopted a Housing Mix policy as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), following growing concern over the mismatch within the existing housing stock in relation to house size and type. We also adopted an Affordable Housing SPG in 2002 and a Sustainable Design and Construction SPG in 2004.

The Council is committed to maintaining a focus on its vision for sustainable communities and regularly prepares development briefs to guide development proposals. The briefs are prepared in accordance with both Local Plan policies and Community Strategy objectives. Within these development briefs the Council clearly sets out its Sustainability Policy and vision for sustainable communities, to provide a clear framework to enable attractive and sustainable developments to take place. The briefs are developed on a site specific basis and are based on local needs assessments and extensive external consultation, ensuring that development proposals take account of local context and local views.

Our relationship with the LSP and with the wider community is seen by the Council as critical in taking forward our Local Development Framework, ensuring that community priorities and aspirations are embedded into our future vision for the borough. This is reflected clearly in our emerging Statement of Community involvement.

2.3 Community and customer engagement.

We have a strong history of successful consultation and have made substantial investments to ensure that we successfully engage with our local communities. We have developed a corporate approach to engagement and have produced a Community Engagement Strategy which provides best practice guidance on all community engagement activities. Our Corporate Communications Team co-ordinates consultation and posts all feedback from consultation exercises on the Council website. A Corporate Consultation Toolkit is also about to be launched on our intranet system as a best practice guide to consultation techniques.

We are keen to ensure that we have a comprehensive understanding of what the community expects and have developed a range of practices to secure effective engagement with the wider community, including focussing attention on those groups that are hard to reach. We have used 'Planning for Real Exercises' which enable members of the community to set out their ideas and ambitions for development proposals and to highlight existing local issues that they wish to see addressed. Such practical exercises have been followed up with local exhibitions on draft proposals, to illustrate how the Council will take forward the views of local people and develop them into workable schemes.

We have used innovative approaches to consultation, tailoring the methods to suit the particular audience. Our Community Wardens are using drama to help primary and secondary school children understand the dangers of building sites, as part of our regeneration proposals for Popley. We have also purchased interactive handsets, based on TV shows like 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire'. These handsets have been highly successful at getting quick responses on key issues and were successfully used by the LSP when consulting on the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

During the Local Plan Review we organised an exhibition of all the sites being promoted through the Plan. Interested parties were able to see the proposals and ask the developers questions. The exhibitions assisted in bringing the proposals to life. To make the proposals easily understandable and to initiate debate, we asked all exhibitors to work to a common brief which included providing a site layout, an aerial photograph, a constraints map and a list of advantages and disadvantages. This included identifying the facilities that the occupiers of the proposed site might require and any measures needed to offset any impacts on the existing community. Over 50 developers, landowners and agents attended and over 1,000 members of local communities viewed the proposals and submitted comments. The event won a Royal Town Planning Institute Award for planning process and technology and proved to be highly successful in engaging with the public.

We also used a mobile exhibition to provide residents with the opportunity to see development proposals and talk face to face with planning officers. This was highly successful in helping local communities to understand the need for further development and in addressing concerns. Over 1300 people visited the mobile exhibition during the Local Plan Review and the Government Office for the South East has promoted our consultation techniques as a model of good practice to other local authorities.

The ability to draw upon these types of links in the community has been incorporated in the draft Statement of Community Involvement which clearly sets out the Council's commitment to engage the community and ensures that the right approach is taken depending on the nature of the proposals and the audience it is aimed at. We are continually trying to improve our consultation techniques and the document includes both tried and tested techniques as well as new innovative approaches. Attention has also been given to improving accessibility through greater use of electronic documents and on-line response forms. This ensures that information is available 24 hours a day and allows responses to be made at a time that is convenient to the individual.

