

Newsline

From Community First Herefordshire and Worcestershire **Winter 2010**



Funding

Focus:
**Grants and
money issues**
Pages 6 and 7



**Create
sustainable
community
buildings**
Page 13 and 15



**Rural Affordable
Housing**
**Can you afford
to live in the
Countryside?**
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Building Better Communities

From our Chief Executive



With the worst of the winter weather behind us hopefully, and the promise of a gradual recovery to the economy eagerly awaited, now is a good time to prepare ourselves for the challenges and opportunities that will come our way during 2010.

Whilst we all know that a general election is just around the corner it is too soon to predict what impact a new government will have on voluntary and community organisations locally. However, we do know that public sector funding cuts are an inevitability and that the sector will once again be facing increasing demand for its services at a time when the public purse is least able to offer support.

In preparing for the challenges ahead we all have to make choices between competing priorities and focus on what really matters to those who most need our support. Community First is eager to hear how we are doing and what you think our key priorities should be going forward. Please do complete the online survey on page 5 or email me at richardq@comfirst.org.uk with your thoughts and suggestions.

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Community First – working for you

Winter Training Programme;



Community First
Building better communities

Details of our Winter Training Programme have just been announced. Further information will be available on our website in the next couple of weeks.

Course: .. **Collaboration Benefits**

Date: 24 February & 1 March 2010

Venue: ... Civic Centre, Pershore

Course: .. **Leading an Effective Team**

Date: 4 March 2010

Venue: ... Worcester Group Training Association

Course: .. **Costing, Tendering & Bid Writing**

Date: 14 April 2010

Venue: ... Perdiswell

Course: .. **Planning for Sustainability**

Date: Spring 2010

Venue: ... TBA

Course: .. **How to Write a Funding Bid
(3 spaces available)**

Date: 4 February 2010

Venue: Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Club,
Worcester

*For further information about any of these courses
please contact Isobel Lindsey: isobell@comfirst.org.uk*

News

Twitter



Community First recently joined the social networking and 'micro blogging' site Twitter. We are now able to post live information in "tweets" signposting people to interesting articles on the web. This information includes the very latest funding opportunities, events information and relevant news.

We will also be 'following' other development agencies and frontline organisations which means together we can create a really useful and relevant forum of ideas and information. We will in turn follow those that read our posts so we are able receive information from people too.

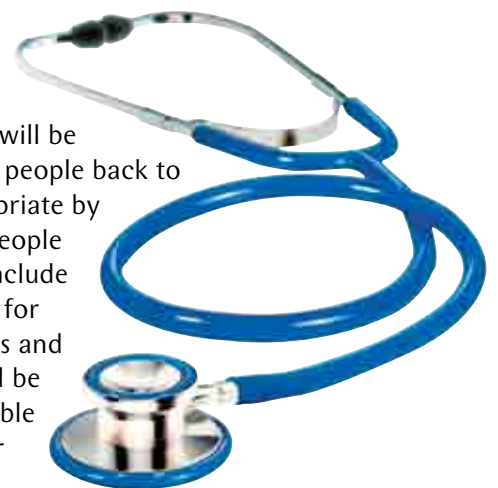
Over the last year we have developed our communications to ensure that our customers are as up to date as possible, Twitter is an excellent extension of our newsletter, WebPages and e-bulletin, and makes keeping up with the latest from the sector really easy and interactive.

Please follow us at www.twitter.com/comfirst

HR updates

In 2012, we will see an extra bank holiday to celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee on Tuesday 5 June. The government is likely to move the late May bank holiday to Monday 4 June to enable a long celebratory weekend.

April 2010 will see the launch of 'fit notes' as opposed to sick notes. GPs will be able to encourage people back to work when appropriate by suggesting what people can do. This will include recommendations for adaptations, duties and hours which could be classed as reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.



There is likely to be a government review in response to growing age discrimination claims during the recession that may see the retirement default age increase from 65 to 68. Watch this space.

Wellness Works. A great start to the New Year!

Wellness Works is a unique service promoting positive mental well-being in the workplace across Worcestershire. We want to help businesses and voluntary organisations create happy, healthy work environments for their staff and volunteers.

Why not make a great start to 2010 by making the most of the people who work for you? Wellness Works is currently running a series of workshops for staff with managerial responsibilities. We know that:

Having a more effective, supportive line manager can improve the well-being of both individuals and teams significantly – improving their performance.

A management style that empowers and develops staff also supports positive well-being – which means people will get more done in less time.

Good communication skills are an essential element of any effective organisation – when everyone knows what they need to do and why, things are more likely to get done.

