

# Feasibility Study

## Continued Interaction of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Nuneaton and Bedworth with the Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone

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## 1 **Executive Summary**

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust commissioned Nuneaton and Bedworth CVS to complete a partnership project, part of which was to undertake a Feasibility Study to identify opportunities for continuing the voluntary and community sector's engagement with the Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone.

The Feasibility Study involved both representatives from front line organisations in the voluntary and community sector across Nuneaton and Bedworth, and also Stakeholders in the Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone. The study responds to the concerns of the former, putting the latter's responses into that context.

The Feasibility Study identified that links within the Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone strategy have to be made clearer to the community; it is important for the community (in its broadest sense) to understand the investment that is reshaping the environment that they live and work within the Zone. However the level of expectation of potential involvement compared to actual involvement is massive without the resource within the voluntary and community sector to sustain this.

The study shows the dissonance between the needs of the voluntary and community sector compared to the priorities that can stimulate funding from Regeneration Zones. The main argument of the sector, and its proponents among the stakeholders, is that you can give people the environment but it is about equipping people to live in that environment. This study does not expect to alter funding priorities, but the hope is that it will help the stakeholders be more aware of the sector's additionality, and concerns about its future engagement bearing this dissonance in mind.

## 2 Introduction

This feasibility study ('research') has been undertaken by Nuneaton and Bedworth CVS ('NBCVS') with the support of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust ('CRT') throughout May and June 2005.

Having identified a gap in provision in relation to the development of consortiums and developing models of management to meet the requirements of mainstream regeneration funding a pilot study was commissioned in 2004 by the CRT of the role of Consortium and Partnership Worker at NBCVS. The purpose of the research was to develop on the pilot study.

The Worker was engaged in the Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone ('CNRZ') throughout the pilot study period (June 2004-March 2005), along with other members of NBCVS staff, attending theme group and partnership meetings.

The pilot study was partially successful in helping to coordinate activity within the voluntary and community sector ('VCS'), however during the pilot study period there were major changes, many without prior notice in the CNRZ, namely:

- Throughout the year there was a freeze on revenue spend projects with committed capital projects
  - Therefore no funds were available through the CNRZ
- Theme groups ended
  - These have been replaced with Strategic Programme Areas ('SPAs') which are currently being established
- In December 2004 Coventry Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership ('CSWP'), managers of the CNRZ, called a moratorium on all meetings until March 2005.

Changes within the CNRZ, plus the end of the pilot study and the post of a Community Development Worker at NBCVS funded by the CNRZ, meant that both NBCVS and therefore the VCS of Nuneaton and Bedworth do not have the capacity and resource to interact with the CNRZ and investigate opportunities, but both are still expected to participate fully. NBCVS is committed to ongoing interaction, liasing and advocating on behalf of the VCS however are unable to continue to the same level as previously enjoyed.

This research, through a process of consultation within the community and then conversations with CNRZ stakeholders, therefore is integral to the VCS understanding of its future role, and also to again raise awareness amongst those stakeholders of the issues involved in VCS engagement and involvement in delivering strategy.

### 3 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To make contact with 20 VCS organisations operating within the Borough of Nuneaton and Bedworth.
- To obtain information pertaining to their awareness of the CNRZ, level of involvement, assistance obtained and overall perception.
- To meet with stakeholders of the CNRZ about community perception of and engagement with the strategy.
- To use this information to develop a set of recommendations for VCS continued involvement with the strategy.

## **4 Methodology**

There will be four stages involved in the research. These will be:

### **4.1 Stage 1**

Literature review: setting the context of the situation locally, and also the work other agencies have done into regeneration strategy and the VCS interaction within these.

This stage will also include informal discussions with key members of staff at NBCVS who have been involved in the strategic development of the CNRZ since its inception and also dissemination of information to the VCS in Nuneaton and Bedworth.

### **4.2 Stage 2**

A call for participation will be made in May 2005, under the title 'Regenerating Nuneaton and Bedworth: Regeneration Strategy and Delivery'. A letter and a questionnaire (see Appendix 9.3) will be sent out to 20 VCS organisations that are already known to NBCVS who have been engaged with the CNRZ at varying levels.

10 of the VCS organisation have been classified as 'larger' Borough-wide organisations, and 10 'smaller', usually ward-based groups (see Appendix 9.1 for original list).

Semi-structured interviews, either face-to-face or by telephone, will be carried out by the researcher over May and June 2005. During the interviews it will be made clear that this is to be an impartial, but independent, assessment of the background and future of engagement with the CNRZ, with all views made in the strictest of confidence unless otherwise agreed. The results will then be analysed to form the basis of a response to the stakeholders.

### **4.3 Stage 3**

A stakeholder list will be identified (see Appendix 9.2 for original list) and meetings held with appropriate individuals to discuss the analysis of information from the community interviews and other findings.

### **4.4 Stage 4**

All information will be analysed and findings reported with a set of recommendations made about how the VCS can maintain a level of ongoing involvement in the CNRZ, and how information about the CNRZ could be filtered more effectively to the VCS in the future.