The draft SCI considers how to engage hard to reach groups, such as those from ethnic minorities who make up 3.4% of the borough's population. In order to secure engagement with this section of the community, the Council provides support to our Diversity Forum and working through the Mayor, we make links with all community leaders. The Council has also successfully engaged with hard to reach groups through the LSP and the various forums within it. By attending these meetings, it has been possible to inform and involve a large number of individuals and organisations who may not normally become involved in the planning of the borough. This has also been assisted by the LSP's Communications Group which aims to share information and good practice through its contacts in the community. The Council's Community Engagement Group ensures the exchange of best practice.

We provide a high quality service to people applying for planning permission in the borough. We welcome and encourage the use of pre-application discussions and provide a pre-application service which is set out on the Council's website. The pre-application process involves a multidisciplinary and proactive approach to ensure that advice is provided on all aspects of an application. As part of this we encourage developers to engage with communities at an early stage to allow them an opportunity to shape development proposals.

To make sure that those affected by developments can get their voices heard, we try and locate meetings close to the community and away from the council offices. A recent example of this was a proposal to release a site for development. A petition was received and members agreed to discuss local residents concerns at a meeting in the local community hall. This allowed a large number of people to attend which gave the local community greater understanding of the issues involved. Similarly to improve access to our decision making processes, we webcast all of our Development Control and other committee meetings. This enables a wider number of people within the borough as well as those further afield to see the outcomes of council decisions without having to travel.

2.4 Actions.

The Council has established successful ways of working and a network of partnerships to deliver sustainable communities. This includes;

- The delivery of sustainable communities as a corporate priority and a cross cutting theme across all of the Council service plans.
- This is endorsed by our approach to scoping potential development proposals and ensuring that we provide guidance to developers which is based on a site by site basis, and involves a wide range of business units from across the Council as well as, where appropriate, external partners.
- Internal restructuring to ensure that there is a strong partnership ethos for tackling cross cutting issues and delivering on the ground efficiently. This has enabled us to take a non-silo approach in delivering our vision for sustainable communities.
- An evidence based approach to identifying priorities and actions to ensure that we respond directly to local needs. Using census data, Indices of Multiple Deprivation and local needs assessments, we have established a profile of the borough to target our resources where they are most needed.
- A proactive approach to assisting developers in delivering our vision for sustainable communities. The Council has developed an Interim 106 Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document, which ensures that our developments meet the needs of the local community through providing contributions for community infrastructure, affordable housing and services. This has led to the recent production of a Section 106 Best Practice Note which provides developers with examples of what the Council expects in terms of contributions.
- An innovative approach to planning for sustainable communities includes the use of land exchanges to initiate development in priority areas.
- A proactive approach to addressing local issues, resulting in the Council becoming one of the first three Borough Councils in the UK to produce a Rural Strategy. We worked with rural residents to develop the Strategy, which is specifically aimed at addressing the key social, economic and environmental issues affecting the borough's rural area. We have also allocated a capital budget which external groups can bid for, to help address local needs. This has empowered the community to take action to improve their local area and has encouraged collaborative working. The Strategy won an award from the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1999 as an example of best practice.
- Positive engagement with local communities has encouraged them to develop their own vision for their neighbourhoods. We have assisted our local communities to produce Village Design Statements which outline the character of a particular area and identify how development should be undertaken so as to respect local identity. When adopted by the Council, the Village Design Statements form a material consideration in determining planning applications and provide the local community with direct influence over development decisions.

