



NETWORK

INSIDE

- How much difference a year makes
- You'll never walk alone
- Wheels 2 Work
- Village of the Year Winner
- Ecological consultancy

In their hands

How can people be given more influence over their local natural environment?
- page 6

Where are we going? - see page 4

July 2009

BRCC - serving communities across Bedfordshire

How much difference a year makes...



It seems incredible that the creation of two new unitary authorities in Bedfordshire was announced barely a year ago. With Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council taking over the functions of the existing four authorities from 1st April this year, there was a great amount of upheaval during the year. While this meant a certain amount of treading water, BRCC was still able to press forward with a number of new projects.

Last summer, BRCC was appointed as the 'accountable body' to lead the delivery of a 5 year, £3 million rural investment strategy for the Greensand Ridge area of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Since then, BRCC has produced an investment prospectus, introductory leaflet and website and established a team of trained facilitators to help interested businesses develop their project ideas.

BRCC also led a successful partnership bid worth £70,000 to produce twenty parish-level Green Infrastructure Plans across the old district of Mid Bedfordshire during the period 2008-2010 (see our cover story on page 6 for more details). Nearly half of these plans have now been completed, and Town and Parish Councils have enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to map their communities' aspirations for their local green spaces.

In March 2009 we launched Wheels2Work, a moped loan scheme to help those out of work (particularly young people) to access employment or training. Flitwick Motorcycles was selected as the authorised scooter dealer and Chiltern Motorcycle Training as the scheme's trainer. According to Aaron Roberts, one of the first beneficiaries, "Wheels2Work has made a huge difference to my life."

Finally, BRCC also completed the development of six Hidden Britain Centres in Bedfordshire (and two in Hertfordshire) under an eighteen month, £89,000 programme administered by EEDA. Hidden Britain Centres are a national initiative to encourage tourists to visit the lesser-known parts of the country, through the development of a network of community owned and led small-scale tourism projects. The eight Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire projects have resulted in the production of a series of local walk leaflets, information boards and community events, and the leverage of an additional £111,000 in grant income.

2009/10 will be our first in the new world of unitary authorities. You can find out about our future plans on pages 4 and 5.

Janet Ridge - BRCC Chief Executive



Wheels2Work is launched at Tilsworth Golf Centre, with representatives from the National Wheels2Work Development Team, funders and partner agencies

Does your village hall need tailored insurance?

Aon has been providing specialist insurance to village halls for over 40 years.

Call Aon village hall insurance today for your quotation.

0845 600 1682

www.aon.co.uk/villagehalls

Covering the heart of your community

Telephone calls are recorded and may be monitored. Aon Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority in respect of insurance mediation activities only. FP3629 - VH - 0707



AON

Clifton is Village of the Year

Clifton has been honoured as the Calor Village of the Year for Bedfordshire for a record-breaking third time in six years.

As one of the judges commented, "Clifton is a very impressive village, with strength in depth, some great people and apparent self-sufficiency".

The other shortlisted parishes - Bromham, Harlington, Chalgrave and Wyboston - were also highly commended.



BRCC to help voluntary groups through the recession

The Voluntaryworks consortium, of which BRCC is a founder member, has been allocated nearly £0.5 million from the Big Lottery's

BASIS II programme to provide funding and development advice to voluntary and community groups across Bedfordshire. The project, which is still awaiting the go-ahead, will be delivered over three years by BRCC, CVS, Voluntary & Community Action and Voluntary Action Luton.

BRCC is also acting as the Local Delivery Agent for the Capacitybuilders Modernisation Fund. Open until July 17, this awarded bursaries of up to £1,000 to voluntary organisations to access expert advice on how to become more resilient during the recession, including options for collaborating or merging with other organisations. To date, four bursaries have been awarded in Bedfordshire.

Another area where BRCC is seeking to help voluntary groups is financial management. The Bedford Charity has awarded £5,000 to BRCC and the CVS to carry out a feasibility study for a community accountancy service in Bedford Borough. This service would advise groups on how they manage their finances, as well as providing additional services such as independent examination of accounts.

