



Village SOS Project Evaluation (Ref: 2466)

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The evidence presented and conclusions drawn, however, remain the responsibility of the authors.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Village SOS is an innovative and challenging programme. It was developed and delivered in a partnership between the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) and BBC One. It involved the funding of schemes in ten villages across the United Kingdom, six of which featured in a BBC One television programme (also called Village SOS).

Other innovative aspects of the programme were the use of ten 'village champions', individuals with extensive business experience, who became residents of the villages for up to one year; and a learning campaign, designed by BIG and delivered by the Plunkett Foundation and which sought to raise the profile and potential role of village based enterprise as a means for reviving rural communities. The outcomes of Village SOS were intended to be within the 10 villages, but also across the UK through raising awareness of approaches to revive rural communities.

This is the final report of the evaluation of Village SOS. The evaluation was undertaken between March 2011 and February 2012. The evaluation used a range of methods, involving interviews with stakeholders, a detailed media impact analysis of the television series, analysis of application and monitoring information and a survey of unsuccessful applicants. However, the main focus of the evaluation was around the activities of the ten schemes, including project and Village Champion interviews, interviews with residents, a postal survey of residents and an analysis of the scheme's use of Web 2.0 (Facebook and Twitter).

Village SOS Schemes

Village	Enterprise
Ballygally, North Antrim, Northern Ireland	The scheme consists of the new build of a two storey building, comprising a social enterprise retail convenience store (a Spar franchise) on the ground floor and a community hall, meeting room and kitchen on the first floor.
Caistor, Lincolnshire, England	Transformation of an old chapel into a café, library, heritage space and a meeting room that doubles as an exhibition space.
Honeystreet, Wiltshire, England	Regeneration of a pub, Barge Inn, into a community hub, the running of an adjacent campsite and, in the first year only, staging a music festival.
Howey, Powys, Wales	Development of activities centred on Ashfield, a large tract of land containing a dwelling house, several ancillary buildings and horticultural installations, for village use and hosting of services for individuals with learning difficulties.
Lochinver, Assynt, Sutherland, Scotland.	Bringing back into use the Lochinver Fisherman's Mission as a community hub providing a café, bunkhouse for visitors, sea life centre and oral history project.
Myddfai, Carmarthenshire, Wales	The scheme comprises a new village hall with café, shop visitor centre and large hireable space, and the Myddfai Trading Company (MTC) through which local artisans will sell their crafts and herbal products.
Newstead, Nottinghamshire, England	The project focuses on the redevelopment of a former colliery site into a country park providing fishing lakes and a visitor centre. The project also ran a music festival in its first two years.
Talgarth, Powys, Wales	The scheme includes the restoration of a water-powered flour mill and a café.
Tideswell, Derbyshire, England	The project focuses on the development of Taste Tideswell, a place based brand to stimulate the local food economy. Key activities include a cookery school, branding for local produce and local retailers, a community gardening initiative and a school education service.

Context

Village SOS is a complex, innovative and to some extent risky initiative. There are no prescriptive outcomes for each project or enterprise, other than the aim that Village SOS should contribute to the revival of rural communities and enrich residents' lives.

The programme is part of the learning mission of BIG, and as such involved the following key aspects:

- involvement of a Public Service Broadcaster (BBC One)
- learning programme, to raise the profile of the potential of rural social enterprise
- promotion of enterprise as a model for rural revival, including the placing of Village Champions in the schemes for up to 12 months.

Village SOS needs to be understood in context: both in terms of the social and economic conditions the programme is working in (e.g. varying levels of deprivation and isolation) and the potential for community enterprise to improve areas. The socio-economic context of the villages also varies markedly, with only Newstead and West Wemyss having high levels of deprivation. With the exception of Tideswell, none of the villages had high levels of prosperity.

What should be stressed is that the conditions of rural areas vary markedly across the UK with increasing policy variation between the four countries.

Village SOS Programme Processes

Programme Design

The origins of the Village SOS programme lie in 2009 when senior members of BIG's Communications team entered into discussions with BBC Wales about a collaboration to produce a TV series about reviving rural communities.

The design of Village SOS was challenging, it needed to meet exacting timescales, including the delivery of a grant programme to fund schemes which would feature at various stages of completion in a television series. It also needed to be an entertaining programme to be aired in a peak viewing slot. These factors put pressure on BIG to develop and deliver a programme different to more mainstream BIG funding programmes. The support of enterprise related activities also raised state aid issues which needed to be addressed.

The programme involved the matchmaking or pairing of village schemes with Village Champions (business people), as part of a process which shortlisted the schemes to go forward for full Village SOS funding. From 28 long listed applicants, six schemes were identified for televised broadcast with a further four receiving 'learning awards' (the same arrangement as for the other six but which would not feature on television).

Stakeholders reflected that both parts of this process were to some extent flawed. The pool of potential village champions, identified by an external organisation, was seen to be weak. Similarly, many of the original proposals for funding were not as innovative or enterprising as Funding Committee members had anticipated. There were also concerns raised that the BBC's informal but key role in selection had influenced the selection of schemes and champions towards those which would make good television, but not necessarily good businesses or community involvement. We found that few of the rejected schemes had taken forward their business ideas.

Programme Implementation

Village SOS was found to be a relatively resource intensive programme to administer - primarily because of the complexity of the programme design and the need for schemes to progress within a short timescale to meet programme making and broadcast schedules.

Although the BBC was keen to work in close partnership with BIG and (when filming began) the villages, it was very clear that responsibility for devising the vision, composition, content and feel of the television series, and its constituent programmes, lay very much with itself.

Broadcast

The programmes aired later than anticipated, through August and early September 2011. Five episodes were broadcast on Wednesday evenings at 8pm on BBC One and the penultimate programme was broadcast at 4pm on a Sunday afternoon. This was later in the year than anticipated, and may have missed a higher profile slot in June or early July. Nonetheless, audience figures of around three million were seen positively and the programme was well received in national and local media.

On the whole residents were positive about the experience of being filmed, despite some concerns that the production team had sought to contrive particular plot lines to increase the entertainment value of the series. Resident perceptions of the television series were also generally positive. However, there was considerable variation between the schemes, particularly in Tideswell. Indeed it misrepresented this village as a place in decline, something which was raised by residents.

A particular concern raised by Board members and staff at BIG was the limited profile of BIG and in particular the signposting to the Learning Campaign and grants programme.

Learning Campaign

Village SOS Active or the Learning Campaign is still underway, following its launch at the start of the television series. Led by the Plunkett Foundation it involves an advice line, a series of regional and country roadshows, publicity material and a website, and national conference. Alongside the Learning Campaign, BIG has implemented a grants programme (for funds up to £30,000 to support development costs).

The original intention for the television series to generate interest in the Learning Campaign and Grants Programme did not materialise as planned. It was noted that the original deadline, in October 2011, was too soon for reasonable applications to be developed, and BIG subsequently announced a second application window. The regional roadshows were also found to generate contacts to an advice line and not vice versa.

Finally, Plunkett's monitoring data suggest that the majority of advice line callers were interested in starting a community enterprise and were very much at the outset of the process. The attendance at the regional workshops was also found to be below target.

Developing Sustainable Village Enterprises

Different business models were found to be operating, with particular differences around the focus on meeting a local need (a shop, café and meeting place) with the development of trading activities.

Village champions

Although the six filmed schemes had Village Champions which retained residency in the village for 12 months, the relationship in each of the other schemes was more distant, and

with the exception of Lochinver, the Village Champion's residency was either short lived or not taken up.

We identified the following lessons which can be drawn from this approach:

- brokerage: the process of matching villages and champions could have been improved. This would have required a larger pool of possible champions from which to draw and the development of a relationship at a slower pace
- range of roles: a range of roles was played: from general business advice to technical support (around marketing and architectural design); to project management of a capital build to enterprise management. Some champions were more 'hands-on' whilst others acted as mentors and coaches
- management of relationships: the lesson here is as much about expectations and the clear communication of these between the scheme and person providing the support.

Viability

Six months following the completion (for the most part) of the schemes and draw down of the final funding from BIG, some initial assessments can be drawn:

- forecasts were very optimistic in some of the schemes. The challenge will be managing the businesses during a phase when cash flow is very tight and the business is trying to find a more sustainable position
- profit margins or levels of surpluses are much lower than anticipated in many of the schemes
- schemes under most pressure are either seeking to reduce operating costs (mainly staffing) or to attract additional grant funding to develop additional businesses
- another model for sustainability appears to be to rely on volunteer support, which helps reduce pressures on cash flow from employing staff.

Community Engagement and Involvement

Village SOS has proved a positive means to engage and involve residents. More than nine out of ten residents were aware of Village SOS and over half said they had had some form of involvement with the project in their area. However, the qualitative findings suggested there were residents who felt that they had not been consulted or involved.

In some villages it was also reported that the schemes were led by 'incomers' (relatively new residents). Some schemes also appear to provide a more obvious route for involvement, such as the provision of a pub, café, shop or village hall, than others.

The research also asked what the associated drivers of involvement were. The following groups were more likely to participate in the schemes:

- 35-64 year olds were more likely to participate than other older or younger age groups
- respondents in paid employment were more likely to participate (perhaps reflecting the age profile of participants)
- schemes which provided some form of community hub were more likely to be associated with higher levels of involvement.

Conversely, involvement was less likely in schemes focusing on selling to other businesses, promoting local produce or providing training. Length of residence however was not significantly associated with involvement. The main form of likely future involvement is as a customer or service user (nearly half of respondents), as might be expected.

Outcomes: Enriching Resident's Lives?

One of the most positive outcomes perceived by residents was in increasing pride in the local area: over half of the survey respondents believed that this was a key outcome. However, there were differences between the schemes: 83 per cent of respondents in Ballygally agreed that the scheme increased their pride in the local area, but only around a third in Honeystreet, Howey and Tideswell. The main difference here is what the schemes offered: the shop and village hall in Ballygally offered something to most residents.

The resident survey also suggests that there were positive outcomes in relation to community participation: residents were more likely to participate in local groups and volunteer in the future (20 and 26 per cent of residents, respectively).

Qualitative responses from residents in West Wemyss and Myddfai bear this pattern out and highlighted the the positive contribution of volunteering.

Residents were also positive in terms of improvements in their access to services, particularly where a shop or village hall had been provided.

Many residents believed that Village SOS would bring changes to the area, and notably around two thirds thought that the image of the area would improve as a result.

There were other benefits too around perceptions that the scheme would bring increased participation, volunteering and resident interaction. Residents also perceived that Village SOS would bring an economic boost to the area, primarily through bringing new visitors to the area and that services would improve.

The preceding analysis indicates that, at both *individual* and *collective* levels, the Village SOS projects have had a range of positive outcomes for local people, who also expect further positive outcomes in the future. Although 57 per cent of respondents overall thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project, this ranged from 96 per cent in Ballygally to 32 per cent in Tideswell. What seems to matter in this regard is the type of enterprise and its direct benefit to residents.

Impact: Reviving Rural Communities?

The aim of the evaluation was to explore whether Village SOS will revive rural communities. Our findings suggest a somewhat mixed picture as to the impact of the schemes. It is clearly too soon to assess either the long term viability of the enterprises or their lasting impact on their areas. Nonetheless, the analysis of business plans, cash flow and progress to date reveals a diverse picture:

- Village SOS schemes are most commonly seeking to provide a product or service to meet a local need, and therefore sell to a local market. There were some exceptions to this, with the more actively trading businesses (Talgarth, Tideswell, Myddfai and Lochinver) showing that their markets lay further afield.
- direct economic impacts were limited, with the exception of a business such as the Barge Inn in Honeystreet, which had created up to 32 part time jobs. However, even small numbers of jobs created need to be understood in context of the local areas.
- it was too soon to judge wider placed based effects, although these perhaps showed potential for greatest impact.
- some of the market predictions have proved to be optimistic, suggesting that a longer planning period might have allowed for better and more conclusive market research to be undertaken.

However, we also found that resident perceptions of impact (around the question of whether the area will improve as a place to live) are important. The findings from modelling resident survey data confirm that schemes providing economic opportunities are perceived more highly, but these should also address a service need and involve a large proportion of

residents. This suggests that the success of the schemes is partly the development of a sound model for a viable business, but also needs to provide a basis for involvement and the meeting of local needs. Engagement, communication and involvement are therefore key parts of the process.

Conclusion and Lessons

The aim of this evaluation is:

To examine how the innovative approach pursued by Village SOS projects has helped revive rural communities and enrich residents' lives (Big Lottery Fund, Evaluation Specification 2010).

The full impact of Village SOS will only become apparent in the longer term. Many of the funded schemes are in their early stages and yet to become fully viable. It is too soon to comment on whether rural communities have been revived. The following set out our main findings from the study:

- different business models (of social enterprise) have been supported with differing types of social and economic benefits. There is no single successful model.
- the socio-economic contexts of the ten schemes vary markedly, and with this the needs that the schemes are seeking to address. With the exceptions of West Wemyss and Newstead, none of the schemes are operating in severely deprived localities.
- schemes which provide some form of community hub (a village hall) and meet an immediate service need (e.g. a shop) were unsurprisingly most effective at involving residents, who also perceived them to be having the greatest effects in terms of improving the village as a place to live.
- the viability of the schemes was still to be proven. In all cases they were still in an early stage of development. Most reflected on the need to reduce costs (typically staffing) and to improve revenues. The scale of turnover also varied markedly between the schemes from a few thousand to half a million pounds. A concern in a couple of schemes is around the burn out of volunteers, particularly playing trustee and management committee roles.
- perhaps paradoxically, those schemes which generate most of their revenues through external trade, that is, their customer base is beyond the village, may have the greatest economic impacts on the villages in the long term.

An interesting and innovative aspect of Village SOS is its wider impact on rural development. It has clearly contributed to a wider movement around rural revival and the role of community ownership. Both the television series and learning campaign have had an impact here. However, it is only one part of this wider movement, and significantly there are marked variations in this across the countries and regions of the United Kingdom.

Lessons for BIG are drawn around the following themes:

- Role of Champions: there are a number of different roles they could potentially play, and also there are key factors which need to be attended to for this model to work.
- BBC and the broadcast media provide tremendous opportunities for BIG to profile how social needs can be addressed. However, working with the media on such a scale is time consuming and Village SOS focused too much on providing prime time entertainment and missed important facets of providing informative and engaging programming
- Social Enterprise: Village SOS highlights the different models of social enterprise which can co-exist, from more commercially oriented schemes to ones having volunteering as an integral component. There also appear to be some models of social enterprise which

were not tested by Village SOS, notably around producer co-operatives and place based development.

- Rural policy in the United Kingdom is fragmented, although there are models of good practice which were not fully recognised in Village SOS, and in particular the need for rural revival to work, for funding to be invested in tune with the local policy context.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Village SOS is an innovative and challenging programme. It was developed and delivered in partnership between the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) and BBC One. It involved the funding of schemes in ten villages across the United Kingdom, six of which were featured in a BBC One television series (also called Village SOS). Innovative aspects of the programme also included the ten 'village champions', individuals with extensive business experience who became residents of the villages for up to one year. The programme involved a learning campaign, designed by BIG and delivered by the Plunkett Foundation and which sought to raise the profile and potential role of village based enterprise as a means for reviving rural communities.

This is the final report of the evaluation of Village SOS. The evaluation was undertaken between March 2011 and February 2011.

1.2. Evaluation and Key Research Aims and Questions

The broad aim for the evaluation is set out below:

To examine how the innovative approach pursued by Village SOS projects has helped revive rural communities and enrich residents' lives (Big Lottery Fund, Evaluation Specification 2010).

The evaluation was also required to:

Explore and understand the impact of the village champion on the ten successful projects (the six being followed by the BBC and the four Learning Awards) assessing how successful the initial phases of the learning campaign have been and consider the impact of the BBC's involvement in the programme.

A series of questions were also set, and which we return to in the conclusion to structure lessons from the programme:

Villages and Village Champions

- a. What difference has having a dedicated Village Champion made to the delivery of the village enterprise?
- b. What has been the impact of creating a social enterprise on the villagers?
- c. What has been the impact of having the extra four Village SOS Learning Award Champions sharing their experiences and lessons learnt with other villages?
- d. How have the applicant Villages who benefitted from the Business Development Grants but were not awarded taken forward their projects?
- e. What are the perceived benefits or challenges created by the Village Champion role? How beneficial (or not) was the involvement of the Champion to the Village?
- f. What are the main challenges and issues that have been faced by the Village Champions?

- g. Have the day to day challenges that the Villages and Village Champion face as they progress through the project been captured and translated into best practice?

Learning Campaign

- h. How have the initial villages involved in the programme (both successful and unsuccessful) accessed support from the Learning Campaign, and what difference has this made to them?
- i. How successful has the Learning Campaign been in helping village communities replicate the success of the funded projects?
- j. Were there any benefits of the application process for those who did not receive funding?
- k. Did Village SOS and the Learning Campaign help to prompt a wider policy debate and move rural issues up the agenda?
- l. Were there any innovative approaches to engaging the community or project delivery that proved successful and could be replicated elsewhere?

BBC

- m. How did BBC involvement affect the project's delivery? Was it deemed as a positive or negative addition?
- n. What benefits or issues has the TV series being aired brought to the Villages?
- o. How did the communities find the experience of being filmed and working with the BBC?

These are wide ranging aims and objectives which we reflect on further below.

1.3. Study Approach and Limitations

The evaluation was designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of Village SOS and importantly to provide evidence from which BIG, the Villages and other stakeholders could draw lessons.

At the heart of the evaluation were **10 case studies**, the Village SOS schemes themselves. Two waves of fieldwork were undertaken: the first was in May and June 2011 when we undertook preliminary visits to each scheme and sought to understand the rationale for the scheme, its drivers and some of the barriers it faced; and the second was in November 2011–December 2012 when we returned to explore progress further. This second visit widened our research beyond the direct scheme participants (the stakeholders) to include local residents, identified from a comprehensive survey. In three villages (West Wemyss, Ballygally and Myddfai) villagers were given disposable cameras and asked to photograph the things which mattered for them in terms of the scheme and which for them had worked well - a method known as **photo novella**. This evidence appears in this report. We also examined the use of Web 2.0 (including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) by each scheme to see whether this was a prominent feature either of communication between scheme participants and local residents or as a vehicle for promoting the village enterprise.

A large scale **household survey of residents** was undertaken across the ten villages. The survey was administered by post with an option for online responses. A

total of 4,592 questionnaires were mailed out and the response rate was 29 per cent. This is high for surveys of this type. Many of the villages had far fewer than 500 households (our sample size for each area) and in these areas we boosted our sample by surveying nearby settlements, ensuring that these could be considered part of the genuine hinterland of the village scheme.

A **survey of unsuccessful applicants** was also undertaken. A questionnaire was sent to 119 applicants to Village SOS. The achieved response rate was 51 (46 stage 1 and 5 stage 2) which is high for this type of survey.

Village SOS is a complex programme and at the start and end of the evaluation we undertook interviews with **national and regional stakeholders**. These included staff from across BIG (including board members, senior directors, policy staff, operations staff and staff in BIG Scotland, BIG Northern Ireland and BIG Wales), the BBC and its production team, and from the Plunkett Foundation. We also participated in Village SOS events, including a national stakeholder conference in June 2011, the national Village SOS conference in February 2012 and regional roadshow events organised by the Plunkett Foundation. Most of these contributors are listed in Annex 2.

An extensive **media study** of Village SOS was undertaken. This sought to extend our interviews with BBC One and BIG's Communications team to assess the reach of Village SOS in national and local media. This gauged the impact of the programme through analysis of coverage in the media and use of the BBC's audience appreciation index.

Finally, wide ranging use of **monitoring, applicant, administrative and financial data** were made. This included analysis of scheme business plans, application forms, local market research and financial accounts.

There is a range of **limiting factors** to the evaluation. Most of the schemes were only finished in the middle of 2011, just as the main fieldwork commenced, and one was still to be completed. More significantly, the success or otherwise of the village enterprises will only truly be known over the next three to five years, when there is a clearer basis to assess their commercial viability and the benefits they have brought the village residents. The evaluation can only therefore be seen as a formative study to inform future policy and practice and provide an interim assessment of impact. As such we do not provide a full assessment of value for money, either in terms of the effects of Village SOS on the residents of 10 villages or its wider impact in terms of raising the profile of the potential of rural community enterprise across the United Kingdom.

1.4. Structure of the Report

The report is structured as follows:

Section 2: The Development and Wider Context of Village SOS

2. Context: provides further background as to the rationale for Village SOS and seeks to place this in the context of rural issues, the opportunities and potential of (social) enterprise and the role of the media.

3. Village SOS Programme Processes discusses the development of the programme, and presents evidence on the application procedure for selecting the successful schemes. This section also presents our analysis of the Learning Campaign.

Section 3: The 10 Village SOS Schemes

4. Developing Sustainable Community Enterprises describes each of the 10 schemes, their aims and rationales, and the extent to which they may become commercially viable and socially sustainable enterprises.

5. Enriching Residents' Lives draws on extensive qualitative and quantitative (survey) analysis to answer one of the central questions of the evaluation.

6. Reviving Rural Communities looks at the likelihood of the longer term social and economic impact of the schemes.

Section 4: Overarching assessment of Village SOS

7. Conclusion provides the overarching assessment of the Village SOS programme, and draws lessons and makes recommendations for future programmes and policies in this area.

SECTION 2: THE DEVELOPMENT AND WIDER CONTEXT OF VILLAGE SOS

2. Context

2.1. Introduction

The Village SOS programme was launched in June 2009 with the aim of challenging villages across the UK to develop ideas for community led enterprises which would help to revive local communities by creating new jobs and improving quality of life for local people.

The programme sought to highlight and provide templates for addressing the social and economic decline afflicting many of the UK's rural areas; some of which are increasingly characterised by rising unemployment, low wages, a prevalence of small businesses and self-employment and declining local infrastructure. However, the problems faced by village communities vary in nature and severity and therefore may require bespoke responses. In recognition of the diversity and the vulnerability of the UK's rural communities, the BIG Lottery launched the Village SOS programme to encourage rural village communities to develop innovative and appropriate solutions to the problems they face.

The programme was launched on BBC One in June 2009 with a call for enterprising village residents to come forward with their ideas for community enterprises. In order to support the communities that came forward in the development of their ideas, 'Business Development Grants' were awarded to 28 schemes to support them in developing detailed business plans for submission as part of a second stage of the competition in March 2010. During this period applicants were supported in the development of their proposals by dedicated 'village champions' who were competitively selected and their skills and expertise matched with individual villages.

The results of stage two of the competition were announced in May 2010 when six schemes were selected to receive £400,000 each and continue to work with their Village Champion, who at this point moved to their assigned villages. The winning schemes were located in: West Wemyss, Caistor, Newstead, Honeystreet, Talgarth and Tideswell. The announcement of the winning schemes was filmed by BBC crews in each of the successful villages.

In addition to the six 'winning' schemes, four additional schemes located in Howey, Lochinver, Ballygally and Myddfai received Learning Awards, also of £400,000 each in order to bolster the potential for learning from the programme. However, only the six winning schemes were intended to be featured in the accompanying BBC television series be aired in August and September 2011. The ten selected projects officially started at various points between June and August 2010.

2.2. Rationale and Design of Village SOS

Village SOS is a complex, innovative and to some extent risky initiative. There are no prescriptive outcomes for each project or enterprise, other than the aim

that Village SOS should contribute to the revival of rural communities and enrich residents' lives.

The Village SOS programme provides the BIG Lottery with the opportunity to implement and test an innovative approach to rural regeneration. Village SOS contains aspects of traditional grant making and business support (for example Business Development Grants to help develop applications for full funding) but also the following aspects which are challenging, creative and innovative:

- **involvement of a Public Service Broadcaster (BBC One):** Village SOS is designed to both deliver benefits to ten villages but also to provide a platform, through the broadcast of the Village SOS television programme, to raise awareness of the opportunities for rural enterprise.
- **learning programme:** Village SOS provides the basis for the promotion and understanding of rural regeneration: amongst the general public (through the BBC series), within the ten schemes, but also in providing opportunities for other villages to learn from Village SOS and develop their own schemes. The Plunkett Foundation has led the BIG Lottery Learning Campaign and this has involved the development of a website, collection and publication of a range of learning materials, operation of a hotline for enquiries (following the BBC One series and open for 12 months) and running a series of regional workshops.
- **village champions:** the role of champions has become an important feature of regeneration and economic development programmes. The success of 'champion' approaches tend to depend on different factors: the credibility and capacity of the champion; the relevance of their knowledge to the issues faced locally; and the wider capacity of recipients to absorb and effectively utilise advice.
- **enterprise:** a rationale for Village SOS is the engagement and promotion of enterprise and entrepreneurship to address local issues, notably through the development of a sustainable and indeed thriving village enterprise. As such, Village SOS is intended to provide lessons for how BIG may promote enterprise in the future as a means for addressing its overarching mission to address persistent needs in the United Kingdom.

Finally, Village SOS needs to be understood in context: both in terms of the social and economic conditions the programme is working in (e.g. varying levels of deprivation and isolation) but critically the reach of Village SOS in supporting community-wide change.

2.3. Understanding Rural Policy and Rural Issues

The Village SOS programme represents a response to the common issues and problems faced by many rural areas in the United Kingdom in recent years. Although their impact and intensity varies with the geographical characteristics and relative accessibility of each area, these challenges and the local and regional policy responses to them can be summarised under seven headings:

- **farming:** although agriculture is no longer a major employer of labour, it still plays a key role in the rural economy, not least in presenting the most visible face of conditions in the countryside. In recent years the sector has been in decline in economic terms, with farm incomes continuing to fall in real terms from the mid-1990s onwards, and this has been aggravated by crises such as BSE and FMD. More recently, there has been growing

interest in the provenance of food supply and in particular the direct sale and marketing of food products - something showcased in Village SOS.

- **business:** while less than a third of all businesses in the United Kingdom are located in rural areas, there are marked regional variations, with figures in the north of the country substantially lower. Rural business growth has tended to be concentrated in more accessible rural areas, especially in the south and east, and has been closely linked to the in-migration of people from urban and suburban areas. The more remote rural areas, by contrast, have experienced relatively meagre growth, and in some cases decline. Rural firms also tend to be very small, with the vast majority employing 10 people or fewer. The main areas of business activity in rural areas tend to involve wholesale and retail distribution, public services, tourism and manufacturing. Against this backdrop a recurring issue in recent policy documents has been the need for specific rural business support and the creation of a favourable environment in which rural enterprises can flourish. A consistent argument has been that, for the countryside to be a viable location for businesses for all sectors, they need ready access to appropriate business advice, training, finance, ICT and other infrastructure.
- **employment:** the rural workforce is relatively well educated and skilled, with a higher proportion than average holding National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 or above. There are higher proportions of part-time and seasonal workers, as well as self-employed, than in urban areas, and unemployment claimant rates are relatively low. These patterns provide conflicting signals in terms of the prospects for social enterprise development and success.
- **population and housing:** the population of rural areas has grown over the last twenty years, particularly in villages and small towns with good access to major urban employment centres, and in desirable locales including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This increase has been mainly as a result of net in-migration, with commuters, pensioners and those taking early retirement moving out from the towns, and mainly young people and families moving in the opposite direction. The latter trend is only partly related to job opportunities. It also reflects the extent of house price inflation resulting from the competitive bidding process in particular rural locations where a large number of affluent people are seeking to purchase from a relatively limited stock of properties. In more remote rural locations the issue of in-migration is less acute, but again the lack of opportunities has prompted many young and skilled people to leave in search of work and housing. Houses for sale may be slightly less expensive in such areas, but remain unobtainable for younger people working in the rural economy. This again has implications for the viability and sustainability of locally provided services, in particular in terms of residents' capacity to mount their own response to what is required.
- **access to services:** geographical access to basic services is a key component of people's quality of life in both urban and rural areas. In the latter, however, the scattered nature of the population often makes it difficult to maintain a customer or user base of sufficient size. This is especially the case at present as both public and private sector providers seek to reduce costs or improve profitability by centralising and rationalising their networks of service points. In many cases this has continued to result in the withdrawal of local provision of services and amenities, with post offices, shops, pubs, libraries, petrol stations, banks, building societies, job centres, doctor's surgeries and hospitals all affected.

Public policy has sought to halt this demise of rural service provision, and in doing so to help revitalise those areas which have suffered economically and socially. An alternative focus for policy has been the potential contribution of locally owned and controlled community businesses, working along different lines to traditional public or private sector operations (for instance from charities to companies limited by guarantee to cooperatives).

