

# **Building on Community Strengths Responding to Community Needs**



**Building on Community Strengths**

## **The development of the Forge Community Partnership**

This paper reflects the contributions and hard work of many volunteers and staff of the Forge in the time since its inception, without which there would be no Partnership to describe. In particular it is dedicated to three of the original volunteers whose care for their local community over many years has been an inspiration to everyone in the Partnership: Betty Varley, Anne Callaghan and Bill Callaghan.

**A. Introduction**

This paper describes the development over nearly two decades of the Forge Community Partnership (FCP or Forge or the Partnership), its organisation and governance, and the projects it has delivered. It seeks to draw lessons from the experience which has been gained throughout that period.

The Forge has been and remains a remarkably successful organisation, which has grown, matured and survived in changing and frequently difficult circumstances. This account may help others to learn from the successes and the failures which the Forge has experienced, and may enable those who seek to work with community and voluntary sector organisations like the Forge to understand better the challenges which they face.

Section B describes the development of the Forge, Section C how it has been organised, Section D sets out the key features of the Forge and Section E the obstacles which it has met. The Partnership's many projects are briefly described in Appendix 1.

## **B. Development timeline**

What the Forge is will emerge more clearly from what follows, but in essence it is a partnership of community organisations and interested individuals in the south of Barnsley, principally the council wards of Rockingham and Hoyland Milton.

Few could have imagined when a small group of local enthusiasts met in the mid-1990s in Hoyland, that nearly 20 years later a vibrant organisation would exist employing over 50 staff, running 5 centres and delivering important projects affecting the lives of many hundreds of local people. This section briefly describes five phases which the Forge has gone through to reach this point.

### **The initial phase (mid-1990s - 1998)**

In the mid 1990s a group of people with strong interests in their local community started meeting together. Some were part of other community groups, especially local churches, some just concerned individuals. This was a period of some decline of services in the community, and the continuing impact of the aftermath of the miners' strike. They were motivated by a desire to see improvements in the community and the lives of its people, as well as frustration at seeing consultation exercises in the community which, if they led to anything, led to projects elsewhere.

In time this loose gathering began to form itself into the Forge and to hold regular meetings at various local venues. These meetings were characterised by enthusiasm and imaginative ideas, but without the resources or structures to make any significant progress. Members were still uncertain of the potential role of the Forge, and frustrated by their inability yet to achieve very much.

Membership was at this stage very fluid, some early members left as the group appeared to be making no progress, others joined as they saw that the initial meetings seemed to be leading to a worthwhile group, and some of the original members remained simply because of their commitment. There were some encouragements which helped to retain interest during this early period. A very small amount of funding, the involvement of Northern College staff and the beginning of encouragement by Barnsley Council, all gave hope that the group might be able to achieve something, though with little idea what that might be.

### **The company phase (1998 - 2003)**

1998 saw two significant events in the Forge's development, and marked its first major step from being a loose grouping of well-intentioned enthusiasts to becoming an effective organisation. These changes strengthened its ability to begin to be active in delivering projects.

The initial phase had coincided with Barnsley Council beginning to encourage the formation of local groups across the whole of the Borough. Council officers provided much needed support which led in 1998 to the Forge becoming a company limited by guarantee, the Forge Community Partnership.

At the same time important changes occurred in the emerging leadership of the Forge which had so far been well-intentioned but not very effective. The new leadership had clearer ideas

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about what might be possible, more energy in seeking to develop the Forge and a generally more professional approach. Meetings became more focussed on identifying achievable goals and there was increased interaction with other agencies seeking their support. It was at this point that one of the key long term characteristics of the Forge began to form, namely its inclusivity (described in more detail in Section D) which enabled it to attract a diverse range of members with different perspectives and aims, making the group one where decisions were challenged for the benefit of the community.

Nonetheless, this was still a group of committed volunteers with ideas but lacking the resources to do very much. But then two small grants were secured to allow computer equipment to be bought, closely followed by a key breakthrough when Neighbourhood Support Fund funding was secured for the Forge Youth Project. This created the first Forge employee in the first Forge project, a turning point for the Partnership. This was then closely followed by a grant to employ a Sports Development Worker.

But then two even more significant events occurred which together transformed the Forge. First was the Partnership's success in being accepted to run the new national and local Sure Start in the area (described in Appendix 1). Secondly, during this period extensive work by Forge's volunteers produced a voluminous Action Plan, with the aim of securing Objective 1 funding. The Plan was successfully endorsed and funding secured which made possible the developments of the next phase.

### **The regeneration phase (2004 - 2008)**

During this phase the availability of Objective 1 and other funding streams led to a rapid expansion of the Partnership. Even early in the phase this was apparent, and by the end of 2004 the number of Forge employees had risen from none to 32 in just 5 years. The rising number of employees led the Forge to becoming an admitted body for pensions so that employees had a more secure base for a career and to be an attractive employer.

