

developed within the community and the recipient reports that they have appreciated the ideas and approaches that have been “brought in” and they see the benefits of broadening the thinking.

*“The Village SOS project greatly assisted our organisation in focussing on the more realistic options available to us so we can concentrate our energies and resources more constructively”.*

## Key areas of learning

- This has been a very complex project and it is clear that the dynamics involved in community level action can take a long time to unpick. VSOS has provided sufficient resources to take some early steps in this process, however in complex situations like this one it does not always enable the community to go from “idea to plan”, the intensive support provided (which probably exceeds the resources normally on offer to communities), has helped clarify the community’s starting point. Progress to a concrete and viable plan will be part of a longer process.
- The case study research has shown that RCCs (such as DCA) have a fine grain understanding of their communities. This means that they have the essential local intelligence to know where some communities need more support than others and are able to vary their approaches accordingly.
- The case study shows that people issues often underlie community development challenges and addressing them can absorb a great deal of time and effort. Handling such issues well often requires a great deal of skill and sensitivity, but is difficult to capture in reports.
- Consultation for this case study has shown that mentors are best involved in an ongoing manner (little and often). For example, using mentors to deliver a single output (e.g., an options appraisal), could be an effective way of accessing external facilitation. On the other hand it isn’t really the core purpose of mentoring and may miss the opportunity to deliver added value through providing advice and support and external perspectives based on the knowledge they have gained about a project/community.
- This case study shows that VSOS is being effective in accessing support providers’ expertise and local intelligence. The VSOS approach is also strengthening RCCs’ effectiveness in mutually beneficial ways.
- RCCs knowledge of their local communities is more grounded in the wider context and challenges of rurality than that of local authorities, which have a different perspective, given that nearly all have mixed urban and rural responsibilities and need to prioritise legislative and regulatory roles.



# Considering New Premises UTASS 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



## Summary

The Challenge	To explore the feasibility of developing a currently disused council owned premises and the transfer of ownership of the building to UTASS/UTCA).
The Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A systematic plan of support to provide help in considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-location options for UTASS and UTCA (e.g. asset transfer of Field Studies Centre, likely impact on established facilities such as the village hall).</li> <li>- Capacity of UTASS and UTCA in delivering the project.</li> <li>- Existing and potential demand for new services.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ongoing mentor support and options appraisal</li> <li>• Funding strategy</li> <li>• Developing the project idea</li> </ul>
How Village SOS added value	Village SOS support has helped the organisations involved to focus their efforts and resources realistically. The Village SOS process led the groups to broaden the number of individuals and organisations with whom they could engage as well as giving structure to that engagement. Skills, capacities and relationships have been developed within the community.

## The challenge

Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Service (UTASS), working with Upper Teesdale Community Association (UTCA) are both considering their options with regard to location, facilities sharing and service delivery, along with the capacities required for delivery and have decided to work together to review their options.

