

4 Walsall, Alumwell – Local Priorities

Two local priorities have been identified and approved by the Alumwell Panel:

- Establish a voluntary infrastructure that will increase resident's involvement in the running, management & provision of activities & services in the Alumwell area, for the benefit of all.
- To create long term opportunities, support, advice and activities for young people living in Alumwell.

Identified needs

- revealed a critical shortage of training, advice, information and support for existing groups and no support available to encourage the formation of new groups.
- identified training needs such as managing and supporting volunteers, employment law, health and safety requirements, and IT use.
- identified the need for more advice and information about sources of funding, fundraising and making funding applications
- concludes that this capacity-building support urgently needs to be provided so that groups can become more effective in meeting the needs of their local communities and can access and use funding more efficiently in meeting these needs.

Background information on the Alumwell area of Walsall

The Alumwell area is a deprived neighbourhood within the Pleck Ward, which is recognised as being within the 10% most deprived wards in England. Other neighbourhoods within the Pleck Ward benefit from SRB 5 funding but Alumwell is excluded from this opportunity.

The Alumwell area is also severely disadvantaged in terms of local environmental quality, with a significant legacy of derelict land and major air quality issues, given the area's position adjacent to Junction 10 M6.

National statistics show that Alumwell has above average claimants for all allowances listed in the Summary of Demographic Data attached to this Plan. Set against the National Average for England & Wales, Income Support, Severe Disablement Allowance & Job Seekers Allowance are double the average, all others are at least 50% higher than the national average. Statistics also show that whilst the average age for the area is below the Walsall average of 38.3, this is caused by unusually high numbers of under 20's and over 50's, this probably accounts for the high levels of unemployment (12% higher than England & Wales Average), higher levels of long term/permanently sick or disabled and the low levels of car ownership.

Alumwell suffers high levels of theft, criminal damage, anti-social behaviour, drugs & prostitution; these problems have been caused by successful initiatives that have reduced these problems in neighbouring areas. With no full time youth provision from

Walsall MBC the area has had to rely on support from the voluntary sector, the Alumwell Community Association provides a Youth Club 3 nights per week and caters for 12–18 year olds and successful Holiday Playschemes for 7–13 year olds. Clubs for younger age groups are run at the Church at Junction 10 and St Johns Church Hall, there are also Scouts & Guides based in Alumwell, together with a Playgroup (Sure Start initiative) & Mother & Toddler Group. Currently the only provision for over 60's is a club based at St Johns Church Hall. There is only one residents group active in the area, but they have been active in the provision of holiday activities for children & young people and involved in the consultation regarding the new children's play area. Since the introduction of Fair Share the area has benefited in the provision of support for young people through the Groundwork Motiv8 and the refurbishment of the old neighbourhood office, on the Old Pleck Road for Community use & activities.

Alumwell is situated within the Pleck Ward of Walsall, Pleck is ranked as the 4th most deprived ward in Walsall and is ranked 350 nationally (out of 8414).

Alumwell has considerable problems with Crime, Health and a lack of provision for those under 20, most of which is the responsibility of the Local Authority. On the surface there seems to be a reasonable number of voluntary organisations (scouts, guides, youth clubs etc) there is however, nothing provided for those disaffected young people who cause the majority of problems. Considering the high number of more mature residents and those with disabilities, the provision available is inadequate, up to 25% of residents are from ethnic minorities, yet their involvement in the area is not very visible. Whilst Alumwell has the advantage of being a very compact area, it has suffered by having no 'heart' to the area, where residents and voluntary groups can operate from. The lack of voluntary involvement within Alumwell has meant that there is a distinct lack of skills available to set up and manage new voluntary groups.

The Neighbourhood Plan identified a number of problem areas within Alumwell and following local consultation, with residents, leaders of voluntary groups and input from elected representatives and educational professionals, the list of 5 priorities were identified. The panel, appreciates that the funding from Fair Share, is inadequate to regenerate the area on it's own, however with the additional resources that have been already committed (Neighbourhood Wardens and IT & associated training at Alumwell Business College), the panel feels that the FST Annuity over the next 10 years will improve the area considerably.

By general consent the most pressing concern raised by residents is the lack of activities, support and opportunities available for young people living in Alumwell. The total lack of support from Walsall MBC in providing professional staff (detached youth/drug workers), engaging with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people at street level has led to a growing problem with drugs (the community wardens collected over 50 discarded needles in one day recently) theft and anti social behaviour. The lack of informal facilities where these young people could be supported (these

young people are not those who would attend formal activities, youth club, guides, scouts etc) is not available in the Alumwell Fair Share Area.

Whilst Alumwell is a very compact area, it is separated from the outside world by being surrounded by main arterial roads and the M6, for many of the most disadvantaged access to statutory services and information is made difficult by lack of own transport. Whilst there are a number of venues situated within Alumwell they each have their individual priorities, as the area has no dedicated community support personnel to work with & encourage resident involvement, these assets are under utilised. This diverse distribution of community venues means that there is no 'focal point' for the community to call its own, being principally residential there is a lack of suitable properties that could meet these requirements.

The above average number of elderly & disabled residents have little or no activities/support in Alumwell, this group of people are the most likely to suffer from poor health and have the greatest fear of crime & anti-social behaviour. Whilst the largest hospital in Walsall is situated in Alumwell, there has been no concerted effort to promote a healthier lifestyle or support those most in need. Supporting a more co-ordinated approach, giving the elderly the opportunity to participate in activities, to meet, share concerns, provide mutual support and to receive information, is identified as essential to meet the needs of this vulnerable group.

The fear of crime is a common problem throughout most areas in the UK, yet this perception is generally out of proportion with actual crimes committed. The problem in Alumwell has been recognised by the authorities (hence the appointment of community wardens), actual crime cannot be addressed by FST and must be solved by the relevant authorities, but increasing the residents confidence and ability to press for additional resources will reduce actual crime levels, therefore reducing the perception.

At present almost 25% of the residents of Alumwell come from minority ethnic backgrounds, yet involvement in local issues affecting the area has been non-existent, to ensure that all initiatives benefit the whole community, they must be inclusive and have had input & support from all.

The Local Panel believes that by creating an environment in which the residents increase their confidence and skill levels. By developing and supporting greater community involvement it is hoped that groups will become more self-sufficient and have the ability to determine their long-term future.

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