

# Conversations

## about building sustainable & inclusive communities

### An invitation

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### Join an on-line conversation

Hosted by David Towell and John O'Brien at  
<http://inclusiveandsustainable.ning.com/>

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Internet links are live and current as of January 2010.



**CENTRE FOR INCLUSIVE FUTURES**  
POLICY, ORGANISATION & COMMUNITY ACTION LEARNING

## An Invitation

We live in challenging times. On the largest canvass, writing in early 2010, it is not at all clear that we have yet come to terms with the real implications of the global economic collapse or started to take seriously the radical changes required to deal with climate change. Adaptive responses to the complexity of these and other challenges as they are experienced locally require both increasing devolution of autonomy and responsibility and the fuller mobilisation of citizens and communities. This mobilization needs to reflect the strengths of citizens organising as well as public sector efforts to achieve community engagement.

One of the challenges in which we have a strong interest is that of how the perhaps 10% of us who are disabled or meeting the problems common in later life as well as the much larger number of people for whom this is part of family life can get the opportunities and support to achieve equal citizenship and live their lives as they want. Disabled and older people and their families of course also face the same challenges as other local people and certainly can bring their ideas and skills to help find promising ways forward.

A key hypothesis of the explorations which we reflect on here is that efforts to promote the inclusion of disabled and older people in the work of building sustainable communities are not only essential in delivering equal citizenship but also a potentially important contribution to improving life for us all.

With support from the Barrow Cadbury Trust in 2009 we were able to test straightforward methods of fostering productive local conversations about sustainability and inclusion in two English Counties. We had local assistance in bringing a cross-section of citizens together to share their perceptions and ideas about community and we had the opportunity to help some of these participants and local government officials identify possibilities for grounded action. We were also able to bring local participants together with national policy leaders to extend these conversations and draw out some implications for central/local efforts to build community.

This initiative is modest in its scale but both offers ideas on promising ways of generating conversations which matter and reports insights about building better communities. Most important to us, this paper forms an invitation to other local leaders to extend these conversations and start new ones to strengthen our capacity as citizens working together to address the profound challenges for people and the planet in the years to come.

John O'Brien and David Towell

January 2010

## Our purpose

We believe that efforts to promote the inclusion of disabled people can positively influence the work of building sustainable communities that are resilient in the face of profound challenges. These challenges include the call to respond to global issues like climate change and the economic crisis, national issues like shaping a sustainable economy and meeting the rising demand for more effective public services under conditions of restrained growth in public expenditure, and local issues like the transformation to personalization in social care.

As an expression of its interest in promoting disability equality, the Barrow Cadbury Trust, an independent charitable foundation, commissioned a small team led by David Towell to study the ways that local leaders influence the interaction of citizen networks, Third Sector organizations, and local government to generate action toward inclusion and sustainability. The team's inquiry was conducted in action by testing a process for gathering people with civic and local government roles to explore their personal vision of a good community and their understanding of the ways their efforts might promote movement toward greater inclusion and sustainability.

This report summarizes what we have learned by reflecting on what we heard from active local people. We hope that we listened well enough to capture some local perspectives on making community life better for all. And we hope that the process that we tested will prove useful to others who want to strengthen the local relationships that are essential to making local progress on difficult global issues.

We are fortunate to collaborate with in Control's *In Community* initiative which looks for practical ways to set the personalisation of social care in a context of building stronger communities. They have produced a framework that demonstrates the linkages between a transformed approach to supporting older and disabled people and purposeful efforts to mobilize citizen action\* and compiled descriptions of a number of promising approaches to community development that call on and strengthen the contributions of people who are at risk of isolation.† We recommend their publications as an important complement to this report, especially for those who are looking for project ideas to build on.

Our intentions for this report are modest. We want to invite people who are busy with implementing complex policies to invest small amounts of time in gathering with diverse groups of fellow citizens and listening thoughtfully to one another's reflections on this big question: ***What makes for good and resilient communities that benefit from the active citizenship of older and disabled people?***

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\* John Gillespie & Simon Duffy (2008). *Community capacity & social care*. [www.in-control.org.uk](http://www.in-control.org.uk)

† Carl Poll, Jo Kennedy, & Helen Sanderson, Editors (2009). *In community: Practical lessons in supporting isolated people to be part of community*. HSA Press. Order from Inclusion Distribution.

## What we did locally

In Lancashire...

- Individual and small group appreciative inquiry interviews with people in Hyndburn, including local authority and health service staff responsible for community development, community involvement and service transformation and local citizen leaders.
- A day long workshop in Chorley for a diverse group of more than 30 people in Central Lancashire, focused on developing a vision of good and inclusive communities and shaping priorities for making progress. This workshop was based on World Café methods.
- A day long workshop in Leyland for people with responsibility for community development in Central Lancashire to consider the implications of what they learned from the previous day.

In Wiltshire

- A day long workshop, based on World Café methods, for a diverse group of more than 40 citizens and officials concerned with communities in South West Wiltshire.
- A day long workshop for officials from across the County to consider the implications of the previous day's workshop.

## Making sense together

Local agendas are increasingly complex. Central policies aimed at improving things for all of the nation's citizens generate a stream of requirements for many local plans and actions in response. The linkages in a globalized economy tie mortgage financing schemes in Florida to the level of resources available to improve neighbourhood life in Tisbury. The level of local recycling efforts modestly but cumulatively influences the whole earth's climate. Individual decisions about diet, exercise and social contact accumulate to shape NHS spending.

Real progress toward sustainable and inclusive communities depends in important ways on local people who care enough to risk investing themselves in organizing to learn from action. Whether this investment leads to political office, administrative responsibility for local government plans and performance, Third Sector management, citizen action, or neighbourly help, locally active people benefit from opportunities to make sense of the social field that they want to change, a field that includes them and many others with differing perspectives and interests.

Many of the participants in the conversations we facilitated found it worthwhile to make the time to step outside the more customary sort of meeting in which there is necessarily a fixed agenda focused on decision making within a particular mandate. In these more typical meetings participants occupy clearly differentiated roles. In contrast, our conversations invited people to speak from their common role as local citizens, turn to each other, and together construct an account of what good and inclusive community looks like to them and what they think it will take to

conserve what is working and build up what is called for to meet the local challenges of a world at a turning point.

Participants in the groups represented some of their communities' diversity and brought people together across usual boundaries giving them the opportunity to listen thoughtfully and with curiosity to understand real differences in perspective, priorities, and interests. Thus participants were offered a practice field for exploring the possibilities of diversity as a potential driver of creativity, looking for common ground that does not deny difference, and discovering patterns that connect issues and so invite correlated action.

Because there was no presentation by experts to absorb or react to, only facilitators deeply interested in understanding the sense that participants' made of their own experience of community and the implications of that sense-making for the work of building community, participants had the chance to experience a miniaturized sort of co-production as they created images and possibilities and deliberated on some of the implications of the connections they noted.

Because the questions focus attention on what people want to create, beginning with available assets and what is currently working, participants can delay immersion in the detail complexity of problem solving and addressing scarcities until they have glimpsed an image of the community they want to build. They can then take ideas from

### Our questions

- What is good about community life here and how do these good things work for older people and people with disabilities?
- When we think about a good future for everyone in our communities, what do we want to keep and what do we want to be better?
- How can we advance from here? What can citizens, and community and voluntary organizations do? How can the public sector help?

this conversation back into their usual planning, problem solving, and decision making processes.

Of course, making sense together in this way can not substitute for other ways of meeting. There are difficult trade-offs among genuinely conflicting interests that require the formality of carefully constituted democratic processes. Increasing citizen participation in local democracy, guided by such carefully designed frameworks as CLEAR, the good effects of which we met in Wiltshire, is critical to assuring the quality and legitimacy of decision making when people see the situation as a distribution of wins and losses. There are initiatives that require strategic guidance over time that is best shaped by debate among people who represent a variety of informed points of view. These require a well structured and expertly supported forum, such as Learning Disability Partnerships are intended to be. Planning any new initiative, whether in the public sector or in civil society, requires a comprehensive and detailed planning process, and there is a growing number of well designed toolkits that structure meetings to shape strategies and think about the details of implementation. Many of these toolkits are readily accessible on the internet.\*

Conversations that invite people to make sense together of what it will take to move toward a good and inclusive community are by no means sufficient to guide local development, but we think that investment in convening them can make a positive difference. We think so because

\*For good examples, see The Young Foundation's *Tools for Local Innovation* [www.youngfoundation.org.uk/](http://www.youngfoundation.org.uk/) and the variety of guides available on The Personalization Network website [www.dhcarenetworks.org.uk/Personalisation/](http://www.dhcarenetworks.org.uk/Personalisation/)

we believe these four things about the challenges facing our communities.

