

## **How might Rufkit fit in with PLANED's action planning process?**

Firstly, I would like to point out that this is not an academic paper evaluating Rufkit and its possible application within PLANED's action planning process. Rather it is my thoughts on the game as an engagement tool and how it might enhance and add value to what we do, and at what stage in our process we might employ it.

Before considering this, I have outlined our process in some detail explaining what each element entails and what it aims to identify – what we do and why we do it that way.

PLANED's process starts with an approach to a community's council or forum or association – a representative body comprising elected representatives and/or local groups and organisations. The benefits of a community action plan are explained as are the advantages of forming a community forum or association if none exists already. Once the council or group has given the go-ahead, there is a six-week lead-in time to engage with local stakeholders – residents, councillors (county and community), groups and organisations, the church and/or chapel, schools, businesses – to encourage the widest possible attendance and participation at the action planning workshops.

An action plan encapsulates what a community feels about itself – it is a frank and honest appraisal of where it is at socially, environmentally, economically, culturally. It also captures what local residents aspire to; what changes they would like to happen to make their village or town a better place to live for all generations. Equally as important it highlights what that community would like to preserve; the aspects which give it its sense of identity.

PLANED's action planning process is evidence that a community has come together to discuss in detail the aspirations and challenges it faces and has come to some consensus on a way forward to achieve those hopes and meet those challenges. The plan is an invaluable asset when applying for funding, evidencing community consensus and commitment.

The action planning process is an asset-based approach and comprises two two-hour workshops run at an interval of two weeks. These facilitated workshops are made up of a number of activities structured to encompass every aspect of the life of that community.

The first workshop sets the scene and establishes where the community feels it is at and how it got there.

The first activity, which also acts as an ice-breaker, invites attendees (grouped around tables) to discuss what is special about their community – the ephemeral things that make living there enjoyable. Once they have shared these thoughts they are encouraged to draw them on flipchart paper. Asking people to draw, rather than write, somehow encourages people to be more lateral and creative in their thinking. A spokesman from each table is invited to feed back the discussions.

Once people have captured the intangible aspects, we ask them to document what assets the community has. By that we mean: community buildings, cultural and historical features, what social and sporting activities take place and where, what services exist, what businesses there are and who the main employers are, what recreational activities people enjoy. We also ask what key services, activities etc might be missing.

Having asked attendees to focus on the community in close detail, we invite them to take a step back and think about where their community sits in the bigger picture. How do global issues, such as the financial crisis or climate change for example, affect the community? And how do the activities of local people have a wider impact? For example, our shopping habits have led to the decline of our high streets. Again, feedback is invited.

The final activity of Workshop 1 is a deconstructed SWOT analysis where people as individuals, as opposed to working in groups, are asked to think of three threats and three weaknesses that might affect the community, and then three strengths that the community possesses. Finally they are asked to note as many opportunities as possible that they may be able to exploit.

These opportunities will be themed by the facilitator and form the basis for Workshop 2.

Workshop 2 focuses on the future – what people would like to happen in their communities.

Activities start with ‘ideal community’ – what would people like their community to be like in ten years’ time? We encourage people to raise their aspirations emphasising that innovations like solar panels and smart phones were in their infancy or unheard of ten years ago. Again they are asked to draw these, rather than write them down.

As PLANED believes that a community’s biggest asset is its people, we ask attendees to do a skills audit. Under a variety of headings ie practical, technical, people, budgeting, organisational etc, we ask attendees to list what they can do and whether they would like training to enhance their skills set. This is not meant to only capture formal qualifications or training, but important life skills and experience. Everyone in a community has something to contribute.

We then ask people to look at the opportunities, that came out of the previous workshop and have now been themed (eg heritage, business, health and wellbeing etc), add more if necessary, and then invite them to work on a project idea inspired by one of the opportunities. This activity takes up the rest of the workshop. At various stages during the project planning process, each group is encouraged to expand the scope of their idea, by looking at examples of similar projects carried out in other communities and by gauging how many themes it encompasses. For example, a heritage project might appear to be centred on a particular site which people want preserved.

However, they might want some interpretative panels to explain the significance of the site. They might want to encourage tourists to visit. This would have an impact

on local businesses such as cafes, shops and pubs. The interest in local history might inspire a group to form a heritage society, bringing people together to go on trips or courses or walks, combatting social isolation, improving health and well-being. The project has consequences that far exceed the initial remit of 'preserving a site of historical interest'.

Draft reports of both workshops are sent out to attendees as a record of what came out of the activities, and attendees have the chance to comment on the reports and amend any inaccuracies.