2004 also saw the acquisition (described in Appendix 1) of the Hoyland Common Community Centre, a key second base for Forge operations. Such was the expansion, with the Learning Net and Arts for Health beginning to make an impact that the next year a Meet the Team event was held to publicise more widely what the Partnership was doing and offering.

A key focus in the latter part of the phase was how to manage the inevitable ending of key funding streams, so that the Forge could continue to provide services. One feature of this was that it proved possible to extend elements of the funding for longer than had originally been anticipated, and every opportunity to do this was taken.

Although this phase of the Forge's development was hugely important and successful, it also held considerable risk for the Partnership. Decisions about what to take on had to be made very rapidly, and often without full prior information being available. For a young organisation with little in the way of paid infrastructure this placed great demands on volunteers, who had to balance their desire to respond to opportunities for the community and the Forge against the risk of over-stretching and being unable to sustain projects. The more settled leadership described in the company phase was important in enabling the members of the Forge to take such risks in the long term interests of the Partnership.

### **The consolidation phase (2008 - 2013)**

The ending of Objective 1 funding and the general decline in the availability of grant funding forced the Partnership into a period of consolidation. Projects which had formed an important part of the Forge's portfolio gradually came to an end, and new opportunities became more difficult to identify and resource. During this phase key projects were Sure Start, together with two completely new projects, the Rockingham Centre and Elsecar Nursery. As the Learning Net and Arts for Health eventually closed, these projects together provided a sound base of operation and several good venues, allowing other smaller projects to be considered. From being largely grant-reliant at the start of this phase, by the end the Forge was operating on a mix of commissioned and self-sustaining activity.

The two new major projects in this phase presented significant risks to the Forge, not all of which were fully apparent at the time. Both were independent trading activities without any revenue funding to support them. In the case of the Rockingham Centre the challenge was to bring back to life a centre which had been in terminal decline, and to create a different sort of centre in the process. Elsecar Nursery on the other hand was an apparently reasonably successful going concern, but limited disclosure of information meant that there were more hidden risks than anticipated. In both cases, had the Forge been more fully aware of some of the difficulties which lay ahead in seeking to make the projects self-sustaining it is possible that different decisions may have been made. Nonetheless, in each case the Forge continued to support the projects because of the community needs and benefits, including sustaining facilities, services and employment opportunities, which it was able to do because of its resilience as an organisation.

### **The restructured phase (2013 onwards)**

As this paper shows, by 2013 the Forge had developed in 15 years from being a small group of enthusiasts with a vision to a vibrant organisation delivering important community services in a range of centres, employing some 50 staff, and in the process had adapted, survived and flourished in a very difficult climate. Not for the first time the Forge was successful in securing a new project, the Tidy Teams, because of its track record of delivering successful projects.

Through the first 15 years, the Forge's basic organisational structure had not changed from that set up in 1998 which had served it so well. But it became apparent that in order to protect the various activities and projects and to minimise the risks associated with them, a new approach would be more appropriate. It was therefore decided to create three new related companies to manage specific parts of the Partnership's activity, and to enable the parent company to become a charity and in time for two of the other companies to do so too.

Two satellite companies were created to manage Elsecar Nursery and the Rockingham Centre, two significant parts of the Forge, each with risks attached to their operation. A third was created to be vehicle for accessing funding for new work. By the end of 2014, with this new structure in place and charitable status being sought, the members of the Forge felt confident that the Partnership was fit for purpose for the immediate future and able to continue to deliver existing work and able to take up new opportunities when they presented themselves.

## **C. Governance and organisation**

### **C.1 Membership**

From the outset the membership of the Forge has been a mix of representatives of local community groups and individuals. Examples of these include a community association, local community hall, several churches, a parish council, a crime a safety group, a residents group. This has provided a broad base covering a wide range of activities, locations and interests within the communities which are served by the Forge. Two benefits of this have been the extent of collective knowledge and understanding, and the avoidance of dominance in the Partnership of any particular sectional interest. The membership has always included local councillors who have played an active part and ensured good liaison with the Council. As with many organisations the active membership is a proportion of the total membership, but has been consistently large enough to fulfil all the responsibilities of the Partnership.

### **C.2 Governance**

The governance of the Forge has been a significant contributor to its success, and has remained in many ways remarkably consistent throughout its life. From the very earliest days the volunteer core met on a monthly basis to discuss all aspects of the Forge's life and activity. After becoming a company, this became more formalised and a pattern developed of monthly meetings which alternated between the Executive Committee and the full membership. In practice, there was a general understanding that any member of the Partnership could attend meetings. This inclusivity has been and remains a hallmark of the way that the Forge operates, so that there is a shared ownership of its life. In the earlier years of the Partnership meetings were sometimes contentious and subject to strong personalities. As the Forge matured they became more focussed, in which positive rigorous debate could take place.