- A focus on community involvement ensures that our developments reflect community wishes. The Bishops Green Regeneration Project was started in 2001, following recognition that the housing and property layout was dated, leading to the occurrence of crime and anti-social behaviour. We are working in partnership on this long-term project to consider how we could best improve the environmental, social and economic well-being of the area. Initially the Project Team implemented a series of "quick wins" to build confidence within the local community and to get their involvement. These included open project meetings and a project logo competition. Whilst the "quick wins" initiatives were underway a comprehensive community survey involving all households was undertaken by independent market researchers. Building on the survey results, a Community Action Plan was developed, setting out targeted actions and identifying timescales for delivery. The main issues raised included lack of facilities, the isolation of the Bishops Green area and the quality of the fabric of the housing estate. A housing option appraisal was used to the potential for the redevelopment of the housing and five options were selected for consultation with the local community. The Council will be donating land for the first new homes to be built on so that existing residents can move before their old homes are demolished to make way for the next phases. This phasing approach is being adopted to prevent the break-up of what is an existing established community. Likewise whilst a new community hall was being built the worn and outdated Bishops Green Hall was kept in use right up to the point when the new hall was handed over to the local community to avoid disruption to existing community activities. The design of the hall reflected the community's wishes whilst taking into account wider landscape impacts and health and safety issues.
- Partnership working with local people has led to the establishment of a project for regeneration of the Longfellow Parade area in Basingstoke. Early consultation, held through a 'Placecheck' initiative, gave residents the chance to identify key problems in the design and layout of their neighbourhood and to suggest ways of making improvements. Residents will also be involved in drawing up the detailed development plans as this project moves forward.
- Our active Local Strategic Partnership has delivered a wide range of tangible actions through a number of successful projects, for example;

The Popley Project, which was the catalyst for the production of our Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, is a joint agency project focussing on reducing deprivation in the Popley area. The Council is the lead partner for the project and is gathering baseline information to identify the issues that need to be addressed in partnership with local residents.

2.5 Partnerships.

Through our long history of partnership working we have developed a shared vision for sustainable communities, which provide the foundation for our continued success.

Strategic partnerships

The Council has a longstanding close working relationship with the independently chaired LSP which has proved to be highly beneficial in creating sustainable communities. At the outset of the Local Plan Review process, the views of the LSP and the themes within the Community Strategy assisted in identifying the issues to be resolved through planning policies, whilst at a more strategic level, the LSP is helping to formulate the future vision for the borough. The LSP has also been engaged in the work that we have been carrying out on the emerging South East Plan to help us understand the wider community perspective. The LSP has received regular briefings from planning officers on the South East Plan and its potential implications for the borough, to assist in understanding and in gauging views. In addition, a workshop for the LSP Board members was held to help the LSP develop an initial response on the South East Plan which in turn was used to inform the Council's initial response.

The LSP's involvement and interest in planning is demonstrated by the inclusion of 'Spatial Planning' pages on the LSP website, and the development of short briefings on the Local Development Framework and the Statement of Community Involvement. Regular liaison between Planning Officers and the LSP Manager ensures the sharing of

information and provides updates on key issues. Members of the LSP Board have also attended meetings of Councillors to personally put forward their views on key planning issues. The Local Strategic Partnership's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy has also been incorporated within the Council's corporate objectives.

Recognition of our proactive approach and the resultant benefits has already been acknowledged. Feedback from our Beacon application for Affordable Housing included the response that "*There is exemplary working with the LSP leading to a truly holistic approach to developing and supporting sustainable communities*".

Private Sector Partnerships

We engage the development industry and private individuals in promoting potential development sites. This was successfully achieved during the Local Plan Review in which 230 sites were put forward as being suitable for development. These were compiled into two 'site registers' containing maps of the sites and a summary of site-specific information. We then consulted widely on this pre-deposit stage of the local plan process (a non statutory stage of consultation) to raise awareness of the sites and to gain the public's views in order to help establish which sites would be appropriate and acceptable for development. 2150 people or organisations submitted written comments on the consultation and many commented on a number of the promoted sites. An analysis of comments was undertaken and was made widely available. The comments received were used to inform the preparation of the strategy paper for the Local Plan, and the site selection process.

We are highly committed to ensuring that the services we provide meet the needs of our users. We have worked hard to establish relations with local planning consultants and have established an 'Agents Forum'. The aim of this forum is to identify any concerns with the services provided and to discuss the best way to overcome these.

We also sought responses to consultation on the South East Plan from the business community through the Borough Business Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce.

