

# **The heart of the Sussex rural community**

*Rural voluntary and community sector infrastructure development plans for East Sussex and West Sussex*

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## 1. Introduction

During the spring and early summer of 2004 Action in rural Sussex has been working in partnership with other voluntary and community sector organisations to develop investment plans for the infrastructure that supports these organisations. An initial framework, entitled **'The heart of the Sussex community'** was completed in July with the intention of informing investment decisions by the Government Office of the South East.

The exercise was commissioned by DEFRA/GOSE in April 2004. However at the beginning of July, two weeks before the deadline for completion, the Home Office issued its strategy for developing voluntary and community sector infrastructure: ChangeUp. Detailed criteria for government investment under this strategy were not published at the same time so this framework identifies priorities for development rather than detailed implementation plans that can fit with this national strategy.

This document identifies the specifically rural elements of the framework. In particular it pulls out those initiatives that can stand alone for investment by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from their rural voluntary and community sector infrastructure 'main spend' monies.

The term 'support infrastructure' is used here to include the wide range of advice, development, assistance, advocacy and training that is needed to ensure a lively and responsive local voluntary and community sector. It includes Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux, Action in rural Sussex, Age Concern, Development Trusts and a wide range of other voluntary organisations that provide support to other organisations.

Throughout this document the term 'users' is being applied to voluntary organisations that make use of, or benefit from, the providers of support services. Individuals who are the end beneficiaries of voluntary organisations' activities will be referred to as 'beneficiaries'.

Action in rural Sussex would like to record our appreciation for the many people from local village voluntary and community organisations who attended consultation meetings all across Sussex during May 2004. Their perspectives and comments have been a major contribution to this framework and especially the rural elements of it.

## 2. Critical success factors

There are four factors that are critical to the success of this framework. These relate to key stakeholders and their commitment to what is proposed:

### 1. Users of support services

The first strand places the organisations that use, and should benefit from, the services of voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations at the centre of the strategy. This user focus should run through all aspects and all investment in infrastructure organisations, it implies that the needs of the user organisations, and potential user organisations, will always come first. This needs to be a key driver when implementing the partnership approach.

### 2. Partnerships of support service providers

The second strand is partnership and co-operation between specialist and generalist VCS infrastructure organisations and between urban and rural ones. This takes the form of agreed priorities and objectives for partnerships/ consortia of infrastructure organisations in each of East Sussex and West Sussex.

### 3. Investors in support services

The third strand is investment to sustain support services to voluntary and community organisations. This also encompasses the relationships and commitments that must be built, re-built or communicated more widely for this investment to be sustained. The implication is that services needed in the long term cannot solely be the subject of short term investment, whilst developmental initiatives can and should.

### 4. The support services

The fourth strand is the services themselves; their objectives, specification, delivery and long term sustainability. Key to this part of the strategy is achieving the right balance between local knowledge and accessibility on the one hand and quality of specialist and technical content on the other. It must also allow for infrastructure support to adapt, develop and, where users needs are no longer being met, disappear.

### 3. Context

The population in East Sussex currently stands at 503,000 and in West Sussex, the population is higher at 764,500.

The net migration year by year is around 5000 into East Sussex and by 2011, it is estimated that the population of East Sussex will grow to 532,155. The population densities are higher in the Eastbourne area with 20 people per hectare, followed by Uckfield. The lowest population densities in East Sussex centre in the North East in rural Rother. The county has generally an older population than the national average, which translates into a high proportion of single pensioner households. 2.3% of the population are from non-white backgrounds and are mainly concentrated in the Wealden district.

East Sussex also has a significant level of deprivation. East Sussex ranks as the 11th most deprived of the 34 shire counties in England, and is the most deprived county within the South East. Over 55,000 people living in East Sussex are dependent on benefits, which is just over 1 in 10 people in the county.

Rural deprivation in East Sussex is predominantly confined to several wards in Rother and Wealden. Deprivation in these areas are defined by a number of characteristics such as poor local transport and continued reliance on a declining agricultural sector.

In West Sussex, it is estimated that the population will grow to 787,300 by 2011. The highest population densities are in Worthing and Crawley, with 30 and 22.2 people per hectare, respectively. The most highly populated areas are the Arun and Mid Sussex districts.

In West Sussex, 24% of the population are of pensionable age. Ethnic minority groups form 2% of the total population.

#### 3.1. Evidence base

Within the South East much of the information and research into the support needs and wants of voluntary and community organisations has tended to come from the very organisations that currently provide this support. This is a genuine source of information as many of these organisations canvas their members on a regular basis to assess whether the services they provide are meeting needs. Within Sussex three exercises have been carried out during the early part of 2003/4 to supplement this ongoing source of information:

- A partnership business planning exercise amongst infrastructure organisations in West Sussex. This has mainly involved provider organisations rather than users of infrastructure services.
- A consultancy exercise in Rother District that has engaged a very wide range of user organisation in a postal survey as well as a participatory discussion with key organisations. This was commissioned by RAISE/GOSE at the instigation of the local CsVS as a result of perceptions that current support provision is fragmented.
- A series of nine evening consultation events with rural voluntary and community organisations carried out during May 2004. This has been explicitly carried out as part of the pre-development phase of DEFRA's rural VCS infrastructure consortia. Copies of meeting notes and summaries of these exercises are available at [www.ruralsussex.org.uk](http://www.ruralsussex.org.uk). They provide a backdrop to the proposals that follow.

