Evaluation of the
Community Regeneration Toolkit

Final Report

April 2005

The Tavistock Institute

for

The Welsh Development Agency, Mid Wales Division

Contents

Executive Summary

The Community Regeneration Toolkit, and its predecessor the Market Towns Initiative, is a well-designed, innovative initiative which has in many respects been ahead of its time – in particular in its integration between the social and economic aspects of community regeneration and in its placing of community capacity building at the centre of the intervention. It has had considerable impact in terms of its twin aims of creating new local capacities and capabilities and contributing directly to local area development. It has also given rise to a significant learning and expertise on the ground in communities and in the WDA.

Circumstances have changed over the lifetime of the Toolkit – both because of its successes in developing local capacity, and with the mushrooming of other support for community regeneration from a wide variety of public bodies and initiatives - and new and different regeneration challenges and opportunities now face the WDA in building on CRT to strategically promote community led local area socio-economic development.

Overview
The aim of the Community Regeneration Toolkit is to provide support for community groups to develop local partnerships and implement strategies and action plans that promoted the economic development of their community. Specifically, it offers assistance in the form of revenue and capital grants in addition to a network of consultants with various skills and expertise to contribute to capacity building, training and support for developing partnerships, and the employment of a development officer where appropriate for the community.

The Community Regeneration Toolkit was developed in the context of the WDA Community Regeneration Policy as a flexible approach to working with and through integrated partnership at a regional and local level, so that priorities are agreed and all possible resources are mobilised and commitment enhanced.

At the heart of the tool-kit concept is the notion of moving individual communities over time along a development trajectory through providing appropriate support at each stage. The underlying aim at each stage is to build **capacity**, that is the communities' own abilities to mobilise, identify and address development tasks. The key mechanism at all stages is the use of intra- and extra-community partnerships. In short, the took-kit provides a scaffold within which communities can rebuild.

The Toolkit consists of eight tools arranged on a developmental scale: from seed corn funding to explore appropriate developments in the community, funding for feasibility studies so as to ascertain whether a particular project being contemplated is realistic and sustainable, revenue grants for the hiring of a development officer and running an office, and capital grants for concrete projects thought to be of merit and bringing real benefit to a community.

Namely:

1. Seed Corn Fund
2. Partnership (Revenue)
3. Training/Mentoring (Revenue)
4. Revenue Funding (Revenue)
5. Development Officer (Revenue)
6. Consultancy/Professional Support (Revenue)
7. Sector Based Intervention (Revenue and Capital)
8. Agreed Structural Intervention (Capital)

Evaluation process
The Tavistock Institute has been evaluating the Community Regeneration Toolkit from its inception and this is the Final Report of that evaluation. The approach to the evaluation has been **formative** in its intent, with regular feedback to and dialogue with the communities and the WDA through workshops and other meetings.

Evaluation fieldwork has consisted of visits to all the groups in receipt of funding in 2002 and 2003 interviewing the co-ordinator, members of the Board and conducting focus groups in the community. In 2005 we have conducted a final interview with the co-ordinator and a member of the Board in all the groups. Throughout the three year period, written material on the groups in the form of, for example, quarterly reports and Action Plans have been gathered and analysed, as well as relevant policy documents on regeneration in Wales.

General developments
Over the three years of the Toolkit initiative participating groups have reached increasing levels of sophistication regarding:

- raising funds for projects

- shouldering increased responsibility in their communities

- professionalism

- changes from limited companies to charitable organisations

- working on structure, processes and HR issues

- bring different local groupings together

- establishing a division of labour in the community ('who does what?')

Regeneration and grant context

Toolkit communities have attracted considerable support for their plans and projects from a wide variety of sources, including:

- Objective One
- Tourism Growth Area (TGA)/Wales Tourism Board (WTB)
- Local Authorities
- Community Councils
- Communities First
- Lottery Fund (Heritage Grant)
- Private sponsorship
- Advertising income

Indeed, all groups were very conscious of work going on elsewhere in their area and all made concerted efforts to work with other organisations and/or initiatives in their area. There was a particularly notable improvement over the years in working with Communities First.

Generally group Boards are an important link to other organisations through direct representation, though there can be difficulties with communications at times. Nevertheless relationship with various local partners varies but can on the whole be described as a "working relationship" – some close and some at 'arm's length'.

Benefits of the Toolkit

The Toolkit itself has had many important benefits for the participating community groups. The Toolkit:

- has been a catalyst for change in the community;

- has in most cases made a full time co-ordinator in post possible: co-ordinator have devoted time to develop and manage projects funded by WDA on merit and other sources. This is by most, if not all groups, considered key to success;

- has sometimes also enabled the hiring of administrative and/or other staff;

- has been used consistently to fund feasibility studies; and

- has been used – with varying degrees of success - to employ consultants.

Diversity of groups
There is a great deal of diversity within the groups funded:

- Some groups focus, e.g. on single events, while others are play a wider strategic role in their area.

- Some co-ordinators are very experienced while others are learning on the job and may not have been in post long.

Different support continues to be needed for different groups.

The Co-ordinators
The role of the co-ordinator is central to CRT. The role is variously described as: *"co-ordinates", "makes things happen", "looks for funding", "keeps things together", "organises".*

Co-ordinators' challenges include keeping and knowing their boundaries – 'what you do and what you don't do', service to their Boards, project management, and combating apathy while not raising expectations unduly.

Support from WDA for the co-ordinators has been on the whole good (see, however, comments on WDA/Community Interface below).

The Boards
The Boards of the groups have been seen as: "representing community", "representing organisation", "bringing in a particular skill", "an opportunity to make something happen", and "making people proud of where they live".

Challenges faced by all Board members was the time it demands (a good full time co-ordinator often makes the difference here) and the complexity of the relationships they have to develop and maintain.

External Partnerships
All groups have an array of partners (often synonymous with funders but not always). Relationships to partners vary greatly but in practically all cases, groups would seem to be catalysts for making things happen in the community by bringing various partner organisations together.

Community engagement
Different contexts need to be taken into account but generally the challenges to community engagement have included geographical dispersal of settlements in the areas covered, apathy in the community or distrust of change, and specific histories of relationships between the community and the local authority.

The main method of engagement is through representation on the Board of different sectors of the community, report on progress through newsletters, open evenings, reports in local papers, and public consultations.

Challenges faced

Challenges faced by groups have included:

- Co-ordinating multiple people, groups and initiatives – most working on a voluntary basis or not under the direct control of the group.
- Keeping the momentum going particularly where projects take a long time to come to fruition.
- Being diplomatic and politic in the context of communities' complex dynamics
- The inevitable difficulty of not being able to please everybody.
- Uncertainty with regards to future core funding and sustainability

The WDA/Community interface

As in any human endeavor things have not always gone smoothly:

- Groups would have liked longer build-up/lead-in period and assistance to reach or improve sustainability.
- At times the WDA's uncertainty with regards to funding periods has made it difficult for groups to plan ahead or to retain staff.
- At times groups have been unhappy with the quality of communication from WDA (this applied especially to issues of future funding.)
- Handovers due to staff shortage on the WDA Toolkit Team could have been smoother.

The WDA is (i.e. WDA staff are), however, on the whole considered by groups to be "good", "flexible", "understanding" – and more so than other public bodies the groups deal with.

Impact

When we look at the actual impact of the CRT and its predecessor – the Market Towns Initiative – on local development and on local capacity building we see:

- Communities which have achieved 'critical mass' in terms of regeneration activities and are on a self-reinforcing upwards spiral (typically after a lengthy period of support and several false starts),

- Communities are very lively in regeneration terms with a range of projects happening and planned, and

- Communities which are struggling to capitalise on the regeneration efforts that have been made over the years, or feel they have reached the limits of what might usefully be achieved (the latter are typically quite small communities).

Our overall finding is that while the road will be rocky, and observable progress slow in the early years, long term funding and support for building regeneration capacity does appear to begin to pay off quite substantially in the medium term.

A subsidiary finding is that we continue to learn on an ongoing basis about new ways to continuously improve the quality and scope of support that can be offered for local regeneration initiatives.

Specific impacts of CRT (and MTI) have included:

- Improvements to the appearances of the towns, their facilities, activities and 'offer', and the confidence of local businesses and residents.

- Specific physical improvements such as those to shop fronts and historic buildings generating a 'new and positive feeling' among retailers, property owners and town folk - reducing number of empty shops, increasing values of commercial property, and investment by property developers.

- Important contributions by groups to securing quite major development projects under Objective 1 and other sources, projects which will help underpin the socio-economic viability of the towns for some time to come and projects which represent good and imaginative use of Structural Fund resources.

