

The 21st century rural community



The impacts of climate change and the diminishing resources of fossil fuels for energy are two of the greatest challenges we will face in the 21st Century.

This illustration, of a community which has joined together to reduce its environmental footprint, offers some ideas for achievable and replicable community action which will help us to meet these 21st Century challenges.

1 Community Car Club

Due to high fuel prices, climate change and environmental concerns, the Smith family have reassessed their need to have a car and have joined the **Community Car Scheme**. This provides a pool of cars across the district, for use by local people. The Smith family pay an annual fee which covers the cost of the insurance, tax and servicing and an hourly rate for the hire of the vehicle.

The village has two of these cars available. Joining the scheme means the family have reduced their carbon footprint and have increased use of local services. They also use their bikes and the community minibus, to access trains and buses in the nearby town.

The cars are parked centrally in the Village Hall car park.

2 Community minibus

The **Community Minibus** is owned by the **Parish Action Group**, driven by volunteers and runs on used chip fat, collected locally. Its daily trips to neighbouring towns take commuters to wider public transport links, take children to schools and colleges and enable residents to attend medical appointments and access other services.

In the evenings the minibus is available to young people, so they can attend after school and social activities. Once a week it is used by older people to get to the lunch club. Every month it also takes them to the Cinema Club or for an outing.

The bus is part of a wider network of community buses throughout the county.

3 Village Hall

The Village Hall is one of the main meeting hubs and has been adapted to reduce its energy use whilst offering an inviting venue. A **wind turbine, ground source heat pump and solar panels** have been installed. These generate enough energy for the building's needs and excess energy is sold to the national grid, providing an income stream to support the building. The management committee has also decided to use **Fairtrade foods, environmentally friendly cleaning products** and has installed **recycling bins**.

The **community nurse** holds a **weekly clinic** in the committee room. A fortnightly **'well clinic'** includes a **baby clinic** and **chiropody service**. The **Tiny Tots Nursery** provides full day childcare. A very successful monthly **Cinema Club** has been established, which shows two new films, one suitable for under 18s on a Friday night and one on a Saturday night for the rest of the community. This provides a welcome community social event. Another resounding success is the **Computer Club** which offers one to one computer tuition and access to computers four days a week.

The Management Committee and Parish Council provided funding for **Wi-Fi access**. A local benefactor provided the computers and software. Many of these new initiatives were a direct result of the **Community Led Plan** the village undertook.

The Village Hall has the office of the Parish Council giving the Council a high profile within the village. The Parish Council also has a **Village Information Point** in one room in the Village Hall which has been established with support from the County and District Councils.

4 Red Lion Inn

As well as being at the village's social heart, the owners of the Red Lion have set up the **Home Working Club** in its function room. The **Community Led Plan** identified a significant number of people working from home and their wish to have a forum to meet and socialise. The Inn provides **Wi-Fi connection** for home based businesses three mornings a week and there is a **small room available to hire for business meetings**. This provides a useful extra income. The **function room** can be used by the wider community when the village hall is fully booked. The Inn has signed up to **cut its carbon and recycles** all it can. It has undertaken an **Energy Audit** with the Community Buildings Adviser from the local Rural Community Council. Once a week the Red Lion offers a 'special offer' **lunch for local residents** which has become very popular.

5 Affordable housing scheme

An affordable housing scheme of 10 units has been built for **local people** in the parish. The homes are built to high **'eco homes' standards** and are owned and managed by a **Housing Association**. The Parish Council was able to use its Village Design Statement to influence the design, layout, style and materials used. The properties are available for rent or part buy, for local people with a strong local connection and will remain in perpetuity. This scheme has enabled Nathan, a man with a young family, to remain living in the parish that he has grown up in and has also helped him to support his frail elderly parents to continue to live in their own home. He is also the coach for the local boy's football team, so his being able to stay in the village, has really benefited the community.

