

**Appendix A – Rural Taskforce Implementation – Action Plan (September 2020 update)**

**DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY, ACCESS TO HEALTH AND TRANSPORT**

**Better connected rural places, where people are able to stay safe, healthy and well, build relationships and community and access skills, education and jobs.**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Associated activities</b>	<b>Planned actions</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>Improving rural transport and access to services</b>	T1. Initiate a review of rural transport options across West Suffolk and then co-ordinate a plan to fill in any gaps, including exploring the potential alternative options to address these	a) Review timetabling and whether it meets the needs of customers  b) explore taxi buses	a) Understand from SCC what processes they undertake to review rural transport efficiency and effectiveness; then review what further action West Suffolk may need to take. (Contact - Simon Barnett – SCC)  b) Explore with SCC, including lessons learned from school bus pilot.	a) <b>ONGOING.</b> SCC Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) reviewing actions.  b) <b>ONGOING.</b> Issue was raised at WSC/SCC Portfolio Holder liaison meeting in December 19 and it was agreed to discuss at next meeting on 26 March 2020.

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
				<p>However, this meeting was cancelled and no further liaison meeting have yet been convened.</p> <p>SCC submitted a bid in June 2020 to a DfT Rural Mobility fund, with a proposal for piloting taxi buses in three Suffolk localities, including Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon in West Suffolk. SCC are in contact with DfT to try and ascertain any progress on the bid, as no further announcements have yet been made.</p>
	<p>T2. Review how all existing transport services and alternative transport methods are publicised and consider improvements</p>	<p>Include consideration of a single point of contact for transport information (whether improving existing or creating new)</p>	<p>Understand how transport information is currently communicated; then consider what further action West Suffolk may need to take to support communication in rural areas.</p>	<p><b>ONGOING.</b> SCC Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) reviewing actions.</p> <p>Earlier in 2020, The Voluntary Network had requested a meeting with WSC to promote the Connecting Communities Service. This meeting has not yet been convened however The Voluntary Network provided medication pick up for West Suffolk during Covid and Home But Not Alone also promoted their use of Connecting Communities Service. West Suffolk Families and Communities team continue to promote the service as and when opportunities arise.</p>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
	T3. Work with the business community to assess the commercial viability of cross-funded services to provide transport to rural areas		Contact Chamber of Commerce to discuss how best to promote this idea.	<b>COMPLETE.</b> Officers contacted Suffolk Chamber of Commerce. They are not aware of any companies offering this at present, however, Suffolk Chamber are doing some work to encourage better bus use, especially for rural businesses. A roundtable meeting was held in January 2020 with bus operators, businesses and Suffolk County Council, at which ideas were explored for doing this, particularly in light of the sustainability agenda.
	T4. Explore with bus companies the viability of incorporating stops at key locations eg West Suffolk Hospital, Western Way for buses to Bury St Edmunds		Discuss with bus companies and SCC to find out what could be possible.	<b>COMPLETE.</b> The viability of changing the routes of buses coming into Bury from rural areas was discussed at the Bury St Edmunds bus liaison meeting (between SCC, West Suffolk Council and the bus operators) on 11 February 2020. The clear response from the bus operators was that this proposal would require additional funding in order to be viable and not to result in negative consequences for other bus services. This was because an extension of the current routes would result in services becoming less frequent in rural areas. Concerns were also raised about the impact on road surfaces of more buses

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				<p>driving on the roads around West Suffolk Hospital.</p> <p>In response to reading the minutes of the meeting, officers were contacted by The Voluntary Network and asked to promote 'West Suffolk Hospital Ride' which supports people needing to travel to West Suffolk Hospital from Haverhill and rural areas between. Further details are attached to this report.</p>
<p><b>Enabling more walking and cycling around rural settlements, safe from speeding vehicles</b></p>	<p>T5. Review availability of information about rural foot and cycle paths (maps, signage etc), encouraging parish councils to publicise these</p>		<p>Find out what information is currently available; then review what further action West Suffolk may need to take.</p>	<p><b>ONGOING.</b> SCC Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) reviewing actions</p>
	<p>T6. Promote use of cycle and footways for both recreation and purposeful journeys</p>		<p>Find out what activities are currently undertaken in this area; then review what further action West Suffolk may need to take.</p>	<p><b>ONGOING.</b> SCC Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) reviewing actions</p> <p>The Cycling Policy Development Panel completed its three-month task and reported to SCC Cabinet in June 2020. The Government awarded funding to</p>

