

LOCALISM IN PRACTICE



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LOCALISM
IN PRACTICE

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Foreword

This is the second in our series of three Localism in Practice publications aimed at showcasing some of the brilliant work undertaken by local councils to support the needs of local people.

These examples continue to illustrate how our most local level of local government in England is already enabling and supporting the principles underpinning the Big Society.

The 9,000 local (community, neighbourhood, parish, town and village) councils that make up the grassroots of our democracy work tirelessly to represent the local community, deliver services to meet local needs and improve quality of life and community wellbeing.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has long supported a fundamental shift of power from Whitehall to the town and village hall and to local people. Empowered local people taking responsibility for their community through local councils is a tried,

tested and trusted model of grassroots neighbourhood action. Local councils – made up of around 80,000 local councillors – are obviously well placed to demonstrate how best to approach and achieve real localism.

But in order to be effective and fully respond to the needs of the community, local councils must communicate well and engage with local people and local organisations – from schools to sports clubs, from businesses and shops to community groups and charities. Research continues to tell us that the reputation and effectiveness of local councils depends upon public awareness. So an ongoing feature of our job is to ensure we communicate what we do and help raise the profile and reputation of local councils to a wide-ranging audience – from

parliamentarians in Westminster and civil society groups to people in areas currently without grassroots local democracy. And indeed to local councils themselves because sharing practice and ideas is more important than ever in these austere times.

This latest publication complements the first *Localism in Practice* and continues to tell the story of how local councils are making a difference – from digital inclusion to sustainability, from supporting the local economy to providing affordable housing. Local councils are continuing to be inventive, innovative and indeed more collaborative to overcome barriers to deliver solutions for local people.

So whatever the collective efforts of local councils making a difference to the lives of local people are labelled as – be it the Big Society, our society or indeed good society – our local councils have been doing it for a long time and will certainly be doing more of it in the future.

I sincerely hope that you will enjoy reading about some of the ideas being put into practice by local councils and the central contribution they are making to improving the quality of life for local people and local communities.

Cllr Michael Chater, chairman,
National Association of Local Councils

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Maldon Town Council, Essex



Population: 15,000

Precept: £336,000

Being dependent on visitors to the Maldon area, the town council has set up a Working Party with the remit to improve the economic vitality of its high street. The Working Party has held a number of events to help raise the profile by bringing in visitors to the town. The Working Party has also acted to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the local Chamber of Commerce and has formed the Maldon Business Association. The town council is aware that Maldon District Council has been required to cut spending in a significant number of areas and is working hard to ensure that the vitality of the town is maintained.

Given that the aim of the group was to support the economic vitality of the high street, its most important achievement was facilitating the formation of the Maldon Business Association. This organisation is now

well established with a good level of membership and clear leadership. Although the town council provided a small set up grant, it is entirely independent of the town council but works in partnership with it.

In addition, the traditional town markets have become moribund and the town council is working with the district council to identify a new site in the town where a weekly market could be held. A thriving market could provide a significant boost for the town economy.

Storrington and Sullington Parish Council, Sussex

Population: 6,074

Precept: £170,000

There are a large number of small shops and businesses in the Storrington and Sullington area that create a great deal of vibrancy and help to serve the surrounding areas. Each year the parish council organises a Christmas Late Night Shopping event, but as a result of the recession this event was enhanced in 2010. The parish council closed additional roads so that a market could be held, with stalls allocated only to local businesses that are not in the centre of the village. The council arranged for the closure of one road for a fun fair and another two roads for stalls selling festive produce and gifts.

Christmas Late Night Shopping evenings have proved to be very successful, with the 2009 event attracting around 11,000 visitors. The 2010 event was slightly reduced as a result of inclement weather, however general feedback has been very positive,

indicating that there was 'something for everyone' including entertainment and attractions ranging from the traditional (carol singing, silver band, Father Christmas, harmonique organ) to the more modern (fun fair, rock and roll band and dancing).

Estimate

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Ivybridge Town Council, Devon

Population: 12,056

Precept: £385,392

The Watermark events and conference venue, owned and managed by Ivybridge Town Council, opened in April 2008. The building hosts a library, 14 business units, IT suite, café, and multi-purpose space suitable for events, conferences, theatre and cinema, with the aim of providing services to the local community and encouraging local business development and tourism.

Situated on the ground floor is the Information Centre, managed by Ivybridge Town Council, along with a brand new library and IT suite. Staff are on hand to help with enquiries regarding tourist, community and town council information.