- **mobility and transport:** car ownership is much higher in rural areas (involving 85 per cent of households) than the national average (70 per cent). Almost 40 per cent of households own two or more cars, compared with 25 per cent nationally. Typically people without access to private transport are those who face disadvantage in the labour market, and as a consequence tend to have much lower incomes. Public transport plays a key role in meeting this residual demand, but given potential patronage levels services are generally variable in frequency and coverage. Continuing subsidies to bus services have helped to maintain a network of regular routes across many rural areas. In more remote or less populated places, greater emphasis has been placed on non-standard approaches, such as “dial-a-ride” buses, community minibuses and taxis, and shared car clubs. Rural areas, due to higher levels of car ownership and greater journey distances are also more likely to be adversely affected by fuel price increases.
- **social needs:** rural areas generally fare well in comparison to towns and cities where indicators of economic and social deprivation are concerned. Thus, unemployment rates, standards of health, income levels, car ownership, educational attainment and incidence of crime all compare favourably. However, this is not to say that problems of social exclusion do not exist in the countryside, just that they are less concentrated and therefore harder to detect. What is distinctive about rural areas in this context is that those with social and economic needs are likely to be widely dispersed within an already sparse and scattered population. It is then very difficult for any organisation to mount cost-effective initiatives of sufficient scale to provide the types of training, employment or support services that are often available to people who live in urban areas.

As we highlight, these issues vary across the United Kingdom, largely reflecting wider economic conditions but also relative levels of isolation. A further issue for Village SOS is the divergent policy context in which it operates. Each of the four national administrations has responsibility for rural issues, albeit working to wider UK and EU policy frameworks. This has shaped some distinct approaches, such as the Scottish Land Fund or the use of EU Structural Funds in rural parts of Wales. The Coalition Government's programme to simultaneously reduce public expenditure, promote the Big Society and support localism will also bring significant implications across the United Kingdom.

2.4. Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of the problems facing rural areas in the United Kingdom and the main elements of Village SOS which seek to address these problems. What is apparent in this review is the sheer diversity of rural issues and therefore the premium placed on understanding each scheme in a very different context.

3. Chapter Three - Village SOS Programme Processes

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with a number of process and delivery issues associated with the Village SOS programme. Specifically, it addresses the following issues:

- the design and development of the programme
- the implementation of the programme, with attention focusing on the process by which villages and Village Champions were selected
- the views and experiences of unsuccessful Village SOS applicants – this section examines the key findings to emerge from a survey of those applicants whose application to become a Village SOS scheme was (ultimately) unsuccessful
- programme delivery and support
- the Village SOS Television Series. This section explores a number of issues including: the 'vision' for the series; the filming process; villagers' views about the filming process; villagers', the BBC's and BIG's views on the TV Series; and the media impact of the Series
- Village SOS Active, which examines the four principal strands that comprise the campaign: the Advice Line; Active events; the Active website; and written material.

3.2. Design and Development of the Programme

The origins of the Village SOS programme lie in 2009 when senior members of BIG's Communications team entered into discussions with BBC Wales about the two organisations collaborating to produce a TV series about reviving rural communities. The original vision was to confine the programme to villages in Wales only, but its scope was extended to include the whole of the United Kingdom.

The development of the programme was very much driven by BIG's Communications and Marketing team. One BIG officer welcomed this: *"It (the Village SOS programme) was a 'Comms' led programme ... it's exciting."* However, another felt very differently: *"Normal policy is policy led not communication led... that makes it more challenging."*

When BIG's communications team first presented the idea of working with the BBC to BIG's board, some members were sceptical and concerned:

"BBC led.... was it truly grant making or some Dragons' Den type programme?"

"There was a great deal of scepticism about the programme. We'd never done anything like this before ... we were concerned about being heavily linked to entertainment ... we had difficult negotiations with the BBC."

Board members and BIG officers had other concerns about the programme with three in particular being cited on a regular basis: that its timetable was too tight; that it was not as *"well thought through as it should have been"* (BIG officer); and that it risked contravening state aid regulations.

A number of BIG representatives expressed their concern about the 'tightness' of the timetable associated with the programme. For example, one officer noted:

"The design doesn't work ... the speed of design ... (it results in) unnecessarily high risks."

The same officer noted that the condensed timetable of the programme could have negative consequences for villages:

"We have interfered with the natural speed of the development of villages ... they would have got there but slower, like Newstead, for example."

The necessity of meeting the BBC's timetable for programme design meant that less time was devoted to the issue than on 'normal' BIG programmes, and one officer referred to the design of the programme as being *"opportunistic"*. Reflecting this, several officers noted that this had an adverse effect on the programme which was perceived to be not as coherent and cogent as other BIG schemes.

The challenge of ensuring that the programme did not contravene state aid regulations was also an issue that concerned BIG board members and officers. For example, one board member noted:

"We had big discussions about state aid ... because of the nature of the programme: the whole idea was you're not applying for a grant but setting-up a business."

And a number of programme delivery officers reported it to be an issue:

"State aid has been a really big issue ... a lot of care and attention has been paid to ensuring that we don't breach the law ... it was also an issue in the selection process."

"There were concerns about state aid – 'they are taking my business'. This affected what projects we funded."

As a result BIG sought appropriate guidance on state aid issues.

3.3. Implementation of the Programme

3.3.1. Selection of Villages and Village Champions

The selection of villages involved a two stage process. After a high profile marketing and publicity campaign which included the programme being showcased in an episode of the BBC television show, *The One Show*, villages

(with a population of up to 3,000¹) across the United Kingdom were invited to submit an outline submission as part of Stage One of the selection process. Some 250 applications were received with 28 applicants being invited to submit a more detailed, Stage Two, application. In order to facilitate the production of a robust business plan as part of this process, applicants were awarded a £10,000 Business Development Grant (BDG).

The 28 applicants in receipt of BDGs then attended a 'match making' conference in Manchester in November 2010 designed to match villages with village champions. At the end of the conference, 24 matches had been made – the four unmatched villages were therefore ruled-out from funding: *"Some groups didn't get match-funded so that was the end of them"* (BIG Officer)

One BIG board member felt there were insufficient village champion applicants at the event:

"There weren't enough village champions at the matchmaking conference ... it wasn't competitive enough."

Some of the villages participating in the conference expressed their dissatisfaction with it with describing the matchmaking process as being "horrendous":

"The process was horrendous ... it was too much like speed dating ... we nominated 13 applicants. We got 30 minutes with each of them... it was wrong from the beginning - we had no clear guidance what to expect from them ... we didn't have time to check on the suitability of applicants." (Village Lead, Funded Village)

The 24 matched villages and village champions were then given further time to develop their ideas, and business plans, in particular. They were then invited to present their ideas to a selection committee at a two day 'pitching' event in London. The pitch comprised the following elements: a short presentation from the village; the showing of a film made by villagers about their village and their ideas; and a question and answer session. The selection panel comprised eight BIG board members, two of whom had a background in business. Panel members reported that (quite intentionally) villagers were given a "tough time" and that they did not hold back from asking "difficult questions."

A BBC film crew was present at the event and there were BBC representatives on the selection panel, although without voting rights. However, despite this one panel member reported that they has been able to "influence" the selection process, something that she did not feel was helpful:

"We were quite influenced by what the BBC needed ... they are leading it. They were not a voting partner on the selection committee but they influenced the committee ... we needed to be more hands on."

Other BIG representatives had a different take on the influence of the BBC. For example, one noted that although BBC representatives had attended committee meetings, their role had been entirely positive. She felt that they had not sought to 'influence' the decision making process and had merely informed

¹ For the purposes of the Village SOS programme, a village was defined as being a settlement with a population of less than 3,000.

the committee as to what their requirements were, and which schemes might make 'better' TV. As a result, she felt that BIG's position was not compromised.

BIG's grant making team provided the selection panel with invaluable supporting information and analysis about applications. However, as was noted by a number of BIG representatives, in line with the organisation as a whole, members of BIG's grant making team had relatively little experience of assessing applications which were concerned with social enterprise:

"We're good at assessing community stuff but we're not used to business stuff." (BIG officer)

"We had to make a commercial judgement ... that's why I was put on the Board." (BIG Board Member)

"Some schemes got rejected initially because people didn't understand business plans." (BIG Board Member)

The ten schemes that were to receive funding were announced in 2010. Six of the areas (Caistor, Honeystreet, Newstead, Talgarth, Tideswell and West Wemyss²) were to be the subject of BBC filming (and a dedicated TV programme) with filming not taking place in the four Learning Award villages (Ballygally, Howey, Lochinver and Myddfai). In addition to receiving support from a Village Champion who, as noted earlier, would be resident in the village for a year, villages also received grants of around £400,000.

3.3.2. Village Champion Selection

Before considering the criteria used to select villages, it is important here to consider the village champion selection process. Responsibility for identifying potential village champions lay with the BBC who employed a recruitment company, Participation Works, to identify candidates. To the consternation of a number of BIG representatives we interviewed, BIG were not involved in the selection process.

"The village champions were chosen by the BBC ... that shouldn't have happened." (Board Member)

"We could have done a lot better with the selection of village champions ... we should have been more involved in the process of choosing them." (Board Member)

"In hindsight, I wish we were more involved in this (the village champion selection) process." (BIG officer)

Other concerns were highlighted about the village champion selection process. For example, two respondents felt that the pool of champions should have been larger, thereby broadening the choice offered to villages:

"We didn't have enough village champions." (BIG officer)

"We needed a bigger pool of champions." (BIG Board Member)

² Although some filming took place in West Wemyss, in the spring of 2010 it terminated with Myddfai which becoming a 'filmed' village.

Another respondent felt that villagers should have been involved in the selection process:

"More input was needed from villages themselves with regard to the selection of Village Champions." (BIG officer)

The same officer also felt that more time should have been allocated to aligning the skills and expertise of village champions with the needs of villages:

"Not enough time was spent mapping the needs of villages with the skill-sets and expertise of Village Champions."

3.3.3. Village Selection Criteria

A number of criteria appear to have informed the selection process and the selection panel appeared keen to fund schemes that:

- **were innovative and imaginative.** Some panel members highlighted these features:

"It was much more about the imagination of bids ... Some that were rejected were too community focused i.e. they were just a community centre ... food and drink was a big trend ... We did not want lazy food solutions."

- **involved some risk.** An inevitable corollary of the desire to fund schemes that were imaginative, was that some would be 'risky.' However, many selection panel members did not perceive this to be problematic and some, indeed, were keen to fund schemes that were perceived to be 'risky':

"If we're not prepared to take a risk we shouldn't do the programme ... we did take some risks ... West Wemyss was a risk ... if one doesn't fail, then we haven't done a good job."

"We received a lot of applications that were as safe as houses. But the committee was willing to take more of a risk ... it is an acceptable risk ... it is not a disaster if they fail." (BIG officer)

- **would produce important learning for BIG, villages across the UK, and other key stakeholders.** As one selection panel member noted, *"we were keen to choose projects that we could learn from."* And a BIG officer noted the centrality of learning to the programme as a whole: *"One risk is if we don't learn from this [the Village SOS programme]."*
- **were commercially viable.** Much debate within the selection panel centred on the importance and centrality of (social) enterprise within the programme and whether funded schemes should be commercially viable. As one selection panel member noted: *"the Committee wrestled with this [issue] in discussions."* The two panel members with a background in business were unequivocal that funded schemes should be commercially sound:

"I said enterprise not social enterprise ... traditionally BIG has not funded enterprise."

"Focusing more on social enterprise is the way of the future and we have to develop these skills."

Another panel member also stressed the necessity of funding commercially viable enterprises:

"[One of the objectives of the programme] is to inspire local businesses to set-up sustainable community enterprises that were new ... we were keen that the ideas made sense with there being a sustainable impact ... an enduring impact ... and there had to be a business case."

However, as will be explored elsewhere in this report, in practice it appears that the business case for some of the schemes were not robust, with some being more "*community ventures*" than "*social enterprises*", to borrow from the words of one selection panel member.

- **had the backing of the broader community behind them.** As one selection panel member noted:

"[We wanted to fund] projects that truly had the support of their communities ... if we felt that communities were divided then we didn't fund them."

- **would make "good telly."** 'Informed' by the views of the BBC, selection panel members were keen to select villages that they believed would make 'good' television. While some appeared uneasy about doing this, others were not.

"Some of my colleagues (wrongly) felt that the Big Lottery is not about making good TV."

- **were varied.** The selection panel was keen that a variety of types of scheme was included amongst the ten schemes that were funded:

"We were concerned to have a variety of projects included in the programme ... we didn't want ten village shops ... we wanted to reflect what was happening in the country ... but having a pub in the mix was important as the area hub" (Selection panel member)

- **were experiencing some form of 'need.'** 'Need' emerged as being an important selection criterion for the committee: "*Need was quite important - it was the back story.*" However, as was acknowledged by all committee members, it was interpreted in the broadest sense to encompass a specific 'need' or 'challenge' within a village because, as noted earlier, most of the villages had relatively low levels of need as measured by deprivation indices.

"It wasn't need in terms of real economic deprivation ... it was communities that faced a challenge." (Board member)

"It (the Village SOS programme) is more about motivation ... and showing what can be done ... It's very much about 'if they can do it we can do it' ... most have high levels of need. Some have a particular need. It's not always about money... it could be a different need." (Board member)

- **had the skills and expertise to deliver to timetable.** Given the really 'tight' timetable associated with the programme, the selection panel was keen to fund schemes which had had some experience of running projects and that could 'hit the ground running.'

3.4. The Views and Experiences of Unsuccessful Applicants

Further insight into the Village SOS application process is provided by the survey of those (Stage One and Two) applicants whose applications to the Village SOS Programme were ultimately unsuccessful. The survey sheds light on the following issues:

- the profile and types of organisation that applied for Village SOS funding
- applicants' experiences of the Village SOS application process
- the progress made by unsuccessful applicants since applying for Village SOS funding.

Before turning our attention to exploring these issues, it is important to make two 'health warnings' about the findings of the survey. First, it draws on a relatively small sample (51 responses). Second, unsuccessful applicants (quite understandably) are likely to be more critical of the VSOS selection process than successful ones and may not be representative (in terms of their characteristics) of *all* the schemes that applied for funding. Therefore the survey findings should be treated with a degree of caution and be seen as being indicative not authoritative.

4.5.1. The types of organisation that applied for Village SOS funding

Organisation Type

Respondents described their organisation in a number of ways:

- 28 per cent said they were a neighbourhood or community group
- 26 per cent said they were a community centre or village hall
- 20 per cent said they were a voluntary organisation
- 18 per cent said they were a social enterprise
- 8 per cent said they were another type of organisation, including a Development Trust, Community Interest Company and Industrial and Provident Society.

Organisation Size

Respondents typically represented small community organisations operating with low levels of income:

- 42 per cent had *no income* or were a *start-up* organisation in the year that they applied to Village SOS
- 32 per cent had an annual income of *£10 thousand or less* in the year that they applied to Village SOS
- 14 per cent had an annual income of *between £10 thousand and £50 thousand* in the year that they applied to Village SOS
- 8 per cent had an annual income of *more than £50 thousand* in the year that they applied to Village SOS.

Staffing

Only 20 per cent of respondents said their organisation *employed paid staff* at the time of applying for Village SOS funding. Furthermore, only 6 per cent of respondents had at least *one full time member of staff* and only 10 per cent had *more than one member of paid staff*.

Summary

These data show that a large proportion of unsuccessful applicants were using 'traditional' organisational forms for community groups, with less than one in five identifying themselves as an existing social enterprise. They were typically small or start-up organisations with little or no existing income streams and only a few had paid staff. This suggests that in applying to Village SOS these organisations were seeking to make a step-change in their delivery model by developing a more enterprise based approach.

4.5.2. Experiences of the Village SOS application process

Who completed the application form?

Respondents were asked who from their organisation was involved in completing the Village SOS application form. The results show that applications were typically made using entirely voluntary effort:

- only 12 per cent of respondents said *members of paid staff* were involved
- 71 per cent said *committee members and/or trustees* were involved
- 43 per cent said *volunteers* were involved.

Understanding of the Village SOS programme

Respondents were asked the extent to which they had a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Village SOS funding programme. An overwhelming majority responded positively: 33 per cent said they had a very clear understanding and 53 per cent said it was quite clear while only 6 per cent said it was at all unclear.

Advice and support from BIG

Respondents were asked whether they had received any practical advice, help or support from BIG during the application process and if so, how effective they found it. Only a third (33 per cent) of respondents received advice, help or support but those that did were largely positive: 65 per cent said it had been quite or very effective.

The process of applying for Village SOS funding

Respondents were asked how straightforward they found the process of applying for Village SOS funding. Their views were mixed, with about a third (31 per cent) saying they found it straightforward and just over half (53 per cent) saying they found it onerous.

Respondents were also asked to provide an estimate of how much time (the total number of hours) their organisation spent preparing its Village SOS funding application. This included time spent in meetings, consulting with local people and researching the need for the project, as well as time spent actually completing the application form.

The 47 respondents who provided an estimate spent a total 3,919 hours on their application: the equivalent of 784 working days. The mean amount of time spent by each applicant was 12 days. This is significantly lower than the 21 days median time spent on preparation by applicants to BIG's Reaching Communities programme identified by the NAO (2008) and suggests that,

relatively speaking, the Village SOS programme did not place disproportionate demands on organisations during the application process.

Organisational skills, knowledge and expertise

Respondents were asked whether they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise within their organisation in a number of areas associated with applying for Village SOS funding. Respondents were generally positive about their organisation's capacity and capability across the board:

- 96 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *identify the need for the project*
- 88 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *gather community support for the project*
- 84 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *identify project outcomes*
- 80 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *work out the cost of the project*
- 76 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *secure the necessary land, building and planning permissions*
- 75 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *fill in the application form*
- 75 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *develop a project timetable and plan*
- 73 per cent said they had sufficient skills, knowledge and expertise to *prepare a business plan*.

Feedback from BIG

Respondents were asked if they had received feedback from BIG on why the Village SOS funding application was unsuccessful and if so, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the feedback provided. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of respondents had received feedback but only 22 per cent were satisfied with what they were told. By contrast almost two-fifths (39 per cent) said they were dissatisfied with the feedback they were received.

Overall satisfaction

Respondents were asked to consider, overall, the extent to which they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their experience of applying for Village SOS funding. 34 per cent said they were satisfied but a higher proportion, 40 per cent said they were dissatisfied.

Project progress

Respondents were asked how their project had progressed since their Village SOS funding application was rejected:

- 2 per cent (i.e. one respondent) said they had been able to *secure funding from elsewhere* and the project had *gone ahead within the same time frame*
- 10 per cent said they had been able to *secure funding from elsewhere* but that the *project timescales had been delayed*

- 2 per cent (1 respondent) said they had been able to *secure funding from elsewhere*, but not as much as they needed, so the *project had to be scaled back*
- 48 per cent were *still trying to raise sufficient funds* to carry-out the project so their plans had been *put on hold*
- 38 per cent had been *unable to raise sufficient funds* so their plans had been *abandoned*.

Collectively these findings reinforce the importance of BIG in funding a plethora of voluntary and community related activities. Without BIG's support, most schemes have not progressed. Although it is unsurprising that the unsuccessful applicants were not wholly positive about Village SOS, the programme does not seem to have placed undue burdens on applicants. Without a full analysis of the reasons for rejection it is unclear to what extent proposals failed on grounds due to eligibility or the extent to which they lost to proposals better meeting the criteria. In conclusion it is perhaps just worth outlining the range of activities which applicants were proposing (of the 49 valid responses):

- 30 proposals focused on some form of community hub, including either renovation of an old building or construction of a new building, together with facilities for sport, storage of equipment and entertainment
- 5 proposals focused primarily on a café
- 3 proposals focused on bringing a pub back into use
- 3 schemes proposed some form of environmental energy scheme (including biomass plant, hydro scheme and wind turbine)
- 2 schemes would seek to improve the market for local food producers
- 2 schemes suggested exchange of local services and products as a means of sustainable living.

Other proposals included business support, provision of workspaces, development of craft businesses, fast broadband and a visitor attraction. Many of the schemes were seeking to combine different ventures.

3.5. Programme Delivery and Support

Once the VSOS programme formally began in May 2010, individual schemes were managed, administered (and supported) by BIG staff in its regions. It is important to make three observations, here, about the support provided to villages. First, there was a consensus amongst those BIG representatives that we interviewed that, compared to other BIG programmes, Village SOS was relatively expensive to run and resource intensive:

"They (Village SOS schemes) are very resource intensive projects... the cost to funding ratio is very high...project admin costs are very high ... I've spent a huge amount of time on the programme." (BIG officer)

"The resources dedicated to the programme were far out of line with its size." (Board Member)

However, whilst acknowledging that the programme was relatively expensive to run, two respondents highlighted the considerable and important 'PR' benefits associated with it:

"I had concerns about how it would develop ... it was quite an expensive programme to be running ... but it does a lot more ... it's a shop window for other programmes ... and it fronts the learning campaign" (Board member)

"It (Village SOS programme) has huge admin costs ... PR costs are high ... it's about creating public perception about BIG and our work ... VSOS can't address need ... there is a big PR benefit for BIG ..." (BIG officer)

Second, it is important to note that organisational 'buy in' to the scheme appeared to vary within BIG, with understandings of what officers were 'buying into' also varying. Nonetheless, the programme did have a high level of support from many interviewed across the organisation.

VSOS provoked a divergence of opinion within BIG, with some holding strong concerns that the need to produce good communications had been put ahead of good funding programme design.

The apparent variance in the level of commitment of BIG staff to the project may be partly attributable to the belief amongst (some of) them that it was a "one-off":

"Everyone views this as a one-off ... this is because it is outside their comfort zone." (BIG Board member)

Another factor which may have affected organisational 'buy-in' is the unfamiliarity of BIG officers with social enterprise, which is the third of three points referred to earlier. A number of board members and officers noted that BIG does not have the skills, expertise, and systems to evaluate, monitor, manage, and support social enterprise schemes:

"We can't manage businesses ... we're not about funding enterprises ... it should have gone to Plunkett ... we don't have the computer systems, we don't understand social enterprises... we don't have the expertise to judge business plans" (BIG officer)

"Traditionally, BIG has not funded enterprise." (Board Member)

"The Board was keen for us to get involved in developing not for profit social enterprise... being self-sustaining is really important ... this has caused us problems in terms of our skill sets ... do we have the skills and expertise to review business plans?" (BIG officer)

3.6. Village SOS Television Series

3.6.1 The 'Vision' for the Series

Although the BBC was keen to work in close partnership with BIG and (when filming began) the villages, it was very clear that responsibility for devising the vision, composition, content and feel of the television series, and its constituent programmes, lay very much with itself:

"It was made clear right from the start that their (the villages) project was their project and the programmes were ours." (Producer, BBC)

In terms of the BBC's overall vision for the series, *"the overall narrative with the programmes is villages in decline"* (BIG officer) – as will be explored later in this section, many villagers were unhappy with this. Each of the six filmed villages had an episode dedicated to it with each programme paying particular attention to a specific theme(s).

In terms of the structure and 'feel' of programmes, the BBC was keen to showcase the personal journeys of villagers: *"the producer is very much into the personal journey thing and is going to focus very much on that"* (BIG officer). It was also keen to highlight 'tensions' and 'conflict' within schemes as it was felt that this 'jeopardy' made for 'good' TV: *"The BBC want jeopardy to make a programme work"* (BIG officer). Furthermore, although the BBC wanted to make films that were an accurate account of the experiences of villagers, it did not want to produce *"public information films"* and was more concerned with producing a series that was *"entertaining."* As one of the Series' producers noted: *"People do not want to feel like they are being lectured."*

Before the series was aired, the BBC hoped that each episode would be watched by at least three million viewers and would garner an "Appreciation Index (AI)³" score of more than 80:

"I'd be disappointed [if the AI score was] not in the high 70s [and we] would love it to get into the 80s. But you are never quite sure what makes people say they appreciate a programme." (Executive Producer)

3.6.2 The filming process

Filming took place at regular intervals throughout the one year life of Village SOS schemes with villages being assigned specific crews. As a result some schemes were able to forge a close relationship with their local crew. One BIG officer felt that in some villages the relationship had become *"too close"* which had jeopardised the BBC's ability to view schemes (and villagers) *"objectively."*

The narrator of the series was Sarah Beeny of Channel 4, *Property Ladder* 'fame'. She only became involved in the project at a relatively late stage and had comparatively little contact with villages. The Executive Producer of the Series changed during the course of the project which, according to a number of respondents we interviewed, resulted in a slight (but important) change in approach and emphasis taken to it by the BBC: *"There was a change of direction when the Executive Producer changed half way through the programme"* (Board member).

The programmes were aired in late August/ early September with the first episode (Talgarth) being transmitted on 10 August. The subsequent three episodes – Honeystreet, Caistor, and Myddfai - were given the same slot as the first episode (8pm on Wednesday BBC1). However, the penultimate episode (Newstead) was moved to different day of the week (Sunday) and time (4pm). The final episode (Tideswell) was transmitted at the 'normal' slot of 8pm on BBC1 on the following Wednesday (7 September).

³ The Audience Appreciation Index (AI) is an index which measures the public's appreciation of television or radio programmes, with episodes being given a score out of a 100. Currently the AI is produced as part of an online Television Appreciation Survey, on behalf of the BBC Audience Research Unit, by GfK NOP.

3.6.3 The views of villagers on the filming process

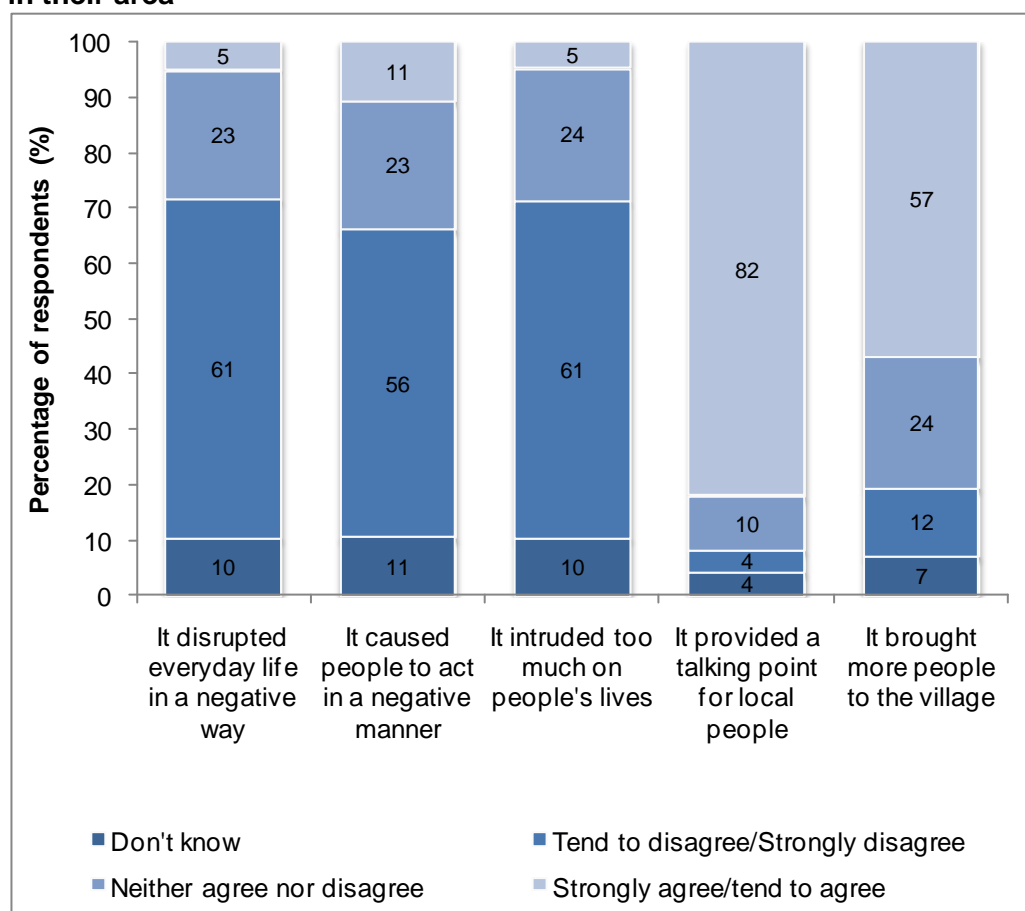
Resident Survey respondents from villages that were filmed for the BBC Village SOS TV series were asked a series of questions about the impact of the presence of BBC TV crews on their local area and local people. They were also asked to provide their perspectives on the broadcast episode in which their area was featured. Nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) said they had been aware of television cameras and crews in their area during the filming. Those that were aware of the cameras and crews were asked a series of questions about the impact of this on the area.

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of their responses. It shows that a majority of respondents did not think the presence of the BBC TV crews had had a negative impact on the local area:

- only 11 per cent thought it caused people to act in a negative way
- only 5 per cent thought it disrupted everyday life in a negative way
- only 5 per cent thought it intruded too much on people's lives.

If anything, the presence of TV crews was viewed positively by respondents as they provided a talking point for local people (82 per cent) and brought more people to the village (57 per cent).

Figure 3.1: How respondents viewed the impact of BBC Television crews in their area



Base: 467

In-depth interviews with villagers actively involved in the filming process revealed a similar picture: most did not find filming to be disruptive. However, a

number did report that sometimes 'tensions' emerged between themselves and the local film crew.

For example, this was clearly the case in Myddfai where scheme participants felt that they had been asked 'leading questions' and that the production team had tried to 'engineer' certain plot lines. When this had occurred 'crisis' meetings were called with the production team who were generally respectful of the wishes of the group. As a result, villagers felt that they had been able to exercise some editorial control, albeit around the margins. However, there was a degree of compromise on both sides, and many respondents remarked that they had endeavoured to be as accommodating as possible knowing how critical the television series was to the success of the scheme. It was repeatedly pointed out that this was 'the kind of publicity that money can't buy'.

