



Stakeholder dialogue

A good practice guide for users

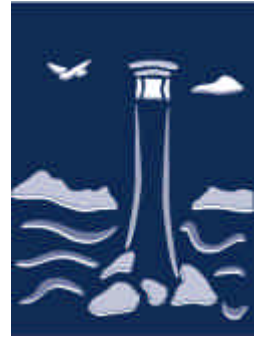
Including 'Making the most of the Islands'
- an example from the Isles of Scilly

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ISLES of SCILLY



Area of
Outstanding
Natural Beauty

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Foreword

This report is about **stakeholder dialogue** - a good practice approach to stakeholder participation. It provides a useful guide for those considering working with their stakeholders in a more constructive way. It describes what stakeholder dialogue involves and the benefits it brings. It also sets out important considerations and good advice.

Alongside the 'how to' of using stakeholder dialogue an example is described from the Isles of Scilly. Here a process was used to involve stakeholders in agreeing the contents of a statutory Management Plan for the Isles of Scilly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Stakeholder dialogue is an innovative approach and each time it is used lessons are learnt – the process on Scilly was no exception. Some lessons were particular to this process, or to Scilly, but those that have wider relevance have been included here as they provide useful insight.

This report can be found in pdf format on the Isles of Scilly AONB Website:

www.ios-aonb.info

Contents Page

1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Background to Making the most of the Islands	2
3.0 Is participation the right thing to do	3
3.1 Key Questions	
3.2 Do key people support this approach	4
4.0 Preparing for participation	5
4.1 Identifying likely issues and subjects	
4.2 Who to include	
4.3 Designing a process	6
4.4 Building Capacity to support the process	
4.5 Preparing for the work	7
4.6 Briefing Participants	8
4.7 Managing Expectations	
5.0 Participating	9
5.1 The vision – what is the long term goal	
5.2 What do we value now	
5.3 What needs to change	
5.4 Getting everyone up to speed	10
5.5 Information gathering	
5.6 Brainstorming new initiatives and identifying new management	11
5.7 Short listing and checking viability	
5.8 Levels of support	
5.9 Prioritising	12
6.0 Next steps	13
6.1 User friendly Action Plans	
6.2 Consultation	
6.3 Ongoing dialogue	14
6.4 Implementation	15
7.0 Conclusion	16
Annex 1 Summary of Process	17
Annex 2 Lessons Learnt	18



1.0 Introduction

The English countryside is a living landscape constantly changing. Planning and managing this change requires complex and integrated decision-making. The difficulty for decision-makers is knowing how to engage the relevant stakeholders, handle complex information, design and manage an equitable decision making process, and manage tensions between different interests.

Typically professionals and experts decide. They tell those affected and invest time explaining and, if necessary, justifying their decisions. Wider stakeholders have limited opportunity to influence what is planned and are usually only consulted when most of the decisions have been made and written in a formal document. Implementation can be an uphill struggle especially if interest groups feel their views have not been taken into account.

The alternative is to take a collaborative approach known as stakeholder dialogue. This means engaging stakeholders at an early stage when options are open and they can influence the outcome. Everyone shares knowledge and insights. Possible actions and ideas are explored before decisions are firmed up and committed to paper. Using the knowledge, views and ideas of a wider group builds social capital, enriches the discussion and leads to better informed, better understood and better supported outcomes

This doesn't happen by good intent but by a carefully and deliberately designed process. It is in this, more than any other way, that

stakeholder dialogue differs from other approaches to participation.

Other key differences include:

- Workshops are seen as just one part of the overall process
- Time is planned in-between workshops for information gathering or to give participants the chance to check back with those they represent
- The approach has its roots in conflict resolution so enables people to move away from win/lose arguments to find common ground and consensus.
- The process generates more active support for delivery and leaves better relationships and improved understanding.

All of this results in decisions that are well informed and seen as the best way forward by the majority of stakeholders.

This theory is all well and good but whilst there is much rhetoric about engaging stakeholders there are still too few good examples of where this has been done well. The process used to agree the actions in the Isles of Scilly AONB Management Plan is one of them.

The remainder of this text weaves together information on good practice in stakeholder dialogue alongside details of how this was carried out on Scilly.

2.0 Background to 'Making the Most of the Islands'



The Isles of Scilly

The Isles of Scilly are beautiful islands that lie 28 miles off the Cornish Coast.

Steeped in legends and history the 200 small islands and granite rocks form a magical place with sparkling white beaches, azure seas, abundant wildlife, small fields, stone cottages, clear skies, and stunning views.

The community of about 2000 live on just 5 of the islands. During the year over 130,000 people come to the islands for day visits or to stay awhile. But these people are referred to as 'visitors', not tourists, and this conveys the warmth and welcome they receive.

The feel of the place is that older values still hold sway. There is a strong, close-knit community and people are friendly and open. They are also outspoken and independent and don't suffer 'interfering mainlanders' gladly.

There is a strong sense of history and gradations of belonging from Scillonian ('3 generations under the sod') to islanders (born on Scilly) to resident and then visitor.

Some members of the community are go-ahead and innovative wanting change that brings a new vitality to the islands, broadens the economic base and provides jobs for local people. Others are concerned that change could threaten the aspects of Island life that everyone values most. The challenge is to find a way forward that retains the best of Island life whilst bringing sensitive and carefully managed change.