## 5 Context

### 5.1 Background

From early discussions in 2001 it was NBCVSs belief that the 'single pot' approach to coordinating and integrating a number of funding streams ('Regeneration Zones' within the West Midlands) was to be a more straightforward method to making funding applications.

The finalised concept of Regeneration Zones, and in particular the CNRZ, that was publicised by Advantage West Midlands ('AWM') and CSWP was the first NBCVS had heard of the strategy. It is believed that the VCS were/are not considered an economic force, unlike business, statutory & public sectors, therefore were not consulted about regional economic strategy and thus not the delivery of the actions (of which Regeneration Zones were one of three vehicles to economic development); see section 5.2.1.

NBCVS were however pleased to be involved and be an advocate for the VCS as it was felt that *historically* the sub-region, and especially the Borough of Nuneaton and Bedworth, lost out to other areas of the West Midlands. The notion that as there were 6 Regeneration Zones the CNRZ would have a fairer proportion of financial support. No partner was or is contractually obliged to be involved but it was seen as important that there was a 'voice' to whatever extent was appropriate and achievable.

There was also a perception that social regeneration would literally mean that, with investment in the 'Regenerating Communities' theme group that would alter quality of life within the sub-region (in comparison to the other pillars that would be concerned with 'purer' economic development). However the first Zone Implementation Plan ('ZIP'), written by consultants, had only 1 reference to social regeneration, with lip service seemingly being paid to the VCS.

Awareness of the powerlessness of the VCS at a strategic level, and the vast difference between the capacity and resource available in Coventry compared to that of Nuneaton and Bedworth was never addressed. For example the number of different large-scale regeneration funding alternatives, like NDC and NRF, and the number of workers Coventry Voluntary Service Council ('CVSC') has compared to NBCVS, and the number of representatives within the CNRZ from Coventry compared to the Borough. NBCVS always had concerns about the actual likelihood of the CNRZ transpiring into a value added source of support, and did not want to raise expectations, therefore did very little active publicity about it.

The Regenerating Communities theme group received some funding from the CNRZ in 2003, which included grass roots community support within NBCVS, ended by March 2005. NBCVS have, since the CNRZ's initial introduction in 2001, attended regular meetings, forums, workshops, away days etc, for Theme Groups (both Regenerating Communities and Bridges to Success), Theme Group Chairs, Resource Advisory Group ('RAG'), pre-RAG and CNRZ Board. However what has become increasingly apparent is that this level of interaction cannot be sustained: the vast majority of CVS funding is project-specific and the sheer amount of CNRZ engagement required often falls outside of these funding remits and requirements. A total of 4 NBCVS staff posts have been involved in these events/meetings, at varying levels, since 2001. 2 representatives from the VCS in Nuneaton and Bedworth started attending Regenerating Communities Theme Group meetings, both stopped going due to perceived inactivity of the group and lack of revenue funding available; another representative sat at CNRZ Board level but stopped attending for similar reasons.

The development of the CNRZ was to some extent an organic process, with additions and priorities changing throughout its 4 year history as AWM defined its 'Agenda for Action' (see 5.2.1), 'Corporate Plan' (see 5.2.2) and reacted to the ZIPs. With each change the Regenerating Communities theme group responded to these, with NBCVS both working in partnership with and also leading on activities. By NBCVS being present at every stage, often in the face of challenges (see 5.2.5) they were always aware of the changes and able to make contributions to discussions and working groups etc proactively rather than reactively. They were therefore also able to respond quickly.

For example in November 2002 the theme group developed a draft Regenerating Communities Strategy, however AWM then confirmed projects would need to be commissioned. The theme group then updated the Strategy to include a commissioning framework in February 2003. It quickly became apparent that the theme groups' priorities did not correspond to those of AWM, hence the theme groups employed consultants (LRDP, see 5.2.4) to undertake a process of community consultation to bring together the differing priorities. From that process in June 2003 a Community Involvement Strategy was produced. In April 2003 CSWP requested applications from wider VCS representatives to join the theme group. The theme group had even got to the point of discussing how application forms should look to be more accessible for the VCS; it was NBCVS who argued that in the first instance this should be a simple Expression of Interest rather than full application as had been the initial suggested process from CSWP.

Very soon after this AWM announced that there was no revenue expenditure available, on which the VCS predominantly depend.

## 5.2 Literature review

### 5.2.1 Advantage West Midlands (2001) Agenda for Action. Spring 2001, Birmingham: Advantage West Midlands

The document that outlines the proposed delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy ('RES'). This would have been one of the first public documents that outlined Regeneration Zones as a focus for action; this was published as a result of "intensive consultation" (AWM 2001:10). However when looking at the list of respondents to the consultation (AWM 2001:51) there were a) no respondents from the VCS, b) no respondents who work specifically in Nuneaton and/or Bedworth, and c) no respondents who work specifically with the VCS in Nuneaton and/or Bedworth.

Furthermore the 3 main result indicators referred to in the 'Pillar' (AWM 2001:6) of 'Regenerating Communities' are all overtly economic: "Economic rates in Regeneration Zones; Unemployment rates in Regeneration Zones; Business formation rates in Regeneration Zones" (AWM 2001:34). This would therefore imply that the VCS were purposefully not consulted in the RES implementation, and thus the initial formation of Regeneration Zones and the sub-regional strategies, possibly because of the view that the VCS is not considered an economic force.

