Outline of an Area Development Plan

The information below is meant to give community groups an idea of the information which would normally be included in an Area Development Plan. There are many different kinds of plans, which often feed into each other, and clarify the role each individual project has in a wider context.

Local Development Plans provide an opportunity to take local circumstances into account when planning future work.

Why Do We Need A Plan?

From the Community's Perspective
Having a Plan helps a group to stay focused, to see how everything fits, and to marshal the available resources and put them to best use.

The process of putting a plan together can be a fantastic tool for motivating people, getting them involved, healing rifts, bringing new people out for the first time, connecting groups in new ways, kicking off new projects..... It can also give recognition to work done in the past, and allow concerns to be voiced, aired, dealt with and perhaps incorporated into new projects.

It is also an invaluable way to reinforce the message of community, of pulling together, helping one another, and looking out for each other. It can help to create a wonderful sense of community spirit in an area.

It's a great way of finding out what your community does well – and learning from that, transferring the lessons into new areas. It's also a great way of catching gaps which aren't being looked after by anyone at all, and starting the conversation around what you're going to do as a community about that!

A well-constructed Area Plan shows each group how what they're doing contributes to the overall goals of the community. This can really help when it comes time to ask for help for fundraising activities. In communities where more than one group is trying to advance a large project simultaneously, an Area Plan can facilitate agreement on the order in which these projects will be pursued, thus easing the burden of fundraising on the area in general. Some communities have even gone so far as to set up one communal fundraising activity, changing the beneficiary projects over time by agreement, as per their Area Plan's Priority Actions and as agreed by the community as a whole!

You will find the community in general will also be more generous in their support of events when everyone is clear on how the whole community is benefiting from the projects which are contained in the Area Plan.

From an individual Group within the Community's Perspective

When a group is trying to advance its own project, it can help to put that project in the wider context of what it will do for the area. Will it help to address the area's most pressing needs? Will it be supporting the most vulnerable people in the area? If there are 200 people living the community, what % of them will benefit from your project – 2% or 80%?

This information can really help a funder to see how important your project might be in helping to improve your area's overall economic or social situation, beyond what benefits your project will bring to your own immediate group.

Sometimes, considering how your project sits in the wider community can open your eyes as to other benefits your project could bring. Small tweaks to your facilities could result in a whole range of new services being delivered to people in your area, and many more people benefiting from your work for very little extra cost or effort. Does your sports club with its 52 members really need exclusive use of your proposed playing pitch, changing facilities, meeting rooms, function room, gym and all weather running track all day and night, and all year round? Maybe older people might be invited to use the track as a safe, level surface for walking two mornings a week. Could a community-wide 'operation transformation' effort make use of the gym and running track? The club showing leadership like this would earn a lot of goodwill in the community, which would stand them in good stead when it comes time to fundraise.....

From the Funder's Perspective

From a prospective funding agency's perspective, it shows that a community has:
- *looked at all of their area's needs*
- *identified the people who need help and the kind of help they require*
- *consulted with the community and*
- *agreed the projects which will best meet those needs*
- *planned out how they will approach each project*
- *worked out how they will finance not just the setting up, but also the ongoing running/ maintenance cost of each project*

A funder has limited funds to work with. If they can fund just one project in your community, they want to know is this the one which will make the biggest difference to people's lives, and how?
- If you've worked that out for them, it makes it that bit easier for them to get on board with you.
- They also need to know that your team is capable of delivering on the vision you've set out. If you couldn't even put your plans down on a sheet of paper, how much confidence can they have that you'll be able to manage a design process, procurement, contracts, then staff, marketing, and build a thriving social enterprise? You need to convince them you're a safe bet.

Having a well written, carefully and thoroughly thought out Plan goes a long way to making both your project and your group credible.

What Should be In a Plan?