- 'Things happening' and momentum for change building up. 'Things' that the communities see happening include the physical improvements, festivals and events, increased footfall, building restoration, and pamphlets and newsletters.

- Large, active, enthusiastic and committed Boards, with sub committees for various projects and/or themes, and with a high level of capacity, was often a common factor in achieving the momentum required for ongoing and successful regeneration efforts (though there were examples of quite small, almost executive groups achieving considerable successes).

- The ability of the Board and subcommittees to make links with and have representation from other agencies, such as the Local Authority, is also key to developing a shared vision and common goals for communities.

- Attracting funds from a range of sources, and using match funding to lever in additional funding, has enabled budgets to be drawn together for both small and large projects. The towns where most impact has been achieved have been those that have been particularly effective at accessing funds.

  For example, one town in particular had placed the skills and training agenda centre stage, and this was impacting on the labour market, with companies

and organisations moving there to tap into the availability of a skilled IT workforce. Another community has mobolised the younger inhabitants of a 'forgotten village' to gain support to arrest its decline with new social facilities, housing and business premises using existing underutilised sites and property.

However the sheer length of timescale involved in community and economic regeneration must always be remembered. The greatest successes are to be found in the communities which have been engaged in development processes for a longish time (though of course longevity in itself is no guarantee of group success).

Sustainability and exit
The extent to which sustainability in the sense of exit strategies to non-funded futures is possible in community regeneration is always a moot point. Many of the CRT groups have been working on building sustainability into their activities including revenues from advertising, volunteers running projects, rental and other commercial income from properties acquired and ventures begun, and the search for alternative sources of medium-term funding. At the same time among the participating groups and communities the Toolkit is considered to have started something valuable and important and they consider it would be a unfortunate to 'pull the plug' at this stage. Indeed in our recent interviews with representatives of groups we found a degree of apprehension, frustration and uncertainty concerning the future of Toolkit funding – issues that have now been addressed by the announcement to the groups of the WDA's plans for future support for regeneration:

The WDA's support for regeneration: now and in the future
The role of the WDA is to support strategic socio-economic development. For many years the lack of local community capacity was a particular barrier to growth and innovation in Mid-Wales, and when the then DBRW (now Mid Wales Division of the WDA) began its support for local capacity building through the Market Towns Initiative it was a pioneer in its field and in the region.

Through its own successes and as support for local capacity development has moved into the mainstream of Agency and wider public policy – as reflected in the various Community Strategies for the local authority areas in the region and through important national initiatives such as Communities First and Rural Community Action – the issue of creating a basic infrastructure of empowered local communities has now been to at least some extent addressed.

The issue now for the WDA is increasingly one of how to work **strategically** with this new local capacity in pursuit of socio-economic (as opposed to purely social) development goals. In terms of broader WDA policy and role, this suggests, and we would recommend, a shift to a more explicit and focused policy of support for Community Led Local Area Socio-Economic Development to build on the

success of the Toolkit. We would particularly support and recommend the approach recently developed by the WDA (in dialogue with the evaluation team) of recasting CRT along the lines of:

1. Pro-active targeting by the WDA and its partners of specific areas for intense proactive support for local economic development on the basis of opportunity and need. These areas should receive the most amount of support, both financial an in the form of officer time and expertise.

2. Supporting targeted pilots on key socio-economic issues where communities and their partner organisations have ideas or plans to address some of the Agency's priority regeneration themes.

3. Continuing practical support for community strategies as appropriate *where* other partners are taking a clear lead and responsibility for community regeneration.

4. Phased exit from Toolkit support as groups complete projects or become self-financing, and as other bodies take an increasing role in supporting and sustaining community capacity.

1. Introduction: the Community Regeneration Toolkit and its evaluation

The aim of the Community Regeneration Toolkit is to provide support for community groups to develop local partnerships and implement strategies and action plans that promoted the economic development of their community. Specifically, it offers assistance in the form of revenue and capital grants in addition to a network of consultants with various skills and expertise to contribute to capacity building, training and support for developing partnerships and the employment of a development officer where appropriate for the community.

The Community Regeneration Toolkit was developed in the context of the WDA's Community Regeneration Policy as a flexible approach to work with and through integrated partnership at a regional and local level, so that priorities are agreed and all possible resources are mobilised and commitment enhanced.

At the heart of the Toolkit concept is the notion of moving individual communities over time along a development trajectory through providing appropriate support at each stage. The underlying aim at each stage is to build *capacity*, that is the communities' own abilities to mobilise, identify and address development tasks. The key mechanism at all stages is the use of intra- and extra-community partnerships. In short, the took-kit provides a scaffold within which communities can be re-built.

The difficulties involved in sustaining communities in rural Wales are well rehearsed and have been variously (and rightly) ascribed to the decline of agriculture and other traditional industries, limited entrepreneurial culture, decline of traditional family tourism, and, more generally, periferality and a 'low wage/low skill' economy.

Nevertheless, Mid-Wales enjoys considerable advantages which can be harnessed to local social development including a picturesque, and in places, spectacular landscape; many attractive, if sometimes neglected, towns and villages (built environment); an often enviable quality of life, linked to (among other things) outdoor activities; low pollution; good schools; social stability; low crime rates; supportive communities; a thriving voluntary sector and a distinctive linguistic culture all within (often socially, if not economically) vibrant communities with high levels of social capital.

Based on previous experience under the Mid-Wales Market Towns Initiative (see below) and elsewhere, and following from the WDA's Community Regeneration Policy, the resources provided in the Community Regeneration Toolkit are designed to encourage local initiatives to exploit these advantages while overcoming these long standing difficulties. In this context sustaining the viability of local communities and thereby the range of life choices available to local people, is a question of achieving or maintaining social and economic 'critical

mass' in individual towns and villages, as well as in the broader area. Actual performance supported by the tool-kit will tend to vary considerably depending on local circumstances (particularly local leadership), previous partnership histories and specific local authority and community capacity, competence and leadership. In some cases communities most in need will prove most difficult to mobilise.

Market Town Initiative (MTI)
The Community Regeneration Toolkit (CRT) grew out of the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) funded by the Welsh Development Agency, operating in Mid Wales between 1997 and 2000.

The Market Town Initiative was launched by the DBRW (now the WDA) in November 1996, offering a package of advice and funding for community led projects. Towns and villages across Mid Wales were invited to bid for £90,000 revenue funding over three years to carry out development programmes in their communities. Ten very different towns in nature and dynamics were successful. Each community had to come up with a united vision for the three years and demonstrate a partnership approach to carrying out projects. Of the ten towns involved in the initiative, nine appointed Development Officers and a wide variety of projects were undertaken with a view to improving the local economy and building capacity in the towns concerned.

The Initiative was evaluated and monitored on an on-going basis by the Tavistock Institute. Generally that evaluation confirmed the usefulness and value of such initiatives at that time, and, in particular, the value of:

- local partnership;

- community led activities;

- modest revenue funding; and

- the employment of dedicated development officers.

The evaluation also made a number of recommendations which were subsequently incorporated into the design of the Community Regeneration Toolkit (see below), including:

- Promoting partnerships through WDA funding
- Introducing a preparatory phase
- Needs based selection criteria
- Differentiated support and funding packages
- Qualification rather than competition
- More organisational development training and support
- Transitional role for management organisations
- Support and supervision for development officers
- Higher level of professional expertise
- Achieving critical mass in regeneration
- Responding to more fundamental challenges: industry, attractions, infrastructure and employment
- Joint interventions with other public sector bodies

On the basis of these conclusions and recommendations the WDA felt that the MTI type intervention should only be one instrument with a bigger tool-kit of policy interventions required to promote community regeneration – hence the Community Regeneration Toolkit.

The Community Regeneration Toolkit

The Community Regeneration Toolkit consists of eight tools arranged on a developmental scale of sorts starting from seed corn funding to explore appropriate developments in the community, funding for feasibility studies so as to ascertain whether a particular project being contemplated is realistic and sustainable, revenue grants for the hiring of a development officer and running an office and capital grants for concrete projects thought to be of merit and bringing real benefit to a community. A list of consultants is attached to the Toolkit where various expertise of potential use to communities was provided.

The Tool-kit includes 8 core tools as a mechanism for the delivery of a community regeneration strategy. These tools are summarised in the table overleaf –

Table: The 8 tools of the Community Regeneration Toolkit

	Tool	Purpose
1	Seed Corn Fund	To aid communities in the development of the local partnership and to develop their future strategy
2	Partnership (Revenue)	The provision of support for the development of partnership groups
3	Training/Mentoring (Revenue)	To provide basic organisational development training and support to community groups
4	Revenue Funding (Revenue)	To provide direct revenue funding for various costs and studies
5	Development Officer (Revenue)	To provide communities that show a clear need with funding to employ a Development Officer
6	Consultancy/Professional Support (Revenue)	To provide appropriate Consultancy/professional support
7	Sector Based Intervention (Revenue and Capital)	To build actions centred around specific sectors
8	Agreed Structural Intervention (Capital)	To provide communities with strategic capital focussed expenditure

The 8 core tools with the toolkit were delivered at the different stages of the Community Regeneration process featured in the Agency's Community Regeneration Policy. Although most of the tools can stand alone, normally communities would be offered a package of support involving multiple tools (e.g. partnership and revenue support and training).