In addition RAISE has carried out a regional mapping exercise of current infrastructure organisations in order to identify their understanding of the quality and integration of current

services from a provider perspective. It is anticipated that this will help inform, from a provider perspective, those investment decisions that will be taken at a regional level.

### **3.2. Current pattern of infrastructure support for voluntary and community organisations**

The current pattern of support organisations for the voluntary and community sector in Sussex is complex and dynamic.

At the most local village and neighbourhood level physical facilities are often provided by Village Halls and local Community Associations. In rural areas Parish Councils are often also important at this very local level in giving both leadership and financial support to local organisations.

In the recent past many small towns have had a volunteer bureau that has been able to direct volunteers towards organisations that have needed to recruit new volunteers. These organisations have also been able to help voluntary organisations in their approach to supporting volunteers and retaining them. In the last year or two many of these very local volunteer bureau have found it increasingly hard to maintain sufficient funding for their operations and in some areas are actively looking at merging and strategically reviewing the nature of their operations. In some rural parts of Sussex this volunteers development role has been carried out for many years by Action in rural Sussex in close liaison with networks of local organisations

Most Districts and Boroughs have Councils for Voluntary Service that provide a range of representative, advisory and developmental functions for the Voluntary and Community sector in their area. The range of services provided tends to be directly proportional to the statutory funding that they have been able to access and the degree of priority afforded to the area they operate in by government investment schemes. Some Districts have Councils for Voluntary Service at a sub-District level, but this is become more rare in Sussex.

West Sussex has for some ten years had a county level of infrastructure in the West Sussex Voluntary Organisations Liaison Group that has mainly operated in the field of health and social care and project development related to these. East Sussex's Voluntary and Community organisations have been in the process of developing a county co-ordinating voice, especially to improve communications with the County Council and the County Strategic Partnership. This group, VOICES, is hosted by Action in rural Sussex.

Action in rural Sussex is the Rural Community Council for East Sussex and West Sussex and provides a range of specialist support services for rural communities. It also focuses on holistic support for rural communities beyond voluntary and community organisation support and to this end is engaged in supporting housing initiatives, economic projects and support of Local Councils.

As part of the South East region voluntary organisations can also link into RAISE. This gives organisations access to influence on regional public policy and the electoral colleges in the South East England Regional Assembly.

There are a number of regional specialist network. For rural organisations membership of Action in rural Sussex also brings with it associate membership of the South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC).

## 4. Rural users of support services

### 4.1. Needs identified by user organisations serving urban and rural areas

The single most frequent comments from user organisations in the consultations has concerned the multiplicity of support organisations and their services. This has been coupled with limited clarity about what support services are available and from whom. Long term, well communicated, services are reasonably well understood but they are in the minority. The length of time that a support service has been available appears to be key. Examples given have been CVS with a long track record of providing an informative generic newsletter and services such as the Village Halls advice service. In these cases the support that is available is better understood and appreciated.

Support services from Local Authorities have been mentioned frequently, but the feedback has been very variable. In discussion with user groups it has become clear that considerable amounts of direct, professional, help have been obtained from Local Authorities direct to voluntary organisations, but only if the person seeking the help is knowledgeable and able to make use of high level networks amongst Officers or Members.

Amongst the service providing organisations that serve combined urban and rural areas a number of threads have emerged from the consultations. The key ones have been a perception that infrastructure organisations can be distant from the specific concerns of local user organisations. There is a clear frustration that the real operational issues, ones that are having a day to day impact on service providing organisations, are not always at the heart of the infrastructure bodies' work. The specific examples that have arisen have been:

- Short term funding on a project basis goes unchallenged despite the service that is being provided being of a long term and essential nature. This is particularly the case for statutory provision that is in areas of service that fall on the dividing line between social and health care.
- Service agreements that are cash limited despite growth in number of beneficiaries. The role that infrastructure bodies could play as the voice of voluntary and community organisations is not perceived to be very strong and the Compact process does not seem always to be well regarded by service delivery organisations.
- The VCS infrastructure jargon, inspired both by government and the organisations themselves, is impenetrable to most people either volunteering for, or working in, user organisations.
- In some cases user organisations do not see a clear distinction between the VCS infrastructure organisations and public bodies, this is especially true of regional organisations. There have been many occasions in the consultations when the names RAISE, GOSE and SEEDA have been used interchangeably by participants.

Some of the infrastructure organisations themselves have a different perspective. They see local voluntary organisations being squeezed by reducing access to funding, either grant or service contract, and as a consequence tending to withdraw into themselves and away from sources of help. Initiatives that might enhance the capacity to deliver services are therefore not taken up, these include quality initiatives, ICT support and training.