6 Outreach Mobile Youth Centre

The **Community Led Plan** identified a lack of activities for young people in the evenings and school holidays. A **Mobile Youth Centre**, provided by Big Lottery funding, travels to the village to encourage young people to get involved in a range of activities. This programme is closely linked with the local schools and colleges. Lorna, Joe and Adele have all recently completed their Silver Duke of Edinburgh Awards and have undertaken a cookery course run from the mobile unit.

7 Rainwater recycling scheme

Martin Perkins, a keen member of the Horticultural Society has a small vegetable patch at the end of his garden, but increasing water bills made him reluctant to water his garden as often as he should. A presentation by the local Rural Community Council on **Cutting Our Carbon Together**, prompted Martin and the allotment users to purchase **water butts** for rainwater. The community hall also uses rain water from a butt to water their hanging baskets and gardens.

8 Solar Panels

The **Environmental Group**, set up as part of the **Community Led Plan**, leafleted all households in the community inviting them to join an **Energy Conservation Club** to 'Cut their Carbon Together' and 'Green Up' their community. The Energy Club has obtained substantial discounts for energy saving products by **buying in bulk** and it has been able to access free **energy saving light bulbs**. A membership fee is charged and the funds plus fundraising and donations from members, financed the **solar panels** for the Village Hall.

9 Community woodland and Green Gym

The woodland is owned and managed by the community. It is used as the location for a **Green Gym** initiative. Sarah attends the Green Gym every Saturday morning meeting friends at the same time as exercising. The woodland also provides the opportunity to learn more about the local environment.

Activities range from planting new trees and shrubs in the woodland, to clearing the undergrowth. **Coppicing activities** produce **local fencing products, wood fuel and charcoal** for the community to purchase. It provides an **informal play area** for young families and the local primary school children.

The parish volunteer Tree Wardens look after the local trees and help with tree planting schemes. They have advised the school on planting trees to provide shaded areas within the grounds.

10 Community orchard

A **community run orchard and soft fruit plot** has been developed. The orchard comprises traditional Sussex apple varieties that are threatened with extinction. The **Women's Institute** use the produce to make apple juice and apple sauce, soft fruit pies, crumbles and cakes. These are sold in the **community shop**. A percentage of the revenue from the sale of the products is given to the community shop and the remainder is reinvested in developing the plot for the following season.

11 Composting scheme / local recycling

Jennifer, a keen member of Friends of the Earth, persuaded members of the **Environmental Group** and **allotment owners**, to form a **community enterprise to produce compost**. They have secured a contract for delivery from the District Council. The introduction of this service has encouraged members of the community to reduce their waste even further and recycling facilities for other items have been set up on the same site.

The scheme offers **free fertiliser** for the local allotments and has provided Jennifer with a part time job as well as involving her in more general community activities.

12 Vegetable box scheme

Having felt badly treated by the supermarket that he supplied, Barnaby Moore was glad when his **local Vegetable Box scheme** took off. He sources his vegetables from local producers. People from the village agree to buy a box of seasonal vegetables each week which Barnaby delivers to their door.

13 Church Hall

At the church hall, Jo has set up a **crèche** that runs three mornings a week, bringing new parents together to allow them to socialise whilst their children play together.

Computers have been installed in the meeting room to give an additional opportunity for the community to **access the internet**. Two teenage mums have begun **home study courses** to help them improve their qualifications.

The Church Hall is also the place where the **Village Lunch Club** is held. This was set up and run by

volunteers to help reduce the isolation of people living on their own or for those who live away from the village centre. Volunteers also pick up people who come to the club regularly.

The Churchyard is managed by the local conservation group with systems that encourage local wildlife.

14 Weekly market / farmers' market

The church hall also provides a venue for a **weekly market** of local goods, crafts and produce, which was originally set up and run by the **Women's Institute** but is now open to all. The market, which is held every Saturday morning, includes everything from bric-a-brac to paintings and arts and crafts.