Challenges

The idyllic landscape and unspoilt feel masks some real challenges that either directly or indirectly impact the natural beauty of the place, for example:

- A decline in the once thriving flower farming is leading to unused farm land
- Opportunities to diversify the economy are constrained by the high cost of transporting goods to and from the mainland
- Open heathland has remained ungrazed to the detriment of wildlife and archaeology
- Sea level rise poses unknown threats to this already drowned landscape
- Visitors bring with them a thriving tourist economy but also impact on the sensitive landscape
- Second home ownership and affluent incomers mean house prices are beyond the reach of many local people
- Old farm buildings and stone walls are falling into disrepair because of changes in landuse and loss of traditional skills

The AONB

The Isles of Scilly are designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Uniquely the boundary of this coincides with just one local authority. Until recently a lack of funding lead some people to see the designation as merely a constraint to planning bringing with it no obvious benefits. Now, with AONB staff and increased funding, positive action can be taken to protect and enhance the unique beauty and character of Scilly - assets on which the tourism economy and quality of life for local people depend.

Following legislation in 2000 (the Countryside and Rights of Way Act) all AONB's must have a statutory Management Plan. The plan is to ensure the natural beauty of Scilly is actively maintained and enhanced. This includes the landform, habitats, wildlife, and human landscape that contribute to the unique sense of place. To achieve positive action it is vital that the plan has the agreement and support of local people and promotes the social and economic sustainability of the islands.

3.0 Is participation the right thing to do?

Collaborative working means recognising that you are one stakeholder amongst many and for the best decisions to be reached other voices should take part in the discussion.

Stakeholders can be defined as any person, group or organisation that is likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, the decisions being made.

Done well, there are many benefits in involving stakeholders but organisations need to think carefully before doing so and ensure it is for the right reasons. Inviting people to participate should be because there is a genuine opportunity for them to influence the outcome. It should not be used to rubberstamp decisions that have already been made. If people think their time has been wasted in poorly run workshops, or their attendance makes no difference to the outcome, they will feel disillusioned and lose trust and respect for the organisation/s concerned. They are also likely to stop current involvement and decline to be involved next time round.

3.1 Key questions

To evaluate whether or not the proposed participation is the right thing to do consider the following questions:

- Is there a genuine commitment to listen and take on board what others say? Will their input make a real difference?
- Do key people (partners and managers) understand and support the use of this approach (see 3.2)?
- What is the level of tension around the issues? Will involvement raise conflict and if so how is this to be handled?
- Are there particular cultural considerations eg stakeholders for whom English is not the first language, who cannot come to daytime meetings, or who need childcare?
- Are there other decision making processes going on which duplicate or overlap? If so how will the two processes be reconciled?
- Is there time for a participatory process? (A big process like that carried out on Scilly takes about a year from agreeing to the approach to producing an agreed text. A process with a single event takes about 2 months).
- Are there in-house skills and time to design and facilitate a good process or does this need to be brought in?
- Is there sufficient funding available eg to hire rooms and provide refreshments and to use a specialist if needed?

- Is there the time and skills capacity amongst staff to support a process? (Tasks include: finding and booking venues and refreshments, maintaining a database of stakeholders, handling mail outs, preparing displays, writing talks or text).
- What are the alternatives to a stakeholder dialogue and what will be the costs and benefits of these (eg lack of 'buy in')?

If a specialist is used they will run through many of these questions and tailor the stakeholder dialogue to the resources available, the issues under consideration and the needs of stakeholders.

On Scilly the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the AONB Officer had a commitment to involving the community to capture their knowledge and ideas for the Management Plan.

In 2001 the Officer held open 'surgeries' on each inhabitant island to collect views from residents and visitors. This showed the complexity of the task and the range of views and ideas that would need to be integrated. To add to the challenge there was only one and a half staff in the AONB unit and a tight statutory deadline.

It was decided that a consultant was needed to design and run a process that would help people agree the contents of the AONB Plan.

Funding was available and although the timetable was tight there was just about enough time to run a participatory process – although in hindsight not enough time was available to ensure all key people fully understood and supported the approach. The process was called 'Making the Most of the Islands'



3.2 Do key people support this approach?

A facilitated participatory process is a very different way of making decisions:

- More people have a say
- No organisation or individual has a veto
- Values and perceptions influence the outcome as well as factual knowledge
- Events involve facilitators and participation tools and techniques.
- Workloads can be unpredictable
- The outcome is open

Before launching into a participatory process it is important that key people (partner organisations and internal management) understand the benefits of facilitated dialogue, how it works, what it will be like, and that they agree this is the approach they want to use.

The process manager will want to see this agreement and get a mandate to facilitate. They will want to be sure that stakeholders are being respected and given a real say in the decisions. They will also want to know that the staff leading the project are supported in what will be a demanding process.

Once the decision has been made to go ahead the process manager will usually want to set up a core group of key people from the lead organisations to share responsibility and advise on the process as it goes along.

Experience suggests senior management and specialist experts are often most likely to find the whole approach challenging. Senior managers are used to directing activities, making swift decisions and taking a lead role. Experts are used to giving advice that is acted on. Sharing decisions and exploring options with other stakeholders may feel frustrating. Also, without understanding why they are used and how they work, the tools and techniques of facilitation may seem a bit like game playing - unnecessary and too informal for serious issues. So it is important that key people build understanding about how it works and consensus about using a consensus building approach!

On Scilly this was one stage that did not get enough time.

The JAC agreed to the need for a third party to help facilitate community participation and it was expected that a topic group approach would be used. Consultants were invited to submit tenders and one consultant '**dialogue matters**' proposed a stakeholder dialogue. This was chosen because it offered the advantage of integrating decision-making and avoided the possibility of different topic groups giving conflicting advice.

The consultant explained the approach at a JAC meeting but time was short, and the contract let, so members were unable to have a formal discussion about whether or not they wanted to work this way. Also the time and travel costs of getting to Scilly ruled out regular meetings with the consultant to advise on the process and share responsibility for key actions. An additional factor was that Scilly is fairly autonomous. Prior to the formation of the JAC, partnership working had been limited and often not worked well. It was a big step to go from this to an inclusive participation process.