- Effective responses are most powerful when a community's assets have the **capacity to act as a whole**, at least from time to time. This capacity doesn't exist on paper, in strategic plans or procedures. It must be embodied in the ways people relate to one another at the point of action. One support for correlated action is a shared map of the local social terrain, its assets and possibilities, and an appreciation of what others care about enough to work for. Working together to sketch what will improve everyday life can enlarge people's picture of what matters to their fellow citizens and highlight connections worth strengthening.
- Effective responses require **working trust** that bridges the many differences that readily separate people and groups and a **shared confidence** that taking action together will matter.<sup>†</sup> One way to build working trust is to take opportunities to engage people who embody different identities, histories, perspectives and interests. This engagement can be strengthened a bit by making time to listen thoughtfully to one another.
- Effective responses call for **adaptive work**. More than implementing new techniques and procedures, the important issues demand changes in routine and settled understanding that affect us personally and threaten us with losses. One difficult part of this adaptive work is the necessity to sort what we believe has real value for a good future from what we need to find ways to let go of and move beyond. Taking a brief time out from routine to reflect as equal citizens with people you don't

## CLEAR

**CLEAR** is a diagnostic tool which helps public bodies to consider strategies for enhancing public participation.

Participation is most successful where citizens:

- **Can do:** have the resources and knowledge to participate.
- **Like to:** have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation.
- **Enabled to:** are provided with the opportunity for participation.
- **Asked to:** are mobilised by official bodies or voluntary groups;
- **Responded to:** see evidence that their views have been considered.

See V. Lowndes, L. Pratchett and G. Stoker (2006) *Locality Matters: Making Participation Count in Local Politics*, London: IPPR

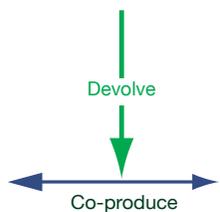
<sup>†</sup>In terms that are becoming familiar in the transformation of social care, this working trust across boundaries can also be called *bridging social capital*. See Robert Putnam (2007). *E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the 21st century. Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, 2, 137-174.

usually encounter that way can help a bit with judgments about what to conserve and what to mourn.

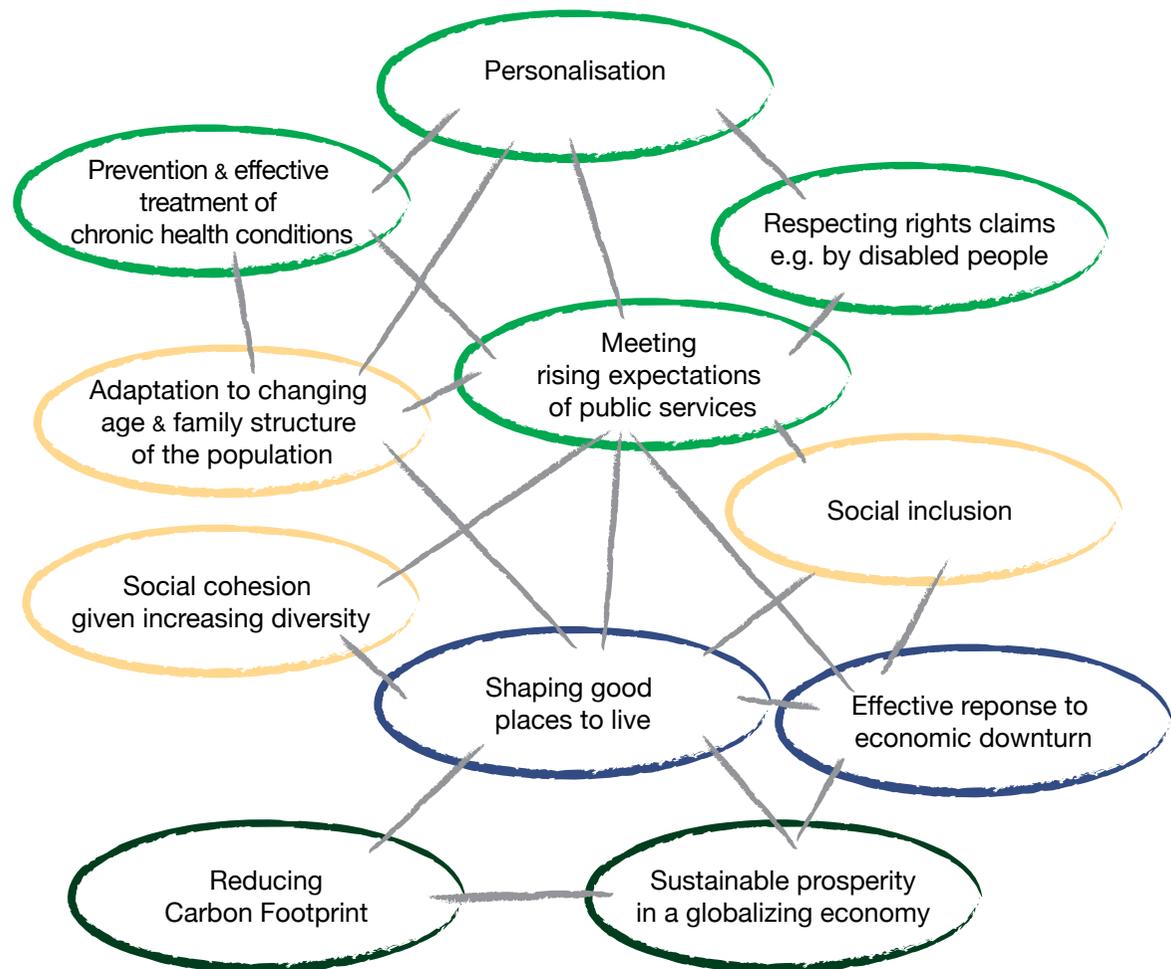
- Effective responses call for **social invention**. Many challenges demand more than just better choices among current alternatives; they require the design of new choices. The system of challenges to good community invites new ways to frame possibilities, new ways to notice and mobilize assets, new relationships, new practices, and new ways to learn. One support for social innovation is the opportunity to join in making collective sense of the shared local scene.

## A system of challenges

Current policies recognize the necessity of local efforts to deal with challenges that have global roots and national reach. And these policies appreciate that making progress in response to these challenges calls for coordinated action that mobilizes public services, Third Sector organizations, local economic actors, and citizen networks to co-produce solutions. The trend is toward devolved decision making that actively engages a wider set of local actors in co-productive relationships.



Local government accountability for citizen engagement in a number of key areas shaped participation in the conversations we facilitated. Most participants are active in at least one effort to involve citizens in planning. A number of the public service staff who joined in carry assigned responsibility for facilitating citizen participation in consultative or deliberative forums or for liaison with Third Sec-



tor groups and citizen networks to assure that they have access to available resources. The diagram summarizes eleven of the challenges addressed by current central government policies that call for the local co-production of effective responses.

Each participant in our conversations came because of their interest in one or another specific issue. The quality of life for all participants is affected by their community's capacity to make meaningful progress on all of them.

Recognition that these issues are interdependent, not just in concept but in their impact on everyday life is an impor-

#### **REDUCING CARBON FOOTPRINT**

Addressing climate change means learning to live with far fewer fossil fuel resources & simultaneously decrease forces that drive production of more stuff & more waste. In doing this it is necessary to tackle inequalities in the effects of necessary changes.

#### **SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY IN A GLOBALIZING ECONOMY**

The world is experiencing a triple crunch of climate change, oil depletion, & financial crisis. New ways of measuring prosperity, influencing the global economy, encouraging innovation, & developing & productively occupying capable workers are necessary.

#### **CURRENT ECONOMIC DOWNTURN**

A once in a generation economic crisis leaves many people insecure & worried about loss of jobs & homes. Public trust has been undermined. Public expenditure is under increasing pressure & growth is frozen.

#### **SHAPING GOOD PLACES TO LIVE**

Local government must use its powers & influence to creatively promote the wellbeing of communities & their citizens. This means public investments that give citizens a sense of security, wellbeing, civic engagement, & pride in their locality.

#### **SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Working trust & belief in joint action varies significantly at the neighbourhood level with low levels of collective efficacy strongly related to poverty, crime, & poor education & health outcomes. Education, employment, development & health initiatives need to address these disparities in order to succeed.

#### **SOCIAL COHESION GIVEN INCREASING DIVERSITY**

As diversity increases, so does the challenge of engendering a sense of shared citizenship & contribution to the common good AND making the best of the distinctive contributions of differences created by culture, ethnicity, & custom.