Area plans can be very different in their content, as they respond to the needs of the area they are written for. But they broadly should cover the same information.
- They should describe the area – its physical location, its attributes & its challenges
- They should describe the people in the area – age profile, deprivation levels, etc
- They should assess the needs of the area – social, economic, cultural
- They should identify measures to address these needs
    o Some will be capital in nature (buildings)
    o Some will be programme in nature (training courses etc)
- They should identify the resources required to make it happen
    o Who will do it
    o What it will cost
    o Next steps
- They should identify some way of measuring progress

The following section provides more detail on what you might expect to find in each section of an Area Development/ Community Plan

Executive Summary

2 - 3 pages outlining who you are, what you intend to do (and why), how you're going to do it, and what you need in order to make it all happen (materials, funding, partnerships with agencies etc).

The rest of the document gives more detail on the Executive Summary. The information in the rest of the document should back up the decisions you have made regarding what is to be done in the area.

Introduction
Who you are:
How long you've been in operation,
Organisational structure - decision making etc
Employees, Committee & the roles of each
Aims & Objectives
How these were drawn up - needs surveys etc
Your overriding policies: eg social inclusion, anti-poverty, Tidy Towns etc.
What you've done:
Outline of work to date
Should feature major achievements, benefits etc

(evaluations would come in here)
probably best outlined on a project by project basis
Revisit Aims & Objectives:
What has now served its purpose & can be discontinued
What went very well & should be continued
What new needs have emerged that need to be addressed

Mission Statement

All the above info. builds up to the rationale behind your mission statement, which should go something like this:

> " *we are in the business of providing xxxxxx to xxxxxxx, and we will do so in a xxxxxx way" (the values you will adhere to in the performance of your work e.g. non-profit making, equal access for all).*

Situational Analysis

This basically looks at where you're at as a community, and the challenges you face. It's only when you know where you are that you can plan how to move forward.

Area Profile

Factual data about the area - where it is, how many live there, who they are (e.g have you a lot of elderly people in the area, maybe a lot of batchelor farmers?), what assets are in the area (skills, buildings, industry, recreational facilities etc), what services are available locally (eg community buildings, bus routes etc)

- Statistical info may be got right down to Small Area level (smaller than townland) from the Census. Go to the SAPMAP section of the CSO website, www.cso.ie . You can zoom in on the map and select the county, DED, townland, etc. you require. The Census includes data on age, gender, type of housing, occupation, farm size, no of cars, disability, nationality, computer and also information about travel to work amongst others
- Information on deprivation levels – how well off an area is compared to the national average, calculated from a number of Census-based indicators – is available from Pobal's interactive maps. Go to www.pobal.ie. Click on maps. Use 'analysis' and select as many DED's as you want to run the report on.
- Get local children involved in doing an asset survey of the area. A schools project might involve children walking around the village and counting how many houses, public seats, street lights etc)
- A similar local survey might look at what services/ facilities are used, and when.

You should look for things that stand out – stats which are radically different from the county or national averages. Black spots and weaknesses need fixing. Strengths need to be taken advantage of. Assets that could be put to use. But also GAPS – things that are missing

and that ought to be there. It might be a building, or a service, or even a feeling, or a value you want to pass on to the next generation.

You should compare the current data with data from 5 and 10 years ago. If you had a Development Plan in the past, compare today's data with the data from back then. Have any of the key statistics changed? Can you point to the reason for the change? Is the change in your area different to the change the county or nation has experienced over the same time frame? These things will indicate that your community may have different needs than another community might have, or that you need to prioritise different things.

Needs Profile

Taking the area profile data, you will have a broad idea as to what the people in the area might need. (e.g. a village with a lot of under 12's may need a playground or a childcare service). Using this information, a Needs Survey should be put together, and distributed around the local area. You'll get a much better response rate if members of the committee call personally to collect the forms, and are prepared to sit down and help people fill them in (remember, over 20% of Irish adults have trouble filling in forms)

