

**Report for the Rural Partnership on the event
Market Towns in West Sussex: celebrating success, looking to the future
22nd July 2010
Lodge Hill Centre, Pulborough**

This report has two aims:

- It gives a summary of the event on the 22nd July with highlights of the discussions taking place during the different sessions.
- It sets out issues and suggested ways forward to maintain support for our Market Towns.

Background and current situation on the support available for Market Towns

Since it was launched in 2004, the Small Rural Towns Programme (SRTP) has acted as a catalyst to harness financial as well as in kind support to help develop initiatives in Market Towns across West Sussex.

So far eight Towns have received investment from the Programme as follows:

Year	Town	SRTP funding	Project	Other information
2006-07	Henfield	£40,000 capital	Minibus for Community transport initiative	Match funded with Section 106 money
2007-08	Billingshurst	£120,000 capital	Centre for Children	Match funded by WSCC
2008-09	Steyning	£40,000 capital	Refurbishment of public conveniences in town and new signposts	Match funded with Section 106 money
2008-09	Pulborough	£50,000 capital and revenue	Improvement of access to Lower Street and improvement of the retail offer	Match funded with Section 106 money
2009-10	Arundel	£43,500 capital	A pontoon and new signposts	Match funded by the Environment Agency, Arun District Council and Arundel

				Town Council; WSCC contributed funding for a feasibility study
2009-10	Midhurst	£40,000 capital and revenue	Programme of improvements in retail in the high street	Match funded by Chichester District Council with whom we have worked very closely to ensure the funding is aligned with the Vision programme that is currently being implemented both in Midhurst and Selsey
2008-10	Selsey	£40,000 capital and revenue	Programme of improvements in retail in the high street	Match funded by Chichester District Council with whom we have worked very closely to ensure the funding is aligned with the Vision programme that is currently being implemented both in Midhurst and Selsey
2010-11	Hassocks	£32,000 capital and revenue	Promotion of sustainable leisure activities, cycle hire outlet , mapped walking and cycle routes which link village and train station to the South Downs	Match funded by WSCC, Leader, Big Lottery Fund, Collabor8, Mid Sussex Healthy Living Partnership, Mid Sussex District Council and Budgens

Key impacts

- £1 million match funding from a wide range of sources including District Councils and the Environment Agency.
- Eleven healthchecks undertaken.
- Four original action plans are still in place. The others have been reviewed or are in the process of being reviewed.
- Ten Community Partnerships set up of which nine have become registered companies operating as social enterprises.
- Numerous hours of volunteer time.
- Community Partnerships have delivered many projects over and above the SRTP and have won local and national awards for their work.

SEEDA reductions

SEEDA has recently asked for uncommitted funding under the SRTP to be clawed back, due to budget savings. WSCC after negotiation will be giving back £14,500 to SEEDA out of the £94,500 left in the Programme. As the funding in this Programme is coming to an end, it is important that we look for other ways to support our Market Towns to make the most of all the capacity built so far. The event on the 22nd July was timely as it enabled useful discussions that can inform the future of support for Market Towns in West Sussex.

The purpose of the event

This event was organised by West Sussex County Council and Action in rural Sussex with support from the South East Rural Towns Partnership (SERTP).

The event had three main aims:

- To showcase the achievements of Community Partnerships in Market Towns in West Sussex.
- To put Market Towns in the context of public sector policy.
- To debate what support will be required in the future for our Market Towns to thrive and to be places to live and work.

Feedback received was very positive and indicated that these aims were very much achieved. Further detail on feedback is offered in the Annex section of this report.

There were sixty five attendees from a wide breadth of local and regional organisations such as Community Partnerships across West Sussex, National Park Authority (NPA), SEEDA, Hidden Britain, South East Rural Towns Partnership (SERTP) Action for Market Towns (AMT), along with representatives from District Councils across West Sussex. The event was chaired by Patrick Perks from Billingshurst Community Partnership. Detail on the different activities included in the Programme is presented in the Annex.

We are very grateful to those that have contributed to the delivery and success of this event.

