

Partnerships West

A regular update on partnership developments in West Cheshire



WELCOME.....to our final update for 2011 of news and activity from the West Cheshire Together partnerships framework.

We reported in last month's edition on Cheshire West and Chester Council's Expression of Interest to Government to pilot **Community Budgets** – a groundbreaking initiative which puts residents at the heart of local spending decisions. Since then, the Government has announced that the Authority, together with key partners, has been shortlisted to the next stage.

Part of the Government's drive to open up public services to different providers and ensure that they better respond to the needs of local people, it awards Councils and their public sector partners the freedom to work together to re-design services around the needs of residents, improving outcomes and reducing duplication and waste.

The Government invited Local Authorities to bid to help co-design two aspects of the scheme – *neighbourhood level* and *whole place*. Neighbourhood level Community Budgets give residents the opportunity to say what services they want, how they should work and whether they want to run them. Whole place Community Budgets work towards bringing funding on local public services together and to focus resources on dealing with root causes of problems rather than treating symptoms. The key themes of Community Budgets are:-

- making better use of resources, including the pooling and aligning of budgets of all agencies where it is effective to do so;
- freeing local professionals from central rules and regulations that are 'getting in the way' so they can re-design services and delivery more effectively for residents; and
- establishing appropriate local partnership and governance arrangements to create a unified approach that suits local needs.

"These pilots attracted a great deal of interest from local authorities across the country, and we are delighted to have been shortlisted. The idea behind Community Budgets is that Councils and their public sector partners understand the needs of their communities and are best placed to run local services, provide value for money and boost regeneration efforts. If we are chosen, it will give Cheshire West and Chester Council and its residents the opportunity to influence a major change in the way public money is spent in our communities".

Cllr Mike Jones, West Cheshire Together Chairman and Council Leader

Cheshire West and Chester Council applied to pilot 'neighbourhood level' in Ellesmere Port and 'whole place' across the Borough. The Government is seeking four Local Authorities to trial the schemes and will announce the successful areas before Christmas. We will report any news in the January edition.

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- ⇒ **Community Forums: Feedback on recent meetings plus forthcoming dates**

The Council and its partners are looking at opportunities to take a carbon neutral approach to the future of services and activities within the borough. A new Sustainability Commission was set up in the autumn, chaired by Cllr Keith Board and comprising representation from the Council and partners, to examine the issues and implications of this in a series of evidence gathering workshops around specific themes.

The first Inquiry session was held, rather appropriately, in Ashton Hayes W.I. Hall on 29th November and considered the theme of “Renewable Energy and Efficiency”. Ashton Hayes aspires to become the first carbon neutral community in the country.

Commission members considered evidence presented by experts around improving energy efficiency by the use of smart technology, including smart grids; the challenge of retrofitting housing stock within the borough and what is being done to try and reduce levels of energy consumption; and ensuring we can benefit from national initiatives such as ‘Green Deal’ which is currently being consulted on (see web link below, closing date 18th January 2012):-

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/green_deal/green_deal.aspx

It was noted that “doing nothing” was not an option with the recent global energy crisis to hit e.g. Japan and Germany highlighted, resulting in the world gas supply becoming increasingly competitive with consequent price rises. The UK needs to create more energy for itself and this needs to be done smartly as the energy grid, both gas and electricity, is no longer fit for purpose. Outcomes from this and forthcoming Inquiry sessions will be worked up into an Inquiry Report with recommendations which will be considered by the Council’s Executive at a later date.

The next Inquiry session will be held in late January 2012 and will consider evidence from experts on the theme of “Housing and Development”.

For further information, contact Peter Bulmer, Climate Change Project Manager, on 01244 972427 or e-mail: peter.bulmer@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

“Save Money, Keep Warm” project launched

Sustainable Blacon has launched its “Save Money, Keep Warm” project which offers up to 150 vulnerable people across West Cheshire (including the elderly, disabled people and families with children under the age of five) the chance to visit the new Eco House and receive free advice and support in the face of rising fuels prices and cold temperatures.