### 5.2.2 Advantage West Midlands (2003) Delivering the Advantage. 2003-2006 Corporate Plan, Birmingham: Advantage West Midlands

Pillar 4, 'Regenerating Communities in the West Midlands', refers to quality of life, but clearly implies that this surrounds economic activity and participation. Delivering Advantage states that AWM will "tackle economic exclusion, primarily through our work in Regeneration Zones...through raising employment levels, increasing business activity and improving the skills and knowledge of our most disadvantaged communities, ensuring that community groups and the voluntary sector are fully engaged in the process...; [developing] a strong regional framework for social enterprise development which contributes to a sustainable and inclusive economy...; and [supporting] the development of sustainable communities in the region – by contributing to the renewal of the housing stock." (AWM 2003:6)

**5.2.3** Advantage West Midlands (2004) An Overview of Delivering the Advantage. The West Midlands Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2004-2010, Birmingham: Advantage West Midlands

A more recent overview continues to support the earlier theory that within the RZs community regeneration comprises economic development, however it does seem to go further than previous delivery documents in supporting wider regeneration initiatives to: “link training and employment opportunities to employer’s needs, for example by improving the links with major employers and by closer engagement with disadvantaged communities; identify and overcome barriers to participation, such as a lack of affordable childcare and low aspirations; support communities so that they are properly equipped to make a contribution to regeneration in their own area; and develop sustainable local economies and communities by improving the environment and social and cultural infrastructure.” (AWM 2004:9)

**5.2.4** LRDP (2003) Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone: Community Involvement Strategy,

A report initiated by the Regenerating Communities theme group in response to defining its priorities and engaging the community in the strategy. The report produced a Community Involvement Strategy, offering a model for building and sustaining participation structures.

**5.2.5** Stuart, L. (2002) ‘Chief Executives Annual Report’. *In* Nuneaton and Bedworth Council for Voluntary Service (2002) Annual Report 2001-2002, p4

First mention about the difficulties in working with the Regeneration Zone, and the monies that had been applied for to fund a Community Development Worker: “...these opportunities [have] also brought forward a tremendous amount of work to CVS, work that at present is not funded...there is an inordinate amount of reading that must be undertaken to keep abreast of developments apart from the myriad of meetings”.

**5.2.6** CSWP (2004) Zone Implementation Plan 2005-2008, Coventry: CSWP Ltd, p1

The foreword by the Chairman, Brian Woods-Scawen, states the ZIP 4 shows “a step change in the way [the CNRZ] approaches regeneration...[Strategic Programme Area Strategic Plans] will identify the key drivers for regeneration...[and] will answer important questions – What will it take to ensure these result in real opportunities for wealth and job creation? How can we be sure local people and local businesses will benefit? The Partnership will mobilise all the funding available for the Zone to achieve the right results. The Zone will definitely not be a stand-alone suite of programmes funded

by AWM. AWM funding...will be used to underpin partners' and stakeholders' mainstream programmes and external funding to produce a programme for holistic regeneration. This new approach means we have to pay even greater attention to understanding how the Zone links with others, including Local Strategic Partnerships, Neighbourhood Renewal, and the New Deal."

**5.2.7** RAWM (2005) Regeneration Zones: Opportunities for the Voluntary & Community Sector to Participate in Policy Development & Delivery of Regeneration Activity. Executive Summary, Birmingham: RAWM

Regional Action West Midlands, through a brief consultation process have defined how the VCS can continue to engage with Regeneration Zone activity. It states under item 7 of 'Opportunities for engagement in policy development' that there is a need for additional "support frameworks for VCS Zone Board members" (RAWM 2005:ii). The report also states in its 'Key messages and Recommendations' that: "The lack of revenue funding in the Regeneration Zones as well as the pressure on VCS organisations themselves in terms of time and capacity are key drivers for focussing the effort of the sector in terms of its engagement in the policy development of the Zones. There is a clear message from the Zones and the sector alike that it would be better to be involved in less policy development but for a clearer purpose...[there is a need to] Build the competency of the Regeneration Zone Boards and Secretariats to work with the sector...[and] There are clear opportunities for VCS organisations to be involved and be paid for the delivery of the Regeneration Zone activity, but this will often be on the basis of tendering for commissioned work...[and] There are...a number of opportunities for engagement that could be funded through other sources, which have not yet been fully explored...influence the allocation of mainstream funding to meet the shortfall" (RAWM 2005: iii-iv).

**5.2.8** Home Office (2004) ChangeUp. Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector, London: Home Office

Talks about the diversity, and often stress placed on VCS infrastructure provision at a local level. "What exists is often patchy and financially fragile, fragmented, fails to benefit from economies of scale...Too many organisations lack the critical mass required to provide a 'voice' to frontline organisations in their area and there are significant gaps in provision at this level" (Home Office 2004: 49). This is a major concern that infrastructure development should be provided for at local, regional and national level.