Whilst in general these meetings have been sufficient to run the Forge, at times working groups have been used to deal with particular issues which required more detailed attention than could otherwise be given. Also, as the Forge is a substantial employer of staff, it became necessary to create a Human Resources Committee and Appeals Committee to ensure that the Partnership was properly able to fulfil its responsibilities as an employer.

The greatest change to the governance arrangements occurred in 2013 with the creation of the three related companies, and although the monthly meetings have continued they have had to adapt to the changing responsibilities of the parent company. Nonetheless they continue to bring together all those involved in the Partnership to provide its oversight and direction.

### **C.3 Officers**

During the initial phase, the Forge appointed a chair, secretary and treasurer as being the key requirements for an informal organisation. On becoming a limited company, this changed and since that time the Partnership has had a company secretary, a chair of the executive committee (and effectively of the Partnership as a whole), a vice chair, a treasurer and a minute secretary.

#### **C.4 Financial and human resources**

For over 10 years the Forge has been a substantial employer of local people in the Hoyland community. Meeting community needs for services and employing local people to do that clearly has double benefits and has motivated many of the projects. Inevitably, as the Forge grew and became an ever more significant employer, issues of finance and human resources required increased attention and focus. In order to be both a responsible and an attractive employer, the Partnership took two significant steps early in its existence. Firstly, it applied to be an admitted body in the South Yorkshire Pension Fund, which enables all Forge employees to be members of the Local Government Pension Scheme. Secondly, it established and has maintained ever since a redundancy reserve. This is held separately from any other financial reserves and guarantees all its employees that if at some point through lack of grant funding or the end of a commission redundancies are necessary the Partnership can fulfil all its responsibilities to its staff. Aware that some other voluntary sector employers had not been able to do this in the past, the Partnership has always firmly believed that as a responsible and significant employer in the local community this commitment is vital.

The financial commitments of the Forge are such that paid staff need to administer them, and so the treasurer's role is not one of day to day management, but of oversight and assurance. At every monthly meeting there is a clear report on the financial position of the Partnership as a whole and on each of the projects with significant financial commitments. There is a reserves policy, so that in addition to the redundancy reserve, the Partnership always has the financial resilience to deal with unexpected events. This also enables it to deal with an increasingly common problem of commissioning bodies which expect the Forge to finance activities whilst receiving their income sometimes months later. Without these reserves at times the Forge would not be able to take on projects.

#### **C5. Forge's area of interest**

Throughout this document there are references to the Forge's area. From the outset this was taken to be Hoyland and the surrounding and associated communities. When the company was formed it became necessary to formalise this, and the articles talked about the council wards of Hoyland East and West (as they were then) and the parish of Tankersley (i.e. Tankersley and Pilley). It thus encompassed Hoyland and Hoyland Common, Elsecar, Birdwell and related communities, as well as Tankersley and Pilley. Throughout the early years this constituted Forge's area.

The arrival of Sure Start meant that the Forge began to operate in Jump (in a Wombwell ward), but not for any other projects. Later the electoral wards changed and Jump and Hemingfield became part of the new wards which cover the Hoyland area, and this coincided with the declining activity of the Wombwell partnership. Thus, the understanding of the Forge's area and the reality of its project delivery included these two extra communities.

Subsequently, the Forge amended its articles to create the possibility of working more widely than its defined area, which later allowed it to take on, for example, the Tidy Teams operating across the whole of south Barnsley.

#### **D. Features of the Forge**

Throughout its life the Forge has had many successes and a few failures. This section describes some of the key features of the Partnership which underpin the successes and the Forge's continuing ability to provide community services in changing and difficult times.

**Quality:** perhaps the single most important contributor to the Forge's success has been its ability to deliver high quality projects, consistently achieving and exceeding the outputs required by funders and commissioners. Notable amongst these are Sure Start, Arts for Health and the Rockingham Centre. In the case of the latter, a key reason why the Council approached the Partnership to take on Rockingham was the success in delivering previous projects, coupled with the credibility which Forge had established as an inclusive community organisation.

**Trust:** allied to quality, and arising directly from it, is the confidence which other organisations have in the Forge, which is both trusted and trustworthy. Its reputation is a hard won one of doing a good solid job, and maintaining that reputation is critical if the Partnership is to continue to be an organisation to which others turn when new work comes along.

**Staff:** quality projects have been able to be delivered because of the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. Although there can be an element of good fortune in this, there is no doubt that a small number of very committed, talented and flexible staff have made a very significant contribution to the Forge's success. To quote from one evaluation report, the Forge has "quality staff operating a flexible and practical approach based in building relationships at a family and community level upon which both challenge and encouragement can be based."