Community and Voluntary Partnerships

We work in partnership at many different levels from formal structured partnerships to more informal local working partnerships. For example the Bishops Green Project Partnership involved officers, ward members, the Parish Council, and the Police working with local residents to deliver the regeneration scheme for the area aimed at supporting the needs of the local community.

We work with local communities to overcome the fear that development will take place with little opportunity for involvement and input into how it should look and what it should consist of. We have produced Development Frameworks which set out a number of details about development sites. They establish the characteristics of the site and give an indication of access arrangements and key landscape features that need to be retained. They also set out some basic ideas for the type of development that should take place and how much development should occur on the site. These Development Frameworks were published in a draft format and made available for comment alongside the Local Plan. Interested local people could both formally comment on the contents of the Local Plan and proposals within the Development Frameworks. By undertaking this approach, we were able to work with the community to identify the best way of bringing a site forward for development, in accordance with the desires of local people.

We are also working closely with Parish Councils to ensure that they are well informed enough to respond on planning matters and to encourage them to undertake pre-application discussions on schemes in their area. We have also established a Parish Liaison Committee which is led by one of the Corporate Directors. This is a consultative forum encouraging Parish Councils to interact and to ensure that they are not left out of the local government structure. We also provide training sessions for parishes to help them better understand the planning system.

Internal Partnerships

Our new internal arrangements encourage and enhance internal partnerships at all levels. Our Planning Department works closely with a wide range of business units including Legal, Housing, Regeneration and Design, Community Safety and Leisure to ensure that all of the principles for delivering sustainable communities are covered. We also have a cross departmental group developing a longer term holistic vision for our town centre which will feed into the LDF Core Strategy.

2.6 Equalities and Diversity.

Through our evidence based approach we use the Indices of Multiple Deprivation to identify the social inequalities across the borough and proactively address these through our planning policies.

The borough-wide housing needs survey has led to the formulation of an affordable housing policy which sets out that 40% of all new housing in the borough needs to be affordable in order to meet the identified housing needs. This will include housing for the borough's 'key-workers'. A specific Rural Housing Needs Survey established a case for rural housing development where an exceptional requirement was proven. Again, this was reflected in a pro-active enabling policy which has been adopted for use in such circumstances.

Due to the increase in the number of small households in the borough, largely due to demographics and social trends, a policy was introduced to ensure that new housing developments contained a high proportion of 1 and 2 bedroom units. This policy is helping to redress an imbalance in the housing stock, and also provides unsubsidised low cost market housing - which has been identified through the Borough Housing Needs Assessment as lacking in the borough's housing stock. To ensure that the dwellings remain 'small' the Council has introduced a maximum floor area for a proportion of units.

A thorough assessment of the need for gypsy accommodation in the borough is being undertaken and if a need for a site is identified the policy position will be reviewed and a suitable site identified.

Ensuring that there is a stock of housing designed for or readily adaptable to the needs of people with mobility difficulties is an integral part of meeting the housing needs of the area, and a figure of 15% of all dwellings are expected to be developed to Lifetime Mobility Standards. This 15% figure matches the 15% of the population who are estimated to have mobility problems. Homes designed to lifetime standards will cater for their needs as both residents and visitors. Increasing the number of lifetime homes will increase the opportunities for people to find a home that meets their needs, or not to have to move if their circumstances change, which means that they can continue to live in familiar surroundings.

Access for disabled people is a high priority for the Council. Wherever possible we are committed to ensuring that all new buildings and facilities are designed to be accessible for all users. We have adopted an Access Policy which puts access at the heart of the planning and design process and have appointed an Access Officer to act as a focal point for members of the public, employers and service providers as well as for councillors and officers.