These groups of vulnerable people will be advised on staying warm and saving money on their heating bills this winter. To do this most effectively, the support provided by the project is free and is being carried out in two stages. The first stage is a visit to Sustainable Blacon’s Eco House at 2 Stamford Road, Blacon, Chester where there will be a warm welcome, a cuppa and a tour of the new Eco House, plus advice about draught -proofing, insulation, how to cut your energy bills and other key tips to help make homes warmer and more energy efficient. The second stage is an optional home visit by a member of the Sustainable Blacon team who will advise where your house is losing heat with a thermal imaging camera, carry out an energy survey, offer more specific advice and install draught-proofing - all free of charge.

The project is being funded by ‘West Cheshire Together’ through its recent Second Homes Taxation Funding grant, as well as support from Blacon Community Trust, Cheshire West and Chester Council and Vintage Blacon. The project will run until early March 2012.

For more information or to book a place on the project, contact Sustainable Blacon on 01244 380150 or e-mail: ged@sustainableblacon.org.uk Visit: www.sustainableblacon.org.uk for more details on Sustainable Blacon.

After more than a year of parliamentary debate, the Localism Bill became an Act of Parliament on 15th November. It contains a raft of measures to decentralise power and give local people greater say over what happens in their area. Different parts of the Act will come into effect at different times: in many cases further details need to be worked out, including asking the public for their views. The aim is for many measures to come into effect in April 2012.

The purpose of this article is to identify the main elements of the Act and ask for your views about how we should be making use of these provisions. There are four main areas:

- ⇒ **Community Rights:** making it easier for local people to get things done and achieve their ambitions for the places in which they live. This includes:
 - **Local Referendums:** residents will be able to bring forward local referendums on particular topics or issues if signed by 5% of the population within six months. Topics can relate to 'the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of the area'. The results will not be binding but local authorities will have to consider them when making their decisions;
 - **Council tax:** Councils, police, and fire authorities which propose an increase in council tax beyond the ceiling set by government will automatically face a referendum of all registered voters in their area;
 - **Community Right to Challenge:** this gives groups, parish councils and local authority employees the right to express an interest in taking over the running of a council service;
 - **Assets of community value:** an equivalent to 'listed buildings' status for buildings of community value (community centres, pubs etc) where residents can get buildings listed for five years. When assets come up for sale or change of ownership, the Act gives community groups the time to develop and bid and raise money to buy the asset when it comes on the open market.
- ⇒ **Reforms to the planning system:** a series of reforms make the planning system clearer, more democratic and more effective. This includes:
 - **Abolition of Regional Strategies:** Councils now need to publish five year land supply and targets at least annually;
 - **Neighbourhood Plans:** a new right for communities to draw up a neighbourhood plan, setting out policies for the location of new housing, business and shops. If this is in line with local and national policy, and supported locally through a referendum then the local authority will bring it into force;
 - **Community Right to Build:** community organisations are able to bring forward development proposals which, providing they meet the minimum criteria and can demonstrate support through a local referendum, will be able to proceed without requiring a separate planning application. The benefits from such development will need to be managed for the benefit of the community;
 - **Reforming Community Infrastructure Levy:** this Levy has traditionally been received by councils from local developers to support new infrastructure. The Localism Act allows for some of the money raised to be spent on things other than infrastructure, and also requires that some of the money goes direct to the neighbourhood where development has taken place.
- ⇒ **Housing:** reforms to rules relating to social housing to ensure that decisions are taken locally, and that they are fair and effective. This includes:
 - **Social housing allocation reform:** Councils will have greater freedom to set their own policies about who should qualify to go on waiting lists for social housing. They are still obliged to ensure that social homes go to the most vulnerable and in need;