**Inclusivity:** the Forge has since its inception been a very inclusive organisation. At no point has any one or two sectional interests dominated its work. The ethos has always been that the personalities involved have been seeking what is best for the community as a whole, even though they may not always have agreed about what that might be, and not trying to advance the interests of their particular community group. The Partnership has avoided the damaging splits, disagreements and factions which sometimes affect community groups. This ethos has been fostered in a number of ways, but in particular through the Forge's governance and clear leadership, as explained in section C, and the fact that most of the active members have interests in more than one community group or agency.

**Selflessness:** at an early stage the Forge identified that an important role it could play was that of a catalyst and enabler, that it could be a vehicle to allow others to access funding, that it could support other groups and organisations with its expertise and experience, because the purpose of the Partnership was to serve its community in whatever way it could and that that did not have to mean doing things directly itself.

**Responsiveness:** throughout its existence the Forge has been a responsive organisation. This can be seen in two ways. Firstly, in the effort made throughout its existence to identify community needs and undertake research to establish possible responses and their feasibility. This has been done a variety of ways, leading to the development of action plans which aim to identify ways of responding to identified needs.

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Secondly through its willingness to consider a wide range of projects and activities. In the early years this was often in response to grant opportunities, latterly more often it has been responding to potential commissions. In each case the Forge has acted where it has seen a potential for benefit for the community and an area of work which fits with the Forge's existing work, capacity and experience.

**Adaptability:** many of the projects have lasted for several years, in which time the requirements of funders and commissioners have changed and in some cases the funding streams have changed. Forge has worked very hard to sustain projects for as long as possible by adapting their delivery to the changing needs and demands.

**Risk taking and innovation:** on several occasions, as is shown by the projects in Appendix 1, the Forge has taken on projects with significant associated risks, in order to achieve something important for the community. This has led to becoming engaged in new areas of work, and the Partnership has willingly embraced this despite the obvious difficulties which sometimes have followed. Whilst often responding to opportunities in ways which were pre-determined, it has also been able to propose and deliver imaginative approaches (e.g. Arts for Health) to issues.

**Persistence:** a consequence of the responsiveness of the Forge has been that a number of the projects which it has taken on, most especially those which already existed but needed new support, have gone through very difficult times. This has required sustained effort through focussed working groups, staff and volunteer time and effort, financial and other resources. In almost every case, the Partnership has held its nerve and done everything possible to make the projects successful. This has often involved changing the direction of a project from that which might originally have been envisaged. The broad base of the Partnership and the resources at its disposal have been critical in enabling it to do this.

**Infrastructure:** with the exception of the period of the Regeneration team, the Forge has always struggled with the problem of its own central resources, mainly staffing. Its many projects, whether grant funded, commissioned or revenue earning, have rarely generated sufficient resource to enable the Partnership to create the sort of central infrastructure which an organisation employing 50 staff and delivering significant activity might be expected to have. Forge has always been a very lean organisation, which creates problems of capacity and requires considerable effort by a small number of staff and by the volunteer base. This will always remain a significant risk to the Partnership.

**Diverse mix:** as will be apparent from Appendix 1, the projects run by the Forge have varied enormously in scope and length, from one part time member of staff to over 30, from 6 months to 10 years. The Partnership has always taken the view that even very small or time limited projects can be worth taking on where they meet a community need and can be resourced and supported. This is especially true where the Forge has already had staff or volunteers who could provide the necessary input, or where the project appeared likely to be a potential gateway to a larger or more long term project.

**Partnership:** it is no coincidence that the Forge is called a partnership. Not only is it itself a partnership, but it has always believed in working in partnership with other bodies. Key among these has been the local authority. An open and transparent relationship with Barnsley Council, its officers and members, has enabled the Forge to demonstrate its capabilities and to explore possibilities. A willingness to work with almost any organisation which shares the

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Forge's core interest of responding to local community needs has opened the Forge up to areas of work which might otherwise have not been possible.

**Community buildings:** the Forge's area is reasonably well provided with a range of community buildings, several of which the Partnership has been able to sustain or rescue from closure, and in one case to create a new venue. Thus, the Forge owns, or has on lease or licence Cloughfields Community Centre, Hoyland Common Community Centre, the Rockingham Centre, Jump Children's Centre and Elsecar Nursery. These are geographically well spread throughout the Forge's area, and provide a variety of facilities and possibilities.

**Realism:** because of the Forge's undoubted success there comes a potential risk of being asked to take on too much too soon, or to make that mistake itself. Knowing how much can or should be taken on, especially in new areas of work, is important if the Partnership is not to over-reach itself. Equally, there has to be realism about when a project is failing and knowing when and how to stop.

**Leadership:** as this paper has made clear, leadership has played a significant part in the Forge's success, perhaps more than anything by setting the tone and maintaining the cohesiveness of the organisation. The leadership has been at different levels. It has come from the membership itself meeting monthly to review and discuss the Forge's work. The various officers of the Partnership have had a particular role to play in this and provided a second strand of leadership. Perhaps most important of all has been the professional leadership within the paid staff driving forward such a diverse and ever-changing organisation.

