

Manjeet Gill– West Lindsey – the Entrepreneurial Council

Manjeet outlined the background to the district. She indicated that it was very sparsely populated with reference to the more limited than the national roll out of broadband. Quickline commercial provider will introduce a 100% coverage to overcome this challenge.

1. Entrepreneurial Council
 2. Localism
 3. Social Investment and Social Enterprise
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1. Entrepreneurial Council – set up in preparation for the impact of the austerity agenda on local government. There was a common councilor and officer accord about a collaborative agenda to achieve what is best for all those concerned on a holistic basis. National response was a focus on structures – with an emphasis on social enterprises and mutuals. It was against this background that WLDC set out to develop as an entrepreneurial council. The approach to this was a cultural initiative. It was about moving from a mindset about solving a problem to maximizing the impact and value of the council's assets, addressing market failure and delivering social value. Key strands – modernizing the council approach to delivery (members paperless for example), multi-skilling and matrix working agenda also developed. This has enabled the council to avoid making people redundant and continue delivering services. Another key theme was a commercial approach to tackling problems. Empty homes in Gainsborough South West ward is a key example of a challenge which the council has addressed in partnership with Hill Holt Wood a social enterprise committed to making a financial return and bringing empty housing back to use. HCA has backed this as an innovative approach. This is a good example of the Council acting directly as an agent of change, in the face of housing market failure. In terms of broadband the Council had the opportunity to take an equity investment opportunity in Quickline, decided not to follow this approach, but to offer a company loan to the organization rather than a grant. This will ensure 100% broadband coverage in West Lindsey and a return to the ratepayer. Governance approaches need to keep pace with the council acting in a more commercial way. West Lindsey has also pursued a broader agenda in working with partners on a commercial and entrepreneurial basis., such as infrastructure organisations.
 2. Localism – Eric Pickles was encouraged to visit West Lindsey. The council thinks about localism in layers. Broadly defined as being: strategic at county level; Central Lincolnshire Joint Planning Authority is an example of this. West Lindsey has then identified 6 sub-areas which define its district components. This areas reflect the functioning economic geography of the district. At this level the issues are about understanding

the distinctive need of the communities (rather than a vanilla solution). Still lower level with area forums and groups representing localities at the neighbourhood level, here the challenge is to work with villages and communities of geographical interest. Priority neighbourhoods and towns were identified as part of this process. A focus on ex-MOD villages also arose from this agenda, key activities to tackle their decline became an important part of the work of the council. Key challenge in a number of these areas was the relationship with social landlords who were concentrating people with multiple needs in these areas. It is important to reflect that community development requires a significant time input to move forward with challenged communities – the example of the development of a lottery bid in Newtoft (ex-MoD settlement) was quoted as part of the presentation. A final focus at street level, this approach is just being rolled out – with an initial focus on neighbourhood watches – this requires community level support. **KEY MESSAGE OVERALL IS YOU NEED TO SEGMENT THE AREAS TO HAVE THE BIGGEST IMPACT WITH YOUR APPROACH.**

3. New localism approach – the Council has made a new and additional investment in community development and has increased its investment in the voluntary sector infrastructure. There is a benefit in increasing the voluntary sector infrastructure notwithstanding some of the challenges local authorities sometimes experience in working with them. Community Action Officers have targets for effective delivery and impact. A reflection in this overall context is that the distinction between statutory and discretionary services is a false distinction. Community Action Officers – two targets – generating funding for their neighbourhoods, increasing the amount of volunteering is the second target. Measuring the impact of the Community Action teams is important if the value is to be fully understood. Council has created a £1.2 million community asset fund based on generating the biggest possible leverage to sustain good ideas and community growth. This fund is delivered by CAN and the Plunket Foundation. A number of projects are in the pipeline including the Newtoft example referenced above. Second fund is a £250K Community Action fund, based on giving out small amounts but encouraging volunteering. Community Asset Fund has been reflected at a national level in terms of the Lottery “Power to Change” initiative. WLDC hope to plug directly into this trend.

Questions:

Levels of Localism and progress with the statutory roll out of powers: Parish Councils, Right to Challenge etc

WLDC is committed to working with Parish Councils and in some cases acting pro-actively to engage with key Parishes. Neighbourhood Plans, West Lindsey have 5-6 plans, Caistor is a large parish going through this process. West Lindsey also help link Parishes to share capacity and development at the peer to peer level. Right to Challenge – criteria has been developed, not a significant level of

interest at this stage. Some reservations about the practical challenges of making the agenda work in the way it is currently constituted.

