

SUFFOLK COASTAL LSP ANNUAL FORUM, FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2011
TRINITY PARK CONFERENCE CENTRE

Workshop Feedback

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<p>2. How well do we identify and agree our community aspirations? Facilitators: Gillian Benjamin: Community Led Planning Officer, Suffolk ACRE. Hilary Hanslip: Principal Planning Officer (Policy), Suffolk Coastal District Council Alison Wheatland: Business Development Specialist, Suffolk County Council. John Parker and Christina Adey: Yardley Gobion Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.</p> <p>Further information: Contact Alison Wheatland alison.wheatland@suffolk.gov.uk</p>	3
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1. HOW WELL DO WE KNOW OUR COMMUNITIES?

Solid evidence is the bedrock of successful community action and grant applications, so more than ever it is really important to look beyond the headline statistics to find the true picture of your area.

The Suffolk Foundation commissioned the Hidden Needs report researched by the University of Cambridge to understand the scale and nature of social deprivation in Suffolk to highlight why local giving is needed to strengthen our communities, to inform their grant-making, and to demonstrate to national funding bodies that some areas of Suffolk do experience high levels of social disadvantage.

The Suffolk Observatory is the one-stop-shop for data, statistics and reports about Suffolk and has been developed to provide the public with useful information about their area. Future development of the observatory will make local and neighbourhood information more freely available.

Delegates gained an insight into the results of the Hidden Needs report and explored the opportunities for the Suffolk Observatory to work for and with local communities and voluntary and community groups in Suffolk Coastal.

How we use data is changing and all agencies/data users/organisations need to find a balance between how they use raw data and local experience as evidence

- Data should be used to support community activity, not to direct it. There is a need to bring together raw data with community experience to create something meaningful. Knowing the population of a given area won't provide any real information on what it's like to live there so need a balance between the two.
- Most people tend to identify an issue and then use data to support what they want to do rather than looking at data as a way of identifying problems. Need to rebalance this in future.
- Need to accept that knowing our communities means knowing that our communities are changing. Can't just look at traditional communities anymore e.g. parishes or school communities, now also need to look at emerging communities such as the network of food businesses/providers in Suffolk Coastal.

Sourcing relevant data and making sense of it can be very difficult and a daunting task. There needs to be more support from agencies encouraging people to use data – how can we expect people to know how to interpret complicated data for funding bids without giving them the tools to do it?

- Needs to be a much more joined up approach to data sharing between different agencies. There is currently duplication of effort from within different organisations providing different data/dates/geographies – makes it very confusing for people!
- Need for more support to help people actually use data to 'jump through hoops' e.g. make funding bids. Could we develop a guide to sit on the Observatory to guide people on how to start?
- Stop using acronyms! They make data/information very inaccessible!

Issues and actions for consideration by the LSP partners

Generally there is a naivety/ignorance of the information sources available and we could use partners to disseminate information to user groups e.g. Parish Councils etc.

The workshop gave the opportunity to raise the profile of both the Suffolk Observatory and the Hidden Needs Report as free resources for all delegates and many reported that they were keen to go away and look in more detail at both.

The Suffolk Observatory in particular, was able to take some very important action points out of the workshop that will be reforming the way that data is presented on the site to make it more accessible – we'll be removing complicated acronyms and adding user guides to explain spatial geographies used on the site and to offer advice on the best datasets to use in different, common scenarios.

2. HOW WELL DO WE IDENTIFY AND AGREE OUR COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS?

The workshop investigated how Community Led Planning is enabling the ideas and inspirations from our communities to be carried forward and how organisations are adapting to what comes up. Delegates heard about progress made in Suffolk Coastal to provide a package of support that can help people bring ideas to life. There were case studies showing the benefits and pitfalls encountered by communities who have undertaken a plan.

The Localism Bill will introduce a new right for communities to draw up a 'neighbourhood development plan' but how does this differ from other community led plans and how relevant will it be for communities in Suffolk Coastal? This workshop also provided the opportunity to hear the latest thinking from those already in the process of preparing a neighbourhood development plan in Yardley Gobion Parish, Northamptonshire.

This workshop explored various Community Engagement techniques to build community spirit, motivate people to get them involved, and looked at the effective use of resources.

Recurring/key issues

- Importance of catalyst to get community mobilised and thinking about undertaking a local plan. This is often related to proposals or concerns around development/planning (as illustrated by both case studies).
- Public consultation/meetings (e.g. as part of village reviews, Safer Neighbourhood Team meetings) tend to attract 'usual faces'. What about the rest of the community? Risk of most vocal having their issues heard and prioritised. Challenge of involving and engaging with all members of community, e.g. 17-25 year males
- Effective Community Led Planning (incl. Neighbourhood Plans) requires big time commitment and good mix of skills on Steering Group. Vanguard Neighbourhood Plan has benefitted from having people in local community with time and relevant skills to take it forward – would this be the case in more deprived areas?
- Steering groups should not anticipate the issues that will come up from the community
- Importance of people being kept involved and informed (Steering Group and wider community)