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				Suffolk for a number of Emergency Active Travel Fund schemes, listed here: <a href="https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/advice-on-travel/active-travel-improvements-for-cycling-and-walking/">https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/advice-on-travel/active-travel-improvements-for-cycling-and-walking/</a>
	T7. Explain the process/criteria that are available to parish councils to influence speed limits		Contact SALC to discuss how best to communicate this information to parish councils.	<b>ONGOING.</b>  This has not been progressed yet due to Covid-19, however Families and Communities Officers are able to provide advice to Parish and Town councils in relation to setting up Community Speedwatch schemes
	T8. Continue to co-ordinate support for Community Speedwatch from the police		Continue role of Families and Communities Team in signposting community groups and parishes who come to West Suffolk Council asking how to do this (the Council has no role as it has to be done directly between the community and the Police).	<b>COMPLETE</b>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
	T9. Explore with SCC/Police/Suffolk Roadsafes the potential for a rural road safety / driver behaviour change campaign to tackle speeding in villages	a) explore ANPR use	Contact Suffolk Police to discuss this proposal.	<b>NOT YET STARTED</b>
<b>Improving digital connectivity in rural areas</b>	T10. Work with SCC/Suffolk Broadband to understand existing provision and planned improvements, including not - spots and plans to target them	a) aim for 100% coverage		<b>ONGOING.</b> SCC Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) reviewing actions

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	T11. Establish what improvements are required to data speeds for health service centres in rural areas to promote access to local provision, minimising travel and maximising use of technology		Contact WS CCG to find out current situation in surgeries and health centres and what improvements are needed.	<b>NOT YET STARTED</b> Officers have not contacted due to CCG focus on Covid-19 response.
	T12. Lobby Government to influence policy on further funding to support rural area rollout of superfast broadband / mobile data		Invite Peter Stevens to write to Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, copied to Chair of Rural Services Network and Matt Hancock MP, lobbying for better Broadband.	<b>ONGOING</b> This issue has been included in the wider lobbying and strategic communications approach that officers have developed during Covid-19. This approach has been developed to ensure key messages are fed into different lobbying opportunities as appropriate, and in a coherent, timely and joined-up way, especially given the pressures Government ministers are facing during the response and recovery phases of Covid.

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
	T13. Ensure clear and realistic provision of information to community groups on local (short term) solutions to broadband data speeds and access to funding	a) Provide information / support to communities on how they can access land for self-dig provision of ducting to enable improved pace / cost of infrastructure provision b) engage open reach fibre project	Signpost community groups to Openreach Community Officer and website	<b>ONGOING</b> Families and Communities officers will continue to signpost community groups to these resources.

## APPROPRIATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A wider variety of housing in rural areas that is appropriate and affordable for a range of local people, located in developments that the local community support

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
<b>Community engagement with future planning and development</b>	H1. Increase the involvement of local communities and parish councils in new housing development	a) Proactively inform and engage with communities and parishes on the need for local growth and affordable housing	Build engagement with rural communities and parish councils into the West Suffolk Local Plan consultation and engagement strategy, including a Parish Forum.	<b>ONGOING.</b> Local Plan consultation and engagement strategy being developed, including a Parish Forum. Officers building in input from the Member workshop on engagement and findings of the Rural Taskforce surveys about how best to engage with rural communities.
	H2. Improve communications and relationships between West Suffolk and Parish Councils, through consistent engagement via Ward members		Ensure engagement on planning applications reflects preferences of rural residents and organisations.  Build local leadership skills around planning and development into Member Development programme, including through Development Control	<b>ONGOING.</b> Findings of Rural Taskforce surveys about how best to engage with rural communities have been shared with Development Management Team to influence engagement.  Officers considering how best to embed local leadership skills around planning and development