Managers who coach staff effectively, build good relationships, increase rapport and focus on solutions rather than the problems!

The workshops will provide you with the technical, HR and legal skills which underpin effective management and will help you identify problems before they arise. They also provide the opportunity to meet with other managers and to have one to one professional support sessions if needed.

The workshops are held on a monthly basis and are delivered by an HR legal specialist, whose friendly and informal approach has had excellent reviews to date. You can choose to sign up for all the sessions or just attend those you feel are most relevant. The series is supported by The Big Lottery Fund so the sessions are low cost for both businesses and voluntary organisations.

Wellness Works: Supporting Effective Management

To find out more about how Wellness Works can help your managers to deal effectively with stress in the workplace and promote wellbeing at work contact Amanda Wright, Business Adviser Health and Well-being
amandaw@comfirst.org.uk, 01684 312754.



The Grassroots Grants Programme

Community First is seeking to contact small voluntary and community groups in Worcestershire who need funding to help them deliver valuable services for the most disadvantaged communities and people in the county.

'Signpost' recently contacted us and applied for a grant to set up a memory café for people suffering from Dementia. Doctors and local representatives expressed a need for the new service as Local Authorities and the Alzheimer & Dementia Society were not able to provide services at an accessible point in the local rural community. A grant from the Grassroots Grant Programme enabled 'Signpost' to set up a monthly Memory Café to provide a support service and a meeting point for people suffering with Dementia and their carers. This facility will provide an accessible, safe and comfortable environment for people to meet and participate in social activity. Carers will have access to expertise and information to help them cope and training will be provided for volunteers to understand issues around the disease. One of the key focuses of the service will be to raise awareness of issues around Dementia to the wider community so that people are aware of what help is available.

If you are a voluntary / community group; locally managed and based in Worcestershire; have a set of rules and a management committee; are predominately volunteer led with an average annual income of less than £30K and have a bank account then you too could receive financial assistance through Grassroots.

Grassroots is funded by the Office of the Third Sector and is delivered by Community First on behalf of the Community Development Foundation. Grants start at £250 and range up to £5000. Funding can be given for a wide range of activities from purchasing equipment, putting on a local event or workshop, to cover staff costs to enable the employment of individuals, contribution to rent costs (related to activities / service delivery), costs of attending a conference or event and paying for training volunteers, the list goes on.

Details on how to apply for funding are available at www.comfirst.org.uk or you can call Sophie Mead, Grants Administration Officer at Community First on 01432 267820 (Monday to Wednesday and Friday) and 01684 312734 (Thursday) or e-mail grassroots@comfirst.org.uk to find out more.

There is a free outreach and support service provided by the outreach worker in Worcestershire, Sophie Mead, and applicants will be encouraged to make use of this service to give groups the best possible chance of being successful in their bid. Don't delay as this money will cease to exist come March 2011.

Quality Standards and Developing our Services.

All voluntary and community groups have to continually improve their capabilities and performance to ensure that not only do they meet the needs of users but can demonstrate to funders and partners that they are best placed to deliver their specialist services.

Many of us respond to this challenge by introducing quality assurance systems at work – these often provide a useful framework to guide trustees, management, staff, volunteers and users in the review of a service or organisation as a whole. At Community First, this is no different.

Over the last two years Community First has been working towards the ACRE quality standards specifically developed to define what constitutes good organisational practice for Rural Community Councils.

The standard covers nine areas of good practice:

Business Planning, User Centred Services, Trustees and the Board, Managing activities, Financial management, Monitoring and Evaluation, Managing and supporting staff, Training and Skills Development and Networks and Partnerships.

Our level 3 peer assessment will take place on 13th and 14th April during which time the assessor will want to speak with our customers and stakeholders. Regardless of how well the assessor thinks we do, we want to know what you think particularly in relation to user centred services and monitoring and evaluation.

To gain your feedback we would like to ask you the following questions, you can answer via an online survey using this link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/newslines> by emailing michelleo@comfirst.org.uk or call our Malvern office. It will only take a few minutes, so please share your thoughts.

1. Do staff at Community First talk to you about your needs as an organisation/group and engage you in planning and reviewing the services we provide?

2. Do we appear to amend and update our services to better meet your needs?

3. Do you feel able and welcome to provide feedback and ideas to CF and its staff in terms of the services provided and how they are delivered?

4. Do we provide a good standard of customer service?

Gaining feedback and developing our services is an ongoing process. We are committed to better understanding the needs of the sector and adapting what we offer and our delivery method in order to better serve our customers. As resources become ever more restricted, we need to ensure we prioritise our services to best meet the needs of voluntary and community groups. If you have a view on this, please email michelleo@comfirst.org.uk – this will help shape our corporate plan priorities for 2010-2011.