To ensure the views of disabled people are taken into account, we have regularly consulted with the Access Group of Basingstoke and Deane. Members of the Access Group have a personal interest in disability issues either because they have a disability themselves or because they know or work with disabled people. The work of this group is now being embodied into a Disability Forum. We are proposing to seek the views of this group when considering the Design and Access Statements, that will be required to be submitted with many planning applications when introduced later on this summer.

We have a designated Black and Minority Ethnic Groups Officer, jointly funded by the Council, Hampshire County Council and the Criminal Justice Unit, who has helped to establish a proactive Diversity Forum. We also have an Older Persons Forum which gives a voice to over 55s in the borough and allows older people the opportunity to engage with topics that matter to them.

In recognition of the many different groups that make up Basingstoke and Deane community, we have recently undertaken a housing needs assessment of both Older People and Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The Older Persons' housing needs survey looked at the housing, care and support needs for older people in the borough, the results of which are due to be presented at the Older Persons Forum to identify actions. The Black and Minority Ethnic housing survey has been translated into seven languages and distributed around the borough, including community centres, mosques, faith groups and colleges. The results from this survey will feed into the forthcoming Housing Strategy 2007-2011.

We have developed an equality impact assessment tool which is used to assess all projects and functions to identify any actual or potential inequalities that need to be addressed. As one of our priorities we are aiming to achieve

level three of the Equality Standard by 2007 or level four by March 2008. We have also put in place a number of strategies to address the needs of different sectors of the community. These include a Rural Strategy, a Homelessness Strategy, a Youth Strategy, an Older Persons Strategy, Equality and Diversity Policy and a Corporate Equalities Strategy. All of these strategies have been developed through research and contain a targeted action plan to ensure delivery. We are working to embed these strategies across the organisation so that there is real corporate responsibility for them. These strategies will provide background information to support the development of our LDF.

2.7 Outcomes.

We have successfully delivered a wide range of tangible outcomes:

- We have delivered a multi award winning regeneration scheme for Oakridge which exemplifies best practice in the delivery of sustainable communities through the planning process. The scheme was awarded the Building for Life Gold Standard in February 2005 and the Housing Design Award for Affordable Housing at the National Housing Design Awards in July 2005.
- The Regeneration of the North of Basingstoke is another excellent example of how we deliver our vision for sustainable communities through the planning process. Recognising that the area was suffering from a number of social, economic and environmental issues, we developed an Action Plan aimed at co-ordinating the regeneration of seven major development sites allocated within the Local Plan. The Action Plan defined a vision for the area to provide developers with an understanding of the type of places, neighbourhoods and communities that we were seeking to achieve. This vision was based on extensive public consultation to ensure that any development proposals met the needs and aspirations of existing and future residents. We saw the development of a new school as being the catalyst for the area's regeneration. By relocating the existing school we have been able to open up the site for much needed housing, the proceeds of which will provide the main source of funding for the new school. The new school will be developed as a community school, providing sports and leisure facilities for the wider area. We forward funded the scheme by £2.5 million and then negotiated with the developer to receive a refund on our initial funding through a Section 106 agreement. The existing school site will provide for 400 homes, 60 of which will be affordable units.
- We are highly successful at negotiating with developers to secure Section 106 contributions towards the provision of community infrastructure, affordable housing and services. In 2004/05 the total income from Section 106 agreements was £2,715,132. This has been reinvested into a wide range of provision including sports and community facilities, transport schemes and facilities to support local needs. We have adopted interim planning guidance on Section 106 Planning Obligations and Community Infrastructure which sets out a transparent framework within which to start negotiations, setting out what we believe is necessary to support development therefore reducing the time spent negotiating on individual planning applications.
- We proactively engage local communities in how their communities are run. We have provided funding and advice to undertake a health-check for Whitchurch, a small market town in the borough. A questionnaire was delivered to every household in the area, asking peoples' opinions on a range of issues including transport, leisure activities, the town and its residents, retail and housing. The health-check team (consisting of residents, Town and Borough Councillors and the Community Centre manager) developed an Action Plan based on the outcomes of the public consultation. Progress on the Action Plan projects, are monitored regularly and feedback is provided to the public. Any problems identified are addressed and new projects introduced as appropriate.
- Although not a statutory function, we have a designated transport policy team within the planning