- **Social housing tenure reform:** rather than tenancies being granted for life, tenancies can be granted for a fixed period of time;
 - **Reform of social housing finance:** instead of sending social rent to Government, and then receiving a grant back for maintenance, Councils will be able to keep this locally to maintain their social home, giving them a more stable basis on which to plan;
 - **Reform of social housing regulation:** social tenants will have stronger tools to hold their landlords to account. Landlords will be expected to support tenants panels or similar bodies to give tenants the opportunity to examine the services they are being offered.
- ⇒ **New freedoms and flexibilities for local government:** enabling local authorities to innovate and deliver better value for taxpayers money. This includes:
- **General power of competence for local authorities:** this gives local authorities the legal capacity to do anything that an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited. It gives them the freedom to work with others in new ways in order to drive down costs. Similar powers have been given to Fire and Rescue Authorities, Integrated transport Authorities, Passenger Transport Executives, Combined Authorities and Economic Prosperity Boards;
 - **Great local control over business rates:** Councils will have the freedom to offer businesses discounted rates in order to help attract new business, investment and employment. These costs will have to be met from local resources, but this should be weighed against the longer term benefits of attracting growth and jobs;
 - **Elected Mayors:** recognising the democratically accountable strong leadership role that elected Mayors can provide, in May 2012 government intends to trigger a referendum in the largest cities outside London to encourage local people to have their say on whether they would like an elected Mayor;
 - **Transfer of public functions from central government and quangos to local authorities:** this is aimed at supporting local accountability and promoting economic growth. Local authorities are encouraged to come up with innovative proposals. This is likely to result in different places accessing different powers over different timescales.

Local Councils are being encouraged to discuss with their partners and communities what these provisions could mean for their area. If you have any ideas and thoughts about how these provisions could be used for the benefit of the communities of West Cheshire, please contact Andrea Mageean, Partnerships Manager on 01244 977561 or e-mail: andrea.mageean@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

This note summarises some of the main provisions of the Act. Further details are available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishupdate

Talking Together: Winter Edition

The Winter issue of 'Talking Together' – the magazine published by the public sector organisations in West Cheshire – is now available and is packed with information for every resident in the borough.

You can view the latest edition, as well as previous editions, on the West Cheshire Together partnerships website at: <http://www.westcheshiretogether.org.uk/news.aspx>

Did you know that a copy of Talking Together (which is produced three times a year) is delivered to every household in the borough – that's approx. 146,000 copies! Copies are also available in the Council's public facing buildings, including libraries.



Ellesmere Port residents urged to join a 'Neighbourhood Action Group'

Cheshire West and Chester Council's 'Our Place' team is urging Ellesmere Port residents to have their say on local issues, their community's needs and help shape the way services are provided in their neighbourhood.



The team is currently building ten **Neighbourhood Action Groups** - one for each 'area' of Ellesmere Port - to become a real voice in making a difference to the neighbourhoods in which they live. Made up of residents, each group will have a real say in how priorities are set for the area, how issues faced by the community are tackled and how services are being delivered.



The team wants to bring decision-making down to the people that are directly affected by it. All they are asking is for an hour or two of residents' time each month to meet with a small group of neighbours and an Our Place officer, to openly discuss what they would like to see happening around where they live. The meetings are informal, in a local venue and are always over a cup of tea or coffee. They are run in a very friendly manner, with everyone getting the opportunity to have their say and can lead to some big successes and large scale projects that not only deal with issues but also provide much needed resources.

The ten new Neighbourhood Action Groups offer local people the opportunity to highlight any problems within their area, find the best solutions and address any issues their community may be facing. We have already seen some great work taking place in some areas of the town, carried out following requests from the community.

If you would like more information on becoming a member of a Neighbourhood Action Group, contact the 'Our Place' team on 0151 356 6450 or alternatively, if you would like to discuss your specific neighbourhood and would like details of when your next meeting is being held, please contact your dedicated officer as follows:-

-  Collette Linford on 0151 356 6691 for the *Central, Westminster, Grange, Great Sutton* or *Rossmore* neighbourhoods
-  Tracey Jones on 0151 356 6603 for the *Stanney/Wolverham, Whitby, Parklands, Netherpool* or *Little Sutton* neighbourhoods

National Recognition for Council's work with the 'Third Sector'

Cheshire West and Chester Council has been identified in a national report as "*demonstrating best practice in the way it has supported the local voluntary, community and faith sector*" in a new report looking at best practice by local authorities from around the country.