#### **ADAPTATION TO CHANGING AGE & FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS**

The ratio of working age to people of pensionable age has tipped. The numbers of people over 85 are growing as are the numbers of disabled elders. Changing family structure creates a potentially significant gap in the availability of family carers.

#### **MEETING RISING EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC SERVICES**

People no longer accept 'one size fits all' service models. They want choice over the services they receive, influence over those who provide them, and higher service standards.

#### **RESPECTING RIGHTS CLAIMS**

People who have historically been excluded have the right to freedom, dignity, voice, & responsibility.

#### **EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS**

Focus on prevention & early intervention serves both wellbeing & best use of health funds. This means not only dealing with illness but encouraging healthy lifestyles & addressing the social conditions associated with differential rates of sickness & death.

#### **PERSONALIZATION**

Social care & health services should be based on clear entitlements, well defined mutual responsibilities, & high standards, good information, & effective means of dealing with poor performance.

tant condition for thoughtful planning and action on any one of them.

It's an important step forward to recognize the need for joined up policies. The next step is finding practical ways to manage the interdependencies that this demand recognizes. As we listened, we noticed that those concerned with a particular issue understandably want others joining up with them but can at the same time experience others' agendas as distracting from or competing with what matters to them. Each issue is complex in itself and has developed shared practices and vocabulary familiar and functional to insiders but unnecessary complexity and opaque jargon to those with different interests. This gives some people a stronger sense of identification with those who share their concern and live a long way away than those who live nearby and have invested in a different though related issue. It is not just organizations or individuals who need to join up, it is communities of language and practice. Our invitation built on common geographic ground: participants live in a place that they all belong to, a place where the joint result of their distinct efforts on each of the issues that concern them comes home to them.

## **A view of co-production**

In our view, co-production is a chosen relationship across boundaries that multiplies the resources focused on an issue of mutual interest. Co-productive relationships are an expression of converging commitments to action. The public sector can be mandated to seek co-productive relationships, but they can only emerge among people and groups who choose to correlate their action. This choice can be influenced by money incentives and rules, but it

also requires a sense of common purpose and a working understanding of each party's differing interests and contributions.

The more relevant boundaries an effort spans, the greater the variety of perspectives, knowledge, connections, influence, and other resources can be deployed and the more effort will be necessary to arrive at a common understanding of what needs to be done and what kinds of coordination are required. While a common shorthand delineates public sector, third sector, and corporate or business sector to identify the boundaries co-production can bridge, in fact each of these sectors are varied and complex in themselves.

Co-productive relationships occur at different scales from the personal to the societal. A family seeking a good life for a disabled child has its best chance of flourishing if its interaction with education, health, and social care resources is co-productive, where each actively appreciates the others' contributions. A family passively absorbing a fragmented series of interventions will do much less well. A nation seeking a good life for its youth has its best chance of success when the variety of available public services, concerned Third Sector organizations, and economic actors realize the possibilities in focusing their different interests and resources on a common purpose.

Each level of co-productive activity influences what is possible at other levels. The success of a public health campaign aimed at reducing heart disease depends in an important way on the willingness and skill that doctors, nurses, and people at risk invest in building collaborative relationships in which each plays their active part. House-

hold efforts to diminish carbon footprints have limited impact on climate change if government and industry can't join in finding large scale ways to decrease emissions.

We have explored co-production at the local level. We have invited active local citizens to talk about their sense of what matters to their community as a whole and where the opportunities for shared action might be. We have asked responsible local officials and civil society leaders to consider what they might do to support and stimulate co-productive relationships.

In listening to the people who accepted our invitation, we have noticed the importance of recognizing and engaging efforts initiated by local citizens. These initiatives may be traditional –annual fairs and festivals. They may be innovative responses to contemporary life, like Timebanks. Whatever their identity, they develop local networks, build a sense of working trust among a widening circle of citizens, and generate public goods. We think that this layer of local action between the private lives of family and friends and the formal world of the organized business, Third Sector and Public sector is important to co-production.

We chose a process that encourages people to identify issues of shared concern. Encouraging networks to grow around these issues make it possible for commitments to action to develop. Shared commitments to action provide the necessary foundation for local structures to support co-production of responses to the system of challenges facing citizens.

## Our process

Our process has two steps: 1) gathering a diverse group of citizens for a conversation about sustainable and inclusive community; 2) a workshop in which those responsible for the local public sector review the conversations and consider what they might do to strengthen and support the interests and efforts they heard about.

### *Conversation about sustainable & inclusive community*

We begin with an application of *The World Café*,\* a method for organizing conversations that matter. The organizing metaphor is of the kind of engaging conversations in cafes or coffeehouses that have shaped important social and cultural movements. This approach embodies the belief that people who talk together about questions that are important to them will discover deeper understanding of their questions and greater possibilities for action.

We chose this method because it guides us to recognize important interdependencies in three practical ways. We ask people from a recognizable locality with different identities, concerns and commitments to attend. We give people opportunities in small groups to mix and listen to many other participants. We invite people to speak of what matters to them and notice and name connections among the different concerns that other members of the small groups express by noting and connecting key ideas on a paper table cloth and bringing their reflections to the whole group. This approach can't replace the rigor of statistical analysis or the discipline of systems thinking as a way of exploring interdependencies, but it creates an everyday language context for noticing links and conflicts

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\*See Juanita Brown & David Issacs (2005). *The World Café: Shaping our future through conversations that matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler and a variety of resources at [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com).

that are meaningful to people in their everyday role as citizens. For a few hours, the group's task is not to look down on a problem from an objective position but to look around and notice some of the live links between what matters to them and the concerns of some of their fellow citizens and to be open to the possibilities for action or further deliberation that arise from what they hear and see.

We also chose *The World Café* because it is easy to use and well documented, so interested people can try it in their own localities. A brief guide to the process follows on the next page.

Most meetings appropriately offer their participants a different structure than *The World Café* does. Participants often have a detailed agenda with allocated times for each item; briefing papers; presentations by experts or staff, often aided by powerpoint; and designated leaders, recorders, and reporters for discussions. In contrast, *The World Café* process makes a demand that some people find unusual. Its hosts simply invite people to come together and converse thoughtfully about serious questions in a way that offers a good chance that new connections and ideas will emerge.

The organizers' role expresses confidence in participants desire and ability to think together. They frame questions that will engage people, bring as diverse a group of interested people as possible into the room, create a welcoming and comfortable space for people to think together, and guide people through a process of exploration.

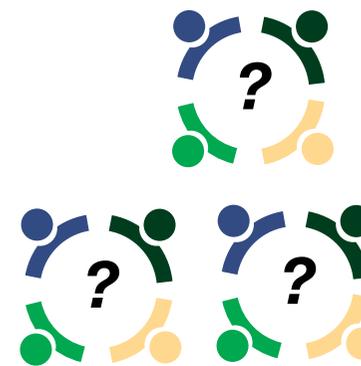
There is an etiquette to participation that makes the conversation work. Participants are encouraged to...

- ... focus on what matters
- ... contribute your thinking
- ... speak your mind and heart
- ... listen to understand
- ... link and connect ideas
- ... listen together for insights and deeper questions
- ... note key ideas and draw out connections

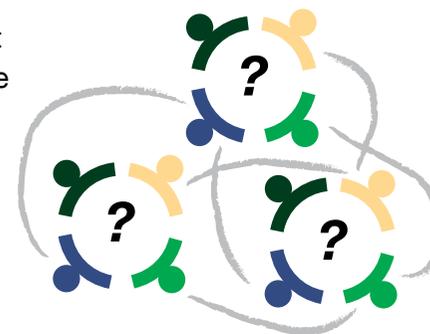
To encourage a wide range of connections, the conversation proceeds in rounds. Small groups share their thoughts on a question for 15-20 minutes. Then all but one person move to different tables where the person who has stayed behind as table host welcomes them and briefly summarizes key ideas from the previous conversation. The discussion continues. After two or perhaps three rounds, there is a whole group conversation where some participants offer an idea or pattern of ideas arising from the table conversations that have particular meaning for them. The main points of the large group conversation can be recorded by one of the hosts on posters and each table can hang up its paper for others to see.

This process is an experiential metaphor for one important aspect of local leadership. It gathers people in a hospitable space and invites them to generate a common sense of local interests and assets and to notice and act on a shared agenda of their own making. This form of coordination complements the more formal processes required to manage big investments of outside resources.

The invitation & workshop programme for Lancashire is in the Annex at page 34.



After each round of conversation, all but one move to another table. The remaining person acts as table host.



