



Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry Rural Strategic Theme

From Action Hampshire

Since 1951, Action Hampshire has been supporting the not-for-profit sector to deliver great services to local people and communities; to speak up for the changes they would like to see; and to shape the future of where they live and work. We are also Hampshire's Rural Community Council, working closely with residents and rural communities to address their own issues and priorities.

A recent perusal of Action Hampshire's Annual Reports from the 1980s has highlighted some (depressing) facts about rural Hampshire. Thirty plus years ago the same challenges we are now facing were also occupying minds. Action Hampshire was reporting on the alarming number of village shops and post offices that had disappeared; the inadequacy of public transport; the lack of suitable housing and employment opportunities for young people. There were also references to the dependence on volunteers to deliver health and social services in rural Hampshire - some in the voluntary sector were concerned that "too much was being expected of them at a time when volunteers were in great demand" – there appeared to be a shortage of volunteers as more married women and younger retired people were returning to employment.

A major debate centered on whether it was "better to take a client to a service or the service to a client in a scattered community". A 1988 report from the Rural Development Strategy Group concluded that it was time to think through and plan the most effective way to deliver health and community care services in rural areas.

On a more positive note, however, there were also examples of community self-help including part-time post offices in village halls, community transport schemes, playgroups; village appraisals; good neighbor schemes; luncheon clubs. Even in 1986 communities were being encouraged to adopt a self-help approach.

However the incredible growth in the use of digital technology and increasing concerns about the impact of climate change were not on anyone's radar 32 years ago.

Hampshire 2050

It is difficult therefore to predict what Hampshire might look like in 2050 because of the many “unknowns” whose impact we don’t know:

- Impact of climate change generally and on health in particular (mental health)
- Post-Brexit and (possible) impact on local workforce availability (eg even just to provide basic activities such as washing and dressing)
- Concerns about loss of EU funding eg LEADER and what will replace it
- Further funding cuts at all levels
- Increased pension age – impact on volunteering pool
- House prices
- Ditto the digital revolution. As an ageing population are we ready for major change? What about the impact of cognitive decline as we age?
- The likelihood of major shifts in the types and cost of energy and transport

We do know that rural settlements are under pressure to survive as viable communities – the result of service cutbacks, dependence on private transport, fewer employment opportunities, shortage of affordable housing, changing age structure. There is increasing polarization the social economic groups and the small but significant pockets of deprivation and poverty are masked by the broad-brush indicators that underpin statistical evidence..

Perhaps residents in rural Hampshire have also been slow to take up the challenge – there has been a dependency culture in the past with the expectation that local authorities will deliver services. Also, most of rural Hampshire is not very isolated. There is relatively easy access to major road and rail links opening up opportunities for work, retail and leisure and reducing the incentive to do something *for the future*. It is only when an individual has to give up driving or starts requiring assistance that the incentive is there.

Any vision for 2050 must have built in the flexibility to cope with the changes that are likely to come along but which, today, are impossible to predict. We cannot predict what will happen, but how we manage change is important. As there are so many uncertainties which will need to be addressed in whatever form they manifest themselves, it is important to provide a platform for rural people to have a voice and to have *their* vision, needs and priorities heard – this will be a challenge. There is a danger relying on the input from a small selected number of stakeholders who are not necessarily representative of the rural community in its full diversity. Giving a voice to seldom-heard individuals and groups is also an important factor so it is not just the loudest voices that are heard.

Between now and 2050 it is likely that there will continue to be a focus on “localness” in terms of food and energy resources and self-help to strengthen the ability of people, businesses and community groups to cope with the

changes that “unknowns” like those above will surely bring, and HCC could have a key role helping to promote this.

What might contribute to a vibrant rural Hampshire?

Shifting demographic – increasing the attractiveness of rural areas as a place to live and work for all age groups, and income brackets.

Improved ability for new generations to stay in rural location – through strong economy, great quality of life and access to affordable housing.

Connected – both improved transport and internet connections (thus allowing for more efficient use of resources; improved health and wellbeing and access to recreational opportunities; connecting students to resources; attracting and retaining businesses).

A strong and diverse rural economy – agriculture, recreation and tourism, energy etc.