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	(with F&C team support)		Committee briefing sessions.	<p>into Member Development programme.</p> <p>The Development Management team send out regular newsletters to Parish/Town Councillors and Members which provide updates on the team, as well as summaries of regulation/legislation changes and spotlights on particular issues (for example, our approach to noise considerations close to the USAF bases, flood requirements etc). We also attend individual Parish/Town Council meetings, when invited, to address particular topics (recently attended Newmarket Town Council to talk about our approach to tree applications, Bury Town Council to give general training on Material Planning Considerations). Since moving to virtual Development Control Committees we have not been able to run any post-committee training seminars with Members, due to time constraints, but Development Management officers are discussing with the</p>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
				Democratic Services Team the possibility of online training on specific hot topics as a series of separate events.
	H3. Support the development of the Eastern Community Homes Hub (a tool for the Parish Councils that are interested in Community Land Trust / community led housing)		Share Community Action Suffolk (CAS) announcement about Eastern Community Homes Hub with Members and officers	<b>ONGOING</b> Eastern Community Housing Hub has now been formed and initial meetings have taken place. A draft offer was discussed on 8 <sup>th</sup> September and communications activity will follow to share information about the Hub.
<b>Establishing an evidence base to guide future development</b>	H4. Develop a compendium of approaches to understanding need and developing local housing plans	a) Become an enabler of housing needs surveys that establish FUTURE housing need (including looking at local land availability) and are supported by communications with local communities	Raise awareness of Housing Needs Surveys in villages.	<b>ONGOING.</b> CAS have now made contact with the selected parishes and are awaiting responses (deadline Oct 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2020). Local ward members have been briefed.

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
		b) Encourage housing needs surveys alongside Neighbourhood Plans	Strategic Planning Team to promote Housing Needs Surveys as Neighbourhood plan proposals come forward.	<b>COMPLETE.</b> Strategic Planning Team have been briefed so that they will encourage Housing Needs Surveys.
<b>Ensuring the planning and infrastructure frameworks are appropriate</b>	H5. Develop a policy that reflects housing need based on future demographics	a) factors are age and ability	Develop an appropriate Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in response to need.	<b>For after 2024.</b> SPD will follow Local Plan
	H6. Review / update the Affordable Housing guide (following Local plan adoption) and promote it with Councillors and Parish Councils		Develop an appropriate Affordable Housing Guide in response to need.	<b>For after 2024.</b> Affordable Housing Guide will follow SPD.
	H7. Explore possibility of designating land as Rural so as to allow affordable housing in developments of <10 dwellings		Include as a question to consider as part of the Local Plan Preferred Options stage.	<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).  The latest Housing White Paper and Changes to the current Planning System consultation document (ends Oct 2020) is likely to make this option no longer

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
				viable in the short term as the Government focuses on delivery.
	H8. Set new local plan policies to cover the following issues:	a) Review settlement boundaries in our rural settlements to allow, where appropriate, small scale growth	Include as a question to consider as part of the Local Plan Preferred Options stage.	<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).
		b) Introduce / develop design standards that promote sustainable places where people want to live		<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).
		c) Explore mechanisms for requiring sustainable technologies e.g. Air/Ground Source Heat Pumps		<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).
		d) Retain single storey homes in villages where appropriate (not within gift of council - can be dealt with through Lifetime Homes)		<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).

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		e) Provide for sustainable and flexible housing types (both tenure and lifetime homes). e.g. revise settlement hierarchy to include more types of place to support growth in rural areas		<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).
		f) Revise exception site policy to enable more exception sites delivered across West Suffolk where there is an identified Housing Need		<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).
		g) Introduce space standards into housing / planning requirements		<b>NOT YET STARTED.</b> For Preferred Options stage of Local Plan process (Jan - Nov 2021).

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	H9. Enable provision of homes for people with a local connection through Affordable Housing SPD policy, based on evidence of local housing need (through survey). This would include Registered Provider-led housing		Include in the range of options considered as part of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).	<b>For after 2024.</b> SPD will follow Local Plan
	H10. Increase provision of rural infrastructure by supporting communities to plan for future needs which will support targeted help		Encourage production of neighbourhood plans and other initiatives by communities to consider their future needs, through ongoing liaison with local areas.	<b>ONGOING.</b> Part of ongoing role of Strategic Planning team and Families and Communities team.