In addition, workshops and events were held for the duration of the Toolkit initiative so that the various groups could network and learn from each other as well as providing a continuous monitoring and evaluation of progress. The groups receiving funding through the Toolkit also had access to a designated officer of the Regeneration Team of the Welsh Development Agency Mid Wales Division.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Toolkit was its emphasis on socio-economic development – with a particular emphasis on the social – as part of

capacity building regarded as essential for securing the future prosperity of communities in Wales. Thus the Toolkit is designed to address a variety of communities who have very different levels of need and development experience. Selecting the right Toolkit elements and creating effective external partnership strategies would be critical to specific interventions.

Evaluation and the evaluation process

Given this tool-kit conception, the associated evaluation was formative in design and focused on process, and specifically on:

a) supporting the capacity development process,

b) promoting learning between and across communities regarding successful development strategies,

c) appropriately identifying and assessing progress at each stage of community development, and

d) supporting the WDA in deciding when and how communities can be supported in moving on from one development stage to another, and to eventual exit from the support mechanism.

An Interim Report on the Roll Out of the Community Regeneration Toolkit was made in May 2003 and concluded that the roll out had been successful and had been welcomed by the communities and by the WDA's regeneration partners including the local authorities. A number of recommendations were made for further improvement at that time, most notably:

- There was a minimum set of adjustments, essential for a wider roll-out of the Community Regeneration Toolkit. These related to:

    o increasing the flexibility of the Toolkit in terms of implementation,

    o provision of guidelines and more general guidance for use of the Toolkit,

    o more information about other funding mechanisms and how the Toolkit link to these,

    o clarifying selection criteria, and

    o redefinition of the use of consultants.

    These suggested adjustments were subsequently acted on.

- There were also some wider issues identified at that time which the WDA was able to address to some extent but remain live issues for the evolution of the Agency's community regeneration policy:

  o Partnerships with other stakeholders and particularly Local Authorities had a key role in the implementation and wider roll out of the Toolkit. In general, partnerships provide the opportunity to work at a strategic level and facilitate the delivery of appropriate and integrated support packages to participating towns and areas. Some partnerships appear to be working well, while others present opportunities for improvement.

  o At an operational and community level, partnership working should be reflected in joint decision and ownership between Local Authorities and WDA. Ideally, a nominated local authority officer, WDA regeneration executive/area manager and the development co-ordinator could form a working triad, ensuring integration between policies, statutory initiatives and community based activities and projects in each case. For a variety of reasons this was often proving hard to establish in practice.

  o In terms of delivering in partnership, there are broader issues of capacity building and continuing professional development to be considered. In particular, this concerned both the nature and content of community regeneration itself and the skills required to work successfully in partnership, especially with regards how to gain positive leverage over partner agendas. Developing and nurturing such skills is an ongoing OD challenge for the Agency.

The evaluation process
The Tavistock Institute was commissioned to monitor and evaluate the Community Regeneration Toolkit in a competitive tender by the Welsh Development Agency Mid Wales Division starting in March 2002. The Community Regeneration Toolkit was then a newly launched Mid Wales initiative, growing out of the previous Market Towns Initiative, and was to last for the duration of three years.

This Draft Final Report (March 2005) marks the end of the evaluation period and indeed the formal period of funding initially sanctioned for the Community Regeneration Toolkit – although as will be obvious in the course of this report, it will live on in a revised shape and form through continued work of the Welsh Development Agency Mid Wales Division.

This study is an evaluation of the Community Regeneration Toolkit and not the performance of the individual groups receiving funding through it. Feedback has been provided throughout to the WDA and to the groups in meetings and

workshops and in this sense, the evaluation has been **formative** in nature. This report, however, adds a further summative dimension to the work.

The evaluation fieldwork has consisted of annual visits to all the groups in receipt of funding in 2002 and 2003, interviewing the co-ordinator, members of the Board and conducting focus groups in the community. A guided tour of the area on foot or by car provided a forum for looking at problems being addressed, changes already made and discussing areas of opportunity and / or concern. These visits took between half to one day (dependent on the size and nature of the area covered by a particular group). The aim of these visits was to review the work and experiences of the participating groups over the previous year throwing light on how the Toolkit was being used "at the coalface".

In 2005, a co-ordinator and a member of the Board in all the groups were interviewed by phone in conversations lasting between 30 to 90 minutes each. These interviews were more explicitly focused on the Toolkit itself, its successes and failures, and what would be needed in practice to regenerate communities in Mid Wales.

Throughout the three year period, written material on the groups in the form of e.g. quarterly reports and Action Plans has been gathered, as well as relevant policy documents on regeneration published by the Welsh Development Agency, The Welsh Assembly and various other institutions in the country. Regeneration literature has also been consulted on a wider basis to inform our views.

The Tavistock Institute has as part of the evaluation process contributed to several workshops with the groups receiving funding from the Toolkit and the WDA Community Regeneration Team in order to variously encourage interaction between the groups and the WDA and to feed back and explore findings of the evaluation so as to aid the further development and steering on the initiative.

Interim Reports were produced in October 2002 and August 2003 in addition to more formal meetings with the WDA discussing progress and points of improvement and learning.

The changing landscape of community regeneration in Wales (see Section 2 for further discussion) has affected the period of evaluation, as has the evolving political and strategic environment of which the Community Regeneration Toolkit and the Welsh Development Agency form part. We attempt to take these changes into account in the following pages, make sense of them and suggest where the biggest impact in regenerating Mid Wales might be made by the Agency in the future (see especially Section 5).

The purpose of the evaluation final report
The purpose of this Final Report is to summarise the lessons learnt in the course of the three years of the implementation of the Community Regeneration Toolkit, identify scope for improvement, discuss areas where real leverage may be had in terms of regenerating communities and what implications this has for the Welsh Development Agency in Mid Wales.

It is envisaged that this Final Report will be distributed to all the groups in receipt of funding through the Community Regeneration Toolkit and we would like at the outset to acknowledge and thank the many people we have talked to and consulted with in the course of the evaluation for their patience, time and valuable thoughts. Please note that the views and recommendations in the following pages are not, however, to be attributed to any single person consulted during this process but are the responsibility of the Tavistock Institute alone.

Overall assessment of the Community Regeneration Toolkit

The Community Regeneration Toolkit, and its predecessor the Market Towns Initiative is a well-designed, innovative initiative which has in many respects been ahead of its time – in particular in its integration between the social and economic aspects of community regeneration and in its placing of community capacity building at the centre of the intervention. Its has had considerable impact in terms of its twin aims of creating new local capacities and capabilities and contributing directly to local area development. It has also given rise to a significant learning and expertise on the ground in communities and in the Agency.

Circumstances have changed over the lifetime of the Toolkit – both because of its successes in developing local capacity, and with the mushrooming of other support for community regeneration from a wide variety of public bodies and initiatives - and new and different regeneration challenges and opportunities now face the WDA in building on CRT to strategically promote community led local area socio-economic development.

2. Background: a changing regeneration landscape

The mushrooming of community regeneration initiatives and Toolkit groups' responses

Multiple regeneration initiatives are now being implemented throughout Wales. Plans for local communities have been developed by various agencies usually and rightly with a central role for local authorities, including Communities First, Tourism Growth Area Action Plans and Rural Community Action. The proliferation of these over recent years has created a danger of duplication and lack of co-ordination. On the more positive side, it has also presented a great opportunity for leverage, combinations of resources, specialisation, and real benefits for local communities and individuals.

This is the environment to which the Toolkit has needed to adapt itself over its operational period and the mechanism for ongoing implementation of the Toolkit within such a changing and complex context was constantly under consideration throughout the lifetime of the initiative and reflected in the evaluation and our ongoing feedback to the groups and the WDA and its partners.

In general, the mechanism for aligning with other bodies has been through consultation, partnerships and plans for local communities. A great deal has improved in this respect during the lifetime of the Toolkit but it remains a priority for the Welsh Development Agency to work even closer with stakeholder agencies in a bid to avoid duplication, encourage synergy, and maximise the opportunities being presented. The key agencies here include the local authorities, the voluntary sector, the further education colleges and other training providers, and the Wales Tourist Board (WTB).