All this had inevitable consequences

- A few people did not see the point of involving other stakeholders and saw it as a lengthy process that could delay action
- Not everyone saw the work necessary to support the process as a priority
- Some felt uncomfortable with the tools and techniques of facilitated workshops
- Some felt uncomfortable with open discussion about their own areas of work

Recommendations:

- Take time to build understanding and agreement about using this approach
- If there is too little time to get everyone onboard, consider if it is the right approach. If it is, accept that there will be some consequences for the process
- Set up a core group to share responsibility for the process if only by e-mail/phone.

4.0 Preparing for Participation

Planning who to involve, when and how is a crucial part of the process and requires particular skills and understanding. If there are insufficient skills in-house options are:

- Training staff in the principles and practice of good participation
- Contracting a specialist consultant

Generally the more complex or tense a situation the more likely it is that a professional independent third party is required.

The rest of this section considers the necessary steps in preparation

4.1 Identifying likely issues and subjects.

Many situations have an existing forum or committee who help steer work and who already represent a range of interests. Working with them to list likely issues is a good starting place. It is also worth using any information that has already been gathered.

On Scilly the open 'surgeries' held in 2001 on each of the inhabited islands generated a long list of comments. These were analysed in preparation for this process and used to help list likely issues and identify stakeholders. An astonishing 71 different subject areas or issues were identified 49 of which were relevant to the AONB! These were grouped under 6 headings:

- Rural
- Coastal and marine
- Infrastructure
- Recreation
- Interpretation and research
- Business and tourism

4.2 Who to include

Identifying stakeholders is a challenge. Who needs to be involved directly? Who needs to be kept informed? To identify who should be on the list the steering group can run through the following questions:

- What are the likely issues and decision areas?
- What organisations or interests would be affected?
- Who could represent their interests (if you don't know ask them!)?
- Is the mix representative and balanced?
- Are there too many or too few representing particular interests?

- Who are the key 'movers and shakers' who can help marshal resources for implementation?
- Who are opponents or blockers? (Better for them to be involved than outside the process giving it bad press)

This should give you a good working list but it is important to keep this under review for the following reasons:

- Different people may need to be involved in different ways at different parts of the process eg some may want to be involved in the general direction of the discussion but not the detail, or a technical or science group may need to be convened to look at a particular problem
- If the dialogue shifts direction new stakeholders may need to be included
- Sometimes similar groups may want to mandate an individual to represent their interests, alert them to subjects they may want to re-engage with, and keep them in touch with progress

It is vital to consider how numbers will be managed. A professional facilitator can work with a team to run participatory workshops with 70-100 people but this requires skilful management and the right facilities.

'Making the most of the Islands' rates highly in the efforts made to include key people.

Based on the issues list over 90 individuals were invited and 66 attended. They represented the interests of Authorities, NGO's, local experts, land managers, local business, and the community (including 4 young people from the school).

The workshops were by invitation only but sought to be as inclusive as possible so throughout the process participants were asked to suggest other interest groups or individuals who they thought should be involved. Several individuals also approached the AONB Officer and were invited to attend.

One difficulty was that a good part of the process, including two of the three workshops, occurred during the tourist season. This made it difficult for those representing tourism interests to participate - although they managed to ensure they were represented at each workshop. However any process involving a sequence of workshops is likely to overlap with someone's busy season - there is no perfect time that will suit everyone.

Transport could have been a good excuse not to be inclusive; local people live on 5 different Islands and some of the mainlanders had to travel for 3 - 4 hours. To ensure people from the other islands could make it, the AONB Unit chartered special boats and mainlanders flew in by helicopter or plane.

Recommendation

If the timescales allow flexibility, do your best to avoid the busiest times for the main interests involved.

4.3 Designing a process.

Too often participatory events happen on an ad hoc basis because someone thinks it is a good idea. But this is unfair to stakeholders who should have clarity about what is happening, why they are being asked to get involved, what influence they can have over the outcome, and how the event relates to the overall decision-making process. For example, if a workshop is being held it should be clear to participants whether this is for:

- Information gathering – where they have no influence over how the information is used
- Consultation – where their views are passed to decision makers and will have some influence
- Shared decision-making – where they are directly helping to make the decisions.

Designing a good process requires a sound grasp of the four ways organisations can relate to stakeholders and that these are used in a deliberate ‘fit for purpose’ way throughout the process. The four different ways are:

	Stakeholder influence	'Buy in' and Social capital acquired
1 Information giving	None	Least
2 Information gathering	↓	↓
3 Consultation		
4 Shared decision making		

Each process should be tailored to suit the needs of that particular situation and the process designer should be well briefed about local circumstances so they can take them into account. It is also important that the situation is kept under review so the process can be adapted as the situation develops.

Having designed the overall process work can begin on the design of each event. This requires good understanding of a range of

participatory techniques and skilful use of them within an event.

On Scilly the core process was designed to span 6 months and include:

- Identifying and briefing stakeholders
- A sequence of 3 workshops each of which built on the work done before
- Gaps in between workshops for stakeholders to gather information, verify facts, or to check out the acceptability of new proposals with those they represented

Following the dialogue phase the AONB plan was written and then sent out for consultation, signing off and most importantly implementation.

Activity	Way of relating to stakeholders			
	Info giving	Info Gathering	Consult	Share decisions
1. Identifying stakeholders and likely issues		✓		
2. Briefing stakeholders	✓			
3. Workshop 1	✓	✓		✓
4. Information gathering		✓		
5. Workshop 2	✓			✓
6. Stakeholders asked to verify information and check out the acceptability of new proposals with those they represented.		✓	✓	
7. Workshop 3				✓
8. AONB plan written then sent out for consultation and signing off			✓	

4.4 Building capacity to support the process

Holding workshops with many different interests requires a team of facilitators. Sometimes participants will work together in plenary other times people will divide into small groups of 8-12. The minimum team will include:

- A lead facilitator to keep an overview and facilitate plenary discussion
- Support facilitators for small group work to ensure everyone gets a say, to keep things moving, and to make an impartial record of the discussion

To provide a professional team is beyond most budgets so a capacity building approach can be taken by training people who are local to the project. This has the advantage that it leaves a pool of skilled people who can be drawn on in the future.