Bovril Offers £100,000 to Repair the Great Outdoors



Bovril, the drinks manufacturer, has announced that it has £100,000 available to small projects that repair outdoor facilities. This could be for example a dishevelled stone wall, a broken stile on a nature trail, a rickety old fishing hut, or a campsite in need of repair. To nominate, a project nominee will need to buy a promotional jar of Bovril. Projects can then be submitted online and the public is then encouraged to vote for them. Nominations will only be accepted for existing facilities and structures that are in need of a makeover. Bovril will not accept nominations for new builds. Five winning projects will each receive £20,000 to be spent on the repair of refurbishment. Projects can be nominated at any time up to the 28th February 2010. However, three of projects will be selected from the Shortlist at midnight on the 28th December 2009. <http://www.bovril.co.uk/revival/>

Santander Foundation (UK)



The Santander Foundation brings together the charitable donations formerly made in the UK by Abbey, Alliance & Leicester and Bradford &

Bingley savings business. Through the Foundation funding is available to registered charities that work in the areas of Education and Training and Financial Capability. The Foundation will make grants to buy tangible items such as equipment or training materials. Grants are also available to fund project costs such as sessional worker fees, salaries, room hire or other costs incurred in the delivery of the charitable priorities. There are two levels of grants available. Grants of £10,000 are available in areas where there is a Santander or Alliance & Leicester branch. In nine areas where Santander has a significant presence they have established Community Partnership Groups. These are made up of existing staff, pensioners and a local infrastructure charity such as a community foundation or Council for Voluntary Services. Grants of up to £30,000 are available in the in those areas. Applications can be submitted at any time. In addition, Santander has launched a scheme to donate £250,000 to local charities across the country. The bank is asking its customers in the UK to vote for the local charities they think should receive funding to mark the rebranding of Abbey and Bradford & Bingley to Santander. Each of the 1,000 branches will be allocated part of the Community Chest Fund and asked to nominate three local causes, which will be voted for by customers visiting braches of the bank between 11 January and 26 February. www.santanderfoundation.org.uk

Youth in Action Programme



The European Commission has announced the application closing dates for the Youth in Action Programme 2010. Youth in Action is the Programme the European Union has set up for young people. It aims to inspire a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the Union's future. It promotes mobility within and beyond the EU's borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background. Funding is available to support partnership projects with regional or local public bodies (i.e. regions, municipalities, etc.) or with organisations active in the youth sector at the European level in order to develop long-term projects which develop or reinforce long-term actions, strategies and programmes in the field of non-formal learning and youth. The closing dates for 2010 are the 1st February, 1st June and the 1st September. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/programme/about_youth_en.php

Free Computer and Broadband for Low Income Parents (England)



The Government has announced the national roll out of a new programme that will provide 270,000 low income families a free computer and free broadband access. The aim of the £300 million Home Access programme is to close the digital and educational divide between rich and poor and will help make England one of the first countries in the world to ensure that young people can use a computer and the internet at home for their education. The initiative will also get parents better involved in and understand more about what their child does at school. Families with children in years 3 - 9 (approximately age 7 - 14), who are entitled to free schools meals or are on certain benefits, will be able to apply for a grant to buy a computer and broadband connection from an approved supplier. Looked after children up to the age of 18 will also receive laptops, and the scheme will offer bespoke packages to provide more support for children with special educational needs. This programme is being rolled out nationally after successful pilots in Oldham and Suffolk showed a positive impact on both the pupils and their parents. For more information how parents can apply for a Home Access Grant call 0333 200 1004 or visit www.homeaccess.org.uk to get more information and request an application form. <http://www.homeaccess.org.uk/>

Next Generation Fund Launched

BIS | Department for Business Innovation & Skills Rural communities and hard to reach areas who do not have access to next generation broadband will benefit from a share of £1 billion of Government investment. The investment will upgrade the UK's digital infrastructure to bring super-fast broadband to 90% of the country, essential if the UK is to remain globally competitive as estimates suggest that private investment will only reach up to 70% of the population by 2017. The Next Generation Fund will provide the UK with a world class communications network to bolster innovation and services in digital content. The Government is now consulting on the most effective way to deploy the investment. The objectives of the Next Generation Fund are; to support Digital Britain's aim to roll out next generation networks to at least 90% of the UK by 2017; to support economic growth by incentivising market investment in communications infrastructure to meet the needs of businesses and households; and to maximise links with the Government's Universal Service Commitment - a parallel broadband investment programme to ensure every community has access to 2Mbps broadband connection by 2012. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/next-generation-fund>

