Fair Oak & Horton Heath Parish Council: Community Development Action Plan

# 1. Background

In November/December 2020 a parish wide community engagement survey was undertaken. The primary goal was to better understand the needs and priorities of residents with a view to using the results to shape a “living” action plan which would inform the strategic priorities in the 2021-2023 Corporate Plan.

From the 30 questions posed in the survey, and the survey results, it became clear that there were occurring key themes being raised by residents. The council used these as a basis for its key corporate priorities.

One of the five strategic priorities set out in the 2021-2023 Corporate Plan details the necessity for a comprehensive community engagement strategy:

“*Community engagement – we will increase our communication and engagement with residents and offer a diverse range of methods whilst improving on our digital engagement as per residents’ request. We will ensure engagement is inclusive and provide greater opportunity for community involvement.*”

The Parish Council set forth a comprehensive community engagement strategy in Chapter 16 of its Constitution. This strategy sets out clear objectives and principles for which all engagement enterprises within the parish must adhere to, and therefore provides the framework for the following Community Development Action Plan.

# 2. What is a community?

The parish of Fair Oak and Horton Heath is comprised of approximately 12,339 residents in approximately 5,012 dwellings as of 2022. However, the classifications of what makes a community are more complex than geographic boundaries.

Communities can, essentially, be classified into the following categories[[1]](#footnote-1):

1. **Communities of Place:** Communities of people brought together by geographic boundaries.
2. **Communities of Interest:** Communities of people who share the same interest or passion.
3. **Communities of Action:** Communities of people trying to bring about change.
4. **Communities of Practice:** Communities of people in the same profession or who undertake the same activities.
5. **Communities of Circumstance:** Communities of people brought together by external events/situations.

It is, therefore, the obligation of the Parish Council to ensure that it is effectively engaging with, and supporting, our community of residents and the wider communities that they belong to and accounting for the diversity that this brings within the Community Development Action Plan.

# 3. What is “Community Development”?

The term “community development” has adopted multiple definitions over the history of its use. However, Rhonda Phillips and Robert H. Pittman[[2]](#footnote-2) have defined community development to:

1. A **process** of developing a community’s ability to act collectively and work together to solve common problems or work towards common goals.
2. An **outcome** of taking collective action and the result of that action for improvement in a community in any or all realms including, but not limited to:
	1. Physical
	2. Environmental
	3. Cultural
	4. Social

With a broad definition such as this, the Parish Council has an obligation to ground its community development strategy within the parameters set out in the 2021-2023 Corporate Plan and Constitution.

# 4. Objectives

The objectives below identify how the Parish Council can ensure that the Community Development Action Plan delivers an effective and coordinated approach to community development for the benefit of all residents and the diverse communities of Fair Oak and Horton Heath. We will:

* **Build a Community Network**
* **Signpost Support and Services**
* **Empower Our Residents to Use Their Skills and Talents**
* **Create a Community for All**
* **Build Trust Between Residents and the Parish Council**

# 4a. Build a Community Network

Fair Oak and Horton Heath is at its best when it is well-connected. We are privileged to serve a parish that hosts many vibrant and well-organised community groups. As a Parish Council, it is our responsibility to create and maintain strong links between our parish’s organisations, groups, and individuals so that they may share their knowledge, support each other, and help contribute to a wider sense of place.

These connections increase our community’s social capacity- the “extent to which members of a community can work together effectively”- and is a vital element of community building.[[3]](#footnote-3)

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| We will… | So that… |
| Communicate regularly with community groups to identify their needs and aspirations more effectively. | The Parish Council can more efficiently connect groups with common interests together so that they may support each other. |
| Encourage partnership working between the Parish Council and its residents, groups, and organisations. | We are more effectively building upon existing assets in the parish, promoting vibrant, sustainable communities. |
| Appropriately utilise our platforms as a service for community groups and individuals to advertise their organisations and events. | Our residents can connect and engage with each other more effectively, encouraging a greater sense of place. |

How Will We Measure Success?

The success of this objective will be measured in the following ways:

* Data to be collected annually from community groups and organisations for the purpose of monitoring the improvement in how engaged and involved our residents feel in the decision-making of the parish. For instance, through the distribution of online and paper surveys.
* Partnership working between our community’s organisations have been given the adequate resources to work together, with reduced level of input from CDO.
* Local groups and organisations can easily access information, decreasing the request for said information from the community’s organisations, groups, and individuals.

# 4b. Signpost to Support and Services

Communities are propagated from both shared experiences and shared services. As a Parish Council, we have an obligation to signpost support and services to our community’s organisations, groups, and individuals. By providing our community’s residents and organisations with the resources and support to help themselves, we are in turn empowering them to become sustainable, invaluable community assets.

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| --- | --- |
| We will… | So that… |
| Gain knowledge and better understand the assets and services within our community and the groups that deliver these. | The Parish Council can aid in building of our community’s capacity and capabilities.  |
| Maintain productive relationships with our residents and their organisations, linking them together.  | The Parish Council may effectively support our residents in accessing and engaging with their fellow community members and their organisaitons. |
| Ensure our communications on voluntary sector support etc. are accessible and current.  | Our residents and their organisations are supported in their engagement with support networks and services. |

How Will We Measure Success?

The success of this objective will be measured in the following ways:

* Our residents can access information pertaining to the support and services on offer to them, and requests for said information decrease due to its accessibility.
* Effective communication has developed between residents and their organisations, the Community Development Officer, and voluntary sector support services.
* Our residents feel empowered to connect with our parish’s support networks and services.

# 4c. Empower Our Residents to Use Their Skills and Talents:

Daniel V. Rainey et al. present three essential forms of community capital wherein a community can locate its assets: physical, human, and social.[[4]](#footnote-4) The “Asset-Based Community Development” approach sets out to build on these assets, rather than focusing on a community’s needs. Anna Haines states that, by implication, “concentrating on community assets will create a snowball effect” whereby the positive community outlook that has been engendered by focusing on what a community succeeds in will, in turn, influence other areas in a community such as its needs.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This objective seeks to capitalise on the wealth of human capital within our community. These are the skills, talents, and knowledge of our residents. The Parish Council is not a supplier, nor are our residents, customers. As such, we must empower them to use their gifts to contribute to the community at large.

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| --- | --- |
| We will… | So that… |
| Encourage local volunteers to sign-on to local initiatives, making best use of their skills and interests. | The Parish Council may more effectively utilise existing resources within our community to contribute to a wider sense of ownership and place. |
| Effectively support our existing network of community groups and individuals to connect residents with one another. | Residents and their organisations can share their knowledge, passions, and skills with one another to contribute to greater community cohesion. |
| Involve our residents at an early stage in our proposed initiatives, utilising the method of “Appreciative Inquiry”[[6]](#footnote-6), incorporating the strengths and aspirations of our residents in our decision-making. | We are engaging in positive discussions with our residents, empowering them to envision solutions to issues that are raised, and encouraging them to explore their aspirations for the community. |

How Will We Measure Success?

The success of this objective will be measured in the following ways:

* Our residents and organisations will be more active in the designing and delivering of our initiatives and events.
* The skills and talents of our residents will more readily be sought out and employed as a pre-requisite to the success of our goals.
* When designing initiatives, public consultations will successfully adopt the method of “Appreciative Inquiry”.

# 4d. Create a Community for All

A community functions at its best when the diversity of its residents is both recognised and represented. As always in a community, there are those who feel that change is happening around them whilst they are left out of the conversation. Oftentimes it is the most vulnerable in a community that are the most under-represented.

This objective seeks to mitigate this by making a concerted effort to ensure that all residents are equally represented and to ensure we are appropriately accounting for the diversity of lived experience within our community.

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| --- | --- |
| We will… | So that… |
| Endeavour to engage with all members of the community.  | The Parish Council may effectively hear all voices within the community, so that all residents can contribute to the ambitions of their place and community. |
| Support community-based initiatives, which represent those that are most vulnerable in our community. For example, by becoming a Dementia Friendly Parish.  | Our initiatives and goals are reflective of the needs and passions of a wider range of our residents so that our residents may take comfort in the confidence that we are an inclusive community. |

How Will We Measure Success?

The success of this objective will be measured in the following ways:

* When engaging in community development, the Parish Council makes every effort to involve and engage those that are the most vulnerable and underrepresented.
* The Parish Council successfully encourages and supports lasting and sustainable initiatives which encompass the most vulnerable members in our community.
* The Parish Council has successfully encouraged partnership working between a diverse array of community groups with traditionally different compositions and interests.
* Our initiatives and projects are representative of the demographics within our parish.

# 4e. Build Trust Between Residents and the Parish Council.

Simon Parker et al. describe the necessity of trust-building between local authorities and their residents as imperative to their overall success. Accordingly, the public is likely to gain this trust “only when they perceive it to be performing well against all three of these factors – services, interpersonal relations and decision making”.[[7]](#footnote-7) Relationship building is highlighted as a valued means to build trust between a council and its residents.

This objective seeks to approach trust-building between residents and the Parish Council by means of expanding our interpersonal relations with our residents and their organisations, which will invariably have a positive impact on other areas such as the Parish Council’s decision-making.

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| --- | --- |
| We will… | So that… |
| Create stronger links with our communities, encouraging opportunities for residents to work in partnership with the Parish Council. | residents feel as though the Parish Council is accessible and accountable to them.  |
| Ensure consultation opportunities are used effectively and advertised clearly at the beginning of the decision-making process.  | The public is aware of their ability to engage in the decision-making process and to have their voices heard. |
| Remain honest and transparent with our residents, ensuring that communications to the public surrounding decisions made emphasis their procedural fairness. | Our residents remain confident in our abilities and feel as though we are an accessible and approachable Parish Council.  |

How Will We Measure Success?

The success of this objective will be measured in the following ways:

* Data to be collected annually from community groups and organisations for the purpose of monitoring the improvement in how engaged and involved our residents feel in the decision-making of the parish. For instance, through the distribution of online and paper surveys.
* Consultations are advertised in a comprehensive manner and in a reasonable timescale, ensuring that every parishioner can participate in the decision-making process.
* Productive and successful rapport built between residents and their groups and the Community Development Officer.

# 5. Timescale

Over the next year, the implementation of this action plan strives to adhere to the following timescale:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Objective** | **Spring** | **Summer**  | **Autumn** | **Winter** |
| **Build a Community Network** | CDO to meet with residents and community groups and begin to highlight shared interests and goals. | CDO to begin linking said groups together in common initiatives. For example, the Jubilee Time Capsule. | CDO to begin forming sustainable links between different residents and community groups so they may share skills and support. | CDO to collect data residents and community groups to assess impact of the Community Development Action Plan and begin forward planning. |
| **Signpost to Support and Services** | CDO to gain working knowledge of the services and support networks within our parish and its neighbouring areas. | CDO to begin using knowledge of said services and support networks to aid residents in accessing information.  | CDO to continue empowering residents to utilise their community network connect with support networks and services. | CDO to approach residents and community groups to discuss the accessibility of information on offer to them to aid in assessing the impact of the Action Plan and in forward planning. |
| **Empower Residents to Use Their Skills and Talents** | CDO to meet with residents and community groups, gaining a knowledge of their talents, skills, passions, and goals. | CDO to encourage local volunteers to sign-on to local initiatives, making best use of their skills and interests. | CDO to empower residents to utilise their skills and talents within community projects as a pre-requisite to the success of our goals. | CDO to review the projects undertaken over the year and conduct a gap analysis to assess if they successfully utilised the skills and talents of our community members. |
| **Create a Community for All** | CDO to undertake profiling research of the parish to ascertain needs in the community.  | CDO to begin working with the relevant groups and services with better access to those vulnerable in our community. | CDO to support community-based initiatives, which represent those that are most vulnerable in our community. | CDO to review the projects undertaken over the year and conduct a gap analysis to assess if they were inclusive and accessible to all members of the community. |
| **Build Trust Between Residents and the Parish Council**  | CDO to meet with residents and community groups and begin establishing rapport. | CDO to focus on delivery of manageable targets to build confidence in residents. | CDO support the Parish Council maintain links with residents, encouraging opportunities for residents to work in partnership with the Parish Council. | CDO to collect data residents and community groups to assess impact of the Community Development Action Plan and begin forward planning.  |

# 6. Evaluation

This action plan will be reviewed by Community Development Officer, in conjunction with clerk, six months after ratification by referring to the implementation timescale and success criteria set out within this document to assess the success of its implementation and pose further amendments.

Following the annual survey, data will be analysed using the aforementioned timescale and success criteria as a metric and presented to Members to inform forward planning and the amendment of the Community Development Action Plan.

1. <https://www.feverbee.com/different-types-of-communities/#:~:text=Different%20Types%20Of%20Communities%201%20Interest.%20Communities%20of,communities%2C%20try%20to%20develop%20a%20community%20of%20interest>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Phillips, Rhonda and Pittman, Robert H. *An Introduction to Community Development* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 7-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mattessich, Paul “Social Capital and Community Building” in Phillips, Rhonda and Pittman, Robert H. *An Introduction to Community Development* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rainey, D.V., Robinson, K.L., Allen, I., and Christy, R.D., “Essential forms of Capital for Sustainable Community Development”, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 85:3, pp. 708-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Haines, Anna “Asset-Based Community Development” in Phillips, Rhonda and Pittman, Robert H. *An Introduction to Community Development* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Appreciative Inquiry is a way of looking at organisational change which focuses on identifying and doing more of what is already working, rather than looking for problems and trying to fix them. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Parker, Simon, et al. *State of Trust How to Build Better Relationships between Councils and the Public*, (London: Demos, 2008) p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)