Actions delegates said they would take back to their organisations

- 3 parish council representatives requested further information on village reviews to take back to their parish councils – felt this was a good solution for small parishes who want to do some form of plan but do not have capacity/enthusiasm for embarking on full parish plan
- Sharing of learning from Neighbourhood Planning vanguards and information on transforming existing parish plans into Neighbourhood Plans without having to start from scratch (Community Led Planning Steering Group)
- Representatives from CLP Steering Group invited to speak about Neighbourhood Planning and National Planning Policy Framework at Suffolk Association of Local Council's SALC meeting in March
- Yardley Gobion to act as 'friend' to Rendlesham in their Neighbourhood Planning bid and work
- Use of different engagement methods to engage with different parts of the community will form part of the next Community Led Planning training event scheduled for April

Issues and actions for consideration by the LSP partners

- Awareness raising regarding implications of Localism Bill for local communities and organisations in Suffolk Coastal – to date this has centered on briefings for Town/Parish Councils but other sectors are also interested (raised by someone from business sector)
- Involvement of other agencies/organisations in Community Led Planning events
- Supporting communities to look beyond their own boundaries and work with neighbouring towns/villages – Community Led Planning can result in NIMBYsm and potential conflict between communities
- Community Led Planning programme is supporting communities who come forward – tend to be already active and in relatively affluent areas. Does the LSP want to stimulate activity in other areas? How could this be done?
- Challenges of involving majority of people in a community

3. HOW CAN WE RESOURCE COMMUNITIES TO HELP THEMSELVES?

Many local people want to make a difference in their community by starting something new, making something better or putting something right but doing this alone is difficult. If individuals and groups are going to make a real difference to their area, it is important that the voluntary and community sector in Suffolk Coastal have access to skills, resources and support to be able to deliver local services and increase volunteering opportunities for everyone, including young people.

This workshop highlighted what resources and support are available to help voluntary and community groups get ready and deliver community led solutions. Delegates heard from a range of projects and services that are currently supporting local groups and individuals and how this support has helped local communities to deliver highly successful outcomes; for example, through volunteer brokerage, funding advice and organisational / individual development and support. Delegates had a chance to access these services themselves.

The group looked at different scenarios that members of the Suffolk Coastal Resource Network (SCRN) had been working on with particular voluntary and community (VCS) groups in Coastal and were asked to develop an approach and comments as to how they would deal with them.

Details:

- Introduction to partners of SCRN and what they do (10 minutes)
- Table exercise - scenario development (30 minutes)
- Real-life conclusions to the scenarios and feedback from the tables, identifying any gaps or interesting conclusions (5 minutes)
- Signposting to SCRN partners for more support (available at the Market Stalls)

Outcomes expected:

- Looking at solving real community issues
- Understanding and discussing the type of support on offer from the SCRN (and wider partners)
- Networking and sharing ideas and information in the table groups
- Giving delegates information about the type of support they can access
- Showcasing some of the work we have achieved through SCRN
- Highlighting areas where there are gaps in support
- Relating the scenarios to current community needs.

Comments from the groups:

- Clear that sustainability must be built into any project development
- Having a strong committee and committed people is key to the success of any community work
- The community group needs to communicate with all aspects of their local community to ensure everyone understands what they are trying to achieve
- Where can more specialist legal advice be found that doesn't cost the earth?
- How to consult different aspects of the community is sometimes difficult and needs a steer
- The support organisations need to operate a 'no wrong door' policy and pass people to the right support, rather than saying no
- Expectations need to be managed realistically
- Setting the baseline is key – how do you know how far you have come without it?

Issues and actions for consideration by the LSP partners

- Ensuring the infrastructure and support organisations are clear on offer and how to connect with others in the network
- Case studies available to give to groups as an idea of best practice
- Training on engagement, communication and consultation
- Dealing with conflict – e.g. if the council has stopped doing something and a group wants to set up to do it, how to keep good relations open and ensure assets are moved?

4. ARE WE GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LOCAL ENTERPRISE?

If localism is about liberating the natural desire of local communities to work together to become more in charge of what matters to them; then are our local businesses being inspired to explore ways that they can improve their profitability themselves by working collaboratively?

Delegates learned about the development and successes of the Heritage Coast Market Towns Initiative and explored how strong business associations and collaborations can work in small market towns and rural areas to improve business profitability. The workshop investigated the real benefits for our communities that businesses who work together can bring.

The group received a presentation on the Heritage Coast Market Towns Initiative (HCMTI) followed by a question time session.

Issues raised:

There are often clashes of events between towns. Great to see Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh have all chosen different dates. Unfortunate that Framlingham date clashed. However, Framlingham has only recently become part of the HCMTI and also there are only so many dates at key times (e.g. build up to Christmas).

Solution: Event management meetings. More communication to avoid clash of events where possible. Why not invite reps from other Business Associations to a meeting of the HCMTI and discuss Christmas events for 2012.

Representative from Beccles Business Association reported on success of Beccles Business Association and their relationship with Waveney District Council. Some delegates keen to promote closer working between business associations in Coastal and Waveney.