The type of people who make good facilitators:

- Are confident

- Have good interpersonal skills
- Can be neutral
- Can stay out of the discussion participants are having

Staying out of the discussion is essential if a facilitator is to retain the trust of participants. The second a facilitator voices his or her own opinion they will be seen to have taken sides and their facilitation treated as biased.

On Scilly a team of volunteers was recruited and trained as small group facilitators. Usually such people come from the professional organisations involved in the dialogue but on Scilly most relevant professionals were stakeholders. So the team also included a pub owner, a dive instructor, Wildlife Trust volunteers, and a Learning Needs Officer. These people received 2 days training in return for mentored live practice helping out with the events.

Some of the volunteers did find it difficult to stay out of the discussion. If someone is having real difficulty they can either take a different role in the facilitation team or declare an interest and withdraw from facilitating.

An aspect of working on Scilly is that everyone either lives nearby or has to stay overnight. This meant that during training and the workshops the team often ate and drank together. This proved to have an unexpected benefit; good rapport was quickly formed and resulted in a strong, friendly team that worked together seamlessly in pressured workshops.

Recommendation

- Socialising together helps to build a good team of support facilitators.
- Ensure volunteer facilitators know before signing up for training that they are going to have to keep out of the discussion themselves - and support them in this during the process

4.5 Preparing for the work

Any organisation undertaking stakeholder participation has to be ready to manage the workload.

Traditional consultation processes require less time in the early stages whilst the document is written, and much more time later in resolving issues and persuading people to agree to, and implement, a plan they have had little say in.

In stakeholder dialogue the opposite happens. Time is invested upfront so that issues and ideas are explored with stakeholders before being firmed up and put in a plan or strategy. This pays dividends later because the process develops agreement and generates 'buy in'. As a result implementation is quicker and easier.

However whilst the process is going on it is demanding on the lead organisation/s and this should not be underestimated. Lead officers have to gather information, prepare text, chivvy other stakeholders to carry out crucial tasks, liaise with the process manager, and carry out their usual day-to-day responsibilities. Support staff are needed to do mail outs, maintain databases and organise venues, catering and transport requirements. Fellow officers and managers may have to provide information or check that proposals are acceptable.

Many of these tasks are known about in advance and can be planned in. But working in a creative process with many other stakeholders is bound to throw up a few surprises so planning in some contingency time is also worthwhile.

Managers and staff need to be aware of all this and ready to prioritise work that is part of the process. If deadlines aren't met, and participant's time is wasted, it will reflect poorly on the lead organisation/s and may reduce 'buy in' and trust.

On Scilly the statutory deadline meant the timetable was tight but the process was carefully planned with key stages in plan production fitting in around workshops. In the event two factors made the situation difficult for both the Lead Officer and the process:

- The Officer had unplanned work leading to slippage in the stages of drafting the plan. It was a particular problem that only an outline of the plan was ready for the last workshop.
- The process timetable was not flexible and could not easily respond to the slippage. This was because workshops had to be booked a long time in advance for mainlanders to be able to book flights and accommodation.

Recommendations:

- Build clear understanding about key stages and workload with officers and management so tasks vital to the process are prioritised
- Keep the timetable as flexible as possible so it can respond to the unexpected
- As soon as slippage looks likely the lead officer, steering group and facilitator should discuss options

4.6 Briefing participants

It is important that potential stakeholders are well briefed about the scope and purpose of the dialogue process, how the process will work, and what will be expected of them. This means they can decide whether or not to take part.

Some key individuals may be sceptical and special meetings might be required to explore their concerns and discuss the consequences if they chose not to participate. The main consequence is that decisions will be made without their input and they cannot expect to veto what many others have agreed.

Part of preparing people is to tell them what workshops will be like. Facilitated participatory events are very different to other meetings. People are sometimes in one large group but most often work in small groups of 8 -12 people. The essence of what is said is recorded on flipchart paper or 'post-it' notes to build openness and confidence. Sometimes people are asked to pair up or move round the room in a particular sequence. All this may seem unnecessary, but used well these tools and techniques achieve results that can't be done any other way.

The majority of people find they get on well with facilitated events feeling they are being properly listened to and their input valued. However there are always some who are less comfortable - though they often acknowledge that more is discussed, more effectively, than in normal round table meetings.

Either way interactive meetings are different and it is wise to prepare people in advance.

4.7 Managing expectations

It is vital to manage people's expectations. Participatory workshops always create high expectations. Some stakeholders feel they have been given a say, and their concerns listened to properly, for the first time. Also a well-designed process gives opportunity for creative thinking. As a result people can get carried away and it is vital to ensure that some realism is maintained to avoid disappointment. Not everything on everyone's wish list can be achieved!

On Scilly briefing material was sent out to invitees about 6 weeks before the first workshop so that people could decide if they wanted to participate. In this and in reminders during the process, stakeholders were told:

"It is likely that many different issues and solutions will be raised. Not all of these can be in the AONB Plan. However these thoughts will not be lost. They will be categorised in the following way:

- *Action to be taken forward by the organisations responsible for implementing the plan*
- *Actions to be taken forward by other local stakeholders – if they chose*
- *Issues and ideas that fall outside the remit of the plan, which will be passed as advice to others. The AONB Officer will not be able to guarantee action on these matters but will take responsibility to pass these thoughts to those who may be able to do something about them."*



5.0 Participating

Not every process is the same but there will be a few stages common to all. The ones used on Scilly are explored in more detail in this section.