Needs surveys are a great pointer as to what people want ("eg 70% of people agree that the priority project will be to sort out the illegal dump at the end of the village"), are fantastic tools for getting people behind what you are trying to do, and more than pay their way be creating a sense of inclusion in the group's plans, thus making fundraising a little easier and maintaining a strong community spirit.
- Use Survey Monkey's free online survey building tools to create a survey asking people what they would like to see in the area, where they think priorities should be etc? Send someone with unlimited data and a big screen tablet around the houses to help people to fill it out on their doorsteps. (with Surveymonkey you get 10 questions free, but there is nothing to stop you creating 2 or even 3 surveys if you need to! www.surveymonkey.com)

SWOT

Write 4 headings on a sheet of paper: **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (I prefer to call these 'Challenges').** Sort the data you have collected under the 4 headings. The goal is to identify the things that can be built on, and the stuff that needs to be addressed before it becomes a problem.
Examples of strengths: Picturesque river flowing through the village, strong sense of community, active Macra club in area
Examples of weaknesses: Untidy banks along the river, lack of public transport, no services for the elderly locally, falling numbers in the youth club
Examples of opportunities: new road being built, new housing development
Examples of threats: the village population growing too quickly with no community facilities, vandalism, illegal dumping in the river

Once you have identified the SWOT, you can start to form a plan for taking advantage of your strengths and opportunities, and minimising the effects and influence of the weaknesses and threats. Good planning can often turn a threat into an opportunity!

County/ National Context

In order to plan what will be done and by whom, you need to take account of what else is happening around you, and who else you can pull in to assist. It is important that you are clear about what you are doing, and how it contributes to the attainment of the various goals which other organisations have set up for the county/ region/ country.

If you have identified your area's main strength to be tourism, then you need to look at where Tourism is going in terms of national policy, and also where the local players are positioning the region: is it being marketed as an outdoor adventure region? If so, then you should think about what you have that can add value to this market.

You should also identify other projects which are being developed in the region and see if there is a need for you to work on developing strategic linkages with those projects – maybe to bring cycling routes through your area, or to have your walks included under a new brand that is being promoted at the regional level.

There are two good reasons for not ignoring this part of the Plan:
1:      make the right connections, and other organisations will do a lot of work for you
2:      having the right connections makes you a credible organisation in the eyes of
        funding bodies, and opens all kinds of doors to you

Development Plan

This section is normally quite concise, as the detail relating to individual projects and programmes are usually put together in separate documents. Start by identifying the areas of activity you have selected for action, based on the research outlined in the Situation Analysis section, then briefly list the activities you intend to undertake to address these needs. This can be done in table form. (for an example, see next page)

Your group may be more advanced with some projects than with others, and this should not be a problem. Lay out your Development Plan like a 'things to do' list. Where you're starting a project from scratch and don't yet know where it might lead, all you can do is leave room for it in the plan, and set up the structures and first steps which you can identify will be needed. For example, if you have established a need for an Actively Retired group locally, the first steps might be to call a meeting and invite a speaker from another actively retired group to talk about what they do. If you have identified a whole sector as an area you wish

to be more active in, you may need to set up a sub-committee to push ahead with those projects.

Identification of Target Group(s)

- The needs of each group
- Any characteristics/ circumstances which must be taken into account
- How these groups can best be reached

Taking all this into account, then you design the products which you intend to deliver to each group:
Break it down into Programmes and Projects:
e.g. a Youth Development Programme might include several projects, each of which contributes to the overall Programme - (a) Provision of drop in centre (b) provision of outdoor all weather play area (c) after school homework club (d) summer camp

If you have already some projects up and running, including them in your development plan is a good time to review how they are going and to make adjustments. So your Plan should identify:
- The Projects you intend to continue, and why (benefits etc)
- any changes this time round & why
- New projects arising from work already completed & why they're needed

NB: ALWAYS GIVE DETAILS OF HOW YOU ARRIVED AT THIS LIST OF ACTIONS - THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Resources

It is important to identify what resources will be needed in order to carry out a project or programme. You may require specific skills (e.g. youth work) or even full time administrative support. Often the running of the group's various projects becomes a programme in itself, and a Manager and admin staff are required in order to ensure everything is running effectively.