### 5.3 Current situation

Meetings of the CNRZ have now been resumed, 2 members of NBCVS staff continue to attend, however there is a great awareness that there is little 'support' for this to be sustained. NBCVS no longer have the 2 posts in place that enabled it to be practically involved and represent the VCS and Nuneaton and Bedworth. The 4 theme groups have been replaced with Strategic Programme Areas ('SPAs', see 5.2.6), one of which is the 'Regenerating Nuneaton and Bedworth' SPA which is being managed by a sub-ground of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Local Strategic Partnership ('LSP'), which again NBCVS has representation on at LSP and sub-group level.

NBCVS recognize that the situation with the CNRZ will inevitably change in the future because of past experience, therefore representation from the VCS must be in attendance at every meeting as appropriate and practicable to be in a position to promote the CNRZ effectively (content and timing), to represent both the VCS and Nuneaton and Bedworth, and to ensure it is the most appropriate and accessible it can be for the sector; arguably this is part of NBCVSs remit.

As this report is being written there is still no revenue funding available via the CNRZ, and all indications are that there will be none until at least 2006/07, however this may be ring fenced for overspend on existing projects. As referred to by the Chairman of CSWP (see 5.2.6) the new approach is about engaging with the strategy and having a coordinated approach using AWM RZ funding to lever external monies. This is in stark contrast to how RZs and the CNRZ were initially presented to the VCS and therefore how both the theme group and NBCVS were funded to promote it to the VCS – but what does strategy *mean* to the VCS?

## 6 Findings

### 6.1 Community Perception

14 semi-structured interviews from the net list of 20 were achieved in the timescale allowed, representing 70% contact and response (see Appendix 9.1 for original list) carried out by the researcher between 20<sup>th</sup> May and 8<sup>th</sup> June 2005. The interviews were based around a set of 12 questions (see Appendix 9.3) with the opportunity to express other comments and opinions outside of that questionnaire structure.

The general reaction from the community was that few knew to any great extent anything about the Regeneration Zone and some/any of the projects that have received direct funding.

2 organisations had received CNRZ funding for projects (the Voluntary Sector Consortium and Coventry & Warwickshire Connexions); 6 had received indirect assistance in the form of advice and/or financial assistance via organisations that had received direct CNRZ funding.

There was an obvious difference between the understanding of the CNRZ among the 'larger' organisations compared to the 'smaller' ones. All those larger organisations spoken to have knowledge of the strategy, 6 had applied in 2003 to sit on the Regenerating Communities theme group. 2 of these were accepted and attended some meetings until, as stated by the individuals during the research, it was clear that activity was slow and there was no money available both stopped attending.

#### 6.1.1 Achieving Economic Health

On the whole 55% believe the CNRZ has achieved its aim of "improving the quality of life of people living and working locally by increasing 'economic health' of the region" (Appendix 9.3, question 6). Comments included:

*"The principle of pumping money in is good, Nuneaton and Bedworth have improved visually."*

*"The answer has to be yes because of the amount of investment, but in relation to the voluntary and community sector it has been slanted to economic targets. I'm not sure if the Regeneration Zone has actually improved anything different to previously though as there were (and still are) other things targeting deprivation."*

*"A lot of people have increased skills and improved their lives through the Opportunities Centre\* but I'm not sure who the users are or where they come from – they might be from outside the Zone – and why shouldn't other people benefit too?"*

\*a project in Camp Hill that was co-financed by the CNRZ

*"Yes, there have been discrete improvements, but I don't see many larger employers coming in apart from distributors: the area is fast becoming a warehouse capital which isn't good enough, we're losing skills and trades. From the community sector perspective I can't see any improvements."*

### **6.1.2 CNRZ Success**

Despite the overall response that the concept is positive, when asked whether it had been a success for the VCS, overall perception was negative; only 1 respondent was aware of the types of projects that had been funded and 45% were unable to comment on success or failure as they knew very little about the funding, the application process or the projects supported as there seems no public information is available.

There is also the strong feeling that Nuneaton and Bedworth are still losing out financially to its neighbours in Coventry. Other respondents suggested that the CNRZ has had a negative impact on other sources of external funding:

*"We're not getting our share in Nuneaton and Bedworth, it all seems to go to the Arena, Foleshill etc. They've got other large sources of funding too."*

*"Obviously Coventry have more community and voluntary projects, however projects that have got funding here, like Pride in Camp Hill, require such massive investment that it slides all money in its favour; this makes it difficult for others to get RZ money (and a possible impact on other sources)."*

*"The notion of an RZ is divisive; supposed 'well off' areas are ignored even though there's pockets of deprivation and individuals needing support everywhere."*

*"Community-wise it hasn't made a difference – the only gains have been for the Borough and County Councils who've spent it on town centre development – they saw the money and quickly accessed it."*

*"...the Big Lottery have now said we're not a priority area because we've got 'all the other sources of funding' which is not true as we haven't been able to access RZ funding for community development...we've missed out all round."*

Some respondents referred to the apparent duplication of resources that seem to have been funded by the RZ:

*"There seems no appreciation of what is already happening, we need to support the existing structures rather than invent new ones...there is too*

*much duplication of effort which leads to misinformation from non-experts who do not understand the locality or the sector properly."*