### 4.2. The perspective of local rural voluntary organisations

There is a set of linked and compelling messages that have dominated all the consultations with rural voluntary and community organisations. These can be summarised as follows:

People active in their own community see themselves as responsible citizens, often 'put upon' by the public services, doing what is needed for the community through a wide variety of formal and informal organisations. They do not see themselves as 'volunteers', neither do they see themselves as intrinsically linked to a single voluntary organisation. It may be a very specific characteristic of rural villages, but they also see very little, if any, distinction between their roles in charitable organisations and similar, responsible, roles as school governors or parish councillors.

There is a clear distinction between voluntary activity that is primarily 'fun', but with a social benefit at its heart, and the long term taking of responsibility within the community. This has arisen spontaneously in almost every consultation with rural VCOs. The latter is seen to be under the greatest threat due to a number of factors. These include:

- legislative pressures
- perceived risk of litigation
- conflicting priorities within rural communities leading to tension between active citizens and those primarily concerned with their property values and lifestyles
- pressures linked to the cost of housing in the area
- a desire to drop responsibilities and gain 'lifestyle flexibility' on the part of those retiring from full time employment.

In some consultations the concerns on this were so strong as to amount to an immediate and severe risk to some of society's most basic assumptions about how local communities and community leadership work. This strength of emphasis was especially true in relation to major capital investment in facilities that were providing a local public service and in relation to support for young people's activities and organisations.

Linked to the last point was a further common thread. Well meaning initiatives, especially those involving capital investment in essential community facilities, have become overwhelmed by central control and bureaucracy. This has left local active citizens disillusioned, de-motivated and reluctant to engage

When asked to score key issues, the rural voluntary organisations who attended consultation events for this framework identified four priorities; finding funds and small grants, finding and keeping volunteers, getting views across to statutory organisations and the provision of information, training and good practise advice.

## **5. Structure and function of infrastructure services in rural areas**

### **5.1. The infrastructure services**

There have been many attempts to define the support services that a wide variety of infrastructure organisations provide to the voluntary and community sector. For the purposes of this framework some simple definitions will be used that relate to the outcomes, or impacts, that Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) need to achieve. These are set out in section 5.3.

Voluntary and community organisations differ dramatically in the nature of what they do, in the operations and resources for which their Trustees carry responsibility and the geographic level at which they operate. There is a danger either of over-simplification or unnecessary complication, the approach set out below seeks to guard against both.

Earlier in this framework the concept was introduced of a base level of infrastructure support to voluntary organisations. This, too, will be teased out in the analysis below.

### **5.2. Patterns of community life in Sussex**

In Sussex the focus of community life is often on the large villages and small towns that dominate the social geography of the area. Many Districts Councils, even thirty years after their creation, need to handle with great sensitivity the different community histories of their areas. The same is true, but perhaps even more so, for the Voluntary and Community Sector. VCS organisations are often the embodiment of people's sense of community and have remained associated with original 'natural communities' rather than administrative areas. In matching infrastructure service provision to structures that can provide it, a flexible approach that will accommodate local culture is essential

The remainder of this section sets out in a table the relationship between the outcomes needed from infrastructure support services and the geographic level of operation needed to juggle efficiency and subsidiarity. From this a draft outline of the base level of infrastructure services required at each geographical level is set out along with specific initiatives that may be needed for each part of both East Sussex and West Sussex. At this stage the framework has not sought to encompass sub-regional, regional or national levels of support service provision. This will be needed, especially, where smaller local support organisations themselves need back up and assistance and some pointers towards these elements of the framework appear in later sections.

## 5.3. Impacts and outcomes related to area of operation

Outcome/impact needed on the voluntary and community sector	What level of operation is needed to achieve the impact?	At what geographic level is the service best located?
<b>I1 A strong voice</b> Ensuring the voice of VCOs is heard	Must align easily to the management structure of the public sector audience concerned ie Parish Council, County Council, District Council, LSP, LSC, SEEDA etc...	Accountable representation at Region, County and District. Not <b>essential</b> that legal structures operate at these level, collaborative agreements between LIOs will be needed if they do not.
<b>I2 Effective and efficient</b> Ensuring that technical information and training is available to VCOs and their Trustees	Must be able to attract sufficient economies of scale to maintain high level of expertise	No specific level, to be guided by the market.
<b>I3 Responsive to community need</b> Project development designed to meet newly emerging needs and find VCS solutions to community issues	Must be provided by LIOs with expertise in the topic concerned but also by those who can access wider partners support through appropriate partnerships and LSPs and identify community needs that are best met through VCS delivery.	Will need to align with County and District Local Strategic Partnerships.
<b>I4 Well informed</b> Responsive signposting, regular contact and provision of easily accessible information	Must be easily accessible to all and recognise the relatively slow take up of internet and helpline service by small and start-up organisations	A flexible pattern of provision would seem to be required. Component parts will be a physical centre bringing together all services in towns and urban areas, regular 'healthcheck contact' for more isolated organisations and locally topical newsletters drawing on County and Regional information.  Substantial scope for collaboration to get best use of available resources.
<b>I5 A base from which to operate</b> Physical facilities from which local organisations can operate or provide services	Must be local to the beneficiaries being served at village/neighbourhood level	All communities from the smallest to the largest will require this to be legally rooted in their community if it is to be sustained in the long term. This very local level of infrastructure will need 2 <sup>nd</sup> tier infrastructure services to support it.
<b>I6 Support with motivated Trustees and volunteers</b> Continuity from one generation of volunteers to the next	Must acknowledge significant differences in volunteering and active citizenship between rural and urban areas. Activity must also be at a level that can address the general public as well as voluntary organisations	Very local, appropriate to settlement pattern, for encouraging and supporting volunteers.  County or sub-regional or liaison with media, major employers.
<b>I7 Start-up and ongoing finance</b> Help to get new initiatives started and progression routes into other funding and advice for development	Must have scale of operation appropriate to the amounts of money involved, the level of risk and probity required and the economies of scale required to develop new income streams.	Advice on funding sources must be very local as part of I2 and I4. Operation and developments of new funds for the sector will need County, sub-regional or regional level of operation.