Access to variety of quality housing options.

Improved self-sufficiency – communities more resilient to disasters, food and energy shortages.

Well paying job opportunities

Access to good education.

Social Care and Housing

a) Social Care

If, as predicted, the population in rural Hampshire continues to age the big question is how we are going to meet the increasing demand for social care? As the costs rise, will other services suffer?

The fact that complaints and enquiries about adult social care have nearly trebled since 2010 (Local Govt and Social Care Ombudsman) indicates an industry struggling to cope with *current* funding pressures, let alone with further probable cutbacks in the future.

- **Recruitment**

Social care is a low paid sector and there are no signs this is likely to change dramatically over the next 30 years.

There will be a need to address recruitment difficulties for essential occupations such as agricultural workers and carers (linked with exodus of young people, high house prices; impact of Brexit on migrant workers who

have traditionally filled vacant low-paid jobs). If people are living longer into *frail* old age who is going to provide even the very basic care they require such as help with washing and dressing?

Whatever happens after 29 March 2019, it is likely that recruiting into the care sector will continue to be difficult. Perhaps Hampshire County Council could step up to address this, for example by looking at ways to pay a higher wage, encouraging more respect for the care worker and improving the value placed on workers and the service they deliver or looking at new models of care delivery.

b) Housing

Action Hampshire, as a member of HARA, has contributed to HARA's response and fully supports it. In addition, see comments below.

HCC should continue to promote and support the building of a range of different accommodations to suit different incomes. This includes the housing needs of those who wish to downsize but stay within their community, and are financially self-sufficient. Small developments can also deliver jobs locally.

Under the "Rural Environment" heading there will continue to be a need for housing for farm workers (tied accommodation) and people who manage the countryside and the landscape. This is a low paid sector.

Co-housing providing semi-shared accommodation could be a big part of the solution. Co-housing and communal living are relatively rare in this country (and are often seen as "alternative") but examples from Holland and Denmark show that self-help and mutual support are a means of continuing an active life and preventing the need for social care (they are not a substitute for social care). They help address other areas of concern including isolation and mental health issues. Co-housing models deliver development with more of a focus on communities doing it for themselves. However, they usually require greater partnership working at all levels (parish council to county council). As no one size fits all, flexible solutions like this are required to meet locally identified need.

Senior co-housing is not primarily social care – it helps to continue an active life thus preventing or delaying the need for social care. Where mutual support and domiciliary care is concerned, a co-housing setting ideally meets these needs. However, this is *not about providing care which is statutory* and should be delivered by professional staff. There would, however, be an opportunity for members to pool resources and hire their own care assistants jointly. (See: *Senior cohousing communities – an alternative approach for the UK? Maria Brenton Jan 2013 Joseph Rowntree Foundation*).

What is required is HCC and partners adopting a flexible approach and coming up with imaginative solutions (eg Dutch nursing home that is also a college dorm). With more and more people living on their own (20s through to pensioners) a co-operative solution might be one answer. These projects

require partners to work together to get them off the ground – as a minimum planning, housing and adult social care. They could be facilitated by Hampshire County Council working with other partners (if students continue to have large debts from loans, then something like this could be a win-win for both parties!). There are examples of very successful projects being delivered in other countries – it would be helpful to research these to find out why they have been a success and to identify case studies to share with others.

HCC could help to promote the new model of community led housing. Council members, for example, could encourage and support rural communities to consider establishing a community land trust. If market housing is delivered through a CLT this could also generate income to pay for local services without the need to rely on grant aid.

As well as encouraging rural communities to take up new ideas, HCC could also be involved in supporting emerging groups (as appropriate) and *enabling* people to deliver their own solutions. Perhaps some form of incentive for “early adopters” to stimulate action could be considered (along the lines of Feed-in Tariffs for those who embraced renewable energy technologies early on – although these could be seen as a reward for those who already had the money to switch).

