



PtP Case Study: East Sussex

An Integrated Sustainable Community Strategy

An unprecedented level of collaboration and exemplary partnership working between district, borough and county local strategic partnerships has resulted in the first integrated Sustainable Community Strategy being produced for East Sussex.

Pride of Place is a strategy to which all partners have agreed, and which lays the foundations for working more closely together in the future. This case study looks at how the partners have collaborated to achieve this and what has been learned in the process.

1. East Sussex is a county in the south east of England with a population of around half a million people. Whilst the county's landscape is predominantly rural in character, nearly three quarters of the population live in urban areas. Four of the five urban centres are located on the coast, of which Eastbourne and Hastings are the largest and most densely populated. A general impression of affluence masks the fact that East Sussex is the seventh most deprived county in England. The majority of the most deprived areas are in the coastal strip however, rural areas also suffer deprivation which is just as challenging to address.

2. East Sussex is governed by two tiers of local government, East Sussex County Council; Eastbourne and Hastings borough councils; and three district councils: (Wealden, Rother and Lewes). Each authority is responsible for working with partners, usually through its local strategic partnership (LSP), to prepare a sustainable community strategy (SCS).

3. Before the integrated strategy was developed, the county, district and borough councils each had their own sustainable community strategy, each of which ran for a different period of time and was on a different cycle of implementation, review and update.



Initiation – the conditions for change

4. Towards the end of 2006, the East Sussex Strategic Partnership's community strategy was due for revision, as were a number of the borough and district strategies. At a meeting of the county-wide LSP coordinators group, the idea of collaborating to produce an integrated strategy was floated. There were a number of conditions which made this feasible. These included:

- ➔ History of good relationships and collaborative working between LSPs;
- ➔ A conducive policy environment; and
- ➔ Recognition by all the LSPs of the potential benefits of linking county, district and borough strategies more closely.

History of collaborative working

5. By the time the idea of developing an integrated sustainable community strategy arose, the LSP chairs and coordinators had been meeting regularly as a group for six years to share information, exchange ideas and identify opportunities for working together. Hence good working relationships, trust and some practical experience of collaborative working had already been established.

6. Supporting this group was an LSP coordinators group which had also been meeting regularly for eight years, principally to maintain communications and information exchange between the quarterly chairs and coordinators meetings, and to oversee projects or carry out tasks agreed by the LSP chairs. This group comprised the five district and borough LSP coordinators, the county LSP coordinator and her assistant, as well as the county council's LAA project manager.

Conducive policy environment

7. When the idea for an integrated SCS was first floated, national policy makers were beginning to place a greater emphasis on partnership working as a way of achieving better outcomes for places and people. The concept of 'super three-tier working' with districts, counties, boroughs and parishes all working together had also been introduced by then local government minister, David Miliband.

8. Legislative changes were also supporting this shift to working in partnership. One significant driver was the impending comprehensive area assessment (CAAs) which had just appeared on the horizon. Whereas comprehensive performance assessments focused on local authorities alone, CAAs, due to be phased in in

2009, will apply to all public agencies and therefore, many LSP partners. It was recognised by LSP coordinators in East Sussex that working together on an integrated SCS could help them perform better in the context of the new performance management framework.

9. This encouragement from the upper echelons of the political system for greater collaboration across agencies and political boundaries meant that from the outset there was strong support from local politicians for changing the way LSPs in East Sussex worked together.

Recognition by the LSPs of the potential benefits

10. The established local commitment to partnership working, alongside a desire to engage with the parish tier more meant that LSP partners already had good reason for being open to the idea of working together on an integrated strategy. However there was also strong recognition of the importance of the SCS in establishing the priorities for the LAA, giving all partners an incentive to become involved. This willingness to work together was a key factor in enabling them to move forward with the plan, and quickly.

Towards an integrated sustainable community strategy - the process

Setting the parameters

11. After testing the idea amongst themselves, the LSP coordinators presented their idea for developing an integrated strategy to a meeting of the East Sussex LSP chairs and coordinators in March 2007, where the LSP chairs agreed an integrated approach to developing the SCS.