Welcome Trust Society Awards

welcome trust The Welcome Trust has announced that its Society Awards are now open for applications. Society Awards provide grants of over £30,000 for ambitious and creative projects that engage people of all ages and walks of life with developments in biomedical science on a regional or national scale. Projects should aim to achieve at least one of the following; stimulate interest, excitement and debate about biomedical science through various methods; examine the social, cultural, historical and ethical impact of biomedical science; and encourage new ways of thinking about biomedical science. The scheme is open to anyone with a good idea for engaging people with developments in biomedical science. This might include: mediators and practitioners of science communication; science centre/museum staff; artists; educators; health professionals; and academics in bioscience, social science, bioethics and history. Grants will normally be awarded through organisations, but individuals can apply. The preliminary deadline for applications is the 31st March 2010. Potential applicants are advised to contact the Society Awards office well in advance of the preliminary deadline to discuss a potential application. <http://www.welcome.ac.uk/Funding/Public-engagement/Grants/Society-Awards/index.htm>

BBC Children in Need Small Grants Scheme



BBC Children in Need are inviting not-for-profit organisations working with disadvantaged children and young people 18 years and under to apply for grants of up to £10,000 through their small grants scheme. BBC Children in Need can only fund projects that focus on the differences made (outcomes) to the lives of disadvantaged children and young people. http://www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey/grants/general_grants.shtml

Sign up to our fortnightly e-bulletin by emailing mattl@comfirst.org.uk – follow our funding updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/comfirst

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Ultralight staging

And as far as the big money is concerned...

I said in the last issue that we were due to hear from the Big Lottery in July about the results of their consultation on their last 3 year programme. Well, that meeting happened and we are not much the wiser about what might be available in 2009 -12. All we can say is that we don't expect any announcements till next year, possibly in the spring. Meanwhile there is this grants and loans funding stream called Community Builders. Some of you wanting big money may have already registered your interest with them

<http://www.futurebuilders-england.org.uk/> We, as advisers, are still waiting for briefing on what this fund can do for our halls and how it will work. As soon as I have more to tell you I will do a block email.

Village Hall ▶

Learning from real examples

We have real halls running green technologies in the two counties. I am determined that we should all learn from their experience. We have Weobley village hall in Herefordshire where their photovoltaic panels yielded over £600 worth of electricity in the first year of operation. Over in Worcestershire, there is Dodford village hall where their new wood pellet heating system is now up and running and proving easy to operate and maintain. Also Norton & Lenchwick Village Hall which has recently installed 2 Air to Air heat pumps to provide all the heating for their main hall.

If you are beginning to think about either of these options, please talk to me so I can put you in touch with these pioneers so that you can make decisions based on reality rather than theory.

What's going to give you a Happy New Year in your village hall?

First, you need to define what would mean "happy" for your committee. Money to build a new hall for you or to do major refurbishment? Or maybe just £10K or so for some much needed modification? Or would it be some relief from rising running costs? More people on your management committee to share the burden? Or more groups using your hall, more function bookings? My guess is that for many of you the answer might be "most of the above". Your best chance of finding any of those kinds of happiness depends on you being able to make new year's resolutions based on highly realistic assessments of what's achievable.

So here's my contribution to help you get started on making realistic resolutions...

Money?

If it's big money for a new hall you're after...

Resolution Put plans on the back burner for next year and think of 3 things you can do to make what you've got a little better for the time being.

If you've got one urgent project for £10-15K or a string of improvements needed...

Resolutions Get one quote for the most urgent of your jobs and then contact me to talk funders and tactics

Running costs?

It's going to be a matter of getting your heat more cheaply, using less of it, losing less of it - or all three...

Resolutions Decide which of the three options you can work on. Then contact me about any of your Action options which will cost money you haven't got, to talk about who's got that money and how you might get it.

More committee people?

OK, this is a tough one; no easy answers. But I've never met a committee where there wasn't at least one thing they could try.

Resolution Identify 3 things that may be putting people off volunteering (times of meeting, amounts being asked of anybody who joins, cold and over long meetings) and change one of them.

More use?

Another hard one; you may think you've tried everything. You probably haven't.

Resolutions List all the things that may be putting people off using your hall and change one of them. Find one new way of publicising your events and services.



Community First
Building better communities

For help with village hall matters contact Rob Grunsell on 01432 262972, email robg@comfirst.org.uk



LEADER funding in Worcestershire.

Any Worcestershire hall committees looking for substantial money for refurbishment should read the following. There will be a piece in our next issue about how the same scheme will operate in Herefordshire.