Community Lincs comment about the long term process of working with communities to make things work effectively. Councils need to have the courage and the nerve to deliver outcomes for the long term. It takes a long time to realize outcomes.

Cllr Lewis Strange – much of the change achieved arises from Leadership. In West Lindsey the real impact has been to widen out the impact of the council away from just the principal settlement.

Cllr M Overton – Social enterprise mindset is a really useful and exciting way to think about the work of a Council. How has this been achieved within the current challenging political environment? Manjeet replied that working hard on the principles, building a consensus and having a long term vision are the key components of delivering the entrepreneurial council.

Peter Waltham – key challenge is to get Parish Councils to work in an entrepreneurial way – taking a calculated risk for the wider benefits of their communities. “The answer is Yes” what’s the problem? Is the best way forward.

Sara Scott – Portas Pilot in Market Rasen – one of the first 12 in England. The approach involves entrepreneurs working on the ground to make things happen in practice around the commercial life of the town.

Rode the wave of retailer frustration about the challenges facing Market Rasen – through a series of meetings which pulled a coherent agenda together for the development of the area. This evolved into the Portas Pilot bid ,which was submitted and ultimately successful. A number of key commitments based on: increasing shopper traffic and making the town more inviting.

Market Rasen had lost confidence in itself and the town was at a crossroads, literally and metaphorically about what to do about it.

Portas success twice – initial funding and then a High Street X-Fund – in total attracted in £250K in as a town team. This is a good result good for a town with 3,500 residents, with a wider hinterland around 30,000 people.

4 core promises:

Town Tidy Up, putting the “Market” back into “Market Rasen” Sustainable Shopping (community shops and trader training and support), Deliver the marketing assets needed to promote growth. The “Town Team” have stuck to these and this has helped the organization deliver its outcomes and mission.

Where necessary the organization has worked with the private sector to make things happen for example in terms of signage on private buildings.

Have focused on the development of a core market , events programme based on income generating events, significant commitment from towns people has been important in making things work. Two community shops have been developed, the most successful was a mini-farm shop – now sold onto private ownership. Training and Marketing have both been strong themes in the development of the town. Branded market goods and information linked to the Portas Pilot have been developed for Market Rasen and helped build awareness of its offer.

Some learning experiences in terms of the market town agenda in relation to things which haven't worked as well as things which have has been a positive feature of the pilot.

The status of the organization is as a Community Interest Company – West Lindsey DC has operated as the financially accountable body for the organization. The team has been very fleet of foot and has developed a “crack on – can do approach”. The town team has performed very effectively but is now almost exhausted. Some key legacies will arise which are sustainable others will fail to be sustainable in the long term.

The team are now actively pursuing more funding, there is no ideal model of what a challenged market town needs to do to pull itself out of its difficulties. There is a pioneering element to this work. Volunteering, succession planning and individual fatigue are all issues for the town team to sustain itself. No project management resource is the biggest challenge.

The group is on the cusp of a number of significant new ideas and approaches, but none of this is easy or straightforward. With hindsight would have perhaps been a little more choosy about projects but that said have been a pilot and this has involved taking a number of risks. Tourism, Trade and Technology are the key opportunity ideas for the future.

Settle representative – issues in relation to signage interested to know where the main challenge is likely to come from in terms of signage – highways and planning problems. Hard for commercial operators to find their way through the maze of regulatory approaches. Volunteering and enthusiasm is a real challenge in sustaining these initiatives more substantially.

Community Council Question – has MR BIG been able to drive wider community commitment and engagement in the area.? Yes but there is still work to do to establish a sense of community value and enthusiasm in the town. Non supporters are often the biggest challenge in the town. It's a persistent struggle to maintain the level of people's engagement.

Cllr Strange – Entrepreneurial agenda is an important joint team in terms of what MR BIG has achieved. What impact has TESCO has in the town? How has the impact of this on the town centre been tackled? - Sara - choice, independent retailers, social experiences can all be on offer in the High Street but only if people work hard on delivering that type of offer. There is more work to do in Market Rasen on this basis.