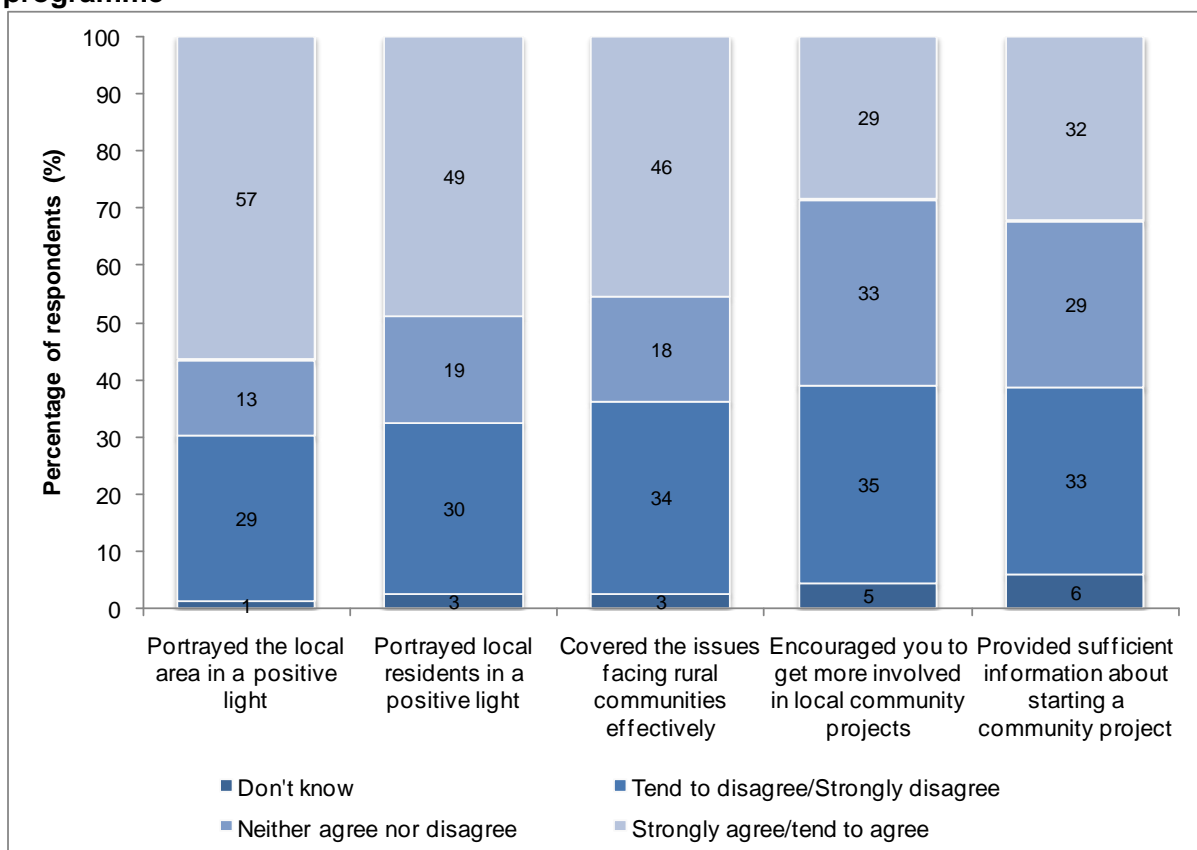
"We were aware that we had worked hard to get the BBC here, because originally we weren't going to be filmed, and because of that we made sure that we cooperated. We knew that this was a golden opportunity, the sort that money can't buy, but at the same time we had to be careful not to sacrifice our dignity for the cause. You have to set boundaries and they will keep pushing them but you have to stand firm. Ultimately it worked and we got a programme we could be proud of." (Member of Management Committee)

The practice of 'compromising' and making 'sacrifices for the greater good' was also evident in Talgarth where several scheme participants allowed the film crews into their homes on multiple occasions and 'tolerated' them focusing on certain 'characters' who they felt, in reality, were not integral to the scheme.

3.6.4 Villagers' views on the Series

Overall, 88 per cent of survey respondents in filmed areas had watched the episode of the BBC Village SOS TV series that featured the project in their area. Those that had were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of the programme. An overview of their responses is provided in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: Respondents' perceptions of the BBC Village SOS TV programme



Base: 672

A majority of respondents (57 per cent) thought the TV programme portrayed the local area in a positive light with half (49 per cent) believing that local residents were portrayed in the same way. Less than half thought the programme covered the issues facing rural communities effectively (46 per cent) and around a third said it provided sufficient information about starting a community project (32 per cent) and encouraged them to get more involved in local community projects.

However, it is important to note that respondents' views about the Village SOS TV programme varied considerably by village, particularly when it came to how the local area and people were portrayed, as Figures 3.3 and 3.4 reveal.

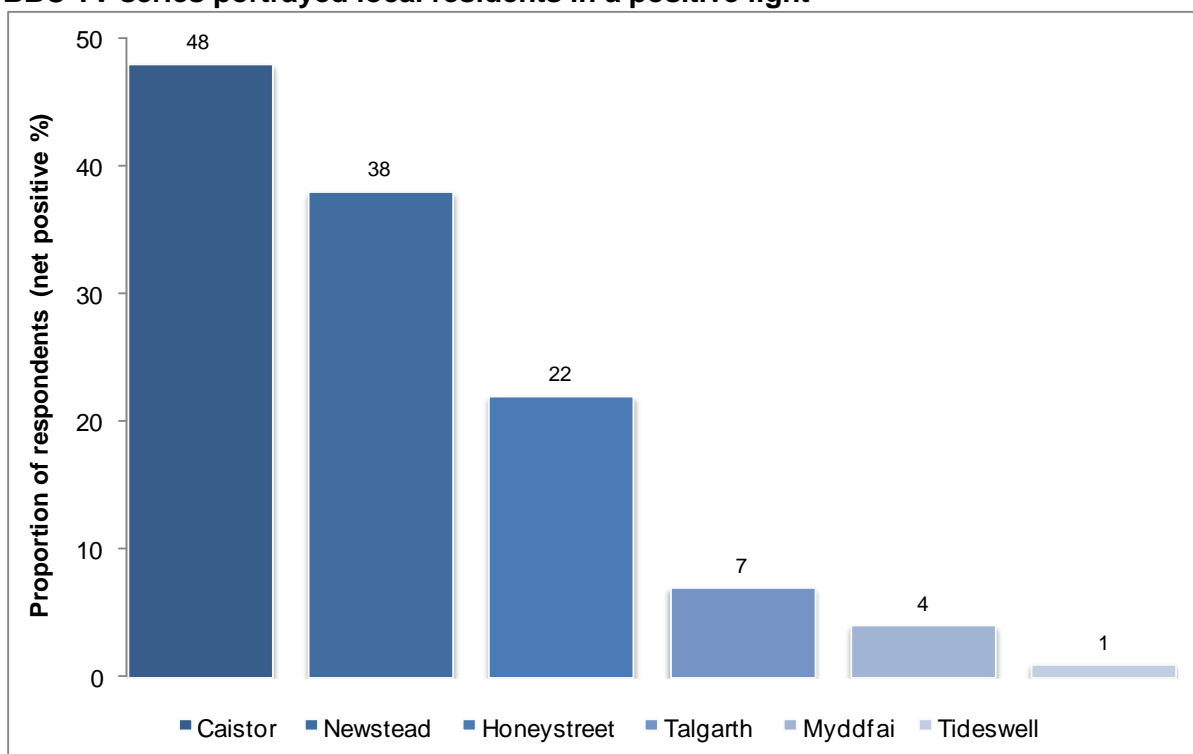
Figure 3.3: The proportion of respondents (net) by area who said the BBC TV series portrayed the area in a positive light



Respondents in Honeystreet, Talgarth, Caistor and Newstead were most positive. In terms of the portrayal of the local area, comparing those respondents who responded positively with those who responded in a negative manner revealed very healthy 'net'⁴ figures in the areas of +54, +47, + 44, +39 per cent respectively, as Figure 3.3 reveals. And, with the exception of Talgarth, the same villages achieved high scores in relation to the portrayal of local villagers: +48 per cent (Caistor); + 38 per cent (Newstead); + 22 per cent (Honeystreet); and + 7 per cent (Talgarth), as Figure 3.4 reveals.

⁴ A 'net' figure was calculated by subtracting the figure for negative responses from the one for positive responses. So, for example, in the case of Honeystreet, 66 per cent of respondents responded positively compared to 12 per cent who did the opposite, resulting in a 'net' score for the village of + 54 per cent.

Figure 3.4: The net proportion of respondents (net) by area who said the BBC TV series portrayed local residents in a positive light



In one village – Tideswell – the picture was very different and, significantly, in this village the number of respondents who felt that their area had been portrayed in a negatively light outnumbered those who felt the opposite, with its net score being - (minus) 19 per cent. Furthermore, the net score for the portrayal of local villagers was only + 1 per cent. It appears that these scores can be attributed to many residents' dissatisfaction with the portrayal of the village as an area in (terminal) decline:

"Tideswell is not a dying ghost town. Filming at 5am makes Marble Arch look deserted. If filmed at 9am the village would be packed"
(Villager, Residents' Survey)

"Many of us have been saddened and angered by the representation of a dying 'backland' village. What rubbish. More shops than many places or similar size. PO, bank, doctors, Chemists, Visiting Chiropodist and physiotherapists, Library, 2 fish and chip shops, 2 hairdressers, coop, village stove, bakery, and a fruit and veg shop which was never going to close as portrayed in the film. It responded within 2 large employers, small trading estate, Dairy (producing Tideswell made Ice Cream) thriving school sports facilities of many, many clubs and activities for young and old and of course a historical church. Is that a picture of a village that needs help. It certainly don't need to be taught how to garden."
(Villager, Residents' Survey)

"I strongly feel that this programme showed the village in the poorest of lights. It did not seem to me like the village I have grown up in and love. In fact it stated "Tideswell is a dying village" then to underscore this it showed shot, after shot, after shot, after shot, after shot, after shot of empty street!!! I half expected the music to be Ghost Town by the Specials. As it was it was the theme from

Monty Python! As I say this programme did not portray the Tideswell I know." (Villager, Residents' Survey)

Antipathy towards the 'decline' narrative that provided the 'hook' for the BBC TV series was also evident in other villages. For example, a resident in Caistor noted:

"As for the TV programme. I didn't think 'Caistor' was the worse one shown. But I thought it made Caistor look like a ghost town, with no one about or anything happening at all" (Villager, Residents' Survey)

One of the primary objectives of the second wave of scheme fieldwork undertaken by the study team in the Autumn of 2011 was to further⁵ explore what scheme activists thought about the BBC Television series and, in particular, the programme dedicated to their village. While on the whole, their response was favourable, they did highlight a number of concerns.

The most commonly cited was that programmes, in order to make 'good TV', did not present an entirely accurate account of what had happened in the villages: the view of one villager was typical of many: *"the TV programme used a lot of poetic licence? Made for TV and not necessarily as accurate as it could be? There are still shops for sale in Tideswell as well as houses?"*

There were a number of elements to villagers' concerns about the 'accuracy' of programmes. First, there was a concern that the BBC had placed too much emphasis on certain aspects of schemes to the detriment of others. For example, there was a concern in Talgarth that the important role of the Village Champion had been underplayed, while scheme participants in Tideswell were irritated that 'their' programme had focused on the Tideswell School of Food and 'Made in Tideswell.' In Barge Inn, a number of activists felt that 'their' programme had paid too much attention to one element of their scheme, Honeyfest:

"It was our project ... it (the TV programme) was the story of Honeyfest, not the story of the project."

In another village, Caistor, two other 'accuracy' issues were reported. First, a number of activists felt that the film on the village had paid too much attention to the Village Champion:

"I felt the programme gave too much focus on the Village Champion and not enough on the body of people on the committee who were working extremely hard voluntarily"

Second, a number were unhappy that one of the most important stages of the scheme - its early stages when *"a lot of people were involved"* - was not highlighted: *"it was a shame this was not depicted."* The same respondent attributed the BBC's decision to do this to its desire to create an 'entertaining' show: *"(it was) more of a show than passing on information"*.

A number of scheme activists also expressed their concern about the inclusion of 'false jeopardy' in programmes - as one villager in Tideswell noted: *"The TV film was pretty light weight and tried to promote tension where very little existed and by nature very narrow in its scope."* This was a particular concern in

⁵ Some Resident Survey respondents were scheme activists.

Tideswell where scheme members felt that the portrayal of the village as being “*on its knees*” and only sustainable if it was ‘rescued’ by Village SOS, as being “*a huge mistake*”.

In addition to angering many local residents who did not want Tideswell to be portrayed as a village in decline, this gave the impression that the School of Food was a very risky project that was likely to fail. Staff reported that many of the enquiries they received after the programme began with “*are you still open?*” Directors reported that the School of Food was on firm economic footings, and that the editorial of the TV programme was therefore misleading and inaccurate.

Other criticisms of the programmes included: irritation that in some episodes (important) residents had been almost entirely ‘written out’ of them; the prominent role of Sarah Beeny; the scheduling of programmes towards the end of the holiday season; and their ‘failure’ to (adequately) highlight Village SOS Active.

Before moving on, it is important to make one final point about the views of scheme activists on the TV Series: while many had concerns about the episode relating to their village, there was an overwhelming consensus amongst them that its overall impact has been positive as it has helped put their village “*on the map*” by showcasing its appeal to visitors. And a number of villages, including Tideswell and Talgarth, reported that visitor numbers increased significantly after the airing of ‘their’ programme.

As is explored elsewhere in this report, the publicity generated by being showcased on national television was an important feature of the business plans of many of the ‘filmed’ villages. It was also a feature of the one for West Wemyss. Thus, the unhappiness of scheme members there about the loss of its ‘filmed’ status can in part be attributed to the impact of this on its business plan:

“One of the things that was central to our Business Plan was the impact that BBC programme would have on our business ... the programme was going to put us on the map and we thought that people would watch the programme and then be inspired to visit the village.” (Scheme activist)

3.6.5 Views of BIG representatives about the TV Series

Most officers and Board Members we interviewed were happy with the series as a whole and its constituent programmes, and felt that “*overall, it was a success*” (Board member) and “*really good... showcasing really well the issues of rural life*” (Board member). However, respondents did articulate a number of concerns:

- the failure of the programmes to highlight the process by which villages were selected, as by not doing so the viewer, including prospective funders of social enterprise, such as representatives of banks, were unable to see how “*serious*” BIG and villagers were about social enterprise. As one Board member put it:

“The only thing that I was disappointed about was that I wish they (the BBC) had shown the journey villages had to go through to get money. This was not featured in the films and you didn’t see anything of the pitching process... or how villages were selected... I wanted the programmes to show how difficult it is to get money

out of us... I wanted them to show that we're not an easy touch... and that we didn't fund rubbish and we take our responsibilities really seriously... banks would see this and think that social enterprise can work and can be viable."

- the lack of visibility of BIG as a "brand" in early episodes. Although, the primary purpose of the BBC Series from BIG's perspective was to promote (rural) social enterprise and to highlight the 'plight' of rural communities, a number of respondents raised this as an issue:

"It (BIG branding) was almost non-existent in the first film... it was improved during the making of the programme... we're not a commercial provider... there was a change of personnel at the BBC... it was almost gratuitous ... it's not unique to VSOS ... there was another example yesterday ... there was a piece in the Telegraph ... about a project through the Peoples' Millions ... there was no mention of BIG." (Board member)

- the misrepresentation of the experiences and 'stories' of villages. For example, one respondent was unhappy about the failure of the Talgarth film to showcase the prominent role of the local Village Champion:

"You never really saw her (the local Village Champion) in the Talgarth episode. And I wish they (the BBC) had been more consistent with the treatment of Village Champions ... they (village champions) didn't come across consistently." (Board member)

- Sarah Beeny was too prominent within the Series. As one Board Member put it: *"it did feel like the Sarah Beeny show."*

3.6.6 The BBC Perspective on the Series

The BBC was "delighted" with the viewing figures for the Series, which were in line with its target of around 3 million viewers per episode. They were also delighted with the 80+ AI rating for each programme. As part of the AI process, AI viewers were invited to provide a short qualitative assessment of the programme they watched and some of these assessments, along with individual AI 'scores', are presented in the Appendix. Analysis of this data revealed that most viewers really enjoyed watching the Series and some were "inspired" and found it "inspirational" viewing:

"I really like this programme. It is inspirational watching all the people working together to achieve a goal. I admire their community spirit and their desire to win through."

"It was inspiring that people try to change the whole ethos of the village."

"Pretty good idea and quite inspiring."

"This is an excellent series that really inspires community."

One respondent noted that the programme had made her reflect on the plight of her village and noted that it needed "sorting out", although she did not think she was the person to do this:

"It made you think. Our village will lose its shop. It has lost the mobile library; has a rubbish village hall that cannot serve alcohol. So many people go. One end of the village will not speak to the

other end after a dispute about thirty years ago. I wish someone would sort our village!"

Despite being “inspired” by the Series, none of the AI panel members reported that the programme had inspired them to set up a rural enterprise in their village. However, this is perhaps not a surprise given the membership number – 250 – and the brevity of response required by participants.

3.6.7 Media Impact Assessment

In order to garner further insight into the broader impact of the Village SOS programme, an analysis was undertaken of written articles about it in the media. Thus, 553 media articles published on the series between Wednesday 10 August (the day of transmission of the first episode) and 6 September (the day before the final programme was transmitted) were analysed. These ‘cuts’, some of which are presented below, were provided via Sheffield Hallam University’s press office through the Durrant’s commercial media monitoring system.

The following parameters were used to frame this analysis:

- publisher name
- whether the coverage was local, national or specialist media
- whether the coverage was positive, negative or neutral
- if the ‘key messages’ of the Village SOS programme were repeated
- coverage type, i.e. TV Preview, news story, feature
- whether articles contained quotes and, if they did, who had provided them (i.e. a member of the local community, a representative of the Big Lottery Fund or the BBC 1 Presenter Sarah Beeny)
- which community was mentioned and whether the community was portrayed in a positive, negative or neutral way
- if the Big Lottery Fund was mentioned
- if the Village SOS website was mentioned
- publication/coverage date.

This analysis revealed the following:

- nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of all articles were published in local media sources, with 24 per cent being published in the national media, and 4 per cent in specialist media
- More than nine out of ten articles (95 per cent) were ‘positive’ with 3 per cent being ‘neutral’ and 1 per cent negative. In the very few articles that were not positive about the Series, the most common ‘gripe’ with it, which was highlighted in seven articles, was its misplaced focus on tackling middle class rather than working class problems. And some critics deemed the regeneration of villages as being less important than tackling the problems faced by working class urban neighbourhoods.

Other criticisms levelled at the programme, many of which were contained in articles that, on the whole, were positive, included:

- unhappiness about the contribution of Sarah Beeny. Three articles noted that she should have visited villages more often and argued that it was

inappropriate for her to present a community oriented programme given her background in profit-orientated property shows

- Some authors were critical of the inclusion of Caistor in the Village SOS Programme because they believed it to be a small town, not a village
- One author felt that there were too many English 'heritage' shows, like Village SOS, on television
- A couple of articles bemoaned the lack of Welsh accents in the Talgarth episode
- Key BIG messages were evident in two thirds (66 per cent) of all the cuts
- The 'cuts' took the following forms: TV previews (52 per cent); news stories (27 per cent); TV reviews (5 per cent); radio interviews (4 per cent); radio previews (3 per cent); other (2 per cent); radio news stories (2 per cent); TV programmes (2 per cent) and features (1 per cent)
- The articles contained 150 quotes. Some 66 (or 44 per cent) were given by representatives of BIG with a quarter being given by a member of the local community and 15 per cent being given by a Village champion. Sarah Beeny was quoted in 11 per cent of articles
- The Village SOS website was mentioned 39 times (7 per cent of cuts).

A specific community was mentioned in 264 of the 553 articles with references distributed as followed:

- Talgarth: 32 per cent
- Barge Inn: 22 per cent
- Caistor: 20 per cent
- Tideswell: 10 per cent
- Myddfai: 7 per cent
- Newstead: 5 per cent.

Figure 3.5: Extract from the Radio Times, Saturday 20 August 2011

WEDNESDAY 24 AUGUST

COUNTRYPHILE
Sarah Beeny visits the site of another rural restoration



Village SOS
8.00pm **BBC1**

PROPERTY Now here's a smashing, inspiring story, of how the good people of Caistor in Lincolnshire, under the tough guidance of their business mentor, Charlotte, turned a derelict chapel into a thriving café, library and heritage centre.

Charlotte, a one-time marketing manager for London Fashion Week, spends a year in Caistor, where the villagers have never seen anything quite like her. "I know my whirlwind, blitz approach will rub people up the wrong way," she says. And it does, as a villager takes umbrage and leaves the project with his treasured hoard of local history items.

But Charlotte's determination to bring cappuccinos to Caistor (villagers have to travel a shocking *nine miles* for frothy coffee before she arrives) galvanises the volunteers to return the heart, and the prosperity, to their village. You mark my words, by the end you'll have a tear in your eye. **AG**

The Alison Graham column: p45

Other issues to emerge from the analysis of the media cuts include:

- The riots that took place across some UK major cities in August were evidently at the forefront of several writers' minds. Some saw the project as an ideal tonic to the unrest while others thought its energies were misdirected. However, the majority of the articles that were critical of the project for this reason, liked the messages of community cohesion, empowering local people to improve their village and maintaining local traditions.
- A couple of articles noted that the underlying 'feel' and themes of the programmes were similar to those espoused by the 'Big Society' agenda.
- The financial value of the publicity generated by the coverage of the Village SOS Series – or the 'Advertising Value Equivalent'⁶ (or AVE) - amounts to a very sizeable, £1,293,777.

Figure 3.6: Extract from Heat, 20 August 2011



3.7. Village SOS Active

This section reviews the activities and impact of the various elements of Village SOS Active, which are:

- the Advice Line
- active Learning Events, including the National Conference
- the Active website

⁶ 'Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE)' is the most common way of monetising the impact of media coverage and has become very much the industry 'standard.' The AVE for the Village SOS Series was calculated by SHU's press team using the Durrants commercial media monitoring system. This figure should be treated as indicative of the scale of coverage rather than a precise value. Furthermore, it should also be noted that it goes marginally beyond the analysis period and does not take into account relative values of positive and negative coverage.

- written outputs.

3.7.1 Advice Line

A key element of Village SOS Active was (and is) the Advice Line. It was designed to be the

“single port of call for any question about setting up a community business in the UK” and to help aspiring social ‘entrepreneurs’ “find expert guidance for (their) journey from initial idea to fully fledged community enterprise.” It was envisaged that most callers would be prompted to contact the line after having watched an episode of Village SOS, as programmes showcased it. On calling the Advice Line, which is open 24 hours a day, callers’ initial enquiries are ‘logged.’ They are then contacted by an expert, who either answers their query or points them in the direction of a specialist who can. The Advice Line is administered by the Plunkett Foundation⁷.

The Advice Line did not receive the number of calls that BIG had hoped for when Village SOS was conceived: 71 calls were received in August; 265 in September; and 259 in October, with, in total, 1,159 calls being received by March 2012, as Table 3.1 reveals.

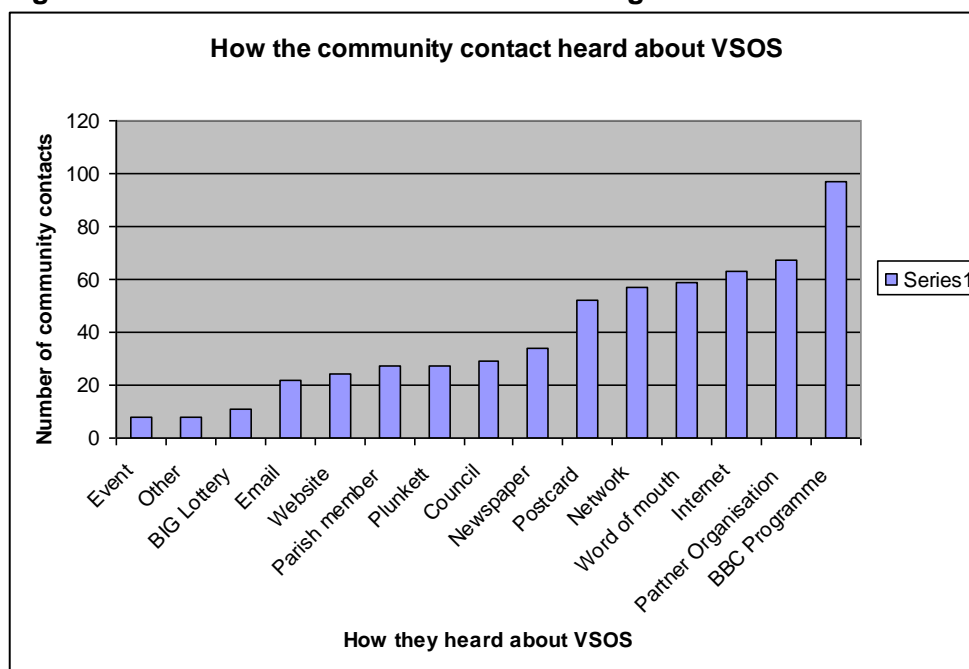
Table 3.1: Number of calls to the Advice Line

August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	TOTAL
71	266	259	156	157	151	30	70	1,159

Source: Plunkett Foundation

Only 10 per cent of callers who rang the Advice Line had been prompted to do so by watching an episode of Village SOS, as Figure 3.7 reveals.

Figure 3.7: How Advice Callers heard of Village SOS

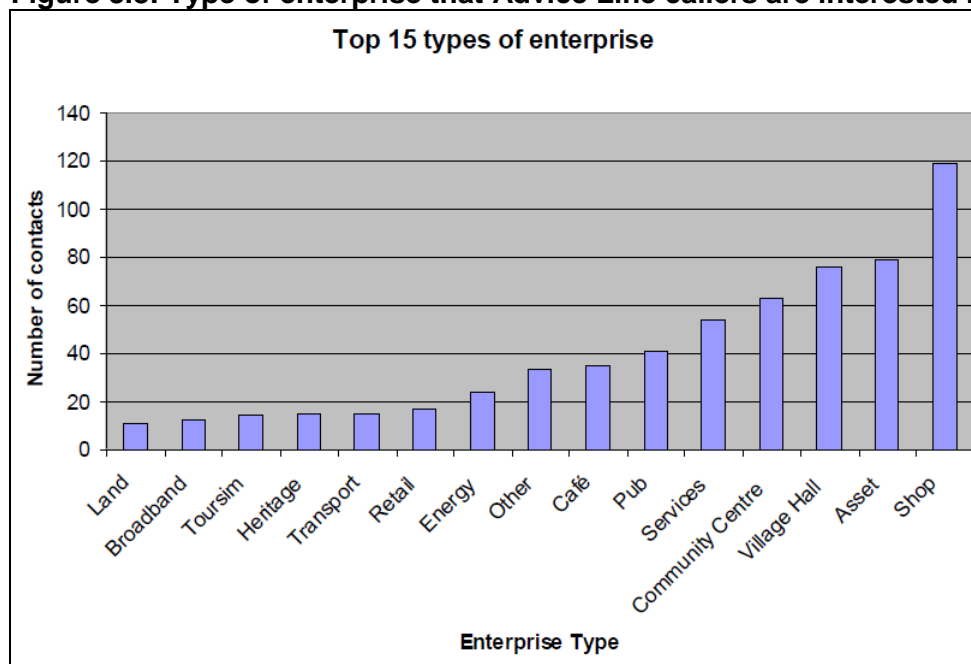


Source: Plunkett Foundation

⁷ These quotes are taken from the Advice Line webpage on the Village SOS website at: <http://www.villagesos.org.uk/get-involved/get-started/advice-line>

In terms of the types of enterprise that callers have been seeking advice on, shop, 'asset', village hall, community centre, services and pubs have been the most commonly cited, as Figure 3.8 reveals.

Figure 3.8: Type of enterprise that Advice Line callers are interested in



Source: Plunkett Foundation

Table 3.2 highlights at what stage callers were in terms of the social enterprise development process. As it reveals, most were at the beginning and were merely expressing an interest in establishing a community enterprise.