By the end of the three year funding period of the Community Regeneration Toolkit, the various groups receiving funding through it have also managed to make use of additional funds available through the European Union Objective One, the Tourism Growth Areas (TGA), the Wales Tourist Board (WTB), local authorities, the Lottery Fund (Heritage Grant), the Forestry Commission and various National Parks in addition to private sponsorship, rental income and advertising on leaflets and newsletters produced.

Community Councils and Communities First have in many places become key partners. The increased sophistication of the Toolkit groups in terms of partnership working and leverage of funding is commendable and shows great promise for the future regeneration of Wales. This is said in recognition of the fact that the groups have worked very hard on securing this additional funding and have had to overcome a great many hurdles and show real ingenuity in order to do so.

All the Toolkit groups have become increasingly conscious of work going on elsewhere in their area and frequently seem to be the body pulling the various

threads in the community together in a concerted effort emphasised by the WDA from the outset to work with other organisations and/or initiatives in their area. There was a particularly notable improvement in the last year of the Toolkit in working with Communities First.

The Boards of Directors of the groups has been an important link to other organisations through representation – although this could have been used to an increased effect through improved communication. The quality of the relationship with various local partners has varied but can on the whole be described as "a working relationship" – some close and others more at "arm's length".

Growth and decay
In the last year in particular, the groups worked on organising and formalising their structures for delivery. Boards now usually consist of several project or area oriented sub-groups and the relationship between the co-ordinator and the Board is more tried and tested. Ultimately, most of the groups have found their feet and managed to get themselves organised to get things done. The increased professionalism of the groups in the course of the three years is impressive and bodes very well indeed for the future.

This is not to say, however, that the picture is entirely rosy. One or two of the groups have folded in the course of the three year period. Others soldier on but with minimum impact despite years of funding from the WDA and/or other agencies. While recognising that regeneration is a long term process then there is some concern here about the efficient spending of public money which the WDA needed to face head on.

Implications of change
The Market Towns Initiative and CRT were cutting edge initiatives designed to address rural regeneration. Subsequently, effectively in the lifetime of CRT, regeneration has become mainstream, with a range of agencies wishing to work in the area and fund initiatives, and regeneration has become central to the activities of local authorities. This has implications for the practice of rural regeneration by the WDA, the orientation of staff and the organisation, especially in terms of the way in which the Community Regeneration Toolkit, and the requirements of implementing it, align with Community Strategies, Tourism Growth Areas and Communities First.

In short, the expectation on regeneration initiatives *sponsored by the WDA* in terms of contribution to economic development might now be said to be higher than ever before.

3. The implementation of the Community Regeneration Toolkit

The implementation of the Toolkit was a dynamic process and gave rise to considerable practical learning – much of which, as we indicated in the Introduction above, was acted on as part of a continuous improvement process during the life of the initiative.

The initial selection process

The Toolkit got off to a good start and succeed in mobilising interest and commitment from a wide variety of individuals and groups.

However, there were some difficulties with the selection process concerning the way in which partners from public bodies were involved. It was felt that neither Local Authorities nor the voluntary sector were sufficiently involved, resulting in initial difficulties with aligning with other initiatives and activities. Further, the criteria on which the groups were chosen by the WDA was not always fully clear to the WDA's partners in the public and community sector in Wales. These factors may have to some extent limited the support that the initiative received from other bodies at start up.

Learning points

A number of key principles which should inform the selection for any initiative such as CRT were identified in dialogue between the WDA and the evaluation team:

- Decisions about selection should be made in partnership (i.e. shared) with other agencies, on a best information basis;

- Buy in and joint ownership of the rationale and process for selection needs to be established at the outset;

- The potential for the initiative to align with other initiatives in the area/town should be considered; and

- Selection can be based on need or potential and this basis should be central to deliberations in any selection processes.

The implementation of the Toolkit design

Overall, our informants have made many positive comments about the design of the Toolkit, including:

- the acknowledgement of different development stages;

- flexibility in terms of tailoring to different communities; and

- the ability to contribute significantly to community regeneration within Wales.

"The Toolkit has been essential to the development of our area." (Board Member)

This is not to say that there were not areas that needed improvement: the identification of such areas and subsequent action were an important part of the evolution of the Toolkit as an initiative (see above). Nevertheless, the concept of the Toolkit as a process, allowing for different assistance for different communities at different stages, makes the Toolkit flexible and well suited to a wide range of communities engaged in regeneration. This is a real strength of the Toolkit.

"The WDA through the Toolkit has been very patient and flexible." (Co-ordinator)

"The WDA has been flexible and suitable to our purposes. This has been very useful". (Co-ordinator)

"It [The Toolkit] has provided flexibility for core work and has allowed us to get funding from other sources".   (Chair of Board of Directors)

However, this flexibility was not always exercised in practice in the first two years of the initiative and the perception prevailed among funded groups that the Toolkit was being more rigidly executed by the WDA than its design warranted. This was evident in:

- what some saw as too much bureaucracy in forms to fill in and 'hoops to jump through';

- a tendency (it was felt) for group action plans to be regarded as blueprints rather than working live documents;

- in the requirement to become limited companies without regard to whether other models might be more appropriate to a particular group or community; and

- in not allowing for easy leaps between stages (e.g. consultancy at the beginning of a project as well as toward the end of it).

Although a few of the groups felt the reporting back process of the WDA was needlessly complex then these were in the minority – and tended to be smaller groups harbouring perhaps less experience than some of the others.

We take up these questions of implementation of Toolkit design here under the headings of Limited Liability Companies, Flexibility versus Structure, Use of Consultants, Information Provision, and Risk.

Limited liability companies
The establishment of a limited liability company as the model selected for forming partnership groups has continued to be problematic for some of the groups. While this makes it easy administratively and financially, this is only one model of development and may not best meet the needs and circumstances of the local community. Other models may be of a more temporary nature, i.e. groups that form for particular projects or tasks and have an identified lifetime or which have an 'natural' finite lifespan. Some of the more established groups are also finding now after three years that having charitable status suits their purposes better than a limited liability company.

"The issue of pushing the groups to setting up as limited companies may not have been appropriate." (Co-ordinator)

"The WDA spent a great deal of money setting us up as a limited company. … But we and the WDA spent a huge amount of time and effort on this – and we really used up all our public credibility while doing it. … [We] should have been pushing on with projects". (Vice Chair of Board of Directors)

Flexibility versus structure
While the need for more flexibility was mentioned by many, it was countered by the need for more information to guide use of the Toolkit and implementation. This highlights the double bind that such community based development tools often encounter - a general, non-prescriptive approach is regarded positively, as it gives community groups maximum freedom to proceed as they see best. However, the need for targeting, more information about 'how to do it', and more support during the process is also clearly needed. Finding the balance between these two competing needs was a challenge for the Toolkit.

This balance improved, however, over the three years and by our last round of interviews, many people commented that it was a great deal clearer to them now what the Toolkit was all about than at the outset. But there is scope for a further clarification of aims and focus of the Toolkit.

> "At the beginning, WDA aims and objectives were not clear enough. It's got a bit better now – but there is still some way to go." (Chair of Board of Directors)
>
> "They have always been very flexible. But also perhaps slightly haphazard … which is slightly worrying." (Co-ordinator)

Use of consultants
The list of consultants attached to the Toolkit has also been very useful to the groups receiving funding. These were used for setting up groups – as in creating Articles of Association and so on as well as for human relations and staff management advice as the groups developed over time. The HR consultants Blue Apple was mentioned by several groups in particular in the last round of interviews as having been particularly useful as groups maturing felt the need to formalise their structures and contracts with staff and partners.

Others reported more mixed experiences of consultants feeling that they had not always grasped or provided exactly what they were after. It was originally intended in the Toolkit design that consultants be used when a significant or major intervention is required. However, in practice, they were on occasion being used for a range of one-off assignments which did not necessarily support the development process in a particularly effective way. For example, consultants may be unfamiliar with the context and considerable time needs to be spent getting them up to speed, there may be a lack of continuity, a sense that they are not concerned about the community, and opportunities to build up and work with local expertise is not being maximised.

On the whole, however, the access to expertise the groups themselves do not possess has when properly used been invaluable and a fundamentally good part of the Toolkit.

Information provision
Given that the funding context in Wales has been constantly changing over the past three years, the flexibility of the Toolkit would also have been enhanced if it were able to describe in more detail the grants and other methods of delivery that are used by the different WDA departments. These could also have been integrated with in formation on other support mechanisms, such as funding from different sources.

Risk
The tension in expenditure of public money is how to balance the creativity, risk and entrepreneurship associated with any community regeneration project, along with accountability and audit controls. Essentially, this highlights the question of how a public body, such as the WDA supports community ventures and projects that are inherently risky.