Conclusions

- We have much to be proud of regarding the local community work taking place in West Sussex. We have a number of very active groups working for the good of their communities that have achieved truly remarkable things.
- Community and businesses engagement -linked to the Big Society- is essential to keep making possible initiatives that benefit the Towns.
- Future engagement of volunteers is a major issue as it affects key groups in the community.
- We need to ensure that new initiatives from central and/or local government do not "reinvent the wheel" and actually build on what is already out there, encouraging the creation of even more social capital and making the current structures sustainable.
- We must look at all Towns and ensure there are opportunities for community development.
- Market Towns must identify what issues they have that hinder their future sustainability; concerning this, facilitation and support are and will be will be very important.
- Market Towns are moving on from being seen as geographical locations to become service centres which people want to access despite political boundaries.
- Market Towns need to offer the right balance of services.
- The National Park can definitely be an opportunity; however, Market Towns need to find out what their offer is and what they wish to obtain out of being part of the National Park.
- A mix of businesses including home businesses is beneficial for Market Towns.
- To maintain sustainability and attract investment identifying a Towns' Unique Selling Point (USP) is key.
- Further support beyond the Small Rural Towns Programme is required.

Next Steps

It is important not to lose capacity from the reduction in SRTP funding as there has been substantial investment, particularly from West Sussex County Council in the County Coordinator role and from some District Councils in the Community Partnerships.

West Sussex County Council and Action in rural Sussex are currently working on developing a programme of support for Market Towns to enable Community Partnerships to carry on developing and implementing initiatives that are of benefit to the economy and the communities in Market Towns and hinterland. In addition to Community Partnerships, we need to work with other key partners such as District Councils, Parish and Town Councils, Councils for Voluntary Services and the West Sussex Social Enterprise Network to ensure consistency and clarity in actions taken forward and to avoid overlapping.

There are three areas of support that we have identified so far to be part of the programme:

- Capacity building for volunteers to include up skilling opportunities
- Provision of expert advice
- Investment for specific improvement opportunities to include capital and revenue projects

We are aiming for the programme to start in April 2011. We are currently looking for external funding, which will dictate the length of the programme. In addition we are also searching for ways to link with new initiatives such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships to ensure there is support for Market Towns through any new programmes and policies. There will be an overlap with the SRTP, which will conclude in March 2012. However, the remaining funding in this Programme is already allocated for the County Coordinator function and earmarked for the last two projects in the Programme expected to begin in January 2011.

We will also explore what the Big Society means to our Market Towns and how initiatives such as the Community Directed Support can enable Community Partnerships and other key stakeholders to play a role in its delivery.

We wish to encourage Parish, Town Councils and Community Partnerships in the Towns to work together and have common goals as this will ensure a robust approach to addressing problems and promoting initiatives.

At strategic level we have also identified a need to encourage and support cross working between County, District, Parish Councils and community groups on the planning and delivery of community strategies. We suggest this may be an area of work for the West Sussex Rural Partnership to take forward.

Recommendation

The Rural Partnership are asked to note the success of the event and to endorse the approach for maintaining support for Market Towns over the next 18 months and for exploring ways to extend this support further.

For further information please contact
Ana Fajardo
Economic Development Manager
West Sussex County Council
01243 777 606
Ana.fajardo@westsussex.gov.uk

ANNEX TO THE REPORT

The content of the event



An opening speech on the Importance of Market Towns by Deborah Urquhart, Cabinet Member for The Environment and the Economy, West Sussex County Council.

Four Community Partnerships showcasing their achievements and highlighting challenges:

- A vertical approach to partnership, Mike de Lara, Arundel Community Partnership
- Working with other partnerships, Tony Jackson, Henfield Community Partnership
- Community hubs, Paul Mackie, Storrington Community Partnership
- Sustainability of a small market town, Patrick Perks, Billingshurst Community Partnership





Two presentations featuring local authority officers to explain how Market Towns link with service delivery and community planning:

- Community Directed Support, Spencer Bryan, West Sussex County Council
- Community Planning in Market Towns: the Horsham District perspective, Natalie Brahma-Pearl, Horsham District Council.