The best practice guidance, produced by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, details the range of ways the Council has supported local organisations, including the funding of local infrastructure organisations, as well as the variety of non-financial support to the sector.

A full copy of the report can be viewed at:

http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/New_best_practice_guide.pdf

LSP NETWORK EVENT: CHANGING TIMES 2

Feedback captured from the workshop sessions at last month's LSP Network Event can be viewed on the West Cheshire Together partnerships website at:

http://www.westcheshiretogether.org.uk/lsp/lsp_network_event_15th_novembe.aspx

You can also view a summary of the feedback forms completed by delegates in attendance.

Community Groups across Rural West have been delivering a number of projects due to a £20,000 **Health and Wellbeing Grant** they received earlier this year.

Made available through the Rural West Area Partnership Board and NHS Western Cheshire Chairman's Discretionary Fund, the scheme aimed to promote the national 2010 Decade of Health and Wellbeing campaign. Projects had to involve one or more of the campaign's five themes: *Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.*

Successful bids included a cycling group, ecumenical singers and a yoga group from Neston, a village sports and market day and sound system upgrades at St Nicholas Church in Willaston, a community garden at Mickle Trafford, a summer play scheme and boot camp in Saughall (*pictured right*), a Bowling Green shelter in Waverton and recreation ground developments in Tilston and Ashton Hayes.

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Planning for the future: Local (Town & Parish) Councils are increasingly interested in producing a Neighbourhood Plan, as introduced in the Localism Act. In Rural West, Tattenhall & District Parish Council has been selected to pilot a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish and this will be an opportunity for sharing their experiences with other Local Councils.



To assist Local Councils with understanding more about the process, including the challenges and opportunities, a number of workshops have recently been held in **Neston, Waverton** (*pictured left*) and **Malpas**.

Feedback from those in attendance was very positive, with participants feeling that the events helped their understanding of the issues associated with Neighbourhood Planning.

We will keep you updated on developments with these plans in future editions of this bulletin.

For further information, contact Rob Callow, Rural West Area Manager, on 01244 972858 or e-mail: robert.callow@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Latest from Northwich & Rural North Area Partnership Board

Community Safety Messages: For the second year running, the Northwich & Rural North Area Partnership Board (APB), in partnership with the Council's Community Safety team, has developed a series of four community safety messages leading up to Christmas. Each message promotes a different safety issue to residents each week - *Minimise burglary; Reducing car theft; Advice on dealing with bogus callers;* and the final message includes *Emergency contact numbers* people may need over the Christmas and New Year period. The messages are designed to help make everyone's Christmas a safe one and can be viewed at:

http://www.talkingwestcheshire.org/talking_northwich_and_rural_no.aspx

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Jingle Bells: Police in *Northwich* and *Frodsham* are tackling the seasonal problem of purse snatches by handing out bells to shoppers, which can be attached to purses or bags, that will alert them if anyone interferes with or tries to open their handbag. The initiative is supported by Northwich & Rural North APB who are providing funding for the bells. Cheshire Police will be handing these bells out to shoppers in public locations so keep any eye out for your free jingle bell!

Snow Angels: This new project, developed by a wide group of partners within Northwich & Rural North, aims to help vulnerable people who need assistance during times of extreme bad weather. The role of the *Snow Angels* will be to respond to requests for assistance during periods of extreme cold weather to ensure that people are kept safe and warm. Specific duties could include assistance with path clearance, making sure that people are warm, assistance with shopping and referrals to other agencies when appropriate.

If you would like to volunteer or would like further information, contact Cheshire Community Development Trust on 01606 723180.

