

Swaffham Town Group – working towards a Town Action Plan



The Swaffham Town Group was recently formed to generate an Action Plan for the town. This body is co-ordinated by the Town Council and the Iceni Partnership. Any member of the local community is welcome to involve themselves in Town Group activities and contribute to the process of creating a vision for the Town and the eventual Action Plan. The Town Group is currently structured around four [working groups](#) who are looking at environmental, economic, social and transport issues affecting the town. The work of the Town Group is being supported by grants from Breckland Council and the Norfolk Rural Community Council.

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Introduction

Market towns across the country are facing an unprecedented set of challenges. Change in one form or another is the order of the day. In Swaffham we currently have to think about many issues, such as:

- How can we best provide services for a growing population?
- How can we help migrant workers integrate fully into the community?
- How can we support local independent businesses in the face of competition from ‘clone’ shops and retail parks in other towns?
- How can we engage with economic and social changes to increase opportunities for local people and businesses?
- How can we best support our traditional market and farmers’ market?
- Promoting renewable energies is a must. To what extent can Swaffham reasonably support this process in terms of building wind farms?
- How can we meet these and a myriad of other challenges whilst staying consistent with our current vision of maintaining ‘Our Traditional Values’ with a ‘Modern Outlook’?

The above are some of the many challenges towns such as Swaffham are currently facing. In response the Swaffham Town Group, which is jointly co-ordinated by the Town Council and the Iceni Partnership, has committed to the production of an **Action Plan** for the Town. Such a plan will seek to improve the social, economic and environmental quality of life in the town. Hundreds of other towns in the UK are doing the same kind of thing and are coming up with projects and programmes to help take their towns forward.

The Way Forward

Swaffham has already made some progress in regenerating the town through the work undertaken in the Market Square, the Community Centre and the Assembly Rooms. Now is the time to identify new projects and programmes that will build upon the successes of these earlier developments.

In 2001 the Countryside Agency set up the Market Town’s Initiative to help market towns and their surrounding areas respond positively to the manifold changes and pressures confronting their economies, societies and environments. The Swaffham Town Group has decided to follow the Healthcheck process designed by the Market Town Initiative. This provides the basis for writing an action plan for the town and its surrounding area.

What does a Healthcheck do?

- provides a detailed record of the ‘state’ of the town

- allows local people to identify the economic, environmental and social strengths and weaknesses of a market town and its surrounding countryside

Once the Healthcheck process has been completed the Town Group will work out the **Vision** for the Town’s future and work on writing an **Action Plan**.

- A **Vision** for a Town presents a vivid image of a sustainable and planned future...keywords that set out the mission for the town.
- An **Action Plan** is a tried and tested way of setting out projects that will assist in revitalising a town. A successful Action Plan will demonstrate that the pressures and opportunities identified during the Healthcheck are being addressed, and that the projects that are taken forward complement rather than duplicate initiatives already in place.

The Working Groups

In order to do this work four Working Groups have been set up to cover the following themes:

- Economy
- Social and Community
- Environment
- Transport

<p>Social and community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S1 Population • S2 Housing • S3 Health & public safety • S4 Local government & community organisations • S5 Sport, leisure & open space • S6 Culture & heritage • S7 Community Legal Service 	<p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EC1 Employment • EC2 Business support • EC3 Training and education • EC4 Learning & skills development • EC5 Retail & town centre services • EC6 Commercial & industrial property needs • EC7 Tourism & visitor services
<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EN1 Character & vitality of the town • EN2 The town & the wider countryside • EN3 The environment & quality of Life 	<p>Transport and accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T1 Ease of travel to and from the local areas • T2 Ease of access to services • T3 Ease of movement around the town

A Flavour of the Themes the four Working Groups will consider

The **ECONOMY** working group will examine issues such as:

- Can more and better paid jobs be created?
- Is there enough childcare to support working parents?
- What shops, restaurants and other town centre services would local people like?
- What benefits might greater tourism bring? How can we improve the local tourism product?

The **TRANSPORT** working group will examine issues such as:

- What could be done to increase demand for public transport, to encourage people to leave their cars at home or what could make it easier to walk or cycle around town?
- How good is public transport? Can people in the town and country readily access goods and services by public transport?
- How easy it is to move around the town, what are the footpaths like? Are there sufficient cycle lanes, car park facilities, and where are there conflicts between pedestrians and motorists? Are HGVs a major problem for the town and villages?