12. A more developed proposal was then prepared, outlining what an integrated strategy might look like, and taken to each LSP board for consideration. Again, broad agreement was reached on developing a single, integrated strategy, with the important proviso that each borough and district would retain its individual focus in the document.

13. The LSP coordinators' group effectively became a 'strategy project team', charged by their LSPs to work up a detailed and timetabled project plan, oversee the project and deliver an integrated strategy that all LSPs and local authorities would approve. At a series of meetings to agree on an approach, initial decisions taken included the following:

→ NO PUBLIC CONSULTATION IN THE EARLY STAGES

14. Vast amounts of public consultation had already been carried out in the process of agreeing the six existing community strategies. To minimise 'consultation fatigue' and make use of existing information, it was agreed to pool the results of those individual consultation exercises to produce the first draft of the strategy before putting it out for further consultation.

→ TO TAKE BOTH AN AREA BASED AND THEMATIC APPROACH AND MAKE LINKAGES BETWEEN THE COUNTY, DISTRICT, BOROUGH AND MORE LOCAL PLANS

15. Having already agreed that each district and borough should have its own distinct chapter, it was decided to take a thematic approach to cover the main issues affecting people across the county, and to help link these to common issues at district and borough level. A mapping exercise identified around eight or nine themes common at county, district and borough level, and these were used to help structure the strategy.

→ TO CONSULT PARTNERS AND GET FORMAL APPROVAL OF THE STRATEGY AT EACH KEY STAGE IN THE PROCESS

16. A 12 week consultation period, in compliance with the Local Compact, and a joint communication and engagement plan was agreed, along with a version control process to ensure each LSP and local authority could comment on and approve key drafts.

→ TO BASE THE STRATEGY ON ROBUST EVIDENCE

17. It was agreed that the strategy should be supported by up to date and accurate evidence. The team undertook to provide data sources for any statistics included in the strategy and to publish this evidence base alongside the final strategy.

→ DEFINED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE GROUP

18. It was agreed that the project would be steered by the project team, but that county council LSP staff would provide a central coordinating and editorial function on behalf of all the LSPs - as it had the greatest available capacity to undertake the work involved.

19. The district and borough LSPs, in addition to taking the lead on their own community strategies, took on other roles on behalf of the whole group. For example, Eastbourne Borough Council undertook the mapping exercise in relation to themes; and Wealden District Council coordinated a 'Dynamics of Place' workshop. This division of tasks continued throughout the process, from the first stages of the process through to the proofing of the final document for rural, equalities and sustainability issues.

A first draft

20. Each district and borough LSP had complete autonomy over its own individual chapter in terms of content and layout. Wealden, Lewes and Hastings chose to update their SCS and provide a summary for the integrated strategy, while Eastbourne and Rother opted to rewrite their strategies and include them in their entirety.

21. The content and evidence base for the introductory and countywide sections was provided in the first instance by specialist officers from the six local authorities and key partner agencies. These were the people with knowledge of any existing plans that the strategy, as a "plan of plans", should be informed by and link to.

22. These included a range of service plans relating to the themes already identified including crime, health, transport, older people, and children and young people. These specialist officers also had access to the evidence on which these plans were based.

23. Based on this information, in September 2007 an early draft of the introductory and countywide sections of the strategy was produced and circulated for comments to LSP coordinators and key contributors.

Refining the draft and getting buy in from stakeholders

24. To ensure that the strategy encompassed the views of as wide a group as possible, a matrix of themes and priorities for improvement from the first draft was presented at a meeting of the East Sussex Assembly, a broader group of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership with 60 organisations attending. At this meeting partners were given the opportunity to feed into the planning process, highlight what their priorities and major themes were; pinpoint cross-cutting issues and identify the needs of local people.

25.An externally facilitated workshop entitled 'Dynamics of Place' was also held at the end of September for partners and local authority officers to get together and identify the distinctive social, economic and environmental issues within and across East Sussex and how these could be adequately reflected in the strategy. This workshop built on the ideas presented at the PtP 'Place Shaping' event and explored interactions and influences between East Sussex communities, their neighbours and London.