It was agreed that it was important to include ALL business within a postal code in Business association activity (not just towns – there is inclusion of the rural businesses)

How do you start up a business association? – Support is available from agencies like Suffolk ACRE

Clarification that HCMTI represents all businesses in its area (Assumption they were retail led)

How can the smaller enterprises link into the Market Towns? Badingham has 17 enterprises! Social Enterprise Day next week?

Wickham Market - Community involvement via co-operatives – working with Primary Schools

What benefit has HCMTI brought to their communities?

- increased footfall by arranging networking events e.g. Where is Rudolph?
- helping local schools
- Business Needs Analysis was highlighted
- Young people – support for local initiatives that develop employability skills

Issues and actions for consideration by the HCMTI / LSP partners

- Market town initiatives/ forums give opportunity for social networking, lobbying organisation, joint work on car parking problems, business directories.
- Woodbridge could look to expand IP12 coverage to include Sutton Hoo and Bawdsey?
- Need to ask question more of what do businesses want rather than what do we think they need.
- This is especially so when recruiting new members or joining Suffolk Chamber of Commerce.
- Possibility of help with empty shops – pop-up shops

- Sustainability of the HCMTI project needs clarification:
 1. Where will funding come from for future initiatives?
 2. Member's v non-members (what are the benefits?)
 3. Formalise the HCMTI to a co ltd by guarantee?
 4. Can they charge for services? (E.g. consulting?)
- Scope for existing business association to support new and emerging associations.
- More scope for Business associations to help businesses play an active role in their community

5. HOW CAN WE SUSTAIN SUCCESS – IS SOCIAL ENTERPRISE THE SOLUTION?

This workshop is for delegates who are either considering, starting or already operating a social enterprise. It will explore what's involved, how you can make it happen and key decisions that you'll need to make. Although there won't be time to cover all the specialist ground you will need to cover – there will be opportunity to learn more about where you can get help and support to achieve your ambitions.

There will be case studies showing the benefits and pitfalls encountered by communities who are operating a community enterprise. Delegates are encourage to bring along examples they are involved with to help promote discussion.

The purpose of the session was for participants to explore potential for social enterprise solutions within their communities.

Issues and actions for consideration by the LSP partners

Key questions arising– how do we prepare the ground for new social enterprises or existing projects or services changing their operational base or setting up anew? Particularly if these are being led by a charitable or community project model. How do people grow the skills and contacts to make new social enterprises thrive through a range of income streams? School for Social Entrepreneurs East can help greatly here, operating across the east from a Suffolk base with top business and social enterprise contacts and with access to national cutting edge social entrepreneurs.

Building on partnerships & networks which exist within the coastal partnership, who else could members connect with to support a social enterprise e.g. business skills, shared premises, start up finances.

Where could income generation come from? And what place does trading for success come in.

Key outcomes:

Each potential project discussed was potentially a viable social enterprise. Key observation is that cooperation and a focus on solving problems quickly and in collaboration will solve these problems, which does mean a culture change from the current pace at which community groups and leaders operate. The groups working together demonstrated that LSP members cooperating in action will significantly help social ventures succeed.

In many cases there was an acknowledgement that thinking needed to shift from a grant funded environment to one where partnership and income generation played a key part. To do this effectively engagement with a community at its widest definition seemed important to the group

All groups produced a plan for a particular problem, which explored the thorny issue of finance and generating income

Building partnerships outside what exists already was deemed important, as was being open to opportunities and connections in a wider network that reached into the private sector.

3 participants showed interested in the school for social entrepreneurs as a place where people leading social enterprises can come to get support to set up sustainable venture

6. WHO OWNS WHAT? TRANSFERRING ASSETS TO COMMUNITIES.

Our towns, village or neighbourhood are home to buildings, land or other assets that play a vital role in local life and if they are closed or sold into private use it can be a real loss to the community. In many places across the country, when local amenities have been threatened with sale or closure, community groups have taken them over. In some cases, however, community groups who have attempted to take assets over have faced significant challenges.

Delegates will hear about some of the key barriers and business case issues and there will be case studies of where assets have been successfully transferred to community in Suffolk Coastal.

Delegates will have the chance to explore the implications and gain a clearer view on the risks, challenges and benefits.

Following presentations on a number of case studies where assets have either been successfully transferred to community management or are in the early stages of transfer there was an open debate on the challenges and opportunities that asset transfer presented and the practical steps that need to be taken to achieve success.

Issues and actions for consideration by the LSP partners

- Helping to share best practice and learning so that everyone can benefit from what has happened before.
- Although funding is a difficult one perhaps some pooled funds to help with 'making it happen' could be identified - e.g. legal fees, training, one off costs to improve the asset etc
- Often when you explore the opportunities around one asset it leads to a bigger debate about public (or even private) property in the wider area. If this crosses over several agencies perhaps there is a role for the LSP to co-ordinate a multi agency type approach
- Importance of promoting Community Led Planning so that communities are clear which assets they value and what they want to get from their ownership so that the whole community can be encouraged to get behind the project.
- Where the asset is owned privately can the LSP identify who can play a facilitation role?
- Develop the 'hand-holding' support for communities for whom this would be a new experience.
- If some of any 'pooled resources' could be channeled into specialist community development officers to provide support for .e.g. the first 6 months to kick-start the process.