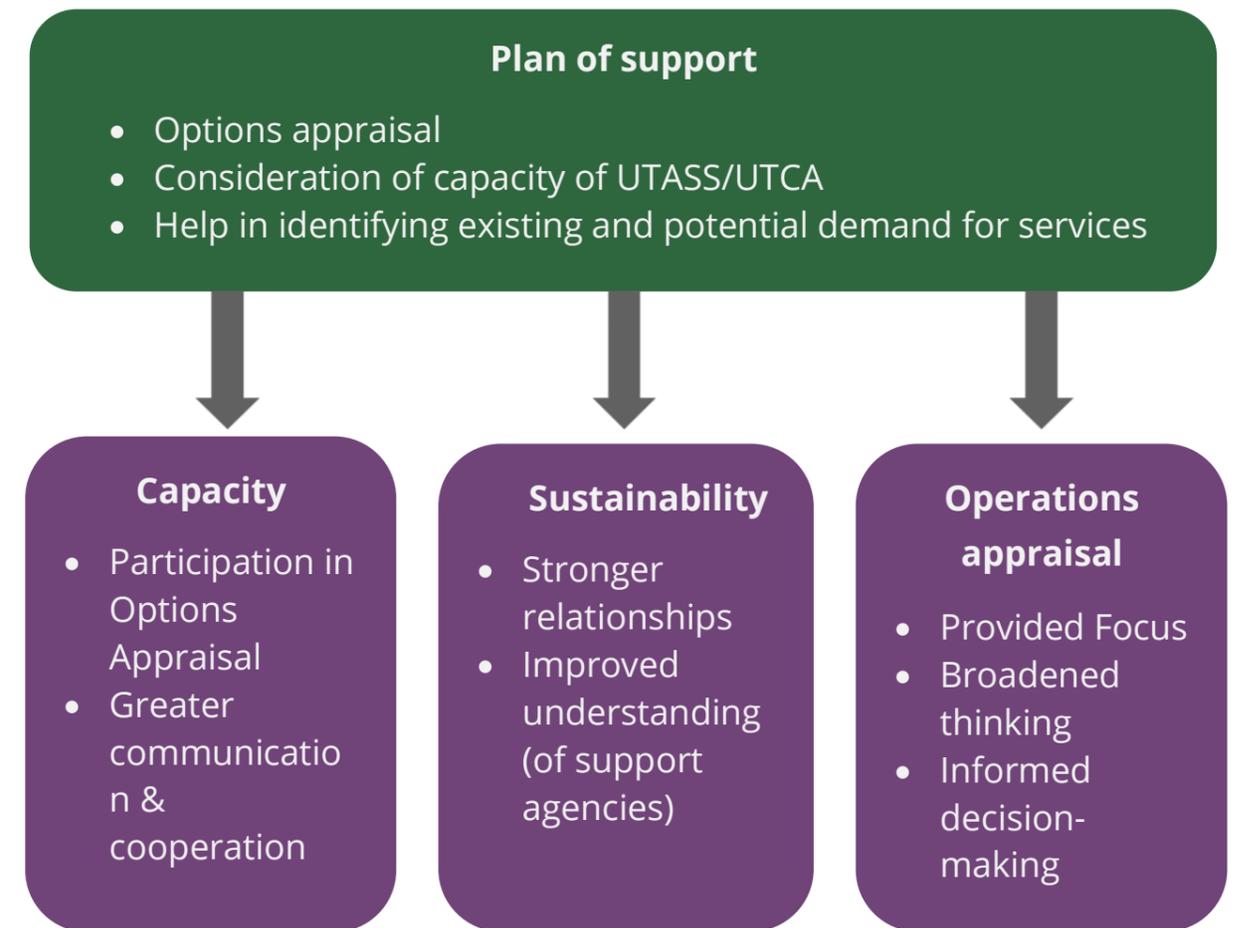
Both organisations are located in Middleton-in-Teesdale, a small town in County Durham, which is an important centre for a wide area of the North Pennines. The town hosts a number of buildings, several of which are vacant or under-used and the local authority is considering options for buildings in its ownership.

UTASS (working with UTCA) contacted VSOS for support and advice regarding asset transfer. They have formed a working group and want to explore the feasibility of progressing with a project to create new premises and facilities from which both UTCA and UTASS could operate. UTCA works from a Durham County Council owned village hall adjacent to the local Primary School and UTASS works from privately owned premises next to the Co-op store. The UTCA premises have been condemned due to asbestos, and the group needs to move. UTASS holds a lease that is due to expire/renew in April 2019. UTASS and UTCA wanted to use VSOS support to help explore the feasibility of developing the currently disused Field Studies Centre in the town (transferring the ownership from Durham County Council to UTASS/UTCA).

## Who's involved?

The local community effort has been led by UTASS, who first identified that VSOS might be a good vehicle for them. The VSOS process led them to broaden the number of individuals and organisations with whom they could engage as well as giving structure to that engagement. Durham Community Action (DCA), have coordinated the process providing organisational support, coordinating and

targeting the support, including guiding the community in choosing the most appropriate tools (i.e., options appraisal, business planning, funding strategy, use of the mentor, etc..) The mentor has been brought in as a critical friend, to be on hand throughout the process as an external point of objective advice and expertise.



## Action and activities

Following the diagnostic, a well-conceived and systematic plan of support was developed and agreed in order to provide help in considering:

- Co-location options for UTASS and UTCA (e.g. asset transfer of Field Studies Centre, likely impact on established facilities such as the village hall). Capacity of UTASS and UTCA in delivering the project.
- Existing and potential demand for new services.

The process of delivering the support revealed other issues that needed to be addressed, leading to outcomes that could not necessarily have been predicted at the outset, for example the formation of a much wider group to review community buildings and services in the round. DCA has travelled to visit the community/UTASS several times throughout the process and much of their effort was focused on supporting the broadening of the approach adopted. The community appreciates the increased engagement that they have received and believes that DCA is now more engaged and better informed, which will itself help provision of future advice. The mentor has focused their input on the development of an options appraisal regarding location/co-location and remains on hand to further mentor the process. The outcome is that an initial conversation between two groups has now been broadened out to 17 groups who are now working together to consider what is needed from the buildings in the community. The mentor reports that the conversations within and between community groups are now more realistic, the support provider reports that skills, capacities and relationships have been