

## 1.0 **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. In August 2000, Gwynedd Council commissioned the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) then North West and North Wales Planning Aid Service (NWPA), to work with Cyfle Ffestiniog, the local regeneration agency, in carrying out a 'Ffestiniog Planning for Real' Project.
- 1.2. The aim of the project was to facilitate wide community participation, using the 'Planning for Real' (\*) technique, in the generation of a Community Action Plan for the Ffestiniog Community Council area.
- 1.3. The idea of the plan was to set out, in simple terms, what improvements the community itself wanted to see – to the environment, community facilities, tourism/leisure attractions, housing provision, the economy, roads and public transport, and in crime and safety – in Blaenau, Manod, Tanygrisiau and Llan Ffestiniog. The idea was also to help make things happen, namely to produce a plan which not only said 'what' people wanted to see, but which spelt out 'when' they wanted to see them and 'who' they thought should be responsible for the necessary action.
- 1.4. The intention was that the results of the project would be fed into the emerging Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan (UDP), the wider regeneration strategies of Cyfle Ffestiniog, and perhaps most importantly, the plans and programmes of all the Council's departments, the National Park Authority, public sector agencies, voluntary community groups and the local business community, which have responsibilities for or an interest in the future of Ffestiniog and its people.

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(\*) Planning for Real (PFR) is a highly participative, 'hands on' consultation technique, developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF). It uses a 3D model, a locally customised pack of option cards, and a simple pin-based 'voting' system, to enable people to make suggestions for and to comment on the improvement of their local area. It also allows the community to prioritise the suggestions made (e.g. now/soon/later), and to identify who should be responsible for making them happen.

## 2.0 PLAN PREPERATION PROCESS

### Introduction

2.1. The Ffestiniog Community Action Plan has been prepared over a period of some 12 months, in three distinct stages: -

- The Planning for Real exercise
- Prioritisation and action planning sessions
- Draft plan consultation exercise

2.2. The approach throughout has been one of informing and enhancing the knowledge of local people, helping them to identify and express their concerns, and above all listening to and faithfully representing those concerns.

### Planning for Real

2.3. A series of five Planning for Real (PfR) events were held in the week beginning November 27<sup>th</sup> 2000, at a range of venues in Ffestiniog. This followed almost three months of preparation, involving community liaison, information gathering, 3D model-making of the area with four local primary schools, community training on the theory and practice of PfR, and an extensive promotional campaign.

2.4. Each event comprised a 3D model-based PfR exercise, together with a series of interactive wallboards addressing a range of local issues, such as the community's views towards the demolition of buildings and the post-demolition use of sites; the future use of the Market Hall in Blaenau; traditional versus modern building materials; and a potential reduction in the size of Blaenau's shopping area.

2.5. The events attracted nearly 400 people drawn from all parts of and groups within the community. Almost 2700 views were registered via the cards and pins placed on the model, and a further 2100 via the wallboards, totalling some 4800 individual ideas and opinions.

2.6. The model-based exercise yielded valuable information on main themes of concern (community facilities, leisure and tourism, local environment) and on what people wanted to see happening. The most popular suggestions focussed on recreational uses e.g. motorbike track, skateboard/rollerblading park, mountain bike trail; crime and safety issues, e.g. police foot patrols, security cameras, car crime; and on local concerns such as keeping post offices open and dog fouling.

2.7. It also highlighted sites/areas where local people felt action was needed, e.g. Market Hall and Diffwys Square (Blaenau), Manod Road, Dolrhedyn, Cae Bryn Coed (Llan Ffestiniog), and particular ideas for particular locations, e.g. skateboard park etc. on the old railway line in Llan, car parking at the old Manod School site.

- 2.8. The wallboard exercise indicated clear community consensus in favour of demolishing redundant buildings; on preferred afteruses (open space, improved roads, landscaped areas, workspaces and tourist attractions); on the future uses of Blaenau Market Hall (indoor market, heritage/arts centre); on the use of traditional building materials; and against reducing the size of Blaenau's shopping area.