Making the most of the Islands – Overview

During the process stakeholders were asked:

- Their vision of the future
- What needed to stay the same
- What needed to change
- For relevant information, existing management, and relevant documents
- To explore issues
- To review current management - was it going in the right direction or did something new need to happen
- To brainstorm ideas for new projects and initiatives
- To agree what action needed to be taken to progress towards the long-term vision.
- To agree how the AONB communicates with the wider community during consultation and with the key stakeholders on an ongoing basis

5.1 The vision – what is the long-term goal.

Creating a long-term vision helps people shift from the positions and concerns they enter the room with to thinking positively. It also shows the common ground participants share in wanting to work towards something better. There are various techniques that can be used to do this.

On Scilly participants were sent 4 post-its and asked to bring them to the first workshop each with a separate responses to the question

'It is 2020 and the Isles of Scilly are a great place to be because.....'

As people arrived they were asked to place their responses on large pieces of paper on the walls. A member of the facilitation team helped people put like with like and sorted any strays into the emerging vision.

Something that people value about Scilly is that each island has it's own character and people want this to be retained. So another part of establishing the vision was to ask

'What is special about each island?'

The breath and range of responses from these two exercises was astonishing. Some have been reproduced here to give you a flavour.

'It is 2020 and the Isles of Scilly are a great place to be because.....'

- *They show that small is beautiful*
- *The magic of the isles has been preserved*
- *Everyone is working together to keep the islands a special place*
- *The community is vibrant and has a positive outlook*
- *People still have time to talk*
- *There is still a relaxed and friendly atmosphere*
- *Residents have a far greater say in how things are run*
- *Scilly is a model of environmental excellence*
- *The wildlife is fantastic and looked after really well*
- *It feels like a real place where local people can earn a living, own a home, educate their children, participate in the community, benefit from excellent health care, and above all, feel proud to be part of successful Scilly.*

5.2 What do we value now.

This is a crucial question to ask. Too often when pressing for positive change people forget to take stock of what they value now. It is vital to do this otherwise valued things can be lost on the way. For example if authorities divert staff and funding resources from something valued now to a new initiative this may be too high a price to pay.

What do you value now?

- *A beautiful place – good for the soul*
- *Blue sky, blue sea, clear waters, sunsets*
- *Night skies*
- *Peace and tranquillity*
- *Each island is individual*
- *Small scale charm*
- *Richness of wildlife*
- *History, ruins, prehistory*
- *Independence and strength of children*
- *People care about each other*
- *Freedom for children - safe*
- *Crime free*
- *Lack of traffic*

5.3 What needs to change?

Asking this question helps people air their main concerns, identify or confirm issues, and develop understanding of others concerns.

5.4 Getting everyone up to speed

Workshops are primarily for participants to have their say, share knowledge and influence the outcome. However there are usually a handful of subjects that everyone needs to be briefed on. These should be kept both few in number and as concise as possible so they do not take up too much time.

Subjects usually include the subject and scope of the dialogue, what people can expect to happen, and information about particular subjects that are causing confusion.

On Scilly short presentations were given at the beginning of each workshop. Those at workshop 1 and 3 concentrated on the reasons for the dialogue and what people could expect. Presentations at the middle workshop were used to address obvious areas of confusion evident in the first workshop. This included; the view of the Local Authority, Objective 1 funding, heathland management and the kind of action that could be included in the plan.

5.5 Information gathering

Where there is too little information the gap is filled with prejudice, assumptions, rumour, and speculation. None of these make a good basis for long-term decisions. Also people usually come to a dialogue bringing with them information which supports their own position. Gathering information and sharing it helps build a solid foundation for good dialogue. It can also identify gaps in knowledge so stakeholders can decide what to do - wait until the information is gathered, press ahead with out it, or proceed with caution and prepare a contingency plan.

For complex document based processes (such as management plans and schemes) a good way of managing information is to link workshop activities directly to the design and format of the document. If participants see their work forming a section in the end document it goes a long way to building transparency and ownership. Using tables containing a sequence of questions is a good way of doing this and has the following advantages:

- The sequence of thought and information used to evaluate issues and find solutions is recorded and easily accessible
- Text in tables can be written succinctly
- Gaps in information or understanding are evident and decisions can be made about what to do about them
- Time is saved in writing up the Plan
- The end document can be easier to navigate

On Scilly the process was designed around subject tables that would form a section of the management plan and set out the following information:

- 1 The long-term vision or goal for that subject
- 2 Facts and figures
- 3 Known or likely positive effects of the current situation on the environment, the economy and social well-being.
- 4 Known or likely negative effects
- 5 Organisations responsible for management
- 6 Key Documents
- 7 Existing management
- 8 Gaps in management or information
- 9 New actions /policies/management measures
- 10 Resources needed for implementation

During the workshops the tables were used to prompt debate and discussion. People worked in topic groups to gather and share specialist knowledge, and worked in mixed groups to evaluate the effect on each other's interests and the environment.

In this way the tables proved very useful for capturing the range of views, perceptions, and 'know how' held by different stakeholders and helped build better understanding between interests. However there was also the following challenges:

- There were 49 tables - one for each of the different subjects identified as either directly or indirectly relevant to the AONB. This was a lot to cope with and when the tables were filled in it turned out there was too much duplication and overlap.
- Time constraints meant that background information was not collated upfront as planned and asking participants to do this in workshops did not work well. This left the tables with too many information gaps.
- Because of the importance of maintaining the character of each island the tables had been designed to give space for information and actions specific to each inhabited island. These made the tables look overly complicated.

In the end, when drafting the plan, the AONB Officer decided to use the content of the tables but abandon the tables themselves.