Rural parts of Worcestershire are set to benefit from a new £1.5 million European fund to support local projects.

The Leader scheme is now inviting bids from charities, formally-constituted groups and businesses with project ideas that will benefit the rural areas of Wychavon, Malvern Hills and Wyre Forest districts.

Eligible projects need to meet criteria such as helping rural people to engage in their communities or improving access to facilities in isolated areas. Projects could also improve social inclusion through recreational opportunities or protect and realise the potential of the natural and built environment.

Any organisations that are interested in applying for funds can find more details on the County Council's website at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/leader. The next deadline for Expressions of Interest is Monday 5th February 2010.

The project is funded from the Europe-wide initiative, Leader and will be delivered by Worcestershire County Council on behalf of Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Leader groups exist all across Europe as part of the Rural Development Programme, which will run until 2013.

Full details of the scheme and application instructions are available at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/leader, or interested parties can contact Elspeth Fry on 07540 672066 or at efry@worcestershire.gov.uk

And my own New Year's resolution.

The saddest part of my job – apart from having to tell people I don't know where the money is for what they need to do – is being contacted by committees who have already misspent lots of valuable time discussing money projects. So my resolution has to be..

Find one new way of convincing committees to talk to me before they get started on detailed planning.



Do you need advice on recent changes in legislation, managing finances, working with volunteers or the responsibilities of trustees?

Calling on a wealth of information and experience gained through many years of providing advice and support to the Third Sector, Newsline is here to help, whatever the problem.

Q. We are a registered charity and want to advertise for volunteers and trustees, do we have to pay VAT on our advertising costs?

A. Your charity can advertise VAT-free in any medium that communicates with the public, such as a newspaper or television, providing the advert is placed on someone else's time or space. This means that if someone charges your charity for an advert, for example in their magazine or on a radio programme or for displaying a poster on their premises, they don't have to charge you VAT.

The VAT relief does not cover costs for advertising in your own media - for example in your charity's own magazine, on your own website, or on your own T-shirts etc.

Adverts qualifying for the relief can be on any subject, including staff recruitment. Charities can also purchase pre-printed collecting boxes, envelopes and appeal letters at the zero rate.

To find out more visit
hmrc.gov.uk/charities/vat/purchases



Q. How can I send a large file?

A. Occasionally it is necessary to send a large file to someone but if it is more than 10MB in size you might have problems. You may have tried to email it as an attachment, but if it is more than 10MB it is often rejected by the recipients email system. Or your email system may reject it before it is even sent.

The first consideration is whether you can reduce the size of the file. If it is a MS Office document with some images in it, try to reduce the resolution of the images (see getwithit.org.uk/new-top-tips). Another option is to use WinZip, a commonly used tool for compressing and packaging files for sending (see winzip.com).

If you have not managed to reduce the size below 10MB, then you can copy your file to a website, and allow the recipient to download it from there. There are a number of websites providing this facility for free, for example, transferbigfiles.com.

This site allows you to transfer a file up to 1GB in size. You enter the address of the recipient(s) who will be emailed when the file is ready. By clicking on advanced options you can add a message, and also password protect the file. A word of warning: it will take some time to upload your file, although the recipient should be able to download it much more quickly.

If you have a problem that you would like us to answer on this page, contact Community First on 01684 312741, or email mattl@comfirst.org.uk or to continue the discussion visit our forum at www.talkgroups.org.uk

Q. We have two part time employees but no proper contracts of employment. Where do we start?

A. The Employment Rights Act 1996 requires employers to provide most employees with a written statement of the main terms within two calendar months of starting work. Not all terms are always explicitly agreed in writing but the courts have established that all employment contracts have the following terms included, whether you have one in place or not:

- to maintain trust and confidence through co-operation
- to act in good faith towards each other
- to take reasonable care to ensure health and safety in the workplace

The written statement must include as an absolute minimum:

- your name/your organisation's name
- your employee's name
- the date when the employment (and the period of continuous employment) began
- pay and the intervals at which it will be paid
- hours of work
- holiday entitlement
- entitlement to sick leave, including any entitlement to sick pay
- pensions and pension schemes
- your and your employee's entitlement to notice of termination
- job title or a brief job description
- where it is not permanent, the period for which the employment is expected to continue or, if it is for a fixed term, the date when it will end
- either the place of work or, if your employee is required or allowed to work in more than one location, an indication of this and of your address
- details of the existence of any relevant collective agreements which directly affect the terms and conditions of your employee's employment
- a note giving certain details of your disciplinary and grievance procedures

Q. We need to discipline a member of staff but don't know how to approach this properly?

A. This is a very tricky subject to deal with especially as none of us particularly likes addressing issues about behaviour or performance. For discipline and grievance, all employers should be acknowledging and working to the new code of conduct introduced by ACAS. The guidance they recommend would be the test of fairness applied by any employment tribunal.