In the course of the three years, and over the past year in particular, our interviewees felt that it had become clearer to them what the WDA will fund and what it won't fund. Risk should be accepted and learning through failure be openly appreciated and allowed for – and it was felt that the WDA was fairly understanding of this.

One interviewee from the public sector early on in the evaluation noted that the LEADER initiative is a more risk capital oriented enterprise with more acceptance of failure than the Toolkit and that an incorporation of this acceptance of failure as learning would improve the Toolkit. Others felt that the WDA had balanced risk fairly successfully.

To an extent, the issue of risky projects was solved through extensive use of the Toolkit for the funding of feasibility studies for complex and inherently risky projects. This aspect of the Toolkit is much valued by the groups and has helped enormously with intelligent planning for larger projects – as well as abandoning projects before embarking on costly expenditure as they have not been deemed feasible. On occasion feasibility studies may have been used as objective opinion when Boards could not agree on the most appropriate course of action, an important *process* contribution. It would also seem that doing a feasibility study before embarking on a major investment has become the norm among the groups – a welcome and positive development demonstrating the maturity and professionalism that has developed in the Toolkit groups over the period.

Community engagement

There was ongoing throughout the lifetime of the Toolkit, a concern about how to achieve and maintain the confidence of the community, especially where there was a lack of continuity regarding personnel and funding. Opportunities to address this were identified, e.g. at workshops, and included getting small projects going quickly so that "early wins" could be had as well as ongoing marketing and promotion of the Board and what they were doing.

Challenges to community engagement included geographical dispersal of settlements in areas covered by single groups, general apathy in the community, distrust, previous history of groups coming and going without leaving much trace and lack of confidence in local authorities. Both co-ordinators and Board members talked about the challenge that lies in getting people in the community involved. The challenge is twofold – that of the group proving itself to the community and earning trust as well as people in general taking pride in their communities and wanting and having the time to contribute in some way.

The main method of engagement used by the groups has been through representation on the Board of different sectors of the community, reporting on progress through newsletters, open evenings, reports in local papers and ascertaining what the community wants through public consultations.

Groups that struggled more getting projects up and running had more complaints of the difficulty of engaging the community – be it through geographical dispersal of settlements covered, depopulation of area or general apathy. It is difficult – impossible in fact - to determine a causal relationship here, but the relationship is certainly there.

Interestingly, groups that have been doing very well during the lifetime of the Toolkit and managed to get ambitious projects successfully off the ground were finding themselves in the last year of the initiative that they had "taken their eyes of the ball" – to use one informant's turn of phrase – in terms of community engagement. At least three of the groups attributed their eventual realisation of this to the WDA emphasis on groups establishing self-evaluation processes and consequently were already setting up measures attempting to remedy.

It would seem then that the more successful Toolkit groups go through a cyclical pattern of intense community engagement identifying worthwhile projects, followed by focused activity by a few committed individuals to realise that and during that more rigorous implementation period engage less with the community. As long as groups are aware of this pattern and a relatively good balance is maintained – particularly when new projects get identified - then this is not necessarily a problem.

> "We identify a project, developmental phase kicks in, then projects take on a life of their own and the idea is that they become self-sustaining. We have taken our eyes off the community in the mean time. Through consultation and involvement we have realised this and are remedying this and it is something we hope to redress this year."
> (Co-ordinator)

Working in partnership

Perennial issues regarding working in partnership continue to re-emerge in a fashion similar to that found during Market Towns Initiative. Getting local partnership members to take ownership of and responsibility for project tasks, managing relationships between local authorities and the partnership, as well as providing leadership and direction with strategic priorities all remain a constant activity of the Boards of Directors and the co-ordinators.

Partnerships such as the Toolkit groups need to be constantly in consultation with their communities - getting feedback, assessing need and keeping their finger on the pulse. With some of the more established there is the sense that they are a bit disassociated from their communities. Some partnerships are continuing to find their feet, and struggle with internal dynamics and organisation issues. This in fact goes for "older" as well as "newer" partnerships. However, it is essential that new groups in particular are supported with capacity building and

advice in their initial years. Some of the "older" groups still struggling are often dealing with a complex reality needing a larger intervention than that they have the capacity to make.

All the groups funded by the Toolkit have an array of partners they work with. Relationships to partners vary greatly but in most cases, groups would seem to be catalysts for making things happen in the community by bringing various organisations together. This may involve a small event set up once a year or an implementation of a town plan and everything in-between. This is a great achievement, one that was emphasised greatly in the Toolkit, and one that would seem to have born rich fruit.

Liaison between partners happens in formal and informal settings. For example some WDA staff are involved in local Objective 1 and 2 partnerships and community strategy partnerships. At an informal level, partnerships are supported by officers meeting at different forums and exchanging information as the need arises. But partnerships would seem to also have moved on from such relative informality to a somewhat more structured notion that certain partners need to be kept on board for certain projects. Tapping into community strategies, as many groups have done, is a good example of this and represents a more – and in our opinion better - structured approach, at a county and sub-county levels essential for long term planning and ensuring the inclusion of appropriate stakeholders.

A couple of interviewees early on in the evaluation noted that partnerships that do work well are often based more on personalities and existing relationships, rather than structured partnership working. It is these relationships that provide the basis for whether "things get done" or not. This highlights the need for partnerships to become institutionalised and not reliant on whether officers "get on".

In terms of the Toolkit and its effectiveness, good partnership working at a strategic level has implications for ensuring an appropriate and integrated support package is delivered to participating towns and areas.

Networking and communication

Networking between groups took place in the events and workshops organised by the WDA Community Regeneration Team sometimes with the participation of the Tavistock Institute. These events were unanimously welcomed by all the group as having added a great deal to the Toolkit. Networking events were, however, deemed to have been of varying quality – although interestingly, sessions deemed of little value to some were considered extremely useful by others. This is probably due to the variety of groups within the Toolkit (discussed further below) and how difficult it is to meet everybody's needs under such circumstances.

Web resources
Early on in the programme, in a September 2002 workshop and noted in the October 2002 interim report, it was considered important that the development officers had a web-based forum to share information with each other, discuss issues and solutions and receive information from the WDA. The evaluation team saw an advantage in this for the success of the evaluation as well as it would serve as an ideal forum to post information related to the evaluation such as materials used in workshops, reports for feedback or comment, evaluation resources and supporting documentation. Initial contacts were held with rural.net but the web-base forum unfortunately never came to fruition.

That this was a missed opportunity was highlighted by informants who felt that communication between the groups had been concentrated on the workshops to the exclusion of other approaches. There could have been more scope for learning between the groups with simple measures such as a web-based forum or – as happened to a small degree through the workshops – visits to other groups to see what they were up to first hand. Learning between the WDA Community Regeneration Team and the groups was also mentioned by some of the more established and successful groups in particular. There has been less use of expertise built up over time by groups – and perhaps especially co-ordinators – than there might have been and there is scope for the WDA to further draw on such knowledge more strategically in the future –to the benefit of all concerned.

The role of the co-ordinator

The Toolkit has made the biggest impact through making the post of a full time co-ordinator in post possible where appropriate through funding of salary and core office costs. By most – in fact all - accounts, this is the basis on which all other developments rest as a paid co-ordinator can devote time to develop and manage projects in collaboration with the Board of Directors – projects funded by either the WDA on merit or from other available sources.

"We wouldn't be where we are today if it hadn't been for the Toolkit." (Chair of Board)

"The Toolkit is our lifeline." (Co-ordinator)

"Having core funding through the Toolkit gives the co-ordinator the time to concentrate on getting on with the business of the group." (Board Member)

"The money is essential to fund a co-ordinator – without a co-ordinator then we can't do it – forget it." (Co-ordinator)

The core funding of a co-ordinator and an office from the WDA Toolkit is considered its most important attribute and key to any successive wins and developments. It needs to be made clear, however, that from our own observations, a co-ordinator in place is not a guarantee for success.

It is clear, however, that co-ordinators have become increasingly savvy in using the multiple sources of funding available for regeneration in Wales. This is an important outcome from the activities within the Toolkit. This remains by most accounts the most time consuming, difficult and anxiety provoking task of the co-ordinator.

A range of issues and challenges that co-ordinators face were identified during fieldwork and interviews. The lack of continuity of funding creates a great deal of uncertainty and leads to co-ordinators leaving their post if a more permanent job becomes available.

> "It is difficult to plan due to the short term of the funding. It is difficult to communicate with the other groups as officers change and again the funding is short term."
> (Co-ordinator)

Questions regarding funding sources, how they can be accessed, what are the criteria, and whether they are relevant to the project have been continuously asked by co-ordinators.

