



**Good Practice**

**Objective**

<p><b>Rural Toolkit approach</b></p>	<p>A mechanism by which the Shropshire Council has chosen to engage with rural communities over future Development Plan Documents. As a supplement to the “normal” planning consultation, involving talks, displays, road shows etc the Council is attempting to undertake a detailed appraisal of the sustainability of place with around 20 rural communities.</p>
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**Detail**

This involves getting together everything the Council has been able to find out about a community, starting with Parish Plans and our own shared evidence base and then asking a range of people from the community to reality check the evidence through a [Community Testing Event](#), with the aid of a colour wheel. People assign colours depending on how strongly they agree or disagree with a headline statement which sets out to describe a community performing well with regard to a number of criteria e.g. being environmentally sensitive.

The use of the [Rural Toolkit](#) has been flagged in the Council’s most recent Corporate Plan as a primary element of the Council engaging with communities. Initially the proposals are to work with around 20 rural communities using the full methodology that has evolved before moving to work with the 16 market towns in the autumn and possibly extending this to neighbourhoods within Shrewsbury beyond that. Resourcing is clearly an issue with such an intense programme of work. The use of the tool and the employment of [Rural Innovation](#) in helping to remodel this to fit Shropshire’s needs has been fundamental in reducing the time taken to deliver on our aspirations. Each event involves up to 30 members of the public, including 3 Parish Councillors and in addition the local Member and last for approximately 3 hours, in evenings or Saturdays depending upon local wishes; light lunches or supper is provided.

What we learn about a community’s needs will be recorded and set down in the Local Implementation Plan (Regeneration Prospectus) and through the LDF money will be captured from agreed new housing development to spend against these needs, demonstrating the lost link between new development and perceived community need.

## Outcomes

The result is a snapshot of the community as viewed overall against the three themes of the Shropshire Sustainable Community Strategy, enabling the local people at the Event to then consider the scale, location, and type of development that might take place in the future, and identify and rank potential community benefits in order of importance. The advantages of this approach are as follows:

- Everyone has the most complete and up to date evidence possible about that community, in terms of what makes it tick;
- The Council will then use that information to help it to make planning decisions that will best benefit that community, including whether villages in the area could be formally identified as community hubs or clusters of communities in planning terms (and thus accepting development);
- The community regeneration officers for the Council will also use that evidence to feed into decision making processes and help identify possible resources;
- The Parish Council will be able to use the information in liaison with local people working on parish plans to develop action plans etc;
- Parish plans themselves will be demonstrated as being useful and as tying very much into decision making processes;
- Partner organisations in Shropshire such as the PCT will be able to use the snapshot evidence and the information about the relative importance of various community benefits and infrastructure needs to help their own decision making processes;
- The Shropshire Partnership will use the information to track outcomes in the short and long term for the Shropshire Sustainable Community Strategy.

**Update – 2012** We have significantly exceeded our targets.

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Project

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