Recommendations

Linking document design directly to what participants do in workshop is good practice. Tables are a good way of doing this and a good way of handling information but require:

- Design to be refined and agreed with members of the steering group.
- Design to be kept straightforward
- Readily available background information to be gathered upfront with workshops used to add and check information.
- The number of tables rationalised to reduce overlap and duplication

5.6 Brainstorming new initiatives and identifying new management

Times of creativity are part of any good dialogue. They enable people to think without constraint or judgement and can unblock polarised debate. Sometimes synergies and win/wins emerge.

Many ideas will not be new but brought into the workshops from other forum. This means they are discussed openly and, if acceptable to others, gain the support and momentum they were previously lacking.

On Scilly the brainstorming took place at Workshop 2.

To prompt and inspire participants a list of potential new projects and management ideas were collated from several sources;

- The original community surgeries
- Good ideas from the 'Vision' and 'What needs to change' sessions in the first workshop
- Ideas that had worked well from elsewhere.

This proved an important resource for later in the process but when it came to brainstorming no one needed the list to be inspired!



5.7 Short listing and checking viability

By its nature brainstorming is creative and throws up a long list of suggestions including some impractical and wacky ideas. To arrive at a list of ideas that are worth working up in detail it is necessary to create a short list. In some situations it will be necessary for stakeholders to negotiate what the criteria for short listing should be. An alternative is to get stakeholders to select from the long list the projects they want to work up in more detail.

A part of short listing is to check the viability of proposals. Are they legally possible, technically achievable, economically viable,

and acceptable to stakeholders including relevant experts?

Some short listing took place within workshop 2 when stakeholders were asked to select the actions they most wanted to see happen and then to evaluate them against the following:

- Would they plug gaps in current management?
- Would they be Ok for other stakeholders?
- If not how could problems be overcome?
- Were they worth exploring further?
- Would they prioritise them for action?

However many participants felt that time was against them and that the shortlist did not reflect their preferences but was really just what they could do in the time. So the next stage took place by post.

The Consultant and the AONB Officer took the prompt list and the brainstormed list and grouped ideas together to form coherent projects or actions. The action list was still long so when it was sent out, participants were asked to concentrate on those they were most interested or concerned about. They were asked to feed back:

- Was it already happening
- Was it acceptable to them, those they represented and relevant experts
- Any comments, concerns
- If they had concerns, how the idea could be adjusted to increase their support
- Would they support the action with time, money or resources
- Did they want to be actively involved in progressing the action

The response was collated and displayed at the final workshop and went on to form the action plan in the AONB Management Plan

5.8 Levels of support

Once the short list has been created it is important to check for the level of support and that participants can see this and each other's comments.

It is unrealistic to think that all the proposed actions will have reached the same stage and full support by the time the action plan has to be written. Often there will be support in principle but there has been insufficient time to gather relevant information, find funding or resolve details. In these cases what has to be written in the plan is not that the proposal will be implemented but that it will be explored further. The following table lists choices about what is written into the plan:

Level of support for idea	What can be done within the timetable	The action written into the action plan
Good support	Any concerns or information needs are easy to fix within the timetable	The idea will be implemented
Good support some concerns	There is insufficient time to resolve concerns before plan deadline.	The idea will be worked up in more detail with those who have raised concerns And /Or Research will be undertaken to gather the information needed to make the decision
Tensions remain outstanding	Tensions cannot be resolved before plan deadline	A dialogue will continue to work at resolving differences before further action is taken
No support	Even the person who proposed it will accept that it is not worth pursuing.	Drop it

On Scilly, prior to going out for stakeholder feedback, the proposed actions were worded in a way that was sensitive to the stage that they had reached.

For example instead of saying there would be a farmers market the proposed action was to trial one for a limited time and evaluate if it would be viable and what effect it would have on local shops.

By writing proposals that were sensitive to the stage they had reached the majority of actions had good support from stakeholders with offers of help to progress or implement the idea.

5.9 Prioritising

In an ideal world everyone would not just agree what action should happen but also the priority of each action compared to everything else. However as well as negotiating with each other, participants would have to have complete knowledge of their own organisations priorities and resources. This makes realistic prioritisation very difficult. Also sometimes a window of opportunity opens up, for example a new funding scheme, and it has to be grabbed whilst it's available.

In reality the order in which actions happen will result from:

- People's 'felt needs' (conscious needs)
- Environmental need
- Policy and legislative imperatives
- Staff capacity
- Funding streams
- A champion who will drive it forward
- Organisational priorities

If there is time for this to be discussed and agreed in workshops it is worth developing some sense of priority to advise those responsible for implementation. However it is likely that the decisions about the order of implementation will revert to the steering group and will change with time.

Whatever and however actions are prioritised the vital thing is to ensure that the plan sets out who will do what, when and with what resources. No doubt at review some actions will not have been implemented as planned but the reasons for that can be explored and amendments made to the plan. If they are not clearly set out to begin with no one will know what they are accountable for, buck passing will occur, stakeholders will be disillusioned and the investment in good process will have been a waste of time.

On Scilly there was too little information available to agree priorities in the last workshop – it was also more important to gather information about the level of support for the actions and to discuss and agree how the AONB unit would relate to wider stakeholders in the future.

To agree priorities a meeting was convened with the JAC. They were the people who could marshal resources for implementation and had responsibility for the AONB. They were facilitated to start work on a complex multi-project timetable spanning 5 years. This included known landmarks and likely resources. However even amongst the JAC the information was not readily available to do this task with much certainty and so the AONB Officer was asked to work it up in more detail prior to formal consultation.



6.0 Next Steps

6.1 User-friendly documents.

Any process of dialogue is going to result in a document of one sort or another. These may be a simple record of what was agreed and who will take what action by when. For more substantial text (such as Management Plans, Strategies, or Schemes) it is worth knowing that stakeholder dialogue is likely to result in a different sort of document. Documents are likely to be:

- Longer
- Much more detailed - expressing local knowledge and views
- Express scientific/factual knowledge alongside values, perspectives and concerns
- Significantly more integrated and rooted in stakeholder /local reality.
- Better supported and easier to implement

Including different types of information has to be done carefully. People - especially experts and authorities - are used to seeing only hard facts and expert comment in documents. If stakeholder views are included at all it is usually as questionnaire results analysed in a dry statistical way.