*"Why does Camp Hill need its own job office and business support, this is what the Job Centre and other places offer."*

*"There has been no explanation in to the way it's been handled, and there is a perception of waste, with no reasoning behind decisions."*

### **6.1.3 Economic Outputs**

Many respondents referred to the nature of the work of the VCS that it is often difficult to directly link its work to the hard economic outputs as is requested of RZ funding in line with the RES. All respondents understood the need for funding priorities and the necessity for the improvement of economic conditions but could not understand why the capacity building that takes place within VCS activity is not considered directly applicable for RZ funding. Comments included:

*"In our sector we appreciate we have to take a step back from economic targets: last year we helped 30 volunteers gain OCN accreditation; many are not ready to go into work now but may be at a later date. Surely this is achieving economic targets in the future?"*

*"We have seen more take up of people claiming the benefits they are entitled to, so they are economically better off, but not by getting a job or training."*

*"Our service helps develop confidence and thus skills which is a link in the chain for ongoing development of individuals – if RZ outputs are about getting people back/into work then what we do is important. You have to build confidence in people before they can even think about entering re/training...Teenagers find it difficult to access college or work without some help in between, yes there are lots of opportunities to get them back to work but many services like ours offer that essential stepping stone in between...it is this that needs the funding – the stepping stone support."*

Similar comments were made about the nature of regeneration: *"it's about changing hearts and minds: we need to do this before we can give people jobs, rebuild their houses or give them new leisure facilities!"*

#### **6.1.4 Voluntary and Community Sector Representation**

The overall community perception that the VCS was represented within the CNRZ, but the extent was questioned; the nature of a sector that constantly changes is a) difficult to be representative of, and b) there is a difference between representing the voluntary sector and representing the community sector. It is felt by both NBCVS and all of the respondents that CVS is the ideal representative for the voluntary sector but extra support needs to come from the community sector.

A number of the larger organisations had either applied or been approached to sit on the Regenerating Communities theme group. The 2 respondent organisations that did both stopped going due to the perceived low priority and inactivity of the group. All I spoke to suggested they would like to be involved if there would be some tangible benefit (i.e. funding).

*"All of those involved are partial to projects coming forward...for example Liz as the only 'real' Nuneaton and Bedworth voluntary and community sector representative can never actually comment on some of the only local and/or sector projects."*

*"The Borough and the County represent themselves first."*

*"It's impossible to represent everyone, the sector is too big and amorphous, CVS are the best people to be representing the sector...they need to battle and win the big stuff so the small stuff can happen...unfortunately the need is often beaten by those with bigger voices."*

*"The theme group meetings were a waste of time; no money, no decisions could be made: there was nothing I could offer."*

*"There should be more than 1 local voluntary and community sector representative...Liz needs the support of others."*

*"There needs to be independent representatives: grass roots delivery organisations not just service/umbrella organisations."*

#### **6.1.5 Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement**

The clearest message from the community research was that enough has been heard about the voluntary and community sector engaging with the strategy; it should be about the strategy engaging with the sector. Only then can there be further understanding of each position.

11 knew nothing or very little about CSWP and their role within the CNRZ; also 11 thought that had not had enough information about Zones, their structure and how they can or should be impacting the locality, in general terms and the VCS. All had only heard of the CNRZ through NBCVS.

When considering other forums and partnerships across the Borough it was heartening to see a mix of successful approaches. There was an even split between decision making and communication/networking partnerships, and a greater number of those that were active 'grass roots' derived and coordinated compared to larger agency (or authority) led. Clearly, depending on who in the partnership one is speaking to some members will always have different ideas or agendas to being involved, individually or as an organisation. It was however apparent that there is little coordination of activity between one partnership and the next, except where there were common individual members to share information; even when there were common organisations some information was not always communicated as it should have been. There is perhaps the view that NBCVS should assume this coordination and communication role, however it is also clear that one organisation cannot be solely responsible for this.

The VCS is changing, and the sector is becoming more strategic in its approach. Take for instance the closer working relationship being sought locally between the NBVC and North Warwickshire VC. The national association of CVS's is currently reviewing its future monitoring and evaluation of services. However there is also a culture of competition with an increase in both a diversification in local authority service provision and private service providers coming into traditional voluntary sector territory. This often makes both formal and informal partnership working difficult: who is the appropriate advocate, representative and 'voice'?

There needs to be a structure for more strategic VCS partnership which offers a transparent mechanism that could act as a cog for a lot of action and activity, including other forums and partnership work. The cog should not be about wanting leadership but about having a higher vision of the diversity of what is happening and to enable wider communication

In more specific terms the apparent capacity and resource issues within NBCVS that have hampered some partnership arrangements it had in place a year ago are being readdressed. Its current involvement in partnership working is prioritised to what is achievable and what is going to have the most impact and add the most value to the VCS of Nuneaton and Bedworth as has always been its objective.

## **8 Recommendations**

- Ongoing addressing of internal NBCVS resource and capacity, prioritising immediate need and capability
- Seek development funding for NBCVS to continue and increase best

practise

A number of the organisations responding to the questionnaires stated their frustration that because they were voluntary and community organisations there was an expectation that services should be free, and that available capacity within the organisation is to compared to that of statutory or private sector organisations. The feeling was that CNRZ monies should be used to support the infrastructure of the sector.