## **E. Obstacles**

The Forge has encountered various obstacles in its work, most of them not unique to the Partnership. They include:

**Funding issues:** for a voluntary organisation with no independent source of funding wishing to deliver community services (unlike, for example, a church) funding is crucial. There are a number of ways in which funding regimes have presented difficulties.

There are many very **short term** and often very **small** grants and commissions, which as Appendix 1 shows can produce worthwhile projects and results, but also create difficulties about recruitment of staff, the need for rapid development, lack of time to plan or evaluate. Whilst such projects can be an effective way of exploring new initiatives, they more often lead to a gap when they come to an end, a demand created or met and suddenly no longer fulfilled.

With longer term funding there is often the problem of the **uncertainty** of its year to year renewal, and on occasions Forge has had to serve 90 day redundancy notices on staff because of not knowing whether a project would be able to continue. In some cases this has happened more than once to the same staff over a period of years, which is both demotivating for them and runs the risk of losing staff.

The possibility that staff may have to be made redundant when a project finishes creates a moral and financial problem. Unfortunately most funding streams make no provision for **redundancy costs**, in effect passing the problem to the organisation delivering the project. The Forge has always believed that it is essential to ensure that it can honour its obligations to its employees. For this reason it has maintained a redundancy reserve against the possibility of the liability arising. Smaller and less financially sound organisations will find this much harder to achieve.

A final financial issue relates to funding which is received in **arrears**. In one example the Forge found itself having to provide £30,000 of its own funds up front in order to be able to employ staff and run a project because of the way in which the funding was being released. Whilst the Partnership was able to do this, it was not without risk to its other work.

**Infrastructure:** comment has already been made in Section D about the Forge's infrastructure. Although some funding streams do make provision for management charges, having a secure financial base for the organisation itself as opposed to the particular projects is not easy to achieve. During the Forge's existence the only time when there was specific funding available for this was during the existence of the Regeneration Team, and it is highly unlikely that such an opportunity will arise again. It therefore requires the Partnership to find imaginative ways of using the resources of money and staff.

Because of the lean management structure, the requirements and **bureaucracy** of grant funders and commissioners can be especially burdensome. In particular the sometimes excessive monitoring requirements, which are often disproportionate to the size of a given project. Forge is committed to meeting the requirements of funders and commissioners, but their expectations of groups like the Forge are not always realistic.

## **F. Conclusion**

This paper has set out some of the Forge's history, how it has developed, the projects it has run, some of the factors leading to its success and the difficulties it has faced. Whilst the Forge is clearly unique and particular to its time and place, the Partnership presents this paper in the hope that others may find useful learning here. It welcomes comments and responses as it continues to seek to live up to its motto **Building on Community Strengths**.

## **Appendix 1. The projects**

This section describes in approximately chronological order the key projects which the Forge has undertaken since its formation. The table at Appendix A shows the time periods in which each project operated.

### **Forge Youth Project**

This project created the first ever Forge staff member, a part time post, funded through the Neighbourhood Support Fund. The project to some extent complemented and picked up from an existing voluntary sector project in Hoyland, and aimed to encourage and support young people to be aspirational and take examinations.

### **Sports Development Worker [2002 - 2005]**

This project funded a full time post which for three years had the aim of developing the take up of sport through encouraging people to become qualified sports coaches. In addition, it focussed on helping individuals and clubs to put in place necessary requirements including child protection policies and procedures, and first aid qualifications, so that sporting activities could be undertaken safely and in accordance with good practice.

### **Cloughfields Community Centre [2002 onwards]**

As the Forge began to develop, the need for a base became very apparent. The council-run community centre on the Cloughfields estate became surplus to requirements at this time and as a result the Partnership applied for licence to occupy it for 15 years at a peppercorn rent. This was granted and the Centre became the first premises to be operated by the Partnership. Its value was very soon realised with the arrival of Sure Start when the Centre became its base. Subsequently it has continued to be the principal location for Forge and Sure Start office staff, the meeting place for the Forge and a centre for Sure Start activity.

### **Sure Start Local Programme [2002 onwards] and Sure Start Children's Centres [2006 onwards]**

Sure Start has from its inception been the largest project undertaken by the Forge, employing at times over 40 staff and providing support and services to many hundreds of families. Regularly meeting and exceeding all its required outputs, as one of the few community-run Sure Starts remaining it is an example of what can be achieved by an effective community organisation.

As Sure Start was being rolled out nationally and locally the Forge was invited with other community partnerships to make its case for hosting Sure Start. The data for the two council wards covered by the Forge did not quite evidence the necessary level of demand and need. However, immediately adjacent to the Forge's area is Jump, and the addition of that made a very clear case for the Forge. Even with Jump, the Wombwell partnership fell short of the required level, so the switch to the Forge did not disadvantage them but, as events proved, significantly advantaged Hoyland and Jump in particular. Thus it was that Hoyland and Jump Sure Start (H&JSS) came to be created.