> The co-ordinators interviewed described their role in various ways. Here is a flavour:
>
> "I am Harry Potter!" (Co-ordinator)
>
> "I act as lubricant to the whole machinery." (Co-ordinator)
>
> "I'm a gopher!" (Co-ordinator)
>
> "I am a friendly face." (Co-ordinator)
>
> "As a co-ordinator you are a lynchpin – you are paid to think about the group all the time as opposed to once a month." (Co-ordinator)

There have also been questions about how the WDA makes decisions about funding. In a sense, the WDA is in a double bind position - on one hand, having clearly specified criteria on which all funding decisions are made is seen as bureaucratic and inflexible. On the other hand, making funding decision based on local needs, and on a more case-by-case basis, is considered as not transparent and potentially unfair. This tension needs to be managed both

internally and externally and did indeed abate in the last year of the Toolkit evaluation.

The majority of co-ordinators talked about the pressure of time and being spread thinly across great many projects as a difficult challenge and they struggled constantly with defining and deciding boundaries. Administrative duties also eat into time they feel should be first and foremost project time.

Co-ordinators vary a great deal in experience and background and they hence have different challenges on the job. Computer literacy is a stumbling block for some while others design their own accounting systems. The majority of co-ordinators found administration and especially finances time consuming and challenging. For most of the co-ordinators, the job has been a steep learning curve and they often feel "out on a limb" to use the words of one co-ordinator interviewed.

Some have never had anything to do with management of time and staff before while others have managed staff all their working lives. The last round of interviews was particularly coherent in the concerted efforts having been made to define and clarify the structure of the groups, what is involved with hiring and managing staff and proper HR procedures. The consultants Blue Apple came up a great deal in this discussion and were unanimously cited as having been very helpful.

Almost every co-ordinator's main challenge, however, is related to funding and when projects are many and complex, on working with other partners. In some of the larger groups, the co-ordinator has become more of a manager; line managing other project officers and volunteers, doing the finances which often have become quite complex and keep the core organisation ticking over.

Combating apathy in the community while not raising expectations too much was also mentioned as one of the challenges. Demands and expectations from the Board also needed to be negotiated. There was quite a bit of lack of clarity about the roles of co-ordinators and Board Members at the start of the Toolkit. Most of the groups had settled into a working relationship by the third year of funding although this had often been preceded by change of individuals on the Board, or change of co-ordinator.

The role of the Board

The members of the Boards interviewed described their role as a Member of the Board of Directors in various ways. The box overleaf provides a sample:

> "I am representing my community" (Board Member)
>
> "I bring in a [particular skill]" (Board Member)
>
> "I want people to be proud of where we live" (Board Member)
>
> "It's an opportunity to make something happen" (Board Member)

The Boards seemed on the whole to be "the best they could be", to use one interviewee's turn of phrase. There is a good mix of skills on practically all the Boards. They tend to be composed of various professionals from the area and the slant is towards the older demography of the population and notably the male half of that population. Having said that, all interviewees were highly aware of the ideal composition of a more representative Board and many Board Members and co-ordinators indicated a will for certain characteristics should they approach a new member for the Board. In several cases changes had recently happened on the Board and without fail people with certain skills and/or characteristics had been approached to come onto the Board – some of whom had happily accepted.

> "This is not my full time job." (Board Member)

All Board Members interviewed found the amount of time needed in order to do their job satisfactorily to be the biggest challenge. On the whole, Boards seemed to split into an active and a more passive section. In most groups the Board was firmly leading the group but in some instances the co-ordinator seemed to be the main driver for making things happen. Roles and responsibilities of Board members and co-ordinators across the Toolkit groups can hence vary a great deal. Although most Boards and co-ordinators had by the last round of interviews managed to forge a working relationship then the struggle with apathy, lack of time and clarity of roles needed to be constantly worked and reworked.

Quite a few Board members interviewed said they had not entirely realised at the outset how much responsibility they would have to shoulder under the Toolkit and how much commitment in terms of time they would have to give. Their feelings about this was mixed. On the one hand they were happy to contribute to a group, which ultimate goal is to improve the area where they live but on the other they often felt they were doing what they felt WDA officers and / or the local authorities were paid to do.

> "The government is getting an awful lot of work on the cheap out of us."
> (Board Member)

Support for the groups from the WDA

Overall, the WDA has been praised by the groups for the quality of their support. WDA officers are perceived by most as flexible, understanding and willing to help.

However, several points were raised in the last round of interviews that need to be noted:

- The separate professional experience of members of groups and co-ordinators may not have been always fully acknowledged.

- The Community Regeneration Team's own expertise may not always be broad enough to address specific issues.

- More expertise or involvement from other WDA departments has sometimes been needed.

- Reporting requirements need to flexible in response to group circumstances.

Uncertainty about future funding
While most of the groups commented on the good communication skills of individual WDA officers, including remarking that this had improved markedly over the last year, there were concerns about communication in the last few months leading up to the formal ending of the funding period. Uncertainly created a great deal of anxiety and guesswork in many of the groups as they were left in the dark as to what the future might hold for them from the perspective of the WDA. Uncertainty with regards to funding periods has made it difficult for the groups to plan ahead and/or to retain staff. Communication was further hampered by the fact that the Mid Wales Division Community Regeneration Team was a bit thin on the ground during this period with a number of staff absences and vacancies.

Diversity of groups within the Toolkit

There is a great deal of diversity among the groups funded under the Toolkit and this was indeed the context it was designed to fit with when it was created. Some groups focus e.g. on single events while others are playing a more serious strategic role in their area. A variety of scale exists in between these two – and very different support is required for the different groups. Some co-ordinators are also very experienced while others are learning on the job and may not have been in post long. Different support is needed for different groups or those who move at a slower pace or are newer risk being left out and the groups moving fastest outgrow their first pair of shoes – and need support of a different kind.

The question of sustainability

The extent to which sustainability in the sense of exit strategies to non-funded futures is possible in community regeneration is always a moot point. Many of the CRT groups have been working on building sustainability into their activities including revenues from advertising, volunteers running projects, rental and other commercial income from properties acquired and ventures begun, and the search for alternative sources of medium-term funding. At the same time among the participating groups and communities the Toolkit is considered to have started something valuable and important and they consider it would be a unfortunate to 'pull the plug' at this stage. Indeed in our recent interviews with representatives of groups we found a degree of apprehension, frustration and uncertainty concerning the future of Toolkit funding – issues that have now been addressed by the announcement to the groups of the WDA's plans for future support for regeneration:

Indeed many groups felt that the sustainability agenda had crept up on them quite suddenly and that a longer build-up / lead-in period and assistance to reach or improve on this might have been built into the Toolkit from the outset. Sustainability has indeed been on the Toolkit agenda from the outset but concrete ways of going about reaching this are not easy.

Sustainability for most groups still means core funding. Many groups felt that without a full-time officer in post to develop projects and look for funding, the group might fold. Others said that the group would continue – but most noted that this might be in quite a different form – and often quite a reduced one.

The implementation of CRT: key learning points

- Partnerships between the sponsoring agency (in this case the WDA) with other stakeholders and particularly Local Authorities have a key role in the implementation and wider roll out of community regeneration initiatives such as the Toolkit. In general, partnerships provide the opportunity to work at a strategic level and facilitate the delivery of appropriate and integrated support packages to participating towns and areas. In CRT some partnerships appear to be working well, while others present opportunities for improvement.

- At an operational and community level, partnership working should be reflected in joint decision and ownership between the sponsoring agency and Local Authorities and other key public sector partners. Ideally, a nominated local authority officer, WDA regeneration executive/area manager and the a local (community employed) development officer could form a working triad, ensuring integration between policies, statutory initiatives and community based activities and projects in each case.

- In terms of delivering in partnership, there are broader issues of capacity building and continuing professional development to be considered. In particular, this may concern both the nature and content of community regeneration itself and the skills required to work successfully in partnership, especially with regards to gaining positive leverage over partner agendas. The local development officer is key here and needs support and training (as discussed below).

- Further too much turn over in development officers can have a significantly negative impact on the momentum and successes that a community initiative has built up. It can result in loss of continuity and it takes time for a new officer to develop their jobs and networks. Again ongoing attention to the training, support and career development for officers is needed.

- Working with volunteers is a particular challenge for Development Officers, especially concerning expectations of board members and those who volunteer to work on projects, how much can be expected, their reliance on often a small group of people who do their work, and their role as the only paid worker. Training in this area could be valuable for both the Officers and board members.

- Information and training about linking strategically with other initiatives and maximising the opportunities that they present, especially with regards to drawing funding from other sources, is of great importance and assistance to community groups. In particular, in the case of CRT, these initiatives have included Tourism Growth Areas, Communities First, and the Community Strategy. All of these initiatives were sufficiently flexible to incorporate other activities and projects in towns or areas. Information was also required about other funding sources, and about training with writing grant applications.

