

## **TIME 2 CONNECT HOUGHTON REGIS – STAKEHOLDER BRIEFING**

### **Introduction**

Central Bedfordshire Council Public Health has commissioned Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity to deliver an exciting community development project, called *Time 2 Connect Houghton Regis*. The project will use community mobilisation and asset-based approaches to engage and work with existing and new residents, communities and other stakeholders, in the growing town of Houghton Regis. The project commenced in May 2020 and will be delivered over the next three to five years.

### **Strategic Aim**

Using community mobilisation and asset-based approaches, the project will reduce health inequalities among the population of Houghton Regis by:

- driving change to improve mental health and wellbeing for people of all ages;
- enabling people to optimise their own and their family's health and wellbeing;
- ensuring that growth delivers improvements in health and wellbeing for current and future residents.

### **Purpose**

To develop the social infrastructure needed for healthy, well-connected and vibrant communities so as to reduce social isolation; improve residents' well-being and mental health; increase community connections among residents and enable them to become actively involved in their community.

### **Objectives**

1. To work with residents, community groups and service providers to facilitate, identify and map community-assets in Houghton Regis and residents' priorities, issues and aspirations.
2. To enable (new and existing) residents to increase access to local services and community-assets; and their participation in social networks, cultural activities, community groups and opportunities for social and community action.
3. To empower (new and existing) residents to build connections with others and opportunities for social interaction between people, neighbours and communities; and improve their well-being.
4. To empower residents to share their skills, knowledge, time and increase community-assets through access to local volunteering opportunities and timebanks, and facilitate a pool of volunteers, from within the community, prepared organise social networks, cultural activities, community groups and opportunities for social and community action.
5. To empower residents to take an interest in, and engage with, local issues affecting them or their community through local forums, consultations and other media.
6. To manage the development of new social infrastructure in a way that makes best use of the resources available and identifies the lessons learned from evidence-based practice and outcomes.

### **Core Values**

The project is underpinned by the following core values:

**Asset-based approach** – everyone has something to contribute, with each person having knowledge, skills, experience and strengths and communities having a wide range of assets. It focuses on what's already strong in the community, rather than on the deficits, by building on people's strengths, motivations and passions.

**Social inclusion** – a sense of belonging where people from different backgrounds feel valued for the part they play in making their community a better place to live, as well as having the ability to network beyond their own neighbourhood.

**Participatory governance** – empowering citizens, individually and collectively, to identify their own potential; to have a greater say in decisions that affect their community and to be involved in a forum or network that is inclusive, open and participatory, which is owned by and accountable to the community.

**Empowerment** – individuals, groups and communities are empowered to take control of their future by organising themselves, becoming active agents in their own development and able to act with reducing levels of external support.

**Community self-help and support** – building confidence and the capacity of individuals and groups to plan and deliver community-led activities and programmes to meet local aspirations through structures that are supported and maintained from within the community.

**Partnership working** – public, private, voluntary and community service providers are coordinated and there is a commitment to open, honest and effective communications between service providers and the community to build trust and effective relationships.

## **Our Approach**

Our asset-based approach focuses on what's already strong in the community, rather than on deficits, by building on people's strengths, motivations and passions. Everyone has something to contribute. It will take time, be gradual, painstaking and dynamic. Our approach will therefore be gradual, careful and sensitive, and will seek to identify what's important to residents while managing people's expectations about what can and can't be achieved.

## **Community Engagement and Asset Mapping**

Starting with initial conversations, engagement and, as community interest and capacity grows, asset mapping and working with the community to identify aspirations, priorities and outcomes.

Using our existing knowledge of community groups and facilities in Houghton Regis, along with further research, and an active community engagement approach, we will use participatory approaches as best we can (given the current social distancing requirements needed to tackle the Coronavirus pandemic) to build community knowledge. This will include online public events and meetings with community groups, public sector partners and residents to identify local community assets; key local services, including those delivered by VCS organisations and the public sector.

Our participatory approaches and IT platforms will enable residents to self-identify their own skills, knowledge, experience, interests, strengths and passions. Those who want to engage in volunteering will have access to our Volunteer Connect platform, which enables residents to identify/apply for volunteer roles, share information on their skills and/or join our Volunteer Bank. Residents who would like to engage in a more reciprocal approach will be able to join the Chiltern Vale Timebank (covering Houghton Regis and surrounding areas) utilising our *Time Online2* platform, an asset-mapping tool for individuals to identify and exchange time and skills with others.

## **Building Community Connections**

Community Connections Advisers will seek to bring residents together to build effective and trusting relationships with one another, encouraging them to make connections with others in the locality and to identify priorities and outcomes they want to work on.