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Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit: This has been developed for the Northwich & Rural North area to encourage partners to work together on engagement activities within the local community. Through the 'Community Engagement' sub-group, the APB commissioned the working document to map and promote engagement activity across all partners within the area. The aim of the Plan is to avoid duplication, reduce the number of meetings, rationalise structures and allow for joint consultation and communication whereby all partners have:-

- ✓ identified why and what they want to inform, consult and engage on
- ✓ identified where and when they want to engage
- ✓ identified HOW they want to engage which will be a more flexible approach
- ✓ shown how engagement activity links to the APB plan and work activity
- ✓ included an assessment of what activity is already taking place
- ✓ included Local (Town and Parish Councils) in the engagement activity as they are already close to the heart of communities
- ✓ created engagement activity to allow balancing between local priorities and strategic or national statistical priorities.

The Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit contains:-

Engagement Toolkit: this provides an introduction to the various methods that can be used when wanting to inform, consult and engage with partners and the local community.

Marketing Toolkit: this provides an introduction to the various methods that can be used to market and communicate messages, projects and ideas to partners and the local community.

Calendar of Events: developed to ensure that all events and engagement activity are shared across the area - key areas will be targeted in line with priorities. We want to work together to ensure the maximum number of residents are able to have contact with partners and view a co-ordinated calendar which sees events shared across the whole area. The 2012 Calendar of Events is currently being developed.

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Frodsham Participatory Budgeting Event: Due to the success of the first Frodsham and Helsby Participatory Budgeting event in February 2011, it has been agreed by Frodsham Ward Councillors Andrew Dawson and Lynn Riley that another event be held in January 2012. This will focus on groups who are based in and work for the benefit of the Frodsham area.

Participatory Budgeting allows the residents of an area to participate in the allocation of part of the Council's (or other statutory agencies e.g. Health Service, Police) available financial resources. It aims to increase transparency, accountability, understanding and social inclusion in local government affairs.

The PB event will take place on Saturday 28th January 2012 (time to be confirmed) at Frodsham Community Centre, Fluin Lane, Frodsham.

For further information on the PB Event or the Communications Plan, contact Fiona Dunning, Community Engagement Officer, on 01606 353526 or e-mail:

fiona.dunning@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Greenbank Clean Up: A clean up day was held at Greenbank Train station in Northwich on 25th November. More than 25 volunteers joined a working party after Greenbank was chosen as the first local station to be tackled, enabling users of the station to notice new bus and road signs. Partners involved on the day included Cheshire West and Chester Streetscene, Northwich Town Council, Friends of Anderton and Marbury, Groundwork Cheshire, Weaver Vale Housing Trust, Barclays Bank, Cheshire West and Chester's Northwich and Rural North Area Team, Friends of Northwich Station, Northern Rail, Cheshire Police, Christ Church Greenbank, NHS Western Cheshire and Mid Cheshire Rail Partnership.

This event is part of a wider Action Plan of the APB's 'Environment and Transport' sub-group, which looks at improving railway stations within the Northwich & Rural North area. The sub-group will be supporting the 'Friends of Greenbank station' volunteers and if you would like to become involved or need further information, contact Mark Simmons, Northwich & Rural North Area Manager on 01606 353537 or e-mail: mark.simmons@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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Guardian Angels: Two neighbourhood community representatives from Rudheath and Witton were successful at the recent Guardian Angels Community Awards event held at Northwich Memorial Hall on 7th December.

Abby Green and *Sarah Barnes* were nominated by local residents, family and friends for their contributions towards local community activities and fundraising. They are both part of a team of community representatives in the Rudheath & Witton Together neighbourhood and have been supporting and leading on a variety of community initiatives, such as the Orchard Initiative down by the River Dane and the youth outdoor activities project which took place during the summer.