Remember, the members of the committee are volunteers, and there is only so much you can do when there are other demands on your time. If you feel that the amount of time needed for a particular project will be more than the committee can give, either scale back the project, or look for support outside the group.

Advice from Carol Lambe, Community Development Officer, Monaghan County Council

Target Group/ Sector	Needs	Agreed actions	Who	When	Resources/ partnerships required	Potential funding sources
Tourism development	More accommodation Activities for visitors Information points	• Farmhouse B&B initiative • Walking route of the village • Develop local lake for angling • Produce brochure listing local amenities • Signage outside the shop	Tourism sub-committee	Immediately Start spring 04, launch spring 05	Advice from Monaghan Tourism & LEADER Liase with Monaghan Co Co re signage	LEADER, INTERREG IIIA Peace II Task Force North West Tourism
Elderly	Social contact	• Weekly drop in centre • Actively Retired club • Go for Life fitness programme	Community Centre committee Establish Age & Opportunity committee Health Board sports officer	Renovations planned 2004 Call first meeting Sept 2003 Make first contact Oct 2003	€250,000 Contact national Age & Opportunity agency for start up advice Health board will deliver the prog to the Actively Retired Club	€60,000 is already raised. Loan in place for the remaining funds

Management Structure

There is always a danger that the committee will get swamped in the detail of a large project, and never manage to get to Project No.2. Sub-committees are very useful ways of spreading the workload, keeping the meetings focused on specific jobs, and finding ways for committee members to contribute in areas in which they have skills or experience.

The more projects a group is running, the more benefit the group will get from running sub-committees. The core committee should be concerned with the larger, long-term issues, such as policy, making plans, checking progress etc. Sub-committees can work well for:

- finance
- employment/ staff
- fundraising/ events
- specific projects & programmes (e.g tourism sub-committee)

The Development plan should identify the structure, and clarify the relationship of the sub-committees back to the main committee (e.g., the chairs of each sub-ctee might sit on the main ctee, and a report from each might be standing items on the monthly agenda).

Operational Plan

This section should give details of how things are going to happen, and what will be required in order to complete each project/ task. Again, this can be expressed in table form

How its all going to happen:
- how many staff, doing what
- links with what organisations
- other resources needed (creche, offices etc)

What it's going to take:
- Operational cost - includes staff, employer's PRSI, pension contributions, office costs, rent, bank loans, travel expenses, materials, internet development, accountant's fees, insurance
- Sources of funds

Over what time frame:
3 year plan, showing start & finish date for each phase of each project (Action Plan)

What will be the outcome:
Will this task need ongoing attention and need to be planned for on an annual basis? (e.g. mowing lawns for a Tidy Towns group)
Does the project have a definite end, by which it will have achieved its purpose and can be closed? This is the easiest to plan for, as you can identify at the outset what resources etc will be required.
Is the project sustainable? Will it pay its own way, or will the group need to have another source of income to cover the costs of the project?

Financial Section

Taking the operating cost above, we add expected sources of income & when we will expect it, to show:

- Income v Expenditure for each year
- Cash flow analysis for each year (or month, if necessary)

There may a big difference between when projects will need money (e.g wages) and when funding will be available, especially with construction projects, and those waiting for completion before grant aid can be claimed back.

Below is a very simple Income vs Expenditure projection for the first 3 years of a project. The balances on the project should show that by the end of Year 3, the project will be making enough money to keep going without grant aid - ie, it's sustainable. Taking on a project for which the community will have to fundraise annually to keep it afloat is a very serious undertaking and should not be done lightly. Therefore it is very important to be realistic in your projections.

From the Community's Perspective

The example below shows a group that is thinking of building a heritage centre. They are borrowing most of the construction cost, and are being realistic about the numbers they can expect to visit, and the amount of staff they will need in order to cover the opening hours (weekends etc). It is clear that the heritage centre will not pay its way. In this circumstance, the group will need to be very sure that this is the project which will bring most benefit to the community, as they are going to have to ask the community to subsidise it on an ongoing basis. Being in debt on that project will limit the funds available to the group to undertake other projects, and the group may become a management committee for the heritage centre, rather than continue to take on projects to address all the problems in their area.