#### **5.4. Village / Neighbourhood infrastructure**

##### **Essential**

Community building, owned and operated by the local community on a not for profit, social enterprise basis. In most villages this will be Village or Parish Hall. In many urban neighbourhoods it is more likely to be a Community Association running a Community Centre. In very small communities there will be a very strong emphasis on making maximum shared use of a single multi-purpose building.

Outdoor recreation and play space to the standard currently recommended by the Playing Fields Association.

A young people's facility where this cannot be accommodated as part of a wider community building.

Neighbourhood or village action plan group taking ownership of the local version of a Community Strategy and linked into the one(s) prepared for the County/District or Unitary area.

In parished areas a Parish Council that is either operating at or working towards Quality Council status.

##### **Desirable**

Community or neighbourhood development worker where there is a concentration of people at risk of isolation or exclusion.

#### **5.5. Small Town / sub-District infrastructure and support services**

##### **Essential**

Neighbourhoods served with the appropriate elements of physical infrastructure set out above.

A community office / advice point through which the widest range of information and signposting can be provided on as informal a basis as possible. This may also provide inexpensive access to copying, internet and other services. Voluntary organisations resource library and materials.

A town partnership / development trust or town based agency to promote and co-ordinate local voluntary activity. This may or may not employ staff and run projects that meet local town needs. The Town or Parish Council would in most cases be a key partner assisting with funding for a basic level of operation.

**Required, but flexible about level of operation**

Community or neighbourhood development worker where there are concentrations of people at risk of isolation or exclusion.

Project and service development aligned to LSP priorities. Co-ordinated with District VCS representative forum where this exists.

Generic non-accredited training provision.

**Specific developments to work towards the above 'template'**

East Sussex:

Rye CVS and Rye Partnership to initiate a process of collaboration with a view to developing close delivery arrangements for sub District activities

Bexhill infrastructure organisations to develop together towards Bexhill Development Agency.

Battle Town Partnership / CVS initiate a process of collaboration with a view to developing close delivery arrangements for sub District activities

Wider remit and funding to be developed with Town Partnerships in Robertsbridge, Wadhurst, Uckfield, Crowborough, Hailsham, Polegate, Seaford and Lewes.

Close working to be sought between range of Newhaven organisations with a view to maximising use of resources.

West Sussex:

Close working to be sought between sub-district CVS and Town Partnerships in East Grinstead and South Mid-Sussex

Wider remit and funding to be developed with Town Partnerships in Midhurst, Petworth, Arundel, Billingshurst, Storrington, Henfield, Steyning and Pulborough

**5.6. District/Borough infrastructure and support services****Essential**

Representative forum or network creating a strong voice for the VCS both in the District and through the District/Borough LSP.

District level Compact with LSP statutory partners

District focused information service drawing on County and Regional information co-ordinated at those levels.

**Required, but flexible about level of operation in multi-centred Districts**

District wide project and development service aligned to LSP priorities. Co-ordinated with sub district development agencies where the focus is on these.

Assistance for new groups start up and funding advice.

Generic non-accredited training provision.

**Specific developments**

East Sussex:

Rother: Development of Rother Community Links into a Rother Council of Voluntary Service the staffing for which is integrated with sub-District development agencies.

Wealden and Lewes: consolidation of Community Networks as a base level part of Southdown CVS and WFVO services that actively draw in sub-District partnerships and development agencies.

West Sussex:

Mid-Sussex: Development of a Mid-Sussex Council of Voluntary Service the staffing for which is integrated with sub-District development agencies.

**5.7. County infrastructure and support services****Essential**

Representative forum or network creating a strong voice for the VCS in the County, especially with Social Services and Education, and through the Strategic Partnership.

County level Compact with LSP statutory partners

Preparation and dissemination of content on County issues for local information services. This should include County based specialist infrastructure organisations.

**Required, but flexible about level of operation**

Specialist project and service development capacity to assist in meeting development needs, especially those identified as priorities by the Strategic Partnerships.

Support for joint working across all infrastructure organisations.

**Specific developments**

East Sussex:

Consolidation of VOICES to meet the essential requirements of base level infrastructure. To be served, and staffing integrated with, other infrastructure organisations.

Creation of a specialist infrastructure forum, linked to VOICES, to ensure maximum effectiveness of specialist county support services.

