

Sustainable Harborough Project Executive Summary

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Sustainable Harborough



Sustainable Harborough

Executive Summary:

INTRODUCTION:

Sustainable Harborough was a five year Big Lottery funded project managed by the Rural Community Council ([RCC] Leicestershire and Rutland) aimed to test and learn from approaches to community sustainability which ran from January 2013 to December 2017. The project worked with the local Market Harborough community to develop enterprises and resources which could continue beyond lottery funding. To achieve this, the team adopted an enabling approach to support local people to take a lead on key projects, build capacity, and to improve relevant skills.

This summary is intended to introduce the work of the Sustainable Harborough project and accompanies a number of reports which evaluate its impact.

THE WORK:

The RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland) was the accountable body for Sustainable Harborough and led a partnership steering the work. The partnership included Transition Town Market Harborough, De Montfort University, Harborough District Council, Leicestershire County Council, Seven Locks Housing, Welland Rivers Trust, Severn Trent Water, Environment Agency and Action for Market Towns (no longer trading). The project comprised 4 full-time staff, a PhD student providing support and advice, and a network of volunteers and engaged businesses.

There were a number of key principles which the project team and partnership worked to –

- Tone of voice – the project wasn't a campaign. Instead, it aimed to work with the broader range of people's interests and concerns with an encouraging and non-judgemental attitude rather than have a purely environmental focus
- Legacy – the partnership were keen that the future beyond the funding horizon was a consideration right from the start and was pivotal in decisions to begin any new work. Consequently, the funding was used primarily as an investment to contribute added value to the sustainability of the town
- Enabling – the team have worked with the people and groups to build on local capacity so that a project has leaders involved and able to take responsibility when the project team are no longer around. This also supported the emergence of networks and a 'safe' space within which experimental activities could be tested and diverse actors come together
- Action learning – working with De Montfort University the team had regular (often facilitated) action learning sessions in order to embed a reflective and adaptive style of working and to capture a record of the project's learnings
- Reporting – the lessons learned through the project in the form of extracts of interesting information and useful key messages, were drawn out over the course of the project's life and fed forward into a Learning Partnership led by Groundwork UK as contribution to the final reporting (the reports introduced below were over and above what was expected by Big Lottery)

The project team developed marketing and communications over the life of the project which ranged from social media, press releases and websites to open workshops (such as early Energy and Food Forums) to an annual festival in the town centre and various subject specific events. Whilst the project hasn't reached everyone in the Market Harbour community, it successfully attracted a large cross section of people who have ranged in the extent of their involvement, from becoming volunteer Directors of Food and Drink Cooperatives to installing solar panels on a commercial basis.

The two forums held early in the project were the spur for all of the projects which have persisted to the end of the funding and are now set to last beyond. These forums engaged people interested or involved in either Food and Drink or Energy locally, sought their views about what works, what could be improved, big and small ideas and crucially asked people how they would like to be involved in what came next. Working groups followed on – some with small, cumulative projects (e.g. community gardening and food and drink promotion); and some with one big complex idea (e.g. edible16 and Harbour Energy). Alongside working groups ran the continuous thread of keeping people in touch with what was happening, generating support and engaging people in projects that matched their specific interests.

The final piece of work was to ensure, once the project was no longer being funded, that the story of the journey of Sustainable Harbour was still accessible, that the tools were still available, and that there were people still working to improve the sustainability of Market Harbour. This involved ensuring that governance was up to date, training has been given, business plans were relevant and support partners were engaged, and of course people knew where and how to stay in touch with all things sustainable. Finally the project wanted to tell the story in a way that would help to encourage and inform similar future projects – this is discussed next in the reporting section.

THE REPORTS:

Reporting on Sustainable Harbour has been carried out through the funded life of the project. In addition to these, the reports referred to here are the culmination of reporting which has been refined over the 5 years, resulting in a suite of methods of demonstrating impact. Alongside these is the official lottery report, this is not included as the detail is included within the reports outlined below. The reports are -

1. **Mid-term formative evaluation** – undertaken at the half-way point of the Sustainable Harbour project, this evaluated progress and recommended areas to focus on going forward
2. **The State of the Town Report** – this evaluated Market Harbour looking at a very broad approach to sustainability using proxy's set against the Bristol Accord (a set of domains which help people to see how their activities contribute to sustainable communities) and also looked at Market Harbour compared to other towns of a similar nature
3. **Learning report** – this took a mixed methods approach to both generating learning, and then verifying the messages that came out of the project – there were a number of key lessons in specific areas of the project
4. **LM3 report** – this looked at the added local economic value of one of the businesses created through Sustainable Harbour by applying the New Economics Foundation LM3 model to evaluate the efficiency of its income within the local food and drink economy
5. **Summative evaluation** – this reviewed the full spectrum of project activities and achievements across the funding period, and provided commentary on performance relative to the lottery targets, and the specific Social Return on Investment (added value) of 3 of the projects (Harbour Energy, Waterloo Community Garden and Green Open Homes).

CONTACTS AND CONTINUATION:

The entities that have been realised through Sustainable Harborough wouldn't have been possible without the inspired imagination and tenacity of the people the team worked with – people committed to taking ideas and work forward. These people took on many different roles. They were volunteer gardeners; they stood up and became directors and trustees; they invested their money in community share offers; they opened their homes for interested strangers to walk around; they bought local food; they installed LED lights and much more – in short, they took advantage of the opportunities the project could offer and took ownership of these to contribute to making a sustainable Harborough.

To contact someone about Sustainable Harborough overall – get in touch with the **Rural Community Council** (Leicestershire and Rutland) on info@ruralcc.org.uk or contact the **Sustainable Harborough Trust** on info@sustainableharborough.co.uk

If you are interested in work progressing the local food and drink economy either contact **Taste Harborough** (food and drink brand and support organisation) on tasteharborough@gmail.com or contact **edible16** (on-line shop selling local produce) on manager@edible16.org.uk

If you want to find out more about community owned energy projects and efforts to improve the energy efficiency of fuel poor households locally contact **Harborough Energy** on harboroughenergy@gmail.com

Finally, to find out more about local food growing there are a number of local community gardens and groups – **Waterloo Community Gardens CIO** can be emailed on waterloocommunitygardens@gmail.com; Lenthall community garden, known as **Elderberries**, can be contacted through David Palmer on **07505 968767**; **Grafters and Growers** (teaching the grafting of fruit trees and creating a virtual orchard - they are also seeking land to establish a community orchard) can be contacted on maycottage12@hotmail.com; **Grow and Pick** are developing opportunities for growing, cooking and eating food through use of gaps of land or containers in public spaces, contact judy.rowley@virgin.net; and **The Undle Project** is a working fruit and vegetable growing space keen to welcome gardeners wanting to learn and help grow, harvest and eat fruit and vegetables – contact j.e.clark@btinternet.com or anjwells@hotmail.co.uk.

We hope that you enjoy the content of the reports and that they prove useful. Of course, they are just the first stage of a shift in the sustainability of this small market town – the work continues through the entities above and the stories to come will inevitably prove to be far richer with plenty more learning to come.