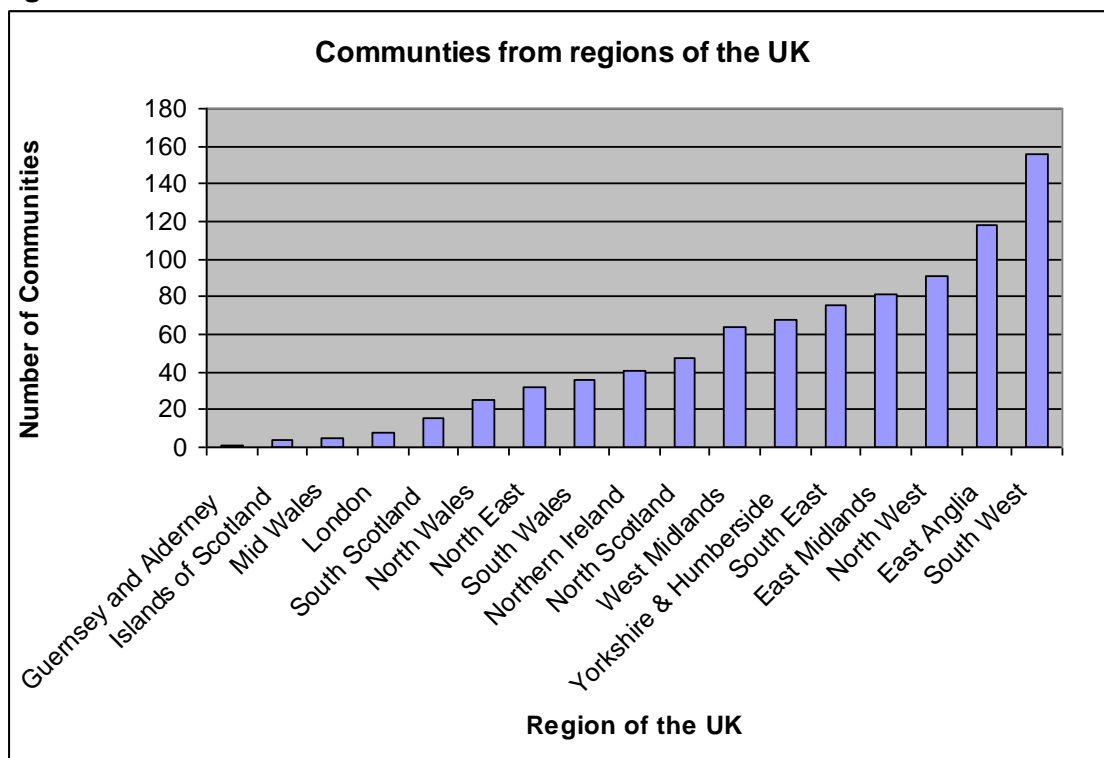
Table 3.2: Stage in the social enterprise development process of Advice Line Callers

	August	September	October	November	December	January	Grand Total
Interested in starting up a community Enterprise	19	118	133	30	3	4	307
Have gained community support	15	36	25	7	13	0	96
Need help with legal structure	12	39	21	4	20	1	97
Already enterprising	8	10	5	0	6	0	29

Source: Plunkett Foundation

In terms of the location of callers within the UK, the South West and East Anglia had the highest numbers, as Figure 3.9 reveals.

Figure 3.9: Location of Advice Line callers



Source: Plunkett Foundation

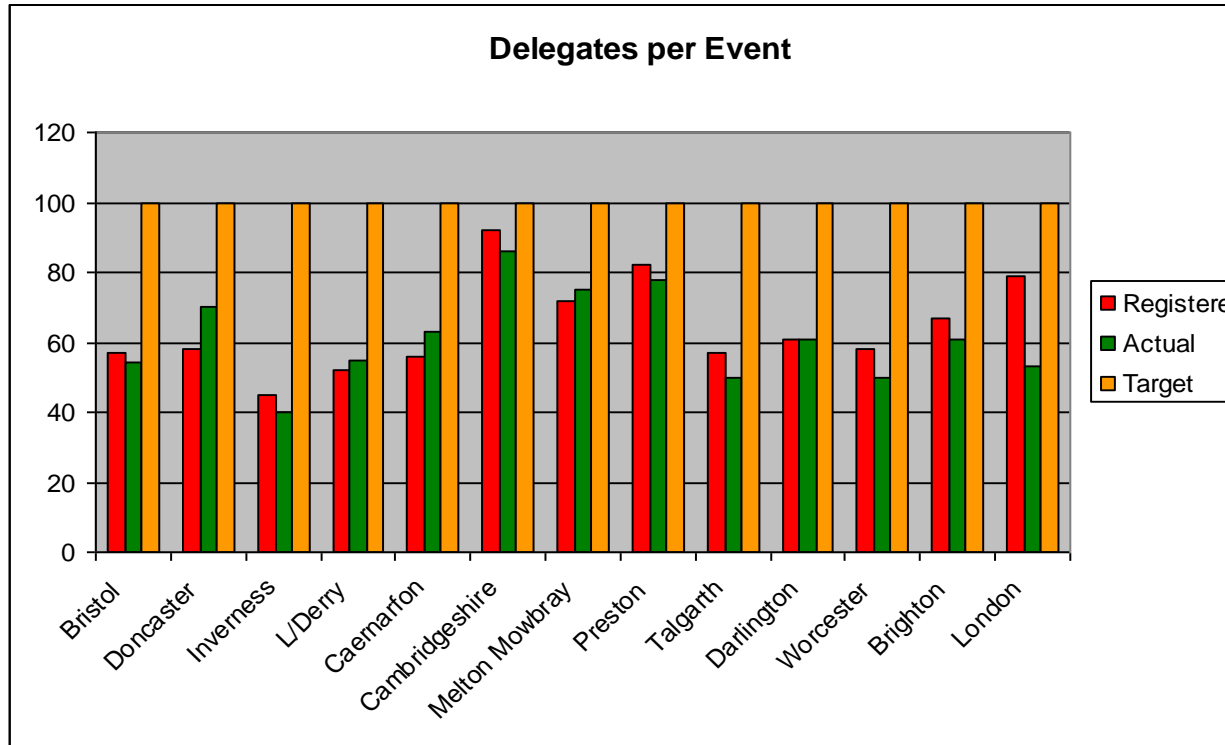
3.7.2 Active events

Roadshow Events

The Plunkett Foundation ran a series of 'Roadshow' Events across the country designed to promote rural social enterprise, with at least one event being held in every country/ region of the UK. The Roadshows were divided into two series: one taking place in the autumn 2011; and one in spring 2012. The first series, which was attended by 766 delegates, took place across the UK including Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (two events) and all English regions, over a 10 week period between 10 October and 16 December.

The number of delegates at each of these events is highlighted in Figure 3.10. As it reveals, the target figure of 100 delegates per event was not achieved in any of the 13 Roadshows, with the one in Northern Ireland having the lowest number of attendees.

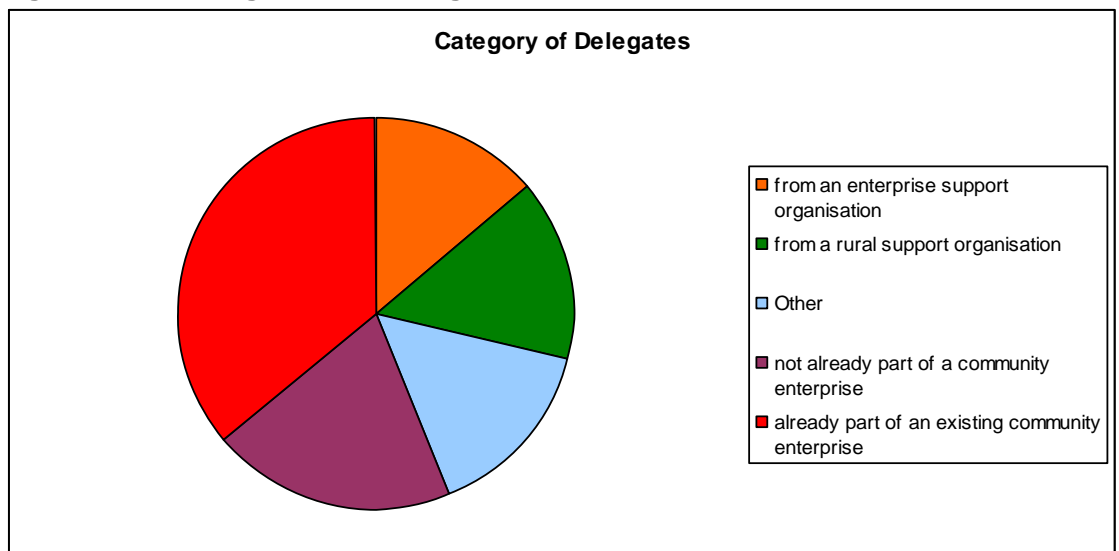
Figure 3.10: Number of attendees



Source: Plunkett Foundation

In terms of the background of attendees, more than a third were *'already part of an existing community group'*, with nearly a quarter reporting that they were *'not already part of a community group'*, as Figure 3.11 illustrates.

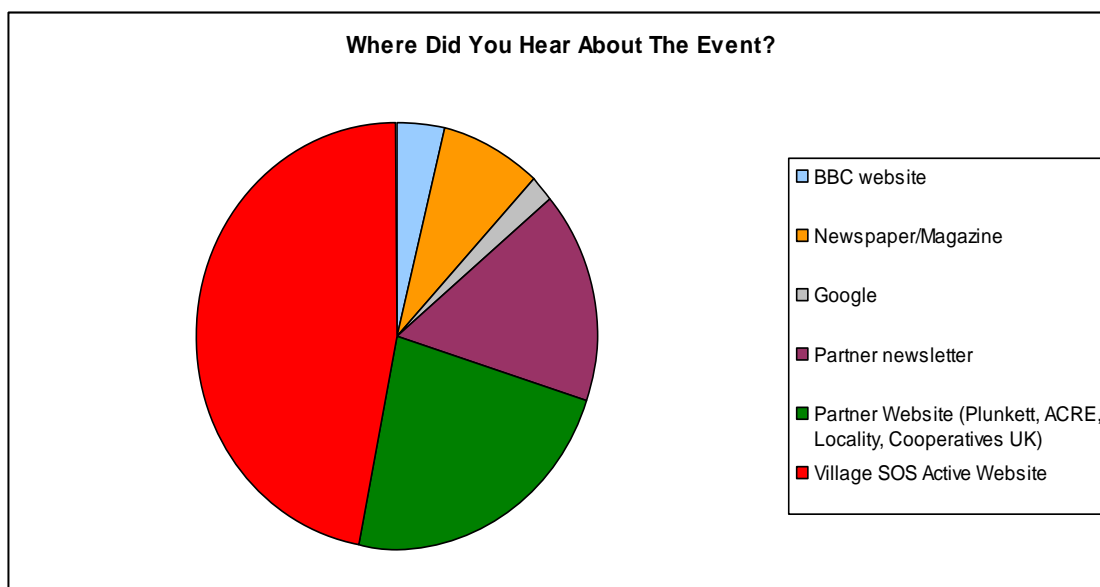
Figure 3.11: Background of delegates



Source: Plunkett Foundation

Delegates were also asked how they had heard about the events. Their response is provided in Figure 3.12. As it reveals, nearly half had found out through the Village SOS Active website.

Figure 3.12: How delegates found about the Roadshow Event they attended



Source: Plunkett Foundation

Feedback from delegates about the Roadshows was generally positive with the average delegate satisfaction score for the series as a whole being a very healthy 8.3 out of 10. Furthermore, 80% of delegates reported that attending a Roadshow event had resulted in them feeling more 'inspired', with 96% reporting that they felt better informed.

National Conference

The Plunkett Foundation also ran a Village SOS National Conference which took place in Birmingham on 27 February 2012 (<http://www.villagesos.org.uk/national-conference>). The event was attended by 219 delegates and 113 conference 'contributors' (i.e. speakers and workshop facilitators).

More than a third - 37 per cent - of delegates were from a rural community and were either about to start, or were already involved in, an existing community project. As anticipated, non-community representatives also attended, including support organisations (28 per cent), policy makers (5 per cent) and academics (4 per cent). Feedback garnered from attendees was, on the whole, positive. A key objective was for 80 per cent of delegates to feel more inspired and informed following the event. In practice, 96 per cent reported that they felt more informed and 91 per cent more inspired. In addition, another key goal was to ensure a minimum overall rating of 8 out of 10. The average score was 8.7.

3.7.3 Village SOS website and the creation of online communities

Siftgroups were commissioned by BIG to re-vamp the Village SOS website and, in doing so facilitate the creation of online communities. They created an interactive site (<http://www.villagesos.org.uk/>) which:

- allows online communities to share their experiences and to provide support to others looking create their own rural social experiences
- offers toolkits offering guidance and support for villages
- provides inter-village forums to encourage knowledge and skill-sharing across the UK

- provides information about the Village SOS programme
- provided information about (the round one) funding programme – The ‘*Village SOS Competition*’ programme - aimed at villages looking to establish social enterprises (applicants from villages with a population of less than 3,000 were able to apply for a development grant of between £10,000 and £30,000)
- allows useful organisations to be identified through a ‘search’ function
- is home to the Village SOS newsletter, *The Local*, which can be downloaded (at no cost) from the site.

The website had 3,008 members (as at 12 March 2012).

3.7.4 *Written material*

Team Publishing were commissioned by BIG to produce written material relating to the Village SOS Programme. This included providing material for the Village SOS website and producing *The Local*, in both paper and electronic form.

3.7.5 *Villages’ engagement with Village SOS Active*

When Village SOS Active was being designed, it had been envisaged that the ten funded villages would play an active role in it:

“The villages will play an active role in the (Learning) Campaign but they will get support to do so.... they need to be encouraged and prompted.”
(BIG Officer)

However, all ten of the villages reported that their involvement in Village SOS Active had been very limited. For eight of the ten this did not appear to be problematic. However, this was not the case for Myddfai and Tideswell where activists were unhappy about their lack of engagement with the campaign, and generally were dissatisfied with Village SOS Active.

Activists in Myddfai reported that they had not been involved in the ‘formal’ Village SOS campaign despite offering to contribute. However, the village had been contacted by nine organisations, including local community groups, development trusts and local authorities, who were eager to learn about its experiences. The village lead reported that he had either ‘hosted’ or visited all of these groups. Although he was happy to do so he reported that he may have to start charging for such activities in the future.

Several committee members felt that the (high) volume of requests for further information about the Myddfai scheme was a marker that the ‘reach’ of the Village SOS Active had been relatively limited, and there was a view that most local organisations were not aware of it. However, committee members did not see this as problematic as they felt that the most effective way for aspiring social enterprises to learn was “*straight from the horse’s mouth*”, though visiting existing social enterprises such as Myddfai.

For the directors and Village Champion of Taste Tideswell, their involvement in the Active Campaign was far lower than they were led to believe. From the outset of their project, the directors expressed a desire to share their experiences and expertise with regard to establishing, developing and running a rural social enterprise. They noted that their motivation for doing so was part altruism and part commercial: they wished to offer advice as a service.

Moreover, they felt that their learned experience of establishing a social enterprise in a rural context had been largely squandered. The Village Champion and the project lead have attended and presented at several of the Village SOS Roadshow events, and the former gave a keynote address at the Village SOS national conference, but otherwise their involvement has been very limited. And Tideswell has not been approached by other village groups.

The expectation of activists and the Village Champion in Tideswell was that BIG would involve them more, and that their experiences would be given greater prominence. Several Directors commented that BIG's Village SOS Active partners had taken the 'lion's share' of the resources, and that their personal experiences and skills had largely been ignored (as had those of the other community groups involved in the Village SOS Programme).

"It's been an anti-climax. The experiences here haven't been captured. We were promised lots by the BBC and BIG. There was a clear understanding that things would come from it, that when the (TV) programme finished there'd be a stream of interest coming our way. But there's been nothing."

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with exploring a number of 'process' issues concerned with the development and delivery of the Village SOS programme. The number of issues it has to address perfectly illuminates one of the key attributes of the programme: that is, it is multifaceted and highly complex, and very different from a 'normal' BIG funded grant programme. Moreover, many of the 'process' issues that BIG has had to address, such as the identification of commercially viable social enterprises and the selection of Village Champions, are issues that, to a large degree, are relatively new to it. Given this, and a very tight project timetable which provided BIG with relatively little room for manoeuvre, it is perhaps not surprising that on occasions 'issues' have arisen in relation to the development and delivery of the programme. How BIG might respond to these issues in the future, and the key lessons to emerge from this chapter for policy and practice, are addressed in the final chapter of this report.

SECTION THREE: ASSESSING THE 10 VILLAGE SOS SCHEMES

4. Developing Sustainable Village Enterprises

4.1. Introduction

Village SOS provides a basis for the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to understand different ways in which it could support villages and help enrich residents' lives and contribute to a rural revival. As we have discussed Village SOS is a complex programme in which a range of different forms of support (grant funding and village champions in particular, but also the effect of featuring in a television series) operate in different socio-economic and rural contexts, supporting a range of different types of rural enterprise to lead to different sets of outcomes.

While the subsequent chapters are concerned with the impact on the villages, either socially or economically, the focus here is on assessing the development of viable community enterprises. This section of the report therefore:

- provides a profile of the 10 schemes
- discusses their local socio-economic context
- outlines the organisational, legal and governance arrangements for the schemes
- assesses the impact of the Village champions
- and explores the potential viability of the enterprises.

4.2. Profile of the Schemes

The following provides a brief summary of the 10 schemes. A more detailed summary is provided in Annex 1. Each scheme received around £400,000, with four funded in England (Caistor, Honeystreet, Newstead and Tideswell), two funded in Scotland (West Wemyss and Lochinver), one in Northern Ireland (Ballygally) and three in Wales (Howey, Talgarth and Myddfai). What is evident from the following is the diversity of the projects supported and their very different local contexts – indeed this diversity was part of the rationale for choosing the six for the television programme.

4.2.1. Ballygally

Ballygally in Northern Ireland is a village on the North Antrim Coastal Route with approximately 550 dwellings. The scheme was built in the centre of the village on the site of a car park on the main road through Ballygally. The scheme consists of a two storey building of approximately 630 sq. m. comprising a social enterprise retail convenience store (leased to Spar to run) and Post Office on the ground floor and a community hall, meeting room and kitchen on the first floor. It is envisaged that the community hall will provide a much needed meeting space for village activities but more crucially will provide income to sustain the enterprise in the future. The shop is leased and provides a guaranteed income for the continued sustainability of the community hall.

4.2.2. Caistor

Caistor is a busy market town in Lincolnshire. The town has a vibrant community with many regenerated buildings. The VSOS scheme in Caistor has transformed an old chapel into a café, library, heritage space and a meeting room that doubles as an exhibition space. The building has a lease of 25 years from Lincolnshire County Council and opened in April 2011. The organisation is a Company Limited by Guarantee, with a Board of Directors, five of whom were drawn from the local community.

4.2.3. Honeystreet

The Barge Inn is situated in the small hamlet of Honeystreet in the Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire. As well as the pub itself, the business includes a small campsite. As its name suggests, it is alongside the Kennet and Avon Canal, and has traditionally provided for the canal's users and local residents of nearby villages. The Barge Inn Community Project (BICP) owns the lease for the Barge Inn pub and campsite and run the business as a social enterprise. The pub serves lunch-time and evening meals. It employs around 12 staff including a full-time bar manager and a full-time head chef. A number of community activities now take place in and around the pub, and more are planned for the future.

4.2.4. Howey

Ashfield Community Enterprise (ACE), a community land trust, situated just outside the mid Wales village of Howey has developed activities centred on a large tract of land containing a dwelling house, several ancillary buildings and horticultural installations. ACE focuses on producing and selling organic produce and craft products locally, providing opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged people and demonstrating energy conservation and other low carbon approaches to living.

4.2.5. Lochinver

Lochinver is a village on the west coast of Scotland in the District of Assynt, Sutherland, north west Scotland. It is a popular tourist destination in the summer months and functions as a fishing port, used mainly by Spanish and French fishing vessels. Lochinver Mission Community Project is run by the Assynt Community Association (ACA). The project involved the purchase and restoration of the existing Fisherman's Mission which closed in 2008. The building now provides a café, an 18-bed bunkhouse and an IT suite to create and access a local historical digital archive for the Assynt region. Eventually, the building will also include a marine centre visitor attraction (development is planned for Easter 2012). A key aim of the Mission is to remain open all year round for the benefit of the local community by operating a business model whereby surpluses generated in the busy summer tourist season are offset by possible deficits accrued through the winter period.

4.2.6. Myddfai

Myddfai is a small village of fewer than 100 residents situated in the Brecon Beacons National Park approximately four miles south of the town of Llandovery. The scheme comprises two main elements: a new village hall with café, shop, visitor centre and large hireable space; and the Myddfai Trading Company (MTC) through which local artisans sell their crafts and herbal products from the shop within the hall and online. MTC also sells a range of externally sourced herbal and cosmetic products bearing the Myddfai brand.

The objectives of the project are to provide a sustainable community hub for the local community in perpetuity, to promote Myddfai as a visitor destination and to catalyse the regeneration of the local economy. The origins of the scheme can be traced back several decades to the point at which the local community began to harbour aspirations for a new village hall as the temporary structure completed in 1952 began to age.

4.2.7. Newstead

Newstead is a former mining village in Nottinghamshire, roughly 10 miles north west of Nottingham. The village was dominated for almost 100 years by the Newstead Colliery which closed in 1987. Since then the site of the colliery, which lies on the edge of the village, has re-vegetated and become a haven for a diverse range of wildlife and a green space used by the local community. Local residents have fought off successive bids to use the site for land fill. The scheme, as described in the business plan (March 2010) comprises five key strands:

- the creation of a country park on the site of the former Newstead Colliery
- a commercial music festival (Headstock) to be held in September 2010.
- fishing lakes for use by a local angling charity and for commercial purposes
- a sustainable visitor centre and car park
- employment of a park ranger to oversee management and maintenance.

The project has stayed largely true to this vision. The only changes are that Headstock has now run twice, once in September 2010 and again in 2011, but is unlikely to be repeated in 2012. At the time of writing, not all elements of the park are complete as funding for the project has now been exhausted. The shell of the visitor centre is constructed but has not yet been fitted out, the fishing lakes are yet to be stocked with fish and funding for a Ranger is yet to be secured.

4.2.8. Talgarth

Talgarth is a small town in Powys with a population of around 1500 people. The town has reportedly been in decline since the 1960s when the railway station closed. Since then the town has suffered a number of further setbacks including the closure, in the mid-1990s, of the Mid Wales Hospital (a mental health unit) which had dominated the town since 1906 and employed 1500 people. The local economy grew up around the hospital which meant that in its heyday there were enough shops and facilities in Talgarth to support a town of almost twice the size. Once the hospital closed, many local businesses closed down including many shops, all but one of the town's pubs and the local Post Office.

The scheme, which opened on 1 August 2011, comprises two main elements:

- Talgarth Mill: a fully restored working water mill. Flour is milled daily in the winter by four trained Millers. Guided tours are offered throughout the week in summer and at weekends in winter. The Mill also includes a riverside walk which allows visitors to walk alongside a section of the mill stream. There is also a small shop on the premises where flour from the mill and other local produce can be bought.
- The Baker's Table: a café and bakery situated in a purpose built building adjoining the mill and overlooking the mill stream. It uses only locally

sourced food and the menu revolves around produce from the adjoining bakery. The Baker's Table is a Community Interest Community (CIC) and is run separately from the Mill.

4.2.9. Tideswell

Tideswell in Derbyshire is a picturesque village in the Peak District National Park, with a resident population of just under 1,900. It is economically prosperous and has a wide range of services and amenities. It acts as a small service centre for surrounding smaller settlements, and attracts tourists. *Taste Tideswell* is a social enterprise which aims to: boost the local food economy by supporting retailers and producers; encourage local expertise in growing, making, cooking, and selling good food; and 'brand' Tideswell as a village synonymous with good quality local food (www.tastetideswell.co.uk). At its heart is the *Tideswell School of Food*, a cookery training school aimed at leisure and corporate markets locally, regionally and nationally. It is housed in a refurbished unit on Tideswell's high street and also includes a nano-brewery, meeting facilities and a small kitchen and food preparation facility that can be used by local producers for a modest fee to develop and expand a new business.

4.2.10. West Wemyss

Like many small villages in coastal Fife, West Wemyss has suffered socio-economic decline in recent years, and until recently its population, which currently stands at 236, has been in decline. The Village SOS scheme is run by the West Wemyss Community Trust (WWCT). The centre piece of the scheme has been the refurbishment of a former public house to create a community hub, the West Wemyss Walk Inn, which operates as a standalone trading arm of WWCT. The Walk Inn comprises a bunkhouse, a flat for rent, a bistro and café, and a small shop selling essential items, predominantly for local residents. The other elements of the programme in the village are the construction of an eco-burial ground and allotment space, both of which are due to be completed.

4.2.11. Scheme Summary

The following summarises key features of each scheme

	Ballygally	Caistor	Honey-street	Howey	Lochinver	Newstead	Myddfai	Talgarth	Tideswell	West Wemyss
A place for local residents to hold meetings or events	X	X	X		X		X			X
Selling to other businesses				X			X	X	X	
Café, restaurant or pub	X	X	X		X		X	X		X
Shop or other retail outlets	X						X	X		X
Provision of services for local residents	X	X		X	X					
Visitor centre or tourist attraction		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Developing local produce				X			X			X
Training/learning opportunities		X	X	X		X			X	
Overnight accommodation					X	X				X
Community organisation existed prior to the VSOS funded project	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Community organisation formed around VSOS funded project								X		

What is evident from the table are the different rationales which underpin the schemes. Some, such as Caistor, focus on providing a local amenity (a café) which is primarily for local residents. Many combine features such as a village hall (Ballygally and Myddfai) with some form of trading activities. Others such as Myddfai, Talgarth, Tideswell and Newstead have a wider place-based rationale intended to develop an enterprise which has a reach far beyond the local area, whether through attracting visitors or in selling and marketing local produce, and it is through this that benefits accrue to the area.

4.3. Understanding Places and Local Context

The ten Village SOS schemes represent a reasonable cross-section of rural areas in the United Kingdom. The Big Lottery Fund required that they each had to have a population of less than 3,000. The exception worth highlighting here is Newstead which although a severely deprived village is adjacent to more prosperous settlements, and this tends to mask the extent of deprivation there:

- **age of residents:** the villages tend to have only slightly higher proportions of people aged over 65. The exceptions here are Howey (32 per cent) and Caistor (26 per cent) with significantly older populations. Reflecting this pattern, the villages have slightly smaller populations of under 16 year olds compared to the UK average (of just under 20 per cent). Exceptions to this include Howey (13 per cent), Lochinver (15 per cent) and West Wemyss (15 per cent). However, we are aware that some significant changes in the demographics of the local areas have taken place in the last 10 years. This was reported on in Ballygally (the proportion of over 65s has increased markedly) and may be occurring elsewhere.
- **housing:** owner occupation was the norm in all the villages with the exceptions of Lochinver (52.7 per cent owner occupation) and West Wemyss (38 per cent owner occupation) which both had significant amounts of social housing (25-30 per cent). Levels of second home ownership and holiday lets also varied between the villages, with higher levels reported in the Welsh villages and in Lochinver. What we did not explore through quantitative data, but which was reported in interviews, was that these places have not been static and have undergone some significant changes in the last 10-15 years, not always for the better and often involving rises in house prices which were beyond younger local residents.
- **deprivation:** England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales construct their respective indices of multiple deprivation on different bases. Cross-country comparison is not possible although we have allowed for comparison of the relative position of each country within each country. Analysis by IMD deciles reveals that these villages are far from being the most deprived places, although conversely none is in the most prosperous quintile in their country. The villages range from West Wemyss which is in the third most deprived decile in Scotland to Tideswell which is in the third least deprived decile in England. The area on which villages are often (but not always) deprived on IMD measures is access to services: Honeystreet, Lochinver, Myddfai and Talgarth are all in the most deprived deciles on their respective IMDs against this measure; conversely, Tideswell is in the second least deprived decile in terms of access to services.
- **Economic Activity:** the economic activity rate across the 10 schemes is relatively high with the exceptions of Howey and West Wemyss (both below 70 per cent). It is also of interest that levels of self employment vary considerably, from 8.5 per cent in West Wemyss to 30.1 per cent in Myddfai. Over 20 per cent of the working age population were claiming benefits in Howey and West Wemyss. Again, we should note that the figures for Newstead are skewed by the inclusion of nearby settlements which are considerably more prosperous.

With the exception of Ballygally and Honeystreet, there were significant levels in semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations (from a third to 40 per cent) in all of the villages.

- **Sectoral composition:** agriculture or fishing have long since stopped being the principal occupations in these areas. Nonetheless these sectors together comprise over 10 per cent of employment in Caistor, Howey, Lochinver, Talgarth and Myddfai, and it is notable that in Myddfai, agriculture accounts for over 20 per cent of local employment.

These data provide an overview of the contexts in which Village SOS schemes operate. We have not explored the principal economic functions of these places (for instance commuting settlements such as Tideswell), the extent to which they are remote (Lochinver), or the significance (and potential) of tourism. With the exceptions of Newstead and West Wemyss these are far from being the most deprived settlements in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless the local schemes were predicated on some form of village revival, whether economic or social.

4.4. Organisational Structures

It is not a key aim of the evaluation to assess the legal structures and governance of the different schemes. However, a brief overview of the different approaches does help clarify some key points.

Most schemes were found to have grown out of a pre-existing organisation, whether this be an unincorporated association or a company limited by guarantee. However, on applying for Village SOS funding, most organisations were also intending to revisit their legal and governance structures and in most cases to form new organisations to deliver Village SOS.