Community Rail Month comes to the Marston Vale

The Marston Vale Line was a hive of activity during Community Rail Month this May, thanks to the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (co-ordinated by BRCC's Stephen Sleight). The extensive programme included a Fun Day at Millbrook Station; a Special Train Service to the 40s Family Festival at Bletchley Park; a Music Train, which laid on entertainment from the 'Marc Time' Barber Shop Quartet; and a 'taster visit' for Bletchley's Asian community.

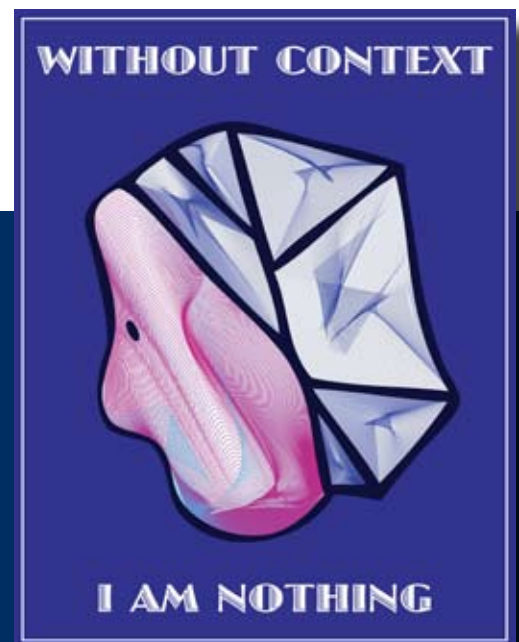
Community Rail Month also saw the launch of a 20% discount for Marston Vale passengers on all types of entry ticket at Bletchley Park, valid until Easter 2010. For further information visit www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk

A Particular finish for HAPPEN

The residency of top local artist Julie Freeman at the Microsystems & Nanotechnology Centre at Cranfield University, funded by the Wellcome Trust, culminated with an exhibition in May 2009.

Called 'In Particular', the residency marked the closing stages of HAPPEN, a strategic arts programme for Bedfordshire hosted by BRCC between 2005 and 2009. HAPPEN explored the ways in which artists could collaborate with professionals in other fields, such as science, education, business, and the natural environment, in order to deliver a range of social, economic and environmental outcomes. While its core funding has now run out, BRCC will continue to operate HAPPEN as an arts project management service.

A leading digital artist, Julie's principal aim has been to help people to understand science in a different way. 'In Particular' gives a unique insight into the hidden world of nanoparticles, too small to see with the human eye, and their surprising behaviours. Julie's collaboration with Jeremy Ramsden, Cranfield's Professor of Nanotechnology, has been a two-way street, resulting in a scientific paper. According to Jeremy, "I really have to think, and I think we all do, with Julie's questions. They are not the sort of questions we would otherwise ask."



The behaviours of nanoparticles are encapsulated through a series of Nano Novels and accompanying images.

Where are we going?

BRCC recently finalised its business plan for 2009-12 - here we outline what we plan to be doing over the next three years.

BRCC is a very different organisation now to the one that was founded in 1953, even if many of our core functions in supporting local communities remain strikingly unchanged.

The environment has also moved on. Like all organisations, we will be affected by the impending public spending squeeze and the longer-term (but more serious) challenges of climate change and peak oil. What has also changed is that spending priorities are increasingly set locally, through local strategic partnerships. More than ever, we have to ensure that our work is relevant to the concerns of the new unitary authorities and their partners, which often means working across all areas, urban and rural.

"BRCC has to build on its successful track record in working WITH communities"

In order to survive and thrive, BRCC has to build on its successful track record in working WITH communities. Part of this is about increasing the ability of local people and communities to act for themselves, and influence decisions affecting them. Statutory agencies, due to their very size, find it difficult to engage with communities at a very local level. Our work supporting parishes, towns and urban neighbourhoods

to draw up plans for their area provides an excellent way to involve the whole community in identifying their aspirations for the future.