In stakeholder dialogue local 'know how', values and perspectives are used to discuss issues and result in better-informed choices. Incorporating them in a document has value as it conveys that people have been listened to. However it does have to be done carefully. It is important to explain that inclusion is an acknowledgement of different views/knowledge but not necessarily an endorsement. Careful formatting can also help readers understand the different sources and kinds of information and so more readily understand the meaning of the text.

It is often at the stage of drafting the plan that much of the good work of involving stakeholders is undone. This happens when the writer reverts to the usual corporate or public authority 'plan speak' that puts everyone off. So to provide a document that is user-friendly to a wide range of stakeholders the following is worth bearing in mind:

- Aim to express what stakeholders have said - the same idea or essence so there is a clear link between their input in the workshops and the final document.
- Use Plain English (active voice, an accessible reading age, non technical language, inspirational text, a good glossary)

- Ensure the document is easy to navigate. It is probably only at consultation stage that anyone will read the document right through. After that people need to be able to find the bit that interests them quickly and easily.
- Use a good designer to improve layout, use suitable graphics and user-friendly fonts, print colours and format.

To ensure it makes a difference:

- Action plans should clearly set out who will do what, by when, with what resources
- The Action should include monitoring of implementation and formal review.

At the time of going to press the plan has yet to be finalised. However the latest draft is full of rich language, stakeholder views and well-supported actions. It cannot be mistaken for a corporate document written behind closed doors by a few experts. Careful design and photos showing the beauty of Scilly are going to make it even more user friendly.

6.2 Consultation

Once the outputs of the process have been written into an action plan it is likely there will be a consultation phase. This is necessary for two reasons:

- The people who participated want to see the written result
- However inclusive, the stakeholder dialogue cannot involve everyone and there is usually a wider group of people who want to be consulted.

In traditional consultation commenting on a draft document is the only opportunity that stakeholders have to influence the content. By this point most of the decisions have been made and there is little room for people to suggest alternatives to what is proposed. If they feel their views have not been taken into account they will ask for substantive changes and may object and challenge the proposals.

A well-written document resulting from a participation process should get a different response. The document should express and reflect shared goals, wide understanding and agreed actions. The consultation is then about checking the accuracy and coverage of subjects and that meaning is clear. It may still prompt a good number of letters and detailed comment, but that is because people feel it is worth bothering – they now have experience of

being listened to and their input making a difference. Provided the text is well written and reflects the agreements reached in the process the document should not prompt controversy or objections.

When the consultation document is sent out it is advisable for the accompanying letter to explain how stakeholders were involved. This achieves two things:

- It can reassure people that a wide range of interests have been taken into account
- It can manage expectations by explaining that with so many people agreeing the proposals the scope for change at this stage is limited

The consultation draft of the AONB Plan was sent out to 123 people. The draft was also put in libraries and reading rooms and a letter and response form sent out to 1050 households. Over 55 responses were received most of these from people who did not participate directly in the process. The draft did not prompt any controversy and there were no objections.

The most negative comment was from someone who felt pessimistic about delivery. Others felt it was too long, more coverage was needed on particular subjects and that the format of the draft document could be made clearer.

Some people expressed confusion over the sections detailing community views and some questioned the merit of including them at all. The consensus was that they formed a useful record and having involved people in the process it was important to include their different perspectives in the document.

The extent that community views have been included in the AONB plan is innovative and has gone a long way to reassuring people that their involvement was worthwhile – something many were sceptical about. Design and formatting will make it clearer how these views are to be understood.

Recommendation

Think carefully about how to format the document even at draft stage so that the different types of information are explained and distinct. (eg scientific/factual, Local know-how, stakeholder views/concerns, discussion and actions etc).

6.3 Ongoing dialogue

Many of the people who have been involved in a participatory process want to continue to influence the future. Clear communication mechanisms should be set up to enable them to do this. If this is not done there is a danger that people will feel used – ‘now the lead organisations have a mandate to act they are not interested in us anymore’.

The best way of arranging something that suits everyone best is to discuss and agree this within the process. Groups that make sense to the lead organisations may not suit stakeholders who do not want to waste time in meetings just for a couple of relevant items. So if people are going to commit to ongoing active involvement groups need to be relevant and make a difference.

Options include:

- **Topic groups:** by definition focused on particular subjects, membership has interests in common and the group is likely to run over the long-term. The group can take the initiative and actively supports implementation.
- **Advisory Groups:** like topic groups but their role is confined to advice.
- **Action groups:** set up to put momentum behind particular actions, likely to be mixed interests and temporary - disbanding when the action is successfully implemented.

Setting up groups by themselves is not enough. To be effective and avoid confusion or disillusion, members should have clarity about how they relate to others and in particular any steering group or committee. They should also know who has a mandate to decide what and what the lines of communication are.

On Scilly the afternoon of workshop 3 was used to discuss ‘working together in the future’.

During this session people were asked to consider whether topic groups or action groups would be most use and to suggest any alternatives. They were also asked how subject areas could be grouped to suit them best. For example those representing marine interests wanted to meet as a separate group rather than split between eg wildlife, recreation etc.

Another part of the discussion was how the AONB unit should best liase with the wider community.

The conclusion was that groups were definitely needed and groupings that best suited stakeholders emerged. How these groups relate to the JAC required further discussion. (This is in part because of a problem particular to Scilly; some of the experts in the JAC also want to be in the groups but this is tricky as they come from the mainland and frequent visits are not possible)

6.4 Implementation

In the end the real test of a good stakeholder process is the momentum and co-operation created for implementation. Unlike traditional consultation this does not have to wait for the

document to go through several drafts and be printed. Implementation can and usually does begin as soon as wide agreement and support for a particular action is evident.