The typical model adopted across the 10 schemes was to form a company limited by guarantee which also had charitable status and a separate limited trading company which would be a wholly owned subsidiary of the company limited by guarantee. Typically trustees of the company limited by guarantee would be directors of the trading company. Any surpluses would either be reinvested by the trading company or returned to the company limited by guarantee.

There were however some notable examples to this standard model. The Ashfield/Howey scheme formed an Industrial Provident Society (as a Community Land Trust) issuing public ethical shares. Such shares are non-dividend bearing and any surpluses are reinvested in the organisation. Both Talgarth and the Barge Inn (Honeystreet) proposed using Village Trusts. This unincorporated form does not offer limited liability and was seen in both cases as providing the legal entity to redistribute any surpluses from the proposed schemes. In most schemes the legal contracting authority with the Big Lottery Fund was the company limited by guarantee, and it is this body which would own the asset funded by Village SOS and be responsible for ensuring that it continues to be used for its originally intended purpose. There are a couple of exceptions to this: in Ballygally part of the asset is leased to a third party (Spar Shops) for use as a village shop; and in the case of the Barge Inn, the lease of the asset is held by a private individual who leases this to the Barge Inn company limited by guarantee.

The case studies briefly explored the plans for redistributing any surpluses to constituent villages and residents. Plans here varied, and in part for legal reasons. The use of an IPS in Howey meant that surpluses would be retained by the society. In other cases most schemes were not proposing the redistribution of funding to local residents, but rather surpluses would be reinvested in the charitable purposes of the holding organisation, typically, to pump prime further and related community

enterprises. An exception here was the Barge Inn where there was discussion of funding for local projects, but it was unclear how precisely this would operate.

4.5. Role and Impact of the Village Champions

In the previous chapter of the report the process for selecting the Village Champions was assessed. The focus here is on the impact the Champions made to the delivery of the village enterprise.

The rationale for Village SOS was that the Village Champions would bring a wide range of business skills to bear, which the scheme would not otherwise have access to. The initial intention was that the Village Champions would move to the village for 12 months and that they would be paid £30,000 from the Village SOS project budget (paid for by the Big Lottery Fund). At the outset it was also intended that the Village Champion in the six televised schemes would form an important part of the narrative and feature strongly in the TV series.

4.5.1. Village Champion roles

Village Champions played different roles in the schemes, and this role evolved over time. A central focus at the outset was the development of the business plan for BIG funding. However, as discussed later, the use of these business plans varied. Moreover, the role of the Champion evolved with respect to relationships with the lead group or individual in the village, based on where the added value of the Champion might lie, but critically around inter-personal relationships between the key actors.

For the televised villages, the BBC production team also had an important role particularly when filming was occurring, with feedback provided on how the Champion and other roles were likely to appear on screen.

The findings from the research show that the Village Champions played three main roles:

- scheme manager: examples here include Caistor and Tideswell where the Champion had a lead responsibility for the development of the enterprise and oversaw most if not all key aspects of the enterprise;
- defined role (e.g. marketing, business planning, finance): in Honeystreet, Myddfai and Newstead a reasonably clear role was defined which used the Champion's expertise to address a clear skills gap;
- advisory role: in Ballygally and Talgarth, and to a lesser extent in Lochinver, the Champion played a less clearly defined advisory role to the project. In the case of Ballygally this did not require relocation to the village.

A key focus in many, but not all, of the schemes was the development of the full business plan for Big Lottery Fund support. It is evident from some of the business plans reviewed that a considerable amount of market research was undertaken, together with an understanding of reaching particular market segments and groups. Branding was a strong theme in the Tideswell business plan for example, but this is not something evident in others. In the case of Howey, not mentioned in the above list, the Champion's involvement largely finished with the completion of the business plan and a mutual decision was taken that the Champion's role was no longer needed. The Village Champion selected for West Wemyss never fully took up post and was not replaced.

Other roles became apparent during the course of the fieldwork, notably the role of project manager for a capital build project. This was not the case for all the schemes,

but was an activity which was often at the forefront of the minds of those developing the schemes. Another role involved liaison with stakeholders, such as other funders and local authorities. In both cases, with one or two exceptions, these were the areas in which the Village Champions did not bring specific skills. This resulted in some of the Champions being under deployed for periods of time.

4.5.2. Benefits of Village Champions

Most of the Village Leads reported that the Champions brought expertise in one or all of the following: marketing and PR, commercial awareness and business development, architecture and capital build, and business planning. These were identified as areas in which the village schemes identified that they needed help. The skills brought could also be quite focused, for instance around developing certain types of business such as cafes. A general assessment is that where the Village Champions worked well, they were able to challenge the schemes and to successfully advise on new directions. This was not simply around the specific business ideas the enterprises had, but in terms of thinking about markets and the importance of product development and placement.

The founding rationale for Village SOS was that the Village Champions would help 'break a mould' and through this develop viable rural enterprises. Our findings suggest that this has largely not occurred, although some but not all villages did gain some benefits. In five of the villages a substantive contribution was made by the Village Champion: plans were typically more ambitious and better thought through than they would have been or project delivery had been strengthened. It is too soon to assess whether this created viable businesses.

4.5.3. Challenges of Village Champions

The model of using Village Champions to support the ten schemes had at best mixed success. In two schemes the Champion left early, in others their role remained unclear, and in some relations between the Champion and scheme leads was poor. A range of factors seem to explain this, including:

- **role was not clarified at the outset of the engagement.** As we reflect elsewhere the 'match making' process between the villages and champions was to some extent contrived and some groups felt pressure to agree to one of the candidates as the means to unlock the capital grant funding.
- **skills match and mismatch.** Although in some cases skills gaps were addressed, this was not the case throughout and with hindsight Village Leads perceived that they had not got as much as expected from the Champion. Frequently cited examples here were the need to understand the context of social enterprise and in particular the importance for the schemes of balancing social and economic returns.
- **soft skills, managing conflict and community involvement.** Working in rural communities to develop social enterprise was new to all of the Champions. Furthermore legal and political contexts for social enterprise differ between the four nations of the UK, and for predominantly English Champions working in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, this was cited as a challenge. The timeframe of Village SOS also meant that there was insufficient time to develop an understanding of local context. It was noted that a role of Village Champions was to challenge existing ideas and understandably this sometimes meant conflict: Champions and scheme leads varied in their abilities to manage conflict.
- **capital build or business development?** The needs of many of the schemes were quite immediate and their need was more for a project manager to lead a

capital project (on behalf of a team of volunteers) with a separate requirement to develop the business. These roles were often conflated and too much was asked of the Village Champions.

The overall impact of the Champions is at best mixed. It is also too soon to say what their long term impact will be given that the viability of most of the enterprises will not be proven until the long term. A more contentious point raised in some of the villages was that the skills of the Champions were not good enough.

Lessons to be drawn

The role of the Village Champions was to a large extent contrived for the purposes of making a television programme. It is unlikely that it would be repeated again in the same format. However, it is evident that there are skills and expertise needs which rural and urban areas may lack in developing some form of social enterprise. As such the provision of expert support is something the Big Lottery Fund may wish to consider in its future programmes. Lessons to note include:

- **brokerage:** as highlighted in the previous section, the process of matching villages and champions could have been improved. This would have required a larger pool of possible champions from which to draw and the development of a relationship at a slower pace and without the immediate requirement to develop a business plan for a funding application.
- **range of roles:** throughout this report and other research on social enterprise it is evident that there are often gaps in expertise which need to be addressed. External support can play a role here. How this is delivered is another matter, and may range from a more hands-on 'champion' as in Village SOS, to looser more task and skill specific requirements (such as for finance or business planning), through to relationships which are longer term but involve coaching and mentoring (either to an individual or group).
- **management of relationships:** the lesson here is as much about expectations and the clear communication of these between the scheme and person providing the support.
- **support locally or from afar:** whilst it perhaps was an integral part of the television programme for someone from a city to reside in a rural community, many of the schemes reflected that support could have been provided from the locality or at least from within the same nation. This may have helped overcome some of the other barriers.

4.6. Web 2.0 Activity

Throughout the evaluation we have explored the use of Web 2.0 (mainly Facebook, Twitter and their own websites) by each of the schemes. Trends in Web 2.0 activities across the ten schemes have varied over the course of the last twelve months. In the early stages of the evaluation several schemes emerged as 'front runners' in terms of their use of Web 2.0 to promote their project, rally volunteers or keep the public updated. Tideswell, Myddfai and Honeystreet are probably the best examples of this. However, as the launch of the television series approached, all six featured schemes started to step up their Web 2.0 activity in order to publicise the series. As a result, there was a clear peak in Web 2.0 activity around the time of the TV series.

Following the airing of the television series a general decline in use ensued, with a few exceptions such as Tideswell School of Food and Myddfai, both of which were already trading by that point. Conversely, activity on Newstead's Headstock Facebook and Twitter sites grew exponentially at this time in the build-up to the festival and their Facebook page rapidly became the most 'popular' site peaking at 2,421 members. However, they began to lose members once the immediate

aftermath of Headstock had passed. There was also a notable, but not unexpected, decline in activity over the winter months amongst schemes that feature a seasonal visitor attraction.

As the hype surrounding the television series began to subside and attention turned to the day to day running of the enterprises, the ten schemes began to shift into two clear camps in terms of their use of Web 2.0; those who embraced it as a core element of their marketing strategy, and those who scaled back or abandoned it altogether. Perhaps unsurprisingly those accelerating their Web 2.0 activities tend to be the more commercial schemes that use a combination of Facebook, Twitter and to a much lesser extent, their own websites for promotional purposes. Talgarth, Tideswell and Myddfai are focussing their efforts on promoting their attractions and products and Caistor mainly use it to promote events at The Arts and Heritage Centre. Myddfai has always made use of web 2.0 quite extensively but more recently they seem to have consolidated their activities, focussing on Twitter (posting daily tweets) and reducing their Facebook activity. Schemes winding down their Web 2.0 activity tend to be those which predominantly serve their local community, such as Ballygally and Newstead, for example or those who never really embraced Web 2.0, such as Lochinver or Howey.

In terms of instruments, as of March 2012, Twitter followed by Facebook are the most popular mechanisms used by the schemes with website content remaining more static and simply providing basic information such as opening times, directions and history. One possible explanation for this preference for Twitter is that it is not only the fastest growing social media tool but is also quick and easy to update, requiring only short statements.

There is a sense that the schemes that invest the most time in maintaining their Web 2.0 fora reap the rewards in terms of popularity (as measured by followers, likes/members). As of March 2012 Tideswell operates the most active and popular Twitter accounts by a considerable margin. The Taste Tideswell Twitter account (@TasteTideswell) currently has 957 followers and the Tideswell Food School (@tideswellfood) has 1131. Myddfai operates the second most active and popular Twitter account with 252 followers followed closely by Talgarth with 247. As previously noted, Facebook use is generally in decline with the exception of Talgarth who have a very active account which they use to publicise events and share news from the Mill. They also receive a lot of feedback from customers this way and currently 686 people 'like' their page. Caistor's site is used in a similar way and 392 people like it. Myddfai also have a fairly active Facebook page but posts tend to mirror the content of their Tweets. 374 people like the Myddfai page.

4.7. Viability of the Enterprises

4.7.1. Original Intentions: submitted business plans

Many of the schemes only began trading in Summer 2011 and do not yet have a full year's set of accounts. Each scheme was required to submit a very detailed business plan as part of the stage 2 application for Village SOS, with many having support from the Village Champion to do this. What was striking about the business plans is:

- large range of annual income forecasts, from £27,000 in Ballygally through to £577,000 for the Barge Inn. The average income was just under £250 thousand
- in year three of the business, profit forecasts ranged from: £1,550 in Ballygally through to £153,000 for the Barge Inn and £115,000 thousand for Newstead.

Each business plan presented cautious and optimistic forecasts and risk analysis and sensitivity analysis were undertaken. The business plans largely followed a structure set by the Big Lottery Fund.

Some of the business plans had relatively high levels of sophistication, with detailed market segmentation undertaken (for instance using Mosaic categories) with brands being developed in relation to this market assessment. It was also striking that many, but not all, of the schemes used the opportunity provided by their development grants to visit other similar enterprises. An example of this is Lochinver where the scheme leads visited other similar visitor attractions and drew lessons from what had made them successful. Nonetheless developing new businesses is not without risks and all business plans explored risks and presented risk mitigation strategies.

What is perhaps striking about the process of business plan development, and the timescales for the capital projects to be completed within 12 months, is that there were limited opportunities to undertake market research and pilot marketing prior to committing resources to a particular strategy. This is a possible weakness and clearly reflects some of the constraints of the programme.

4.7.2. First steps: progress after six months

Six months following the completion (for the most part) of the schemes and draw down of the final funding from BIG, some initial assessments can be drawn:

- **forecasts were very optimistic in some of the schemes.** The challenge will be managing the businesses during a phase when cash flow is very tight and the business is trying to find a more sustainable position.
- **profit margins or levels of surpluses are much lower than anticipated** in many of the case studies. Unsurprisingly these are often marginal businesses with the trading operations not generating the returns originally anticipated. However, it is too early to make a full judgement.
- **schemes under most pressure** are either seeking to reduce operating costs (mainly staffing) or to attract additional grant funding to develop additional businesses.
- another model for sustainability appears to be to **rely on volunteer support**, which is perhaps less risky in terms of cash flow, but perhaps misses intentions for more commercially self-sustaining approaches to be at the heart of Village SOS.

4.7.3. Looking ahead: what next?

As with start-up commercial enterprises one of the main challenges is around cash flow, particularly in the short to medium term. These organisations face additional challenges, they are setting up in areas where purely-market based activities have withdrawn, access to further capital and credit is difficult either due to restrictive supply or because of risk aversion on the part of community based organisations, and more broadly, market opportunities are more curtailed in areas where average incomes are typically low, local customers dispersed, and routes to wider markets relatively long.

On the positive side, as we explore in the following chapter, a strength of the enterprises is the level of volunteer commitment to their survival. Many could continue on relatively low levels of staffing. However, this often will require a core of individuals to play wide ranging roles and to provide a high and perhaps unsustainable level of time to the organisations. Developing approaches to

continually engage local residents and to expand volunteering into key organisational roles appears to be a central challenge for the viability of the schemes.

Perhaps the riskiest ventures are those with highest levels of staff costs, although to a large extent these are potentially the ones with the greatest economic benefits (notably Tideswell but also the Barge Inn). A starker lesson can be drawn from Newstead where its staging of a festival failed to gain the surpluses originally intended and needed to be subsidised from other parts of the activity and from trustees. With hindsight a more focused development would have been to develop the country park and a smaller visitor centre with a longer term plan to develop other revenue streams, including fee paying events such as festivals.

4.8. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from this section:

- the ten Village SOS schemes were very diverse in terms of their business models, although they broadly were seeking similar legal and governance structures.
- the schemes operate in very different socio-economic and rural contexts. Only two (West Wemyss and Newstead) were in what would be termed deprived areas. Other schemes, notably Lochinver, are remote and face many of the barriers of peripheral rural areas. The data available suggests that there has been considerable change in the villages over the last ten years, although these did vary. In-migration and rising house prices were seen as threats to sustainability in some villages.
- Village Champions were found to play a wide range of roles, from project manager, to mentor to scheme lead. The village champion element of Village SOS has at best had mixed success. There are lessons here for the future around role identification and the development of relationships.
- Web 2.0 (mainly Twitter and Facebook, together with project websites) was used to varying extents across the schemes and largely reflected the business models they had adopted. Those which used it more extensively were trying to attract clients from further afield and in particular Web 2.0 was tied to branding and customer engagement. Activity around Web 2.0 declined after the airing of the television series.
- it is too soon to assess the long term viability of the funded schemes. Nonetheless, there are early indications that some have faced considerable barriers and that their original expectations will not be realised. Nearly every scheme was seeking to reduce costs and two were becoming far more reliant on volunteer time. It is not inconceivable that some will either face closure in the next 12 months or become almost entirely volunteer led endeavours.

These findings may appear critical and downbeat. They should also be understood in context - many of the rural areas in which these schemes operate do not have vibrant and growing businesses in the private sector. Moreover, most of the enterprises are relatively small and their impact needs to be understood in this light.

However, some of the schemes are likely to survive and flourish. Their ambitions were perhaps more modest, their business plans more conservative around growth or they were operating in an environment where in recent memory there had been a viable business (e.g. a pub, a shop, visitor accommodation).

5. Community Engagement

5.1. Introduction

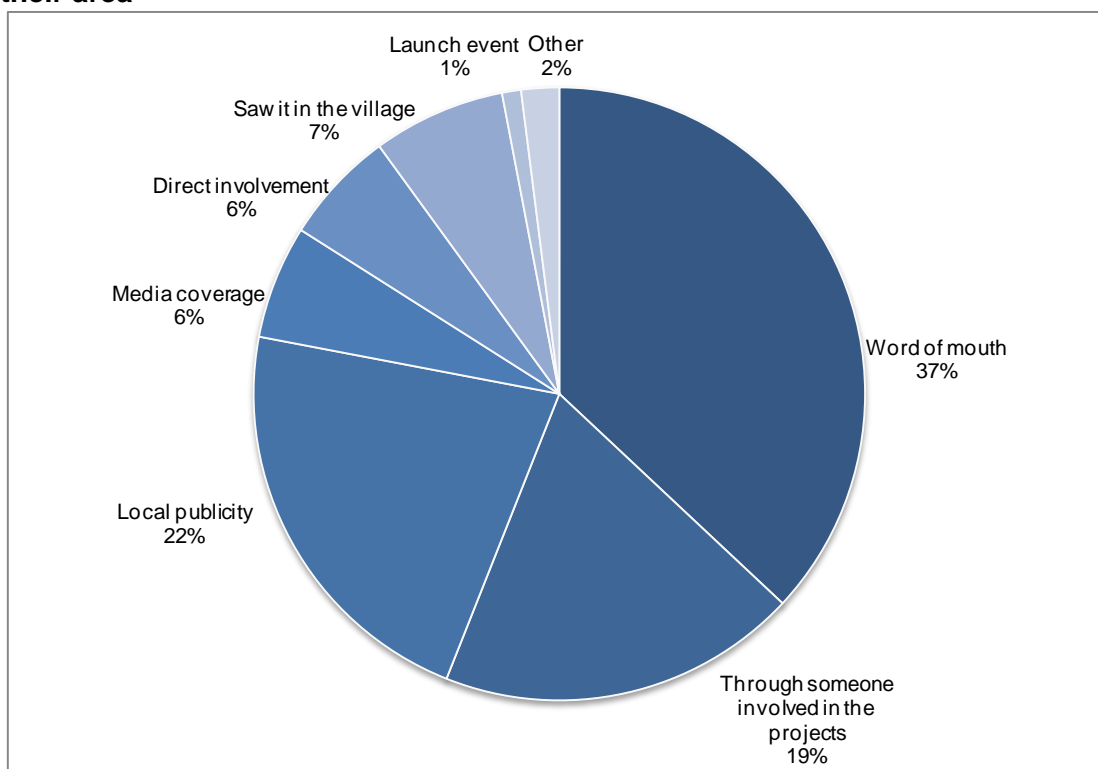
This chapter is concerned with exploring community engagement in the ten funded Village SOS villages. Drawing extensively from data garnered from the resident survey, it maps both current intentions for and perceptions of likely future involvement. It is divided into the following sections.

- awareness of the programme amongst local residents
- involvement in the Village SOS project to date. This section examines the level of engagement and how residents have been involved. It also identifies those variables that are statistically associated with participation.
- future involvement in the Village SOS project. This section is concerned with identifying the likelihood of respondents being involved in the future and exploring their views on the likely levels of community participation in their villages. Again, those variables that are statistically associated with participation are identified.
- conclusion. This section identifies the key findings to emerge from the chapter.

5.2. Awareness of the Village SOS Project

The resident survey asked respondents whether they were aware of the Village SOS project in their area prior to receiving the questionnaire. More than nine out of ten – 94 per cent – replied in the affirmative. They had first become aware of the project in a variety of ways but the most frequently identified source was word of mouth (37 per cent) followed by local publicity (22 per cent) and by talking to someone directly involved with the project (19 per cent). The full range of responses is outlined in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: How respondents first became aware of the Village SOS project in their area



Base: 1,173

5.3. Involvement in the Village SOS Project to Date

Respondents were asked whether they had been involved with the Village SOS project in their area and if so, in what ways. Overall, 51 per cent of respondents said they had had some form of involvement with the Village SOS project in their area. Involvement was highest in Lochinver (77 per cent), Myddfai (73 per cent) and Ballygally (71 per cent) and lowest in Newstead (25 per cent) and Howey (28 per cent), as Table 5.1 reveals.

Table 5.1: Type of involvement in the project so far by village; percentage of respondents within each village

	%							No involvement
	Customer	Volunteer	Consulted about the project	Committee members	Supplier	Employee		
Lochinver	70	6	5	2	4	2	23	
Ballygally	50	5	15	9	1	0	29	
Caistor	46	6	2	4	1	1	45	
Honeystreet	36	4	5	2	1	1	57	
Howey	14	6	5	3	1	0	72	
Myddfai	40	39	12	10	15	1	27	
Newstead	11	11	11	5	1	2	75	
Talgarth	32	14	7	1	4	3	49	
Tideswell	25	5	10	2	1	1	62	
West Wemyss	40	8	3	5	3	0	47	
Total	37	11	8	4	3	1	49	

Base: 1,292

As highlighted in Figure 5.2, by far the most frequently identified form of involvement was as a customer or service user of the project (37 per cent). More than one in ten – 11 per cent - respondents reported that they had been involved as a volunteer although the survey does not shed light on what form this took – this issue is addressed in the next chapter.

The volunteering rate found in funded schemes is very impressive. And recent research in the field suggests that the majority of volunteering (by number of hours volunteered) is undertaken by a relatively small proportion of society: the so called ‘civic core’ (Mohan and Bulloch, 2012).

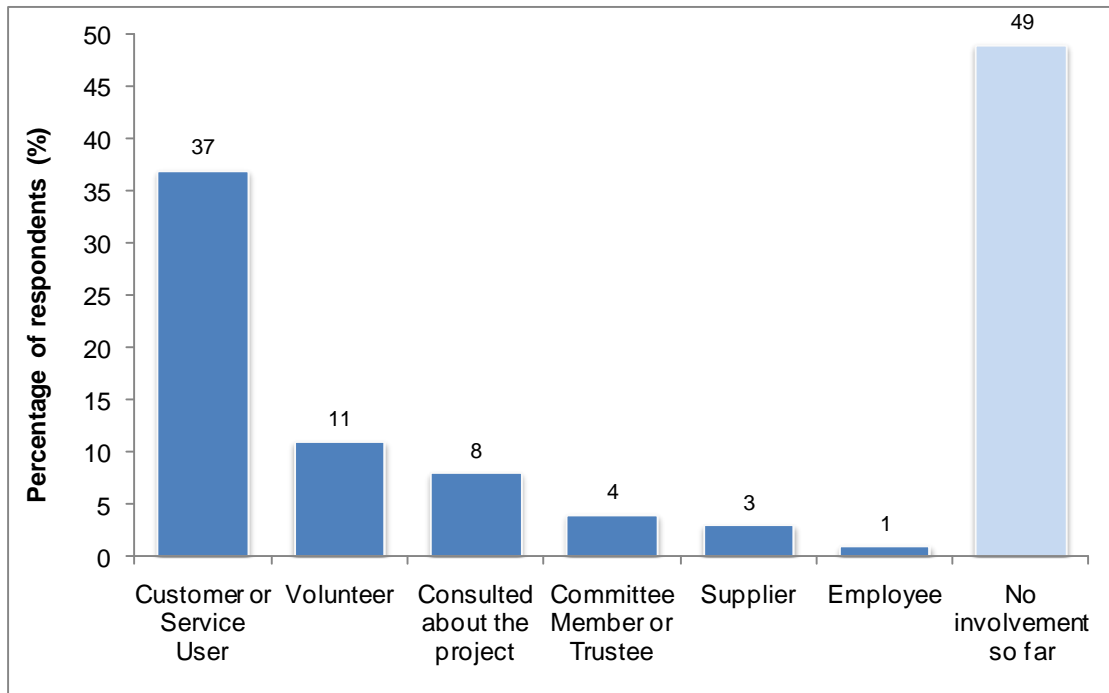
Some eight per cent of respondents reported that they had been consulted about the development of the project. Although it is important not to place too much emphasis on the significance of this finding, as it appears that it is principally a result of ambiguities associated with the meaning of the term ‘consulted’ amongst respondents, it is undoubtedly the case that some in all ten of the funded villages felt that they had not been adequately consulted. Residents in West Wemyss were most likely to feel this way and only two out of the 81 residents (or three per cent) there who had taken part in the resident survey felt that they had been consulted, as Table 5.1 illustrates. The view of one villager was typical of many:

“Once the funding was awarded there was an air of secrecy with regards to how the project was progressing. Only on the opening night of the hub were the locals informed that there would be no public bar and plans for a shop were on the back burner.” (Villager, Resident Survey)

The apparent initial failure of the Village SOS scheme in West Wemyss to communicate with, and to involve, the broader local population was acknowledged by a volunteer there:

“Communication from the committee could have been better and also I don't think anyone in the village knows who is running any decision making process.” (Volunteer, Residents' Survey)

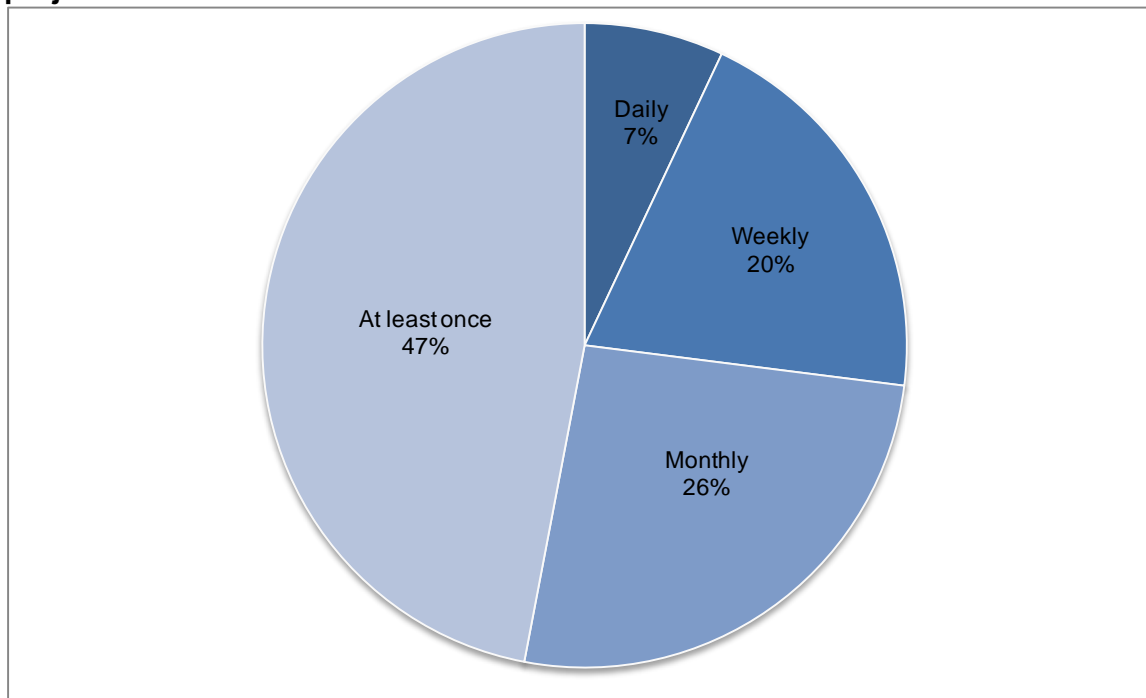
Figure 5.2. How respondents had been involved with the Village SOS project in their area



Base: 1,290

Respondents who had been involved in the project in their area were also asked how often they had been involved with their responses provided in Figure 5.3. As the figure reveals, seven per cent said they had been involved on a daily basis compared to 20 per cent who said their involvement was on a weekly basis and 26 per cent whose involvement was on a monthly basis. About half (47 per cent) of these respondents said their involvement had been less frequent than monthly but that they had been involved with the project at least once.

Figure 5.3: Frequency of respondents' involvement with the Village SOS project in their area



Base: 601

5.3.1. Understanding and exploring involvement

Two statistical techniques – Pearson Chi-square and the Cramer V statistic⁸ - were used to identify those factors that were associated with involvement with the Village SOS Programme. The following variables were found to be statistically associated with participation.

- **age.** Respondents most likely to have been involved were in the 35-49 (59 per cent) and 50-64 age (53 per cent) categories. By comparison respondents in the under 35 (37 per cent) and over 65 (47 per cent) categories were less likely to have been involved.
- **employment status.** Respondents who were in paid work were more likely to have been involved (56 per cent) than respondents that not in paid work⁸ (47 per cent).
- **scheme activities.** Several types of activity were *positively* associated with involvement. Respondents were *more likely* to have been involved with the scheme if it:
 - 5.1. provided **a place for local people to hold meetings or events** (62 per cent)
 - 5.2. has a **café, restaurant or pub** (60 per cent)
 - 5.3. has a **shop or other retail outlets** (62 per cent).

