



**South Northamptonshire VCS Forum
20th November 2008 at SNC Training Room**

Eighteen people attended the meeting. See appendix 1.

Welcome and Introductions

Phil Drage (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the forum

Phil explained the background to his being involved with the forum by posing the question 'Why do it?' Phil said that his vision was to help groups at 'grassroots' level by putting them in touch with each other. He saw the forum as the platform for the exchange of information between groups and with statutory agencies such as the district council.

The Community Shop Handbook

Beth Caswell, ACRE explained that both hers and Mike Oakley's roles were to support community groups whenever/wherever they could. Beth covering South Northants and Daventry and Mike East Northants. Beth's remit included Community Speedwatch and environmental/climate change, whilst Mike's was transport, social enterprise and community shops.

Mike spoke about the Community Shop Handbook, a publication commissioned by Northamptonshire ACRE. He highlighted the need for this publication and gave the example of Aynho that is looking at creating a community shop. In the county both Sulgrave and Titchmarsh have community shops. He thought that the present economic climate may increase the number of community shops as people may find travelling difficult and will be looking for local facilities but match funding for any grant application could be harder to find.

He highlighted some important factors to consider in developing community shop:-

- a) Consultation – important to consult with the local community, to see if they would support a community shop.
- b) Volunteers –he suggested Involving young people as it would allow them to feel a part of their community.
- c) Funding –ACRE can undertake funding research.
- d) Location – The Village Retail Services Association will send a consultant to a village to look at the viability of the project
- e) Research – important to research fully as every case was individual

Mike said that there are 170 community shops nationwide, with potential for a lot more

Phil Drage asked Mike if the size of a village were important in relation to a community shop.

Mike did not believe that size was important it was more important to consider natural feed into the proposed location. He said that a typical community shop requires a

minimum turnover of £84k per annum to be sustainable and that a community shop must be run as a business.

Pub is the Hub

Mike then described another initiative 'Pub is the Hub'. This is the idea of incorporating a community shop within a pub. This initiative has been driven by licensees who are keen to keep pubs open by incorporating community facilities.

Phil Drage asked if there are any other community facilities that could be used in addition to a pub. Mike replied that village halls and even churches have been considered and also hairdressers, chemists or any village facility which was under utilised.

Question & Answer session

a) Roger Clarke from Pattishall Parish Council said the village does not have a centre. There were two shops and a post office and the parish was made up of six villages with 1500 people. As a result of their parish plan the parish council went down the road of looking into a village shop and had visited the community shops in Sulgrave and Castlethorpe but had decided that at moment a shop would not be financially viable but the local pub is looking at undertaking retail sales. Roger added that Pattishall is serviced by retail mobiles and their services are published on the village website.

b) Tony Pateman from Old Stratford parish council said that the post office facility within the village shop had closed. The shop now seems to be focusing on selling alcohol with subsequent complaints to parish council members regarding sales to underage drinkers. Mike wondered if the village had looked at the community taking over the shop.

c) John Nash from Syresham added that he felt a community shop had to have a niche e.g. a speciality item like local bread. Mike agreed and said that local produce was important and that the Titchmarch community shop also sells unique local greetings cards.

d) Phil Drage asked if profit was the only driver for a community shop if a minimum £7k turnover a month is required for it to be viable. Mike responded by saying that a community shop was not just profit, it created a community hub, but it must be viable.

e) Phil Drage asked whether a village shop would be more attractive if it was part of something else e.g. a coffee shop. Mike said that there was the 'cross market' concept and he knew of an internet café in a shop which attracted young and old.

f) Tristan Hale, Northamptonshire Sport, asked Mike whether there were any examples of cricket or rugby grounds being used for a community shop. Mike said that he was not aware of any but they could be potential locations.

g) Matthew Croft Jnr added that shop security should be considered as this affected insurance premiums.

h) Bob Williams, SNVB, commented that he has listened to the discussions and wondered whether the community element was saleable i.e. are there any other things

you could sell people? Mike responded by saying if a shop was the community focal point it would survive.

i) Susan Kerrison, Flore Parish Council, asked Roger Clarke, Pattishall Parish Council, why the mobile shops did not work in conjunction with the local shops that used to exist in the village. Roger said that this idea had been tried but hadn't been successful.