There were questions and answers sessions after the presentations which generated a lively debate. These were the main issues raised:

- Sustainability of Market Towns and the need to explore who is the real population they offer services to, what do they need and what do they want.
- The role of Market Towns as service centres-with banks, health centres, schools and retail offering-rather than geographical entities separated by political boundaries; people do not always acknowledge boundaries when it comes to access services. Access to services in Towns happens despite County, District and Parish boundaries.
- Volunteers are absolutely key to keep things going; a clear example of this is all the activity under SRTP, which would not have happened without volunteers.
- How will Community Self Directed Support work? Where is the funding coming from? How can savings be made compatible with more localised provision of services? how will the practical issues around the provision of certain services by the community be resolved? For example around insurance issues; these and other such details need to be looked at carefully.
- What is the future of the decision/community planning process? What needs to happen is involvement of the community rather than consulting the community.

- Is the Big Society happening already in Market Towns in West Sussex? We need to look at what we have already got and harness that for new initiatives; harness the social capital and volunteer momentum that exists in some of the Towns; not only is this good practice but it will contribute to their sustainability. Don't need to reinvent the wheel.

After lunch there were five workshops to discuss opportunities and issues for Market Towns related to five different themes namely:

- A vibrant economy
- Provision of services
- The National Park
- Town centre regeneration
- Community involvement

The main aims of the workshops were:

- To discuss the themes below in the context of Market Towns.
- To find out how Market Towns are affected by the issues related to the themes; whether it is in a negative or in a positive way.
- To consider, debate and document the opportunities and the issues for Market Towns on these areas.

Principal points debated at the workshops are as follows:

A vibrant economy- Facilitated by John Peel



Opportunities

- A key thing is to have a vibrant retail economy and visitor economy: a busy High Street
- Offer events for all the community
- Involve retail business: providing money and services
- Market Towns need to look wider in terms of their economy not only retail but also homebased businesses and land based sectors; it is important to engage with the farming community
- Initiatives such as the Microbiz fair organised by Horsham District Council are important
- Surveys indicate that there are a huge proportion of small businesses and self employed people in Market Towns and their hinterland

- Support for small business such as peer to peer networks is very important
- Home based business and home workers also need support
- Accountability is important so links to authorities are important at the early stages

Issues

- Business are hard to engage as they are so busy
- Transient communities can be an issue as you end up losing the local knowledge
- Midhurst lack of new business makes it difficult to revitalise
- Issues of dormitory of towns: how do you engage the new community: welcome packs
- Market towns need to find their uniqueness, their niche that they can develop and capitalise on rather than compete with each other
- Market towns need to provide services for all
- Pockets of deprivation do exist
- There is sometimes a lack of jobs which makes people commute elsewhere for work

The provision of services- Facilitated by Mark McTaggart



Opportunities

- Services must be advertised appropriately, help point and information boards can help
- A sustainable Market Town should be the place where all these services are provided: lunch clubs, schools, medical/dental, library, pre-school care, opportunities for Further Education, banks, Post Office, cafes, church, trades people, groceries, leisure, public transport, garage/fuel, emergency services, newsagent, meeting spaces, pharmacy, pub, clothing and shoes, vet, youth provision, job centre
- Some services can be provided as mobile outreach and using partners
- Infrastructure has to be made the most of, for example why not use IT infrastructure in schools during the holidays?

Issues

- To ensure the provision of services appropriate housing is required; housing in itself is a service that should be made available
- Some towns do not have a varied enough provision of services to attract people; some towns have a huge predominance of one type of shops-restaurants or antiques- but you would not be able to buy clothes or shoes; this stops people from shopping there altogether
- Broadband needs to be available and infrastructure in Towns must move fast with the times to ensure the development and provision of all sorts of services from retail to home based business are not impaired by poor access to technology
- Is community transport the answer? It is not only a service for older people, others need to be able to access it too, how can routes, prices, flexibility improve service provision in Market Towns and enable access to services

The National Park- Facilitated by Valerie Carter

Opportunities

- National Park (NP) is a huge asset, in economic terms as well as landscape. The Park is incredibly varied and beautiful. Even as an AONB, it always attracted more visitors than other NP
- Visitors: as soon as they stay more than one day they have a big impact on economy
- Need to find ways to improve sustainable tourism



- New bus services – the area is in a unique situation
- Dialogue between Market Towns and National Park Authority (NPA): how is that relationship going to look like? What do Towns want out of being part of a NP? What can Towns do to improve their offer? What can NPA do for them?
- Cross-border working – might want to do Arundel, Petworth, Midhurst tour, Arundel, Pulborough, Billingshurst tour
- Now is the time for looking at new initiatives and opportunities for development and to make sure they are part of the NP business plan