department, which provides localised support and actively assists the County Council on transport matters. Through this approach to joint working we have developed a Quality Bus Partnership. Within the partnership the bus operators are committed to improving bus services, through re-branding, introducing low floors vehicles and increasing frequencies. In return using Section 106 contributions, we are improving the infrastructure, including provision of better waiting and information facilities and raising pavements to provide easy access to the buses. Bus routes have also been introduced that run from Basingstoke Town Centre, as the main service centre, to the main settlements within the borough. Basingstoke therefore acts as a hub which allows passengers to access services and make onward journeys by rail if required. Survey results from the Confederation of Passenger Transport indicate that the borough is now the 7th fastest growing area for bus patronage nationally.

- In recognition of excellent performance in dealing with planning applications, planning policy development and housing delivery we received a Planning Delivery Grant award of £473,000 from Government in 2004/05. Our continued high level of performance has meant we received a further £423,993 in 2005/06 and were awarded £392,284 for 2006/07.
- We are one of only four authorities to win Beacon Status for Affordable Housing in recognition of best practice in the provision of affordable homes.
- Although there is a statutory requirement to undertake a customer satisfaction survey every 3 years, we are committed to undertaking an annual review. By doing so we will gain valuable information that helps shape our priorities and identify areas for improvement. The latest survey carried out in Autumn 2005, shows that 91% of residents feel that the borough is a good place to live, offering a high quality of life. The English Indices of Deprivation also show that the borough has an improved quality of life, and has improved its overall position within England's 354 districts since 2001. Basingstoke and Deane has moved up the rankings by 15 places from 298 (in the top 16%) to 313 (in the top 12%).
- Planners in the Council have the opportunity to diversify their day to day duties through involvement in a number of different corporate projects. This broadens the knowledge and understanding of our officers which adds value to the Council. The team have recently been involved with corporate groups on youth issues, customer services, reviewing the external website and the Council Travel Plan. We are keen to encourage and support staff to develop their specialist skills in planning, and provide excellent opportunities for undertaking professional courses and training. The Council's role as an Investor in People and our increasing emphasis on flexible working initiatives also contribute to a general sense of positivity and wellbeing.

3 Outline, with reference to a specific case (a geographical area, a particular section of the community, an individual or particular issue) how you have taken action to address an issue and the impact that this action has had.

The Oakridge Central Regeneration Group was formed in 1997, following concern about the level of deprivation in the area. The existing 4 and 5 storey maisonettes did not cater for the needs of the people that lived there. The buildings had poor access, making it difficult for both families and elderly people. The area was unpopular and under occupied, leading to vandalism and high levels of crime. In July 2000, a comprehensive regeneration masterplan was produced in partnership with the local community, with the aim of creating an affordable, popular and long-lasting development. Following completion, a thriving sustainable community has been created, with access to affordable housing, strong design features, improved infrastructure and enhanced local facilities.

The Scheme exemplifies best practice and was awarded the Building for Life Gold Standard in February 2005 and the Housing Design Award for Affordable Housing in July 2005.

A holistic approach was taken to the regeneration scheme based on an understanding that sustainable communities possess social, economic and environmental attributes. Extensive and continuous involvement of the local community along with a robust Local Plan framework helped create a vision for redevelopment to achieve:

'The creation of an urban village designed to an exemplary standard which will achieve mixed tenure, increased density and an integrated approach to the design of buildings, roads and open space. The building of a strengthened community with a scheme which has been designed in consultation with local people and which fulfils their aspiration for inclusive community facilities and a lively mixed use village centre'

Innovative ways of consulting were developed which included the use of drama, local public art, a web-based toolkit, a DVD, and a study trip to London, for local residents to provide an opportunity to look at similar projects. A residents' survey at the start of the project identified existing problems and a residents' panel ensured the community was involved in every stage of the development. Regular open days, exhibitions, design meetings, surveys and walkabouts were organised to gain resident feedback and newsletters were used to keep residents informed throughout this project.