West Sussex:

Review of the Voluntary Organisations Liaison Group's (VOLG) Business Plan and core mission to ensure that it can deliver the essential requirement of base level infrastructure at County level.

Creation of a specialist infrastructure forum, linked to VOLG, to ensure maximum effectiveness of specialist county support services.

**5.8. Pan-Sussex or sub-regional infrastructure and support services**

A later section looks specifically at those support services that may best meet the needs of voluntary and community organisations through operation at a greater than county level.

## 6. West Sussex and East Sussex rural action plans

### 6.1. Rural Priorities

A number of priorities have emerged from the consultation discussions with user organisations and from the county infrastructure partnerships. The main ones are:

#### **Village community facilities**

There exists a substantial gap between available capital investment and the capital requirements of rural villages if a modern community facility is to be provided to local residents. An integrated approach to physical facilities and service provision has been demonstrated to be successful and this approach would seem to meet the needs of rural communities where services are hard to access. This element of the framework will be to develop an exemplar scheme to demonstrate integrated provision of outreach services coupled with development of physical infrastructure through which services can be provided at a village level.

Services provided by voluntary and community organisations at a village level do not only need facilities but they also need the active involvement of local people. Key activists tend to be engaged in multiple organisations and can be central to recruiting the next generation of active citizens. The initiative will assist in connecting together current activity with 'new' voluntary activity, drawing in new active citizens and generational links, helping Parish Councils to develop strategies to engage with local voluntary organisations.

A scheme to address this priority needs to be closely integrated with a number of other initiatives set out in the County Action Plans and the proposals for pan-Sussex initiatives. Further discussion over the integration of these initiative will be sought.

A draft project specification for the developmental phase of this scheme is appended as Appendix 1.

#### **Support for rural young people's voluntary organisations**

Development of a support infrastructure to enable village communities to support voluntary sector provision for young people. This is a priority need due to the increasing reluctance and nervousness amongst the adult population to engage in provision of this sort. Any scheme to address this priority will need further detailed discussion with existing specialist statutory and voluntary sector support service providers.

Action in rural Sussex has been very active in this field for a number of years and will draft a scheme specification and work with Connexions, the Councils for Voluntary Youth Services and the local authorities. The rural action plan contains an indicative allocation for development work in this area.

#### **Integration between AirS, District CsVS and Town Partnerships**

The County Action Plans set out important initiatives that need to be developed by the generic infrastructure partnerships in each County. Some of these may be susceptible to gaining greater economies of scale by working across both Counties but this will take more time and collaboration across urban and rural areas.

It has become clear in the drafting of the framework that many of the centres of urban population have brought together a range of infrastructure services under one roof. However it has also become clear that this is less straightforward in rural areas and this is reflected in Recommendation 1.

A specific part of the action plan is therefore designed to help the specialist support for rural communities provided by Action in rural Sussex to be more closely integrated not only with

the District based CsVS but also with the town and sub-District based partnerships that have developed through the DEFRA/Countryside Agency/SEEDA market towns initiatives.

Up to now this has been a significant part of the work of Action in rural Sussex but not one in which CsVS have always been engaged. These Town Partnerships now exist in almost every rural town in Sussex and have considerable potential to act as a very locally accountable and dynamic catalyst for local community initiatives. However, they have considerable development needs in their own right if they are to live up to their early promise. The challenge for AirS and the Councils for Voluntary Service is:

- to provide them with generic support as local voluntary groups,
- direct highly specialist support services to them when they are tackling complex issues such as local housing, transport or economic issues
- but also encourage them to blossom as the voice of local community activity.

The proposals set out in the rural Action Plan aim to achieve this through a partnership approach with the more rural CsVS.

## 6.2. Rural Action Plans

Strategic Objective	Action	By whom	Resources	Timing
<b>1.To sustain local physical facilities and voluntary services in remote village</b>	<p>Bring together a consortium of villages where access to services is poor (as measured by the appropriate IMD domain) and local physical facilities need improvement.</p> <p>Prepare investment proposals with the consortium and with service providing organisations that could use local facilities for service provision.</p> <p>Research and target investment proposals to appropriate public and charitable sector sources.</p> <p>Put in place enhanced support for local volunteers alongside development of physical and outreach service provision.</p> <p>Research social enterprise options for assisting local communities to exploit the approximately £500m in community held assets tied up in Sussex rural community buildings in order to create more sustainable local service provision.</p> <p>Explore with the Associations of Local Councils enhanced roles that could be played by Local Councils in support of local facilities and service provision.</p>	AirS, contracting where appropriate with other members of the rural consortia	£40k West Sussex £40k East Sussex	18months from Autumn 2004
<b>2. To support people volunteering in rural young people's organisations</b>	<p><b>Initial phase only set out here.</b></p> <p>Bring together the specific statutory and voluntary organisations concerned with supporting activity for young people in rural villages.</p> <p>Research the specific issues that are</p>	AirS, CVYS, Connexions	£20k across East Sussex and West Sussex	18 months from Autumn 2004