A **farmers' market** is held on the last Sunday of every month, selling a selection of local foods, like eggs, meat, fruit and vegetables, pies and preserves. There is also the opportunity for those who are not yet involved to sign up for Barnaby's **weekly vegetable box** delivery.

15 Village shop and Post Office

After the opening of a large supermarket in the neighbouring town, Mr Goddard, who owns and runs the **village shop** was fearful of a reduction in trade. With the support of the **Rural Community Council** and the **Environmental Group**, local people have been encouraged to shop here for everyday items and local produce. The shop has arranged, with the supermarket, a **weekly delivery of items** it cannot stock, which people order on line and then collect from the shop. This has reduced their need to travel and also increased the footfall and spend in the shop.

The **Post Office** was originally earmarked for closure but, supported by local residents, it now opens in the shop three mornings a week. Local businesses were delighted with this initiative that saves additional time and cost of a trip to the Post Office in town.

16 Primary School

The school has a number of schemes to encourage children to use a greener method of travelling to school and get exercise at the same time.

Mrs Green has two children at the school; Lucy uses the **walking bus** to get there on time and her older brother Matthew **cycles** and stores his bike at the **bike racks** inside the school gate. The school has recently run a cycling proficiency programme to ensure that all the children can ride their bike safely.

Mr Terry runs the **school farm** which is home to 2 sheep, 2 goats, 1 cow, a calf and 8 chickens. It also provides an allotment which produces a significant percentage of the vegetables for school dinners.

Fruit is bought from the **Community Orchard**. Parent and older students at the school help feed the animals and tend the vegetable garden on a daily basis during term time and the school holidays and have also used the Thermal Imaging Camera to look at heat loss in the building.

The school has recently installed a wood fuel boiler that is powered by wood pellets supplied locally. Talks are going on with the Village Hall to see if the same boiler could heat the hall. The school also installing a small wind turbine to supplement its heating systems.

17 Insulation and retro fit

85% of the households in the village have participated in the **Energy Club** in some way. Most of the older houses have had their **lofts insulated** and as many as can, have insulated their **cavity walls**. Other households have participated in other ways such as installing **solar panels** or **water recycling tanks** to re-use 'grey water' from baths and from washing machines.

18 Swap Shop

A **monthly Swap Shop** is held in the function room at the Red Lion Inn. This has turned into one of the most popular events that are held. People attend bringing things that they would like to exchange including clothes, games and books. Tokens are given to the vendor for their trade-in items and they can then use this token to purchase other items. Everyone thinks it is a great way of reusing items that they may not

want, but someone else might. Items not 'swapped' are sorted and recycled by the **Environment Group** who also use the swap shops to collect and recycle items not usually collected separately, such as **foil, lightbulbs and batteries**.

19 Cycleway

A **cycleway** has been built from the village to the nearest town; it is a path that avoids the fast roads. Derek uses the path to **cycle to work** in the neighbouring town and has saved a lot of money that would be spent on petrol by doing so. The path is also used by school children who **cycle to and from secondary school**.

20 Tourism

The cycleway has encouraged more **visitors** into the local area. The **Parish Council** have funded the production of **walking and cycling maps** to include **local places of interest and sign boards** in the village centre.

The Business Community have welcomed this initiative as it **advertises their services**.

On summer weekends, the **Community Minibus** takes tourists without bikes, from the railway stations to local attractions in the surrounding villages and supports pubs and tea shops – supporting local jobs.

The maps also show **'Green' B&Bs** and converted Farm accommodation.

21 Walking bus

The PTA at the school wanted to reduce the traffic at the school gate and, at the same time, improve the health of the children. They have organised a **'walking bus'** with parent volunteers and a trolley for the bags. Over half of the children now come to school this way.

22 Small businesses

Apart from the shop and Post Office, there are a number of **small businesses**, some working from home, some from converted properties and a number in a small nursery unit development on the edge of the village. A **business directory** has been produced to help advertise local businesses to local residents and to nurture networking and joint working. The businesses have co-ordinated their own **cardboard recycling** and also collect household cardboard from the village recycling site.