Volunteering

The 2017 ONS survey highlighted that the number of hours people in the UK spent volunteering each year had fallen by 15% between 2005 and 2015 (with a 7% fall between 2012 and 2015). However since 2000, volunteering by people aged 16 – 24 has increased while those aged 25 – 34 have halved the time spent volunteering. It appears that the nature of volunteering is also changing as young people look for short term opportunities to gain experience or help with CVs. This is a trend that it is important to track as it could change the face of volunteering at a time when there is a growing reliance on volunteers – for example, as an important part of public service delivery when budgets become tighter. The not for profit sector is finding that one of the biggest problem with volunteers is recruiting committed individuals who are there for the long haul. The “gold dust” is those people who give their time and energy over a long period and are reliable.

Volunteering, of course, is not a free option but does need funding and support to ensure effective management. (Communicare in Southampton has five paid staff but this leverages a significant number of hours given by 200 volunteers).

If, as has been predicted based on ONS statistics on life expectancy, the state pension age will be at 70 in 2050 then we will have to work longer. The result could be fewer numbers in rural communities to deliver the informal care that currently helps keep older people in their homes.

An ageing population and the decline in final salary-type pension schemes introduces the risks of old age poverty in rural Hampshire. This may mean

that many older people, short of income and with few savings, will need to work beyond the retirement age. The knock on effect is that volunteer numbers are likely to decline accordingly and individuals could find themselves with few resources to fund their retirement.

These informal networks are beginning to fragment (the result of having children at a later age, working longer and looking after elderly parents / relations) as people have less free time to get involved in community volunteering or providing support to those who don't have relatives nearby. There is anecdotal evidence (from a social isolation study undertaken by Action Hampshire) that there is a disconnect developing. Some places are changing as more people work out of the area and the village is beginning to transform into a dormitory settlement, with a consequent reduction in mutual aid and "social capital".

Faced with these demographic and other challenges, HCC and partners should be encouraging rural communities themselves to start thinking about their longer term future. Asking such questions as: What will your area look like in 2050? What do you want for your community? What are the solutions you want and how can you deliver them? There is a key role for community planning and engagement to facilitate rural communities to "imagine their future" alongside external stakeholders. Engaging with young people as part of this is crucial – they should have a say in their future as they are the ones who will be living and working through the period up to 2050. Today's young people will be the decision makers and the managers responsible for service delivery in 2050. What is their vision for the future of the rural community in which they have been raised?

Social and Community Business

If social and community business are going to help plug the gaps, HCC and partners will need to manage the transition from what could currently be perceived as a "dependency culture" to a more can-do approach. At the moment if a service or facility has to be withdrawn only those who are confident and capable or have financial resources will survive. One role that HCC and partners could adopt over the next years would be to ensure that all communities and community activists receive the training, support, encouragement and investment they need to take action on behalf of their own communities. Otherwise some rural communities will get left behind.

By 2050 rural communities could be delivering their own services through established community or social businesses. These businesses also provide employment opportunities locally, deliver solutions to locally identified priorities and contribute to, and keep money circulating in the local rural economy. Current examples in Hampshire include community land trusts; community owned shops and pubs; and transport schemes. If this trend continues to develop it could help make rural Hampshire a more viable and vibrant place to live and work in the future. Investment, though, is required.

HCC should maintain investment in infrastructure support agencies and the work already developing in the county around social / community enterprise and community led housing. Support for people to support themselves is required and this enables them to start to deliver their own solutions – this is the focus, for example, of the social entrepreneurs and community business programmes at Action Hampshire.

Within Hampshire there are many rural residents with high level managerial skills and qualifications – including many who are retired. At a time when an entrepreneurial attitude will be crucial, HCC and partners could nurture, encourage and support innovation and creativity. The question we all should be asking is “How can we empower people to innovate”?

HCC (and partners) could again take a lead on publicising the community and social business model and the benefits it can bring. Perhaps tax breaks could be used to incentivise (to be negotiated at a higher level?). The outcome for the partners would be to ensure that social and community businesses are seen as mainstream and that their purpose and ways of operating are understood. There is no one size fits all. People need to have options presented so they can make their own informed decisions.

Technology

There have been such huge strides in digital technology over the last 30 years including developments such as telemedicine and GPS tracking. Whatever approach HCC decides to adopt for future service delivery, it needs to be flexible to take advantage of new and unpredictable developments in the future. However, with the focus in 2019 on loneliness and mental health, a lesson to be learned is that digital technology cannot replace human contact. Too heavy a reliance might lead to increasing social isolation particularly in rural areas.