	<p>creating blocks to people volunteering for village level young people's organisations.</p> <p>Identify through existing work with young people their perspectives in relation to adult support for young people's initiatives.</p> <p>Bring forward potentially sustainable initiatives to tackle the detailed issues that have been identified.</p>			
<p><b>3. To integrate support for local initiatives through AirS, District CVS and Town Partnerships</b></p>	<p>Commission work from selected Town Partnerships and local Councils for Voluntary Service to identify common aims and activities between the two and scope for greater integration.</p> <p>Provide specific 'change management' consultancy support where functions or projects can be delivered more effectively at a different geographical level of operation.</p> <p>Research options for a 'model' allocation of responsibilities between local town, District and pan-Sussex levels of infrastructure support to local community organisations.</p> <p>Develop an update to the AirS Partnership Development Toolkit for small rural town partnerships. Explicitly add to the Toolkit guidance on linking local town action plans with Local Strategic Partnerships as set out in Countryside Agency 'Bridges' project.</p>	Rural infrastructure consortium	£30k	From Autumn 2004

## **7. Appendix 1 - Village Community facilities and services**

### **7.1. Introduction and history**

In 1998 Action in rural Sussex initiated a unique programme under the Rural Development Commission's (now Countryside Agency) Rural Challenge programme. It concentrated on a small number of communities in the East Sussex Rural Priority Area. Over four years this programme targeted communities with a programme of capital funding for community facilities linked to support for innovative outreach service delivery from a range of service providing voluntary organisations. In addition there was an underpinning community capacity building programme, support for local community transport initiatives and a project designed to draw young people into community life. The project received £1m of central government funding and achieved a total leverage of over 1:2.5 over its life.

At the conclusion of the project the evaluation identified that a major step change in the provision of locally provided VCS services had taken place. It also identified that the methodology used, especially for the capital enhancement to community assets, had raised capacity and provided a sustainable way forward for local provision of services.

### **7.2. Exemplar application**

This proposal is for a longer term evaluation of the continuing sustainability of the solutions that the initial project created, coupled with the development of a consortium to take forward a similar approach across all of rural Sussex. This is a logical step designed to build on the good practice of the initial project and test its applicability on a larger scale that could be repeated elsewhere. The aim will be to draw in service providing bodies across all of Sussex to work alongside village level organisations that manage community owned facilities. A particular feature will be made of drawing in the Volunteer support organisations that exist at local level and their District, County and National support networks.

The consortium will work towards a collaborative bid to Futurebuilders and other national and local funding schemes, combining capital investment with outreach service development on a collaborative and joint working basis

### **7.3. Why is the initiative needed?**

#### **Community buildings in rural Sussex**

There are 380 community owned and managed building for multiple use in Sussex's villages. These provide for a very wide range of community needs. The Action in rural Sussex Village Halls advisory service has identified 65 that have major replacement or extension projects in the process of development, the majority of which would substantially add to the service provision capacity of the building as well as its accessibility. Many more have minor improvement projects that are required, designed to meet DDA audit requirements.

The management of these community buildings is in the most part vested in a local charity, the Trustees of which are appointed by the local VCS. Links between these local charities and service providing organisations covering often a County or District area is often limited. The need to draw these elements of VCS infrastructure together was clearly demonstrated in the East Sussex Rural Challenge programme.

For communities to work together to identify and meet local needs there needs to a high level of confidence and a high level of capacity within the community. A well managed and presented community building has a symbolism that transcends its practical use and can

form a 'rallying point' for community activity that gives newcomers confidence to join in. The opposite is also true!

### **Support for volunteers/active citizens/local voluntary groups**

The initial audits carried out by the VCS infrastructure networks in both East Sussex and West Sussex have identified a worrying fragility in the funding and establishment of the Volunteer Bureau and other volunteer support mechanisms. In addition Action in rural Sussex survey of members and other stakeholders during the summer of 2003 identified a very strong concern that there is a severe shortage of 'active citizens' who are willing to engage in a wide range of formal and informal community activity. The community cohesion of village life, and its tendency to meet local needs with informal preventative services, is at risk if support for active citizens is not enhanced in a way that is sensitive to the way rural communities work.

Almost every village in Sussex has pre-school and after school provision that makes substantial use of volunteers either on management committees or directly delivering services. Feedback from this network suggests that exposure to risk in these very small organisations is becoming major block to recruitment.

### **Service delivery**

The State of the Countryside analysis and rural services surveys carried out by the Countryside Agency provide an overview of the relative decline in services that are locally accessible for rural people in all parts of the South East. The IMD Access domain data for Sussex re-inforces this picture: sixty four rural wards are in the 20% nationally with worst accessibility, this is around 40% of the total in Sussex. In the relatively densely populated and serviced South East this is surprising and demonstrates how hard it is to provide services to rural communities in the South East where the cost base is also relatively high for service providing organisations.

One answer is for the local community and service providers to share fixed costs within rural communities, maximising the use made of community assets.

### **Capacity of village communities**

Action in rural Sussex is currently working with eighty villages across Sussex to support their creation of local Village Action Plans and help to integrate these into District and County Community Plans. The feedback from the Action Plan groups that are leading this work in individual villages highlights the difficulty that they foresee in building the capacity of the community to implement the VAPs. In many cases the VAPs are identifying specific service provision needs that need three elements for them to be met:

- Local facilities
- Local volunteers
- Expertise from specialist service providing organisations

For the provision of services within the VCS to be established, the capacity of the local community, and active citizens within it, needs to be substantially enhanced. The local Action Plan groups require support and the development of key skills and knowledge to be able to match local needs, local resources and external specialist support.