They will seek to do this by encouraging residents to:

- make connections with others in the locality, especially where there are common interests/concerns, but also with people they may think they have nothing in common with;
- develop their knowledge about, and access, local services;
- develop a greater awareness of their personal relationships and view them as partnerships that invite and inspire all parties to learn and grow together, and challenge each other in trying new things;
- demonstrate an openness and warmth towards others; a curiosity and an interest in their experiences, stories and perspectives;
- make sense of experiences using group activity to create new ways of seeing, thinking and doing; looking beyond individual responsibility for change;
- develop opportunities to reflect on what happened rather than what went wrong;
- increasingly live and move towards more fulfilling lives.

These interactions are the art of conversation and of making, and maintaining, connections with themselves, others in their lives, and others in their locality.

### **Community Mobilisation**

Community mobilisation empowers communities to engage directly with the issues that affect them the most, to organise themselves and become active agents in their own development; instigating, planning, resourcing and providing their own community-based activities and bringing about sustainable change. Community Mobilisers may need to support individuals to:

- identify the outcome they want to achieve
- scope and plan what they want to do
- strengthen existing links and relationships
- mobilise and involve others, including enabling communities to support the inclusion of marginalised, minority and socially isolated groups
- share, acquire and develop the community-assets needed
- plan, publicise and organise the activity
- review and evaluate what they do; celebrating skills, strengths, assets and achievements
- develop and sustain the activity, if appropriate.

### **Who's Involved**

We aim to involve/mobilise everyone who is a resident in Houghton Regis – recognising the diversity of residents who may be engaged or not engaged with community life. Residents may belong to several communities: their neighbourhood, a community of interest and a community of culture; they may be part of the established community or a new arrival. Some may not feel part of any community or want to be involved.

Those already involved can contribute early in the asset mapping; these groups/individuals will be crucial in taking the project forward and will key stakeholders in this.

The challenge is to reach all residents. Those who are quite confident can be very easy to work with; the challenge is to work with those who do not feel engaged, empowered or involved; those who are isolated, hard to reach and who may need the most support to be involved too. Individuals at most risk of poorer health and more likely to experience lower wellbeing outcomes are most likely to benefit.

Our asset-based approach builds on people's skills and strengths. Everyone has something to contribute and everyone could have a role to play in delivering the project and helping it achieve the outcomes. They may be active neighbours, participants, leaders, facilitators, community organisers or activists. They may join their Nextdoor Neighbourhood or a community group, volunteer with a public sector organisation, become a Timebank member or Nextdoor Street Warden, sharing their knowledge and skills with others.

Our partnership working approach with public, private, voluntary and community providers will seek to build open, honest and effective communications between service providers and the community.

### **Communications and Community Engagement**

We will engage those already involved in the community and those who aren't and who are most likely to benefit from the project. It's important to reach those who are most at risk of poorer health and/or are socially isolated and unlikely to be engaging with local community groups, support groups, networks etc. We'll identify these individuals by engaging with GPs, other health/care professionals, social media, community newsletters and meeting people in the community.

A new Facebook Page for the project, along with our website and use of our existing social media, will promote the project, campaigns and events; provide information on how local people can get involved, the benefits of doing so, and how to access local services; and encourage residents' participation in community life.

Through our partnership with Nextdoor UK we'll encourage residents to join their Nextdoor neighbourhood, link-in with other neighbourhoods and use the platform to full effect.

We will use our communications channels to ensure the project is informed by a diversity of views and voices from across the community and to facilitate communications between service providers to improve collaboration.

We are mindful that people with a strong social media presence can still be socially isolated through a lack of personal contact and physical presence with others and will address this. We will seek to find new ways of people developing and maintaining contact with others while maintaining the current social distancing requirements needed to tackle the Coronavirus health crisis.

### **Outputs, Outcomes and Sustainability**

The key outputs expected to demonstrate delivery of the project are:

- Number of residents or households that have registered with the project.
- Number of agencies and organisations engaged in the project.
- Number of activities (e.g. meetings, activity sessions, events etc.) run or hosted by the project.
- Number of residents who participated in an activity run or hosted by the project.
- Number of residents signed up to Nextdoor (and as % of total households).

The principle outcomes expected to demonstrate improved health, wellbeing and resilience among Houghton Regis residents are the number of people who state, as a result of participating in social networks, activities, community groups or other services offered or promoted by the project,

- they are better informed about local services.
- they have made new friends or formed new social relationships with other residents.
- they are actively involved in the community.
- they feel less isolated or lonely.
- their physical, emotional or mental health and wellbeing has improved.

The effective use an asset-based community development approach will create a legacy of evidenced outcomes for the improvement in wellbeing of residents and reductions in health inequalities, sustained beyond the timescales of the project.

### **Further Information**

For further information on *Time 2 Connect Houghton Regis* or to find out how to get involved, please contact Gina Croxford, Community Engagement Manager, at Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity by email to [gina.croxford@bedsrcc.org.uk](mailto:gina.croxford@bedsrcc.org.uk) or phone on 07555 904174.