

“A Vision for Sidmouth”

A scoping document by the Vision Group for Sidmouth in response to “New Thinking on Clean Growth - Transforming Sidmouth” by Prof Evan Parker

Scope:

The purpose of this document is to consider proposals made by Prof Parker at a talk in March and the response from the Vision Group for Sidmouth at an ensuing meeting.

Background:

The Transition Town model was founded to tackle increasing carbon emissions at a local level, but has largely failed due to an over-dependence on volunteers.

Prof Parker proposes the setting up of new food and transport systems to be run by professionals and entrepreneurs: this will convince the public with the immediate, tangible rewards of re-localisation and de-carbonisation.

The wider democratic mandate for such a project can be found in the policies and community actions of the Sid Valley Neighbourhood Plan, which promote greater biodiversity, park and ride, home working, renewable energy and enhancement of the town centre.

Prof Parker's proposals:

A re-localised food and transport system would promote a more resilient Sid Valley:

- market gardens would be bought and managed to produce food;
- a network of mini-vans would deliver food and provide public transport;
- additional facilities would revitalise a car-free town centre.

Bids would be invited for a local food production and supply system; for a clean transport infrastructure, free at the point-of-use; and for town centre enhancement.

Capital investment costs would mount to approx £7.5m for farm-land, infrastructure, vehicles and town-centre businesses; plus £1m p/a to monitor bids and grants.

Funds would come from central government grants, rises in council tax, crowd funding, legacies, a levy on house purchases and residents.

VGS proposals:

Opportunities in a time of crisis:

The current situation might provide a catalyst for change:

- People are discovering that it is not necessary to travel to the shops or to work.
 - ACTION: to collate local/national information on new public attitudes to travel.
- Bottom-up initiatives and local entrepreneurs have used existing infrastructures and developed new networks to deliver food, products and services.
 - ACTION: to collate information from Sid Valley businesses operating during the crisis.

Project 1: Transport

Local and central government must play a role:

- STC has introduced the Hopper Bus, but struggles with finance.
 - ACTION: to work with STC on extending the bus service and new sources of funding.
- DCC has introduced e-bikes and has proposed initiatives (park and ride) but lacks funds.
 - ACTION: to work with Cllr Hughes on an e-trike network to deliver goods.
- Central government is rethinking public transport.
 - ACTION: to lobby Simon Jupp MP re subsidies, a carbon tax and other govt initiatives.

The policies of other authorities should be considered:

- Bristol, Frome and Greater Exeter are developing their own public transport plans.
 - ACTION: to investigate the processes and achievable outcomes of these plans.

The Sid Valley Neighbourhood Plan lays out specific policy areas and community actions.

- Eg: Further pedestrianisation; expansion of the cycle/shared-use network; park and ride.
 - ACTION: to work with Cllr Hughes, STC and the Chamber to further these policies.
- Eg: Encouragement of working more from home, which will remove much congestion.
 - ACTION: to work with The Lighthouse and the Frome civic hub projects.

Project 2: Food:

Public awareness of the risks to the production, supply and distribution of food needs to be raised.

- In particular, the idea of greater economic resilience through the re-localisation of food.
 - ACTION: to collate local/national information on new public attitudes to food.
- There is a need to expand the current pool of consumers for local produce.
 - ACTION: to collate information from Sid Valley residents re habits during the crisis.

There is growing demand for allotments in the Sid Valley.

- In particular, there is interest in the land for sale at Fortesque.
 - ACTION: to allow stakeholders to contact the seller – eg: Arboretum, estate agents.

There are already organisations/networks/businesses in operation in East Devon/the Sid Valley.

- In particular, there are business models and best practice to build on.
 - ACTION: to engage with local growers – eg: from the Sidmouth farmers' market
 - ACTION: to engage with other local farmers' markets – eg: Budleigh/Honiton
 - ACTION: to engage with local entrepreneurs – eg: Riverford
 - ACTION: to engage with local distribution projects – eg: the Food Bank
- There is a need to expand the current pool of businesses/suppliers/distributors.
 - ACTION: to engage with Ruth Hancock of Fresh & Green/Landworkers' Alliance.
 - ACTION: to engage with Ben Upchurch of Partridge Farm.
 - ACTION: to engage with In My Back Yard, the new East Devon producers' network.
 - ACTION: to encourage the creation of a East Devon wide farmers cooperative.
 - ACTION: to engage with the estates, eg Clinton, Cave, Coombe, National Trust, etc.

Project 3: High Street:

The high street will have to expand its offer beyond retail.

- Shops and restaurants will have been affected by the current crisis and might not reopen.
 - ACTION: to collate local information from the Chamber.
 - ACTION: to collate local/national information on new public attitudes to the high st.
- New businesses will have to be attracted.
 - ACTION: to explore the success stories re the high street – eg, The Lighthouse.
- Culture will have to be at the centre of rejuvenation.
 - ACTION: to engage with cultural bodies, eg, the Folk Festival.
 - ACTION: to engage with craft workers and businesses.
- Young people will have to be at the centre of rejuvenation.
 - ACTION: to engage with youth groups, eg the Youth Centre, the College

Any new transport infrastructure will affect the future of the high street.

- In particular, the balance of accessibility to and positive experience of the high street.
 - ACTION: to collate information on how other towns have rejuvenated their high sts.

The Sid Valley Neighbourhood Plan lays out specific policy areas and community actions.

- In particular, the built environment must be taken into consideration.
 - ACTION: to engage with the planning authorities re sustainability issues.

Constraint 1: Initial capital investments:

Financing a large-scale project need not be an issue – if the project is ambitious and achievable.

Constraint 2: Engagement:

A new delivery model is essential:

- The volunteer model has proven to be inadequate.
- To deliver projects, a broad alliance must be built of councillors, land-owners/workers, entrepreneurs, NGOs, local community groups and the public.

It is imperative to offer immediate rewards:

- Eg: free transport, a clean and safe town, an improved local economy, food delivery, local employment, etc.

Next steps:

The VGS can be a catalyst to the initial stages of such a project:

- ACTION: to meet and provide feedback on Prof Parker's proposals: DATE: 8th April
- ACTION: to write a scoping document to consider delivery: DATE: 12th April
- ACTION: to contact champions and protagonists of relevant areas: DATE: April/May
- ACTION: to meet Prof Parker and champions: DATE: 20th April
- ACTION: to write a 1-page document to be tested with key stakeholders: DATE: April
- ACTION: to apply to ED AONB to fund a viability study: DATE: April/May
- ACTION: to involve Creating Excellence: DATE: April/May

Other parties will have to become involved in any further stages:

- ACTION: to prepare for comprehensive community development
- ACTION: to apply for funding
- ACTION: to write a brief and an invitation to bid for a project
- ACTION: to employ management to oversee the project

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9th April 2020