

## Key areas of learning

- Attention to detail and delivery partner involvement at the scoping and planning stage of a project can fast-track set-up and deepen local engagement.
- Experienced local partner and mentor support is critical in rapidly building project team confidence and capacity, providing reassurance that the idea and approach will really work.
- Making rapid contact with, and learning from similar projects in other areas also rapidly builds capacity and confidence in what can be achieved.
- VSOS support provided 'gravitas' to gain increased local support
- Using professional, experienced advisers enables Action Plans to be more realistic and more robust, with a pilot phase to test and refine initial ideas.

## Community Market Church Eaton Case Study



Evaluation prepared for Big Lottery Fund by Catalys Ltd  
Reporting on delivery of Village SOS (VSOS) Learning,  
Outreach and Engagement Campaign

1st December 2014 to 1st September 2015

Campaign Lead partners: Action for Communities in Rural  
England (ACRE), Rocket Science and Rose Regeneration

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## Summary

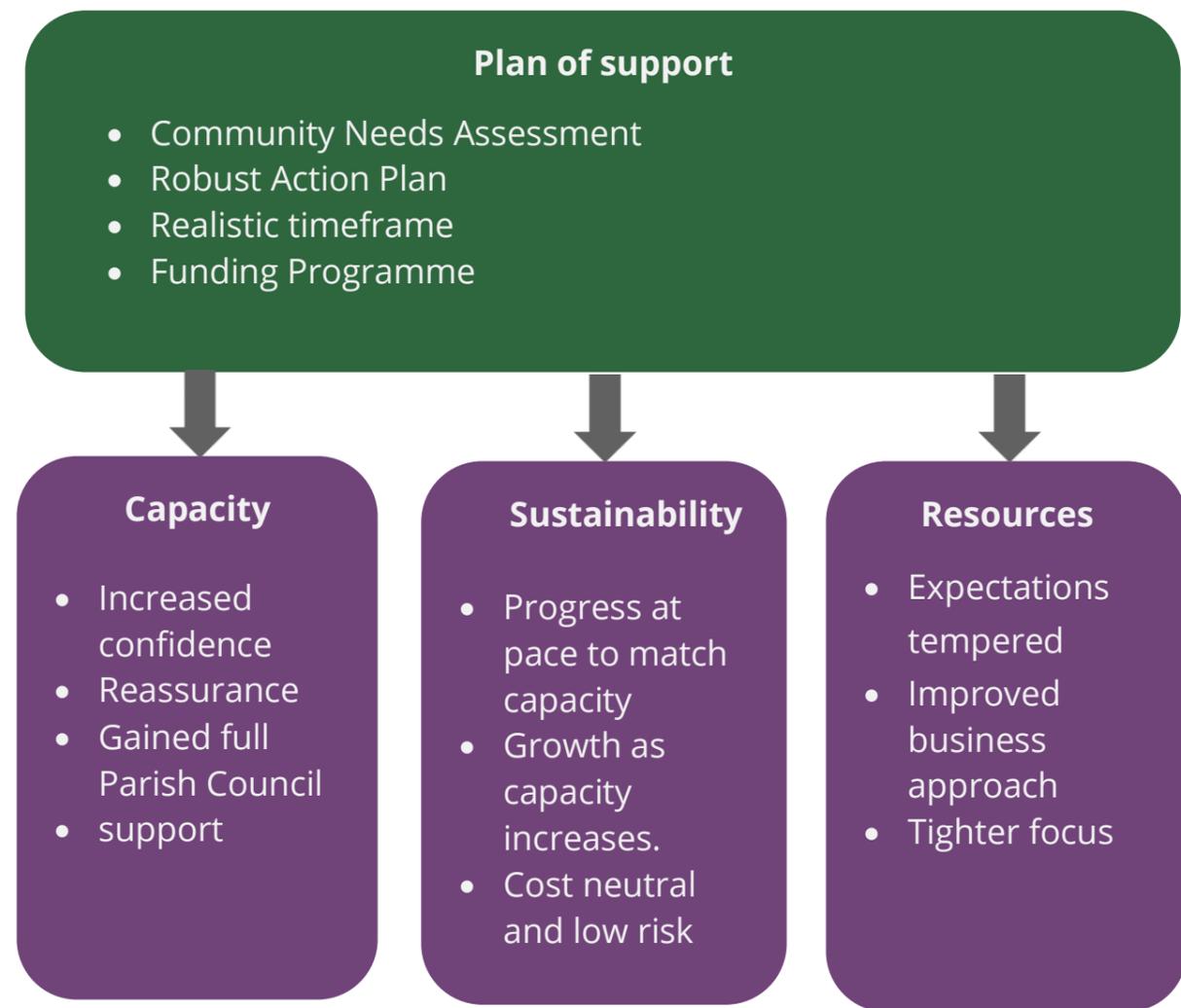
The Challenge	Similar to many small villages and rural parishes, Church Eaton lacks food shops where locals can buy basics, but being in a mixed dairy and farming area there appear to be many local producers. The aim is to bring local producers together for regular community markets in the village hall.
The Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and completion of initial community needs assessment</li> <li>• Development of robust action plan with a realistic timeframe</li> <li>• Trial/pilot period and evaluation process scoped</li> <li>• Mentor brought in</li> <li>• Visits to other, successful groups arranged both by the delivery partner and the mentor</li> </ul>
How Village SOS added value	Considerable confidence and reassurance has resulted from delivery partner and mentor input, enabling faster and more pragmatic progress. Being able to discuss ideas with similar groups has been invaluable and VSOS support has helped win full backing from the rest of the Institute and the Parish Council.