Voluntary & community groups also form an essential part of vibrant communities, and we will continue to provide a range of support services such as Criminal Records Bureau checking. In particular, we are delighted that, for this whole three-year period, we will be able to offer



Above: BRCC's Community Transport Brokerage scheme enables voluntary groups across Bedfordshire to access low cost minibus hire, enabling them to go on trips that they might otherwise find difficult to afford.

Far right: BRCC is aiming to transform the Grade II listed Ridgmont Station building, ideally placed for both road and rail access, into a Social Enterprise Centre.

Our vision



funding and development advice to organisations across the county together with our partners on the Voluntaryworksconsortium, through a new project funded by the Big Lottery.

Strong communities are also those where everyone is included. Many people in Bedfordshire, particularly in rural areas, struggle to access employment, services, and housing. Our 'Good Neighbour' schemes provide easy access to help and support through volunteers to everyone who needs it. We help disadvantaged people to access employment and learning through the intermediate labour market (ILM) and Healthy Steps to Employment programmes. We also facilitate access to transport through Wheels2Work, Community Transport Brokerage and other schemes.

Another key strength of BRCC is that we work across economic, social and environmental interests, which need to be balanced against each other. Our Sustainable Communities Team supports communities to protect, enhance and enjoy their natural

environment (you can read more about this on pages 6 and 7). Our Nourishing Neighbourhoods project enables people in Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis to grow and/or access fresh and affordable local fruit and vegetables, and to understand how to prepare and cook them - we are hoping to develop this work across the whole county.

An increasing part of our work is in economic and enterprise development in rural areas. As reported in this and previous issues, we will be delivering the £3 million Greensand Ridge Development Programme until the end of 2013. Over the next year or so we will also be refurbishing the old Ridgmont Station buildings as a Social Enterprise Centre.

Finally, BRCC will continue to represent the interests of local communities within Local Strategic Partnerships and with local authorities and

their statutory partners, working to increase the involvement of local people in decision-making; promote sustainable development; and ensure a fair deal for rural communities.

By 2012 we hope that we will have made a significant contribution to making Bedfordshire's communities great places to live and work, for everyone, now and in the future.



Our vision is of sustainable and empowered communities across Bedfordshire.

This means communities that:

- are inclusive and cohesive
- can influence key decisions affecting them
- have a thriving, low carbon economy and services
- act to protect the environment both locally and globally

Mission

BRCC aims to be Bedfordshire's leading sustainable development charity supporting and representing

local communities, working across a range of economic, social and environmental interests to address their needs and wishes.

We do this by:

- creating opportunities for participation and empowerment
- supporting community led action
- supporting marginalised groups and individuals
- lobbying and advocacy
- developing and delivering partnership projects



Planning to Go Green



House-building across England may currently be at a record low, with many builders having downed tools due to the credit crunch. But, come the economic recovery, Bedfordshire will still be expected to accommodate significant housing growth over the next twenty years. The challenge is how to ensure that growth is sustainable and does not negatively impact on the environment.

One way of addressing this is through **Green Infrastructure (GI) Planning**: developing and enhancing the networks of green spaces and routes that are essential for quality of life as well as environmental stewardship. A Strategic GI Plan for the whole county was produced by the GI

Consortium (chaired by BRCC's Joel Carre) in 2007, and plans also exist at district level as part of planning policy. Now, BRCC is facilitating more detailed planning at a parish level across the eastern part of Central Bedfordshire, including Stotfold, Arlesey, Shefford, Henlow, Biggleswade, Potton, Sandy, Langford, Clifton, Meppershall, Lower Stondon and Shillington.

"This is a new approach that we are pioneering in Bedfordshire."