The project required commitment, determination and tenacity on the part of the town council, and a willingness to work closely with the district council and take some calculated risks.

Capital funding was required to deliver such a large project, but the town council is working to a business model, which will ensure long-term financial sustainability.



Climate change & sustainability

Henlow Parish Council, Bedfordshire

Population: 3,084

Precept: £103,000

The Henlow Parish Hall was built in the 1890s and is in need of major improvements. A planning application to convert the parish hall into six one-bedroom dwellings was submitted in 2010, but was refused planning permission. A revised plan is under consideration at present for the conversion to form one four-bedroomed dwelling. Should planning permission be granted the parish hall will not be sold until after the construction of the new multi-use parish property, as its sale will contribute a substantial amount to the overall cost of the project.

Henlow Parish Council is also currently investigating the building of a new multi-use venue to incorporate changing rooms and sports facilities. The parish council currently leases its sports pavilion to Henlow Sports and

Social Club, under whose umbrella the local cricket, football and bowls clubs operate.

The existing building is poorly insulated and in need of extensive improvements, including a new roof. The parish council is exploring funding to build a new multi-use venue on the site of the existing pavilion, in addition to selling the site of the hall.

While the project is in the early stages at present, full consultations and public meetings will be held with local people once all the options have been investigated. The community is kept informed through the parish council's quarterly newsletter.

Redbourn Parish Council, Hertfordshire

Population: 4,166

Precept: £171,463

Redbourn Parish Council has recently planted a community orchard. The trees were sponsored by members of the public and the council hopes that local people will pick the produce once the trees bear fruit.

The parish council has worked with Redbourn in Bloom to improve the village, gaining Silver Gilt awards, and recently opened the Cumberland Garden (using Section 106 investment from a housing development) off the high street where fruit trees were planted in the garden. A large compost bin was built in the garden to take the garden's refuse and plant debris from village planting schemes. Water butts have also been placed in various buildings around the village and the hanging baskets are watered with 'grey' water. The parish council is also installing a footpath, working with Redbourn

Care Group, to provide disabled access and complete a circular walk around the common.

The plants in Cumberland Garden continue to mature and the garden is well used by the community as it serves as a link from the high street to the health centre and is a quiet retreat from the busy high street. The fruit trees in Cumberland Garden did very well considering their young age.

The parish council has also installed a path that gives access for the disabled from the high street to the community orchard and the Nickey Line (a pedestrian/cycle path on a disused railway line). As well as giving access to the disabled it is also used by cyclists travelling along the Nickey Line to work in Redbourn (previously they had to bump cycles down a long flight of steps).

St Osyth Town Council, Essex

Population: 4,000

Precept: £104,942

In St Osyth, a small village in coastal Essex, 34 allotments were created only a year after residents submitted a petition requesting allotments in the area.

Local community members contributed to the project – one land owner provided the land on lease to the parish council for a small rent; a farmer contributed turf and manure to fertilise the plots and parish councillors helped plan the plots and design the placement of water facilities, all provided at a minimal cost. The council itself provided £6,000 in its capital budget for the general work, including planting, ploughing and hedging. A small car park was also created to provide easy access for allotment owners.

The parish council has recently applied for, and received a tree grant from Tendring District Council, to replace and plant trees in the perimeter hedge.

The inaugural Allotment Harvest Supper took place in the village hall annexe on 12 November 2010 and allotment holders provided food and refreshment, produced at the allotments. The occasion enabled the allotment holders to socialise and reflect on their first growing season and provided the opportunity for them to formally thank the parish councillors and members of the community who generously gave their time, resources and funding to enable the allotment project to be realised.



Cam Parish Council, Gloucestershire

Population: 8,500

Precept: £163,390

Cam Parish Council ensures that sustainability is within the remit of each of its committees and has a sustainability budget that has enabled significant grants to be made to the managers of local community facilities, firstly for professional energy audits of premises and also for implementation of measures recommended as a result. These have included improved insulation, new heating systems and a rooftop photovoltaic array for the main village hall. All of these improvements have been part-funded by the parish council.

The parish council is now embarking on an exciting project to build a new community resource centre and café, which will contribute to local sustainability by having facilities to access local government and other services in the community, with space also available

for hire to local community groups and businesses, reducing the need to travel.

