

Rural Services Network: Rural Economies: taking a lead on community regeneration and social value – Swindon 20 October 2016 – Discussion Notes

Supporting communities to become more enterprising – key reflections from Village SOS

C.Cowcher@acre.org.uk

- The essence of the programme has been about providing confidence and support in *place* to enable communities to do more stuff on their own account.
- Investment in *peer networking and learning* in Scotland and Wales is more advanced and distinctive than in England.
- *Infrastructure* in community and rural development has been hollowed out – what has filled the gap?
- The role of *volunteering* in rural areas – a significant amount of this happens informally and is not captured meaning we don't sometimes the recognising skills and expertise that benefit a rural community from "within". Harnessing this can be very powerful.
- VSOS UK perspective has demonstrated that there is more scope for sharing learning and practice across the *UK*.
- '*Idea to plan*' is not well resourced but intervention at the stage that people want something without having a solution is really important (it helps acceleration of good ideas, helps with sustainability and reducing failure).
- Communities should be driven by their idea, not a funding stream.
- People in rural areas have massive amounts of knowledge and skills and are happy to make that available – but you need to do something to stimulate it.
- Communities often get involved when there is an external threat or have a good community leader.
- Getting inspiration and learning from another community helps the community in question think about what they can achieve in their area.
- A legacy of the programme is 242 Village SOS mentors who are happy to share their skills across the UK.

The role of local food in community regeneration

Rob.Poole@CornwallRCC.org.uk

- The international operation of the global food change provides massive scope for local action to generate positive locally owned economic and health outcomes.
- Communities with deprivation are not the places where local food activities are happening at present and this in many senses represents a lost opportunity.
- The role of Local Authorities in helping communities to grow food in a local area is very powerful where they can act as a facilitator (secure space, usable ground, etc).

- There are significant health benefits to be generated through growing local food (obesity) and cost savings – social prescribing is also powerful in harnessing the therapeutic aspects of local growing.
- There are a number of different ways of conceptualising local growing schemes from Farmers Markets to Food Assembly initiatives – each has a distinctive contribution to make – see presentation
- All local food initiatives can be harnessed to deliver a distinctive and meaningful contribution to the economic development particularly of smaller and market towns.

Social value

Ivan.Annibal@roseregeneration.co.uk

- The Social Value Act 2012 has made it very clear that considering the wider impact of public policy particularly in terms of procurement is a social necessity as well as desirable.
- There are number of ways this can be addressed based on being clear about what you want to measure and building it into grant programmes, funding bids etc.
- It is important before jumping into social value analysis you have a sound theory of change – based on asking: why are we doing this project? How can we measure the change we want to see?
- SROI is as powerful when it is used for forecasting as when it is used for evaluation.
- SROI is powerful when it is used to target the level of grant you award as a local body – it enables you to make relative judgements about the value to the community of an organisation doing a project in their area.
- When used consistently it is really useful in identifying trends and information over time so you can see the impact and outcomes you are generating from a programme rather than just a project perspective.

LEADER

Gareth@rnuk.co.uk

- Where it works well is an approach not a programme to make a difference in a locality. The key distinction is the involvement of the community in owning the Local Development Strategy and implementing through a Local Action Group.
- The application and claims process can be very onerous. It is particularly challenging in terms of an applicant proving they need the money and have the resources to cash flow the activity in the first place.
- There are challenges in terms of the ability of small/micro farmers to invest? How can LEADER focus more on micro businesses and giving small grants of less than £5,000? Unless a small grants approach is built into the programme at this level the paperwork and regulations cost more than the value of the grant.

- Under the current programme the approach has meant that LEADER feels more like a national business grant programme with a Local Action Group.
- Notwithstanding the loss of local expression and discretion businesses are benefitting from this round of LEADER – demonstrating growth.
- There is also an argument that these small scale interventions are sustainable. If you create 100 jobs in 100 individual LEADER projects your investment is more resilient as you spread your bets.
- The importance of animation in bringing forward high quality projects is crucial although the resources for this sort of pro-active work are now very limited.
- Providing loans to small businesses could be one innovative way of managing LEADER applicant cash flow problems. At present there is no clear means of doing this.
- There is currently no clarity (pre 23 November when the autumn statement is expected – and possibly post that) about the short term future of LEADER.
- There is no clarity in terms of Brexit overall about what will replace key aspects of the current EU based rural funding landscape.