

Building Good, Inclusive & Resilient Communities in Wiltshire

Key Ideas from Workshops on 5–6 May 2009

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Thanks to...

The citizens who gave their time on 5 May 2009 and shared their vision of a good community and their ideas about how to move Wiltshire even closer to that vision.

The people who hold responsibility for assuring that the variety of services that Wiltshire's citizens count on are effective and open to community influence and gave their time on 6 May 2009 to consider how their efforts might affect the messages from the previous day's workshop.

Julie Martin, Heather Patrick, and Sue Redmond. With very little notice, they convened two workshop groups and arranged venues, necessary assistance, and hospitality that made the work summarized here possible and pleasant.

Our purpose

As an expression of its interest in promoting disability equality, The Barrow-Cadbury Trust, an independent charitable foundation, has commissioned a small team, led by David Towell, to explore the ways that a concern for the inclusion of disabled people can positively influence efforts to build 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 the rising demand for more effective public services, and local issues like the transformation to personalization in social care. The team is particularly interested in the ways that local leaders guide the interaction of citizen networks, Third Sector organizations, and local government efforts toward inclusion and sustainability.

Wiltshire provides an important site for the team's exploration. As it has moved into a new status as a unitary authority, it has built on more than 10 years of work on engaging and empowering local communities. This includes thoughtfully involving local people in the constitution of 18 Area Boards which aim to assure local decision making in local matters and local influence over public services. The Wiltshire Assembly provides a forum for guiding adaptive change and a network of organizations and associations that can mobi-

lize action. The Assembly has recently identified local options for dealing with the global credit crunch. Wiltshire sees itself as a good place to live that is working to be even better.

This report captures some of the key ideas that emerged from two workshops, one, a larger group that included a number of Wiltshire citizens, the other for citizen

engagement. This report is based on summaries that John O'Brien presented during the discussions and tested for accuracy with the groups. It is organized in terms of the team's further reflections on both workshops. The workshops looked for breadth and diversity of ideas rather than convergence, so not everyone will agree with all of the points made here.

Workshop participants took away a number of ideas for action which we hope will take



root. The ideas from these workshops also will inform the team's continuing exploration and its efforts to involve a growing network of responsible people from Third Sector and local and central government in developing a better understanding of what it takes to build good, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

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

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

A good community

As we reflected on what participants shared from conversations around their World Cafe Tables, an account of good, inclusive, and resilient community took shape.

A good community is a place where people feel like it is possible to take actions that contribute to progress on important issues; 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 the possibilities in conflicts and potentially threatening differences face-to-face; 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; not a comfortable place to hide. A good community is a place where people support one another in contributing what is meaningful to them; not a place where people live as passive, isolated consumers.

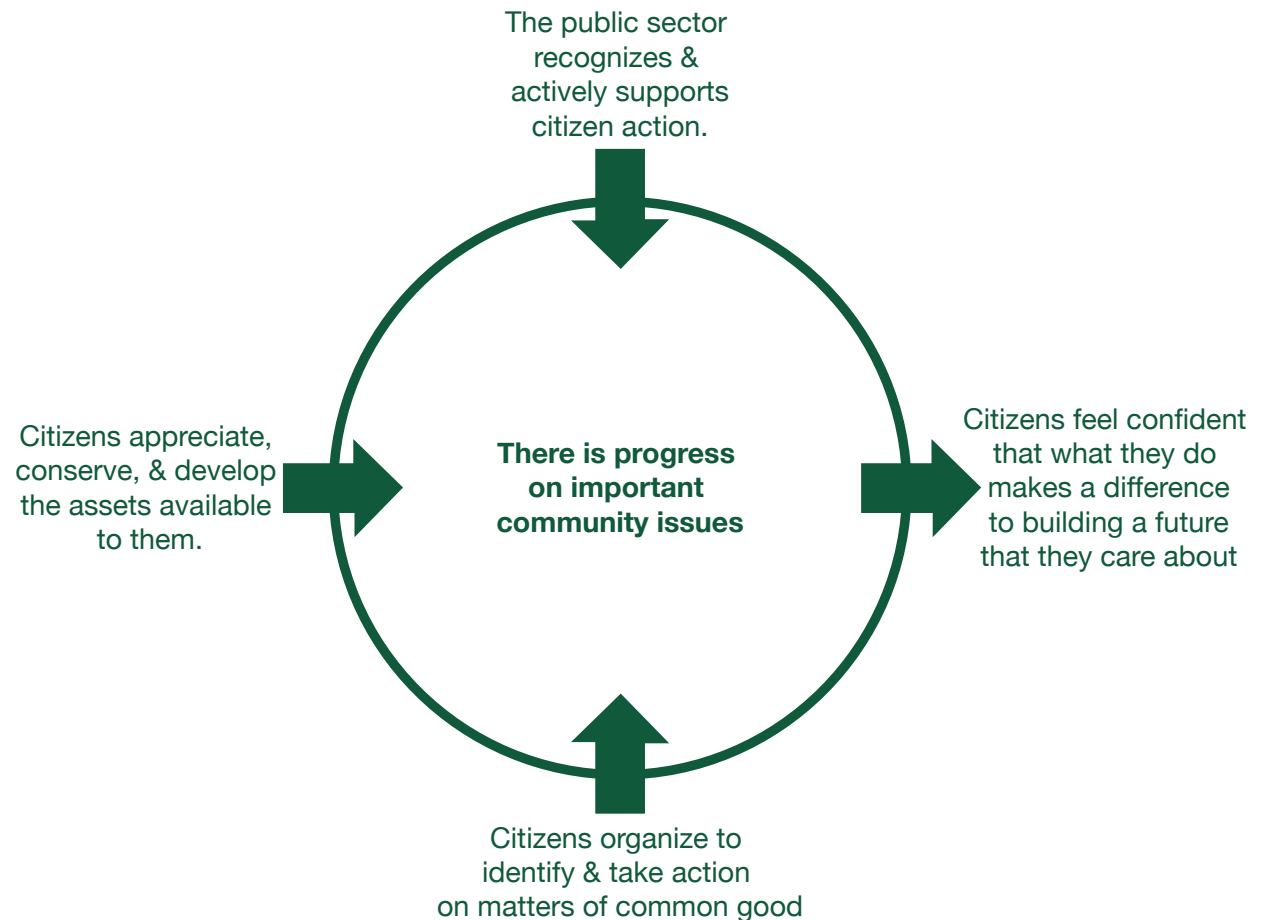
What kind of progress is needed?

