

Action for Cheylesmore

The Action for Cheylesmore team describe themselves as an action group, not a talking shop. Cheylesmore isn't viewed as a deprived area, which can make getting support for their projects tricky, but from litter picks to bus petitions, the team have certainly achieved a lot in a short time

Quinton Park Baptist Church is situated at the heart of Cheylesmore, and they have been exploring how to make the most of their location. As well as rebuilding their premises, they wanted to impact the local area in positive ways. John Kirby, a local resident and deacon at the church, says, 'Quinton Park church wanted to 'show the love of God to the neighbourhood' – in other words, to get more involved in the neighbourhood, instead of huddling away in our church.'

So the minister of the church called a community meeting, inviting local people including residents and the police. The Action for Cheylesmore team was born with the aim of making Cheylesmore a better place to live. John, who is also chair of a local tenants association, is now involved with the team.

No hub

As John sees it, 'this area is designated as a place the authorities don't have to worry about – its not one of the deprived areas. But there are pockets of deprivation within Cheylesmore, especially amongst the elderly. You go from the lowest Council Tax band to the second highest, sometimes within a street.'

The church conducted a survey of the local area that showed that many people were concerned at the lack of a sense of community in Cheylesmore. 'There's been no focus in Cheylesmore. All the employment is outside of Cheylesmore, and people go out for their entertainment. Cheylesmore is just a place where you come to sleep. There's no real hub' says John.

Involving others

One of the aims of Action for Cheylesmore is to build



In the 18 months Action for Cheylesmore has been running, the group has:

- installed a community noticeboard
- successfully petitioned to reinstate a local bus service
- persuaded BT, who own a local piece of grass, to keep it mown
- gained 'Liveability' funding to redevelop the front of the shops
- begun to develop a website and
- held several litter picks which have drawn in new members.

In the future they hope to improve the traffic situation near the shops, clean up or knock down the public toilets, put in pay area for children, and organise an annual fun day and run a project with a school to clear up the local pond.

A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

a network of people who are concerned about the area. The group has been successful in involving both church and local people, and they now regularly get 20-25 people to their meetings, with local councillors and police also attending.

They have found that the litter picks they hold around the area are great for drawing in new members. And the police have also come along and helped. *People see us litter picking and say things like "how did you get lumbered with this?!". When we explain that we're not being punished, we're doing it to clean the joint up a bit, they say, "oh, its about time" and join in.'*

What about partnership?

Action for Cheylesmore have also had input from councillors, the local youth worker, and Neighbourhood Management, who helped them draw up a constitution.

However John feels that one result of not being seen as a deprived area is that it can be a challenge to get help from partners who may have their focus elsewhere: *'It can seem that they are more interested in using us to further their ends and tick their boxes than helping us to further our ends. Whatever help we've had, we've had to fight for.'*

John finds bureaucracy can also be a problem: *'It's very difficult to find out what is available. They will say, "we've got this, this and this". But to get hold of it you find you have to jump through lots of hoops. It might take more to jump through than anything we'd get back.'*

John feels that their councillors are the group's main source of help and information. *'For example we might talk to councillors at a ward forum and ask them who we 'buttonhole' for something'.*

Secrets of success

The group has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short space of time. Jenny Flint, another member of the group, put their success is down to:

- the determination of the people involved
- being an action group, not a talking shop – people take bits of work away t
- learning from other people
- connecting with others.

And John adds, *'You've got to keep going, be committed. Success does breed success, but the only way you will get success is if you keep plugging away.'*

The views expressed in this article are those of the interviewees and not necessarily those of Coventry Community Empowerment Network.

'Liveability Funding'

The concept of 'liveability' is short hand for the things which improve our daily experience of life where we live and work.

For ideas and guidance on getting funding for similar projects, contact:

Coventry Voluntary Service Council

T: 023 7622 0381

6th Floor Coventry Point
Market Way
Coventry CV1 1EA

Or

City Council External Funding Helpdesk

T: 024 7683 1394

E: FundingHelpdesk@coventry.gov.uk