The **SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY** working group will examine issues such as:

- Crime prevention
- Housing
- Access to medical and other services
- Are young people getting access to the social and educational facilities they need?
- How well are the needs of migrant workers being met? Can they be better integrated into town life?
- Access to community services such as services for the elderly
- Leisure and recreational activities and cultural facilities

The **ENVIRONMENT** working group will examine issues such as:

- What do people think of the appearance of the town, its street fittings and fixtures? What about the appearance of the rural-urban fringe?
- Is Swaffham doing its bit in terms of recycling and promoting renewable energy and conservation?
- What opportunities are there to enhance the environment and the countryside around Swaffham or to encourage greater access?

How can *you* help?

- You can join one of the four Working Groups and be directly involved in planning and doing the research for the Healthcheck as well as identifying projects and activities that might go into the Town Action Plan.
- You can volunteer to help with handing out leaflets and surveys.
- You can help out on consultation days and events
- You may have expertise or specialist knowledge that will assist one of the Working Groups.
- You may have IT skills which could be useful when we produce reports and analyse data.
- You may be in a position to provide sponsorship. For example, you could help us meet the printing and design costs of producing surveys and reports, in return your company logo could be included on published items. You could provide prizes which will be

available to people to encourage them to take part in consultation events. Or you may well be able to provide staff time to help us with data collection and analysis.

If you think you might like to become involved in *any* way then please get in touch. The Town Council and Icenis Officers overseeing the process can be contacted by the following means:

Phone: 01760 722922

Email: dave@swaffhamtowncouncil.co.uk

The Officers can then put you in touch with organisers of the Working Groups. Ultimately this process is all about community involvement. The more that people get involved the more effective the process will be.

Town Surveys

During August and September 2007 the Town Group will be carrying out various surveys to capture people's opinions about different aspects of life in Swaffham. Some surveys will be targeted at specific groups of people (such as school children, migrant workers, parents of young children and so forth). There will also be a questionnaire targeted at the population more generally. Some people will come across the questionnaire through organisations to which they belong, whilst others will have the opportunity to access the questionnaire online (from either the Town Council or Icenis websites) or to collect copies from the places in town such as the Town Hall. In addition there will be three consultation days held in the Town which anyone can attend and fill in a form – there may even be tea and cakes available!

The main questionnaire will be available from the middle of August. Further details will be available from the website in the next week or two.

Press Release

Get Involved in Plotting Swaffham's Future

Exciting times lie ahead for Swaffham as the local Town Group, an organisation co-ordinated by the Town Council and the Icenis Partnership, are starting to do the groundwork for a detailed town Action Plan. Hundreds of market towns across the UK are going through a similar process, which starts with a thorough examination of the current state of the town and its relationship with surrounding villages using the Market Town Initiative's Healthcheck system. Having looked at the experiences of many similar localities, the Town Group have set up four working groups to look into different aspects of the Town. These groups are **Economy, Transport, Social/Community** and **Environment**. The idea is to find out the strengths, weaknesses and aspirations of the town and its people. Then projects and plans can be put in place to improve everyone's quality of life. Many big issues are ongoing in Swaffham at the moment, such as the management of allotment land, the future of the hospital, the development of wind farms, increased house building, tourism development and the provision of facilities at the recreation ground. The writing of an Action Plan will enable the Town to think about how best to manage these, and many other issues, in a co-ordinated fashion as well as being able to influence policy at Town, District and County levels.

Similar exercises carried out in other towns have directly involved scores of local volunteers who have put forward ideas and made invaluable contributions to the collecting of information. Basically the very success of the whole process depends upon members of the community getting actively involved. The Working Groups are open to all members of the community, not just in Swaffham but also surrounding villages.

According to the Town Council's Project Officer, David Bek, "This is a big moment in Swaffham's history as the research leading up to the writing of the Town Action Plan will have a great bearing on the future direction the town takes". The Town Group are keen to reach out into the community and recruit people to join in. Anyone who thinks they might like to be involved in any way, big or small, can contact the Town Group on 01760 722922 or dave@swaffhamtowncouncil.co.uk for more details.