#### 7.4. How will needs be met?

The experience of the East Sussex programmes gave some important messages about how to meet the needs that have been identified above. The evaluation report is available if required. In addition some more innovative ways of promoting active citizenship and volunteering will need to be explored and the role and function of the Local Strategic Partnerships will need to be factored in. The key phases will be:

1. Identify where current access to key services that are most important to rural people at risk of social exclusion are most of risk. These will include services for older people, money advice, housing advice, outreach youth services and access to learning opportunities. To build on IMD appropriate domains.
2. Invite Village Hall and other local community facility providers to express an interest in being part of a consortium that will develop a joined up approach with service providers. Those coming forward can be checked against perceived needs (1.) and initiative taken to prompt further engagement where required.
3. Identify rural communities and service providing, or potential service providing, organisations along with infrastructure and developmental organisations that can provide capacity building support.
4. Engage all potential stakeholders in developing a consortium to develop a combined approach to futurebuilders for one-off and start up funding whilst also developing an action plan with local statutory service providers.
5. Engage Village Action Plan groups and Local Strategic Partnerships in the development of the action plan in order to ensure that needs that have been identified in the preparation of village and District level community plans are being targeted.

#### 7.5. How have potential users been involved?

The project is building on the experience of the East Sussex initial programme, within which user experiences and feedback from service providers has been available. In addition Action in rural Sussex has carried out an extensive survey of all its members to identify further areas of support that are required to meet local needs. The two highest scoring requirements in the survey were:

1. a requirement for co-operation between different elements of the VCS infrastructure to support village level activity
2. and the desire for Action in rural Sussex to promote initiatives of this kind that will bring services into rural villages.

Details of the survey are available if required.

### 7.6. Sustaining the outcomes of the initiative

The long term sustainability will be central to the project and will differ for each element of the approach. It is anticipated at this stage that the following are the most likely resource streams to provide sustainability:

Element	Sustainability approach
Community buildings	Asset development through local fundraising and Futurebuilders Ongoing finance through commercial and community exploitation of community assets
Support for volunteers and active citizens	Government initiatives to underpin civic renewal through support for the volunteering infrastructure. In West Sussex, possibly through performance reward grant arising from the active citizen PSA Target
Rural service delivery	Application of mainstream service delivery budgets in more flexible ways through co-operation and joint working.
Capacity of rural communities	As part of long term provision of VCO rural specialist, or sub-sector, infrastructure.

### 7.7. Adding value to the sector and its funders

The central premise of this approach is that there is a synergy between the ownership of community run buildings, as a community asset, and the needs of service providing organisations to serve either a District or County defined set of users. Village communities need to get their assets up to the required standard and run them in close liaison with service providers. The substantial scope for linking traditional service providing VCOs into the informal and local community oriented volunteers that participate at village level could also add considerable value.

The evidence that comes from Action in rural Sussex's work with Village Action Plans suggests that people are willing to volunteer to play a part in their community. They are simply waiting to be asked in an appropriate way.

### 7.8. Network support

Through the local organisations involved the initiative is linked closely into a number of national networks through which support can be accessed and good practice information promulgated. These include:

- VDE – Volunteering England
- ACRE - the Association of Rural Community Councils
- NACVS – National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service

## **8. Appendix 2 - Functions of good rural infrastructure (ACRE)**

### **8.1. Universal support for groups, communities and individuals**

- Outreach development and support within communities, rather than centralised, reactive delivery
- Community development expertise for communities, not just organisations
- Working in partnership with communities and within community structures eg through action plans resulting from community planning initiatives
- Building the capacity of local community leaders to work within and across communities
- Working with, or providing services to, individuals to overcome social exclusion eg wheels2work, training, lap-top loan schemes

### **8.2. Delivery or connections with particular specialist support**

- Provision of specialist advice and support for community facilities, transport, social and community enterprise, affordable housing etc
- Supporting the growth of networking between specialist community organisations

### **8.3. Holistic, integrated service**

- Support that is appropriate within the local community context, which takes account of impact on other services, facilities and activity within the community
- Seamless provision according to the specialist services required from voluntary or public sector advice agencies
- Clustering and networking communities to achieve viable solutions

### **8.4. Proactive work, seeking out communities in need of developmental support, to build the capacity of:**

- Local community organisations, facilities and activities
- Community governance
- Connections between community activity and external agencies/networks

### **8.5. Involvement in direct service delivery:**

- Supporting Parish Councils to take on devolved delivery where possible
- Working in partnership with statutory providers eg rural transport provision
- Identifying priority needs in service provision in individual communities and seeking best value solutions to delivery.

### **8.6. Delivery of small grants funding / Delivery of delegated grants:**

- Access by all rural communities to small grants funding for community work, through strategic work with local, regional and national sources

**8.7. Capacity for strategic work in rural and mainstream delivery:**

- Policy and research.
- Production of a rural evidence base, mapping provision of services and activity in rural communities.
- Negotiation with statutory providers, and active rural proofing of the delivery plans of all service providers.