Abby won the 'Contribution to Community' category award with Sarah as runner-up in the 'Carer of the Year' category award. Northwich Guardian in partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council, Roberts Bakery, and the Co-operative group have developed Guardian Angels award scheme which recognises the excellent work people throughout Northwich do to help others in the community.

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Rudheath & Witton Together Neighbourhood: As reported in last month's edition, community representatives were invited to the LSP Network Event "Changing Times 2" at the Guildhall in Chester on 15th November where they gave a presentation on activity within their neighbourhood around local community empowerment. The presentation was well presented and each of the reps received a follow up letter of thanks from West Cheshire Together Chairman, Cllr Mike Jones.

The Community reps have also agreed to the creation of a newly constituted Community Board which will replace the conventional partnership board and 50% of its members will be residents in the neighbourhood. As we go to print, the inaugural board meeting will take place on 12th December where four key executive roles will be endorsed, along with the final constitution and an outline proposal for the Big Local Getting People Involved community-led phase 2 plans. The creation of a Community Board is a significant milestone in the move towards community ownership and empowerment of locally delivered community plans. It has taken 18 months to achieve this and the enthusiasm and determination of the Board, along with other community representatives and critical partners, will make this an exciting future for the neighbourhood and its communities.

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Team Northwich & Rural North news: The team recently said goodbye to their Partnership Support Officer, **James Ollier**, who has moved to a new role in the Council's Highways Department and will now be based in Phoenix House, Winsford.

Debra Brown has recently joined Team Northwich & Rural North on an interim basis (from the Rural West Area team) and will be taking on a number of community engagement projects within the Frodsham and Helsby area. Debra will be based at the Northwich Information Centre and can be contacted on 01606 353537 or e-mail: debra.brown@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Second borough area becomes “Responsible Drinking Zone”

On 16th December, the Northwich and Rural North area is set to become the second area in West Cheshire to have a designated “Responsible Drinking Zone”. As part of the application process to adopt this power, the Council consulted with the Police, businesses, licensees, Town & Parish Council representatives and local residents. The order, backed by Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheshire Police, provides a valuable tool to help combat alcohol-related crime and disorder in and around the Northwich and Rural North area. The defined boundaries for the blanket coverage are the same as those marked out for the Northwich and Rural North Area Partnership Board.



Creating a ‘Responsible Drinking Zone’ means that residents, visitors and businesses can rely on Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers and Community Safety Wardens having the power to remove alcohol from people who are causing a nuisance, or are suspected of being likely to cause a nuisance, whilst drinking alcohol in public places.

Many people are concerned about this type of behaviour in their communities and this initiative is a preventative approach in reducing nuisance incidents associated with alcohol related crime and disorder throughout the area. The ‘Responsible Drinking Zone’ does not stop people drinking in these designated areas, but it will however make it an offence if someone who is causing a public nuisance refuses to comply with a request to stop drinking.

“A Responsible Drinking Zone throughout the area is a positive step towards tackling the issues caused by alcohol related anti-social behaviour and crime. The adoption of the power will provide officers with an additional tool to enable them to remove alcohol from people they suspect are causing, or are likely to cause, a nuisance linked to alcohol consumption. It will enable partner agencies to continue to make the area safe for residents, workers and visitors”.

Inspector Paul Loughlin, Cheshire Police

Advisory signs are being erected throughout the designated zones to inform everyone of their responsibilities to comply with the new order.

For further information, contact Joanne Byrne, Safer Stronger Partnership Officer, on 01244 973941 or e-mail: joanne.byrne@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Calling all Carers

Cheshire West and Chester Council is hosting a **Carer’s Open Day** on Wednesday 21st December, 10.00am – 2.00pm, at the Independent Living Centre, 5 Hartford Business Centre, Chester Road, Hartford, Nr Northwich, CW8 2AB.

Come along for a mince pie and a non-alcoholic mulled wine and find out more about the range of free services currently on offer for carers, including **Telecare sensors** and the **essential Carers Emergency Card**. Help and advice will also be available on equipment and services to help people live independently.

