

New Thinking on Clean Growth: Transforming Sidmouth Talk by Prof Evan Parker at the Café Scientifique on 31st March 2020

Further feedback from VGS Coordination Team meeting on 20th April

Attendees:

Prof Evan Parker
STC Cllr Denise Bickley (chair, Environment Cttee), STC Chris Lockyear (deputy chair)
Jon Ball, Dave Bramley, Graham Cooper, Robert Crick, Rita Hedley, Peter Murphy, Roger Till, Mary Walden-Till, Jeremy Woodward

Creating a vision for Sidmouth

The VGS can be a trailblazer for new models of sustainability in a time of change:

- how to manage the traffic and transport issues; how to adapt the town centre to the changing high street retail model, and increase footfall; and how to provide, produce and distribute food locally.

Constraint 1: Initial capital investments:

Financing a large-scale project need not be an issue – if it is financially viable and achievable.

Sources of funding:

- Public Works Loan Board: <https://www.dmo.gov.uk/responsibilities/local-authority-lending-pwlb/about-pwlb/>
 - eg: £10m capital over 25 years = £532k pa (fixed) = £70/household pa (for Band D property paying £1.9k pa Council Tax = 3.7% increase; to deflate to 2% after 10 yrs)
 - £1.5m pa recurrent amounts = £3.80/average household per week total
- STC Precept currently = £0.5m = £72/household; an increase to £1.5 pa = triple amount
- central government grants: <https://www.grantfinder.co.uk/>
 - eg: Coastal Community Fund through EDDC: to contact officer Jamie Buckley
 - the government is looking to big new changes: to contact MP Simon Jupp
- community financing models:
 - eg: two social enterprises for local transport and local farms run by professionals with the backing of STC
- investments from local residents and businesses
- philanthropy

Constraint 2: Engagement:

A new delivery model is essential:

- Any large-scale project will need the support of the STC, EDDC and MP Simon Jupp
- Any commercial venture will need a viable business model to obtain funding
- Above all, any community project will need the commitment of the wider population:
 - mass engagement: going beyond the current VGS model, involving others such as the Rotary, Food Bank, small-holder farmers...

To achieve the bigger vision, initial, incremental steps will be needed:

- An aim of the vision is to offer immediate rewards:
 - eg: free transport, a clean and safe town, an improved local economy, food delivery, local employment...
- Any 'interim' projects which give clear returns will help move forward the bigger vision:
 - we will need a breakthrough to persuade people to engage
- Several such projects are already happening under the coronavirus lock-down:
 - new networks are emerging; local entrepreneurs are delivering; new outlets are opening
 - people are getting used to new ways of doing things, eg: cycling/less traffic

Project 1: Transport: we need to:

start with an incremental approach to maximize involvement of the local community:

- to test public interest first – to get them used to how things can work
- to experiment – and then formally consult with the authorities:
 - eg: we need a working model for shopping without cars
 - any extra delivery/transport vehicles and bus routes could be added as and when

involve all tiers of government:

- STC frameworks and initiatives:
 - eg: more pedestrianisation on Sundays initially; consideration of trialling the closure of the High Street to traffic from 12.00 to 1600
 - Neighbourhood Plan policies and community actions
- EDDC Local Plan
- DCC and Cllr Stuart Hughes:
 - however, there have been previous issues re engaging DCC officers
 - there have been difficulties in engaging on the Feniton to Sidmouth route
 - latest Zero-Carbon planning

build on current research:

- eg: Graham's project ideas for Port Royal and town centre

carry out further research locally:

- eg: what are the numbers re who would use what bus routes?
- eg: local traffic survey
- eg: original plans for greater pedestrianisation in Sidmouth town centre

carry out research on community models in other towns and countries:

- eg: Stroud and Frome; the Totnes model: [Idea for the pedestrianisation of Fore Street in Salcombe discussed in the town](#) and [Why 'weird' Totnes holds the secret for every struggling high street](#)
- eg: Barbados transport project re mini-buses

carry out research on other current projects which could be transferred to Sidmouth:

- eg: hiring delivery e-trikes from Exeter

carry out research on emerging technologies:

- eg: 1st electric HGV vehicle from Volvo could provide a request bus/delivery service from Waitrose using a team of delivery drivers on a loop

contact local entrepreneurs to take on or expand projects

- contact Chamber or STC for possible leads

Project 2: Food production and distribution: we need to:

take control of our own food:

- working with local farmers and distributors

Project 3: Rejuvenating town centre: we need to:

appreciate that this issue is tied up with other issues:

- a rejuvenated high street can only work if traffic issues are addressed
 - eg: traffic flow; parking spaces; pedestrianisation
- the future of the town centre will be a mixture of retail and residential
 - planning regulations

be ambitious:

- what do we want a 'sustainable' high street to look like?
- which facilities would people appreciate in the town centre?
- what new opportunities are there – eg: restaurants?
- how can we 're-localise' supermarkets?

Next steps:

The VGS will commission a Viability/Feasibility Study:

- The purpose of the Study would be to determine:
 - what sort of vision are we creating?
 - what problems are we trying to solve?
 - how would these solutions work?
 - what are the numbers envisaged? (buses, hectares, funds, customers, entrepreneurs...)
- An initial draft would be put together:
 - JW to circulate draft to VGS/Evan Parker/Denise Bickley/Chris Lockyer
 - then to STC/EDDC Cllrs; Chamber and SVA
 - plus 'new stakeholders' eg Rotary, Food Bank, local businesses/shops/small-holders
 - plus Creating Excellence
- The ED AONB offer grants through the Sustainable Development Fund. Applications must meet strict criteria and projects must demonstrate support and involvement of communities, business or environmental interests within the AONB:
 - Applications must demonstrate how AONB policies will be met, and comply with the Sustainable Development Checklist.
 - There is a matched funding requirement of 50%
- Once funding has been raised, an agricultural professional will be sought and engaged to deliver against a Project Brief
- An essential step will be public engagement through press coverage

Jeremy Woodward
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