From the Funder's Perspective

The Centre is going to be operating at a loss. So SUSTAINABILITY is going to be a concern that rears its head immediately with any potential funder. 'If I put my money in here, is it going to end up having to close in 3 years' time?' 'Is there a believable plan in place for how they are going to meet the funding deficit?' Any funding application should have the answers to those questions before the funder even thinks to ask them – or it's setting itself up for disappointment!

Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Heritage Centre			
Visitors to the heritage centre (adults @ euro 8.50, children at Euro 4.50) - Year 1, 1000 adults, 500 children. Year 2 1300 adults, 550 children . Year 3 1500 adults, 700 children	10750	13525	15900
Schools programme 6 euro per child, starting in Year 2	0	4200	9000
Merchandise (pens, etc. target spend of Euro 1.50 per visitor)	2250	3825	5550
Youth Programme			
25 participants at Euro 50 each	1250	1250	1250
Grant aid from VEC towards summer camp (50% of total cost)	1500	1500	1500
Fundraising			
Lotto - average 300 profit per week	15600	15600	15600
Charity auction	5000		
Dance	2500		
Bank loan - mortgage on heritage centre	60000		
Total Income	**98850**	**39900**	**48800**
Expenditure			
Heritage Centre			
Capital expenditure - construction of heritage centre	75000		
Running costs:			
Light, heat	3500	3600	3700
Phone	1500	1550	1600
Insurance	3000	3000	3200
Wages, incl employers PRSI. Year 1, 1 full time worker, years 2 & 3, 1 full time worker & 2 part time	25000	55000	55000
Loan repayments (60k over 10 years at 5%)	6300	6300	6300
Youth Sports Programme			
Venue Hire, fees for instructors, insurance etc	3000	3200	3500
Total Expenditure	**117300**	**72650**	**73300**
Cash Flow			
Bank balance at 1 Jan	6000	-12450	-45200
Add income for the year	98850	39900	48800
Less expenditure for the year	117300	72650	73300
Closing balance at 31st December (opening balance plus income, less expenditure)	-12450	-45200	-69700

The Development Planning Process

Putting together a Development Plan requires information, discussion and agreement. This takes time and there is a logical progression of steps which must be followed.

1. Initial meetings with all groups active in the area (sports, macra, GAA, development associations, childcare committees, IFA, rod & gun club etc) to discuss the issues and how best to progress
2. Research to gather the statistics relevant to the area
3. Expansion of the committee to ensure the plan is inclusive of everyone
4. Public Consultation
   a. Needs survey
   b. Public meetings to discuss the issues
   c. Focus groups
5. Preparation of draft
6. Consultation on the draft
   a. Agreement of priorities
   b. Adjustment in committee structures if necessary
   c. Consultation with relevant agencies to ensure what is proposed is achievable
7. Finalisation of the plan
8. Publication & launch - make sure to invite everyone who participated

Typically, a group will review the statistical data available to them, then design a needs survey and go out and get people's opinions, the hold a public meeting to discuss the results of the survey and agree the priorities.

If the community have been included at every step along the way, the chances are that you will end up with practical projects which have real and immediate benefit to the locality. Including people at all stages of the development process also makes them more likely to use the new facility/ service, and more supportive towards any fundraising which may be required.

A Development Plan provides the group with the opportunity to create goodwill through positive PR. A group which handles the process badly, by overlooking groups at the consultation stage, by announcing they are going to do a particular project without consulting the landowner/ group involved, or by forgetting to invite people who participated in drawing up the strategy to the launch, is undermining the key benefit of the planning process before they even start implementing the plan.

Funding

The achievement of many of the goals stated in the development plan will be dependent of the availability of funding. It is worth bearing in mind that government and EU-sourced funds can only consider providing funding to projects where 'sound community practices' are followed, such as inclusion, consultation and consensus.