From the reports, a PLANED officer will write a draft action plan, copies of which are posted to every household in the community. Residents are invited to an action plan adoption meeting where the plan is read through paragraph by paragraph, and agreed or amended by attendees. Once the community is happy with the plan, it is adopted by a show of hands.

The next step in the process is to encourage the community to form a constituted forum comprising representatives of every groups, organisation, business etc as well as interested individuals in the area. This forum's role is to bring people together to prioritise and implement the proposals in the action plan. Once the forum has been formed, PLANED continues to support and advise the group to enable them to fulfil their role.

The entire process, from initial engagement to the development of the forum, can take from between six to 18 months, bearing in mind that we work at the speed of the community and rely on people's goodwill and the generous donation of their spare time.

It is also important to point out that the process is bottom up. We do not have an agenda for any of the communities that we work with or try to influence them in any way – we work with what *they* give *us*.

PLANED has refined this methodology over 29 years, and while we have tweaked elements of it, adapting it for communities of interest ie a local disability charity, we have found it to be successful in yielding action plans that have served their communities well. A slightly abridged version can also be run in one two-hour session, to help organisations and businesses 'action plan' for their future.

### **How might Rufkit fit in with this process, and at what stage?**

The idea of a board game customised to a community is appealing. It is also a user-friendly format that would engage all ages and would definitely have novelty value.

Bespoke boards would be needed and a question grid around the community would then have to be planned, taking in the important aspects such as community assets (buildings, sites of historical interest, areas of environmental impact, green spaces, post office, school, pub etc). The next step would be to devise the questions relevant to the numbered stages on the board.

As we are not prescriptive in our approach, I do not feel that we could pre-empt what local people feel are their resources and assets or any questions attached to them. If this were a community we hadn't worked with before, we wouldn't have the necessary local knowledge to plan a board of any meaningful complexity. If, during our initial engagement, we picked up on some local issues which we then put on the board, we would be skewing the aims and intentions of the workshops before they have taken place by encouraging people to focus on topics already identified for them, rather than identifying them themselves. If there is an issue of importance to a community it will come out of the SWOT analysis and possibly focused on in Workshop 2.

I am convinced that RUFkit would not be a suitable tool to use during our initial engagement stage or during Workshop 1.

From the findings of Workshop 1, we would have a much better idea and, from our perspective, more of a community mandate to devise the community board. The question grid would become apparent from the 'something special', community asset, skills audit and SWOT activities, and consequently the related questions would be more evident. Personally, I would still have reservations about framing the questions ourselves and would prefer some input from people who attended Workshop 1. This would entail willingness on the part of people to give up more of their time to develop the game in partnership with us. It's feasible, but as we already encourage people to give up five hours for the two workshops, another two hours for the adoption meeting plus the commitment to set up and run a forum and attend meetings, it's a pretty big ask. The process might work better if we used statements rather than questions as we do with the yellow cards during the 'Your Community in the Bigger Picture' activity in Workshop 1.

RUFkit might play a role in the project development stage of Workshop 2. The boards and questions could relate to the themes inspired by the opportunities that came out of Workshop 1. For example, an 'environment and enhancement' board, a culture and heritage board, a business and economy board, all with theme-specific questions, might encourage participants to explore projects in a more cohesive and coherent way, looking at the village or town as a whole rather than looking at one idea or specific area in isolation. However, the issue of who frames those questions and how still applies, and does this add any value to the process over and above our existing methods?

PLANED's ethos is very much 'bottom-up'; we respond to each community's needs individually and respect their self-determination. The pre-made boards would have little relevance to Pembrokeshire, so bespoke boards would be essential. There are downloadable formats for the board and grids, but not in programmes we use (SVG, Adobe Creative Cloud, Inkscape). These would also require a level of expertise we do not have. There are also rights to images issues when using Google Maps etc. As already indicated, the 'off the shelf' questions would not be applicable, requiring questions to be formulated following Workshop 1, adding considerably to the workload of the relevant community officer.

As it stands, RUFkit feels too prescriptive and theoretical to dovetail into PLANED's methodology. To make the necessary adaptations to incorporate RUFkit into our

existing process would require a high level of customisation with regard to the boards, question grid and the questions themselves. This would make an already administration-heavy process even more labour intensive for a relatively small team.

I feel RUFkit could be better applied to a wider geographical area than individual communities, perhaps to unify multi-agency working.

With the introduction in Wales of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, local authorities will have to set up Area Forums. In Pembrokeshire, there will be a couple of pilot projects to scope the formation of these Forums involving communities, the public and third sectors. There has been some discussion around using RUFkit to as part of this scoping exercise.