*“There was a feeling it would all happen organically, which is patronising, with ideas coming up from the community that the CNRZ would support them to do. But it doesn’t work like that – people only join something that’s working or is successful – but with the CNRZ there was no motivation to join...nothing makes it feel like we’d want ownership...they’re paying lip service to sector involvement.”*

*“I don’t mind being active if there’s money available...the managers of the zone are not engaging with the not for profit sector – they should send people out to see what we want and think rather than just putting a call out for us to come to them – they should come to us.”*

*“We don’t want just another funding pot, money should help people like CVS and Citizens Advice so the community are able to deliver...at the moment there’s no direct voluntary sector assistance, only expired support mechanisms.”*

*“We want organisations like CVS to help us muddle through the sheer amounts of information...aiding infrastructure support is necessary...but money has to be constant, not just a short term fix.”*

## **6.2 Stakeholder Response**

The importance of involving stakeholders in discussions was recognised as crucial to this research, firstly in terms of relaying some community comments and concerns, but also to give a balanced view to making realistic recommendations. 10 individuals were identified and contacted to talk to the researcher, of whom 7 participated.

Among those stakeholders that took part in discussions there was an appreciation of the position of the VCS, and of NBCVS as its role of representative. The additionality that the VCS bring to the sub-region is appreciated, but it was felt by a few of the respondents that this does not have a direct fit with the hard economic outputs that AWM, and thus the CNRZ, have to achieve.

## 6.2.1 Economic Outputs

Having spoken to a representative from AWM many 'social regeneration' activities are not acknowledged as linking to 'economic regeneration'; there has been an increasingly hard line drawn around the definition of what AWM, as an economic agency, consider an economic output.

Rhetoric about the VCSs additionality has improved, with a strategic acceptance of the need for wider regeneration initiatives (see 5.2.3), but criteria set by AWM (and thus funding availability) does not meet the rhetoric, that is Tier 3 outputs (now 'Tasking Outputs'), e.g. jobs created, businesses assisted, reclaiming brownfield land; note even the Tier 3 output 'Community Enterprise Initiatives' does not have a tasking equivalent.

*"The agency has a very different agenda to working towards economic development...Over a period of time the emphasis of the agency has moved away from supporting social activity to business support."*

*"Any regeneration funding, not just AWM, has to be split equally 3 ways: economic, social and physical."*

*"The voluntary and community sector are immature in developing and delivering hard economic realities. AWM outputs need to be 'pure' and direct with a level of immediacy, like number of jobs; capacity building through the sector is a long game."*

*"The support mechanisms for the pre-steps, that the voluntary sector are so strong in delivering, can be funded, but only as part of larger projects with long term impacts that can deliver some of the hard outputs elsewhere in the project...we can provide the capital investment but revenue must be levered in from elsewhere...local government should be providing the support for the pre-steps."*

*"With the financial constraints lip service has been paid to holistic regeneration."*

*"Regional Development Agencies haven't refunded on the same basis as SRBs allowed. There was an assumption that Zone funding would have the same flexibility that SRB offered in social funding; Government Office took on the social mandate instead, via Community Empowerment Networks, LSC etc, but most voluntary groups work at grassroots and not at these levels."*

## **6.2.2 Community Perception**

When discussing the perception of the CNRZ among the community, stakeholders did seem aware of their concerns and issues with the funding process, some even felt that the community concerns reflected their own concerns. It was agreed by all respondents that Coventry was probably better placed to take advantage of the opportunities that the RZ held because they already had structures and capacity in place to move projects forward quicker than Nuneaton and Bedworth may have.

*"Most organisations feel the Zone is irrelevant and disillusioned by early promises; now they've accepted that it's just not for them."*

*"The RZ has had discrete impact, but the long-term vision won't be achieved without investment in wider regeneration...which includes investing in the social element of regeneration activity."*

*"We seemed to fall into a structure, we were helping them...[this] doesn't engender trust, no wonder the community are confused and mistrust the Zone."*

*"You need to capture the hearts and minds of the heads of Regional Development Agencies and higher; it is a long game for the voluntary and community sector about changing the perceptions of how it can impact the economy."*

The AWM representative that took part in the research stated that it is about moving forward, dealing with the situation as it now is: *"Nuneaton and Bedworth have done very well out of the Zone, it's not the agency's fault that they're not working properly with the voluntary sector or that there's perceived duplication...the Zone itself has to take substantial responsibility for its decisions, past, present and future, more than Advantage West Midlands."*

## **6.2.3 Representation and Engagement**

As VCS impact on economic regeneration is little appreciated then it was inevitable organisations representing this within the CNRZ would feel less inclined to be involved in RZ activity. There are moves to improve the engagement of the VCS, for instance CSWP have called for nominations from the VCS across Coventry and Warwickshire for representation on the CSWP board. There was also a guarded acceptance by most that the new SPA structure would increase participation and involvement of the VCS, although 1 respondent stated that SPAs might make engagement more difficult for large and small VCS organisations because LSP membership is not open to everyone.