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	H11. Explore HMOs / Temp accommodation in hard to let properties (on a case by case basis, depending on suitability, e.g. transport)		Monitor hard to let properties, using data from Choice Based Lettings. Then share with housing strategy team to work with Registered Providers to see if there are alternative options.	<p><b>NOT YET STARTED</b></p> <p>This will be a future task for the Data and Analysis Business Partner: to look at properties on the Choice Based Lettings system; to analyse the number of bids; to identify which properties have not been let; and from this deduce which are the 20 properties which are the hardest to let in West Suffolk. This analysis will then be shared with the Housing Options Team, to consider whether alternative options such as HMOs and Temporary accommodation should be discussed with Registered Providers.</p>
	H12. Explore opportunities around church and charitable land		Raise awareness of services offered by Locality <a href="https://locality.org.uk/">https://locality.org.uk/</a>	<p><b>NOT YET STARTED</b></p>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
<p><b>Changing the wider economic model for housing development</b></p>	<p>H13. Lobby Government for greater funding to support building rural housing</p>		<p>Invite Peter Stevens to write to Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, copying to Rural Services Network and Matt Hancock MP, lobbying for greater funding to support rural housing.</p>	<p><b>ONGOING</b></p> <p>This issue has been included in the wider lobbying and strategic communications approach that officers have developed during Covid-19. This approach has been developed to ensure key messages are fed into different lobbying opportunities as appropriate, and in a coherent, timely and joined-up way, especially given the pressures Government ministers are facing during the response and recovery phases of Covid.</p>

## STRONG COMMUNITIES

**Strong rural communities that are integrated, informed, equipped and empowered.**

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
<b>Supporting long term planning by communities to identify need / support</b>	C1. Support communities with appraisal / plans for their future	a) Gain a better understanding of people in communities (their capability and capacity) and assets	<p>Include this approach in Member Development for Ward Members.</p> <p>Continue the support of Families and Communities Officers for local communities, in line with Asset Based Community Development approaches.</p>	<p><b>ONGOING</b></p> <p><b>ONGOING</b></p>
	C2. Review the toolkit / compendium of guidance to help communities obtain targeted and proactive support from VCS / Councils		<p>Review the communications, resources, training and signposting available to local communities.</p>	<p><b>ONGOING.</b> CAS attended team meeting in January and gave a briefing in relation to support available.</p> <p>Established catch up meetings with CAS to ensure support is available to communities and how to enhance the offer from WSC F&amp;C team.</p> <p>Groups that were established or enhanced during Covid-19 were</p>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
			Explore the resources available from other organisations working in rural West Suffolk.	<p>signposted to relevant support organisations (for PPE, finance, safeguarding issues, volunteer training) by WSC and CAS working in partnership.</p> <p>Following a SWOT analysis of the community groups that worked on Covid-19, CAS have also contacted these groups to ask what type of support they would like in the longer term.</p>
<b>Supporting and nurturing volunteering</b>	C3. Work with the VCS on flexible and creative approaches to engaging people in volunteering, including young people and businesses. (for example, information in GP surgeries, shops, workplaces, libraries and pubs)	a) Encourage employer-supported volunteering schemes, encouraging businesses to support volunteering initiatives in communities or undertake volunteering initiatives themselves	Find out from Community Action Suffolk (who are leading on promoting volunteering) what work is underway or planned; and then consider whether further action is needed by West Suffolk Council.	<p><b>ONGOING.</b></p> <p><b>Pre-Covid-19:</b> Meeting held with SALC CEO and Chair (13 March) to discuss better ways of working between district council and parish/town councils.</p> <p><b>Following Covid-19:</b> WSC are involved in reviewing the Suffolk Volunteering Strategy, working across West Suffolk Alliance to enhance volunteering opportunities following Covid-19.</p> <p>This work will also involve other WS teams (for example, Economic</p>

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Associated activities</b>	<b>Planned actions</b>	<b>Progress</b>
		b) Support new volunteers through mentoring		<p>Development and Skills) to ensure the strategy reflects the contribution of other agencies and also supports education and training.</p> <p>90% of parish councils played an active role in Covid-19 work, for example, through dedicated helplines, co-ordinating the community groups in the area, or signposting residents to existing support.</p>
		c) Support volunteering by enabling local people to just get on and do the things they are passionate about to help others		
		d) Tackle understanding/myths about red tape associated with volunteering		
		e) Work with parish councils to myth bust about what being a parish councillor involves		
<b>Helping communities access funding</b>	C4. Provide local communities with information and support on accessing funding	a) Share information with local councillors and community champions	Find out from Community Action Suffolk (who lead on supporting communities to access funding) what work is underway or planned; and then consider whether further action is needed by West Suffolk Council.	<p><b>ONGOING.</b> Initial meeting held with CAS and overview of services given.</p> <p>Ongoing catch ups with CAS to discuss further support and how we can link in with their services better.</p>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
			<p>Establish links with Suffolk Community Foundation and share funding opportunities with communities</p> <p>Continue to promote funding opportunities to communities when new funding streams become available.</p>	<p>Grants officer attending Suffolk wide funding group.</p> <p>Attendance at February team meeting from Suffolk Community Foundation's link officer for West Suffolk.</p> <p>Linked into opportunities to work with community groups to highlight funding opportunities eg: Village Hall Week – officer in attendance to talk about support available.</p> <p>First in a series of workshops for community groups on how to apply for funding and writing a funding bid took place before Covid-19.</p> <p><b>During Covid-19:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Locality Budget allocation increased by £500 for each Councillor</li> <li>- Promoted Suffolk Community Foundation's Covid-19 Response Fund.</li> </ul>

