

# 'What is Community Cohesion?' Event Report



Report compiled by  
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Rural Action Derbyshire  
*formerly*  
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RURAL  
COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

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## Introduction

This half-day event, held at the beautiful Willersley Castle in Cromford on the 6th November 2009, was coordinated by the Voice for the VCS Project in partnership with Rural Action Derbyshire (formerly known as Derbyshire Rural Community Council). Forty people attended the event which aimed to raise awareness of the contribution that the voluntary and community sector make towards cohesive communities and provided an opportunity to hear more about, and to comment on, the Derbyshire Partnership Forum's draft Community Cohesion Strategy. Many of the people who attended were involved in supporting community development at a very local level, either via their Village Hall or as a result of being involved in developing Parish Plans.



Claire Thornber addresses the delegates about what community cohesion is.

## Setting the Scene

Sylvia Green, RAD's Chief Executive and the VCS rep at the Community Cohesion Working Group, welcomed everyone to the event and introduced Claire Thornber Voice for the VCS Project Officer. Claire's presentation gave the background to the Community Cohesion agenda, explaining why it has become a priority in Derbyshire and how the Local Authority and partners are looking to address the issues behind it.

Andie Brazewell, a resident of Bonsall in the Derbyshire Dales, gave a presentation about the village, following its success as winner of the 2009 Calor Derbyshire Village of the Year award; the competition places a high emphasis on community cohesion when scoring for the award. Andie talked about what initiatives had worked in Bonsall, especially the community's annual celebration event which brings people together to both organise and participate.

## Discussion

Delegates then discussed the contribution they each made to their communities and tried to agree three key elements which are important to encourage community cohesion. It was generally agreed that bringing people together was the best way to create better understanding amongst communities and to make them more cohesive.



There was a general consensus that, while different communities have different needs and solutions, generally communities benefit from:

- Enthusiastic individuals and people who can lead them
- A focal point, e.g. a school or hall or a focus e.g. an event or objective
- The ability to communicate
- Resources – volunteers and funds
- Capacity – time, experience, knowledge and commitment

## Strategy

Sarah Eaton, head of the policy team at Derbyshire County Council presented the draft Community Cohesion Strategy, 'Bringing People Together', which identifies the six priorities that need to be addressed for the picture to improve across the county. According to the results of the Place Survey <sup>1</sup>, Derbyshire sits within the bottom 25% of local authorities in terms of community cohesion – that is, the numbers of people who feel that people get on well together in their area. However, people are very satisfied with Derbyshire as a place to live. Sarah outlined the key challenges and 'where we want to be.'

*1 The Place Survey happens every two years to collect information on people's experience life in their area and is sent out randomly to households across England. Further information can be found at the Communities and Local Government website [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk).*

Delegates were asked to indicate their top 3 priorities from the strategy with the following results.

Priority	Counts
“Develop a sense of pride and belonging and celebrate what is good about Derbyshire”	26
“Develop a strong and effective leadership of community cohesion and mechanisms to ensure people’s voices are heard”	23
“Visibly work to tackle inequalities that exist in the county”	18
“Develop and promote a shared understanding of cohesion in the county”	14
“Address and promote community cohesion through mainstream service delivery”	5
“Develop and implement a prevent strategy that recognises the new challenge and threat of violent extremism”	1

## Consultation

Delegates were also able to leave comments in response to certain questions posted on flip charts around the room. A snap shot of these are below,

*“Tell us about any other local factors affecting community cohesion in your community which aren’t reflected in the strategy”*

- Being able to recruit and train volunteers was highlighted as a potential barrier to organising community activities.

*“What is your organisation doing to make local communities more cohesive?”*

- Getting involved in the development and implementation of the parish plan
- Derbyshire Fire and Rescue service lead on the Handy van service / Home fire safety checks / firesafe scheme/ YES project (Youth Engagement Scheme) Miss Dorothy School Project Improve communication within the community
- Volunteer centres provide opportunities for individuals and groups to get together and share experience and best practices. We also encourage groups to register their volunteering opportunities with us, so that we will have a good range of roles to offer local volunteers and we highlight the benefits of volunteering (benefits to the individual, community group and the wider community)

*“Are there any other comments you would like to make?”*

- Include community leaders at strategic decision making/ priority setting level and then support the outcomes.
- As a representative of rural Derbyshire, in particular the farming community, I would like to see statutory partners demonstrate an understanding of how the changing nature of rural communities affects community cohesion, as ‘incomers’ affect the type of services available to that community.
- Applaud the strategy but a lack of financial commitment may make it slow going
- Support is needed to finance communication, publicity, promotion, websites, local radio, notices.

## **Evaluation and Conclusion**

The event evaluation forms showed that the event was very successful. Everyone agreed they had learned something and an overwhelming majority said they would like more information about RAD/ Voice events in the future.

On a scale of one to five, 95% of delegates scored the event either four or five overall. 85% of people said that the information provided and the discussions on the day were either good or excellent.

It was great to see so many people in attendance and hear about the amount of activity happening at ground level which helps to bring people and communities together. Many people commented that the event had been a useful networking activity and that the opportunity to connect and learn from peers had been valuable.

## **Further Information**

The Voice for the VCS project is considering establishing a network of organisations motivated by the Community Cohesion agenda who could share experience and learning and support the work of the VCS rep at the Community Cohesion working group. If you would be interested in linking with this network, please contact Claire Thornber at [c.thornber@derbysrcc.org.uk](mailto:c.thornber@derbysrcc.org.uk) or telephone 07827 243800.

Information about the Voice project can be found at [www.3dsupport.org.uk](http://www.3dsupport.org.uk)

Information about Rural Action Derbyshire, its work and events can be found at [www.derbyshirercc.org.uk](http://www.derbyshirercc.org.uk) or by calling 01629 824797.