*"The SPAs will have greater power and it should strengthen the board...money should therefore filter down to LSPs to decide at a local level, this can only be positive."*

*"Why would the sector want to engage with their limited resource and capacity? It is less about absorbing costs, but more about sparing the time."*

*"The Regenerating Communities theme group couldn't make any decisions, we were told no at every turn so why was it established in the first place? We couldn't work within a structure that was constantly changing."*

*"It is integral for CVSs to be able to continue to attend...unfortunately it's when everyone's lost interest and moved away then that's when there's movement and no-one's there to do anything about it."*

*"The voluntary sector needs to be smarter when engaging, it should be sharing the burden with councils."*

*"It's dangerous to walk away, you need to be at the table, although I do appreciate the difficulties for the Regenerating Communities & Learning theme groups as there was no money attendance did seem pointless."*

*"It's important that it's more than CVS's who are involved."*

*"A lot of people are there for the wrong reasons – i.e. only when there's money – unfortunately when money is there strategy and partnership working are lost in the dash for cash...the SPAs will help solve this silo mentality."*

Most respondents agreed there had been little communication outside of the CNRZ partnership meetings, but that there is expected to be a shared responsibility for disseminating information appropriately.

*"It's my job to gather information as a potential match funder but I have found this difficult to come by, CVSs are the only 'easy' mechanism to receiving pertinent information...Even [we] are losing interest until there is more money to use as leverage."*

*"The CNRZ partnership has not been in the right position to communicate externally with other funding bodies – even though the rhetoric suggests this was (and is) the future RZ aim."*

*"It is CSWPs responsibility to communicate information at a general level, like updating its website, running events as appropriate, but it is the partners responsibility to communicate this to their networks."*

## 7 Conclusions

The most striking result of the consultation and research period was that it was made clear from both formal and informal discussions that the CNRZ should not be about raising the VCSs aspirations about funding opportunities, instead it should be about engaging the sector with the strategy.

The changes in the CNRZ, namely the shift in focus from 'theme group' pillars of activity to SPAs as suggested in ZIP4, have meant that there is an implied shift in focus away from RZs towards a more joined up approach to working in the sub-region, and that the strategy can be used to lever more external funding into the area. Due to the harder line on economic outputs projects should be developed in closer partnership between stakeholders and other organisations.

All through the discussions it was assumed, equally by the stakeholders and the VCS organisations, that NBCVS will lead VCS involvement from Nuneaton and Bedworth in the CNRZ and therefore attend all meetings as appropriate. However it must be recognised that from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 NBCVS no longer receive any specific project based funding to financially support its involvement, either from the CNRZ direct or from external sources. Any continued involvement therefore has to be taken out of other project time and expenditure: a fact that has been and is still little appreciated. Furthermore it was stated by many that the level of interaction by the VCS should be *increased* to gain a broader and more representative view. However comments from a RAWM representative stated that via a current ChangeUp bid includes budget for compensating VCS organisations for their attendance at meetings; which if the bid is successful will be a positive precedent.

Comments from Liz Stuart, Chief Executive of NBCVS, confirmed that involvement had been difficult from the start, and NBCVS were appreciative of the fact that CSWP Ltd had recently been through a significant period of restructuring not least because of the change of approach as outlined in ZIP4.

Recent research conducted by RAWM (see 5.2.7) about how the VCS continue to interact with RZs mirrors the findings of this research that communication between RZs and the VCS needs to be improved, and engagement could be improved. The RAWM research seems to suggest that building capacity and infrastructure of the VCS should be invested in, by the RZs and externally; of the respondents of this research 8 pointed directly to the same recommendation, however RAWM seem less positive that this is likely to happen until the VCS can be clearer in how it can achieve the types of output it requires.

The limitations of the research is that it was viewed through the eyes of the organisations, some of whom had had unsatisfactory experiences with the CNRZ in the past, and felt disillusioned by the strategy and its opportunities, especially those available within the Borough of Nuneaton and Bedworth. Little research has been done into the impact of the CNRZ, of the improvements in activities that have been made possible, or the scale and scope of services have been established or extended and those have become more accessible; the effect on the beneficiaries has not been measured. CSWP did state an impact assessment of the CNRZ was needed, and that it was genuinely interested in outcomes (compared to AWMs concern with outputs and milestones).

A couple of the research respondents were cautious as to accepting that the RZs have had any visible impact on the growth of the region; the majority had to agree that it was working to achieve its aim of improving the economic health of the region, but that it was failing to make any impact within the VCS, except for perhaps arguably in Camp Hill which is undergoing widespread regeneration.

In AWMs 2004 Economic Strategy and Action Plan (see 5.2.3) it states that the agency, with its partners must seek to “improve the...cultural infrastructure” and “identify and overcome barriers to participation, such as...low aspirations” – have Nuneaton and Bedworth benefited in these areas? The results from this research would conclude not. All of the organisations responding to this research felt they could arguably assist in delivering these outcomes, but felt left out of RZ funding plans. This, argued the AWM representative, is because there is not a clear enough match in output delivery ability; instead this should be funded at a more local level.