#### Prioritisation & Action Planning

- 2.9. Two prioritisation/action-planning events were held in Blaenau Ffestiniog, in December 2000 and January 2001. Their purpose was to make some sense of, and impose some order on, the vast majority of the 2700 comments that were expressed through the PFR exercise.
- 2.10. The events involved 20 people, working in 4 small groups – one per community – facilitated by NWPA workers and Gwynedd Council officers.
- 2.11. The aim for each group was to sift the ideas put forward for locations within their community, and to reject any that were considered unrealistic. The remainder were then prioritised on a now/soon/later basis, and categorised according to which agency or organisation was considered to be the most appropriate to lead the work.
- 2.12. The outcome of the events was a 'draft community action plan' containing 393 separate proposals. This combined the ideas generated by the PFR events under the headings 'what' people wanted 'where', with additional information on 'when' those ideas needed to happen and 'who' might be responsible for making them happen.

#### Draft Plan Consultation

- 2.13. Four public consultation events were held during the week beginning May 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, one each in Blaenau, Tanygrisiau, Manod and Llan Ffestiniog.
- 2.14. Each event centred on interactive displays, setting out the draft community action plan proposals for each of the four communities, together with voting sheets and stickers for people to register their support for or opposition to the proposals.
- 2.15. A total of 145 people attended the events, registering over 2300 'votes'. Of those, over 90% were in support of the action plan proposals.
- 2.16. The consultation provided solid endorsement for the action plan. Only 27 of the 393 proposals were opposed, and of these only 6 attracted significant opposition.

These were omitted from the final plan as they were considered to be unpractical and/or inappropriate.

### 3.0 **COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

- 3.1. The following pages set out the resultant 'Community Action Plan' for Ffestiniog. The Community Action Plan represents the views of the community itself as made known during the plan preparation process.
- 3.2. The Community Action Plan is presented on a community by community basis, and contains key suggestions for individual locations, possible implementation agencies and the priority that the community attaches to each suggestion.
- 3.3. The identification of an agency under the 'possible implementation agency' heading is in no way binding on that agency and is not a guarantee that action will or indeed should be taken by that agency. Equally, the timescales specified for suggestions under the 'action when' heading take no account of available resources, existing work programmes etc.
- 3.4. The hope is that at the very least, the plan will be taken on board by all agencies with responsibilities in Ffestiniog, as a legitimate and widely endorsed statement of community concerns and requirements.
- 3.5. Specifically, all such agencies are requested to: -
  - Give serious consideration to incorporating the plan's proposals into their work programmes;
  - Discuss proposals with potential partner agencies;
  - Allocate resources to relevant proposals;
  - Attach a timescale for implementation of relevant proposals;
  - Provide feedback to the community, either directly or via appropriate representative agencies, setting out their reasoned response – whether positive or negative – to the proposals relevant to their responsibilities.
- 3.6. Obviously, some of the plans/ideas are more mature than others as they have been formed or developed prior to the Planning For Real process. However, it is encouraging that the Planning For Real process has proved that there is community support for these projects.
- 3.7. The success of the Ffestiniog Planning For Real exercise, now and in the future, is dependent on the level of co-operation between the relevant bodies to develop and achieve the plans which have resulted from the participation process and which are set out in the Community Action Plans.

- 3.8. This document does not mark the end of the Planning For Real process but provides a foundation for the future of Ffestiniog that is based on the views of local people. These plans have been highlighted and prioritised by the residents of the Ffestiniog area and therefore provide a true reflection of their aspirations and hopes.
- 3.9. It is hoped that the Community Action Plan, and the ideas contained within it, will be given the consideration deserved. It should provide direction and guidance for all the relevant bodies to encourage and enable practical implementation of the proposals, in order to benefit the area and its people.