The challenge for HCC is how to ensure that technology is used to improve life. Older people in 2050 (today’s younger generation) will, of course, be very confident with the technology as they will have used it both at work and in their social lives and networks. More can be done “on line” whatever form this takes in 2050. But if advances are at a similar speed to those we have seen over the past 30 years older people, as they experience cognitive decline, may find themselves becoming digitally excluded.

A recent study into the impact of becoming a cashless society concluded that rural communities may struggle where alternative ways of paying are affected by poor broadband or mobile connectivity. It has also highlighted difficulties for some who have a physical or mental health problem and find it hard to use digital services (www.accesstocash.org.uk)

Facilities

Rural facilities such as shop, pub and post office have a social function as well contributing to the rural economy. Their decline and loss has been

changing the economic environment and has brought about an increased interest in the social / community business model.

Almost certainly there will always be a need for local meeting places such as a community hall or a church building. HCC should continue its support for the volunteers who manage these – either by providing direct financial support and investing in the maintenance and upgrading of buildings that are deemed fit for purpose or by maintaining support for the agencies that provide the guidance and training for the volunteers who run them. If direct service delivery continues to be withdrawn, services could still be delivered to a community through the multi-use of existing facilities (hubs). This would, however, require support from both HCC and from the community.

Realistically there will never be the resources to maintain all community buildings, particularly where they are poorly used locally. It is also extremely unlikely that direct services will be delivered in every village.

A solution could be to establish a model with a community hub in one location that “serves” surrounding villages. This will require members of some rural communities to think differently about how they access services and facilities and what their expectations can reasonably be. Community hubs are likely to be located in larger villages or market towns.

Transport

This is one area where technological developments should make a big impact by 2050. Personal car ownership could become a thing of the past. If driverless cars are the norm by then, those with money will probably have their own, those with less could book a communal car when necessary. These communal cars will need to be fully accessible for those with poor mobility in rural Hampshire. This could help residents access the community hub if located in a different settlement.

Community engagement and participation in decision making is crucial, particularly in relation to behavioural change and self-help initiatives (such as car sharing, combined drop off / collection points, integrated transport schemes that include public and community transport). Rural communities themselves need to be encouraged to start thinking longer term thus preparing themselves for the inevitable changes which will be coming along eg in the way they use transport.

Despite the growing use of technology to deliver services, people will still need physical access and the opportunity to travel further afield for social contact, leisure and recreation, and for different experiences. HCC could enable a more joined up approach to providing transport by involving partners and by supporting new initiatives and developments that are unknown at the moment.

In Summary

By 2050 we need to have moved towards some more imaginative solutions. This will require a leap of faith and acceptance of calculated risks. Cooperative enterprises (housing, shops and post offices, care and support agencies) could deliver the solutions to the challenges that in a society where more and more people are living alone especially in old age.

Could HCC become a beacon of support for self-help and mutual provision at a time when less service and social care is available? This will need some investment in terms of capacity building, training and financial assistance at rural community level. It will also require maintaining support for not for profit organisations whose role will be “to be there” to provide ongoing help and support.

It is important that all policies and decisions are subject to rural proofing from the outset and not just as an “add on” at the end or a tickbox exercise – this is about fairness and ensuring that the implications and possible knock on effects on those who live and work in rural Hampshire are being considered.

The constant requirement for not for profit organisations to ‘bid’ for small amounts of funding from various sources means that they have less staff resources to deliver their primary functions. A guarantee of at least medium term support and core funding is needed for key services and organisations in rural areas – this will deliver a degree of certainty and allow organisations to plan ahead. Rural projects, such as affordable housing, often have longer lead-in times compared with those in urban areas.

HCC should move towards adopting a genuine empowerment and enablement role so that rural residents can deliver solutions themselves in partnership. This would require behavioural change for HCC and for many of the rural residents who have come to depend on others but now need to think about future priorities and how they can be achieved. The future includes encouraging and supporting those living and working in rural areas to help themselves and empowering rural residents to innovate.

Action Hampshire
December 2018