- Supermarkets: their location has to be right so footfall is not driven away from Towns; if somebody big wants to invest, planning authority has strong negotiating tool in how it can benefit rest of town
- Looking at new logo, it has to be a brand that towns and business can use and be proud of. It must have branding initiative behind it

Issues

- There are real socio-economic issues because the South Downs has towns in the National Park that other National Parks don't have.
- High numbers of day visitors resulting in parking issues. This could impact on people who come in to do their weekly shop. If people can't park they will drive on
- Signs at boundaries: are they important? is there a need for a logo or not?
- Need to define links between NPA and the tourism agenda
- Market Towns offer to NP visitors have to be very clear. Towns must know what their offer is and it must be clear and attractive; being in the NP is not enough
- House prices up
- Businesses need to be recognised as important to towns. Town Partnerships need to involve businesses. Chambers of Commerce and local business are one of biggest assets. Need to be able to work together

Town Centre Regeneration- Facilitated by Kenrick Garraway and Jim Green



Opportunities

- How to make a Market Town a strategic hub/Service Centre
- Towns need to know its Unique Selling Point (USP) related to demographics: what do people want and when?
- Key drivers of change
 - Branding
 - Proper holistic Planning
 - Trader co-operation/working together
 - Ambiance
 - Perception of traders
 - Responding to change in retail offering

Issues

- Are Town Centres fit for purpose re changing demographics? Regenerating for the future
- How do you determine the area a Service Centre would cover
- How do you ensure the right retail mix
- Small Market Towns want more services but not for the Town to grow
- Do traders who open shops know their audience (management intelligence)
- Does a Market Town need a supermarket or a service that makes it a destination worth going to?

Community involvement- Facilitated by Caroline Gosford and Mike de Lara



Opportunities

- The assets and infrastructure available: knowledge; partnerships, volunteer centres, community spaces, such as Village Hall, publications going to households
 - New technologies to reach commuters/people of working age; in Arundel you can have a cyber chat with the Mayor- now in Facebook
 - To get the youth involved visit schools and youth drop in centre, normally you get high level of response
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- To reach commuters: go to station am & pm
 - Try to get "quick wins", this is key
 - Use equality/diversity forum to access harder to reach groups and minorities
 - Subgroups for specific interests can ensure better take up- Billingshurst going on for 8 years
 - People coming up to retirement
 - Engage the business community: in kind time and money
 - Support required
 - Corporate Social responsibility- how can we develop?
 - Ask for support from AirS
 - Engage with WI-lots of good experience
 - County wide Market Town forum- share info

Issues

- Hard to get views for proactive initiatives- easy to get people together against something

- Credibility when you are starting up; need to Start small and build reputation and name for the group- the “brand” is hard to establish
- Consultation fatigue
- Not managing expectations
- Lack of people willing to get involved
- Dormitory concept- for some people the Town and what happens in it is not that central to their lives: tenants, commuters, new communities...
- Succession planning in all agencies- Com Partnerships, Councils.....it is a time bomb, need to engage with others

The event finished with a speech by the current Chair of the South East Rural Towns Partnership, Frances Stokes from Hampshire County Council. Frances highlighted the importance of carrying on working for the benefit of Market Towns across the South East and build on the good work from the last eight years.

Feedback

We have received very positive feedback as some of the quotes from the feedback forms show:

“Good day the issues raised and examples of success generated healthy debate. The key to future success, however, rests with the ability to tackle the issues raised. A good start but needs further action”

“Excellent, some useful information obtained from presentations and displays”

“Thank you for providing such a good programme with great relevance to the current economic situation”



“I learnt a lot that the South Downs National Park Authority can put into action”

“Very useful to hear that issues with face in our Market Towns are echoed by others”

“Highlighted the value and importance of bring groups together to share information and experience- many issues are common but views and solutions vary widely”

There were some criticisms too such as the length of breaks; more importantly one of the attendees wondered where to from here and how effective these occasions really are:

“A bit of a talking shop, not sure what was achieved”

This comment highlights the relevance of taking action swiftly in ensuring the continuation of support for our Market Towns.