### 9. Appendix 3 - Correlation of ChangeUp recommendations to Sussex proposals

ChangeUp recommendation	Overall Sussex framework	Pan-Sussex Action Plan	East Sussex Action Plan	West Sussex Action Plan	Rural Action Plan
High level framework	Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 on base level of service, role of LSPs and joint commissioning				
Performance improvement		Workforce development, with support identified from SLSC	Quality initiative	Quality initiative	
Workforce development		Workforce development, with support identified from SLSC			
ICT		2 <sup>nd</sup> tier support initiative developing service of an existing social enterprise	Links to communication strategies	Links to communication strategies	
Governance			Sector promotion initiative	Sector promotion initiative	Support for active citizens and new volunteers taking on responsibilities in rural communities
Recruiting and developing volunteers		Identification of a higher level of activity required with the media and major employers	Increased joint working across volunteer development agencies		Support for volunteers working with young people
Financing VCS activity		Sussex Community Foundation			
Infrastructure			Development of base level of service and negotiation of geographic level of delivery		Initiative to integrate services from AirS, CVS and local partnerships
Reflecting and promoting diversity		Exploration of further specialist services designed to widen access			
Sustainability	Recommendation 6 on full cost recovery		Initiative to identify base level of sustainable infrastructure service	Initiative to identify base level of sustainable infrastructure service	

## 10. Appendix 4 – Membership of East Sussex and West Sussex rural infrastructure consortia

Guidance on the setting up of rural voluntary and community sector infrastructure consortia were published in February. The aim has been to bring together all the providers of support services to rural voluntary organisations into consortia that can ensure the best value is derived from public sector investment in these services. In both East Sussex and West Sussex partnership groups of exclusively voluntary sector infrastructure organisations already existed and were in the process of exploring ways in which services could be improved.

Action in rural Sussex, therefore, called meetings of the wider range of partners suggested by DEFRA and sought agreement that the existing Steering Groups be used to progress this specifically rural initiative. The active members (in each there are others who are nominally involved) of both Steering Groups is set out below and on the following pages are the lists of organisations that were invited to initial rural Consortia meetings.

Action in rural Sussex will convene further meetings of all rural Consortia members in September / October in order to ensure maximum engagement in taking the Action Plans forward.

<b>West Sussex VCS infrastructure partnership</b>	<b>East Sussex VOICES infrastructure group</b>
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Group	Eastbourne CVS
Crawley CVS	Southdown CVS (Lewes District)
East Grinstead CVS	Lewes Volunteer Development Agency
Mid Sussex South CVS	Wealden Federation of Voluntary organisations
Mid Sussex Volunteer Bureau	Rye CVS
Chichester CVS	Bexhill Community Partnership
Worthing CVS	Hastings Voluntary Action
Arun CVS	Sussex Community Internet project
Age Concern West Sussex	Action in rural Sussex
ISIS – Information for Life	
Sussex Community Internet project	
Action in rural Sussex	

## **Initial partners/consultees for the West Sussex rural VCS infrastructure consortium**

### **West Sussex VCS infrastructure organisations**

Members of the West Sussex VCS infrastructure group:

This includes all the Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux, countywide specialist VCO organisations, West Sussex VOLG and Action in rural Sussex

### **Key West Sussex cross sector partnerships**

West Sussex Strategic Partnership

Arun, Chichester, Adur, Horsham, Mid-Sussex District Local Strategic Partnerships

West Sussex Learning Partnership

West Sussex Rural Towns Network

### **Statutory organisations**

West Sussex County Council

Arun, Chichester, Adur, Horsham, Mid-Sussex District Councils

Western Sussex; Horsham and Chanctonbury; Adur, Arun and Worthing; Mid Sussex Primary Care Trusts

Sussex Learning and Skills Council

Connexions Sussex

### **Sussex VCS infrastructure organisations and partnerships**

Sussex Voluntary and Community Organisations Learning Consortium

Sussex Community Internet Project

Sussex Community Foundation Steering Group

## **Initial partners/consultees for the East Sussex rural VCS infrastructure consortium**

### **East Sussex VCS infrastructure organisations**

Members of VOICES:

This includes all the Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux, countywide specialist VCO organisations and Action in rural Sussex

### **Key East Sussex cross sector partnerships**

East Sussex Strategic Partnership

Lewes, Wealden and Rother District Local Strategic Partnerships

WARR Partnership

East Sussex Learning Partnership

East Sussex Rural Towns Network

East Sussex Food and Health Partnership

East Sussex Rural Transport Partnership

### **Statutory organisations**

East Sussex County Council

Rother, Wealden and Lewes District Councils

Bexhill and Rother, Sussex Down and Weald, Eastbourne and Down Primary Care Trusts

Sussex Learning and Skills Council

Connexions Sussex

### **Sussex VCS infrastructure organisations and partnerships**

Sussex Voluntary and Community Organisations Learning Consortium

Sussex Community Internet Project

Sussex Community Foundation Steering Group