Information exchange and discussions

Barron Walton, SNVB, explained that SNVB's role is to facilitate the VCS Forum and provide the secretariat service. He felt that a forum had an important role as it should:-

- a) Facilitate networking amongst the members.
- b) Be a conduit for information between the VCS and statutory agencies
- c) Allow members to have a collective voice

Barron invited attendees to exchange information

Aynho

Stephen Brook, Aynho Parish Council said that their second parish plan showed a lot of contentment within the village and that there were many active societies and groups. There had not been a question about the provision of a village shop in the questionnaire for the plan but the replies had come back with the need for a shop as the top requirement.

Flore

Susan Kerrison from Flore Playing Field Association said that the group had been maintaining play equipment and keeping the recreation grounds tidy for ten years. The parish council were looking to organise a 'Volunteers' afternoon early in 2009 to encourage more people to volunteers for village groups.

Old Stratford

Tony Pateman, Old Stratford Parish Council, commented that he felt that Old Stratford was a transient village; with lorries using it as a 'rat run' he was therefore interested in a community speedwatch scheme. The village hall was shared with another village but there was a football team, karate club, short mat bowls and a playgroup.

Pattishall

Roger Clarke, Pattishall Parish Council said that they had completed their parish plan in spring 2008 and that the parish council has met all targets in relation to the plan but the youth groups were short of leaders.

Silverstone

Matthew Croft Jnr said that there was strong support in village for the local amateur dramatics group SAD (Silverstone Amateur Dramatics) and their last production had been well supported. Matthew Croft Snr commented that from his experience activities in various villages differ. Barron Walton said that SNVB was able to offer support and guidance to village groups to help them develop and that the vcs forum was useful mechanism for groups from different villages to get in touch with each other.

Syresham

John Nash, Syresham Parish Council, stated that the village had a coffee shop which is open every Thursday morning in village hall and that this was becoming a focus for the village.

Weston

Phil Drage explained that Weston Community Project had started when he and another couple realised that the local Baptist Church was only used for Sunday worship. Together they raised £300,000 to extend and modernise the chapel and it is now used as a coffee shop, lunch club and a meeting place for several groups e.g. computer, wine, tots and keep fit.

Phil suggested that people in their communities should contact their local ministers to see what help they could offer.

Northamptonshire Sport

Tristan Hale, Northamptonshire Sport, said that their website had been re-launched. This had resulted in the recruitment of 100 new volunteers but they were now having problems identifying placements.

SNVB

Volunteering

Melanie Bignell, SNVB, provide information on volunteer brokerage service that SNVB provides. She explained that SNVB would promote the vacancy locally and on the National Volunteering Database www.do-it.org.uk. Nicola Shaw was the volunteer development co-ordinator at SNVB

Infrastructure Support and Development

Amanda Harris, SNVB, explained that her role as the infrastructure development worker was to support local groups.

South Northamptonshire E-Forum

Barron Walton said the E-Forum was a tool to facilitate an effective communication channel. He talked through the E-forum handout and asked everyone to register and suggested that some of the topics that had been raised at the meeting should be placed on the E-forum for further discussion.

Bob Williams said that the E-Forum was to be re-designed and that it was intended to send out fortnightly email highlights to registered members.

Any Other Business

Jenny Carter, SNVB, apologised for her late arrival but she had been to a Joint Action Group (JAG) meeting. She circulated a leaflet 'Stronger and Safer Communities' that she had brought from that meeting.

Phil Drage thanked everyone for attending and invited people to join the forum development group at their next meeting on 10 December 2.30pm at Northamptonshire ACRE.

The next VCS Forum meeting is 2.00 on 29 January 2009 at SNC Committee Room
The meeting closed at 3.45

Future Meeting

Forum meetings:

29th January 2009 2.00pm SNC Committee Room:
Youth Development in Village Communities

26th March 2009 (time and venue to be confirmed)
Provisionally Bugbrooke Community Centre 2.00pm