It is early days to assess this for Scilly but the stakeholder feedback on the action plan indicated a good level of support along with offers of resources and help for implementation.

The AONB Officer reports that there is already increased participation and interest in projects that are underway and progress in implementing the action plan is encouraging.



7.0 Conclusions

Stakeholder dialogue is good practice amongst participation approaches. It has many distinct advantages over traditional consultation.

- The majority of stakeholders appreciate being involved and feel they have been able to influence the future
- The process builds better understanding and more trust

To achieve all this requires a skilfully designed process, good planning, and adaptability by both the process manager and the lead organisations sponsoring the process.

At the last workshop participants were asked for their feedback on the process - what went well and what went less well.

Negative comments include:

- The process was too long or too short
- The workshops were too long but not enough time was given to particular tasks.
- The second workshop covered too much of the same ground as the first
- There was too much paper
- The draft plan was not ready for the last workshop.
- A detailed 'map' showing this process would have helped people know where they were within it.
- As expected a few did not get on well with a facilitated events (The harshest critic described the process as 'Unwieldy and shambolic')

The majority of comments were positive. The following selection is typical:

- *Great opportunity to contribute to the plan and to the work of others*
- *Wonderful to have opportunity to express and exchange views, to discover I am not alone*
- *Enjoyed a workshop that had a positive structure which was progressive*
- *Enjoyed feeling part of the workshop and exchanging opinions /airing concerns*
- *Allowed a wide range of individual interests to have integrated discussion*
- *Has been good to talk with people from different backgrounds about similar topics – very interesting*
- *Well structured, well facilitated and update and actions well communicated to everyone concerned*
- *A very good opportunity and process for getting many people together to discuss things that concern us all, a chance to raise awareness and understanding and hopefully to now follow through with positive actions*



Making the Most of the Islands - Summary of the process

Action	Details
Mail out to potential stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation and briefing to tell people what was happening, how it would work and what would be involved if they took part
Workshop 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing participants • What future do you want? • What do you value now • What needs to change • Filling in tables assessing each activity or issue including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives, • Current positive and negative effects on the environment, the economy and the social and cultural life of the Islands • Facts and figures about subjects – or where the information can be found
Information gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder were asked to supply any information that plugged gaps in the tables
Workshop 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings for particular subjects – funding, the Duchy of Cornwall, the Councils view, the Wildlife Trusts management, Objective 1 funding • Brainstorming ideas and suggestions to address issues and aspirations identified in workshop 1 • Checking the accuracy of information • Selecting proposals from the brainstormed list and discussing in more detail
Checking viability of suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions were grouped together into coherent projects and the draft list sent to stakeholder to check acceptability with those they represented and relevant experts, raise concerns, and to express their level of support
Workshop 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review comments made to the draft list of actions • Work up certain projects in more detail • Comment on draft AONB plan structure and contents • Advise on wider consultation • Discuss ways that stakeholders could continue to influence AONB work via topic groups • Evaluate the process
JAC meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on the draft AONB plan • Work on timetabling actions • Agree method of wider consultation • Discuss topic groups and their mandate • Discuss sensitive issues that remain outstanding • Evaluate the process
Draft Plan Production	Draft Plan to express stakeholder views, factual information and action
Consultation	Plan sent out to all stakeholders and made available for wider community to see and comment on
Publication of final Plan	

Lessons learnt

The AONB Officer and the Countryside Agency Contract Manager were asked for particular thoughts or comments and these have been written below.

The process

- Using a professional third party works well when the situation is complex and the neutrality of a third party can be very useful when the situation is sensitive.
- Training volunteers to facilitate is a good way of building capacity The process provides a good joint learning opportunity
- Opportunities to give information and ideas anonymously are important for those less used to or comfortable with speaking out
- Workshops are hard work so energy levels of participants and facilitators need to be kept up - make it fun, not too complex, and feed people well (but not too well or they go to sleep!!). Sweets on tables are a good tip to help keep energy levels up and concentration high.
- Try to include a wide age range from the community - from secondary school to retired.

The human dynamic

- It is important to realise that even a process like this is not going to result in 100% consensus - it is unrealistic to think everyone is going to end up agreeing about everything. A process that has to stay focused and work within timetable and budget constraints cannot resolve all areas of tension surrounding multiple issues. The open discussion will throw up surprises and bring things into the open. People will hear views expressed that they disagree with and new tensions can develop. However finding as much common ground as possible helps move things forward and builds a foundation for the long-term process of establishing good working relationships with all stakeholders.
- It is difficult/unrealistic to expect equal power levels when some organisations have statutory responsibility and larger resources - but this does not negate the value of empowering other stakeholders to share decision-making.
- There will be complex interrelationships and interests between participants that influence their input. Opportunities to give ideas and views anonymously helps.
- The process raises momentum and high expectations. But delivering action will be dependant on the staff and financial resources that are already available or that can be secured for the time span they are needed. Lots of funding opportunities are short term or for very specific things. If it turns out that the necessary resources can't be secured actions will have to be delayed, cut back or not happen at all. This could lead to misunderstanding and people doubting the good intentions. Managing expectations is the solution but trickier than it sounds - you don't want to put a damper on things, or make people cynical about the intention to bring about change, but neither do you want people to have unrealistic expectations and then be disappointed.

Managing the workload

- Stakeholder participation is hard work but worth doing
- Planning for the workload is vital. The time required and timing of tasks and events are a real issue and need to be carefully planned allowing flexibility wherever possible.

The output

- Plans that result from stakeholder participation are different. They need to express what was agreed in the process and reflect stakeholder views but they also have to fit with statutory requirements. A balance in style and wording acceptable to all stakeholders has to be found.