## Hosting A Conversation About Sustainable & Inclusive Community

**Purpose.** To bring a diverse group of local citizens together to explore questions that matter to building a more sustainable & inclusive community. This provides a chance to make sense of some of the interdependencies that shape local quality of life & may indicate possibilities for shared action.

**Principle.** When people turn to one another in their role as citizens, & listen thoughtfully to one another's concerns, visions, & ideas, a sense of the whole community that orients positive action can emerge often together with the energy to support this action.

**Time.** 3 hours or more

**Space.** A comfortable & accessible place with round tables for groups of 4-6.

**Materials.** Paper suitable to write on to cover each tabletop (poster paper, flip chart paper, or paper tablecloths). Several different dark colored markers for each table. An outline map of the local area and a supply of sticky notes so people can locate where they live. Light refreshments.

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For a detailed guide, download *Café to go* from [www.theworldcafe.com/hosting.htm](http://www.theworldcafe.com/hosting.htm).

**Participants.** Seek a diverse group of people from the same locality who are active in different ways on different issues. Think about people who are active in civil society and people who play informal leadership roles as well as those active in politics or local government and its advisory bodies. Personal invitations from a known and trusted person work best. If space allows, a group of up to 50 is not too large.

**Questions.** The conversation is guided by questions that open opportunities for participants to talk about what they care about & listen for possible connections among their concerns. These questions have been effective.

- I. What is good about community life here and how do these good things work for older people & people with disabilities?
- II. When we think about a good future for everyone in our communities, what do we want to keep and what do we want to be better?
- III. How can we advance from here? What can citizens, & community & voluntary organizations do? How can the public sector help?

**Etiquette.** The conversation will be rich & interesting if people follow these guidelines:

- Focus on what matters
- Contribute your thinking
- Speak your mind and heart
- Listen to understand
- Link and connect ideas
- Listen together for insights and deeper questions
- Note key ideas and draw out connections.

### Process

1. As people arrive, greet them and ask them to locate themselves by placing a sticky note on the local map.
2. Welcome people, review the questions, & introduce the etiquette.
3. State the question I, ask people to introduce themselves to the others at their tables & spend 20 minutes on the first round.
4. Ask one person to remain as table host & the others to move to a different grouping. The table host welcomes travellers from other conversations & very briefly shares key insights from the previous con-

versations so that the newcomers can link and build their own ideas. Spend another 20 minutes on question I.

5. Invite a whole group conversation for about 10 minutes. Avoid table summaries; ask people to say what they have discovered or been reminded of that is especially meaningful. Record the key points on a poster.
6. Ask the table hosts to remain & others move to a different grouping. Introduce question II and repeat the process of two rounds of conversation and 10 minutes of large group conversation.
7. Call a 15 minute break. If wall space allows, ask groups to hang up the paper from their tables so that others can see the images of what has come up at the table.
8. Introduce question III and repeat the process of two rounds of conversation and 10 minutes of large group conversation. Ask people to clearly note possibilities for shared or mutually supportive action that they have identified.
9. Invite comments on what has come from the conversation.



Gather

Listen



- Collective themes...
- How do we connect with a wider group of people/communities?
  - Make more use of local resources/activities
  - Funding for communities centres - regional wealth of knowledge in the /Comm /Health groups are effective processes and sustainable if
  - Be more creative in the way we consult /work in order - link with First Citizens etc - engage local people - local knowledge
  - Transfer the ethos of LSP to be employed in communities to people on diverse ways to engage - change understanding / engagement
  - Take a fresh eye in LSP to work together to share strategic approach to funding



- Ideas for action
- Reinvigorate community centres
    - Community panel - to change our
    - Change centres - back to work
    - Partnership - well defined responsibilities
    - Get into "strong" character better positioning
    - Rebuild around an location - people, experiences, and
    - Think to future - "In people, experiences, and
    - Support all it requires
  - Making the best of local resources
    - Find out what is out there e.g. schools, art centres
    - Building / renovate schools with extra use for them
    - Link people with P.G. to local festival clubs to share
    - Share look to find @ other people / places
    - See "Community Engagement" sites on internet
    - Develop "Time Banks"

Connect ideas

Identify better questions & possibilities for action

## *Making sense & planning supportive action*

The second step in our process is a workshop for people in local government and local civil society roles that include responsibility for developing effective co-productive relationships and increasing citizen engagement. The purpose of this workshop is to consider the implications of the messages from the citizen Conversation About Sustainable and Inclusive Community for their organizational roles and the work of their organizations.

Those who participated in the citizen conversation make the transition from speaking as a local citizen to speaking in their role as responsible for an important aspect of community development. It has been helpful to have a few participants in this workshop who were not part of the citizen conversation. They have served as a focus for those who did participate to create an account of what came up and have often raised useful clarifying questions.

The workshop begins with a *World Café* process in which participants take two rounds of conversation to share important messages from the citizen conversations and two rounds to draw out the implications for local community development. The following whole group conversation draws out the highest leverage local community development challenges: those issues where progress will open the greatest possibilities. Participants self-select into work groups around each key challenge, outline a way to address each, and map the network of roles and relationships necessary for shared action on each challenge. The workshop concludes by identifying next steps and the forums and partnerships in which these steps will be taken.

Applied in two localities, the process we have outlined here has produced helpful accounts of the qualities and practices that a good community will cultivate as well as some ideas about what it will take to develop the kind of local co-productive relationships necessary to meet the challenges that policy makers have so clearly identified.

Our reflections on what we have learned from listening to these groups follow. We offer them as a sample of the ideas that local people can produce when they make time to think together and listen to one another about questions that matter. Our thoughts are very far from a final word on issues of local community development. They are an invitation to try the process in more places.

### **Workshop on the implications for community organizations**

Welcome and introductions

Visions of a better future and issues in getting there: Important messages from the citizen conversations and implications for community development? [*World Café* process.]

Key local challenges for the next year or two.

Small group work on key challenges.

Roles and relationships in developing good and inclusive communities.

Towards an agenda for further action.



## A good community

As we reflected on what participants shared from conversations around their *World Café* tables, an account of good, inclusive, and resilient community took shape. A good community is a place where people feel welcome and citizens believe that they can take action that makes a difference to the quality of local life and where there are many pathways to taking an active role.

This vision of a good community describes the ideals and actions of some citizens and their associations in a way that demonstrates the need for much more social innovation. Local innovation in four areas seems important.

Local citizens feel confident that what they do makes a difference to building a future that they care about.

Local citizens appreciate, conserve, & develop the assets available to them.

The public sector recognizes and actively supports citizen action.

Local citizens organize to identify and take action on matters of common good.

### *Citizens know that their efforts make a difference*



A good community is a place where people feel like it is possible to take actions that contribute to progress on important issues. It is not a place where all the problems are solved to satisfaction. It is a place where people have the courage to reach out to others with different experiences and interests and explore face-to-face the possibilities in conflicts

and in perceived or potentially threatening differences. It is not a place where everyone sees things the same. It is a place where people are willing to face the challenges that come from living in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world whose challenges come right down every citizen's street. It is not a comfortable place to hide. A good community is a place where people support one another in contributing what is meaningful to them. It is not a place where people live as passive, isolated consumers.

Some community issues have technical solutions that require skill and resources. Keeping the roads smooth and clear takes skill in engineering and construction and skill in the politics of deciding how much to allocate to repairs and whose road will be improved first.

Other issues pose an additional challenge because they call for changes in thinking and action that require a loss of settled ways. Think about reducing the carbon footprint generated by the drivers who benefit from improved roads. This not only takes technical skill, it also calls on people to add new criteria to their decision making and find sensible ways to respond to climate change. This reveals interdependencies that drivers have not had to think about: my long drive alone to work or to shop has a miniscule but real long term effect on the climate. What difference should this make? The preamble to the Aalborg Charter, quoted in the next column, makes the extent of necessary change clear. This sort of issue tests resilience: the capacity to work through change and potential loss in a meaningful way.

*We understand that our present lifestyle, in particular our patterns of division of labour and functions, land-use, transport, industrial production, agriculture, consumption, and leisure activities, and hence our standard of living, make us essentially responsible for many environmental problems humankind is facing.*

*The charter of European cities & towns towards sustainability (The Aalborg Charter) (2000). Brussels: The European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign. P. 3.*

Another example. Physicians have greatly increased their technical skill in managing diabetes. However, good health outcomes depend on their patients' adaptability in adjusting their everyday routines and relationships.

It is reasonable to expect steady progress toward smoother roads with no more than the price of paying tax. And a well governed place will make its budget decisions fairly, transparently, and with opportunities to register citizen views on the plans.