The needs and wishes of residents directly influenced the development plans. An example was the retention of a tower block which was unexpectedly highly valued by elderly residents. The design of the community centre which was altered from a modest building for use by Oakridge residents, to a large building attracting people from the wider community. The new community hall logo was the result of a drawing competition with local school children. Residents took part in selecting the contractors and opportunities were given for local people to work on the project. A local labour and construction programme was developed which involved apprenticeships from the college.

The Regeneration Group included a wide range of partners including the Council, Oakfern Housing Association, Social Services, the Local Health Authority, the Police, Oakridge Young Peoples' Project, the Methodist Church and Hampshire County Council's education department. The partnership established a chain partnering approach with local firms, enabling the work to be carried out more efficiently, allowing cost savings. Links to partner organisations was strengthened through engagement with the LSP which provided access to decision makers at both a strategic and operational level. Pre-application consultation between the developer and planning department clarified and maximised the Section 106 requirements. Regular liaison between different departments within the Council maintained a focus on the overall vision and ensured a consistent approach.

All affordable homes within the scheme have been built to Lifetime Standards allowing for future changes in occupiers needs. The new community centre includes a youth room, cyber café, health authority consultation room, preschool provision and a large hall used for 'silver surfer' learning events, a break dancing club and coffee mornings. In partnership with the Housing Association we have funded a Community Warden to work with local residents to continue community involvement. The warden for Oakridge received a National Community Warden

Award in 2004 for innovative projects.

With its distinctive qualities, Oakridge has a strong sense of place, with which the local community identifies.

- The church, community centre and High Street provide a focal point.
- Shops are located on the main High Street to attract the maximum amount of passing trade.
- A square provides a vibrant, busy centre
- Green routes provide safe and pleasant links to local facilities for those cycling or walking.
- The new road layout creates a 'heart' for Oakridge and residential streets enhance local character.
- Housing density has increased from 19 units/Ha to 43 units/Ha, making efficient use of space.
- The increased population makes local facilities and public transport more viable and sustainable.
- 52% of the dwellings are for affordable housing meeting housing needs and the Council's Housing Mix Policy.
- 'Pepperpotted' across the site making homes for rent and sale indistinguishable, providing for a more inclusive community.
- Higher density housing is located around the High Street to create a more urban and vibrant centre.
- Use of colour in houses helps to define smaller local neighbourhoods
- Homes have their own secure private outdoor space, achieving a Secure by Design Certificate.
- A highly innovative steel framed pre-fabricated building system reduced construction time, costs and improved the overall quality of the finished product.
- Nearly £500,000 in Section 106 contributions were secured for wider community improvements.
- The image of the area has improved with 800 people from the housing register queuing to register their interest in one of just 27 properties released during Phase II.
- The local school has gained Specialist Performing Arts College Status and received over 190 applications for just 150 places in 2005.
- Oakridge has become a centre of excellence for older people, endorsed by Better Government for Older People.

The project demonstrates the success of the Council in achieving innovative and effective solutions to delivering sustainable communities through the planning process.