For more information, call the team at the Independent Living Centre in Hartford on 01606 881980.

Blacon Asset Management Company

The shadow board for Blacon Asset Management Company has now been set up and its first board meeting was held on 12th December. With nominees from Chester & District Housing Trust and Blacon Alliance now in place, the Cheshire West and Chester Council nominees will be confirmed in the new year. Working on the detail of the business plan, the company aims to be fully operational by April 2012.

Recent Chester Activity

Communities across Chester had the opportunity to clear out their unwanted items and have them reused or recycled through a new innovative approach to skip days.

Through their Member Budget grants, Councillors across the city funded clean-up/recycle days where residents brought their unwanted items to the skip and recycle vehicle manned by Cheshire West and Chester Council's Waste Management team. Items were then further sorted for either reuse or recycling, resulting in less waste being taken to landfill.

Community charities also benefited from the events held in **Pulford, Huntington** and in the **Garden Quarter of Chester City**, including Home Care Services who will collect from the depot any unwanted furniture, household items and toys that can be used by families in need. The Ellesmere Port 'Men in Sheds' project will take any wood which will be reused within their community projects.

Item sorting was undertaken by volunteers or through those on Community Pay Back schemes, helping them to gain a qualification or employment.



In the Garden Quarter, over 30 students along with Community Safety Wardens and Police Community Support Officers also gave up a Saturday morning to help clear the streets and alley ways (*pictured right*).

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Local communities across Chester now have their own Christmas tree to brighten up their communities this Christmas. Funded by the Councillors Member Budget grant, communities in **Newton, Northgate Village, Lache, Handbridge** and **Westminster Park** areas have celebrated the start of the Christmas period with their own switch-on ceremonies along with bands playing, carol singing and mince pies being served!

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A major funding boost has sown the seeds of success for Chester's proposed new **Country Park**. To celebrate and mark National Tree Week (26th Nov – 4th Dec), local people joined in tree-planting sessions on the Countess of Chester Health Park. This gave a great boost to the proposal to create a new country park for Chester, adjacent to the Countess of Chester Health Park. A Community Planting Day was held on 3rd December after funding for more than 2,500 trees and shrubs had been secured from NHS Western Cheshire, The Woodland Trust's MOREwoods project and the national 'Big Tree Plant' campaign as part of The Mersey Forest initiative.

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) also led its first Green Gym taster sessions for local people, in partnership with landowners Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, NHS Western Cheshire, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and the Homes and Communities Agency, plus project partners Cheshire West and Chester Council, Chester Area Partnership Board, Groundwork Cheshire and The Mersey Forest.

Under the guidance of experienced leaders, the Green Gym initiative offers individuals the chance to improve their health and their environment at the same time. As an alternative to attending a conventional gym or sports centre, people have the chance to get fit out in the fresh air by taking part in environmental and conservation projects. Anyone interested in joining the Green Gym with an existing health condition is advised to speak first to their GP.

For more information, contact countessofchestercp@hotmail.co.uk

For any information about the above Chester news, contact Michelle Talgam, Chester Area Manager, on 01244 972859 or e-mail: michelle.talgam@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

City: Residents from the Garden Quarter, City and Boughton wards came together for a joint forum on 14th November at Boughton Cricket Club. An update on the Christmas programme of events was received. Representatives from Waitrose attended and responded to questions and concerns about the planning application for a store at the former Boughton Retail Park. It was hoped these concerns would be taken into account as part of the development and in the consideration of the planning application by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Upton, Hoole and Newton: Over 50 residents came together on 21st November at Newton Primary School and heard about the Council's tree maintenance programme and the latest update on developments at Chester Zoo. Following a request from residents at the previous meeting, Royal Mail attended to listen to concerns around postal deliveries. The necessity for some service changes was explained and, as this area was one of the first to implement these changes, some initial teething problems had been experienced. A brief outline of the Woodfield Extra Care Scheme was given, with further consultation planned for 2012 when full details will be given. During public speaking time, residents raised concerns over a proposed Sainsbury's planning application for Hoole, as this could affect trade at the local community shops. In addition, questions were asked in relation to planning regulations around houses of multiple occupancy, the Council's new waste collection service and services for the elderly still living in their own homes. These matters will be revisited in more detail at a future forum.