We strongly recommend you have a policy in place to deal with both discipline and grievance but if you don't then you should at least do the following:

Take informal action – employers are now strongly encouraged to take all reasonable informal action to resolve disputes before they escalate. Where this has been exhausted or is not appropriate;

Take formal action

- establish facts
- notify employee in writing
- hold meeting
- allow employee to be accompanied
- decide action

Inform the employee of an outcome

- no penalty
- first improvement note
- final written warning
- dismissal or other sanction

Finally, provide an opportunity for the employee to appeal against any decision.

We would always suggest you seek advice at the time. ACAS helpline 08457 47 47 47 is a good place to start given it is free. They will talk you through a process to follow.

NB: If there is enough interest from our customers, HR staff at Community First will happily start an informal HR e-bulletin that alerts you when we become aware of legal changes or best practice advice. This could include generic updates about the issues/topics we are looking at internally which may help your thinking. If this is of interest to you, or you have suggestions about others we could help, please email michelleo@comfirst.org.uk.

Question: How can you create truly sustainable community buildings for the future?

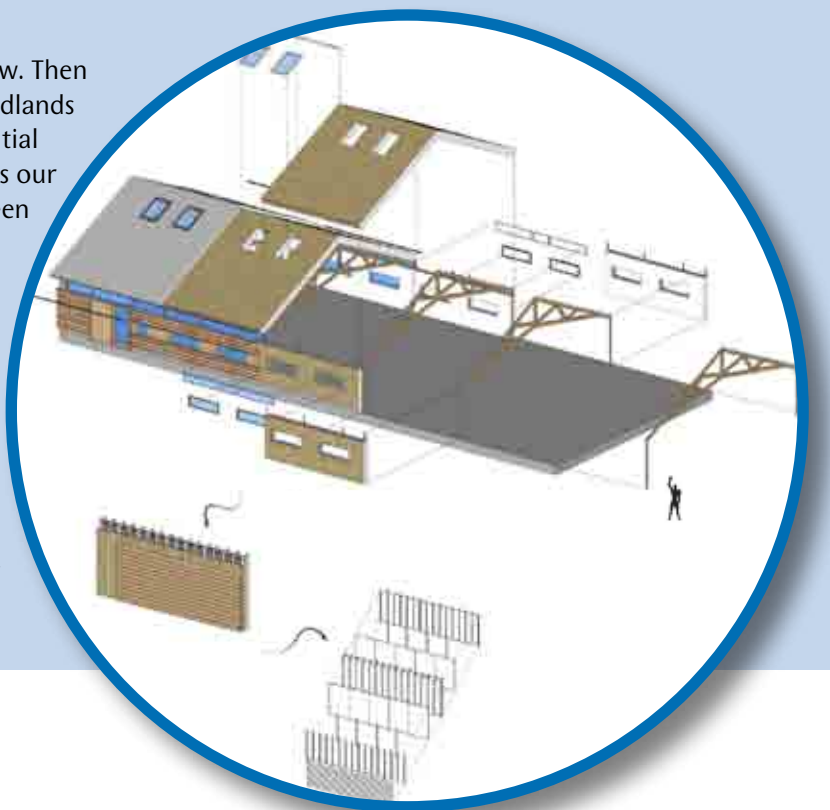
Answer: Mod-e-com

The idea came to me in the early days of my tenure as community buildings development officer. I was looking at yet another very beautiful one-off architects design for a new build village hall, a design with a big price tag which was going to be very difficult to raise money for. And I thought: why do we keep reinventing this wheel? Community halls all need certain predictably sized spaces, the community rooms, the kitchen the toilet, the storage spaces. Why not produce a cleverly flexible modular build system which can meet these predictable space needs, more easily and cheaply and be suitable for elements of self build? And the more I listened to hall committee people talking about the increasing burden of running costs, the more convinced I became that all new halls should aim for the lowest possible carbon footprint. So this meant I wanted a modular build system with the highest possible levels of insulation.

Time passed but the idea didn't go away; it just grew. Then early last year I got £10K from Advantage West Midlands the regional development agency to conduct an initial feasibility study on the idea. Using Herefordshire as our base area, and in partnership with "Architype", green award winning local architects, we set out to test the feasibility of creating and marketing a modular based community building design system which maximised the potential for active community engagement, achieved the highest levels of environmental and running cost sustainability and could be used across the country in a variety of sizes and configurations to meet the widest range of different needs.