The smaller VCS organisations all expressed their frustration at having lost any of the grass roots support they had benefited from via the CNRZ (i.e. Community Development support from NBCVS). The larger VCS organisations all felt they never had any real opportunities to benefit, even though some of them seemed to directly fit the priorities. It is these issues that must be approached if the VCS is to be successfully engaged with the strategy in the future.

Communication must be improved in all directions to ensure that the disillusionment and confusion of previous activity is not repeated. Those who represent the VCS within the CNRZ must ensure that communication to the VCS is clear, honest and appropriate. All respondents to this research within the VCS stated they would be happy with information through existing channels, like newsletters and websites.

## 8 Recommendations

- The VCS need additional resources to enable them to continue to engage with the strategy; this is in-line with recommendations made in ChangeUp (see 5.2.8). Communication channels must be improved to ensure information and best practise can be shared.
- VCS requires strategic decision making responsibility within the sub-region, therefore VCS representation is needed at CSWP board level to help broaden participation and engagement.
- There needs to be a better understanding of the VCS by partners, especially within the CNRZ board, CSWP and AWM (see RAWMs capacity building recommendations, section 5.2.7). Initially this could be achieved by work shadowing both at chief officer level and grassroots community work.
- There needs to be a broader acknowledgement of the additionality the VCS bring to wider economic development within the sub-region; this will help to continue/increase VCS engagement.
- Stakeholders and other local partners should be brought together as appropriate to discuss the results of this research and how the recommendations may be approached and resolved for the future both locally and across the CNRZ.
- Further study may be needed to discuss issues raised in this study with other RZs in the West Midlands and possibly discussions with other Regional Development Agencies, for example the East Midlands Regional Development Agency.

## 9 Appendices

### 9.1 Community Consultation List

RZ_Other_big	Sue Palanganda	Volunteer Centre
RZ_Other_big	Mary Beaumont	DIAL
RZ_Other_big	Theresa Cook	Nuneaton Training Centre Ltd
RZ_Other_big	Pardeep Gill	Chilvers Coton Initiative
RZ_Other_big	John Rigby	People In Action
RZ_Other_big	David Gooding	Citizens Advice Bureau
RZ_Other_big	Lynn Webster	Warwickshire Welfare Rights
RZ_Other_big	John Frogley	VSC
RZ_Other_big	Anne Steele	Community Alcohol Service
RZ_Other_big	Dave Fraser	Coventry & Warwickshire Connexions
RZ_Other_small	Stephen Wilks	Cedar Tree Residents Association
RZ_Other_small	Ann Hayes	Nuneaton Club for Young People Ltd
RZ_Other_small	Frank McGale	Nuneaton Credit Union Ltd
RZ_Other_small	Tom Douglas	Caribbean Friendly Association
RZ_Other_small	JS Matharu	Guru Nanak Day Centre
RZ_Other_small	Joe Lawley	The Compassionate Friends
RZ_Other_small	Mike Daniels	Griff & Coton Cricket Club
RZ_Other_small	Brian Lowe	Nuneaton & Bedworth Neighbourhood Watch Association
RZ_Other_small	Lena Patel	Nuneaton Women's Multicultural Resource Centre
RZ_Other_small	Jane Brown	Acorn Pregnancy Counselling

## 9.2 Stakeholder Contact List

RZ_Stakeholder	Louise Winterburn	Coalfields Regeneration Trust
RZ_Stakeholder	Stephen Copley	Advantage West Midlands
RZ_Stakeholder	Roger Dowthwaite	CSWP Ltd
RZ_Stakeholder	Dawn Ford	Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
RZ_Stakeholder	Janet Fortune	Warwickshire County Council
RZ_Stakeholder	Nick Blamire-Brown	Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
RZ_Stakeholder	Yvonne Rose/ Elizabeth Hancox	Learning Skills Council
RZ_Stakeholder	Simon Cottingham/ Sharon Palmer	Regional Action West Midlands
RZ_Stakeholder	Rob Allison	Coventry Voluntary Service Council
RZ_Stakeholder	Tammy Matanky	Coventry & Warwickshire Cooperative Development Agency

### 9.3 Community Questionnaire

## Regenerating Nuneaton & Bedworth

### Regeneration Strategy & Delivery

#### About the Coventry & Nuneaton Regeneration Zone ('Zone')

Q1 What do you understand about Regeneration Zones and the Coventry & Nuneaton one in particular?

Q2 Has your group/organisation benefited from Zone support (financial or advice)?

Q3 Which agency/organisation provided this?

Q4 Are you aware of any other Zone projects? (These can be managed by or supporting the voluntary & community, public or statutory sectors)

Q5 Have you been involved in the Zone in any other way? How?

#### Your perception of the Zone

Q6 In your opinion has the Zone achieved its aim of improving the quality of life of people living & working locally by increasing the 'economic health' of the region?

Q7 In your opinion, to date, has the Zone been a success? In what way?

Q8 Do you feel the voluntary & community sector are represented within the Zone?

#### Communication about the Zone

Q9 What do you know of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership (CSWP) & their role in the Zone?

Q10 Do you feel you get any/enough information about the Zone?

Q11 What information would you like to receive about the Zone? How often? In what format?

#### Other

Q12 Any other comments.