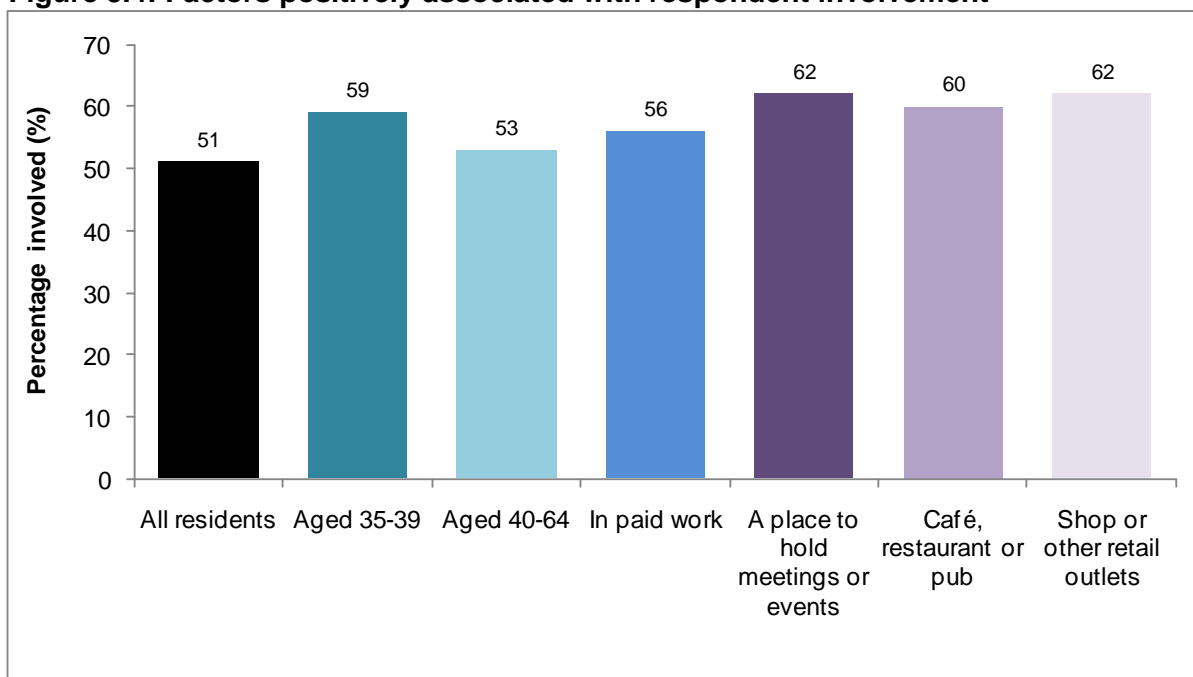
In addition, several types of activity were *negatively* associated with involvement. Respondents were *less likely* to have been involved with the scheme if it:

- involved **selling to other businesses** (48 per cent)
- involved **developing and promoting local produce** (48 per cent)
- provided **training or learning opportunities** (38 per cent).

The findings are summarised in Figure 5.4, which identifies all of the factors with a *positive association* with respondent involvement in Village SOS schemes.

⁸ The 'not in paid work' category includes residents who were out of work but economically active (e.g. on Jobseekers Allowance or in looking for work) and residents who were economically inactive (e.g. retired, looking after family/home)

Figure 5.4: Factors positively associated with respondent involvement



Length of residence did not emerge as being significantly associated with participation. This is perhaps surprising. This is because a frequently cited narrative by villagers in many of the villages was that Village SOS programmes had been ‘hijacked’ by ‘incomers’, with this narrative being particularly prevalent in Tideswell, West Wemyss, Myddfai and Talgarth.

In Tideswell, there was resentment amongst some ‘local’ residents that the project had been driven (and steered) by a ‘*bunch of blow-ins*’, who were characterised as being interested in serving their own interests, particularly around benefiting their own tourist and retail businesses. A number of ‘locals’ believed that the project team were benefiting financially (directly) from the local Village SOS programme and were critical that it did not meet ‘local’ (i.e. their) needs. However, it must be stressed that this was a perception and there was no evidence of any such direct financial gain.

In both Talgarth and Myddfai, some residents were unhappy that the local scheme was dominated by retired professionals from England:

"They are all outsiders working there and as far as I am concerned I am not interested." (Talgarth Villager, Resident Survey)

"The project has undoubtedly brought more 'life' to the village. Unfortunately, there is still a 'them' and 'us' attitude between people born in the area and people who have moved in, largely from England." (Myddfai Villager, Resident Survey)

In Myddfai, the ‘incomer-local’ issue was not as clear-cut as in Talgarth as the Village SOS scheme there, which was driven (to a large extent) on a day to day basis by three English residents, was overseen by a board comprising almost entirely ‘indigenous’ Welsh residents. However, the situation in the villages was similar in one respect: in both villages another important issue - class - added another layer of complexity to the ‘incomer-local’ issue. In both areas, tensions between the two communities appeared to be driven in part by class with educated, middle class ‘gatekeepers’ of the project being reluctant to let local (working class) residents contribute to it.

"The volunteering process was a little "closed shop" and is perceived as benefiting the few rather than the many." (Talgarth Villager, Resident Survey)

"It feels very much as though the people already involved in the Mill project are a rather exclusive 'club' and do not welcome others." (Talgarth Villager, Resident Survey)

Of all the ten funded villagers, the 'incomer-local' issue was most marked in West Wemyss, where Scheme activists reported that the 'local' (predominantly long standing) population had been reluctant to engage with Village SOS:

"I knocked on people's doors in the village to tell them what we are going to do in the hub... I spent ages with this elderly woman who thought what we were doing was a waste of time. She said that the village is fine as it is and doesn't need anything else... and she said that doesn't need a shop and is happy to chat with other villagers in her home." (Scheme member)

"Some people... a vocal minority... are working against the project" (Scheme member)

A number of long standing residents reported that the local scheme was being run by incomers, something with which they were unhappy with:

"The whole thing has been a fiasco, complete waste of money. I have listed my reasons: 1) The people running the operation are all incomers; 2) After more than a year there has not been an AGM nor have the villages been told by means of yearly accounts as to what the money has been spent on....." (Villager, Resident Survey)

However, others did not see this as problematic. For example, one long standing resident reported that he was not concerned where scheme members originated from while another thought that it was important that 'locals' and 'incomers' mixed:

"I believe that the community hub works hard to improve facilities and amenities in the local area. Two things I believe may be stopping more people from becoming involved. As you will be aware there are three separate Wemyss villages. I think there is a hint of inter village rivalry perhaps a bit of unwillingness in the other villages to lend as much support as they could. The second is the opinion that I have heard voiced that none of the committee is local, meaning born locally. Whether this is true or not I do not know. Not having been born locally this does not concern me." (Villager, Resident Survey)

"I am speaking for the local people who are still left who are wanting to get to know the outsiders who are moving into West Wemyss. I am tee-total myself, but it's not about me, it's about local people of West Wemyss." (Villager, Resident Survey)

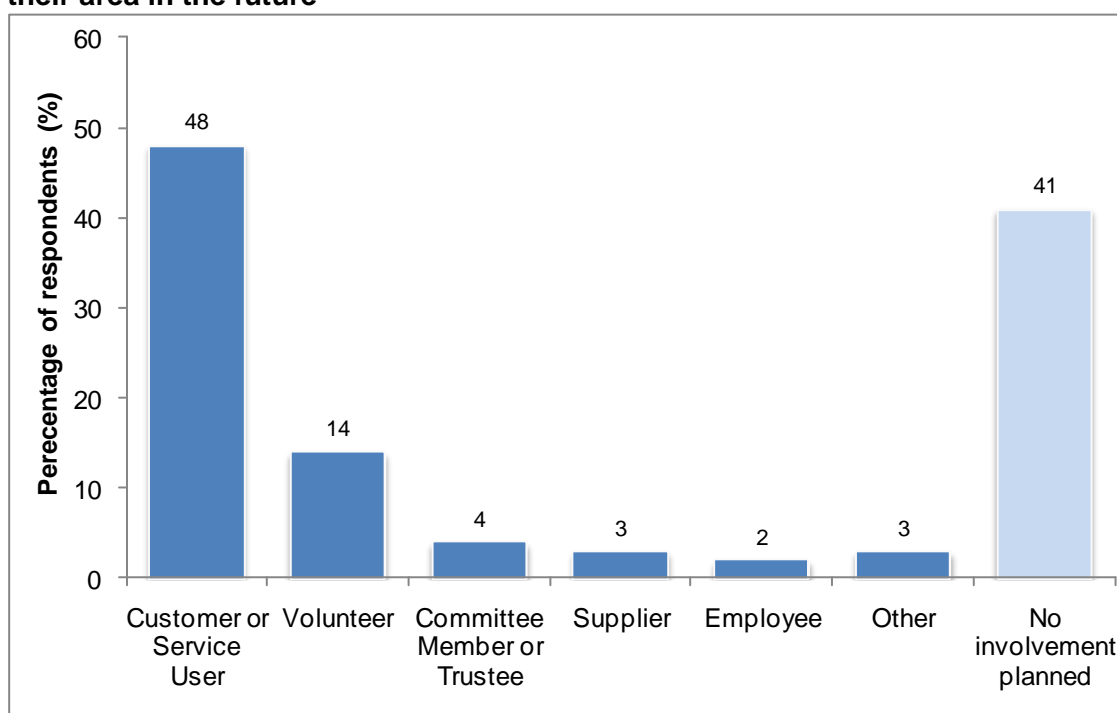
In light of this evidence, it is important here to reflect why length of residence did not emerge as being statistically associated to participation. The most obvious explanation for this lies with the meaning attributed to "incomer" by "locals" and it appears that for many length of residence was not a key defining factor of it. Thus, for some "locals" a resident who had moved to the village (and area) as long as

twenty years ago could still be seen as being an “incomer.” This finding is line with other studies into the impact of (in)migration in rural areas.⁹

5.4. Future Involvement

Residents were asked whether they had any plans for getting involved in their local Village SOS programme in the future and the type of involvement that this might entail. An overview of responses is provided in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: How respondents’ plan to be involved in the Village SOS project in their area in the future



Base: 1,290

The figure shows that these responses followed a very similar pattern to respondents’ current involvement with the Village SOS project. More than half (59 per cent) of respondents said they planned to be involved in their local project at some point in the future. Once again the most frequently identified form of involvement was as a customer or service user (48 per cent), followed by being involved as a volunteer (14 per cent). Fewer respondents planned to be directly involved as trustees or committee members (4 per cent), suppliers (3 per cent) or employees (2 per cent).

An important point to note is that a greater proportion of respondents were planning to be involved with the project in the future than had been involved so far: of the respondents who had not been involved in the project so far 28 per cent said they did plan to be involved in some way in the future. This probably reflects the fact that not all of the projects were fully functioning at the time the survey was carried out, and that many residents will be involved as some point but on an ad hoc or infrequent basis, particularly if they do not have direct role within the project (i.e. as a trustee, employee or volunteer).

⁹ Burnett, A. (1998), 'Local Heroics: Reflecting on Incomers and Local Rural Development Discourses in Scotland' *Sociologia Ruralis* Volume 38, Issue 2, pages 204–224.

Turning now to the response at the scheme level, respondents were most positive in Ballygally (69 per cent of respondents said they would be more likely to participate), Myddfai (44 per cent) and West Wemyss (41 per cent), and least positive in Tideswell (12 per cent) and Honeystreet (17 per cent).

5.4. Conclusion

The key findings to emerge from this chapter, which has drawn extensively on data garnered from a postal questionnaire survey of residents, are:

- most residents had had heard of the Village SOS project in their area prior to receiving the questionnaire: more than nine out of ten – 94 per cent – reported that they were aware of the programme
- more than half had been involved in some way with their local scheme
- in line with the picture at the national level, a relatively small proportion of residents have been involved in their local schemes as volunteers
- a number of variables were found to be statistically associated with ('existing') involvement. These were: age; employment status; and the nature of schemes. Surprisingly, given the widely held view that in some villages, schemes had been "hijacked" by "incomers", length of residence did not emerge as being a statistically significant factor
- a sizeable proportion of residents – 59 per cent - reported that they are likely to be involved in their local Village SOS programme in the future. And, significantly, a greater proportion of respondents were planning to be involved with the project in the future than had been involved so far: of those who had not been involved in the project so far 28 per cent said they did plan to be involved in some way in the future.

6. Understanding Outcomes: Exploring the Views of Local Residents

6.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with exploring an issue that lies at the heart of this evaluation: the extent to which Village SOS projects have helped to *revive rural communities and enrich residents' lives*. It explores these issues through the eyes of local residents and highlights a number of social and economic *outcomes* to emerge from the programme.

The chapter draws on data gleaned from three research instruments:

- a postal questionnaire survey of residents in the ten villages
- in depth interviews and focus groups conducted with local residents, including volunteers
- the photography (*photo novella*) exercises undertaken in three of the villages: Ballygally, Myddfai and West Wemyss.

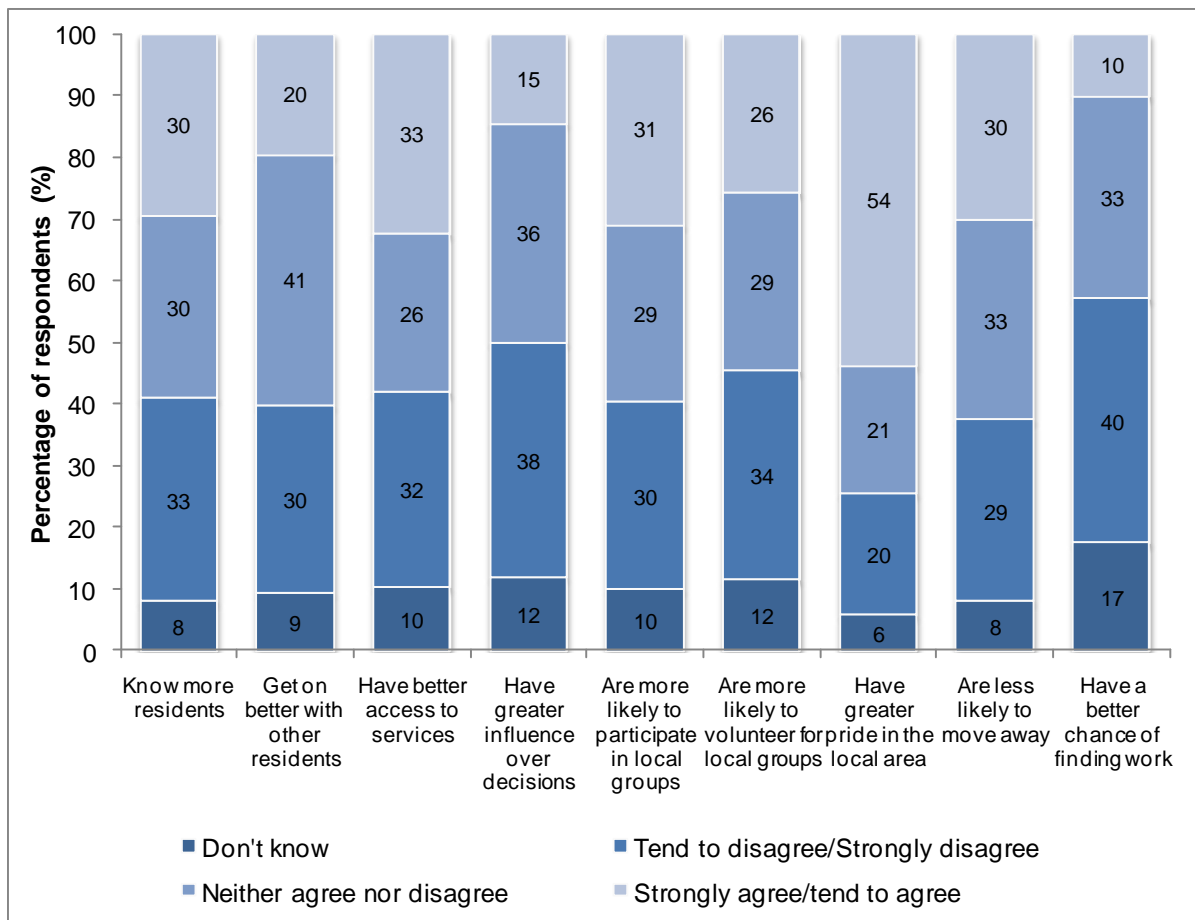
The report is divided into five sections, including this one:

- section 6.2 examines the extent to which Village SOS projects have changed the lives of residents in the ten funded villages and focuses on how it has affected them directly as *individuals*
- section 6.3 is concerned with exploring how Resident Survey respondents perceive their local Village SOS scheme will change the lives of the local population as a whole (or *collective*), and how it will affect their area as a whole
- section 6.4 provides an assessment on the overall outcome of the Village SOS programme on villagers and villagers, as seen through eyes of local residents. It uses two statistical measures to identify those variables that appear to be associated with an overall positive outcome
- section 6.5 Conclusion, highlights the key findings to emerge from the chapter.

6.2. 'Individual' Outcomes

Survey respondents were asked to consider the extent to which the Village SOS project in their area had changed their lives in a variety of ways linked to their relationships with other local residents, access to services, influence over local decisions, participation and volunteering, pride and attachment to the local area, and prospects of finding work. An overview of responses is provided in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: The extent to which respondents thought the Village SOS project in their area had affected their lives



Base: 1,250

This shows some quite wide variations in the extent to which respondents identified positive personal outcomes as a result of the Village SOS project in their areas. These outcomes may be loosely bundled into three (overlapping) categories: those relating to residents' perceptions of 'community' and the 'social fabric' of the village; those relating to participation and volunteering; and those relating to 'socio-economic' issues.

6.2.1 Community and 'social fabric' outcomes

Respondents were asked whether their local Village SOS scheme had resulted in them being more proud of their area, getting on better with local people, and knowing more people. To varying degrees, the response to all three questions was positive, as will now be explored.

Greater pride in the area

More than half – 54 per cent - of respondents reported that their local Village SOS project had made them more proud of their area, and this was the most frequently cited of all (positive) outcomes of the programme. For many it was a renewed sense of pride that appeared to be the most important outcome to emerge for them from the Village SOS programme. The views of the following Resident Survey respondents were typical of many:

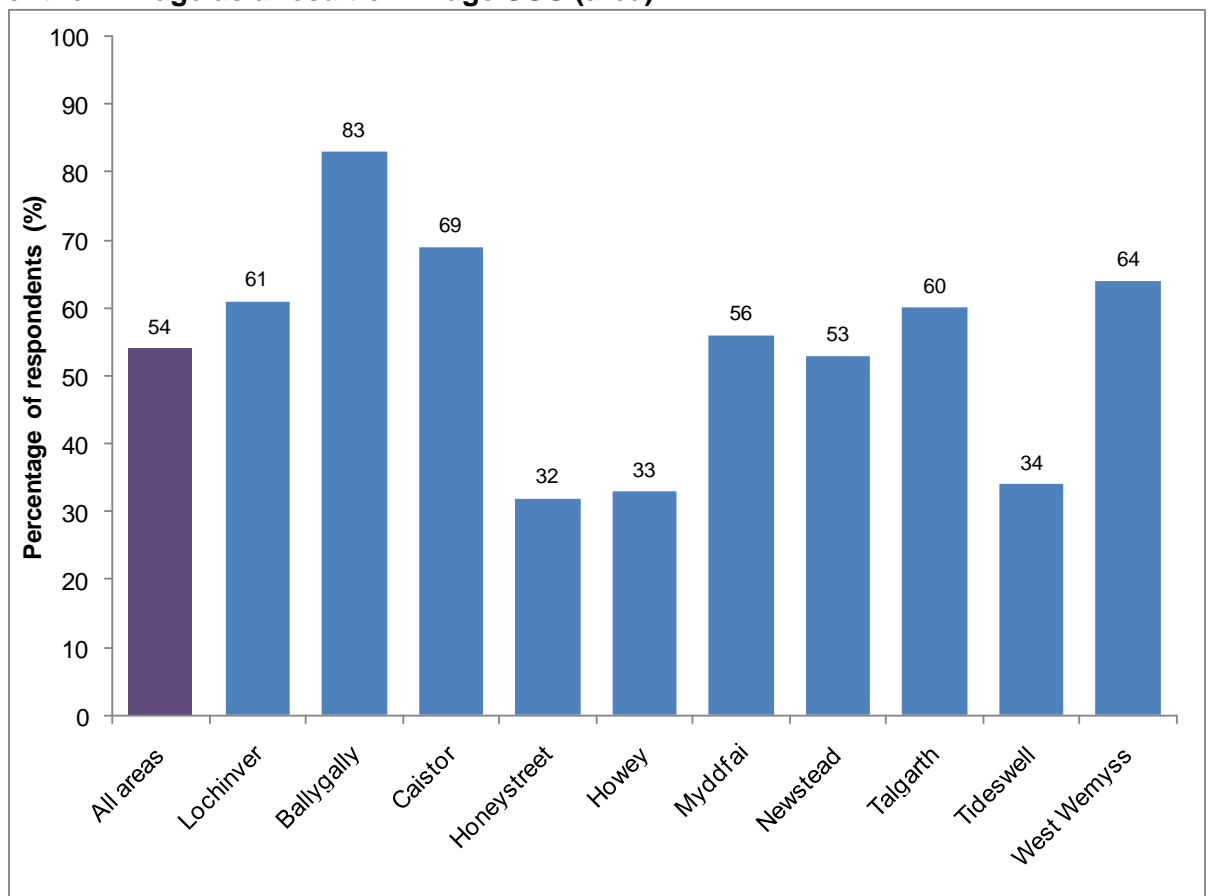
“This initiative has been a godsend for the residents of Ballygally. Not only will we have the services of a shop and post office at a later date, the community will have a centre. A heart; where activities, events or

even celebrations, for all ages and sections of the community can congregate. All this leads to a more defined community identity and pride.” (Ballygally resident, Resident Survey)

“It’s wonderful to see our local area being improved. It’s such a beautiful area to live. We have wonderful neighbours and have been made very welcome here. We feel we have found our forever home. We have eaten at the hub several times. The staff are fantastic. The food very good and it was wonderful to talk to fellow villagers.” (West Wemyss resident, Resident Survey)

However, while sizeable proportions of residents in all ten funded villages reported that they were more proud of the area, the proportions varied markedly by village from 83 per cent (Ballygally) to 32 per cent (Honeystreet), as Figure 6.2 illustrates.

Figure 6.2: Proportion of respondents who reported that they were more proud of their village as a result of Village SOS (area)



Base: 1,250

Perhaps not unexpectedly, those schemes like Ballygally, West Wemyss and Lochinver, which had ‘reached’ the most residents through ‘community hub’ initiatives, had the highest proportions of respondents who were more proud of their areas. And conversely, those with smaller ‘reaches’ (Tideswell, Howey and Honeystreet) secured lower ‘scores’ (this important issue is addressed again in section 6.4).

It is important to offer one other reflection about the responses at the village level: the score – 53 per cent - for Newstead is remarkably high given the problems encountered by the scheme there and the fact that it was a long way from completion when the Resident Survey took place. Data garnered from in-depth interviews undertaken with local residents sheds some light on why this was the case –

residents were more proud of the area (as a result of Village SOS) because it had brought the “*promise of better times ahead*” and enhanced its image:

"You have to understand that nobody bothered with Newstead for a very long time. In fact, the Coal Board was the last people to really invest in this community and that was a long time ago. I think people do feel more proud of the village now, not because there is a shiny new park because there isn't yet but because there is the promise of better times ahead. They can't quite believe it yet but they know we are on the up. They are proud because someone valued us enough to give us nearly half a million pounds just to spend on us." (Volunteer, Newstead)

"Image? We've never really had an image before, well not one that you would be proud of anyway. I suppose we were another pit village before and now we are the village that got all that cash and got on the telly so I suppose we've got ourselves an image for the first time." (Volunteer, Newstead)

As the quotes above allude to, there was a myriad of reasons why residents were more proud of their areas, including the re-creation of a community identity, the (high) quality of the local Village SOS scheme – numerous residents spoke with emotion about how “proud” they were of their local scheme – and (in some villages) the re-invention of the village as a tourist destination. Another important contributory factor also emerged: the (perceived) Village SOS inspired “revival” of local communities:

"This project has brought the heart of the village back to life. When the hall opens the village centre will be further transformed to the good. The village residents have been given a shop and village hall which for most will result in a great entertainment." (Ballygally respondent, Resident Survey)

"One of the main (impacts) is having a community.....before we were a cluster of houses. there were no links between us.... even if people hate this place (the Walk Inn) they can gang up with people to talk about us!" (Volunteer, West Wemyss)

"We all wish to thank the VSOS Big Lottery and BBC for giving us funding towards our fantastic new community centre which has become the hub of the village and has brought life back into our community by providing a place to meet, hold classes and events, volunteer and outlet for local businesses to sell their produce and an amazing place for the increasing number of visitors we have been getting since the 31st August TV showing." (Survey respondent)

Material collected as part of the *photo novella* exercise also highlights how (in the eyes of many residents) the local Village SOS programme had helped revive their local communities:

Figure 6.3: Ballygally Hall



BALLYGALLY HALL (30 NOV 2011)

Ballygally community together again
— the heart of the village has
been restored. Not an empty
seat in the room!!

Source: *Photo novella* exercise, Ballygally

In addition to reviving local communities, it is important to note that a number of residents also reported that it had helped to revive them by giving them a “*new lease of life*”:

“This has been a new lease of life for me. Before Village SOS came along and I was talked into dusting off my tools I thought I was obsolete. It’s nice to know that people value your handy work so much that they want to buy it....I am just so flattered that anyone wants to buy my products. I have been making them more or less for fun all these years and then I find out that people are willing to pay for them... it makes me feel alive again and I get a cheque at the end of every month too.”
(Myddfai resident)

Knowing more, and getting on better, with local residents

It appears that an important outcome of the Village SOS programme is that it has increased levels of social ‘interaction’ (in the broadest sense) in villages. Nearly a

third – 30 per cent – of respondents reported their local Village SOS project had contributed to them ‘knowing’ more residents. And one in five reported that their local Village SOS scheme had resulted in them ‘getting on better’ with other residents.

Qualitative data garnered by the study team also highlighted the positive effect Village SOS projects have had on social ‘interaction’ in villages:

“I wouldn’t know people without Village SOS. The social aspect.... that’s what it’s about.... this (the local VSOS project) has just been the conduit.... it’s been about a group of people, villagers taking ownership.”
(Village Activist, West Wemyss)

“It’s good thing for people to get to know each other. Good for families to have somewhere to eat, drink, take the kids. I have young family all the time taken up with them. I’m looking after my home, too.” (West Wemyss respondent, Resident Survey)

It appears that Village SOS projects have fostered interaction in two ways: by bringing people together through the Village SOS delivery process, and volunteering in particular; and by creating a place where residents can interact. Turning first to the former, a number of residents highlighted the positive social aspects of volunteering which had resulted in them getting to know more people and establish new friendships.

“Since I’ve been volunteering here, I’ve got to know people who I have seen around for many years but have never really spoken to. Who would have thought that in a village this size you could still find new friends? All the volunteers get on really well and we work together to make this work.” (Volunteer, Myddfai).

“The thing I love about volunteering in the shop is that I have never met so many different people and seen so many new faces in Myddfai. Before this was here you would just see the same old people all the time. Now we have visitors from all over the world coming to our little village.”
(Volunteer, Myddfai).

The importance of the social spaces created by many of the Village SOS projects was recognised by residents:

“Having the Walk Inn has given the village a centre to meet socially.”
(West Wemyss respondent, Resident Survey)

“(There is an) opportunity for community classes to help with social interaction.” (Ballygally respondent, Resident Survey)

Figure 6.4. Myddfai Christmas Fair



MYDDFAI CHRISTMAS FAIR, 3.12.11.

SHOWS THE MANY STALLS SELLING CRAFTED GOODS SUPPLIED BY MANY PEOPLE IN THE AREA. THE FAIR BROUGHT VERY MANY PEOPLE TO MYDDFAI WHO NOT ONLY WERE ABLE TO ENJOY WHAT WAS ON OFFER BUT ALSO WERE ABLE TO STAY AND ENJOY REFRESHMENTS IN THE CAFE.

THE DAY BROUGHT MANY OF THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER, WHICH IN MY VIEW WAS THE WHOLE IDEA OF THE VILLAGE SOS

Source: Photo novella exercise, Myddfai

6.2.2 Participation, volunteering, and 'local influence' outcomes

Data garnered from the Resident Survey suggests that a number of positive outcomes in relation to community participation have emerged from local Village SOS projects. Respondents reported that they had resulted in them being more likely to participate in local groups and volunteer in the future (20 and 26 per cent of residents, respectively, responded in this fashion). And 15 per cent thought they had resulted in them having greater influence over the local decision making process.