Frequently Asked Questions

How Does the Type of Area Affect the Content of the Plan?

An area may be rural in nature, and have a large number of elderly people living alone. Such an area might benefit from community alert, home security initiatives, and transportation projects, while at the same time the local community might be planning how to make the area more attractive for young families to want to live in the area, so that the community will continue to be vibrant and sustainable in the future.

Whose Responsibility is it to Do the Plan?

The best plans are the ones that are done in partnership by all the stakeholders. By stakeholders, we mean the people who have an interest in seeing the area thrive. So, the people who live there, work there, go to school there. The local Council. Local businesses. But someone needs to lead the conversation. And usually the entity which is seen as having no agenda, and having the best interests of the community at heart is the local Community Development Group. Where such a group doesn't exist, your local community section in the Council may be willing to host some initial meetings to kick off the conversation.

Who Does the Work?

Usually it's best to bring in an independent 'facilitator' to run the community meetings, and to guide the community towards the formulation of their Plan. They'll have a number of exercises they can use to help get people thinking about the issues in their community. They're also a 'neutral' person, with no perceived 'side', which can be useful if there are tensions around certain issues in the community.

Bringing in a facilitator also means that every committee member gets to participate fully in the meeting – nobody's stuck trying to chair or take minutes. The facilitator will write everything up afterwards, including a draft plan for the community to consult on. So it's the way to go.

How do we Pay for the Plan?

Most funders recognise the value of a good community plan, and offer seed funding for such plans. Usually work of this nature is funded at an 80-90% rate. Talk to your local Council, who may be able to assist with closing the gap on the remaining funds.

What Can we Include in the Plan?

Anything you like.   Maybe your area's biggest potential for helping to generate extra income for your small farmers is tourism, so maybe you wish to focus on that.   Or maybe your community sits right on the border and was badly hampered by the closure of border roads

during the Troubles, and you desperately want to reconnect with the communities on the other side of the border. Maybe your area has a high number of bachelor farmers with no social outlets and you'd like to add a pub to your community centre so they can pop in for a pint.... Identify the need. Then PROVE the need (back it up with research, surveys etc), design the response to the need,   justify the set-up cost and show how it can be made to sustain itself (cover its costs once up and running). Then you've a viable project proposal!

How do we Link into Help?

Development Plans should identify the various jobs of work to be done, and who is best positioned to do them. In many cases, the development group will be acting as a facilitator, rather than as the main project promoter. For example, the community may need to identify key partners in the revival of their area, such as the County Council, who might be approached to provide a small sewerage scheme or affordable housing in the area. If it's a need for training, you may be facilitating the Education & Training Board to come out and deliver accredited courses in your community centre. If your area surveys show that transport is an issue, contact the Rural Transport Initiative and ask them to provide a local bus service in your area. You don't have to run everything yourselves – link in to what other organisations are doing. Think of your plan as the blueprints, and your team as the catalysts for action, pulling in resources to where they're needed.

The goal is to get as much going on as possible, but using as few of your own (human and financial) resources as possible to get the job done.

You need to plan not only for getting a project up and running, but for maintaining the effort over the long term. This means planning for bringing new people onto your committee constantly, finding ways to find 'small wins' so that people feel they are making progress and making a contribution to their community, and finding a way to finance it all so that it doesn't become an unbearable burden which grinds to a halt, leaving the community back where it started a few years further down the road.

Sustainability of the committee and its projects is the secret to successful communities!

Remember to ask for help.

Monaghan County Council's Community Department is there to advise, assist and guide. Monaghan County Council itself also supports communities. Contact the Community Dept for more information about how you can benefit from developing a closer link to MCC.

Your Community Development Officers:

General community development, Tidy Towns, Community Alert: Carol Lambe clambe@monaghancoco.ie

Social inclusion, Age Friendly, disability: Bernie Bradley bbradley@monaghancoco.ie