Ivan Annibal – why are some settlements more dynamic than others? – some of it is down to individuals and culture. Town Councils see development as a threat. One of the issues is the way communities have developed, bringing traditional and new communities together can cause tension. Its hard to get people to relate to the community itself. This is often seen in the lack of support given to community groups and initiatives. Cllr Overton people and leadership is at the nub of these problems. It is important for example for local authorities to take some responsibility themselves for making things happen. It often takes a long time for organisations to come round to engaging with things but positive engagement can be achieved on this basis.

Judy Bell – Wolds agenda around LEADER, sparseness is a key factor on the sustainability of communities. Marketing and external appreciation is important.

Jonathan Platt – Head of Libraries and Heritage

Lincolnshire Libraries

Lincolnshire CC needed to save £125m rising to £146m and potentially more in the longer term. £2 million to save from the front line library services. This led to the library needs assessment. This approach assessed the library services and costs. It also involved some pilot work in key settlements. Saxilby and Waddington libraries helped shape what was approached. The original plan was developed in 2013 via public consultation on proposals from January 2014 to implement a new approach. Now challenged in the courts through a successful judicial review.

3 components to the statutory services, universal services, core libraries and targeted provision.

Universal provision – a computerized library catalogue of what is available to the general public, also e and downloadable devices. Reference material is also available on line – e-magazines and e-audio is also available.

Core libraries – 10 at the heart of the offer. These open 40 hours a week, fully staffed – chosen according to usage Index of Multiple Deprivation and built up areas. Real challenge is those areas that you cant reach by public transport within 30 minutes.

Targeted provision 83,531 outside catchments – signposting to Call Connect, Home Library Service and innovative partnership with the COOP Pharmacy service.

County Council wanted to additionally support community hubs – large mobile library service, non statutory services - 550 households chosen as the benchmark for where libraries would be supported. Large vehicles containing about 4000 books are part of the response.

187 stops withdrawn from 6 May this year. The council also support libraries in prisons and music groups on a fee basis

Can support community hubs – prepared to help develop and sustain the facility. 21 of the 30 remaining libraries which could close are in council buildings.

4 Library Development Officers working in communities to support the development of the transition of the library to the community, up to 31.3.2015.

Expressions of interest have been invited. These led to a significant number of expressions of interest in running a library – more than there are libraries.

Pilot outcomes from Saxilby and Waddington – both showed positive outcomes linked to changing (more advice less issue of book/items) approaches.

Judicial Review – caught out by the localism act – Greenwich Leisure Limited proposal – should have been investigated more fully according to the judgement. It is suggested that the Council could have responded more deeply to this proposal.

Community Council Question – is it easy to pin down differences in the age groups – making use of libraries? At a service level this is available most robustly – younger and eldest user profile emerges. 135,000 active borrowers out of 750,000. 40% of population in total may be involved in libraries in one way or another.

Saxilby perspective – the Parish Council has been entrepreneurial in responding to the challenges and opportunities of keeping the library over. They pro-actively asked to Council to engage with them in terms of this approach. An initial lag/drop off by service users, but over time people have got used to the new service. The role of the library development officers has been a very important aspect of the process. Dependence on volunteers has been a key aspect of the development of the service. Not a simple solution which has been offered but an important one. Most of the experience has been positive but there have been some ongoing challenges. The transition from pure libraries to community hubs is a different offer. First adopter advantages have accrued to Saxilby as a pilot.

In the context of the judicial review will there be any change to the current proposed model going forward? There is a political dimension to this ,which is something which is outwith the scope of a detailed presentation.

Localism discussion – what does consultation really mean? It is a challenge to make this happen effectively in the context of localism.

Welfare benefits and computer access in libraries. – has it come as a directive in terms of a statutory add on? No this hasn't been required in terms of the issues. Co-production as a key approach to engaging and consulting with individuals is a good way of tackling some of the consultation challenges places face.

It could be advanced that the library service evolving and developing in positive ways in the light of the current austerity agenda.

Marianne Overton – National Vice Chair of the LGA – The Current LGA stance on local authority powers and its implications for localism

The new Local Government offer – Marianne outlined the LGA role as an organization and explained she is the national independent councillor representative.

Local Government has a high trust basis it has set out a bold new agenda for the future

LGA proposal – re-wiring local government - financial independence and statutory power. More democratic services under one roof at the local level

The Future Investment for Local Government:

Schools and Jobs for All
Homes for All
Health – stronger links with social care
Fairer Share of Prosperity

This approach recognises the need to re-engage local government as part of the bigger localism agenda.

Freeing up of the Housing Revenue Account is a good example of decentralization as a positive force.