26.Between September and November 2007, five more draft versions of the strategy followed, each being sent to the LSP coordinators to gather and return responses from their LSP and local authority.

27.The role of the LSP coordinators was critical throughout this time. They acted as lead mediators in the process of revising - and ultimately gaining approval for - the consultation draft of the strategy alongside consultation, revisions and approval for their own district or borough chapter. Their precise role differed depending on the consultation protocols agreed within their own LSP and local authority. As well as checking the accuracy of information that had been provided, the coordinators took the draft to their individual LSP chairs, who played a critical role in promoting the strategy to their boards. The coordinators also consulted with key officers across the county, district and borough authorities; and others who had expressed an interest to get feedback on the content. They then relayed this information to the strategy coordinator who incorporated the changes.

Consultation process

28.On November 20th 2007, a draft of Pride of Place went out for public consultation for a period of 12 weeks, to mid February 2008. The consultation included:

- public and partner consultation;
- proofing exercises to ensure the strategy addressed rural, sustainability and equalities principles; and
- checking, and where necessary, updating the evidence base.

29.The Pride of Place consultation draft was published online on the ESSP website, and hard copies were made available in all public libraries. The consultation was promoted via email, on the six LSP websites and through local press and radio. Community consultation events were coordinated and held by Eastbourne LSP and Rother LSP, consultation events with hard to reach young people took place in each of the districts and boroughs, and the East Sussex and Traveller Forum was also consulted.

30.A total of 98 responses were received from individuals and organisations via consultation surveys and written responses. The feedback was broadly supportive of the strategy's vision, objectives and priorities. However, in addition to minor suggestions relating to its wording and design, a number of strategic issues were identified. The most regularly mentioned were the environment, climate change, sustainability, local distinctiveness and extremes within and between localities. A report on the consultation and its findings can be found at <http://www.essp.org.uk/essp/review.htm>.

31.Proofing of the strategy's county-wide sections was again a collaborative effort:

- Rural proofing was carried out by Wealden District Council;
- An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken by Rother District Council; and
- A sustainability appraisal was done by Lewes District Council.

Final draft

32.In a matter of days, the strategy coordinator collated the responses and put proposals to all the LSPs and local authorities on how the strategy needed to be amended in light of the feedback received. A sixth draft was then produced and circulated to LSP chairs and council chief executives via the LSP coordinators to agree final amendments.

33.The 'final version for approval' was circulated to the six LSPs and six local authorities at the end of February 2008 for formal approval. By the end of May, all 12 had approved the strategy with only a few minor suggested changes. These changes were discussed at the LSP chairs and coordinators meeting in June. An approach to the amendments and formal approval was agreed. The strategy coordinator set about making these final amendments, all of which were approved by the six LSPs and local authorities.

34.One year and nine months after the initial idea of an integrated strategy was first discussed, and eight drafts and three key decision-making cycles later (consultation draft, approvals draft, final draft), the final strategy was formally adopted on behalf of all LSPs and local authorities at the East Sussex Strategic Partnership executive board meeting on 26 June 2008 and was published online on 30 June 2008.

Structure of final draft

Introduction

- What is a Sustainable Community Strategy?
- What is a Sustainable Community?
- Links to Local Development Frameworks

CHAPTER 1: Our Vision, Objectives and Priorities

CHAPTER 2: Delivering Change and Monitoring Progress

CHAPTER 3: What is Distinctive about East Sussex?

- The Economy, Jobs and Prosperity
- Transport, Access and Communications
- Housing
- Environment and Climate Change
- Education, Learning and Skills
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Safety
- Community Strength and Leadership
- Culture, Sports and Leisure
- Older People
- Children and Young People

CHAPTER 4: Eastbourne

CHAPTER 5: Hastings and St Leonard's

CHAPTER 6: Lewes District

CHAPTER 7: Rother

CHAPTER 8: Wealden

CHAPTER 9: Evidence Base and Related Plans and Strategies

What has been achieved?