Very quickly we discovered that existing modular build technologies hadn't yet been applied to

community building design. So we weren't about to duplicate existing work. Suitably reassured, we then set about producing a draft modular design system on the basis of the highest possible insulation levels – the German "Passivhaus" insulation standard, way ahead of the standards currently being applied in this country. What emerged was a modular panel system, panels that could be produced by local firms, shipped to site and then could be put together and sealed using supervised volunteer and trainee labour. The system would allow client communities to select, from a modular options "menu", the size and space configurations that met their needs; to choose an external finish that matched the building style of their area, to have the chance to be actively involved in construction; and to end up with a



building with running costs 80 -90% lower than a conventional hall.

Then we invited feedback. Potential Herefordshire village hall customers were enthusiastic. They liked the fact that they could be actively involved in all stages of the design and build process; they liked the fact that the build cost could be confidently predicted (freedom from the fear of unfundable cost overruns) We talked to building trades course providers and they could all see how their students could benefit from involvement. We showed the design to village hall advisers from all over England who were attending their national conference. Their feedback forms gave a unanimous response: 100% thought the idea worth pursuing; 100% could see local projects where this idea could be the solution to their building problem.

So, mightily encouraged by these positive responses, we published our feasibility study report on what we are calling Mod-e-com – which you can look at by going to http://www.comfirst.org.uk/files/csb_report.pdf

What do we do next?

We have an original idea with a wealth of potential applications: community buildings, sports halls, changing rooms, local clinics and surgeries and much more. We have a system that can work anywhere in the country using local firms and labour to create buildings that fit with their surroundings. But we need to follow through with detailed designs, to re-examine our provisional costing of £1550 -1600 per square metre for building using only professional labour. We need to look carefully at the savings and costs of using amateur labour in the construction: how much time commitment would real life communities be prepared to put in? We need to be sure the system will deliver the huge running cost savings we predict. We need to build a pilot hall to prove we are right. Last, but by no means least, we need to find the



best organisational vehicle to deliver the system to local customers around the country. Do we need to create some form of social enterprise, a partnership between Architype and Community First?

We are poised to start pursuing the funding to do all this, mindful of the fact that we are in the midst of a funding landscape where money for new community buildings will be very hard to find. We know that our system, whilst being competitive with conventional build, cannot claim to be the cheapest build option. Achieving the level of insulation we are aiming for does cost in terms of initial outlay. There is a crucial argument to be won here about the need for this additional cost outlay to achieve the real long term sustainability so urgently needed by communities and by our planet.

So far, so good. Watch this space. Hopefully we will be back in the nearish future to give you the next chapter in the progress of our very Green and cunning plan.

Rob Grunsell
Community Buildings development Officer

Rural Affordable Housing

Can you afford to live in the Countryside?

Affordability is a big issue for many people living in the countryside, caused by the high cost of open market homes through demand. This is compounded by the shortage of new properties and lower wages for rural workers. The situation is most pronounced for affordable rented accommodation that comprises only 13% of stock

in rural areas compared to 21% in urban locations.

Other challenges include the growing need to build energy efficient housing in areas often lacking mains gas supplies and the need to provide supported housing for an increasingly ageing population.

Who are Rural Housing Enablers?

Community First employs two Rural Housing Enablers who work in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. They are funded by local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (often called Housing Associations).

The role of the Rural Housing Enabler is to identify housing need and help provide affordable housing in rural areas in the two Counties. This involves significant time spent liaising, communicating and educating local communities about the provision of rural affordable housing schemes in terms of the size and location of schemes, and importantly the housing of people with a local connection to the parish.

An important element of the Rural Housing Enablers' work is with Parish Councils and local communities to assess housing need through parish wide housing needs surveys. Whilst secondary data from Housing Waiting Lists and national and regional evidence suggests significant rural housing need, the local surveys are necessary in terms of identifying specific needs and evidencing the justification for building affordable housing schemes.

Why is the provision of Rural Affordable Housing a contentious subject?

Rural affordable housing can be a contentious subject because of NIMBYism, fears that developments will not be for local people and that they will be the 'thin end of the wedge' to much larger developments. The Rural Housing Enablers spend considerable time raising awareness about affordable housing and that the new homes are for allocation to people with a local connection to the parish. One of the more difficult areas relates to the location of sites and the size of development. A key role of the Rural Housing Enablers is to communicate with Parish Councils and individuals, explaining planning and housing policy in relation to the development of exception sites and local allocation policies.

