

Love it, Hate it or Shape it..!! – A Local Approach to Social Action*

What is a Community?

A community is a group of people that feel connected because of something they have in common. It might be a shared interest, skill, experience or profession. It might be a particular demographic: age, faith, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability. *How can a community development initiative reach all of these people?*

The answer is to work with communities based on place. Virtually everyone has a place they call home. The people who live nearby form the local community. They are the people we see every day, where local amenities are shared, where neighbours look out for each other, important friendships are formed and people feel a sense of belonging.

People innately understand that working to improve their local community will bring improvements for themselves, their immediate family and their circle of friends. The strength of these social connections and community activities is often the difference between a neighbourhood that is vibrant and buoyant and one that's dis-engaged and deprived. Place-based community development can also reach people and communities that are connected by other criteria such as interests and demographics: *it is a leveller that ensures no one is excluded by design.*

Developing and supporting communities is nothing new. There are many models in existence, such as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), Neighbourhood Management, Neighbourhood Cares and Community Organising. The defining ingredients in all of these models are People and Places. Places bring people together, and the people define the character of these places.

There is a clear set of compelling rationale that should encourage the organic development of community approaches to social involvement. These are:

The Local Rationale:

At a local level, communities and places are sites of identification and have a greater meaning for people.

The Civic Rationale:

The concept of a place provides a site for innovation and developing integrated and seamless local action.

The Social Rationale:

Local action provides the potential for empowerment, for democratic engagement, accountability and greater responsiveness in decision making.

The Economic or Political Rationale:

There are clear cost savings to be achieved when synergies between related services reduce duplication or replication in communities and places.

What's working?

Support Cambridgeshire partners fully support a place-based approach to communities and development, and have been working at various locations across Huntingdonshire over the past 12 months. Much of the work has been developmental, much is still to be learned from past experience and much will be driven by the communities in which we work.

However, a number of key strands have already been identified:

Strand 1: Mapping community assets:

Assets include buildings, equipment, people, groups and activities. It is imperative that communities know what's on, where and how they can access or contribute, thus perpetuating their sense of belonging and galvanising connections between residents.

Strand 2: Surveying the community:

A survey of local residents asks them questions such as what they like and dislike about their neighbourhood or village, what community activities they participate in, what new activities they'd like to see and whether they'd like to be more involved. This process has numerous positive outcomes:

- To provide additional data for the mapping exercise.
- To help residents, local groups and other stakeholders understand the shared concerns and aspirations of local residents.
- To encourage residents to think critically, creatively and with aspiration about their community.
- To encourage engagement, particularly among those who aren't already active in their community.
- To provide evidence for any future funding applications.

In communities already surveyed some of the headline themes have included:

Positives:

- A general positivity about their sense of place.
- A high value placed on community and what it means.
- A willingness to become involved and take part in community based activities.

Negatives:

- Low level anti-social behaviour within communities.
- **Perceived** rising crime rates.
- Housing expansion without the requisite infrastructure or support.

- A lack of (and high demand for) youth activities.

Strand 3: Networking and social action:

Residents are invited to leave their contact details at the end of the survey if they'd like to be more involved in their community. These people are invited by Support Cambridgeshire to meet to discuss the survey results, and to begin to make plans for the future. A mixture of existing community leaders and newcomers to community action creates a fertile environment for mutual support in the development of new projects.

Our previous experiences have led us to believe that this is best achieved through:

- Informal get-togethers, hosted by Support Cambridgeshire, where residents can exchange views, network and brainstorm new ideas.
- Facilitated meetings chaired by Support Cambridgeshire to develop ideas into viable projects.

Experience has also shown us that some form of pump priming fund would also be useful (a nominal £500.00) which enables residents to test their ideas on a very small scale. It is envisaged that this element would be match funded through local business.

Strand 4: Ongoing support:

Community engagement and development can take time. Strand 4 therefore dovetails the project into Support Cambridgeshire's core offer. This centres upon the development of individuals forming collectives or groups (either loosely associated or those who wish to constitute). This includes:

- 1-1 and group advice and support
- Peer network and best practice evaluation
- Critical friend assessment
- Formal training (general or bespoke to individuals or potential groups)
- Group constitution
- Funding advice
- Voice and Representation
- Signposting to other partners and their services.

Identifying communities:

Our work has largely taken place in communities with a population of 10,000 or under. Whilst we believe our model could work with larger populations (St Neots being a prime example) our timetable would be longer and more resource and capacity would be required.

Communities can be identified through a range of avenues:

- Discussions with Statutory Partners (County, District and Town and Parish Councils). Discussions with the Local Police and Crime Commissioner on anti- social behaviour and crime rates.
- Local intelligence gleaned from voluntary sector partners and delivery agents.
- Raw data and statistics on Health and Social Care, social isolation and loneliness.

Any discussion on which community to target for our place-based approach would be collaborative, and would build upon what partners already know about the areas in which they live and work. Support Cambridgeshire believes that communities with lower levels of pre-existing social activity and engagement are particularly suitable for this approach.

Added Value:

The power of the voluntary sector is often in its independence. Communities have welcomed us as a *fresh set of eyes and ears*, free from any political or competitive mantra. Communities drive the design, and Support Cambridgeshire uses its networking abilities to deliver partner support as required by the needs and aspirations of the communities we work in.

Timetabling:

Our approach has a timetable of eight months. We believe this is a suitable and sensible timeframe in which to identify, map, network and galvanise community support and development. Our Communities Officer will be working extensively within a targeted community for two days per week during this period. The timetable can be shortened or lengthened as required, provided discussions have taken place around impacts and outcomes. If communities can self-own within a shorter timetable, then the schedule can be curtailed. In most cases individuals and groups can take advantage of the Support Cambridgeshire core offer from month nine, although some may have the capability and confidence to access this support at any earlier stage.

Activity Schedule	Timetable
Preliminary Networking	1 Month
Asset mapping and community survey	2 Month
Survey results and reporting	1 Month
Targeted Networking and Development	4 Months
Total	8 Months

Budget costs:

The largest proportion attributable to the budget cost is the Communities Officer time, at two days per week for a period of eight months. Venue hire and refreshments will enable targeted networking and development to take place. Some community venues may be available free of charge, in which case this budget head will not apply.

Activity	Cost
Communities Officer x 2 days x 8 Months*	6940.00
Administration and supervision on-costs at 10%	0694.00
Survey construction and circulation	0750.00
Venue Hire *	0500.00
Refreshments *	0150.00
Pump Priming Fund	0500.00
Total *	9534.00

Salaries:

This budget head is based upon a pro-rata salary of 26,000PA.

Venue Hire:

This budget head may or may not be applicable.

Refreshments:

This budget head may or may not be applicable.

Total cost:

This is based on a population of approximately 10,000. Smaller populations could reduce costs and larger populations increase costs, although this is subject to discussion.

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Notes:

***Support Cambridgeshire is a partnership of three trusted community based organisations: Hunts Forum lead the partnership, with support from Cambridgeshire ACRE and Cambridge CVS. Support Cambridgeshire is funded by Cambridgeshire County Council.**

***Whilst this framework has been written by Russell Rolph, any member of the partnership can use and interpret this information for the purpose of presentation. Most presentations will be undertaken by Julie Farrow (CEO of Hunts Forum).**

***Social Action is a generic term for bringing communities together to solve the issues they care about. It is not just about the identification of those issues however, it's about calling people to action in order to solve or resolve some of those issues they care most about.**