A smaller carbon footprint or good long term management of blood sugar call for more than just a tax payment. They cannot be produced and delivered to disengaged consumers. They must be co-produced at multiple levels, from the way a household manages its trips and its diet to the incentives, rules, and plans that influence transit and the food system at the societal level.

There are at least two keys to citizen's recognizing that their action matters. The first is the way the need for co-production is framed and the resources that citizens have for making sense of the connections between their actions and the complex of big issues that face them. The second is the level of working trust that local people believe can translate into constructive action.

**Seeing the connections.** In the sense we use the word here, frames are the terms in which people understand an issue, highlighting some aspects of a complex situation and rendering others invisible, making some actions seem natural and others alien or unthinkable. One aspect of each of the system of challenges that localities face (outlined page 8), is that the search for effective action asks people to adopt new ways of framing the issue. Making



progress on climate change calls for a way of understanding that makes it sensible to accept the costs of measures to decrease carbon emissions. This is easiest when a citizen's frame for appreciating the climate change challenge includes the recognition that actions that impose significant immediate costs are necessary to decrease stocks of atmospheric carbon that are likely to have catastrophic effects if they grow unchecked.\* Dealing effectively with

\*See Peter Senge (2008). *The necessary revolution: How individuals & organizations are working together to create a sustainable world*. London: Brealey.

diabetes calls for a way of understanding people's relationship to health care that shifts from passive patients following doctor's orders to active collaborators in new ways of living.

The results of changing the way people frame an issue may be a bit like looking through new glasses, but the process is more difficult. Frames filter and organize information, so more information is seldom sufficient to change the terms in which people understand. Without resources for sense-making, new information may simply get buried in old mental folders. This difficulty is compounded when habits are involved. One more car journey makes such a tiny impact on climate that it's hard to reshape our shopping habits and easy to resist a carbon tax of sufficient magnitude to significantly influence the number of those journeys we collectively make.

The most important resource for shifting frames is the opportunity to actively explore the implications of new information in a new context with other people. The context may be a discussion group, a task force, an association's planning effort, or a learning experience.\* What matters is that people are active participants in figuring out what new information means for them, not simply members of an audience or readers of a brochure or web page.

People often share their ways of understanding with those with whom they associate. This makes it important to purposely design opportunities for people to explore new ways of understanding and acting that bridge across usual boundaries of association and encourage people to listen to those who see a common situation with different eyes. This bridging will be easier when the group who hosts

such conversations is diverse enough so most people find their way into the experience through a person with whom they identify.

We notice that many participants in the conversations we facilitated have a sense that they are poorly informed about local and central government plans and actions. Some of this undoubtedly can be remedied with greater transparency and more attention to packaging information in accessible form and disseminating through more channels. But we think that some of this feeling of being left out of important information comes from the lack of opportunities to test new frames for complex issues. We imagine that there is scope for applying the *The World Café* approach to specific challenges, for example, with questions focused on climate change.

**Working trust.** Confidence that citizen action matters grows with a way of understanding that clearly shows how citizens can make a difference. It also depends on the degree to which people experience themselves as part of a network of people and associations that can act and learn by dealing with the consequences of their action. The notion of working trust suggests that people are willing to count on others to follow through on their agreements and behave with reasonable concern for the common good. Many social scientists put their investigation of the effects of these networks of ties and norms of trust under the heading of **social capital**, and most of their investigations reveal a positive association between high levels of social capital and a variety of measures of health and wellbeing. Efforts to deal with social exclusion recognize the corrosive cycle that goes with limited working trust. Social

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\*A family of intensive learning experiences developed by Partners in Policymaking provide a powerful context for changing citizen's frame for social care and activating their engagement. See [www.partnersinpolicymaking.co.uk](http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.co.uk)

and material structures marginalize people. Constrained networks and low working trust reinforce the sense of being an outsider, limit what people can accomplish, and encourage people in a fatalistic understanding of their situation and low expectations of benefit from acting with other citizens who seem different from them. Many of the ways that people cope with the difficulties that come with social exclusion can reinforce the pattern of exclusion. The design of effective ways to bridge the gaps created by social exclusion is at the leading edge of necessary social innovations. Citizens encourage one another in making effort to reach out when they develop the habit of asking, “Who is not here and what will it take to engage their contribution?”

One of the biggest barriers to mobilizing more citizens is the self-fulfilling prophecy that some –or even many– people are socially disengaged beyond reach. Participants in citizen conversations had helpful guidance:

Feeling bad because “they won’t come to us” in response to a general announcement doesn’t help. Sometimes we need to go to them with a specific invitation.

People act from what they care about. We have to be sure that our agendas don’t get so full that there is no room to find out what else matters enough to people for them to choose to get involved.

A good communication strategy will offer people multiple ways to connect with issues that call for action. Engaging people is partly about figuring out how to make the link between what you care about and what they care about. This is about both messages and media: where and when

we meet and how the meeting is structured sends a message.

Controversy draws some people. We need to be sure that we don’t avoid open consideration of real conflicts and trade-offs.

Some people face practical barriers like the need for child-care, transport, or information in a form that they can understand. Reducing the obstacles might bring some new faces forward.

### *Citizens appreciate, conserve, & build on their assets*

Citizens appreciate, conserve, & develop the assets available to them.



People are apt to avoid situations that they feel powerless to influence. It’s understandable to think that big challenges can only be handled by those with authority to command big money and power, but such a belief cuts the ground from under necessary efforts to locally co-produce effective action. It could also create a crisis of legitimacy when necessary large scale actions entail sacrifices from people who have not faced the challenges with open eyes.

The working trust and capacity for positive action that is a sign of healthy community grows from a shared appreciation of assets. Local assets include features of geography and built environment, economic activity, social relationships, and accumulated knowledge, skills and capacities of citizens that can be mobilized to serve the common good. Resilience –the capacity to adapt to challenges– is strongly associated with a sense of available assets.

**Deficiency view.** The scale and complexity of the system of challenges that localities face can lead people to ignore

or diminish the importance of their assets and focus on local deficiencies. Lists of lacks and problems abound and claim the greatest share of serious attention. Reminders of what is here to build with are easy to rush past or even dismiss as Pollyannaish.

Social problems –social evils– are undeniable and a good understanding of their roots and workings is necessary to address them wisely. But effective address depends partly on the development of stronger, more inclusive local communities,\* and that development depends on citizens appreciating, conserving, and building on their assets.

In part, people may adopt a deficiency view because to recognize an asset is to open the way to admitting responsibility for action in a situation that might be fraught with uncertainty and discomfort.

In part, we think the deficiency view reflects a limiting understanding of the necessary relationship of government and citizens. The challenges localities face call for co-production through relationships among citizens, associations and networks, Third sector organizations, and Government. However, we often heard people talking in terms of delegation rather than co-production. This reflects what can be tagged the *needs > services* perspective: citizens pay taxes and government assures that services are available at points of need. This is a reasonable reflection of people's experience. At the appropriate age schools are there for children and heating allowances arrive for elders. If work is difficult to find, there are benefits and services. When there is a break-in or disturbance the police respond. When illness manifests, health services provide treatment. When a person requires social care, there is

planning and service. When people wish to discover what services and benefits match their needs, advice is available. When they choose to influence the implementation of policy, government provides channels and liaison workers to help organize participation.

The *needs>services* perspective positions government and its agents as provider and citizen as client-beneficiary. As provider or purchaser, government brings expertise to bear on need and holds primary responsibility for the quality of service. Third sector organizations often act as providers of services and advocates for policies that respond to the interests that they represent.

As client/customers, people demand a rising standard of government problem-solving: greater convenience and ease of access across diverse populations; less waiting and fewer eligibility hurdles; more account taken of individual circumstances and preferences. They can choose to influence the way government goes about problem-solving by complaining formally, sharing their views in advisory and planning groups, campaigning or participating in governance through the political process or by becoming trustees of Third Sector organizations.

As we listened to the conversations we convened, we noticed how powerful the *needs>services* perspective can be. When a small group included someone with formal authority, people sometimes forgot the invitation to use their brief time to speak and listen as local citizens and moved, at least for a few minutes, into a familiar pattern of complaint or petition and response.

Within the *needs>services* perspective there are critical decisions about what Government should pay for or regu-

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\*See David Utting (Editor) (2009). *Contemporary social evils*. Bristol: Policy Press.

late and what should be left to citizens' own responsibility. There are equally important decisions about what Government should contract for and what it should produce and about what level of Government should hold primary responsibility for commissioning and delivering effective responses. As important as these need>services decisions are, we see them as about the boundaries of delegation and the means of delivering services rather than about creating the possibilities for co-production. These discussions focus on only one part of the co-production equation: what can be purchased and delivered as a service. We believe that co-production necessarily involves jointly mobilizing each co-producer's resources in a way that changes the relationships among them. Those who bring only what they lack to the effort can't play an active part in developing the myriad local innovations necessary to respond well to complex challenges.