35. The result of this work is a document which, although acknowledged by its co-creators as not 'fully' integrated, is widely viewed as a significant step in further developing partnership working and a more coordinated approach to community planning across East Sussex. Pride of Place is a single document with a shared vision and shared objectives which have been signed up to by all parties; which includes consistent, shared themed sections which require an entirely new, partnership-based approach. It also provides for district and borough level strategies – some of which are included in their entirety (Eastbourne and Rother), others being summaries of more detailed strategies (Hastings, Lewes and Wealden).

36. It is perceived as having successfully set the context of the bigger picture at county level, while also recognising the variation and complexity that exists within it. Some of the particular benefits highlighted by the collaborating partnerships include:

→ GREATER WEIGHT TO INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES

37. For the individual LSPs the integrated strategy is perceived as putting 'weight' behind their individual priorities on a range of themes including, specifically, childrens' services and the environment. With the new LAA having targets related to these themes, partners feel that it will be helpful to be able to refer to the integrated strategy.

→ MORE OPENNESS TO PARTNERSHIP WORKING

38. Although the relationship between district and borough councils and LSPs has not changed significantly as a result of this process, the integrated strategy has provided all with tangible proof that working together can result in a quality outcome. The process has essentially built greater trust between partners and resulted in a 'feel-good' factor which may translate to stronger relationships and more collaborative working in the future.

→ BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF PRIORITIES FOR LAA

39. Priorities in the new LAA have been identified using those in Pride of Place, leading to a more cross-cutting, joined up approach across the county. For example, the inclusion of NI 175 (Access to services and facilities by public transport etc.) to address the key task of increasing sustainable travel choices and improve public transport; and NI 117 (number of young people not in education, employment or training) to address the key task of enabling all young people to be in education, employment or training.

Challenges

40. There were two main challenges to overcome in undertaking this work:

→ FEAR OF LOSING INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

41. An early concern from individual LSPs was that they would lose their individual identities and focuses by signing up to an integrated strategy. It was consequently decided very early on that each borough and district would have its own chapter within the strategy, over which it would have complete control.

42. While this placed a limit on the level of integration that could be achieved, it gave partners a level of assurance that very local issues would be adequately covered, which was necessary for them to want to proceed. For example Hastings is home to significant concentrations of deprivation, and its LSP has consequently placed a strong emphasis in its community strategy on 'narrowing the gap' between these deprived areas and the rest. The borough was in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, and now, the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, to help achieve this. As a consequence, the Hastings LSP has been in existence for longer than some of the others in the county, and the prospect of losing its focus or having to forfeit its individual strategy was not tenable. In this case a further compromise was reached – that in the event of any conflict between Hastings' SCS and the integrated one, the former would be given precedence.

43. As one partner put it, it was a case of 'knowing how far to go' in integration without overstepping the mark and losing support.

→ LIMITED RESOURCES

44. The capacity of the coordinators, only one of whom was full time, and the tight time scales involved were serious limiting factors in the process. This was mitigated in a number of ways namely: the county LSP coordinator taking on a central project coordination and editorial role on behalf of all the LSPs; having an agreed project timetable and decision-making process; having a joint communications strategy to facilitate quick and effective communication; and a strong LSP chairs and coordinators group committed to the project, and managing and championing the process within their individual councils and LSPs.

What's next?

→ ACTION PLANNING

45. The LSP coordinators will now coordinate the production of action plan/s for the sustainable community strategy. There will be an in-built strategy review process, following a similar approach to that taken with the development of the strategy itself and applying the learning achieved during this process. Three sets of action plans are now in progress:

- The county's local area agreement, reflecting some of the highest priority 'key tasks' identified in the community strategy, completed in June 2008. In the past the districts and boroughs have had a relatively small input into the LAA but it is felt that the process of agreeing the SCS will engage local authorities in a more aligned process;
- A countywide action plan which encompasses the remaining key tasks and, where appropriate, indicators from the national indicator set that are not reflected in the 2008-2011 local area agreement; and
- Local action plans based on the district and borough community strategies and partners' plans – some of which are already in place or in development.

