

Our Vision & Plan

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The First Year

The ideas in the foregoing section and the more detailed thoughts in the annex provide an exciting, enticing, menu (which could absorb many times the amount of funding actually available). We are much encouraged by the ingenuity of our community, and keen to see as many projects as possible brought to reality as quickly as possible.

But we are also conscious that as we work to do so, we could induce a sort of child-in-a-sweetshop syndrome, whereby it becomes difficult-to-impossible to make choices. As risky as this sort of inertia might be, it might be at least as counter-productive to opt for too ambitious an initial stage of action.

We are therefore resolved to begin with measured but significant steps that we hope will at the same time lay the groundwork for maximising the longevity of this project, help realise some of our more fundamental objectives, and encourage a strengthened sense of self confidence among our community, that will in turn encourage the production of still more innovative and well-supported projects.

At this stage, therefore, we intend to work on three levels simultaneously.

Our initial experience with small scale participatory budgeting events has been wholly positive. Very modest amounts of money have made a significant difference to a number of local groups. At the same time, the process has resulted in a feeling among those who participated that it was their own voices that mattered. Furthermore, the nature of the process provided opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas that few had originally anticipated. We envisage a continuing role for events of this nature – possibly for the entire life of the Big Local project. We therefore intend to hold further small-scale participatory budgeting events: probably two per year, with a total budget of up to £20,000 per annum.

Building on this base, we also propose to encourage (and if necessary assist with the development of) proposals for two or three more substantial projects during the first year of our programme. We will give preference to projects likely to help produce jobs and income or to improve the look of our area, since we see these as key early steps for our community. But we would not exclude well-designed and convincing projects covering some of the other priority areas we have described. In year one of our project, we would anticipate devoting some £30,000 to these.

And at the same time, we wish to address some of the cross-cutting issues that we believe can help make an important beginning to a newly-energised local area. With this in mind, we intend to focus our efforts on securing comprehensive feasibility studies on the possibilities of creating a community hub building and of an ambitious community growing space/garden/farm facility.

There is a strong local view that an innovative and flexible community hub building, which could not only provide a focal point for community services, but also an opportunity to assist efforts at providing training and employment support to our community, ought to be a priority. Any project of this nature, on the scale currently being considered, would consume (in its early stages at least) a large part of our Big Local funds, and it is likely that supplementary funding from other sources will need to be secured to complement our own. We share the view that a community hub building could play an invaluable role in helping equip our community for the future. But given the scale of the ambition, we believe that it is essential to satisfy ourselves that the strength of the ambition can be matched by an equally robust feasibility and business case before we commit substantial funds.

A second cross-cutting project that we believe has the potential to make an important contribution to our objectives would be the establishment of a sizeable community garden or farm. This could help bring the community together in a cooperative venture, provide opportunities to improve health, employment, and recreation – as well as reducing the cost of living of those involved, and providing income that could be recycled into further projects. But here too, we would wish to reassure ourselves that the potential has a realistic possibility of becoming a successful reality.

We would envisage commissioning a single feasibility study to cover both projects – not least because of the obvious advantage if we were able to see them co-located. We would not expect the sort of professional help that we require to come cheaply. We would therefore propose to earmark up to £50,000 for this work.

Infrastructure

In order to achieve the first year objectives described above, we foresee a need for some relatively substantial infrastructure: much of it likely to be required only in the shorter term.

We consider it essential to build upon the achievements of GPs 1 and 2, by encouraging still wider participation from within our community. There are a number of complementary ways in which we propose to work towards this. First, we propose to appoint a number of part-time community champions, to work in the various parts of our area to explain what we are doing and ways in which individuals can become involved. In parallel, we wish to secure the services of a number of young entrepreneurs, whom we can pay to provide specific services relating to increasing interest and participation by our young people.

Fortuitously, we also have an opportunity to acquire – for a year – a shop space almost adjacent to the local supermarket which is used by probably 90% of our residents. By sharing this with those developing the St Blaise Neighbourhood Plan, we could make good use of display materials etc, further driving home to our community the ways in

which we hope to see our neighbourhood developing. By having a suitably knowledgeable advisor in the shop, we could further assist people to come forward with, and to develop, their ideas for projects.

In addition to these activities, we anticipate that at some stage during the year it would be right to hold a large-scale event to bring what we are doing to the fore. This could be a key step in efforts to involve other potential funders – private and public sector – in what we are doing, and encouraging them to provide additional funding.

Furthermore, while we are comfortable with a public participation approach to the smaller projects, we might need something more detailed when it comes to projects worth several thousand pounds. It might therefore be necessary to seek professional support from those with experience and expertise in the assessment and administration of grants and loans. We are fortunate enough to have a number of such bodies in Cornwall, including the Cornwall Community Foundation and the Cornwall Community Bank (our local credit union). But their assistance will come at a price.

This will be a relatively expensive set of infrastructural arrangements. But we believe that £50,000 or less, spent carefully now and amortized over ten years, will prove to be exceptional value for money.

Future Years

We do not find it easy at this stage to forecast likely expenditure patterns for year two and beyond. Much will depend on the outcome of our year one plans. A positive feasibility study for a neighbourhood hub and community farm might result in a heavy year two and three draw down, with the expectation that these projects might in the medium term begin giving a return that could be recycled. On the other hand, a conclusion that the two projects should not go ahead in the early years of the Big Local, might result in a more modest demand in years two and three, until momentum builds.

We recognise that this sort of prevarication does not help those charged with managing the funds. But we consider it futile to pretend that we can offer a clear steer beyond year one when, for the moment, this is beyond us.