



Commissioning case study

Trowbridge Our Place

The headlines

- Wiltshire Council is open to the devolution of power and transfer of assets to the local level and is working closely with Trowbridge Town Council in order to make 'the most of localism to bring decision-making within the community' (Our Place operational plan).
- Trowbridge Town Council is willing and able to take on the management of local services as part of a place-based strategy which has mobilised the community and local businesses.
- As a result the local community has been engaged and enthused to become directly involved and have recognised and applauded the demonstrable improvements that have been made to local services.

What is the context?

Trowbridge is a post-industrial West Country town, once home to many cloth mills and food manufacturers. The last of the mills closed in the 1980s, the brewery in 2000 and the last big food factory in 2008. The 2011 census data shows that 13 of the 133 output areas in the Trowbridge community area are among the 20 per cent in England with the highest percentage of households experiencing three or four measured types of deprivation. These are among the highest indices of deprivation in Wiltshire.

After local elections in 2013, both Trowbridge Town Council and Wiltshire County Council had four-year mandates and agreed to seize this opportunity by developing a coordinated strategy involving devolution and asset transfer, development of the town, promoting a Business Improvement District and other measures to improve and promote Trowbridge.

What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

The model takes the form of community engagement by Trowbridge Town Council and Wiltshire Council, supported both by Wiltshire's policies of devolution and asset transfer which enable local management, and by the town council's pragmatic approach to taking on functions which are best managed locally to reflect local circumstances.

Our Place Trowbridge is led by the town council in partnership with a number of community organisations coordinated by Trowbridge Community Area Future, a community partnership which has existed since 1996.

Liaison with Wiltshire Council takes place through the Trowbridge Area Board which comprises elected members of both councils, representatives of the police, health and fire services, community partnerships and young people.

This model makes effective use of existing governance arrangements and enables the key council partners to realise their shared objectives in close cooperation with community and business representatives.

The coordination between local partners worked like this:

- **2011:** Trowbridge Community Area Future produces Trowbridge community area plan after public consultation;
- **2013:** that plan informs the Trowbridge Town Council strategy;
- **2013:** Wiltshire's joint strategic assessment for Trowbridge is published under the auspices of the Wiltshire Public Services Board, the findings of which are discussed at a 'What matters to you?' consultation forum held by the two councils and Trowbridge Community Area Future; and
- **2014:** all of this feeds into the Trowbridge Our Place operational plan

What has been the impact?

As a result of the consultation and decision-making process described above, the Our Place priorities include these community-centred priorities:

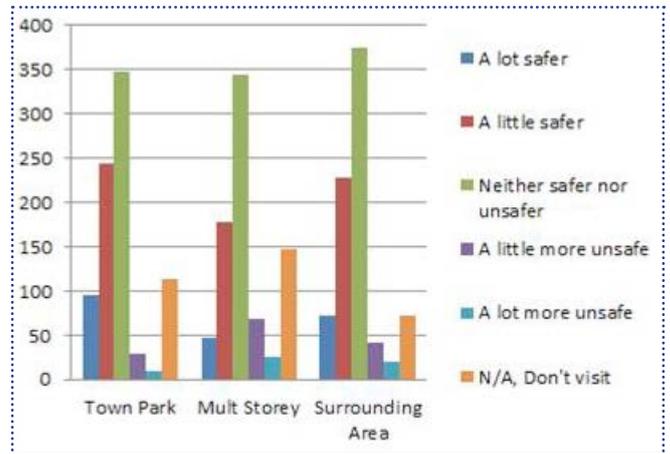
Asset transfers from Wiltshire Council

The town council took over control of the town park in 2013 and immediately set about a programme of improvements which have been well received by local people. This has been achieved on a budget 11.25 per cent lower than Wiltshire’s maintenance estimate, and the town council is currently running beneath its own budget.

The impact of this work in the community is shown by the creation of a ‘Friends of Trowbridge Park’ group to build on the council’s work. The group is currently consulting to “inform residents about our proposals to transform Trowbridge Town Park during the next five to eight years and to establish what their wishes and priorities are. Proposed projects include remodelling of the lake, improving the bandstand, creating and erecting a major art installation and introducing an ‘Art in the Park’ for schools project. Other intended activities include a fitness trail, constructing a community lodge/ youth meeting place, improving the kiosk and its immediate surrounding area. Other group discussions will also concentrate on antisocial behaviour and ASB reduction strategies.”