Boughton Heath, Vicars Cross and Overleigh: A forum specifically for Handbridge Park ward residents was held on 23rd November at St Marks Christian Centre where residents heard a presentation from the Council's Strategic Planning Officer, Phill Bamford, on how Neighbourhood Plans could influence future development in their area. In addition, local updates were given by Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service, the Police and Community Safety Wardens. During public speaking time, a discussion ensued on the benefits of having one Community Forum covering the whole of the Chester area.

Ellesmere Port: A joint "town wide" forum was held on 29th November at Ellesmere Port Civic Hall. A packed agenda included: updates on the Academy where potential traffic concerns were raised; proposed boundary changes - a twelve week consultation setting out the proposed boundary changes closed on 5th December; roadworks in and around Ellesmere Port where some individual speeding and parking concerns were raised; and the launch of the Council's Transport Plan was noted. The main topic of discussion was around a proposed site for Gypsy and Travellers.

Blacon: One Voice for Blacon met on 6th December at Blacon High School where more than 45 residents discussed the Parade Development. Chester & District Housing Trust presented draft designs as a guide to begin community consultation about the look and use of the space. David Parry and Claire Westmoreland, who are heading up the Health facility, talked about their aspirations for an integrated and multi-purpose facility which residents could use for a wide range of health related treatments and services. Proposals for Chester Student Village were also discussed and some residents expressed concern over building on greenbelt land. It was anticipated that planning permission would be sought for this development in January.

Northwich Town: Met on 8th December at Northwich Memorial Hall for residents of the wards of Winnington & Castle, Witton & Rudheath, Hartford & Greenbank and Davenham & Moulton. Chaired by Cllr Julia Tickridge (local Member for Witton & Rudheath), items for discussion included an update on Northwich projects including the Barons Quay development, the Responsible Drinking Zone (see article on page 9), a local Policing update, an overview of the 'Economy & Education' sub-group of the APB and the gyratory proposals for Northwich town centre. In addition, local Member Budgets were discussed, with an update from Ward Councillors on their current spending and the projects they have funded.

Forthcoming Community Forums

As we have previously reported, the Council's Locality Working Scrutiny Committee is continuing to review the Council's governance arrangements for locality working. Whilst this review is ongoing, ward Councillors are discussing their own approach to Community Forums and re-establishing them across revised geographical areas to reflect the recent ward boundary changes.

As we go to print, the following Community Forums are scheduled as follows:-

Winsford	Wednesday 14th December , 6.00pm for 6.30pm, Wyvern House, Winsford
Hoole, Upton and Newton	Monday 16th January , 6.30pm, Hoole Methodist Church
	Thursday 19th January , 5.30 for 6.00pm, Lache Community Centre - a meeting for Lache Park ward residents Wednesday 22nd February (time and venue to be confirmed) - a meeting for Handbridge Park ward residents
City	Monday 30th January , 7.00pm, University of Chester (Westminster Building)
Blacon	Tuesday 7th February , 5.30 for 6.00pm, Blacon High School (Community Wing)
Weaver and Cuddington	Wednesday 15th February , 7.15pm, Sandiway and Cuddington Village Hall
Ellesmere Port Town	Tuesday 28th February , 6.00pm, Ellesmere Port Civic Hall

Check the website at: http://www.westcheshiretogether.org.uk/community_forums.aspx in case it has been necessary to make any changes to the information given above.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Our next edition will be in January 2012....



FEEDBACK.....your views or news

Your comments on this bulletin, or any partnership news you would like to share, should be forwarded to Lyn Brown, Partnership Information Officer, on 01244 972370 or e-mail: lyn.brown@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk