

**Evaluation of the
Coastal West Sussex Programme
5 Towns Network Case Study**

The Gilfillan Partnership Ltd

April 2008



4.3 Case Study Three: The Five Towns Network

Project partners: Arun, Adur & Worthing and Chichester Local Authorities, West Sussex County Council, SEEDA, West Sussex Economic Partnership. A representative of West Sussex County Council chairs the Management Group.

CWS Programme funding: £712,000

Other public sector investment: £400,000

Total investment: £1,112,000

4.3.1 Project description

The network, which was originally formed in 2004 as an informal network for exchanging experience, brings together regeneration practitioners (officers) from the five towns of Selsey, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing and Shoreham by Sea to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the long term regeneration and vitality of the five towns.

The original objectives for the network were to strive for:

1. A more co-ordinated approach to urban regeneration and town centre management
2. A network to share information, best practice, lessons learned
3. Increasing the skills base of regeneration, economic development and planning practitioners
4. A sequenced approach to accessing SEEDA funds

4.3.2 Key achievements

Each of the five towns has developed a Masterplan setting out their long term vision for revitalising their towns, with extensive consultation to agree priorities and actions for delivery. The officers involved have learned a lot from each other during the process and the network has given them a ready made source of mutual peer support and practical help.

In order to pump prime progress towards achieving the goals and ambitions set out in their Masterplans, and in order to bring forward the release of key development sites, the Network applied for and was provided with a significant budget (approx £1million) of CWS Programme funding in late 2006. Decisions about how this budget should be divided were devolved to the Network. A protocol for how the funding should be distributed was agreed and the towns were invited to come forward with detailed proposals setting out their plans, outputs budgets and leverage. The funding for the Network also contained other elements, including funding for a co-ordinator and funding for a small training budget. The arrangements appear to have worked very well since. Members of the network attribute the smooth running of this aspect of the network to the experience, which members had gained of managing devolved budgets in SRB.

This devolved pot of funding has resulted in the following activity in each of the five towns:

In order to progress the Littlehampton Vision, small scale funding for a series of development plans, small scale bridging funding for research and other studies necessary to inform and encourage potential investors and other related activity in pursuit of the Masterplan where there was no mainstream or other identifiable source of funding.

A programme known as 'First Domino' to take forward the initial phase of the Shoreham Renaissance Strategy. This was a series of interrelated projects to bring forward the two key development sites identified in the strategy. They included; the relocation of a number of Adur's community groups in order to assemble and bring forward sites identified in the Shoreham Renaissance Masterplan, at the same time providing improved community facilities in Shoreham; a movement study to mitigate the impact of pedestrianisation; removal of car parks and upgrading of rough land to a car park, illuminations for a local 11th century church; landscaping; assembly of a key development site (which was in multiple ownership) with a development brief.

Creation of a welcome landmark for visitors as they enter Selsey; development of a technical guide for High Street Highways, Public Realm and Paving Improvements, development of a blue plaque scheme and Heritage Trail, an audit of local retailers as potential investors into the High street and the production of promotional literature promoting the High Street to residents, in order to improve the physical environment and restore traditional features, creating a sense of well being and a wealthier image for the High Street.

A series of projects to support the initial delivery of the Worthing Masterplan, including a town centre transport study/model; specific planning guidance via site briefs for four separate areas; a beach front implementation plan; a marketing and branding plan; a public realm and seafront improvement strategy; and a report on options for Cultural & Civic Hub development.

In Bognor Regis, due to the scale and nature of the developments taking place across the town and the progress already made, the need for specialist advice and support on a long term and continuing continual basis was recognised early on. Arun District Council have appointed EDAW together with Peter Brett Associates and DTZ as specialist development advisors to provide specialist advice in relation to the developments. CWS Programme funding has been used to support this contract by undertaking an initial in-depth strategic assessment of the town.

Funding has also helped to to bring in specialist environmental remediation expertise for a potential key site within the town. AIH has also supported the development of a mobile live information point for the public to keep them informed of the progress of regeneration in Bognor Regis. This can be moved around to different locations in the town to help to spread the message to wider audiences and to be used for special events or public consultations. This is key in keeping the community engaged and involved in their changing town.

These activities appear to be small steps individually and it could be argued that the local authorities themselves could have paid for some, but they built on local authority investments, enabling them to go further or to do things they otherwise could not have contemplated doing, and cumulatively they have helped to ensure that things can be progressed more quickly than would otherwise have been possible and in a far more concerted way than would have been possible, especially if each town had been working to the vastly different timescales for Masterplanning that is all too often the case between neighbouring towns.

One proposal attempted to quantify what potential outputs might be expected in the next 15-20 years in just one of the five towns if the project proposals went ahead as planned:

- Up to 2000 new homes

- Enhanced visitor attractions for the seafront
- A sustainable and more attractive town centre
- A new cultural and creative quarter
- Significantly improved gateway to the north of the town
- Significant levels of new employment
- Positive impact on deprivation in key deprived wards

If even a fraction of these outputs are achieved, CWS Programme pump priming alongside other investment will have been catalytic in contributing significantly to revitalising these towns.

Cross network working has involved the following:

Production of a Coastal Investment Guide promoting Coastal West Sussex as an attractive area for investment. Linked to this, a Coastal Opportunities event took place at Goodwood in June 2007 to promote the area to prospective developers and inward investors.

A Five Towns plus Chichester Retail study completed by CACI detailing the current 'offer' of competing retail centres and potential retailers and shoppers who could be attracted to the area.

A contract was awarded to DTZ in 2006 to provide specialist ad hoc on demand property advice to facilitate developments coming forward from the towns' Masterplans

South Coast Design Forum (SCDF). The Network has provided initial funding to enable the Forum to be established and to run some 'testing the water' events held in Bognor Regis and Shoreham-by-Sea in February 2008. These informal networking events were aimed at inviting local businesses to find more out about the forum and its activities. The third event '5 Towns Network & SCDF Panel Discussion' took place on Tuesday 18th March in Littlehampton. This was part of the Network's capacity building programme and involved a panel of expert speakers chaired by Peter Murray, the SCDF Chairman. The event attracted over 40 attendees ranging from local businesses, Elected Members, local authority officers and SEEDA. Funding has been secured from other sources to continue the SCDF beyond March 2008.

A 'Coastal West Sussex Accommodation Futures Study' across the five towns is expected to report in May 2008, assessing the future demand of the accommodation sector across Coastal West Sussex Strip.

4.3.3 Training and development

Until June 2007, a series of formal and informal training programmes were delivered by experts in their fields to develop the capacity and skills of members of the network. More than 290 people attended these events and a further 50 participated in three formal training courses. The events included sessions covering issues such as:

- Delivering your Masterplan
- Site Development
- Retail and construction skills
- Compulsory purchase
- A presentation on the Five Towns retail study completed by CACI (with CWS Programme funding)

- Understanding commercial development
- Effective media skills
- Sustainable communities masterclass
- Information exchange

The addition of a further £50,000 from SEEDA in June 2007 via the Academy of Sustainable Communities to pilot a bespoke training for councillors and officers working across the fields of planning, regeneration and community development. Known as the Learning Laboratory, this initiative added considerably to the profile of the network (it also added pressure on the network co-ordinator to deliver the programme in an almost unrealistically short timescale) and opened up more opportunities for events involving both practitioners and politicians, which in turn has helped participants to improve their understanding about each other and about wider issues beyond narrow day to day issues and professional boundaries. One aim of this funding was to influence the nature and shape of training programmes and budgets of partners beyond the end of the funding period (also 31 March 2008). Training has included:

- Prince 2
- Urban design
- Section 106 (Planning Gain) Masterclass
- Sustainability appraisal training
- I&DeA workshop on Effective democracy for sustainable communities
- Effective Media Skills Training

Since June 2007 until the end of April 2008, the network trained 205 people, including 11 councillors and 194 officers and others.

4.3.4 Wider networks

The network has begun to create links with other networks and share experiences with others across a range of relevant subjects. This wider network is estimated to comprise some 182 members relating to the local authorities, local agencies such as Business Link, local businesses and some members from Portsmouth across to Brighton, offering further potential for cross boundary working. It was a source of some surprise to us that the network does not seem to have looked yet to the South to potential partners in France or even further afield.

The network has joined the BURA Seaside Network and other relevant networks such as the Association of Town Centre Managers and the Coastal Communities Alliance. The manager has attended various meetings and conferences to provide a voice and to help to raise the profile of the five towns and Coastal West Sussex on a wider national stage.

Key points:

All the relevant studies have been unanimous in identifying that the coastal areas of the region are areas of massive untapped potential. Through the joint work of the network some of that potential at least is starting to be released.

An event to review the achievements and to look towards the future of the network was held in March 2008. It concluded that:

- The network has ‘delivered what it said on the tin’, acknowledging that they are working in partnership on common issues in a context where each town is individual and each has individual and varying priorities.
- The network had worked better than many had expected.
- It had been particularly helpful, for example in enabling the network to address common issues as a network; and, enabling the 5 Towns & County Council to learn from one another’s experience had enabled them to develop better quality Masterplans than would otherwise have been possible
- One measure of how far the network has come is that it is ‘even being acknowledged politically’ as was demonstrated by the featuring of a joint policy framework on planning of employment space
- The network has been an invaluable support network for officers
- It has impacted on the skills base across officers in a range of different departments and disciplines and on members. Not only have skills been developed and gained, but also the training and development and cross fertilisation has enabled officers to better understand and improve their work with officers in different departments and professional disciplines and their work with members and their understanding of policy areas/issues, as well as the work of members themselves. Network members now have a far broader view and overview of policy areas and are far better able to see things more broadly than hitherto.
- The group also identified a ‘spill over’ or ‘ripple’ impact and benefit of the network on other policy areas, for example neighbourhood regeneration.
- The Network has also achieved much in working to represent the towns externally
- In making capital spending decisions the network inherited some elements of the approach from SRB, it agreed a protocol on how funding should be spent and the arrangements have worked well. Members of the group felt the arrangements had demonstrated the benefits of a further level of devolution from the CWS Partnership Board.

Our discussions with members of the network and with a range of people running other projects lead us to concur with these observations. In our view the network, thanks in no small measure to the tireless energy and dedication of its co-ordinator, and to the commitment and backing of its members, has been a real jewel in the CWS Programme crown with unlimited potential to add far more value in future.

4.3.5 Next steps

The original proposal submitted to SEEDA in October 2006 was for a project, which would run until the end of 2008/9. It was not until late 2007 that it was confirmed that funding would cease after March 2008. This has necessitated a revamping and bringing forward of plans and has resulted in some (albeit limited) underachievement on the original objectives of the project.

In terms of the future, all concerned have agreed that the network should continue and that it would be a serious backward step if it did not. A proposal for funding (capital and revenue) was submitted to SEEDA in late 2007. This was not accepted although we understand that SEEDA consider the project to be Transitional, which apparently indicates a willingness to support its continuation, at least in revenue terms. Whilst the project could have delivered more in terms of its capital support for progressing the various Masterplans if there had been more time, CWS Programme has provided the pump priming funding to help get things moving and to help lever and proactively influence massive private and public sector investments which are planned for the area of the next decade or so.

There remains a long way to go on issues of co-ordination, even though (in large part as a result of the network) politicians may be beginning to see Coastal West Sussex as a coherent area. There also remains a great deal to do around issues of current and future professional skills, including the availability/or lack of it of suitably skilled people such as planners; further joint work could help in recruitment of officers but also in terms of skill development and recruitment of councillors

The network also needs to consider how it should fit with other sub regional structures/partnerships and with Local Area Agreements, not only in Sussex but also wider e.g. in terms of the emerging Partnership for Urban South Hampshire, and also to be realistic and to have ambitions which will work in the 'real world'

The network has potential to forge relationships with other organisations and partnerships (such as Universities and FE Colleges) – this issue needs further thought, particularly in light of indications from SEEDA that they would be likely to provide some funding for a group that had a focus on education led regeneration.

4.3.6 Lessons learned

A host of useful lessons were learned, particularly in the following areas:

Training

- Member engagement - email is not always the best form of communication, need to use different ways in which to reach out to them, build on established relationships that officers have with their Members
- Engaging peoples interest to take up courses - need detailed information on the content of course and interesting email heading to make people read it or an interesting speaker to draw people in
- Need a different way for people to sign up rather than send out info in boring HTML text email. For one of the SCDF events, a local design company did an electronic invite. It was well designed, grabbed peoples attention and they could click on a link which took them to an email to sign up straightaway, quick, painless and easy. This worked really well.
- Evaluation Forms - people got fed up filling these in; in the future the network will look at an online evaluation form, easy to fill in, weblink.
- Website has been used as useful tool in terms of advertising and retaining information on events. Included feedback from all events, proved very insightful
- Having 6 months to plan, spend £50,000 and run a programme of events is not long enough.

Capital funding

- Takes longer than 18 months or 2.5 years to see sites come forward and be developed - more like 10 - 15 years - funders need to be realistic about timescales, especially if looking for long term impacts and benefits
- Masterplans are a key invaluable tool for planning authorities in identifying and challenging ad hoc development not in line with their co-ordinated efforts
- Guidance produced such as Public realm strategies or technical guidance needs to be integrated as part of Local Development Framework processes or as supplementary planning guidance in order to realise the real benefits

- PID process, which was how the members of the network would bid for projects, worked effectively, enabling easy management and financial management and in helping to keep up to date with progress on each others' projects.

Project management

Finally, the project co-ordinator, in common with the Programme Team, developed a 'lessons learned' log, which is included as Appendix Two. This helps to capture some of the day to day issues and lessons learned during the course of co-ordinating the project.