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
		b) Ensure training and development for parish councillors includes material on accessing funding and is promoted	Find out from Suffolk Association of Local Councils what work is underway or planned; and then consider whether further action is needed by West Suffolk Council.	<b>ONGOING.</b> Meeting with SALC CEO and Chair took place on 13 March. Actions agreed, to be taken forward.
		c) Promote the funding portal / help to apply	All Families and Communities officers to continue to signpost community groups to <a href="#">Funding4Suffolk</a>	<b>ONGOING</b>
<b>Improving knowledge of and access to information and advice</b>	C5. Improve how existing VCS resources are communicated to communities	a) Further develop the network of community connectors / champions that can be go-to supporters	Continue with the Families and Communities Team approach of identifying, supporting and equipping Community Connectors to lead change in their local areas.	<b>ONGOING</b>  <b>During Covid-19:</b> Relationships with Community Connectors were found to be strong and effective, as 400+ organisations came forward within days of lockdown being announced, asking to be involved in the Covid-19 response in West Suffolk.
		b) Understand and communicate who partners are and what their offer is	Review the current approach to communicating with communities, sharing best	<b>ONGOING</b>  <b>Post-Covid-19 response:</b> Feedback from community groups

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
		c) Share best practice and learning from successes/failures	practice and signposting them to support; and put in place improvements.	was that communication with was in large part extremely effective during Covid-19. CAS and WSC are working with community groups to ensure these links continue after Covid-19, and that community groups' views on the best form of support are taken forward.
	C6. Promote and develop use of networking resources such as "Next Door" to enable individual engagement in supporting community needs		Remind Families and Communities Team to promote use of networking resources within communities.	<b>ONGOING</b>
	C7. Explore with SALC the development of an app to communicate with parish councils	a) Share information on opportunities for development of assets (churches, village halls and other buildings)	Explore with SALC.	<b>ONGOING</b> . Meeting with SALC CEO and Chair took place on 13 March. Work on hold due to Covid-19.

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
<b>Identifying and nurturing assets</b>	C8. Raise awareness of the value that community assets offer		Continue to support communities in championing the role of both existing and new facilities in their local areas. Signpost community groups to support from <a href="#">Locality</a> .	<b>ONGOING.</b> e.g. Suffolk Village Halls week event Suffolk ACRE and CAS in January 2020.  Business grants to village halls and places of worship  WSC and support for when community groups are up and running again
<b>Bringing all together in supporting rural communities</b>	C9. Promotion of parish council clustering where appropriate to share approaches		Families and Communities Service Manager to explore with parish councils the opportunity for clustering and where appropriate share resources.	<b>ONGOING</b> WSC to explore with Parish Councils in the future as appropriate as opportunities arise.
	C10. Explore approaches to clustering assets e.g. village halls to simplifying management		Where opportunities are identified Families and Communities Officers will continue to promote sharing and clustering of assets with communities for example sharing of booking systems.	<b>ONGOING</b> WSC to explore with Parish Councils in the future as appropriate as opportunities arise.

Themes	Actions	Associated activities	Planned actions	Progress
	C11. Explore combining SALC and WSC Parish liaison		Discuss with SALC the opportunity to merge forums to ensure better support from all parishes	<b>ONGOING.</b> Meeting with SALC CEO and Chair took place 13 March. Plans still being progressed, but due to Covid-19, further work has been delayed. Will be explored in the future.
	C12. Continue linking up Good Neighbour Schemes		Remind Families and Communities Team to promote within communities, where appropriate.  Continue to work with CAS in promoting Good Neighbour Schemes.	<b>ONGOING</b> A number of new Good Neighbour Schemes have emerged as a result of Covid-19. WSC links new schemes with existing ones to share best practice.  WSC is working with some of the smaller schemes that would like to have co-ordinating arrangements to bring them together.