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? This sort of issue tests resilience: the capacity to work through change and potential loss in a meaningful way.

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.

Citizen organization



Citizen engagement in local government decision making is important to democracy. It increases

people's stake in the place they live, informs both decision-makers and citizens about options, preferences, conflicts, and trade-offs, and results in better decisions.

When they talk about making Wiltshire's communities better places, many workshop participants highly value citizen engagement. A number see the implementation of the unitary authority and the Area Boards as an important opportunity to increase local gov-

ernment responsiveness to what matters to citizens. They are also thirsty for information about what local government and its contractors are up to and what they are planning. They feel like citizens know too little about what is available and what is being decided. Some think that small single issue groups have unfair advantages because they have figured out how to become better informed in their area of concern than their neighbors. They want more information, that is more accessible, and available in more media. They want to know the facts and they want stories of success that help them see how they can experience the benefits that other citizens do. The image of a local government strategy of 360° communication had appeal. This image seems to combine the idea of information in multiple forms flowing to every corner of the authority with the principle that when citizens make their views known, the communication loop is closed by letting them know what has been decided, how their input has been dealt with and what the results of the decision are.

It is important that communication strategies support citizens to actively make sense of different kinds of information. Personal knowledge, especially when it arises from experience directly relevant to an issue, makes an essential contribution to deliberations. Some believe that these contributions would be even stronger if more people had access to

other kinds of information. They would include information about the evidence base for different options, the facts about important trends, and the views and perceptions of others. One participant offered an example from a study of the credit crunch. The study found that Wiltshire citizens surveyed estimated a much greater negative effect of the first months of the credit crisis than local business indicators have shown. Things have been, in an important way, better than the opinions that many people express –and this negative view is in itself becoming part of the problem as it shapes economic decisions. Good decisions, one group pointed out, result from making sense of diverse points of view and diverse kinds of information and knowledge.

While citizen engagement is a good thing in itself, and while it can contribute to setting some of the conditions for citizen co-production, co-producing decisions is different in crucial ways from co-creating wellbeing.

Citizen empowerment, as some spoke of it, is distinct from citizen engagement. It refers to citizens organizing and taking responsibility to define and carry out changes that matter to them. They name the difference they want to make and get on with it. Citizens may seek government investment in their projects; they may work to influence government decisions; but the locus of action remains with them.

The most typical patterns of citizen empowerment are so common as to go unnoticed because most people take them for granted as their everyday reality. Individuals get on with their daily lives in ways that make sense to them. People meet their GP for a routine screen. Families work out how to deal with difficulties. Neighbors offer a lift or a meal. A local business owner opens her doors. The cubs meet. The curtain lifts on the drama society's autumn production. Commonplace, no doubt, but valuable in many ways.

These routine patterns become a matter for civic consideration at points of breakdown or awareness of exclusion. Workshop participants noted several such issues, at varying levels of resolution.

- People with mobility impairments are less excluded as efforts to improve accessibility have increased.
- More intensive in-home supports have allowed more older people who require assistance to keep their place among familiar surroundings.
- The personalization agenda aims to shift power over an individual share of public resources so that people can decide for themselves what best suits them when they require long-term support to deal with impairments. This allows and challenges

people to mobilize all of their social resources as their lives change.