## The challenge

The village of Church Eaton, located in Staffordshire to the southwest of Stafford, 6 miles (10 km) northwest of Penkridge in gently rolling farmland 4 miles (6 km) from the county boundary with Shropshire has a population of some 630 residents. The village has a pub, a school and a church but there are no local shops and nowhere within easy walking distance to buy food or similar produce. Local residents have to travel by car or bus to buy their food supplies, with Stafford being the main service centre some 6 miles (10 km) away. The idea was to set up a “Community Marketplace”; a regular local food market in the village hall so that Church Eaton’s residents can buy direct from, and support local producers and food and drink businesses. The ultimate goal is to establish a monthly market as an ongoing initiative, starting with quarterly or seasonal events.

## Who’s involved?

The idea for the initiative came from a member of the Church Eaton Village Institute Committee who sounded out a few colleagues about taking things forward. As the initiative started to be scoped via an initial village survey and getting views from a few potential stall-holders, the launch of VSOS Phase 2 was advertised in the Staffordshire Village Halls newsletter. The Village Institute project lead decided to register the community marketplace initiative with ACRE in April 2015. ACRE’s rapid support resulted in the Community Council of Staffordshire being able to provide immediate face-to-face advice. This comprised a deeper and more robust scoping process for setting up the community market project as a long-term enterprise, resulting in a well-structured Action Plan. The Community Council and ACRE also offered a specialist mentor to the project from the outset (an experienced rural enterprise support professional based at Community First, Hereford and Worcestershire) so that the Church Eaton group could call on independent, objective experience and advice to get a fresh perspective on things as and when this was most needed.



## Action and activities

The Church Eaton community marketplace project would have gone ahead without VSOS support, but the Community Council for Staffordshire was able to ensure that a realistic and robust Action Plan was developed much faster than would have been the case, effectively “professionalising” the set-up process. Using highly experienced support also enabled the project to make rapid, effective contact with similar initiatives in other areas to find out what had worked well and what to avoid. The mentor met the project group when the Action Plan was being developed, tempering expectations, guiding the set-up of a more realistic and structured approach whilst also providing considerable reassurance and a sounding board for next steps. All agreed, however, that his involvement was best targeted at the evaluation stage after the first market event is held on September 19th 2015. Being a part of the VSOS campaign, with experienced support and advice considerably reassured fellow committee members that the initiative was worth backing so the project is now fully supported as a village initiative. The aim is that the market will be cost-neutral to run, with village volunteers helping to set-up and run regular events so that local producers can simply turn-up to sell. The markets should also help foster a social hub for the village, making good use of the village hall as an existing asset. The local paper is helping to provide publicity to attract stall-holders, in addition to the Staffordshire village halls network.