A number of residents reported that they would get involved in local groups in the future, with several reporting that they would volunteer:

"I would be interested in forming a book club. Language classes, Ballroom dancing, flower arranging classes, guitar lessons, weight reducing classes, health promotion lectures." (Ballygally respondent, Resident Survey)

"I have supported the West Wemyss Community hub by attending the Westfest on the both occasions. I show interest in the project and ask

members questions of interest and I feel this project is a very positive and relation building for local residents. I would gladly give time to volunteer for this project when I have more available time..... I also have used the facility and I am still being very pleasantly surprised at the potential the community hub can provide for all ages.” (West Wemyss respondent, Resident Survey)

“I might get involved in other activities when I find out what they are” (Ballygally respondent, Resident Survey)

6.2.3 Socio-economic outcomes

Respondents were asked whether the Village SOS programme had resulted in them having better access to services, enhanced their chances of finding work, and reduced the likelihood of them moving away. To varying degrees, the response to these questions may be characterised as being positive.

Better access to services

A third of respondents reported that the Village SOS programme had resulted in them having better access to services, with respondents in the village that had previously been bereft of services - Ballygally – being most likely to report this (88 per cent of villagers there did).

“It’s great, you can drop in and have a reasonably priced cup of tea and maybe some lunch and there’s always someone to chat to. You can’t underestimate how important that is when you live 5 miles from the nearest town and although that doesn’t sound a long way, it might as well be 200 miles when there is no bus service, you have no car and you are in your 70s.” (Myddfai respondent, Resident survey)

“It’s nice to have somewhere to go during the day and evening that’s within walking distance of home.” (West Wemyss respondent, Residents’ Survey)

“I currently I travel to Larne (5 miles) for exercise classes. It will be great to have them on my doorstep.” (Ballygally respondent, Resident Survey)

Providing services of poor quality potentially could dilute the accessibility benefits accruing from them: this did not appear to have happened in the villages, and the majority of villagers thought that the newly created services in their village were of high quality, although the proportions holding this view varied by village:

“Excellent facility for all ages.... The cafe is a superb addition to Talgarth - a quality cafe. I purchase bread from this establishment on a regular basis and am proud to take any visitors (family or friends) to the cafe. Hopefully, birthday parties or school trips, OAP trips etc will keep the mill and cafe going throughout the winter. Long may it continue.” (Talgarth respondent, Resident Survey)

Figure 6.5: The shop at Ballygally



The shop has gone from
Stough to Strength since the opening
two is not an uncommon sight

Source: Photo novella exercise, Ballygally

Figure 6.6: The West Wemyss Walk Inn shop



I chose this photo
because it shows
what can be done
on a budget to fulfill
a crucial community need.

Source: *Photo novella* exercise, West Wemyss

Figure 6.7: 'Wizard of Oz' at the new hall in Myddfai



This photo was taken by my daughter Fionagh Griffiths. It was at a performance of 'The Wizard of Oz' performed by a local acting group - 'Towy Youth Actors' in our new hall, where they used the new light & sound system to its full use. There were two performances on the Saturday & they were ^{both} a sell out. Again they were all impressed with our amazing facilities. We are very lucky to have such a lovely new centre.

Source: Photo novella exercise, Myddfai

Likelihood of moving away

Nearly a third – 30 per cent – of residents reported that their local Village SOS scheme had made them less likely to move away. Although it would be dangerous to place too much emphasis on this figure as research¹⁰ has shown the link between actual and intended residential mobility to be relatively weak, this is still a remarkably high figure and supports the assertion that Village SOS has revived local

¹⁰ Cole, I, Lawless, P, Manning, J. and Wilson, I. (2007) *The Moving Escalator? Patterns of Residential Mobility in New Deal for Communities Areas*, Research Report 32. London: Communities for Local Government.

communities and enriched the lives of local residents. Furthermore, in the context where many of the villages have suffered population decline in recent times and where the success of local schemes is in part predicated on the assumption that the (majority of the) existing population will not leave, this augurs well for the sustainability of schemes.

Chances of finding work

One in ten Resident Survey respondents reported that they thought their local Village SOS project had increased their chances of finding work locally. Given the relatively small (economic) scale of schemes, and the fact that many are very reliant on volunteers, this figure is perhaps higher than one might have expected, and may reflect a lack of understanding amongst some residents of their economic 'model.'

6.3. 'Collective' Outcomes

Survey respondents were asked if they thought their local Village SOS project was likely to improve the local area in a variety of ways linked to social and economic improvements for local residents, collectively. An overview of responses is provided in Figures 6.8 and 6.9. Taken as a whole, it is important to make the following points about the data: respondents were broadly positive about the likely overall outcome of the Village SOS programme and identified numerous collective benefits that they thought would accrue from it. Second, there was a sense amongst them that one of the benefits of the programme was that it would result in *shared* benefits and outcomes and a greater sense of *collective* belonging and identity, albeit to varying degrees across villages:

"There is so much positive benefits for the village and I feel this project can turn a quiet village into an interesting village filled with stories and memories shared by all at the village population." (West Wemyss respondent, Resident Survey).

6.4.1. Community and social fabric outcomes

Figure 6.8 shows that respondents were largely positive about the ways in which they thought the local Village SOS project would lead to improvements in the social fabric of their area. Similar to the previous section, respondents were most positive about the effect the project would have on local people's experiences of living in the area:

- 66 per cent said the overall image of the area would improve. The view of one resident was typical of many:

"I think the completed Mill project is a wonderful asset for Talgarth. The location in the centre of Talgarth has influenced the local traders to 'smarten up' and the local residents to appreciate the place they have, for so long, taken for granted. The stigma of having the Mid Wales (Mental) Hospital as the main employer for many years and the association of friends and relatives coming to Talgarth to visit the asylum was for these visitors a negative experience. I think the Mill project will go a long way towards re-establishing this village as a place well worth coming to." (Talgarth respondent, Resident Survey)

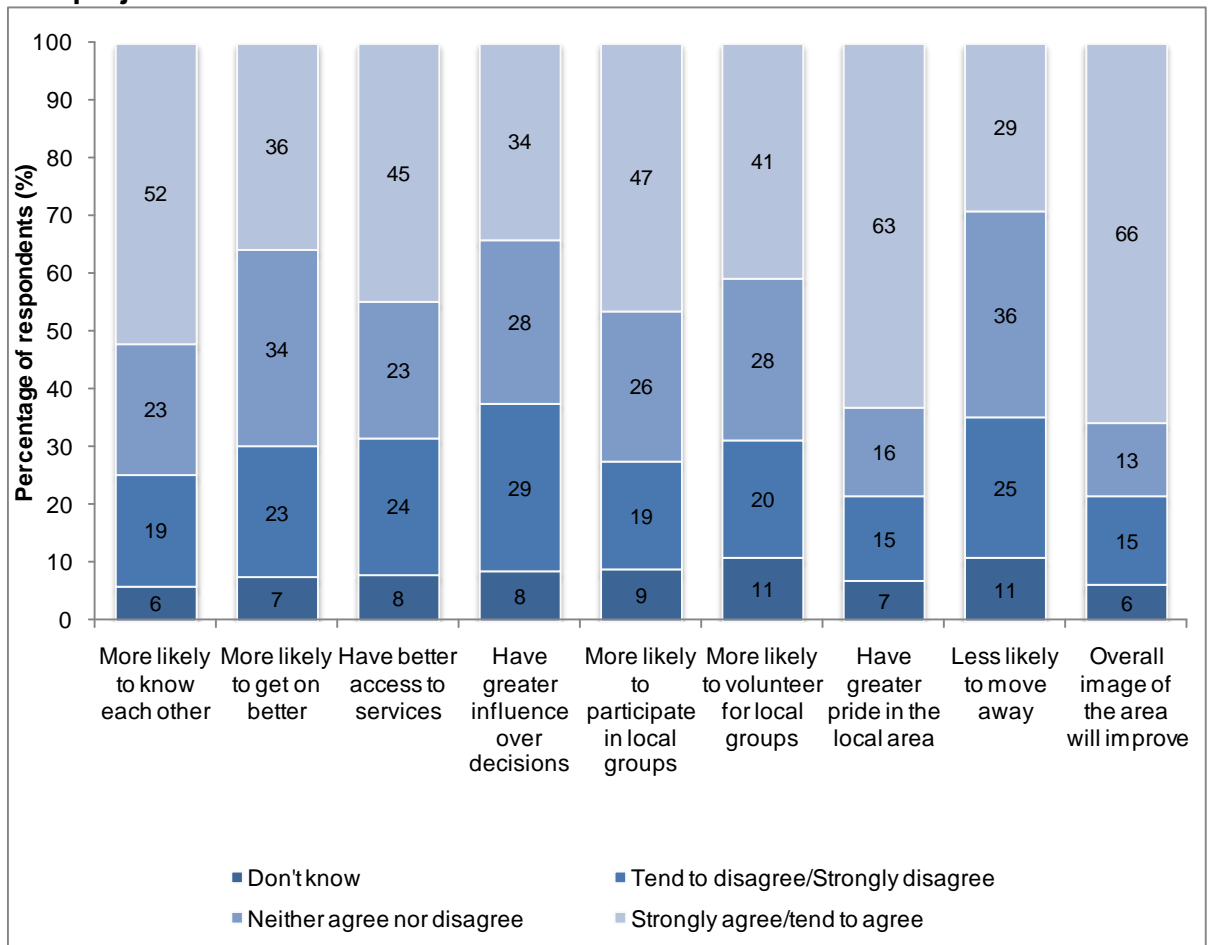
- 63 per cent reported that local residents would have more pride in the area
- 52 per cent noted that local residents would be more likely to know each other
- 36 per cent said local residents would be more likely to get on better together.

6.4.2. Participation, volunteering, and 'local influence' outcomes

A large proportion of respondents also expected local residents to experience positive outcomes associated with involvement and participation with local groups and other residents:

- 47 per cent said local residents would be more likely to participate in local groups
- 41 per cent noted that local residents would be more likely to volunteer for local groups
- 34 per cent reported that local residents would have greater influence over local decisions.

Figure 6.8: The extent to which, and how, respondents thought the local Village SOS project would affect the area



Base: 1,265

6.4.3. Socio-economic outcomes

Respondents identified a number of 'collective' socio-economic outcomes. For example, 70 per cent thought that their areas would receive more visitors in the future as a result of the local Village SOS project, with many reporting that visitor numbers had already increased:

"(The project) has brought lots of visitors to the village and provided a really good venue for activities etc. So much nicer than the old hall. It also provides an outlet for local produce. If the local pub were still open the village might be able to live again." (Myddfai respondent, Resident Survey)

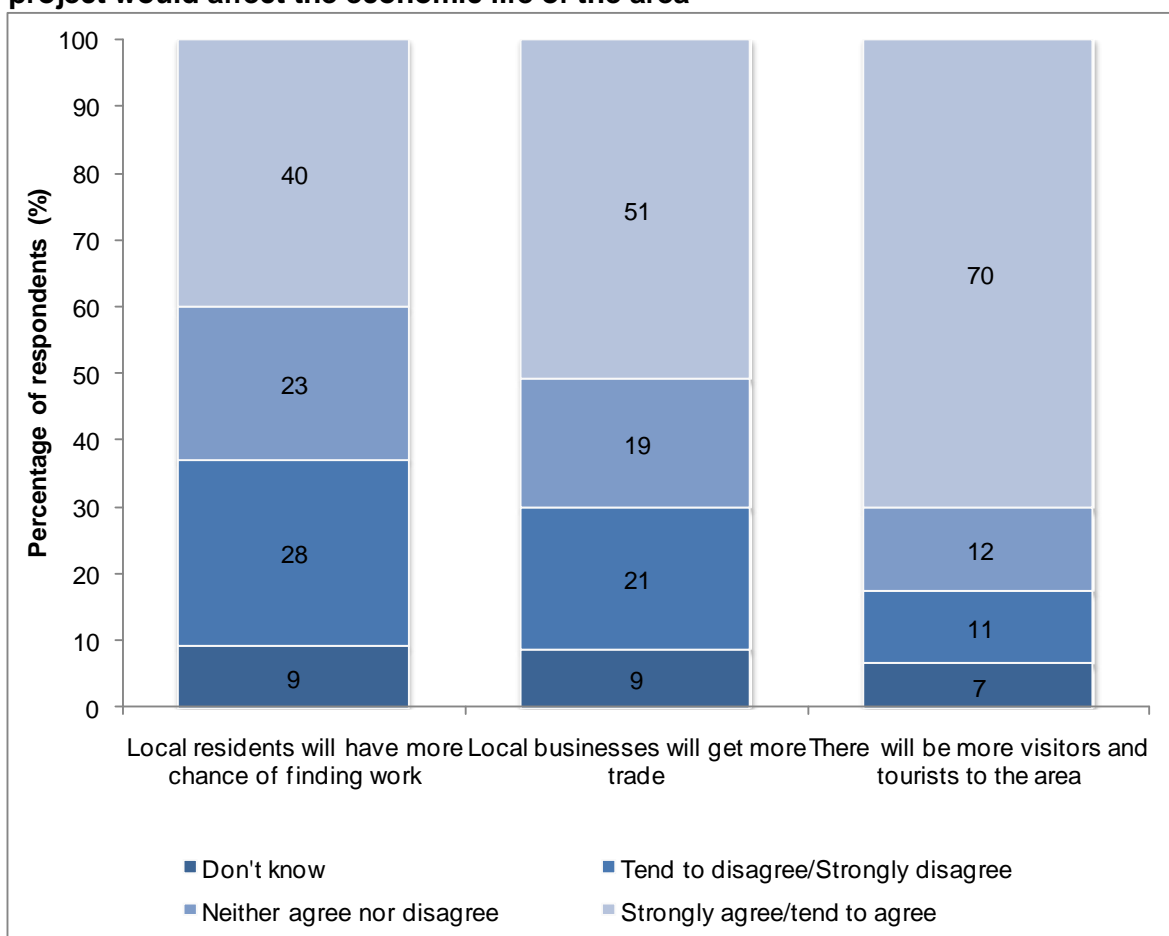
"The mill has brought lots of tourists to the area this year." (Talgarth Respondent, Resident Survey)

More than half – 51 per cent - of residents thought that the Village SOS programme would result in more trade for local businesses, (in part) as a result in the growth of the number of tourists:

"The project has increased the visitors to Talgarth significantly with the corresponding increase in the turnover of local businesses." (Talgarth respondent, Resident Survey)

Finally, 45 per cent of respondents reported that local residents would have better access to services; 40 per cent though that there would be more employment opportunities for local people; and 29 per cent said local residents would be less likely to move away from the area.

Figure 6.9: The extent to which respondents thought the local Village SOS project would affect the economic life of the area



Base: 1,265

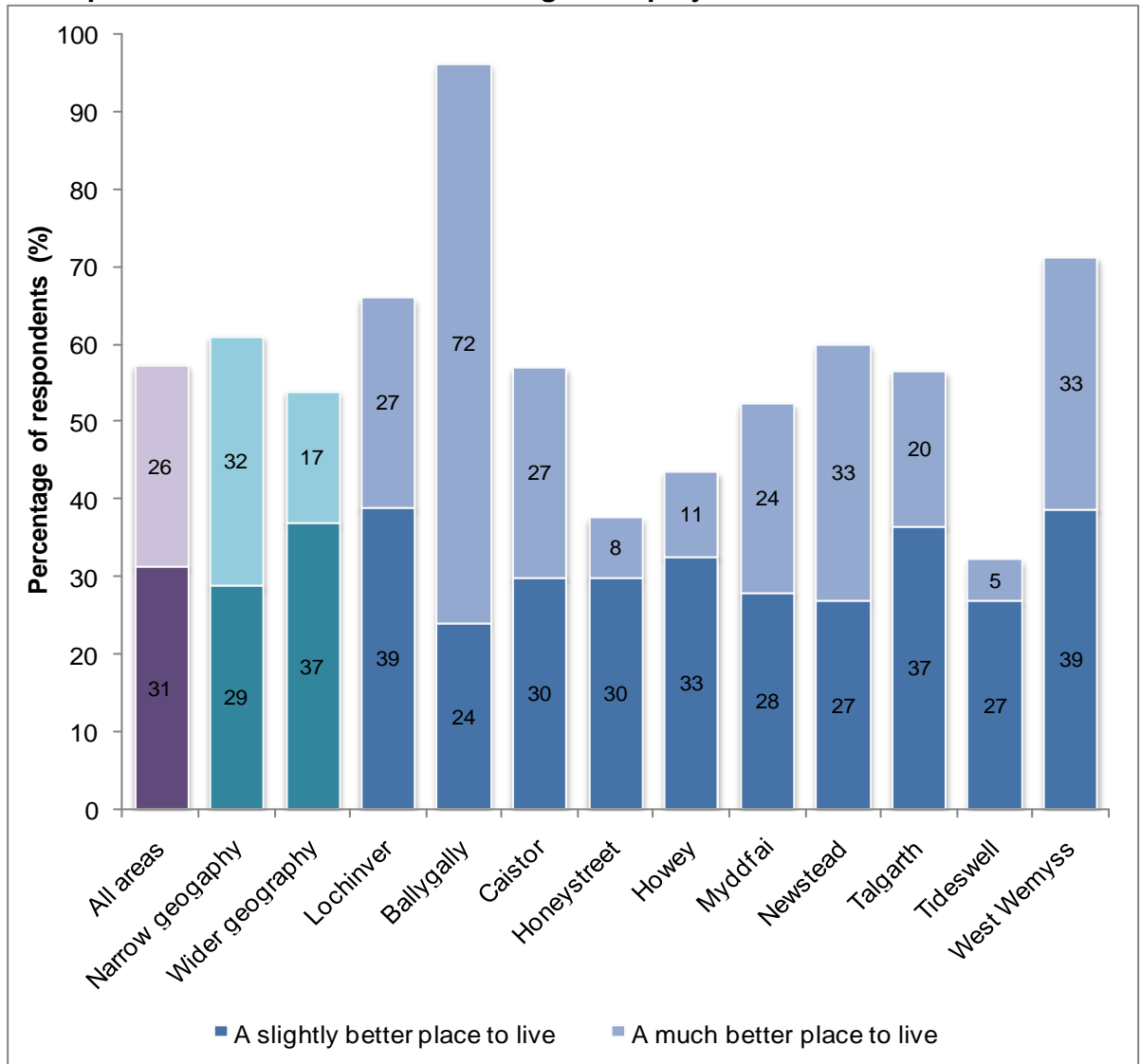
6.4. An Overall Assessment of Village SOS Programme Outcomes

6.4.1 Immediate outcomes

The preceding analysis indicates that, at both individual and collective levels, the Village SOS projects have had a range of positive outcomes for local people, who also expect further positive outcomes for residents in the future. In order to capture the overall outcome of each Village SOS project and the Village SOS programme more generally, respondents were asked to consider the extent to which their local

area will be a better or worse place to live as a result of the Village SOS project. This is a key measure as it perhaps provides the best insight (of all the questions included in the Resident Survey) into the extent to which the Village SOS programme will achieve its overarching aims of *reviving rural communities* and *enriching the lives of local people*. An overview of responses is provided in Figure 6.10.

Figure 6.10: The extent to which respondents thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project



Base: 1,286 (All areas)

This shows that, overall, a majority of respondents (57 per cent) thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project. When only the responses from residents within the immediate vicinity of the projects are considered, more residents, 61 per cent, thought the area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project compared to only 54 per cent of respondents from beyond the village boundary (i.e. the wider geographies). This suggests that proximity to a project does influence residents' views regarding its outcome.

When explored in more detail the survey reveals wide variations by project:

- 96 per cent of respondents thought Ballygally would be a better place to live as a result of the Community Hall

- 72 per cent of respondents thought West Wemyss and the surrounding area would be a better place to live as a result of the Community Hub
- 66 per cent of respondents thought Lochinver and the surrounding area would be a better place to live as a result of the Mission development
- 60 per cent of respondents thought Newstead would be a better place to live as a result of the Future Newstead project
- 57 per cent of respondents thought Caistor would be a better place to live as a result of the Arts and Heritage Centre
- 57 per cent of respondents thought Talgarth would be a better place to live as a result of the Mill project
- 52 per cent of respondents thought Myddfai and the surrounding area would be a better place to live as a result of the Ty Talcen project
- 44 per cent of respondents thought Howey and the surrounding area would be a better place to live as a result of Ashfield Community Enterprise
- 38 per cent of respondents thought Honeystreet and the surrounding area would be a better place to live as a result of the Barge Inn Community Project
- 32 per cent of respondents thought Tideswell would be a better place to live as a result of the Taste Tideswell project.

These variations are likely to reflect, at least in part, the type of project that was developed in particular areas. The wide variety of projects inevitably means that some projects will have greater 'reach' into the community (for example, a community hall and shop) than others (for example, a tourist/visitor attraction). The findings could also reflect the extent to which particular projects have had a unifying or divisive influence on the communities in which they are located. These are among the issues that are explored in the next section which considers the survey findings in more detail using statistical association measures (Pearson Chi-square and the Cramer V statistic).

7.4.2. *Understanding and exploring the likely future outcome of the programme*

The following variables were found to be statistically associated to a positive overall outcome in relation to the *'local area will be a better place to live a result of the Village SOS project'*:

- **age.** Respondents in the 35-49 age group (67 per cent) were most likely to say they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project, followed by the under 35 (61 per cent), 50-64 (55 per cent) and 65 and over (52 per cent) age groups.
- **length of residency.** Respondents who had lived in the area less than three years (70 per cent) were most likely to say they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project, followed by those who had lived in the area 3-10 and 10-20 years (both 61 per cent) and more than 20 years (52 per cent).
- **economic status.** Respondents who were in paid work (61 per cent) were more likely to say they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project than respondents who were not in paid work (54 per cent).
- **involvement.** Respondents who had been involved in their local project in some way (73 per cent) were far more likely to say they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project than respondents who had not been involved (41 per cent).

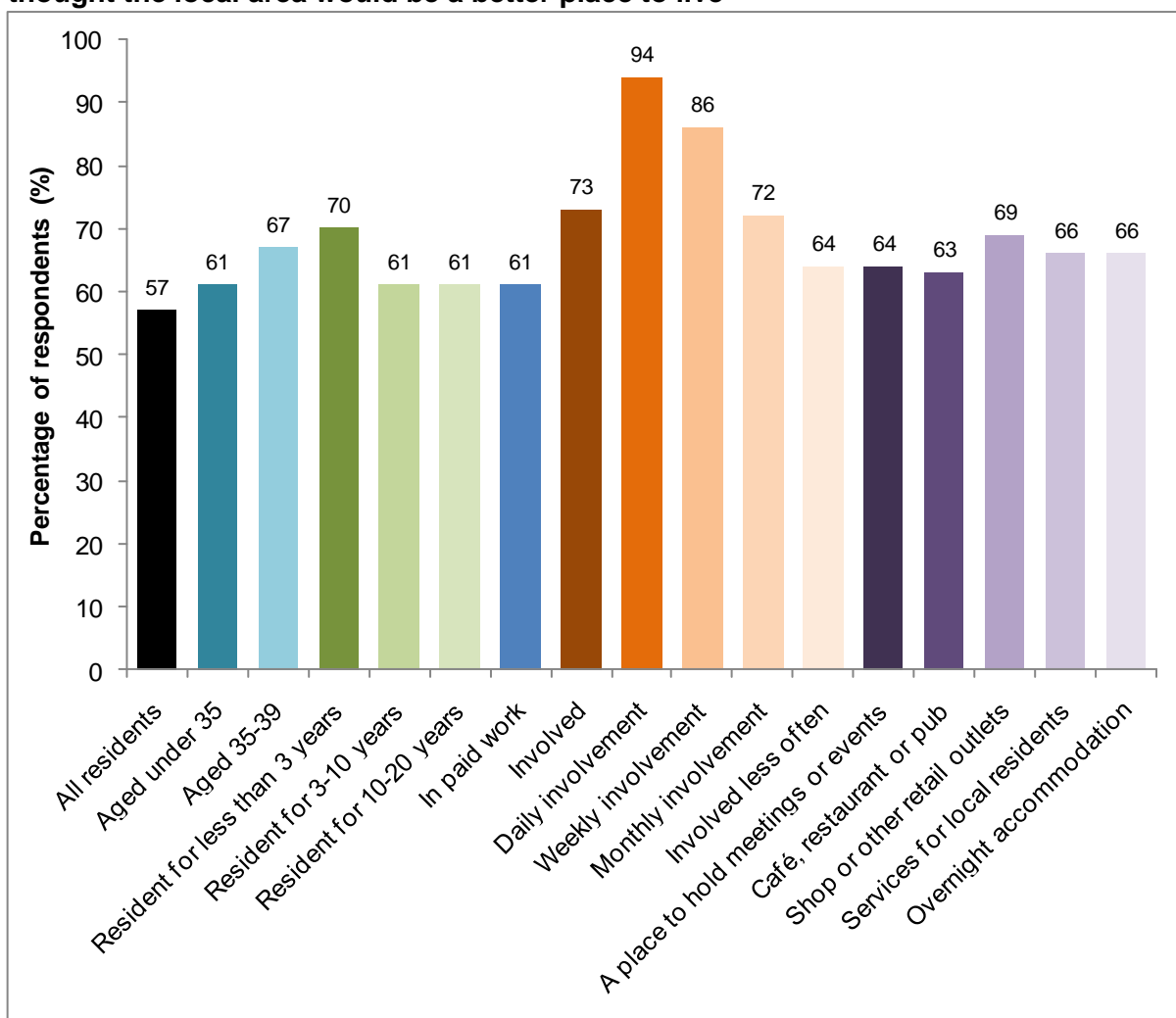
- **frequency of involvement.** Of the respondents who had been involved in their local project, those whose involvement was most frequent were most likely to say they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project. 94 per cent of respondents who had been involved on a daily basis said they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project compared to 86 per cent who had been involved on a weekly basis, 72 per cent who had been involved on a monthly basis and 64 per cent whose involvement was less frequent.
- **scheme activities.** Several types of activity were *positively* associated with respondents saying they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the local VSOS project. Respondents were *more likely* to be positive about the area being a better place to live if it:
 - i. provides a place for local people to hold meetings or events (64 per cent)
 - ii. has a café, restaurant or pub (63 per cent)
 - iii. provides a shop or other retail outlets (69 per cent)
 - iv. provides services for local people (66 per cent)
 - v. provides overnight accommodation (66 per cent).

In addition, several types of activity were *negatively* associated with respondents saying they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the local VSOS project. Respondents were *less likely* to be positive about the area being a better place to live if it:

- vi. involves selling to other businesses (46 per cent)
- vii. is a visitor centre or tourist attraction (52 per cent)
- viii. is developing and promoting local produce (50 per cent)
- ix. provides training or learning opportunities (46 per cent).

The findings are summarised in Figure 6.11, which identifies all of the factors with a positive association with the respondents saying they thought the local area would be a better place to live as a result of their local Village SOS scheme.

Figure 6.11: Factors positively associated with respondents saying they thought the local area would be a better place to live



6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a number of positive outcomes for residents to emerge from the Village SOS programme. They appear to have benefited both *individually* and *collectively* from the programme and there is considerable evidence to suggest that the programme has helped to enrich residents' lives and revive rural communities.

The chapter has also shown that certain population groups – residents aged between 35-49, relative recent 'incomers', and residents in paid work – were more likely to view the overall outcome of Village SOS projects in a positive light, with the nature of schemes also affecting residents' assessment of their overall outcomes. This raises a number of important issues for policy, which are addressed in the final chapter of the report.

Before turning our attention to the longer term social and economic impact of schemes, which is the focus of the next chapter, it is important to make two final points about the analysis presented in this chapter. First, the overall outcomes of the programme as experienced (and perceived) by local residents has not been evenly felt across the ten villages. In some villages, such as Ballygally and West Wemyss, in particular, the overall impact of the programme to date has been very positive whilst in others (Tideswell and Honeystreet) it has been more muted. Second, the analysis is based on residents' perceptions. While this is wholly valid, and the most appropriate way of assessing social outcomes, residents may not be in the best

position to assess the likely economic outcome of schemes, an issue which is explored in the next chapter.

7. Reviving Rural Communities?

7.1. Introduction

The full impact of the Village SOS schemes will only be revealed in the long term and once the viability of the enterprises is proved. This section explores the likely scale of social and economic impacts, what may be understood as their footprint on a local area. Some of these issues have already been touched on in previous chapters, not least the consideration of participation in the schemes by residents and the extent to which social interaction has increased. This is undoubtedly a key part of the aim of Village SOS to 'enrich resident's lives'.

However, the parallel aim of Village SOS is to revive rural communities, and with a focus on enterprises, to revive rural economies. Village SOS appears to throw light on the two, largely contrasting, rationales for investment in rural community enterprise:

- **plugging the leaks:** many proponents of rural community enterprises have claimed that they are an effective vehicle for retaining money in the local economy; namely through increasing the level of trade and expenditure in a local area, and thus reducing dependence on local trade. This has been loosely termed 'plugging the leaks'.
- **growing the economic base through trade:** the alternative strategy and role of rural community enterprises is to contribute to growth in the local economy through attracting greater funds into the area, from sources including trade/exports (to other areas), investment or government expenditure.

Our case study methodology explored the extent to which these two approaches was prevalent and the implications each held for reviving rural economies.