**Conservation.** The space for designing innovative responses exists between citizens' willingness to confront adaptive challenges and their clarity about what they want to conserve. By definition, life can't be the same in the face of an adaptive challenge because life as it has been is part of the challenge. Climate change faces us because of the accumulating effects of our habitual uses of carbon.

One point of sorting through a situation to identify what we want to conserve is to deepen our understanding of the challenge itself. Some good things probably cannot survive and we need to acknowledge this and mourn their loss. Some of what we value may become more important, and perhaps even motivate the social inventions we need to create. The demographic crisis in social

care makes it unlikely that most elders and their families can simply count on local government to take over when a person thinks that they "need to go into care". And it highlights the value of the ties and connections of neighborhood and family life and the possibilities in being able to self-direct a fair share of social care resources. A thoughtful approach to what to conserve and what to let go generates inventions from internet based ways to shop for support\* to initiatives that keep elders in active and contributing roles.†

### *Citizens organize*



As we reflected on what we heard from the workshops we facilitated and the people we interviewed, we noticed a distinction between two worthwhile activities.

**Citizen engagement.** The first, initiated by government, promotes citizen engagement in decision making by creating channels and supports that involve citizens in planning and decision-making. This objective is served in multiple ways: devolving more decisions and budgets to a more local level, increasing transparency in decision processes and offering accessible information, seeking citizen input in assessing need and making plans, widening representation on various planning bodies, and assigning staff to reach out and support participation. Third Sector organizations often designate or support members as representatives in planning or decision making. This kind of activity increases people's stake in governance of the place they live, encourages political participation, informs both

\*See [www.shop4support.com](http://www.shop4support.com)

†See, for example, the account of Southwark Circle at [www.participle.net/projects/view/5/101/](http://www.participle.net/projects/view/5/101/)

decision-makers and citizens about options, preferences, conflicts, and trade-offs, and results in better decisions.

**Citizen organizing.** The second kind of activity is initiated by citizens who care enough about something to organize themselves and take action. They take responsibility to define and carry out changes that matter to them, naming the difference they want to make and getting on with it. To support their effort they may seek government investment in their projects; to promote their objectives they may work to influence government decisions; but the locus of action remains with them.\*

Much of this activity is very small scale and local, the sort of thing that shows up on parish notice boards. The Timebank committee meets. The local Campaign for Real Ale works to keep a local pub from turning into an upscale wine bar. The cubs meet. An environmental group holds a workshop on alternative energy. The book club gathers. The locally organized folk festival kicks off. The community choir rehearses. The curtain rises on the drama society's autumn production. Disabled people and family members gather to plan the next step in the local Changing Places Campaign.† Commonplace, no doubt, but valuable both for itself and for the networks of working trust it nourishes.

The experience of disabled people provides a helpful perspective on citizen organizing. Access is better, supports are more personalized, and participation in employment is higher because disabled people worked together, created a powerful understanding of their situation that undercut the mindset that justified their social exclusion, formed alliances to shape policies, and continue to take organized action at many levels from the local shops to Westminster

and Europe. The more visible signs of this organizing are in the laws and rules that promote access and adjustments. Equally important is the impact on the people involved in making the change. Those disabled people who act as citizens are building and expressing capabilities that are lost to passive consumers of service. Their allies and opponents have experiences that overcome the stereotypes that can easily separate citizens from one another.

It seems to us that citizen organizing could contribute significantly to the co-production of sustainable responses to the system of challenges facing local communities. Citizen associations bonded by a common interest have an important role to play in calling attention to difficult questions, adding dimension to the way challenges are understood, and mobilizing knowledge and skill that can generate co-productive efforts. Alliances among citizen associations have the potential to bridge the interests and identities that easily divide people and create common ground for shared action. A local network that links associations and alliances provides a seedbed for social innovation.

Realizing this possibility will take thoughtful effort to reinvent local organizing in the face of what a number of participants in the conversations we listened to see as facts of life around them.

Many people's work lives are so busy that they have little time or energy for a community life (ironically, this can include local government officers with responsibility for community development).

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\*For a guide to citizen organizing, download *Turning Point* from [www.communitysectorcoalition.org.uk/news-events/latest-news/the-turning-point-guide-an-opportunity-to-recognise-what-we-are-capable-of-and-what-were-up-against.html](http://www.communitysectorcoalition.org.uk/news-events/latest-news/the-turning-point-guide-an-opportunity-to-recognise-what-we-are-capable-of-and-what-were-up-against.html)

† Changing Places is a campaign to make toilets in public spaces available to people who cannot safely use ordinary accessible facilities see [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org)

A number of people have stronger links to on line interest groups or national or international organizations than they do to local people and groups. Their sense of identity as local citizens is very thin.

In some places the fabric of village or neighborhood life is fraying. Pubs are closing or converting to more expensive restaurants. Shops are emptied. There is a threat to local post offices that will affect people's easy access to banking. This discourages some people from moving outside the private paths that make up their daily routines.

Some Third Sector organizations are challenged to balance their roles as contracted service providers (which continues to grow) and organizers of local citizen associations.

Citizen leadership encourages people to set aside isolation and delegation in favour of organizing for local co-production of meaningful responses to the system of challenges facing us. Participants in the conversations we facilitated identified the following actions as contributing leadership.

- Citizens act from the belief that progress is possible when people tackle big issues in small ways.
- Citizens believe that together they can puzzle out a good enough understanding of a complex situation to take useful action if they actively seek information and knowledge.
- Citizens hold up a vision that brings the possibility of a desirable future into a clear enough view that people are motivated to act.

- Citizens look for reasons to raise their expectations, especially in areas that seem hard to deal with, like youth unemployment or sustainable economic development.
- Citizens honestly describe what is happening and where current reality falls short of what they value enough to work on changing.
- Citizens accountably describe the results of the steps they take to make things better.
- Citizens notice who else can help and invite them in.
- Citizens support one another in ways that build trust and overcome fear.
- Citizens move between talk that informs action and action that tests people's best ideas.
- Citizens steadily show up to do the everyday work of organizing action and tending relationships. There are people to call with reminders, bring refreshments, keep track of the money and do the clean up.

The following two pages outline a pathway and a related set of practices that builds opportunity for citizen organizing.



## A good community is a place where more and more people say...

*I belong to this place and I act from responsibility for it*

This means that more people can say...	...because more community settings cultivate...	...through such practices as these...
<i>My contribution is welcome &amp; so am I</i>	Invitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spending time listening to people in places that they are comfortable in order to discover what they care about &amp; what their capacities are.</li> <li>• Reaching out to ask clearly for active involvement</li> </ul>
	Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being thoughtful about the ways people are welcomed &amp; purposeful about greeting &amp; involving newcomers.</li> <li>• Making places accessible</li> </ul>
<i>I can see how to contribute</i>	Channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assisting people to see a pathway that connects where they are now with a way of being involved.</li> <li>• Assuring that people can see models: others that they identify with experiencing satisfaction from involvement.</li> </ul>
	Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking through the work to assure that there is something meaningful for each interested person to do</li> </ul>
	Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering necessary support so people understand how to be a part of things, both the tasks &amp; the social dimension.</li> </ul>
<i>I make a difference because of what I offer</i>	Practical help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Figuring out how to match the person's capacities to work that needs doing &amp; assuring that the person can see how they make a difference to the whole effort.</li> </ul>
	Information and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening clear ways that people can contribute ideas to the way the things are done.</li> </ul>
	Connections to networks & associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging people to recruit support &amp; build alliances</li> <li>• Offering opportunities for people to be well-informed ambassadors of the effort.</li> </ul>

<b><i>I can get what I need to make my contribution</i></b>	Encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping people see their abilities</li> <li>• Holding high, positive expectations that people will find ways to contribute.</li> <li>• Supporting people to stretch a bit outside their comfort zone</li> </ul>
	Adjustments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modifying environments, procedures, or routines to make it possible for people to participate more effectively.</li> </ul>
	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assisting people to develop skills &amp; knowledge.</li> </ul>
	Personal Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assuring that people who need personal assistance have it in a way that doesn't take away from their dignity or diminish their participation.</li> <li>• Honoring people's preferences about who they want to assist them and what their preferences are.</li> </ul>
<b><i>I can invite, welcome, encourage, &amp; assist others to join in and contribute</i></b>		

Thanks to the participants in the Wilshire Citizen Conversation for this way of understanding the promotion of citizenship.