4.1 Factors that underpin your success.

- Our commitment to delivering our vision for sustainable communities gives us the ability to respond corporately to the needs of the local community
- Our successful engagement with the LSP ensures a consistent vision for the borough
- Our ability to provide clear and consistent leadership ensures focus is maintained on our vision
- Our long history of partnership working enables us to build successful relationships with a wide range of partners who are willing to share our vision.
- Our ability to successfully negotiate Section 106 contributions helps us to fund facilities that benefit the wider community
- Our commitment to fully embed community consultation within the work of the Council ensures we have a clear understanding of local community aspirations and are able to empower them to develop their own vision for their neighbourhoods and assist in its implementation
- Our commitment to regularly review consultation methods means that we are able to introduce fresh approaches and successfully engage more of the local community in planning processes
- Our commitment to investing time and resources in community engagement ensures we are successful at creating a sense of local ownership which strengthens our vision for sustainable communities
- Our use of strong design features ensures that developments have a strong sense of place with which the local community identifies.
- Our commitment to regularly monitor quality of life ensures we maintain an understanding of local needs

4.2 Successful initiatives.

- Regeneration Partnerships- Our Oakridge regeneration scheme has been multi-award winning. The lessons learnt from this scheme have informed our subsequent projects, such as the Bishops Green regeneration project, allowing us to continually improve our services and the way we take forward development
- Housing Partnerships- Our successful housing partnerships were recognised in our Beacon Status for affordable housing and we are developing regional and national best practice in this sector
- Consultation Initiatives- Our consultation initiatives have won Royal Town Planning Institute Awards and have been promoted by the Government Office for the South East as an example of best practice.
- Community Wardens Scheme- Our community wardens have been the frontline officers in our regeneration projects, working at a grassroots level with our local communities to identify and address their needs.

4.3 Who are the key target audiences that would benefit from hearing your key messages?

- Other Local Authorities to learn how they can deliver a high quality, customer focussed planning service that translates to high quality delivery on the ground.
- Developers to learn how they can deliver for local communities as well as their bottom line
- Local communities to learn how they can become engaged in the process of developing a local vision for their neighbourhood and to understand how the planning system can work to deliver their vision.
- LSP's to learn how to integrate their work with the Local Development Framework

- Other statutory and voluntary organisations who want to be partners in helping to achieve successful communities

4.4 Beyond the national Learning Exchange conference and Open Day, how might you work with other Beacons within your theme to maximise the impact of your learning activities?

- BDBC developed a virtual e-learning tool for affordable housing, launched in October 2005 www.beacon@basingstoke.gov.uk. Key features of the tool include easy access to materials and data about affordable housing including video footage, audio dialogue, interactive features and a discussion forum. This allows users to customise their own learning experience to enable and support learning with other subscribers. We would develop a similar tool that will feature best practice and the challenges faced in relation to delivering sustainable communities that could encompass the work of other beacons.
- We propose the organisation of a national LSP conference, hosted by the Beacons, to explore methods of linking the Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework and demonstrating examples of good practice.
- We would work with other Beacons to maximise the impact of our dissemination by holding joint conferences and events to share best practice. The local community will have an integral role at these events to illustrate how they have been central to the delivery of sustainable communities within Basingstoke and Deane.
- We would utilise our existing IT technologies such as remote web casting to web cast examples of best practice.
- We would seek opportunities for joint editorial and advertising campaigns in local government and best value authority media channels to maximise cost effectiveness.
- We would seek to work with the relevant government agencies and departments to maximise our dissemination.

4.5 What experience does your authority have with sharing lessons with others? Give examples of where your authority has supported others to improve.

We actively seek opportunities to share what we have learnt. For example:

- a number of local authorities have visited us to look at our methods of Planning Enforcement, our planning application process and approach to Section 106 agreements, our electronic forms of service delivery, including our Electronic Document Management Systems, and to discuss our recent Local Plan Inquiry experience.
- officers have spoken at national and more local conferences in the last year on a range of planning issues.
- we acted as a critical friend for East Hampshire District Council on their Development Control service
- working with West Berkshire Council and Hampshire County Council on issues of joint interest including exploring the potential for some joint LDF work.

We also look to learn from others through regular meetings with other authorities through groups such as the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Planning Officers Group, the Planning Officers Society and the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub regional officers group. We also sit on the Hampshire and Thames Valley Economic Partnership and the Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Region. These forums are used to share good practice and consider emerging issues of local or regional importance.