- People with learning disabilities have better access to primary care medicine in some places; in other places they remain among the excluded.
- Libraries have complemented their traditional role to become important sites for civic activity from providing activities for young children and their families to offering relevant information on access to services.
- Public transportation hours, routes, and costs currently limit participation options for some people who don't have cars.
- In some places the fabric of village or neighborhood life is eroding. 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.
- 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 empowerment).
- Some Third Sector organizations are challenged to balance their roles as contracted service providers (which continues to grow) and sources of self-help with their role as civic organizations.

As workshop participants noted, the experience of disabled people provides a helpful perspective on another important level of citizen empowerment. Access is better, supports are more personalized, and 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. Perhaps the more visible signs of this empowered 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 who are acting as citizens are building and expressing capabilities that are lost to passive consumers of service.

The extent of this more civic level of citizen organizing offers one key to progress on critical agendas that shape action on personalization, public safety, sustainability, economic development, and quality of local life.

Confidence that citizen action matters



People feel the effects of global trends, and recent national economic events show that changes can come up suddenly

and unpredictably. Many of the issues that compete for attention are complex. And the sense that shadows of threat hang over our lives from such previously remote and un-considered sources as a changing climate or “toxic debt”, decreases confidence in citizen action. When people feel like they are in over their heads, two common social processes become understandable responses: denial and delegation. Denial mutes the call for new learning. Delegation turns the problem over to those in authority and expects a quick and painless solution from “them”, while often distrusting their competence or concern.

Encouraging one another to set aside denial and delegation for action-learning is the work of leadership. The importance of such leadership was a significant workshop theme. These are some of the results of leadership that they identified as important.

- 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.

Developing assets

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



Assets develop when they are mobilized. Workshop participants identified a number of under-utilized assets, including these.

- Many good things happen in Wiltshire and self-organized citizen efforts already make a significant contribution. Celebrating these

efforts, and learning what makes them work, would be worthwhile.

- There is an unrealized potential in creating the channels for inter-generational involvement. Older people have much to offer children and youth and will benefit in turn from making themselves useful as mentors, teachers, and caretakers.
- Many providers of advice and services could use more volunteer workers. It would be good to find even more ways to publicly recognize these efforts and find ways of reaching those who do not currently see themselves as potential volunteers.
- There are a growing number of immigrant families and it is important to find ways to invite them to contribute to the life of the whole community.
- Public and community service internships would add to the career possibilities that young people in transition consider.
- There are a rapidly growing number of ways for citizens to be involved in governance. It would be a good idea to figure out ways to move beyond “the usual suspects” and tap the talents of people who don’t currently see themselves as influencing public or Third Sector decision-making.
- There are a significant numbers of disabled people who want to be employed for pay. It’s worth pushing to assure that the best

supports are available to them –including well informed benefits counseling and customized employment strategies.

- There are significant numbers of older and disabled people who would be interested in being more active in cultural and association life than they are now.

A community grows more inclusive as more citizens ask “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 had helpful guidance:

- It is not always a matter of feeling bad because “they won’t come to us” in response to a general announcement. Sometimes we need to go to them with a specific invitation.
- People often 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 to people enough for them to become involved.
- A good communication strategy will have multiple ways for people 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.

- 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.

The public sector role

The public sector recognizes & actively supports citizen action.



The Wiltshire Council tags the heading on its webpage with a powerful commitment: “Where everybody matters.”

There are several distinct ways in which everybody matters:

- As citizens whose voice should influence the benefits they receive from their local government, the issues it tackles and the priorities it sets through the Wiltshire Assembly and in other ways.
- As residents of a locality who should have a meaningful say in decision-making about local matters through Area Boards.
- As recipients of services provided or contracted by the Council, with expectations of high quality and responsibilities to play their proper part.

- As organizers and initiators of economic, civic, and cultural action which makes Wiltshire a good place to live. Some of these activities may benefit from government investments or be subject to government regulation, others will not require them.

The Council influences the amount and quality of citizen action in a number of important ways.

Of great importance is the way the Council exercises authority. A paternalistic, experts-always-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 rules are the most important concerns.

Workshop participants identified several ways that the Council can promote citizen action.

- Demonstrate the political will to identify difficult issues and call for citizen action as an essential part of making progress toward viable solutions.
- 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 the Council 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 Council 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.

The future

Participants in the two workshops made some new connections and each took away their own sense of how Wiltshire and its communities might make use of the discussions. Indeed on the second day there was explicit consideration of how best to continue these conversations in relevant County forums, recognising that both the elected Council leader and its Chief Executive had made the time to join part of the workshops as had the Chairman of the Wiltshire Assembly, among others. These actions did not depend on our record of the discussions - and just as well since writing 4000 miles part, it has taken us two months to produce this! However in offering this report now, we hope we are providing a useful stimulus to further attention to these issues in Wiltshire and a few ways of thinking which may help to shape productive action.

As part of our national explorations, we hope to learn more from how people in Wiltshire develop and act on these ideas in the coming months.