## *The public sector supports citizen engagement and citizen organizing*

The public sector recognizes & actively supports citizen action.



Local government depends on people in its population capably filling multiple roles, each of which defines mutual responsibilities. They are citizens whose voice should influence the benefits their

local government offers, the issues it tackles, and the priorities it sets. They are local residents who deserve to contribute to the way that the place they live is shaped through their efforts and by having a say in local decisions. They are recipients of publicly provided or commissioned services who are responsible to play their proper part in co-producing good results for themselves and their families, including holding high expectations for good quality. They are economic actors and initiators and participants in civic and cultural action; some of their activities may benefit from government investment or be subject to government regulation –when this is so they should expect fairness, effectiveness, and respectful treatment. Each of these dimensions of citizenship deserves public sector support.

There must be clear channels to bring citizen voices into important deliberations. Those who are marginalised are likely to need extra support to join in. Providing this support, either directly by officers charged with community engagement or by investing in groups organized by people at the margins, is an important area for local government investment. Critical decisions are made by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP), but many citizens don't know what the LSP does or how to influence its plans. Making such

bodies more open to citizen influence is both a matter of making good information available and a matter of creating ways to strengthen the LSP planning process to better generate and reflect local deliberations.

Recognition of the importance of the texture and distinctive identity of local neighborhoods as an aspect of place shaping leads to more local forums and more local accountability for decision making and public investment. An agenda that opens space for local concerns as they are locally defined rather than being completely filled with items and terms related to fulfilling mandates and requirements demonstrates trust in local initiative.

Good support for citizen engagement in local government decision making will include experimentation with more and better ways to help citizens address the challenges that face them and find frames for understanding that reveal the interdependencies among the challenges and the importance of action-learning in response.

The effectiveness of some public services depends on co-production of good outcomes within the relationship between the service provider and the person or group that benefits (e.g. social care, children's services, education, health care). There is a good deal of room for jointly inventing new ways to understand these relationships in order to better mobilize and harmonize people's assets. These assets include their own knowledge and skills, the resources in their relationships, their expectations for what providers can do and what they must do, and the other services and benefits that they are entitled to as citizens. Making this work requires renegotiation of boundaries, priorities, and practices. It will confront unresolved con-

flicts of priorities that mandate both joined-up working and a set of objectives that require holding other agendas at a distance.

Of great importance is the way that local government exercises authority. A paternalistic, experts-know-best stance has bad effects. It encourages citizens to delegate responsibility for matters that require their active engagement. It encourages citizens into a passive and isolated consumer role. It can generate resentment if people feel it is failing to meet the expectations it creates. It discourages organizing and initiative. Equally problematic is a timid stance that sends the message that avoiding risk and complying with central government mandates and rules are the most important concerns.

The public sector can encourage citizen organizing in several ways.

- Demonstrate the political will to identify difficult issues and call for citizen organization as an essential part of making progress toward viable responses.
- Avoid the pretense that profound challenges can be met without uncertainty, risk, and loss and affirm that citizens' active support for one another is a necessary condition for an adequate response.
- Continue to refine structures that engage citizens in decision making.
- Operate straightforward ways that citizen groups can look for investment of money, expertise, or time from the Council.

- Continue to improve availability of information about local conditions and options for dealing with issues of concern to citizens.
- Continue to look for more ways that local government acts as a model of accessibility and inclusiveness.
- Appreciate and expand the role of front line staff as carriers of important messages to the people with whom they come into contact. See them as an important part of the Council's communication strategy.
- Spot areas of local government activity that take a risk avoidance approach and move them to a thoughtful risk management approach.
- Consider ways to avoid interpreting legislation as a barrier to what otherwise seems to be reasonable action.
- Implement the personalization agenda in social care in a way that strongly encourages citizen mobilization around self-directed supports.
- Encourage the development of networks that spread the knowledge of social inventions which are better meeting different local challenges.



## The national perspective: Now is the time

Our focus is on ways of building sustainable communities which include disabled and older people as valued citizens. From the national perspective, there has never been a better time for pursuing this agenda, both because of need and opportunity. NEF's recent pamphlet *Green Well Fair*,\* makes a strong case that the huge challenge of achieving sustainable development in the face of climate change requires fundamental change in how we link the 'three economies' of nature, human resources and the commercial sector to achieve social justice, when the only economy we can grow in future is the human one. On a large scale we need to find ways of enabling our human assets to flourish and expand so that we achieve well-being through better support to each other.

More narrowly, cross-party support for transformation in adult social care and the significant public investment in personalisation through *Putting People First* offers a moment of opportunity for radical change. In addition to the agenda for shifting resources to prevention and putting disabled and older people 'in control', DH has just launched an initiative which seeks to learn from local experience how about to build community capacity to support people to live fuller lives and ensure they are able to contribute to their communities.

Opportunities for radical change bring risks. The idea of community empowerment and local people finding their own solutions is powerful but not if it denies the structural causes of local problems requiring to be addressed more strategically or neglects the huge and growing inequalities between people and communities. Equally, hard economic

times may drive fresh thinking but there are many cul-de-sacs in the search for better ways of using resources which are more likely to deliver less for less rather than more for less, especially if the time horizons for savings are too short.

### *National support for positive change*

National support is partly about policies but the processes and relationships which link 'the national' and 'the local', and ensure that government is 'joined up' in ways which promote intelligent community action are even more important. Current enablers of efforts to build sustainable and inclusive community include these.

- Growing appreciation of the scale of the national crisis, as identified above.
- A new understanding in policy circles of the idea of convergence\*\* in which we look to make connections between different areas of policy or different kinds of local action which mobilise wider support for complex changes through achieving multiple objectives.
- Existing legislation (*Disability Discrimination Act, Disability Equalities Duty, Right to Control*) and new legislation (*Duty to Involve, Single Equalities Bill*) which seek to promote inclusion and empower citizens.
- The more holistic and devolved approach to local planning and delivery represented in the so far perhaps not well understood machinery of Local Strategic Partnerships, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, Local Area Agreements and Comprehensive Area Assessments (the latter seeking to assess whether the public sector and

### **What we did nationally**

On 5 November 2009 we convened a further conversation to explore a national perspective on local efforts to build inclusive and sustainable communities. The day was structured on the model of an informal Parliamentary Select Committee, with a **Panel** of local activists taking evidence from **Witnesses** who have national leadership roles (see Annex 2, page 36 for the participant list).

The workshop explored these **key questions** about building inclusive and sustainable communities:

- How is government helping?
- How, in light of our experience, might government help better?

\*Download from [www.neweconomics.org/publications/green-well-fair](http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/green-well-fair).

\*\*See Giddens, A. (2009) *The politics of climate change*. Polity Press.



its partners are meeting the needs which local people identify) and related efforts which emphasise ways of using and building on local assets.\*

- The social policy shift towards self directed support and individual budgets, especially where this is understood and supported to be a route for often excluded or disadvantaged individuals to strengthen their community connections and influence the pattern of local opportunities and supports.
- Increased recognition of the contribution of families and unpaid carers and the need to address their support and well-being as an issue in itself (e.g. in the Equalities legislation) as well as to recognise the new interdependencies created by demographic and other changes (preferably without recourse to the stigmatising language of 'time bombs' and 'burdens').

### *Doing better*

There are many ways in which government, working with localities, could enhance the prospects for achieving the more resilient, sustainable and inclusive communities envisioned in public policy.

- Important and indeed helpful policies and incentives –such as *Putting People First* and the *Duty to Involve*– tend to 'come down' from government through different channels and be received locally by different players. There is a real need locally to find ways of understanding these policies and incentives better across different boundaries so as to maximise the scope for convergence and concerted local action. It would of course help if more of these connections were also made

centrally: for example, there are potential synergies between DH's *Building community capacity* initiative and a number of DCLG policies relating to strengthening communities but currently a lack of cross-referencing.