- Sustainability and the development of larger income generating projects requires dedicated attention from Development Officers. Finding the balance between ensuring long term planning takes place, along with managing the smaller projects and day to day business is a challenge for most Development Officers. Some groups reached a stage where additional administrative support was required to attend to such matters, and in order to progress a larger project.

- More generally development of capacity amongst local boards required ongoing attention. Especially as projects become more complex, more is required of board members, and capacity to manage and deal with complexity is essential. Related to this is the challenge some Boards and Officers had with the boundaries, roles and responsibilities of the Board, the Town Council and the Chamber of Trade. Again appropriate training and organisational development can make a contribution here.

4. Impact of the Community Regeneration Toolkit

As part of our fieldwork for the evaluation of the Community Regeneration Toolkit, in-depth research on impact was conducted in a number of communities that are part of the Toolkit initiative. These towns were selected as they have been receiving funding from the WDA for several years (on average in excess of six years), initially through the Market Town Initiative, and latterly through the Toolkit.

The field work involved:
- Review of available documentation (business plans, progress reports, documentation on specific projects)
- Meetings with the local development officer and a trip around the town, viewing current and previous projects.
- Meetings with the local committee or board.
- Focus groups with; 1) local business and professional people, 2) people actively involved and with a practical connection with the initiative, and 3) town folk not associated with the Toolkit.

The rationale for using this approach to conduct an impact assessment is that the stories told by people about what the community is like now and what it was like before, is an effective way of gauging the dynamic, extent, and impact of change which complements the documentary and physical evidence. Most of the people involved in such meetings are long term residents and business people in the area and as such, have first hand experience of physical, economic and social impact. It is also a welcomed opportunity for people to reflect on the changes that have taken place.

Overall findings
When we look at the actual impact of the CRT and its predecessor – the Market Towns Initiative – on local development and on local capacity building we see:

- Communities which have achieved 'critical mass' in terms of regeneration activities and are on a self-reinforcing upwards spiral,

- Communities are very lively in regeneration terms with a range of projects happening and planned, and

- Communities which are struggling to capitalise on the regeneration efforts that have been made over the years, or feel they have reached the limits of what might usefully be achieved (the latter are typically quite small communities).

The overall finding of the assessment is that while the road will be rocky, and observable progress slow in the early years, long term funding and support for

building regeneration capacity does appear to begin to pay off quite substantially in the medium term.

A subsidiary finding is that we continue to learn on an ongoing basis about new ways to continuously improve the quality and scope of support that can be offered for local regeneration initiatives.

Positive Impacts
The positive effect of regeneration efforts and investment was very apparent in most of the towns. They showed that through good organisation, effective partnership working, and networking with agencies, that much could be achieved to improve the appearance of the town, its facilities, activities and 'offer', and the confidence of local businesses and residents.

"The attitudes and expectations of the town and life in it has been raised, standards have gone up". *(Y*outh worker and resident*)*

The impact of physical improvements such as those to shop fronts cannot be underestimated. This generates a 'new and positive feeling' among retailers, property owners and town folk. The spin off is that other shops either take up the grant, or pay for the improvements themselves. This in turn attracts more pedestrians and visitors, more shoppers, more spending, and profits for retailers. One focus group participant noted that this was the theory in the beginning but is now actually happening. Evidence was given in terms of reducing number of empty shops, increasing values of commercial property, and investment by property developers.

A number of the towns have managed to secure quite major development projects under Objective 1 and other sources, projects which will help underpin the socio-economic viability of the towns for some time to come and projects which represent good and imaginative use of Structural Fund resources. It is implausible to believe that the ideas, credibility and capacity to develop and secure such projects would have been around in the absence of the MTI/CRT support for regeneration.

'Seeing things happen' was a phrase frequently used and highlights the importance of how the momentum for change gets built up. 'Things' that focus group participants saw happening include the physical improvements, more things happening (festivals and events), the town being busy (more people), building restoration, and pamphlets and newsletters which show the town being promoted. This is tangible and important feedback for town folk, businesses and the numerous volunteers involved in the board and subcommittees. It engenders a positive attitude, confidence, credibility and trust in the Community Board, of

which town folk and business people may have been suspicious in the early days.

A large, active, enthusiastic and committed Community Board, with sub committees for various projects and/or themes, and with a high level of capacity, is also a critical factor for achieving the momentum required for ongoing and successful regeneration efforts. Key roles for boards were identified as enabler, catalyst, and co-ordinator.

The ability of the Board and subcommittees to make links with and have representation from other agencies, such as the Local Authority, is also key to developing a shared vision and common goals for the town. This is an important strategy for changing the perception held by agencies about a community board. If they are seen as effective, they gain the confidence of agencies as a group that has its ear to the community, but can deliver agency requirements.

> "Before it was all top down, and now it's bottom up. Now Council officers ring us to see what we think." (Board Member)

One town in particular had placed the skills and training agenda centre stage, and this was impacting on the labour market, with a recent announcement that a Cardiff based company was moving there to tap into the availability of a skilled IT workforce. The emphasis of the regeneration plan for this town was based around taking training to the community and making it very accessible. Other towns have also included training in their activities, but with a focus on quality standards for accommodation and tourist providers

Attracting funds from a range of sources, and using match funding to lever in additional funding, enables budgets to be drawn together for both small and large projects. The towns where most impact has been achieved have been particularly effective at accessing funds.

Two towns in particular indicated that a critical mass of activities and projects, along with a high level of capacity within the partnership, and ongoing commitment and enthusiasm from board members, had been reached. The positive impact and effect of regeneration funding was evident both in the town, and as expressed in attitudes and comments about how the towns had changed for the better.

Time scales
Finally, we were forcefully reminded of the shear length of timescale involved in community and economic regeneration . In one town that has undergone significant positive changes, board members commented that after six years work it was only in the last 18 months that 'it had really started to fall into place'.

While in what might be considered to be the single most obviously successful of the towns, the Chair of the Board, remarked that 'we've always said it would be a ten year process and so it is proving'. In this town, for instance, certain environmental projects which where planned almost from the outset are finally now coming to fruition having overcome a long series of funding, planning and operational delays.

5. The future of the Community Regeneration Toolkit

The WDA: supporting communities

The May 2000 WDA Community Regeneration Policy opened up the concept of regeneration and added to the Agency's existing mainstream activites – such as property and business support – a community centred approach reflected in the Community Regeneration Toolkit, drawing not only on the range of available business support and capital programmes but also acknowledging the need for capacity building and other "softer forms" of assistance. Commitment to rural Wales in particular through delivery of Rural Community Action (community regeneration and capacity building) and Article 33 of the Rural Development Plan (community led regeneration) was pledged, as was allegiance to and co-operation with local authority-led community strategies: in short, greater convergence and integration of the strategies and aims of the Welsh Development Agency in terms of regeneration.

The WDA Business Plan 2004-2007 – Creating Success Together (March 2004) is the first combined Plan prepared by the WDA that is owned by all four divisions of the WDA. This is done in accordance with the Agency Remit Letter from the Minister for Economic Development and Transport as set out in the Welsh Assembly Government four year plan outlined in the policy document "Wales: A Better Country". The WDA Business Plan 2004-2007 also pays heed to the "Wales Spatial Plan: People, Places and Futures", "which proposes a framework for prioritisation and allocation of resources for actions which reflect local distinctiveness" (Business Plan 2004: 3).

In the Business Plan, the WDA sets out how regeneration of communities in Wales is an integral part of its activities and a "pre-and co-requisite of economic development" (ibid: 18), helping" to create a climate for businesses to prosper and grow" (ibid: 18). The regeneration described in the Business Plan is about community ownership and involvement, partnership working with local authorities and other public sector agencies and community groups and voluntary bodies. In short community regeneration is economic regeneration – although the opposite is not always true.

The Mid Wales Division of the WDA, growing out of the DBRW, has its own history of social and community involvement. The remit of the economic regeneration of Wales has been approached very much from the bottom-up in the Community Regeneration Toolkit based on the understanding of the importance of community ownership and mobilisation. The structure in Mid Wales has been developed taking into account the rural nature of the region and to ensure integration of capital and revenue funding in small scale/small community projects.

As the WDA as a whole becomes part of the Wales Assembly Government questions are raised about how the WDA delivers community regeneration, what is its ethos of delivery and at what level it should be operating. Mainstreaming community regeneration within the Agency's activities and culture will require new measures, indicators and targets – particularly with regard to capacity development, productivity and performance (i.e. as opposed to, for example, job creation or retention).