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Through many changes locally and nationally, H&JSS has developed and thrived, delivering a wide and varied range of services to children from pre-birth to age 5, and to their families. In the process it has built up a strong body of knowledge and skill in the delivery of preventative community health services for families with young children, in the preparation of children for entry to school, in the development of relationships to support family social and emotional wellbeing and in the delivery of community based family support services. At its most recent Ofsted inspection the Sure Start Children's Centre was judged to be Good, while the Little Gem's Day Nursery was judged Outstanding. This has been achieved by quality staff operating a flexible and practical approach based in building relationships at a family and community level upon which both challenge and encouragement can be based.

Extensive use has been made of the Forge's range of venues, as well as many other locations in the community, so that services have been easily accessible. Participation levels have been consistently high, with H&JSS reaching the vast majority of the target population. Examples of the opportunities offered include baby massage, story / rhyme time, play and learn, Webster Stratton programme, family walks, male carers drop-in, breastfeeding support.

A particular success was the ability of H&JSS to access funding to build the Jump Children's Centre, providing state of the art premises in the heart of that small community, complementing the few existing community facilities.

## **Neighbourhood Learning Net [2003 - 2011]**

The Barnsley Neighbourhood Learning Net was funded by the Learning and Skills Council, and rolled out across the Borough as a series of Learning Nets, based in the community and managed by community partnerships.

Its aims were to encourage adults to become involved in learning, especially the disadvantaged and hard to reach, and to provide effective support, information and advice for learners towards building their self-confidence, encouraging them to progress in their learning and increasing their employability. This was done by consulting local people to find out what kinds of learning they wanted and giving feedback to learning providers and encouraging them to put on appropriate community-based courses.

Underpinning this was work with providers to bring learning provision into the local area based on actual want and need, supporting community-based and voluntary organisations to build their capacity to deliver learning opportunities.

The Forge delivered the Learning Net very successfully through the life of the project, consistently reaching and exceeding the required outputs, and helping to bring back to the Forge's area many of the sorts of learning opportunities which had been commonplace and popular in earlier times. Although only staffed by one full time and one part time member of staff, through its links to other Forge activities such as Arts for Health and Sure Start it was able to have a significant impact.

## **Elsecar by the Sea [2004 onwards]**

At an early stage in its life the Forge decided to run an annual gala, reviving traditions of the past. This was based in Elsecar Park which has a number of existing attractions (cafe, bandstand, sandpit, play equipment, reservoir and nature reserve). The so-called Elsecar by the Sea galas were from the start very successful, organised by staff and volunteers from within

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the Forge. No entry charge has ever been made, the costs to the Forge being defrayed out of the modest fees charge to commercial stalls and attractions. A wider range of community organisations have been able to use the galas to promote themselves and to raise money, as well as some statutory agencies. The Partnership sees the galas as important community events which provide fun, entertainment and information to people both locally and from further afield.

### **Regeneration Team [2004 - 2008]**

A key element of the Objective 1 funding was the creation of a small Regeneration Team, consisting of a Regeneration Manager and two support staff. Coming at a time when the Forge's base of activities was expanding rapidly but with few paid resources to sustain them the Team provided much needed capacity and resilience. The Team were able to develop and identify funding for a number of the projects in this Appendix. An inevitable difficulty with this project and all of those funded through Objective 1 was achieving any sort of sustainability when the funding ceased, and whilst this was by no means entirely successful, the Partnership was able to build on aspects of what the Team achieved.

As part of the work of the Team two small projects were delivered, the **Young Carers Project** in partnership with NCH (now Action for Children) and the **Activities Based Crime Diversion (ABCD) project**, which worked with primary aged children.

### **Hoyland Common Community Centre [2004 onwards]**

In the late 1990s a group of local people formed a church which met in homes in the area. They became active in the Forge, and with its support achieved grant funding which allowed them to convert a former Parish Hall in Hoyland Common which they had bought with their own money. This they ran as a community centre, including a cafe, largely with voluntary effort, and used on Sundays as a place of worship. In order to do this they had established a charity and company, Hoyland Common Action Group (HCAG). Unfortunately, increasing financial difficulties led to the group finding itself unable to continue to run the centre which it had to close.

By coincidence, at this time the Partnership was looking for another set of premises for its expanding work, and had negotiated funding from Objective 1 to enable it to bid for a redundant, but modern, church building in Elsecar. As it happened the Forge was outbid, but within a matter of a few weeks HCAG approached the Forge about the possibility that it might be able to take their premises over. Some rapid negotiations led to the trustees appointing several Forge officials as trustees of HCAG, after which the original trustees resigned. The funding which had been set aside for possibly acquiring new premises was able to place the Centre on a sound financial footing

The Partnership decided that it should leave the centre in the ownership of the HCAG in order to secure its future. But in order to operate it, HCAG leased the centre to the Forge, which after a short period then re-opened. The cafe continued, the Forge used some of the premises as office space and the rest as a community rooms. Whilst Objective 1 funding remained that Centre was able to operate with good staff support, but when the funding ceased the financial viability of the Centre once again became problematic.