If there is a local housing need, how is a suitable site found?

When the housing needs survey results have been analysed by the Rural Housing Enabler, he provides Parish Councils with a report that includes his professional assessment as

to whether there is a need to build a housing scheme, and if so, the type of dwellings, the mix of tenure and the scale of development. Where the need justifies a new housing scheme the Rural Housing Enabler will then organise a 'village walkabout' with Parish Council representatives, the Area Planning officer and the Development Officer from the nominated Registered Social Landlord. When a suitable site(s) is identified the Rural Housing Enabler will contact the owner and discuss the proposal and give an indication of the land value that the owner can expect from the sale.

What are 'Exception sites' ?

Rural 'exception sites' are small areas of land that have received planning permission exclusively for affordable housing. The sites are normally on land that is within or adjoining existing small rural communities which would not otherwise be released for general market housing. The housing provided on such sites should meet local needs in perpetuity

Did you know

In Herefordshire last year, the average annual income was £20,304 and the average house price was £185,000, pricing many residents completely out of the market. If you are a potential first time purchaser in Herefordshire and you are on average wages, you would need to borrow 9.4 times your income in order to buy an average priced property. In view of the current financial climate it is unlikely that you would be able to get a mortgage without putting down a large deposit on the home.

What is Affordable Housing?

In recent years house prices have risen to such an extent that for many potential first time purchasers on average incomes, they are unable to obtain mortgages, or find rented housing that is within their financial means and has long term security.

In order to help address this housing issue, local authorities have the power to insist that all new housing developments must provide an element of 'affordable housing'.



The generally accepted definition is:

Housing provided by an organisation such as a registered social landlord (also known as Housing Associations) or a local authority, who allocate the homes on the basis of housing need. While the dwellings will normally be made available for rent, they may also include subsidised home ownership, such as shared ownership, where the registered social landlord or local authority retains a continuing interest in the property. Certain low-cost market housing may also be considered as affordable housing where it helps first time buyers, single people, older people, or other low income households, who cannot afford to rent or buy houses generally available on the open market.

Why we are needed;

One village primary school closes every month – and 200 more to close by 2014 – as families priced out of countryside

One primary school is closing every month in rural England – as young families are increasingly priced out of villages and migrate to urban areas where there is cheaper housing.

The National Housing Federation, National Association for Small Schools (NASS) and Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) warned a lack of affordable housing in the countryside for local families on modest wages was fuelling rural primary school closures, which have increased significantly over the last five years.

“The tragedy is that small schools represent one of the most overall effective educational models yet developed. And of all the services that bind communities together the school is perhaps the more significant and the more vital to defend.”

“Quite simply small rural schools are at the heart of sustainable village life.”

They also warned that the problem, which is accelerating,

is now so great that 200 small primary schools in rural England could close over the next five years, as local authorities look to make efficiency savings and streamline the delivery of services.

315,000 people on Housing Waiting Lists in Rural England

The gentrification of much of the countryside has priced out families and young people who support local schools, shops and pubs so vital to traditional village life, with the number of people on waiting lists for an affordable home in rural England has rocketed to 315,000. This is a 23 percent increase over the previous five years.

It is likely that the figure vastly underestimates the true housing need in rural communities, because rural households have not registered their need, and sometimes this is because they do not believe that local affordable homes will ever be built.

100,000 new affordable homes in rural areas needed each year

The National Housing Federation, which represents England’s housing associations, estimates around 100,000 new affordable homes are required in England alone to meet rural housing need over the next 10 years.

The Federation is calling on local housing authorities to draw up action plans to address the housing needs of their communities, and ensure that local villages are sustainable.

Worcestershire Rural Housing Enabler Project – delivering new homes

Since the inception of the Rural Housing Enabler Project in 2001, 226 new rural affordable homes have been built to date on 27 sites across Worcestershire, and a further 357 dwellings on 31 sites are in the pipeline. 226 households now live in decent secure affordable homes, in locations where they want to live by reason of their local connection to that rural community.

The total investment value to the County from the construction of the 226 homes (using an average of £120,000 per property) can be assessed at £27.12m and has provided much needed new jobs for people involved in the building construction industry.

The Housing Association homes have been built to high eco standards that have reduced carbon emissions and reduced energy consumption. Importantly for new residents of these dwellings, there has a significant reduction in fuel poverty.

For more information about rural housing please visit the web page
http://www.comfirst.org.uk/rural_housing

or contact:

Keith Parry (Herefordshire)
01432 262963 (office) 07970 650866 (mobile)

Nigel Potter (Worcestershire)
01684 862373 (office) 07971 853695 (mobile)

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