Our work has highlighted the importance of communicating internally and externally the structure and rationale for the delivery of the Community Regeneration Toolkit in Mid Wales. Strengths of the models include enabling staff to multi task across a range of Agency activities as a way of encouraging an holistic understanding of the Agency's business, as well as providing opportunities to develop a broad range of skills in policy and operational work, and community development.

The emphasis in the recent outflow of policy documents from the Assembly on holistic regeneration and the co-operation of many partners on many fronts would seem especially welcome, however, and fits very well with the aims of the Community Regeneration Toolkit. What the Toolkit has brought to community groups over the past three years is considerable development to these groups to the point where they have become quite sophisticated in terms of finding funding for projects and judging which projects will make a difference in their community and which will not.

The continuing regeneration challenge in Mid-Wales

Given these changes in the WDA's policy remit and the likelihood of further change as the WDA is absorbed into the Welsh Assembly Government, given the changes in the wider regeneration landscape (see Section 2 above), and given this evaluation of the effectiveness of the Toolkit, it is now timely to take stock of the regeneration challenge in Mid-Wales.

The Mid-Division Community Regeneration team have identified a set of key issues impacting on regeneration in Mid-Wales, all of which map clearly onto wider WDA strategic policy objectives. These are:

- Economic inactivity
- The social economy
- Skills and training
- Growth of the knowledge economy
- Entrepreneurial culture
- Youth migration
- Affordable housing
- Quality of jobs

These set an important agenda for the types of activities the WDA believe they should be targeting in support of regeneration in Mid-Wales and in many cases mean building upon but also moving on beyond the current activities funded under the Toolkit.

Further, the Community Regeneration team have identified – in line with the Spatial Plan and WDA national priorities, as well as regional need and opportunity – a number of key geographical areas for more targeted and systematic support. These include:

- Cardigan and South Ceredigion
- Cardigan Bay Coast (Coastal Regeneration)
- Llanidloes – Llandrindod Wells
- The Dyfi Valley

As well as the need for continuing commitment to local authority priority areas, both:

- Communities First impacted areas; and
- other growth areas (Aberystwyth, Newtown, Brecon).

This agenda and these priorities suggests a plan of action which includes:

- Fewer, stronger and better groups
- Action plans which directly address WDA and Welsh Assembly Government priorities
- A renewed focus on practical partnership working in the **execution** of regeneration initiatives
- Piloting alternative ways of getting desired results.

Next steps in CRT

The role of the WDA is to support strategic socio-economic development. For many years the lack of local community capacity was a particular barrier to growth and innovation in Mid-Wales, and when the then DBRW (now Mid Wales Division of the WDA) began its support for local capacity building through the Market Towns Initiative it was a pioneer in its field and in the region.

Through its own successes and as support for local capacity development has moved into the mainstream of Agency and wider public policy – as reflected in the various Community Strategies for the local authority areas in the region and through important national initiatives such as Communities First and Rural Community Action – the issue of creating a basic infrastructure of empowered local communities has now been to at least some extent addressed.

The issue now for the WDA is increasingly one of how to work **strategically** with this new local capacity in pursuit of socio-economic (as opposed to purely social) development goals. In terms of broader WDA policy and role, this suggests, and we would recommend, a shift to a more explicit and focused policy of support for Community Led Local Area Socio-Economic Development to build on the success of the Toolkit. We would particularly support and recommend the approach recently developed by the WDA (in dialogue with our Tavistock evaluation team) of recasting CRT along the lines of (see Section 5 for detail):

1. Pro-active targeting by the WDA and its partners of specific areas for intense proactive support for local economic development on the basis of opportunity and need. These areas should receive the most amount of support, both financial an in the form of officer time and expertise.

2. Supporting targeted pilots on key socio-economic issues where communities and their partner organisations have ideas or plans to address some of the Agency's priority regeneration themes.

3. Continuing practical support for community strategies as appropriate *where* other partners are taking a clear lead and responsibility for community regeneration.

4. Phased exit from Toolkit support as groups complete projects or become self-financing, and as other bodies take an increasing role in supporting and sustaining community capacity.

Appendix 1: The Community Regeneration Toolkit

	Tool	Purpose
1	Seed Corn Fund	To aid communities in the development of the local partnership and to develop their future strategy
2	Partnership (Revenue)	The provision of support for the development of partnership groups
3	Training/Mentoring (Revenue)	To provide basic organisational development training and support to community groups
4	Revenue Funding (Revenue)	To provide direct revenue funding for various costs and studies
5	Development Officer (Revenue)	To provide communities that show a clear need with funding to employ a Development Officer
6	Consultancy/Professional Support (Revenue)	To provide appropriate Consultancy/professional support
7	Sector Based Intervention (Revenue and Capital)	To build actions centred around specific sectors
8	Agreed Structural Intervention (Capital)	To provide communities with strategic capital focussed expenditure

Appendix 2: List of groups in receipt of Toolkit funding over the evaluation period

Antur Dwy Afon, Welshpool

Antur Penllyn, Bala

Brecon Action Ltd, Brecon

Builth Wells

Curiad Caron, Tregaron

Deudraeth Cyf, Penrhyndeudraeth

Ecodyfi, Machynlleth

L.L.A.N.I. Ltd, Llanidloes

Menter Aberteifi, Cardigan

Menter Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth

Menter Cei Newydd, New Quay

Menter Llambed, Lampeter

Newtown Partnership, Newtown

Pentir Pumlumon, Ponthrydygroes

Rhayader 2000, Rhayader

Swyddfa Llandysul a Phont Tyweli Ymlaen, Llandysul

Swyddog Datblygu Cyfle Ffestiniog, Blaenau Ffestiniog

The Sleeping Giant Foundation, Abercraf

The Spa Town Trust, Llandrindod Wells

Traws-Newid Llys Ednowain, Trawsfynydd

Appendix 3: Organisations and people consulted in the course of the evaluation

Interviewed July 2002:

Co-ordinator and / or Board Member in New Quay, Trawsfynydd, Dyfi Valley and Bala (none of the towns formerly having been participants in the Market Towns Initiative)

Co-ordinator and / or Board Member, local committee, focus grous with business people and townsfolk in Newtown, Welshpool, Builth Wells and Llandrindod Wells (all towns formerly part of URBED)

Co-ordinator and / or Board Member in Penrhyndeudraeth and Dolgellau (both formerly Market Towns Initiative where significant changes had occurred since the evaluation of that initiative)

Interviewed September 2002:

Head of Economic Development, Powys County Council

Head of Economic Development, Ceredigion County Council

Focus group with representatives from CAVO, WCVA and Brecon National Park

Workshop with WDA officers and Toolkit groups, Llandrindod Wells

Interviewed June - July 2003:

Ann Watkin, Head of Rural Policy, WDA

Gareth Hall, Director of Strategy, WDA

Andrew Dakin, WDA, South East Division
Anthony Griffiths, WDA, South East Division
Martin Hall, WDA, South East Division

Betsan Caldwell, WDA, South West Division

Dee Reynolds, Mid Wales Regional Tourism Partnership

Amanda Gee, ELWa
Nia Griffiths, ELWa

Jasper Roberts , Head of Rural Policy, Welsh Assembly Government

Graham Benfield , WCVA

Dave Adamson, University of Glamorgan

Norma Barry, Communities First, Welsh Assembly Government

Jill Venus, Mid Wales Partnership

Dick Crawshaw, South West Wales Economic Forum, WDA South West Wales Division

Barbara Castle, Regeneration Consultant

Derek Vaughan, Councillor, Neath

Rob Gough, Councillor, Treboeth

Charles White, Councillor, Swansea

Interviewed January – March 2005:

Dafydd Morgan, co-ordinator Curiad Caron
Huw Evans, Chair of Board of Directors, Curiad Caron

Lindsay Sheen, co-ordinator Menter Aberteifi
Alan Wilson, Chair of Board of Directors, Menter Aberteifi

Debra Renshaw, co-ordinator Menter Cei Newydd
Angela Blakemore, Chair of Board of Directors, Menter Cei Newydd

Elaine Parker, administrator, Menter Llambed
Selwyn Walters, Chair of Board of Directors, Menter Llambed

Ann Jones, co-ordinator, Swyddfa Llandysul a Phont Tyweli Ymlaen
Keith Evans, Chair of Board of Directors, Swyddfa Llandysul a Phont Tyweli Ymlaen

Wynne Jones, co-ordinator, Pentir Pumlumon
Peter Lloyd Harvey, Chair of Board of Directors, Pentir Pumlumon

Eluned Hughes, co-ordinator, Menter Aberystwyth
Huw Bates, Chair of Board of Directors, Menter Aberystwyth

Wil Thomas, co-ordinator, Deudraeth Cyf
Dewi Lewis, Chair of Board of Directors, Deudraeth Cyf