One of the conditions for the operation of the café will be to use local produce wherever possible, and this part of the building will provide a much-needed local social venue for all ages.

The building itself has also been designed with sustainability and energy efficiency very much in mind, being timber framed with enhanced insulation and including rooftop photovoltaic panels to generate power from the sun.

Great Waltham Parish Council, Essex

Population: 2,100

Precept: £41,416

Great Waltham Parish Council is currently working on proposals for a new cycling and walking link in the area. It believes that a cycle link is needed to benefit local secondary children, staff at the local hospital and that the link will provide a footpath for residents to the hub/interchange area around the hospital for bus services. The farmer/landowner has agreed that the project can progress with the upgrade of a footpath to a bridleway and the parish council has received the support of the borough council through inclusion in the Local Development Framework.

Essex County Council has provided the design work to carry out surfacing of the right of way and the parish council has secured funding through the county council, which allowed the project to go ahead during February and March 2011. This is a first-rate example

of all three authorities working together on an original initiative from the parish council.

Through the governors of local primary schools, the parish council has promoted cycle training and has three trained members of the community with the 'Bikeability' qualification.

In July 2010, Great Waltham Parish Council and the Great Waltham Community Network promoted a cycling day to encourage cycling because it is healthy and good for the environment. The event was held on a sunny Saturday starting at Great Waltham School. Chelmsford Borough Council sent along one of its 'Bike Doctors' and local bike repair company Spokes provided a fantastic service repairing a large number of bikes and getting them back into action ready for the summer holidays.



Digital inclusion & engagement

Honiton Town Council, Devon



Population: 11,822

Precept: £116,000

In recognition of the accessibility and immediacy of e-communication forms, Honiton Town Council ensures that all of its newsletters and information, such as agendas and minutes, are available on its website. The council believes that this encourages a broader range of access than has been possible previously. The town council's website has also been improved to provide the facility for polls and questionnaires to gain more accurate information about the needs of local people. A resident has also set up a page on a social networking site for the town, which the town council uses as part of its consultation processes.

The town council has also liaised with Age Concern and the local school to enable older people access to information and communications technology facilities, as well as providing training for older people.

Wokingham Without Parish Council, Berkshire

Population: 8,097

Precept: £114,000

Wokingham Without Parish Council has commenced a digital heritage project, working with local history groups, with the aim of capturing the history of the area and providing a permanent display.

Two volunteers are involved in capturing the living testimonies of local people who either worked or were patients at the former hospital (for tuberculosis patients) and recording them digitally. The parish council has been capturing testimonies on film. A large number of photographs and postcards have also been lent to the parish council and these have been scanned and stored electronically.

The council held a tea party for the interview subjects at the end of last summer to encourage further recollections and to allow them the opportunity to meet up after a great many years. A slide show of the

photographs and cards via a laptop and projector was also prepared, which the guests enjoyed greatly.

In addition to this project, the parish council has agreed to set up a Community Orchard at Pinewood, on the site of the old hospital orchard. Work has already begun on clearing the site of brambles, bracken and self-seeded saplings and it is hoped that the first new fruit trees will be planted soon. Although the parish council will pay the initial costs, it is expected that this will become self-funding.



Horwich Town Council, Greater Manchester

Population: 19,312

Precept: £96,192

Horwich Town Council has an acclaimed website offering free publicity and information on many local community and voluntary groups. The active promotion of its Horwich Live page where local voluntary, community, sporting, cultural and supporting organisations can advertise future events and on-going activity at no charge has been a great success.

The council is fortunate that, in addition to its local newspaper, the new website has also been promoted widely through other print forums: press releases about the website and the Horwich Live page have featured regularly. The council also promotes it, from time to time in its own quarterly newsletter, and from information points in the public hall and at the council's own community centre.

The website also contains a full list of all

organisations in the area that have registered with the council, and extensive promotion of this option takes place – so most organisations that serve Horwich Town are included.

Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Parish Council, Staffordshire



Population: 10,600

Precept: £58,400

Having secured a grant of £1,000 from one of its county councillors, Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Parish Council has purchased a computer and organised free training for residents, with the aim of providing a basic knowledge of a number of computer packages. This initiative has led to the development of a strong link with the local college and the council has been able to connect local people to a broader range of computing courses as a result.

This project is in line with the council's 'Green Policy' to review its actions and aim for more sustainable practice. This policy has also led to a change in a different kind of project, the Christmas Lights Competition. Instead of giving a cash prize as in the past, the council has now decided to give energy saving light bulbs or insulation to the same value.

