



CASE STUDY



Community Action

In Bridgend, the Valleys to Coast Housing Association (V2C) has made collaborative, open frameworks central to the regeneration of deprived communities in the area. Its Demonstration Project has highlighted how an innovative approach to creating value and social justice in the local community via training and employing them to refurbish and maintain homes gets real results.

Valleys to Coast housing association (V2C) is all about places and the people that live in those places. It is about providing the facilities and resources that are needed for a sustainable community. In essence, V2C is committed to a transformation agenda and, as such, it seems natural that it would embrace the principles of rethinking construction, because without a collaborative, co-operative approach it could not succeed as a not for profit organisation.

"We are an agent of change, not just a construction, repair and maintenance organisation," explains Nigel Draper, the Head of Neighbourhoods. *"Unlike the Decent Homes scheme in England, that sets a standard for a dwelling, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard looks to set a standard for the homes and also the physical place that it is situated – i.e. the community."*

Bridgend has some very deprived communities as a result of multiple deprivations – lack of jobs, poor education, lack of money and low self esteem – combined with some bad 1960s/70s estate designs. This means that V2C has to contend with the failure of investment due to the long term effects of widespread economic depression throughout South Wales.

"Our starting point is to improve the homes themselves, but we have to quickly move towards improvement of the community," says Nigel. *"Basically, it doesn't matter how many doors, windows and boilers you fit – if we do not improve the places where these homes are, then we will not have made any long term difference."*

Consequently, Nigel Draper's fundamental goal as the man responsible for the regeneration of these communities is to boost local skills. The theory is that by recruiting local labour – i.e. workers from the estates themselves – the local economy benefits, a certain pride is restored in the area, making it a better place to live in. To do this, V2C aims to establish a structural approach to deliver long term solutions.



V2C created a strategic partnership with the aim of regenerating the local area and providing jobs and training for the long term unemployed. The partnering agreement is for five years and involves four partners operating on an NEC Open Book Contract. The contract partners come from different backgrounds and bring differing levels of partnering experience to the table. Consequently, the development of trust and openness has varied between partners, but this has been checked by vigorous KPIs, reviews and sensitive management.



David Clague, the director of Demonstration Projects for CEW says: *"The approach to managing the partnership has been to take a robust and direct approach to the hard measures with the relationship issues being managed according to individual needs. The structure involves a monthly contract review when all the deliverables and KPIs are reviewed and a quarterly meeting which focuses on more general and softer issues. Successful management of the relationship is through ad-hoc interventions by the partnership leaders."*



"We have worked with Constructing Excellence in Wales and Construct Wales to drive forward a supply chain improvement programme as part of the framework agreements we have established with our main contractors," says Nigel Draper. *"Our contractors Lovells, Connaught, Bowater and Dunraven Windows have signed up to the principles of collaborative working. Dunraven is the only local business,*

as many of the SMEs in Wales just do not have the capacity to cope with our requirements, but we have invested time in helping Dunraven to adapt to the framework ideas."

This is typical of the top down, bottom up theory that Nigel Draper is applying to the regeneration of the area. Bigger more experienced firms such as Lovell and Connaught not only have the experience and skills to do the work, they are at ease with the collaborative nature of the V2C contracts – such as the clause obliging them to employ locally based firms and labour.

"Smaller traders, one-man-bands etc, are not normally linked to bigger firms such as Connaught and Lovell and don't involve themselves in our kind of business. But, if the economy on our estates is to prosper then we have to encourage these very small firms to be a part of the V2C supply chain. We need to help them raise their game, trade better, think differently and gradually the change in approach and improvement in skills will benefit the community," explains Nigel.

To encourage some of these micro-businesses to take part and also to motivate some of the 'economically inactive' individuals on the estate, V2C will facilitate the establishment of intermediary labour market (ILMs) groups. They will be the physical link between the estates, local labour, the framework contractors and V2C.

"ILMs are almost like quasi parents, offering coaching, mentoring and social

support. Sometimes they knock on doors, wake people up and drive them to work," says Nigel. "What we have to make sure we do is to involve the disaffected youth and long term unemployed as well as the enlightened local people who see the benefits of our approach. We hope that the more formal approach we are developing will help us achieve this."

The results are impressive. V2C invested £80,000 in a Construction Skills training centre, set up in Maesteg, with grant funding from the Assembly Government and managed by the local authority. With its multi-skills focus it has seen 40 trainees complete NVQs.

"The strategic partnering with our contractors enables us to provide job placements for 39 weeks following the 13 week course, so that after 150 applicants have been whittled down to the forty or so NVQs we might have around 18-20 full time jobs at the end of the training. I can think of at least one trainee that was considered economically inactive and is now employed by V2C," comments Nigel.

Four trainees have been taken on by V2C, with four by Lovell and four more by Leadbitter. The Leadbitter up-take is an example of skills being matched to an employers need as it is looking to expand and requires the work force to do so. Objectives for the future are to increase the numbers of trainees and broaden the cohorts from which they are sourced.

Nigel Draper, head of neighbourhoods at V2C, says: "The project is considerably outperforming the 75 percent target,

currently running at 90 percent. The team however isn't being complacent. An exercise is currently underway to use audit and Geographical Information Systems mapping to identify how much of the labour force lives on the housing estates themselves. The aim is to increase this proportion thereby creating true sustainability."

Partnering with its main contractors has allowed V2C to develop a shared vision, not just a form of contractual obligation. The framework stipulates a community clause, where contractors give a percentage of their contract back to the community in kind. This has allowed key ventures to be developed that otherwise would have failed through lack of initial funding.

"This arrangement has meant that Youth Works (a Bridgend based youth organisation) were able to develop new facilities, receive matched funding and really kick start their work engaging with and including the youth amongst the deprived estates we are striving to reach out to. This form of strategic partnering with Lovells and Connaught works well – V2C acts as a catalyst or broker for change and their skill and experience allow it to happen," states Nigel Draper.

David Clague adds, "The contract has performed well on all the key measures. Whilst quality is satisfactory, the main challenge has been to address skill deficiencies further down the supply chain. Assistance has been given through the 'Construct Wales' initiatives on supply chain sharing of best practice. It is clear that the sole traders and



small companies lack a forum for the development of skills and continuous improvement processes."



Although V2C is a value driven organisation with social justice clearly at the heart of their ethos, the approach to management of the housing stock needs to deliver value for money both in maintenance expenditure and rental income. The partnering strategy outlined above has driven value through the contracts and the involvement of the local community has the aim of increasing the rental income whereby more people are paying their rents more often. This is achieved through improved collection systems and encouraging long-term tenancies. Being able to demonstrate a deliverable strategy also has the effect of reducing insurance premiums.



Building on the successes to date, V2C is now moving into Community Transformation. Improving the quality of life will, it is hoped, engender a sense of ownership and pride in the community which will in turn have the knock on effect of reduced maintenance costs and increased revenue. This will be the subject of the next Demonstration Project, so watch this space.

