

Peter Goodier



25th August 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

Hartlepool Borough Council Electoral Review

I am writing on behalf of the Rift House Neighbourhood Action Plan Forum who would like their proposal of retaining 3 Elected Members for the Rift House Ward, and retention of the existing Rift House Ward Boundary to be fed into the electoral review of Hartlepool Borough Council.

The Rift House Neighbourhood Action Plan boundary covers one of the most deprived areas in Hartlepool and was recently altered in April 2009 to reflect two communities with a common identity. The geography of the Neighbourhood Action Plan (NAP) is covered by two resident groups, the 'Rift House Community Association', and Rift House East Resident Association who have historically operated as separate entities. However through our work on the Neighbourhood Action Plan, the NAP Forum has brought our communities together and we now operate as an umbrella organisation for the whole area.

The NAP Forum works hard to improve the quality of life for all residents within the area and data provided by the local Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit, and the MORI Household Quality of Life Survey has enabled us to identify where the NAP Forum and its partners need to focus their resources to achieve this in our neighbourhood. The NAP document is monitored very closely by Forum members and our annual report for 2009/10 demonstrates that some clear gains have been made over the last few years through the NAP (attached)

Joint working through the Forum has enabled us to reach out to the broader community and elected Members have played a pivotal role by supporting the community to develop and maximise social networks, and encourage the growth and use of local physical resources such as the development of the Rift House Community Building and the development of a Community Garden. The recently refurbished Rift House Community Building in particular has become symbolic of a common shared identity providing a hub of activity for local residents where they can go to socialise, improve health through exercise and weight management classes, learn a foreign language, or get employment and training advice to name but a few services.

However our NAP area is still faced with many challenges and it is our main priority to strengthen our community to ensure they become more involved in decision making and the many opportunities available to participate in community life and improve skills. During this current time of 'austerity' the Forum is of the firm view that it is essential to retain the support of the three ward members to assist us in progressing our priorities for the future and we object to any change in ward boundaries that would result in splitting our community that would clearly undo the good work that we have undertaken over the last few years.

I would therefore be grateful if you could ensure that full account is taken of our views by feeding them into the electoral review process.

Yours sincerely

Peter Goodier
(Vice Chair Rift House Neighbourhood Action Plan Forum)

**Rift House Annual Neighbourhood Action Plan Report April – March
2009/10**

Section 1

Name of Partnership, contact details, budget allocation, and supporting evidence sources:

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| Name of Partnership: | Rift House Community Forum |
| Name of Partnership Chair and Vice Chair: | Cllr Christopher Akers-Belcher Peter Goodier |
| Contact Officer: | Clare Clark (HBC Neighbourhood Manager Central) |
| Contact Telephone Number: | ██████████ |
| Contact Email Address: | Clare.clark@hartlepool.gov.uk |
| Budget Allocation for 2009/10: | WNF – Resident Priority Budget £24, 821 |
| Supporting Evidence Sources 2009/10 | MORI Household Survey 2008 TVJSU employment/crime/housing data |

Section 2

Brief description of NAP Area and Neighbourhood Partnership

Following boundary changes to the Rift House/Burn Valley Neighbourhood Action Plan area in 2009 this NAP area now falls exclusively within Rift House Ward. The NAP boundary encompasses the majority of the Rift House ward, and has a resident population of approximately 4,800 people living in 2,373 households. The area is bordered by the Burn Valley Gardens and Waverley Terrace Allotments and, is served by two active Residents' Associations operating across the area, Rift House East Residents Association, and Rift House Community Association.

The boundary change has had a positive impact on how the Forum functions and operates as a cohesive group to effectively address issues, identify priorities and progress appropriate actions. There is also evidence of increased attendance at Forum meetings during this period with an average of between 11-12 residents at each meeting.

Section 3

Direction of travel: Any notable progress made against outcomes including local residents perception of change /gaps to be addressed

The MORI Survey (2008) identifies the Rift House neighbourhood as one where many residents have lived for five years or more, and the vast majority are either social renters or owner occupiers. Satisfaction with the area is high, and residents report that their quality of life is good. Significant improvements in the health of Rift House residents is also identified in the 2008 survey with 22% of Rift House residents saying they have a long standing illness or disability that limits their activities compared to 39% in 2004. This has now taken the neighbourhood to a level slightly lower than the Borough as a whole (29% in 2008) and in line with the national level (19%)

Confidence levels in Policing also increased during this period. However during the same period there was a significant increase in the fear of crime, declining levels of influence, and only two fifths of Rift House residents compared to 51% town wide were in employment. Priority measures to improve quality of life identified by residents in the survey were: transport (particularly parking provision); issues relating to the environment; and the need for play areas for children/facilities for teenagers.

Section 4

Action Plan 2009/10 – focus of activity/ achievements/outputs during 2009/10 and how they link to outcomes - include case study as an example/ and factors affecting/impacting on performance eg match funding and relationships with partners

Declining levels of influence and the lack of voluntary sector infrastructure in the NAP area focused Forum activity during 2009/10 on the development of community facilities, and building the capacity of local residents groups to deliver services to the community that will be sustainable in the future. Key initiatives included: lighting and environmental schemes to improve feelings of safety and parking on the estate; the further development of the Rift House Community Garden at Waverly Terrace; and the development of a newsletter, along with a number of events held to promote cohesion and reach out to the broader community to ensure information on services available and opportunities for getting involved were broadly disseminated. Investment in training for key community activists was also supported through the Forum including conflict resolution and chairing skills, media training and food hygiene courses.

The Forum continued to invest in its young people over the year by allocating funding to the Youth Forum, and providing support to St Columbas Youth Café. However one of the most successful projects established in 2009/10 was 'The Rifty' - a drop-in facility for young people aged between 8 and 18 that meets

weekly on a Friday evening. The project provides a safe place for local young people to be participate in a range of supervised activities and is run by a team of dedicated volunteers. It attracts between 45 and 60 young people each week, and is highly valued by young people. Measures to ensure that the project is sustained in the future include the establishment of a Board, and the provision of training for volunteers. This has included the OCN accredited Sports Leaders Award and Food Hygiene Certificates. Training in NVQ Level 2 in youth work is currently being investigated.

Input from partners has generally been good and the Forum has been successful in attracting £43,000 of funding from external sources to match their resident priority budget. The area has also benefited from £64k SCRAPT funding to renew the hard surface in Longfellow and Fletcher walks. Work initiated by the Forum to upgrade Catcote shops in 2007 continued during 2009/10 with the help of HBCs Economic Development and Community Safety teams. This has resulted in a further investment of £72,000 in Catcote shops . The overall result is a shopping parade with improved aesthetics where people want to visit to do their daily shop with vacant units being occupied and local jobs being created/sustained.

Section 5

Challenges/Areas for improvement 2010/11

Development of the Masefield Centre is key to making progressing across all outcomes including employment, training and health. As a matter of urgency some thought needs to be given as to how the centre will continue to provide a facility for the local community as NAP funding comes to an end in March 2011.

Housing Hartlepool continues to be an important partner on the Rift House Estate and there are number of examples of joint working with the NAP. However NAP meetings and Forum activities would benefit from a greater input from Housing Hartlepoons capacity building team.

Although a range of courses have been offered from the Masefield Centre to improve learning and skills there is much more to be done on the estate to tackle barriers to employment in conjunction with HBCs Economic Development Team.