- Community representatives often don't understand the policies, processes, and indicators used in JSNAs, LSPs, LAA and other local planning forums that are intended to engage them in bringing local planning efforts together. There is a need to find better ways of illuminating these processes and spreading their ownership.
- The trend to enhance local autonomy and responsiveness by reducing ring fencing of funding and other features of the command and control model of policy implementation offers important benefits. It is less clear that there are yet good mechanisms to reduce the down-sides of such autonomy, reflected for example in the diversion of investment into less productive pathways (perhaps because of the dominance of professional interests) or the neglect of marginalised minorities.
- The London Borough of Camden's mental health services have made a significant positive shift towards outcomes based commissioning and the co-production of promising new ways of providing support. This sort of local action begins to demonstrate the possibilities of realizing policy themes in a practical way by focusing commissioning and procurement on locally agreed outcomes, promoting social return on investment, grounding its expenditures in an holistic approach to place shaping, and orienting mainstream services to strengthening communities. Despite much concern for world class commissioning that embodies these themes, there

\* For example, see the Carnegie Trust's *Manifesto for Rural Communities* [www.uktrust.uk](http://www.uktrust.uk)

is much more to learn before positive local examples like Camden's become regular and general practice

- Making the change that policy already requires calls for a paradigm change in local planning: identifying communities in terms of their assets not just their problems, identifying the functions played by community networks (such as the University of the Third Age) and looking for ways of enhancing local capacities (like Time Banking).

All this presents another fundamental challenge. Not only are policies and structures sometimes obscure, the policy language that seeks to encourage community building itself can undermine the effort. Powerful ideas such as co-production or building social capital have their roots in everyday experiences of people living and working together, but these ideas can lose their edge if they turn to a jargon that separates professionals from other citizens. To be useful, these terms need to take their place in the context of everyday language and everyday stories. The methods for conversation that have been used to guide this exploration –appreciative inquiry, the World Cafe, and the “Select Committee” format– open the space for people to think and plan together in ways that can make stronger connections between local action and key terms of national direction such as inclusion and sustainability

And finally... Fortune favours the brave. If now is the time for boldness: we won't meet the multiple challenges of our age without fresh thinking and the willingness to take risks in the interests of a better tomorrow.

## Afterword: Extending these conversations

This report has consciously stayed close to what we did and what we heard in Lancashire and Wiltshire: we want to provide readers with a real sense of some promising ways of generating thoughtful conversations among citizens and showing where these might lead when our big question is about strengthening sustainable and inclusive communities. We know that there are many other issues and indeed many other kinds of conversation which are important to addressing this big question.

This paper concludes our work with the Barrow Cadbury Trust. However during 2009 some of the themes and processes explored here have been taken up on a bigger scale. Notably, the Department of Health has initiated a learning network involving more than twenty local authorities and their community partners (again including teams from Lancashire and Wiltshire) with the aim of fostering and illuminating the process of building community capacity to include disabled and older people as part of national policies to transform social care. Similarly the In Control development agency is using its extensive networks (including its links to citizen graduates from Partners in Policy Making) to invest in a programme designed to support ordinary citizens in exercising leadership to improve their communities, again with a strong interest in reducing social exclusion. And looking more widely, there are growing efforts to revive and renew the field of community development to meet the challenges of new times, seen for example in the work of the Community Sector Coalition and New Economics Foundation initiatives to support local co-production.

For our part, we are publishing this paper on the internet through a *ning* site *Building inclusive and sustainable communities\** which offers opportunities for interested readers accepting this Invitation to input their own experiences and reflections. We will report lessons we derive from our involvement in all the initiatives noted above through this site over the coming year. And from time-to-time we will revisit this paper in the light of wider experience.

We hope you will join us in this extended conversation.

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To join the conversation, go to <http://inclusiveandsustainable.ning.com/>

## Annex 1: Workshop Programmes

### What makes for good communities in Central Lancashire and how can we ensure these include disabled and older people as valued citizens?

A guided exploration with community leaders and local government representatives during (some of) 22&23 June.

#### Introduction

We live in troubled times, most visible at present in concerns about the economic downturn but also reflected in even bigger challenges like the need to tackle global warming. Local government and its partners are seeking to promote strong and prosperous communities. These communities reflect many kinds of diversity, including the perhaps 10% of us who are disabled and/or encountering the difficulties more common in later life. Lancashire has been one of the authorities taking the lead in trying to ensure that people using social care maintain control over their lives. It is increasingly recognized that doing all these things together requires that we understand better what is required to develop local communities which are both resilient and inclusive.

The Barrow Cadbury Trust (a charity with a strong interest in supporting the work of grass roots voluntary organizations) has commissioned a small team, including John O'Brien, John Gillespie and David Towell, to meet a cross-section of local people to explore these questions with a particular focus on the contributions of citizen networks and voluntary organizations. With encouragement and assistance from Kim Haworth, this work is beginning in Lancashire. We spent 2&3 March in Accrington meeting a score or more of local people. At Kim's suggestion, the next phase of this work will be in Central Lancashire, and involve people from its four areas. We have identified 22&23 June for this purpose and met a small group of interested leaders on 17 April to shape the plans which follow.

We want to ensure that a significant majority of people we meet are community and voluntary sector leaders, including from disabled and older people's organizations, but also include local government officers with an interest in community development. Kim's advice is that few will be able to join us for the whole of this time (although we hope some will) but we should nevertheless be able to 'link up' the conversations and we will take responsibility for 'writing up' the messages from the two days.

#### Goals

A cross-section of Central Lancashire people are being invited to work with us and each other to:

- Develop a vision of good and inclusive Lancashire communities.
- Explore the contributions to be expected from community organizations in advancing this vision.
- Identify what is helping and what is hindering the journey forward.
- Shape together some priorities for making progress addressed to community organizations, localities, the County Council and its partners.

This will take the form of a day workshop (10.00am until 4.30pm) on 22 June, which invites teams of up to ten people from each of the four areas in Central Lancs to work with us in envisioning a better future; and then a smaller workshop (10.00am until 2.30pm) on 23 June (including if possible three members of each of the four teams and some other people from both Lancs CC and strategic voluntary organizations) to draw out proposals for action, taking account of wider national policies.

Both events will be designed to encourage and learn from everyone's contributions. The Barrow Cadbury Trust will meet the costs of these activities, including for those who need this, necessary travel expenses etc.

## ENVISIONING GOOD AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

### Monday Programme

- 10.00 Welcome and introductions: Who is here? Putting ourselves on the Lancashire map
- 10.25 World Cafe Conversations
- What's good about community life in Central Lancashire?
  - How does this work for disabled and older people when things are going well?
  - Looking a few years into the future, what would we want to sustain and what would we want to be better in local communities which are good and inclusive?
- 12.40 Display posters and highlight issues for development
- 1.00 Break for lunch and informal networking
- 1.50 Afternoon introduction: Aspirations and issues for Central Lancashire development
- 2.20 Geographical groups
- What are our priorities for locality development?
  - What might these mean for community organizations?
  - How might the public sector help?
- 3.15 Posting proposals and more refreshment
- 3.35 Sharing local proposals
- 4.15 Small group review: What are we taking away from today?
- 4.30pm Close

## GOOD AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

### Implications for community organizations and public policy

### Tuesday Programme

- 10.00 Welcome and introductions
- 10.20 Visions of a better future and issues in getting there: Sharing key messages from Monday's workshop
- 10.50 World cafe Conversations: What are the implications for public policy and community development?
- Noon Sharing themes from the table conversations and drawing out key challenges for the next year or two
- 12.30 Break for lunch and informal networking
- 1.15 Recap on aspirations and challenges in Central Lancashire
- 1.30 Small group work on key challenges: Roles and relationships in developing good and inclusive communities
- 2.00 Towards an agenda for further action: Sharing insights on the ways forward and considering how to address these through appropriate Lancashire forums and partnerships
- 3.15 Strategic reflections: An opportunity to share insights from the two days and engage with County and other strategic leaders
- 4:45 Close

## Annex 2: Participants in the national workshop

People with local roles in building better communities:

**Angie Carmichael** – Disability activist in Wiltshire

**Heather Ludlow** – Head of Transformation, Wiltshire Council

**Alex McMinn** – Founder of the University of the Third Age in Ormskirk

**Greg Mitton** – Chief Executive of the West Lancashire Council of Voluntary Service

**Karyn Kirkpatrick** – Chief Executive, Key Ring

**Sally Warren** – Managing Director, Paradigm

**Jackie Collins** – Grants and Outreach Manager, Barrow Cadbury Trust

People with national roles relevant to building local communities

**Martin Routledge** – Department of Health, Putting People First Delivery Manager

**Charles Woodd** – Department of Communities and Local Government, Lead on Community Empowerment Delivery

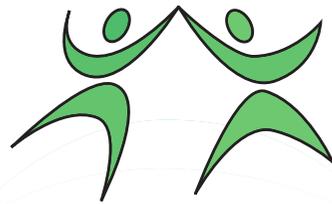
**Philippa Russell** – Chair, Prime Minister's Commission on Carers

**Anna Coote** – New Economics Foundation, Head of Social Policy

Moderator.

**David Towell**





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