Newick Parish Council, Sussex



Population: 2,343

Precept: £54,400

Since the start of the Newick Parish Council website in 2007, there have now been over 56,000 'visits' to the website at www.newick.net. The website provides a range of resources that the clerk and council update regularly, including information about the local community clubs and activities. This is in addition to all the information published by the parish council, including council minutes, planning applications and meeting agendas. The website also provides a forum for community members to debate potential issues affecting the Newick community, and hosts e-petitions and/or surveys, which have been a successful way of gathering community support on key issues.

The website also has the capability for parishioners to post their own information on it, thanks to carefully controlled registration. So far, over 100 community members have registered for this service.



Housing

Misterton Parish Council, Nottinghamshire

Population: 2,000

Precept: £48,800

Last year, Misterton Parish Council worked with a large housing developer to provide a site for six live/work units to try to encourage additional business opportunities in the area. This is a key aim within the council's parish plan: to maintain a vibrant, economic environment with thriving businesses, enough jobs, locally or within a reasonable travelling distance, and adequate training.

The council has also sold a small piece of access land to a housing association, to facilitate the building of five affordable dwellings, following publication of its Housing Needs Assessment, which demonstrated a need for more affordable housing in the community.

The houses were completed last year and are all occupied, providing much needed affordable housing in the area.



Wingham Parish Council, Kent



Population: 1,618



Precept: £36,706

The village has benefitted from two phases of the development of affordable housing in recent years.

In 1991, an affordable housing development of 18 dwellings was completed consisting of two and three bedroom houses and one and two bedroom flats.

By 2005, this was no longer sufficient to satisfy the need for affordable housing in the village, so the parish council worked with the Rural Housing trust to provide an additional development of 26 dwellings, comprising a mixture of houses and flats of differing sizes, at a relatively low cost.

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal officially opened the development.



EAST ELEVATION

Blakeney Parish Council, Norfolk



Population: 744



Precept: £23,000

In the Blakeney area the number of second homeowners impacts on local people. Around 50% of the village now consists of second homes and holiday homes, making affordable housing a top subject. Blakeney Parish Council's councillors and clerk have all completed the Power of Wellbeing training and hope that this will help them to provide some additional affordable housing for local people.

Many of the local people are in poorly-paid seasonal jobs, and many of the families live in Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Society properties, many of which are small cottages with no parking and small gardens. Local people are often left feeling pushed out of their own community, the one in which they were born and raised. Financially for housing purposes, they find themselves having to move away, and this has a knock-on effect on other village assets, such as

the primary school and the pre-school, both of which struggle to survive because with second homes and holiday homes there are no children to contribute to the long-term future of these facilities, or indeed the village.

The council is currently working in conjunction with North Norfolk District Council, Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Association and Norfolk Rural Community Council and others, to see if it is possible to develop some charity land, of which the parish council is trustee. This plot of land currently has two older cottages on it, and the council hopes to be able to add another one or two properties to this site, and is currently working in close co-operation with the district council to realise this project.

Have you been inspired by these good practice case studies?

If so, then you can continue being enthused by reading LCR magazine – the high-quality quarterly publication published by NALC.

Each issue of LCR features in-depth articles and features offering advice and good practice, along with regular spotlights on local councils and top tips information to assist you with the real issues affecting local councils and communities.

In the latest issue of LCR, we look at the importance of cross-local government tier working for local councils; highlight how one rural community has taken the bull by the horns in a bid to get decent broadband for its village; how local councils can go about employing the best people; the role local councils play in allotments; and how Eaton Bray Parish Council in Dunstable set about creating a skatepark for its youngsters. Plus, NALC's chief executive, John Findlay, explains what the organisation stands for and what it is doing on behalf of its member councils. And this is just in one issue.

Every week, LCR's website, LCR Online (www.lcronline.org.uk) brings you important news, features and events on the major issues affecting local communities via parish, town and community councils. We use good practice here to illustrate these points.

To encourage debate and feedback on all things to do with our tier of local government, the website also features videos of the interviews we have done with MPs such as Caroline Flint, Bob Neill and John Denham. Plus there are blogs and twitter pages.

LCR and LCR Online act as the perfect compliment to this latest Localism in Practice guide. Every councillor and officer in local councils should be getting their own copy.

For more information on subscribing to LCR, email: lcr@nalc.gov.uk.



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