"This is a new approach that we and our partners are pioneering in Bedfordshire," says BRCC's

Environmental Team Leader, Cliff Andrews. **"Parish-level GI planning offers the best way of getting the community involved in planning for the natural environment."**

Local people are invited to attend interactive workshops to help draw up plans for the parish's green spaces. **All plans are endorsed by Central Bedfordshire Council** and the relevant town or parish council, and are used in considering development proposals. Most importantly, they are used as the basis for joint working to create new green infrastructure, dependent on obtaining landowner agreement and funding.

Parish level GI planning has already been so successful that it is being adopted elsewhere. BRCC has won a contract to deliver GI planning in Whaddon Chase, Buckinghamshire, in partnership with our counterpart

Ecological consultancy

BRCC has an in-house ecologist, who can undertake a wide range of wildlife surveys from amphibians to plants, bats and other mammals and invertebrates.

We can also undertake vegetation surveys and write management plans, create interpretation panels and write leaflets. Our experience has been built over 10 years of undertaking ecological work throughout Bedfordshire and the surrounding counties, such as Phase 1 studies, protected species scoping surveys, management plans for green spaces, and advising on wildflower meadow and pond creation.



Recent examples of our work include surveying Biggleswade Allotments Meadow to establish its fitness for recognition as a County Wildlife Site - this is awaiting approval from the County Wildlife Site Panel later in the year - and the creation of wildlife leaflets for Castle Close in Sharnbrook, helping visitors to identify plants and mini-beasts.

Weblinks:

www.letsgo.org.uk

- green spaces and routes in Bedfordshire

www.bedslife.org.uk

- Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership

www.whi.org.uk

- national Walking the way to Health campaign

VOLUNTEER: Are you interested in becoming a conservation volunteer in the Ivel

You'll never walk alone

in that county, Buckinghamshire Community Action.

Biodiversity

A vital element of green spaces is the richness of the wildlife that they support - in other words, biodiversity. BRCC is now working with communities across Bedfordshire to preserve, enhance and create orchards and ponds, funded by GrantScape and in partnership with the Greensand Trust. These exciting projects will build on existing work, such as planting orchards in Biggleswade and Great Billington, and



“rescuing” the ancient trees at Stratton Moat.

New orchards will be planted in Colmworth and Odell, using local Bedfordshire varieties and rescued ancient trees grafted by local experts. New ponds will be created in Sandy and Stotfold, and several ponds will be enhanced throughout the county. Volunteers will be trained in planting, formative pruning, wildlife surveying and harvesting, as well as pond creation and surveying, in order to leave a legacy of greater knowledge and understanding and rekindled enthusiasm for these wonderful habitats.

Regular walking has many physical and mental health benefits. It has been shown to help reduce anxiety & depression, help prevent diabetes, increase ‘good’ cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, benefit the immune system, improve bone and muscle strength, increase stamina, and aid weight loss. Walking with other people can help reduce loneliness and increase the feeling of independence. However, many people are physically inactive, for a number of reasons.

Walk4Health in Bedfordshire offers people the opportunity to join a regular walk (lasting around an hour) led by a trained Health Walk Leader, who is normally a volunteer. Having come about as a result of the national ‘Walk the Way to Health’ campaign (launched in 2000 by Natural England and the British Heart Foundation), the scheme has been particularly successful in Bedford and eastern parts of Bedfordshire.


BRCC’s Mike Fayers, who runs the scheme, says: “Walking is a great way of increasing physical and mental health. People of all ages can join in; it is low-impact; there is no need for special equipment, just comfortable footwear; and you can quickly see the benefits. The social side is really picking up now as well - people enjoy meeting other walkers, and some have started to organise trips together.”

Margaret deciding to join a Health Walk after her doctor told her that her blood pressure and cholesterol levels were high: “At first, I struggled to walk 200 yards. I persevered and joined the Walking 4 Health group at Henlow. I also walk twice a week on my own - about 5 miles in total. Now I have never felt fitter, and my blood pressure is the lowest it’s been for 10 years.”

Viola joined the Health Walk Group at Great Barford Surgery following a period of quite serious nervous stress and related problems: “I found the walks improved my energy levels and stamina, plus meeting people from a variety of backgrounds was of great interest...My health is greatly improved, I feel much more invigorated and life is great”.