As a result the Forge gave a great deal of attention through a working group to finding ways for the Centre to be self-sustaining. In the time since then, the cafe has continued to flourish,

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the office accommodation has been used for a variety of Forge staff, and parts of the building have been let to tenants. The use of the building for community activities has declined, in part because of the presence of other facilities nearby. Nonetheless the Centre has remained viable and a valuable part of the Hoyland Common community.

### **Forge News [2004 - 2006]**

For a period during the Objective 1 funding and soon after the re-opening of the HCCC the Forge produced a free newsletter which was widely distributed in the community. Issued every four months it both covered Forge activities and projects, and other community activities as well as providing advertising space for local businesses. The project ceased because of lack of staff and volunteer time and funding.

### **Welland Community House [2004 - 2014]**

Welland Crescent is a street in Elsecar consisting of rather poor quality housing, much of it in council ownership, which is far removed from any community facilities and over the years acquired a bad reputation. When a council house became vacant, a small group of local residents conceived the idea of establishing a community house in the property. The Forge acquired a lease on the property and secured funding to make alterations and provide appropriate facilities and equipment inside.

Initially Welland Community House as it was called seemed to serve a useful role, and some of the Forge's projects were able to use it to deliver some of their work. However, there were significant problems with the local group, and the house suffered from theft and misuse. After a period of time it ceased to operate and the building was mothballed. Eventually the Forge, with regret, terminated the lease and returned the property to the local authority.

### **Forge Arts for Health [2004 - 2011] and Health Trainers [2009 - 2011]**

One of the Forge's most successful and innovative projects, Arts for Health was a response to Healthy Living Barnsley, a £2 million funded public health programme, itself being Barnsley's response to the national Healthy Living Centre programme set up in 1998. Instead of proposing a physical building or conventional approach, the Forge put together a proposal to enable children, young people, parents and older people the opportunity to access the 'arts' as a vehicle to better health.

For children and young people a range of sessions were offered incorporating expressive and visual arts, dance and drama. Links with Sure Start offered sessions to young mothers babies and toddlers, while sessions for older people helped to prevent social isolation and create a channel to manage pain and long term illness. Local exhibitions of art work were put on, festivals and Health and Fun days, community visual arts and crafts workshops and performing arts events. Support was given to mental health groups, older people's groups, supported accommodation projects, youth groups, schools, families and Sure Start, creating activities that engaged, inspired and reflected people's interests and concerns. Although only initially managed by a single worker, the project gained much acclaim for its approach.

The project adapted to change demands and targets, and in its latter stages the emphasis was on community health development. Targets and outputs were consistently met and exceeded.

**Volunteer Co-ordinator [2005 - 2008]**

One of the posts created with Objective 1 funding was intended to raise the profile of volunteering, to encourage more people to volunteer, support groups seeking volunteers and to identify increased opportunities for volunteering. An example of this work was the post's enabling of a number of groups in Elsecar, in the Forge's area, to produce the Elsecar Together booklet which provided local people with the right information about volunteering in all its aspects. Also supported was a local history group in Blacker Hill which produced a booklet and DVD, and enabled a number of residents to discover abilities in research, writing and film making. Whilst mainly based focussed in the Forge's area, the post was also able to undertake some activities across boundaries in neighbouring communities.

**NEETs project [2008]**

This was a short six month project, working with other key agencies including Kirk Balk School, with a single member of staff which aimed to tackle this issue of young people who on leaving school and not progressing to employment or some form of training. Focusing on a small number of identified young people, it sought to provide family-centred advice and guidance by working with the whole family and not just the individual at risk.

**The Rockingham Centre [2008 onwards]**

In 2008 the Big Lottery began offering grants to restore and refurbish community buildings. Barnsley Council identified the almost derelict Rockingham Welfare Hall and associated sports field as a potential project. At that time the Hall was run by the Rockingham Community Association (RCA), and was in a very poor state due to vandalism, lack of resources and other factors. A condition of any grant was that the council must hand over the building to a community group to manage for 25 years. Therefore in 2008 the council approached the Forge and invited it to be the partner community group, but working with the RCA. Forge saw that this was an important project for the local area, recognising that the Welfare Hall had been a valued facility for many years, and so agreed to be involved.

The council's bid was successful and a grant of £1 million secured to refurbish the building. There was however no revenue funding for ongoing operation, nor for the extensive sports fields. Over the next two years or so whilst the plans were being worked up and the refurbishment carried out, the Forge and RCA worked together to develop a management agreement under which the RCA would operate the Rockingham Centre (as it was to be called) on behalf of the Forge. Unfortunately it became clear after long discussions that the RCA was not able to undertake the task in a way that would be acceptable to the Forge, and the decision was taken to operate the Centre directly. The RCA subsequently ceased activity.