The table shows people’s perceptions of safety in the area around the park and its adjacent buildings since 2013, when the town council took over the park and a major private sector leisure development took place:



The town council also took over three allotment sites from Wiltshire in 2014 and, again, introduced a programme of improvements which has increased the occupancy rate significantly.

Potential future asset transfers include:

- car parks – Wiltshire Council is consulting on future arrangements for car parking. It recognises that the existing standard charging regime across the county is inappropriate and fails to recognise substantial differences between the requirements of different towns. The town council is confident that it can introduce a new regime which will encourage greater use of car parks and increase revenue. They envisage the Business Improvement District taking a role in deciding charges and length of stay, so that local businesses will have direct input into an issue which has an impact on the local economy;
- recreation grounds and children’s play areas – these could be part of the car park deal, whereby Wiltshire would be foregoing revenue from car parks but also transferring the recreation grounds and play areas and their associated costs. Wiltshire’s openness to this ‘cost-neutral’ approach is extremely supportive of the town council’s place-based strategy; and
- further in the future, the town council want to discuss the possibility of taking over responsibility for bus shelters from Wiltshire Council to make a direct local contribution to the street scene, public transport and the environment

Trowbridge campus

Wiltshire Council proposed a number of 'campus' developments, including one in Trowbridge, to boost local economies and co-locate council and other public and voluntary services. The Trowbridge campus became an early priority for the Our Place project and the project team soon secured the agreement of all health service providers and the Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group to locate in the campus, which will also include active leisure facilities.

“ **Wiltshire CCG proposes the following services for the campus: a minor injuries unit and urgent primary care centre, outpatient clinics for multiple use including the mental health partnership, therapy services, a birthing unit and office space for the integrated health and social care teams.** ”

Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group

“ **GP services in Trowbridge believe the campus is an exciting opportunity to enhance the health facilities in the area and support its speedy development.** ”

Local GPs

“ **Without the Our Place project we might not have achieved this agreement as soon as we did.** ”

Lance Allan, Town Clerk, Trowbridge Town Council.

Business Improvement District

Trowbridge Our Place is taking forward this project with Wiltshire Council and the local business community, whose concerns about car parking and the condition of the town centre reflect those of local people. The Business Improvement District will allow businesses to control an element of investment in the town centre through a levy on the business rates, and there is the potential for businesses to play a direct role in street cleaning and litter collection.

Public safety and the evening economy

Our Place sponsored a survey to assess residents' perception of safety and antisocial behaviour after the recent improvements to the town centre scene and the park. The results showed significant improvement over earlier perceptions, although actual levels of crime and antisocial behaviour in Trowbridge are no worse than elsewhere in Wiltshire. The survey also pointed up areas for further action, such as lighting in the park and cleanliness in car parks.

What have been the key elements of success?

The national prominence of the Our Place initiative gave added weight and profile to what the town council wanted to do together with its partners. Other important elements have been:

- Wiltshire's policies on asset transfer and devolution of powers have enabled significant improvements in public services in Trowbridge;
- Trowbridge Town Council has adopted a pragmatic, realistic strategy, concentrating on what is deliverable in order to secure buy-in and continuing support from local people. A 12.5 per cent increase in council tax attracted only four questions, a sign that people recognise the good job the council is doing; and
- both councils made deliberate use of their four-year mandates from 2013 to set out a strategy for local service improvement

What has been learnt?

There never seems to be enough time to establish and operate partnerships of this nature. It requires early commitment by leaders and continuous effort to maintain momentum. If we are serious about new ways of working we need to put the right resources into it.

Lead partners need to communicate with other existing and potential partners directly and continuously. All organisations have different levels of responsibility and different decision-making processes, so if organisation X assures you that organisation Y is on board, check directly with Y to avoid doubt and confusion.

Wide consultation is always important, but it is at least equally useful to spend time face-to-face with individuals who have the power to influence opinion, to explain what you are doing and perhaps make them advocates for your project.

Who can I contact?

Lance Allan, Town Clerk, Trowbridge Town Council,
email lance.allan@trowbridge.gov.uk

Other useful information

<http://www.trowbridge.gov.uk/>

<http://www.transformingtrowbridge.org.uk/index.php/board/>