BRCC also now runs the Buddy scheme in Bedford on behalf of NHS Bedfordshire, which finds volunteer ‘buddies’ for people who need help with walking. Mike’s hope is that some of these people may go on to join Health Walks in the future, once their confidence has increased.

If you are interested in becoming more active while meeting new people, why not contact Mike to find out about walks in your area?



Network is the magazine of
Bedfordshire Rural Communities
Charity (BRCC).

Editorial: Jon Boswell
Design: John Hambley
Photography: David Maxwell, LRPS
Printing: Olive Press Ltd
73 The Green, Stotfold, Hitchin,
Hertfordshire. SG5 4AN

BRCC exists to support and represent
the interests of local communities
across Bedfordshire. To become a
member of BRCC please contact us
using the details below.

The Old School, Cardington, Bedford
MK44 3SX (registered office)

The Smithy, The Village, Old Warden,
Biggleswade SG18 9HQ

01234 838771
info@bedsrcc.org.uk
www.bedsrcc.org.uk

Chief Executive

Janet Ridge
T: (01234 832611)
E: janetr@bedsrcc.org.uk

Corporate Services team

Jon Boswell
T: (01767 626460)
E: jonb@bedsrcc.org.uk

Roy Sinfield
T: (01234 832615)
E: roys@bedsrcc.org.uk

Roz Carman
T: (01234 832612)
E: rozc@bedsrcc.org.uk

Isobel Keech
T: (01234 832613)
E: isobelk@bedsrcc.org.uk

John Hambley
T: (01767 626461)
E: johnh@bedsrcc.org.uk

David Maxwell
T: (01767 626466)
E: davidm@bedsrcc.org.uk

Sustainable Communities team

Joel Carre
T: (01767 626458)
E: joelc@bedsrcc.org.uk

Cliff Andrews
T: (01767 626456)
E: cliffa@bedsrcc.org.uk

Richard Lawrence
T: (01767 626451)
E: richardl@bedsrcc.org.uk

Mike Fayers
T: (01767 626453)
E: mikef@bedsrcc.org.uk

Philip Jerred
T: (01767 626467)
E: philipj@bedsrcc.org.uk

Beni Wright
T: (01767 626455)
E: beniw@bedsrcc.org.uk

Chris Bland
T: (01767 626456)
E: chrisb@bedsrcc.org.uk

Anne-Marie Hamilton
T: (01480 212772)
E: anne-marieh@bedsrcc.org.uk

Rebecca Gibbs
T: (01767 626454)
E: rebeccag@bedsrcc.org.uk

Community Empowerment team

Jane Markham
T: (01234 832644)
E: janem@bedsrcc.org.uk

Zoe Ashby
T: (01234 832618)
E: zoea@bedsrcc.org.uk

Jemma McLean
T: (01234 832617)
E: jemmam@bedsrcc.org.uk

Sue Norman
T: (01234 832614)
E: suen@bedsrcc.org.uk

Justine Hunt
T: (01234 832648)
E: justineh@bedsrcc.org.uk

Stephen Sleight
T: (01234 832640)
E: stephens@bedsrcc.org.uk

Neil Burrows
T: (01234 832645)
E: neilb@bedsrcc.org.uk

Geoff Telling
T: (01234 832640)
E: geofft@bedsrcc.org.uk

Louise Ashmore
T: (01234 832647)
E: louisea@bedsrcc.org.uk

Rosie Kind
T: (0800 0391234)
E: rosiek@bedsrcc.org.uk

Francesca Johnstone
T: (0800 0391234)
E: francescaj@bedsrcc.org.uk

Peter Martin
T: (01234 832619)
E: peterm@bedsrcc.org.uk

Tony Nash
T: (01234 832614)
E: tonyn@bedsrcc.org.uk

Bob Hughes
T: (01234 832646)
E: bobh@bedsrcc.org.uk