→ STRATEGY REVIEW

46. With a strong desire to make the integrated strategy a living document, the coordinators group is also working on developing a rolling programme of reviews, theme by theme. The challenge ahead is not just to review strategies together, but also to get better integration and clearer governance between the county thematic sections and the similar themes at district/ borough level.

→ FUTURE SYNCHRONICITY IN COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

47. It is acknowledged by all partners that had there been sufficient capacity and greater certainty over what the resulting strategy might look like, proposals for action planning and strategy reviews could have been developed alongside the development of the strategy itself. As it is the action plan will not be completed before March 2009, and implementation and monitoring will not begin until April 2009. However, the integrated strategy is seen as a starting point for achieving more concurrent community planning across East Sussex; and next time, all will be starting from a more synchronised point than in the past.

Key success factors

48. There are a number of factors which stand out as having contributed to the success of the East Sussex story. Some of the key ones are as follows:

A coordinated communications plan

49. Open and coordinated communication was crucial to the process, and a joint communications plan, agreed early on, enabled this to happen to guide the coordinators through the process. The team met monthly to ensure that they kept each other informed about progress in their individual authorities and LSPs, and could identify and pursue ways to resolve any difficulties throughout the process.

50. The plan related to both internal communications (within individual authorities and/or LSPs), and external communication. In relation to joint external communications the following was agreed:

- Everything regarding the integrated strategy would be held on a page on the ESSP website with links to the district and borough partnerships;
- Joint press releases would be issued to communicate a common/unified message;
- Direct mail to partners, other organisations, partnerships and networks e.g. parish councils, across the county; and
- 'Online first' policy in terms of dissemination of drafts with printed versions only when absolutely necessary.

Role of the LSP chairs

51. The chairs were critical to the success of the project – by guiding debates which led to agreement by all LSPs and local authorities to an integrated approach, providing leadership to the LSP coordinators, facilitating discussions with their LSPs, and - with delegated authority from their LSP - helping to resolve any difficulties and approving the strategy at each key stage.

Role of the LSP coordinators

52. Although the LSP coordinators themselves emphasise that the success of the process was down to excellent teamwork, their specific role warrants a mention. They were instrumental in promoting the strategy in their individual local authorities, pursuing responses and collating input, mediating between the strategy coordinator and their authority and LSP. Working to extremely tight timescales their skill, perseverance, and dedication to the task was instrumental in getting the job done.

Role of strategy coordinator

53. The coordinating, editing and mediating role taken on by the strategy coordinator (the ESSP LSP coordinator), responsible for taking the input of the LSP coordinators and translating it into reality in the document itself was a significant and time-consuming task.

54. The person who undertook this role had experience in partnership working and in developing partnership plans but, she would not have been able to successfully deliver her responsibilities on behalf of the six LSPs and six Local Authorities without the support, engagement and commitment offered by all partners, and the active involvement of the LSP coordinators, LSP chairs and local authority chief executives and other senior staff. The supporting frameworks for project management, decision-making, conflict resolution and communications also played a critical role in ensuring objectivity and inclusiveness throughout the process.

Starting from where each partner was at

55. Each of the districts and boroughs were in different stages of reviewing or producing their own community strategy. To get everyone on board it was decided to start where each had got to, so for example: Eastbourne and Rother wanted to rewrite theirs and their entire strategies are now included in the Pride of Place document; while Lewes, Wealden and Hastings included only a summary of much bigger individual strategies that stand alone.

Strength of existing relationships

56. All those involved testify to the strength of the existing relationships between LSP coordinators, chairs and council chief executives, which translated into a huge willingness to work in partnership with one another, despite the level of effort involved.

Thanks and contacts

This case study has been put together with the help of the following individuals and organisations:

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For further information and updates about progress of the integrated strategy please go to the East Sussex Strategic Partnership website at www.essp.org.uk

