

**Changes in role of current Saffron Walden Project Officer
Operations Committee, item [Click here to enter Item no.]**

Committee: Operations Committee

Agenda Item

Date: 29th June 2006

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Title: Expanding the current role of Saffron Walden Project Officer

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Item for
decision

Summary

This report sets out the proposed changes to the current Saffron Walden Project Officer's role in order to make the resource available to other Market Towns in the district.

Recommendations

- 1 Members support the proposed extension of the Project Officer work into Great Dunmow in the first instance
- 2 Title of the Saffron Walden Project Officer be changed to Market Towns Project Officer

Background Papers

Saffron Walden Healthcheck and Action Plan
Minutes of Saffron Walden Partnership Board meeting
Minutes of Dunmow Town Strategy Group meeting 15.5.06

Impact

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Communication/Consultation | Public consultation will be required to determine the needs and priorities of the towns in the district |
| Community Safety | No particular community safety issues |
| Equalities | Consultation is required to ensure, where appropriate, the needs of hard to reach groups are included in any work |
| Finance | External funding will be sought |
| Human Rights | No issues |
| Legal implications | No issues |
| Ward-specific impacts | All |
| Workforce/Workplace | Work space may be required in Great Dunmow |

Situation

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Background

- 1 In 2003 the Saffron Walden Initiative, a community group established in 1999, was informed by the Countryside Agency of the opportunity to apply for funds under their Market Town Initiative. The SWI decided to apply for funding to complete a Healthcheck and their application included securing funding in-kind and support from numerous businesses and organisations in the town, including Uttlesford District Council. The SWI were then offered funds to complete the Healthcheck as they were an independent, non-political, active group with a track record of consultation and research into Saffron Walden's needs and wants.
- 2 The SWI used the funds to employ a person for 100 days to research and analyse the state of the town with regards to the environment, transport, economy and community and complete a wide consultation with residents and businesses. This work was supported with several hundred volunteer hours from the local community. The Healthcheck provided a snapshot of the health of Saffron Walden at a particular point in time and concluded with an Action Plan of projects.
- 3 The production of the Healthcheck and Action Plan enabled the Saffron Walden Initiative to apply successfully for funding from the Countryside Agency for the post of Saffron Walden Project Officer. The Project Officer role was to deliver the action plan detailed in the Healthcheck. The Countryside Agency committed to 50% of costs until March 2006 with the remainder of the funding being secured from Town, District and County Councils.
- 4 The work of the Saffron Walden Project Officer is steered by the Saffron Walden Partnership Board. This Board consists of representatives from Saffron Walden Initiative, Saffron Walden Town Council, Uttlesford District Council and Essex County Council. It determines the priorities of the Project Officer and offers support and involvement in local projects.
- 5 During 2005/6 the Project Officer made considerable impact by enabling local groups to establish projects, acting as a catalyst, securing funding and demonstrating the power of partnership working.
- 6 The Countryside Agency is now changing to establish the Commission for Rural Communities and Natural England. These changes will come into effect in October 2006, at which point the Countryside Agency will cease to exist. As a result the Countryside Agency's Market Town Initiative came to an end in March 2006 and the Saffron Walden Initiative sought funding for the Project Officer post from other sources. Uttlesford District Council has provided the majority of the funding and contributions were also secured from Saffron Walden Town Council and Essex County Council.
- 7 As the majority funder the District Council wishes to expand the role of the Project Officer and pass on the experiences learnt in Saffron Walden to other towns in the district. This report proposes to outline how that expansion should take place.

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The Opportunity for other Market Towns in the District

- 8 A dedicated Project Officer in Saffron Walden has proven to be a catalyst for making things happen. The post has brought together groups, started new organisations, secured funding and reinvigorated existing groups that had become dormant. The partnership working has forged links between the community and local authorities.
- 9 Other market towns in the district have their own needs and projects and they too could benefit from project delivery, partnership working and a feeling that 'things are happening'. The first challenge is determining these needs.
- 10 This piece of work needs to be driven and owned by the Community in order for them to have ownership of the resulting projects. This could follow the format of the Countryside Agency Healthcheck. Alternatively this could draw together and consolidate existing work and identify any gaps. A broad based action plan should be created as a result of either of these pieces of work.
- 11 Therefore the recommended approach for Market Towns is to have:
 - A clear and broad action plan based on community need, created and endorsed by the community.
 - A community group that own and prioritise the action plan and want to see it happen. This group acts as the main contact point for the Project Officer.
 - A base in the town where the Project Officer works from and delivers the projects
- 12 It is recommended, in the first instance, that the Project Officer starts to work with Great Dunmow. It is recognised that various groups in Great Dunmow and in particular the Dunmow Town Strategy Group have completed research and numerous studies into the needs and aspirations of the town. The Dunmow Town Strategy Group (DTSG) is a community group that includes representatives from Dunmow Town Council, the Chamber of Commerce, Uttlesford District Council and assorted other people from the community.
- 13 Whilst it is not clear at this time how the work of the Project Officer will be steered or managed, it is anticipated that close links will be established and maintained with the DTSG. The splitting of the Project Officer's time across two towns of Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden will require careful management to ensure that the effectiveness of the role is not compromised.
- 14 It is recognised that the Project Officer will need to undertake an induction into the town of Great Dunmow to familiarise herself with the key stakeholders and gain an understanding of the issues of the town. It is envisaged that this will take place through a series of meetings over the summer and autumn months.
- 15 It is then proposed that dialogue continues with the DTSG with a view to the Project Officer working with them to:
 - i. Consolidate the research work that has been completed and compile an action plan

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- ii. Identify any gaps in that work, determine if it is appropriate to complete any further research and support that work if necessary (e.g. sourcing funding)
- iii. As appropriate, support the delivery of a prioritised list of projects as determined by the Dunmow Town Strategy Group

Job title of the post

16 The work of the Project Officer will be focused on the four local centres of the district. These fall within the definition of a Market Town as set out by Action for Market Towns:

“The traditional definition of a market town is one where agricultural occupations predominated, in a settlement that serves a rural hinterland. However, the presence of a 'market' as such is not the determining feature. Of greater importance is the relationship between the town and its hinterland. The definition of a market town is as follows:

- Have a population of between 3,000 - 38,000
- Provide at least convenience shopping with some weekly and specialist needs being accommodated
- Act as a service centre for its hinterland and local community for many things, typically having **some** of the following services:
 - a bank/building society/cash point machine
 - a small health centre or large daily doctors surgery
 - a secondary school
 - permanent library facilities

17 The term “Market Town” is recognised by the local and wider community and allows access to a Market Towns network which presents a number of benefits, e.g., accessing funding information, sharing learnings and contributing to a Market Towns Forum.

18 The current job title of the post is Saffron Walden Project Officer and this will need to be changed to reflect the extension of the post. It is therefore suggested that the title of the post be changed to Market Towns Project Officer.

Risk Analysis

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigating actions |
|--|---------------|---------------|---|
| DTSG do not wish to work with the Project Officer | Medium | Medium | Try to persuade them of the potential benefits of working together, but if still unenthusiastic examine opportunities in other Market Towns. |
| There is not the will from the | Low | High | Work with the local community at an early |

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| <p>local community to produce a broad based action plan</p> | | | <p>stage to gain understanding of the importance of the action plan approach</p> |
| <p>There is not the will from the local community to deliver the action plan</p> | <p>Low</p> | <p>High</p> | <p>Work with the local community to ensure they understand the context of the action plan.</p> |