On taking over the Centre in 2010, the Forge's task was to re-establish a base of activities and uses which had all dwindled away and ceased. In so doing it had in mind the outputs required by the Big Lottery to justify the grant. The lack of revenue funding was a significant problem, but gradually the Forge was able to engage some part time staffing and find the resources to put in some facilities, principally in the kitchen, which unfortunately had not been included in the refurbishment, the lack of which was an obstacle to successful operation.

In time the use of the Centre and the sports field gathered pace and the Centre once again became a successful community venue. This in turn led to the Forge being able to employ

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more staff resources to manage and maintain the building and site, creating a virtuous circle so that by 2014 the Centre had become self-sustaining with a secure future.

### **Elsecar Nursery [2010 onwards]**

Holy Trinity Elsecar Primary School had for many years struggled because of the lack of nursery provision on site, and this situation was changed when the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA) erected one in the school grounds and proceeded to run it. However, in 2010 the PLA began a rationalisation exercise which led to it withdrawing from a number of its nurseries across the country, including Elsecar. Faced with the prospect of losing the nursery, the school governors invited expressions of interest to take over the nursery. The Forge decided to put itself forward, because of its experience gained through running Sure Start, and in order to preserve a vital local facility and local jobs. The governors accepted the Forge's interest and the Partnership duly took over the nursery.

It soon became clear that the nursery had not been run on a sustainable basis previously, and over a period of many months the Forge had to make significant changes to the way the nursery operated, what it offered to parents and the employment of staff. Not all of these changes were well-received but were essential if the nursery was to survive. As with previous difficult projects a small working group was established to oversee the project. In time a more settled, but not entirely secure, state was reached. Throughout all of this the Partnership was determined to persist with the project for the same reasons that it took it on in the first place.

### **Forge Job Club [2011 onwards]**

Working with Job Centre Plus, this began through the Forge offering IT equipment and a volunteer to provide advice and support to people looking for employment through sessions at Hoyland Library. In time this expanded and through a modest grant has provided a very part time post to give the support and expertise. Despite being a very small project, its outcomes have been profound for the people it has helped to gain entry or re-entry to the employment market.

### **Tidy Teams [2014 onwards]**

The Tidy Teams are the most recent in the long line of Forge projects. This was a Barnsley Council initiative from which Forge successfully bid for an initial one year commission for the South Barnsley area, which includes the Forge's own area. Currently seven posts provide the capability of helping local communities to deal with untidy and unkempt areas and aspects which detract from a good environment. Forge's infrastructure of staff, resources and premises has enabled this project to make a very rapid successful start to this new work.

### **Other activities**

The preceding paragraphs describe the Forge's main projects, but during its existence it has been involved in or supported many other activities, or which the following are some:

**Community summits:** in partnership with the local authority the Forge has helped to run and host three community summits as part of its commitment to being responsive to community views and needs.

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**Stakeholder Forum:** the Forge initiated a regular meeting between key agencies and itself in the Hoyland area, including local schools, health and social care, with a view to improved communication and co-ordination.

**Wellbeing:** the Council initiated Wellbeing partnerships in each locality in the borough, with aims similar to those of the less formal Stakeholder Forum referred to above. These partnerships ran for several years and the Forge played its part in the Hoyland one representing the community and voluntary sector.

**Volunteering:** an offshoot of Wellbeing was a group led by the chair of the Forge which worked to raise the profile of and increase the participation in volunteering in the Hoyland area.

**Hoyland Town Centre funding:** Forge members were actively involved in discussions about Hoyland town centre which led to the improvement of the square, public toilets and other aspects. The Partnership was also able to provide the means to access funding to pay for the works undertaken.

**Elsecar Park:** the Forge supported work in the park, in particular accessing funding for improvements.

**Milton Hall:** the Forge has had a long association with Milton Hall, a member organisation, supporting it to install a computer suite and using it as a venue for adult learning activities.

**West Bank House:** when West Bank House was faced with potential closure because of the withdrawal of local authority funding, the Forge was able to give support through advice and expertise, and by locating some of its activities there to provide a much needed income stream. This enabled the House to re-establish itself and to continue to operate.

**Appendix 2 Timeline of Projects**

Project	Phase 2				Phase 3					Phase 4				Phase 5	
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Forge Youth Project															
Sports Dev't Worker															
Cloughfields CC															>>
Sure Start															>>
Learning Net															
Elsecar by the Sea															>>
Regeneration team															
Hoyland CCC															>>
Forge News															
Welland Community Hse															
Arts for Health															
Volunteer Coordinator															
NEETs															
Rockingham Centre															>>
Elsecar Nursery															>>
Job Club															>>
Tidy Teams															>>