Conventional measurement of local economic impact is best understood through what is termed local Keynesian multiplier analysis (or more correctly Keynesian open economy multiplier models). This separates out two main elements: firstly, a consideration of local economic linkages (e.g. employees, where money is spent and suppliers); and secondly net financial flows into an area (what is also termed the multiplicand). Authors such as Armstrong and Taylor (2000) have developed multiplier models at a local geographic scale. Armstrong and Wells (2001. p.263) highlight that "genuine multiplier effects can only arise where money is injected into the local economy from outside. Orthodox economic theory identifies three main injections into the circular flow of income, exports, investment (from outside - autonomous investment) and government spending".

What does this mean in practice? It suggests that the economic scale of activities needs to be considered (and employees are used as the main proxy here) but also to understand where income is derived from (crudely, from the local area or outside). It is also necessary to consider whether the supported activity has any net effect (e.g. is it displacing activities which were already being undertaken). It is necessary to consider wider or what may be termed place-based impacts. This provides a framework for considering the economic impacts.

Social impacts are considered differently and are derived not against a prescriptive list but inductively through case study research in each of the 10 schemes – that is, each scheme identified their main beneficiary groups during the research.

This chapter also presents a framework for considering the full social and economic impact of Village SOS in the longer term. At the end of the chapter we also return to resident perceptions of impact: this provides an important contrast to anticipated impacts. The resident survey has enabled perceptions of impact to be modelled. The conclusion draws together the main findings and highlights the implications of resident perceptions of impact which may differ from actual benefits.

7.2. Economic Impact

7.2.1 Impact components

Our case study methodology used the component parts of local Keynesian multiplier analysis as a means of constructing an explanatory and descriptive analysis of their contribution to the local economy. Research with the case studies involved interviews with their managers or trustees together with an analysis of financial accounts (or other financial information). From this it was possible to identify in broad terms the proportion or significance of the different elements of the local multiplier. It should be stressed that this evidence was insufficiently robust to support numerical implementation of the full model, so the findings in this section are necessarily indicative and illustrative.

The following components of economic impact are considered in turn

- employees
- volunteers
- competitors
- suppliers
- other income
- place based impacts.

Village SOS schemes are of different scales and the significance of each of these linkages will vary.

7.2.2. Employees

Each case study was asked to outline their employee base and where possible to give this as a full time equivalent figure. There were some sensitivities around discussing precise wage levels and we were not able to compare these to wage levels in the wider area. Residency was asked on the basis that local resident employees would be more likely to spend earnings in the village than non-resident employees.

Village	Employees	Residence	Salary Levels
Ballygally	8 part time staff in shop and the shop owner	All in the Village/Within 5 miles	Shop staff all on minimum wage
Caistor	16 hours of staff time in library; full time and part time staff member in café. Café manager	All in the Village/Within 5 miles	Salary levels not known, assumed to be just above

	now left		minimum wage
Honeystreet	32 staff all part time, but considerable seasonal variation. Often employing young people for bar work.	All within 10 miles and about a quarter in nearby villages	Salary levels are mainly at minimum wage.
Howey	0.75 FTE staff and 0.5 administrative staff. 2 FTEs also at the WCVO on site	All within 10 miles.	Not known, but assumed to be relatively low.
Lochinver	5 part time staff including chef, kitchen assistants, centre manager	All within Lochinver	Above minimum wage
Myddfai	2 FTE staff running Myddfai trading company	In Myddfai or neighbouring village	At minimum wage
Newstead	In kind support from RCAN (2 days a week) and former Village Champion (1.5 days)	n/a	n/a
Talgarth	Mill employs 1 FTE and Bakers Table CIC employs 4 staff	All within Talgarth	At minimum wage
Tideswell	12 part time and 1 full time staff plus a freelance chef.	11 live in Tideswell, 1 lives locally	At minimum wage (except freelance chef)
West Wemyss	6 staff on a part time basis.	3 live in West Wemyss and 3 within 5 miles	At minimum wage

The following key points emerge from the employees:

- The number of direct employees in each scheme and related activities is low, although some may grow if the ventures are successful. An exception to this was Honeystreet
- Talgarth, Honeystreet and Tideswell have most employees (over 5 FTEs)
- Caistor and Newstead are heavily reliant on volunteers to play staff roles
- Staff almost entirely live locally and salary/wage levels tend to be low, at or just above minimum wage levels
- It is unknown whether jobs are additional or not: the assumption is that most staff would have found other forms of employment (see later section on social benefits).

The direct economic impact of the schemes is likely to be low, although on the positive side, employees tend to live locally. It was unclear from the research to what extent the jobs were additional, that is the individuals would have got jobs anyway.

7.2.3. *Volunteers*

Each scheme was asked to indicate the number of volunteers they had, how frequently they were engaged and for what amount of time. Volunteer numbers do not constitute any formal monetary flow, although to some extent it is a measure of the scale of unpaid time to sustain the enterprise and of opportunity cost.

Village	Volunteers	Amount
Ballygally	4 on management committee	Not known
Caistor	50-60 volunteers	Provide 2-4 hours in the café
Honeystreet	No volunteers except those on managing committee	Trustee and management committee time not know
Howey	12 trustees and a further 25 scheme volunteers	Amounts of time vary.
Lochinver	No volunteers beyond the core management committee and trustees	Management committee time found to be considerable during the build phase
Myddfai	80 known volunteers with 40 making a regular contribution.	Amount of time given by regular volunteers was between half a day and 2 days a month. Trustees gave more time.
Newstead	400 volunteers known to the scheme in addition to in-kind time provided by the former Village Champion	Volunteer activities also linked to training.
Talgarth	80 volunteers providing up to 2 days a week	A core of 10 volunteers has taken the project forward.
Tideswell	3-4 volunteers in the education strand and 5-6 in the gardening strand of the project	All from Tideswell or surrounding area
West Wemyss	None in the trading arm, and 6-7 in the community organisation	All local residents

The pattern of volunteering revealed the following:

- **Use of volunteers.** Volunteers were found to be integral to the business models of the Caistor, Myddfai, Howey, Newstead and Talgarth schemes. Caistor was found to be highly reliant on volunteers and on the whole this worked well. Newstead also found to be highly reliant on volunteers. Newstead was only scheme which overtly linked volunteering with increasing qualifications to raise employment prospects. The extent to which additional jobs followed is not known.
- **Key skills.** Volunteers played key roles and brought particular expertise. For example, trustees with financial management and business experience were found to be invaluable. Some schemes also found to rely on a core of volunteers, sometimes retired, who brought considerable expertise.
- **Risk of burnout.** Elsewhere in the study we reflected on the risks of burnout by volunteers, particularly those playing management committee roles. Whilst these were anticipated during the build phase of projects, the demands of running enterprises placed ongoing burdens on what were seen as key individuals for the projects.
- **Some schemes were** found to provide an excellent focus for voluntary activity. Issues of additionality were not formally explored, although there was qualitative

evidence to suggest that schemes had greatly increased amount of volunteer time, particularly from a core group.

As we have reflected in the viability of the schemes, it was evident that some of the businesses were at best marginal, reflecting adverse trading conditions.

7.2.4. Competitors

Each scheme was asked to discuss the nature of the competition they faced for the service or product they provided. In some cases there was none. Moreover, the location of competitors was requested, as an indicator that the more local and more direct competition was, the less likely the scheme would provide additional economic benefits to the area.

Village	Nature of Competition	Extent of Competition
Ballygally	Two main forms: Village hall: other local village halls Shop: other retail outlets	There is competition around the village hall although seems that there was an undersupply. There were found to be no similar retail outlets in the local area
Caistor	There is no other library in the area. There are other café and pub outlets in the village	Café seen to be attracting a different customer base through providing a higher value offer.
Honeystreet	No pubs within 2 miles but 10 pubs within 12 mile radius. Campsite has less direct competition	Competition for pub and pub food likely to be high, although offer seen to be slightly different from competition. Also it has a niche, serving a barge community and crop circle interest.
Howey	Competition from other organic food producers. Social service contracts not seen to be in direct competition	Few other producers, so not seen to be in direct local competition with other providers. Social service contract could not be let locally as there are no other providers.
Lochinver	3 restaurants and 2 other cafes in Lochinver	None of the other outlets is open throughout the winter on all evenings. Some of the competitors had complained about displacement, but it was difficult to assess the legitimacy of this.
Myddfai	There are 2 village halls in the surrounding area. Many tourist based gift outlets in the area.	Village hall offer is better and bigger than surrounding area. Gift product competition is quite high.
Newstead	Other country parks in the Trent and Rother valleys which offer fishing permits.	Newstead offer seen to be different in a market which was not seen to be saturated.
Talgarth	2 local cafes.	Talgarth Mill café offer is very different and focused on higher value and attracting tourists.
Tideswell	Some cookery schools in the wider area.	Placed-based approach is distinctive. Competition from other cookery schools and providers of corporate

		away days.
West Wemyss	Cafes in surrounding area and Kirkcaldy. Shop serves local area	No direct competition in the vicinity

Competition is unlikely to be 'like-for-like' as purchasers substitute different products and services depending on a mix of location, price and product/service factors. Nonetheless, this is one of the most contentious areas around Village SOS and the research revealed the following:

- the perennial risk of interventions in local enterprise is the risk of **displacement**. Cafes and general retail outlets, even in rural areas, face competition. The case for public intervention is typically harder to make on market failure grounds but is possible on equity (e.g. unmet need) grounds.
- for those schemes involving shops or cafes we found that the enterprise was either serving a currently unmet need (Ballygally and Lochinver were good examples of this) or were offering something different to existing provision. Similar reflections could be made around initiatives to stimulate local tourism, the risk being that this is to the detriment of other nearby attractions.
- one argument to be made for local enterprise investments is where they are seeking to stimulate the whole of the local economy, that is they are having a place based effect. This is the case in a number of the schemes, and notably is shown in the design of projects such as Lochinver and Tideswell. These are discussed below (place based effects).

7.2.5. Suppliers

Local suppliers are an important component of the 'plugging the leaks' rationale for rural enterprise. We focused on supplies of materials and products and unless evidence was given to the contrary the expenditure on utilities was from a national provider.

Village	Nature of Suppliers	Location of Suppliers and scale
Ballygally	Attempts made to source products locally	Most supplies as a Spar Shop come from a Spar wholesaler, outside the local area. Scale of local impacts limited
Caistor	Some locally sourced products	Most products purchased wholesale for the café. Scale of local impacts is limited
Honeystreet	Food is sourced locally where possible and some beer is sourced locally.	Commitment to buy local where possible although scale not great.
Howey	Supplies for allotments and garden sourced locally where possible	Efforts to source supply locally appear effective. Reasonable scale of local purchasing.
Lochinver	Attempts for some local purchasing.	Most supplies are from outside the local area
Myddfai	Where possible supplies sourced from mid Wales.	Reasonable scale of local/regional purchasing.

Newstead	Supplies limited	Most supplies from outside the area
Talgarth	Attempts to source supplies for café locally	Reasonable scale of local/regional purchasing.
Tideswell	Attempts to source supplies locally	50% of food supplies from local area, 30% from within 10 miles and 15% from rest of Derbyshire. All part of Taste Tideswell brand
West Wemyss	Attempts to source supplies locally	Where possible supplies purchased from the local area

We have not considered the full array of suppliers, such as utilities, but rather the materials which the schemes use on an everyday basis.

- the assumption is that utility (water, electricity and gas) supplies will be purchased from national providers, except in schemes which have their own heat and power plant (e.g. Lochinver). The main other supplies are likely to be in the form of food and ingredients on the one hand and office equipment and stationery on the other.
- all the schemes had made conscious efforts to source supplies locally and to maximise their local economic impact. For Myddfai and Taste Tideswell such purchasing was part of their marketing strategy based on building a place specific brand. This was less true of the other schemes.
- supply chain effects are likely to be limited in relatively small and highly open local economies. Most money will leak away. Conversely, the case against local purchasing is that organisations are seeking the lowest cost for any inputs.

We found evidence that local purchasing strategies needed to be tightly linked to the marketing and branding of the scheme, and through this enterprises could sell goods and services at a premium. However, this was a risky approach particularly where purchasers were relatively price sensitive. Myddfai had sought to adopt a hybrid approach, selling some locally sourced goods at a premium but otherwise sourcing gift products on cost alone and badging the goods as Myddfai.

7.2.6. Customers

This is probably the most important component part of the impact Village SOS schemes may have. The more customers are local, the more the scheme can be seen to be 'plugging the leaks' and meeting an unmet need, whilst the further afield customers come from, the more likely the additional injection of income into the local economy.

Village	Nature of Customers	Location of Customers and scale
Ballygally	Custom is made up of local residents and tourists	Assessment was that most trade is from local residents
Caistor	Custom is made up of local residents, some outside catering and business people using café and Wi-Fi	Assessment that most trade is currently from the local area.
Honeystreet	Custom is made up of local residents (from surrounding settlements) and tourists	Tourist custom is seasonal although is a significant part of income in the summer.

Howey	Custom is for produce sold through local shops and markets and through the social services contract	Most custom is not from the immediate area but the wider local authority area
Lochinver	Custom is from local residents and tourists	Trade is highly seasonal and in winter trade is almost entirely from local residents
Myddfai	Custom is from local residents and tourists in relation to the community hall, shop and café. Much of MTCs custom comes from online orders and trade fairs.	Trade is highly seasonal and in winter trade is almost entirely from local residents. MTC trade is mainly from outside the village and some is corporate. MTC is less seasonal.
Newstead	Most trade (for the visitor centre and the fishing lakes) is from the local area and sub-region.	Local residents use Newstead as an amenity although do not necessarily spend money there
Talgarth	Custom is from local residents and tourists	Trade is highly seasonal and in winter trade is almost entirely from local residents
Tideswell	Customer base is mixed although mainly from outside the local area	Customer location was found to be: 5% from the village; 15% from within 10 miles; 65% further afield/region; and 15% other (outside the region)
West Wemyss	Custom is from local residents and tourists	Majority of custom is from local area although aspiration is to grow the amount of visitors using the cafe

This is a contentious and controversial area: should rural enterprises seek to serve local markets or bring new trade into the area? Both can be supported, one in terms of meeting unmet local needs and the other through growing the economic base.

- Custom from local residents is a key feature in the majority of the schemes. On the one hand this is positive where it stops money leaking from the local area. However, it does not represent additional funding being injected into the local economy.
- Talgarth, Tideswell and Myddfai (trading activities) were found to have the most significant economic impacts in terms of the customer base and represent the largest net inflows of money into the local economy.
- The findings suggest a tension between enterprises which meet local needs and those which seek to have a significant economic impact.

This is a contentious area and raises wider concerns about how rural areas may be revived.

7.2.7. Other income

Our focus has largely been on trading and commercial income to the village enterprises. Nonetheless some of the enterprises and their parent non-profit organisations (where appropriate) will secure some non-trading income, typically through grant funding. It is difficult to provide annualised estimates for this income although it is possible to reflect on the funding they anticipate applying for.

On the whole most of the schemes were not looking for further grant income and as discussed earlier, most were focused on being self-sustaining enterprises. Some schemes such as Howey and Newstead envisaged bidding for further public sector contracts to provide services. However, some organisations recognised that grant income may be needed to undertake specific activities; this was cited in the case of Taste Tideswell.

The non-trading parent organisations may have separate plans for future grant applications but to a large extent these were separate from the specific trading activities.

7.2.8. Place based impacts

Place based impacts are the effects of the schemes above and beyond direct economic impacts which can be traced through the normal operation of an economic multiplier (such as supply-chain and income multipliers). A rationale of Village SOS is that it also has a place-based impact, for instance, more tourists are attracted to the area.

Village	Nature of Place Based Impact	Indicators and scale
Ballygally	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	No evidence that this has occurred.
Caistor	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	No evidence that this has occurred.
Honeystreet	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	No evidence that this has been sustained. The HoneyFest was an example of an initiative which may have lead to place based effects, largely . through the Barge Inn helping to attract tourists to the area by the area's association with crop circles.
Howey	No aim to have a place based effect	No evidence of placed based benefits
Lochinver	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	Main indicator over medium term would be an increase in visitors to the area, brought about as a result of the Mission and increased profile of Lochinver as a tourist destination. However, it is too soon to state whether this is the case.
Myddfai	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	Some evidence of more visitors to the area and using the scheme, but limited evidence of wider placed based effects
Newstead	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	Visitor attraction may in the long term lead to increase local demand from visitors (for example for food, drink and possibly accommodation)
Talgarth	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services	Some evidence to date of more visitors who are also using other services. There was also anecdotal evidence of

	in the village	more investment in the village in the form of the refurbishment and improvement of property.
Tideswell	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	Some evidence to date of more visitors who are also using other services, notably B and B accommodation in the village. Longer term the brand 'Taste Tideswell' may increase sale values for local produce
West Wemyss	Improved amenity; attraction of more visitors using other services in the village	No evidence that this has occurred. However, the longer term plans (including eco burial ground) may lead to place based impacts

This is an area for future consideration in the design of programmes. Social enterprise with some form of local ownership and aims for general benefit may operate to promote the local area directly or act for example to promote local goods and services produced by commercial trading enterprises (akin to farmers and food producer co-operatives). The research nonetheless raises the following points:

- the resident survey revealed some perceptions of such place based effects, although these were only perceptions. We did not conduct a survey of local businesses. Moreover, in the majority of cases it was far too soon to observe any place based impacts.
- the most positive example of a place based impact was in Tideswell where two local accommodation providers suggested greater demand for accommodation for attendees of Tideswell School of Food. Similarly, there was anecdotal evidence of improvements to property in Talgarth. Notably the rationale behind Lochinver and Newstead was for wider place based impacts but these had not yet been realised.

7.2.9. Concluding Points

The main conclusions from the assessment of the economic impact of the Village SOS enterprises are:

- it is too soon to make a full economic assessment of impact. This is in part tied up with the longer term viability of the enterprises, as discussed in a previous section.
- employment effects in most cases were relatively small, although need to be understood in a local context. Nonetheless, there was no strong evidence to suggest that without the enterprise that residents would not have found employment.
- volunteers played an important role in all schemes, but were found to be critical in a small group where income would not sustain the jobs required to run the enterprise.
- most schemes were largely providing low wage and part time employment opportunities. This may be sufficient in particular local contexts, but is unlikely to have a transformative effect.
- perhaps counter-intuitively, the schemes which are most likely to have transformative effects are those which bring new income to the area, rather than helping to circulate existing funding. Initiatives such as Tideswell and to some extent Talgarth, Newstead and Lochinver also showed potential for place based

effects - that is wider economic impacts on the area not generated through direct economic links such as supply chains or employee expenditure.

7.3. Social Impact

This section considers the array of social impacts from the schemes. We have not sought to prescribe a particular set of outcomes but rather drawn on qualitative case study research to uncover the array and relative importance of different impacts. Issues around greater participation and volunteering are largely considered elsewhere. A final note of caution is that this section is largely based on consideration of expected social outcomes: many of the schemes had not made sufficient progress to demonstrate changes in outcomes for either individuals or places.

Village	Identified Social Impacts	Indicators, scale and additionality
Ballygally	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Greater community interaction from the Village Hall Meeting need for a local shop 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Impact indicators show this has been achieved Shop has high level of usage by a high proportion of residents
Caistor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of a library Provision of a meeting space 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Main benefit through local access to books and library resources Main benefits highlighted in survey of residents (greater participation)
Honeystreet	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community benefit of providing a meeting place for local residents 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed evidence suggesting benefits not fully realised. Pub not being used by as many local residents as expected, however the pub has traditionally served a wide range of groups.
Howey	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of allotments and space for local residents to grow (and sell) their own food Support to individuals with mental health problems and learning difficulties delivered through Social Services, MIND and Kaleidoscope 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes mainly experienced in greater wellbeing of participants and social interaction. MIND supports around 3-10 people at any one time; Kaleidoscope 3-5 people; and Social Services 5-6 people. Understanding is that support is over the long term.
Lochinver	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Local people are employed Meeting place, particularly in winter 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Has employed local people although unclear whether they would have found jobs anyway. Moreover, it provides employment during the winter when cafes and B and Bs are closed. Observation of café in winter suggests that it is being used.
Myddfai	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Greater participation and the creation of volunteering opportunities Opportunities for local artisan to sell their products 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteering opportunities have helped some local people to forge more social connections and overcome isolation. A number of local residents are

	3. Meeting place for local people	generating additional income 3.Hall has a busy programme of events all year round.
Newstead	1. Support for young people to volunteer, gain experience and qualifications (in environmental management) and through this employment 2. Amenity value from improving quality of life and liveability of the area	1. Evidence of high levels of volunteering and of qualifications to NVQ2 equivalents. No evidence of job outcomes 2. Anecdotal evidence of a 'feel good factor' from profile of Village SOS and willingness of an external body to invest there.
Talgarth	1. Increase in participation 2. Provision of new services including 'bistro evenings' and 'flicks in the sticks'	1. Considered in a separate section 2. Services appear additional and would not have occurred without the Talgarth Mill.
Tideswell	1. Volunteering in the scheme 2. Local employment and uplift of skills 3. Wider outreach to schools	1. Volunteering has occurred but comments that there is no formal volunteer strategy and there are many other volunteering opportunities in the village 2. 12 employees were taken on as cleaners and now have progressed to food operations. 3. An officer is employed and together with volunteers runs courses in schools (e.g. on world cuisines)
West Wemyss	1. Provision of a meeting place	1. Provision of a new meeting place which is not the village hall.

Throughout the preceding sections of the report issues around participation and engagement have been considered, although not as 'hard' impacts of the scheme. The consideration of social impacts here reveals that:

- findings from the case studies point overwhelmingly to the main social benefit of Village SOS being in the form of greater participation. This is as would be expected. These were schemes funded on the basis that they should provide tangible community benefits, stem from consultation with communities and, in many cases, build a physical asset which enables greater participation (cafes, pubs and village halls).
- the second order of social impacts is around employment benefits, in particular those schemes (Tideswell, Lochinver and Newstead) which had some form of strategy to increase employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups. This may be through direct employment but also included training and volunteering. We received comments from individuals benefiting in this way that this support was positive and welcome, but it was not possible to quantify these benefits or assess the level of additivity.

- the final order of effects was from schemes which were delivering activities which had a direct social benefit. Examples here include support to individuals with mental health problems or learning difficulties (in Howey) and outreach work in schools (Tideswell). There are problems in attributing outcomes to this work. For instance, outreach in schools may raise awareness of food issues amongst pupils, and although tied to the National Curriculum it is difficult to attribute and changes like improved exam results to such provision. Similarly, the work at Howey on mental health may have benefits for the individuals concerned but may be masked by a far larger group with mental health problems who do not attend the sessions. These are perennial problems of intervention intensity and scale.

7.4. A Model to Understand Perceptions of Impact

7.4.1. Introduction

Economic and social impacts from the schemes should be of central importance in reviving rural communities. However, the case study findings and resident survey also suggest that the process of delivery, and in particular the perception of impact, may be important factors too. The evaluation therefore undertook statistical modelling to answer the question: **what are the key factors associated with the impact of the Village SOS programme?**

A logistic regression (logit) model¹¹ was developed to explore in more detail the factors associated with the overall impact of the Village SOS programme. Whether respondents thought ***the local area would be a better place to live as a result of the Village SOS project*** was used as an overall measure of the impact of Village SOS on local people. This is as elsewhere in this report.

The following factors were included in the model as explanatory variables:

- **demographic characteristics:** gender; age group; length of residency; economic status
- **involvement:** frequency of involvement
- **outcomes attributed to Village SOS project:** getting on better with other residents; having better access to services; being more likely to participate in local groups; being less likely to move away from the area; more employment in the local area; more tourists and visitors to the area.

Involvement was included in the model as it was identified throughout the descriptive analyses as an important factor associated with outcomes. The outcome variables were chosen to represent the different benefits Village SOS projects were perceived as having¹². Demographic characteristics were included to control for individual features.

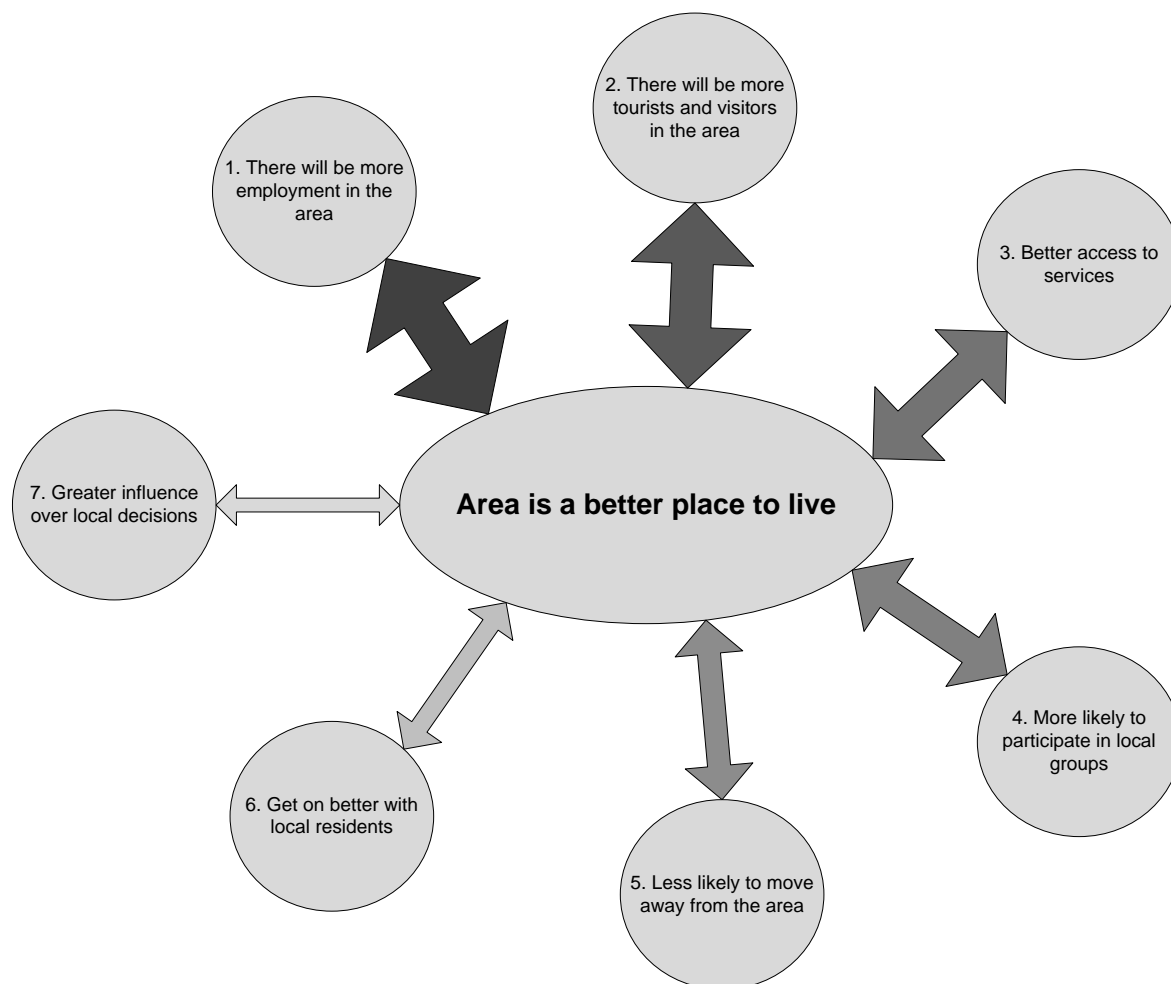
¹¹ The effectiveness of descriptive approaches is limited because they can only explain how *outcome x* (i.e. VSOS impact) is related to *variable y* (i.e. involvement) even though *variables a, b and c* (i.e. residents perceptions of different impacts) is known to be a factor as well. Statistical models overcome this problem because they enable variables *y, a, b and c* (plus others) to be linked so that their individual and collective influence on an outcome such as the impact of VSOS can be explored. *Logistic regression* is the preferred modelling approach when categorical outcome and explanatory data is predominant.

¹² It should be noted that several outcome variables were removed from the model as they found to interact with one or more other variables in the model. For example 'More business in the area' interacted with 'More employment' and 'More visitors' in a way that distorted the findings, so was excluded from the model

7.4.2. Model findings

Figure 7.1 provides a visual summary of the model findings by depicting the seven statistically significant factors and the relative strength of association that exists. Following that Table 7.1 provides a more detailed overview of the model.

Figure 7.1: Factors with a statistically significant association with programme impact and their relative importance



This evidence from the model shows that **economic benefits** are more strongly associated with resident perceptions of programme impact than **social benefits**. It also indicates that demographic factors such as gender and age are not significant.

Whether or not residents think the Village SOS project in their area will lead to **more employment** is the most important factor associated with overall impact followed by whether or not it will bring **more tourists or visitors** to the area. Both measures are indicators of the perception amongst residents that the Village SOS project will bring **economic benefits** to the area.

Of the perceived **social benefits** associated with the Village SOS project, providing **better access to services** was the most important factor, followed by being **more likely to participate in local groups** and being **less likely to move away from the area**.

Although **getting on better with local residents** and having **greater influence over local decisions** were significant factors they were far less important than the other types of perceived benefit.

Table 7.1: Logistic regression model summary

Variable	Significance ⁱ	Odds ratio ⁱⁱ	95% confidence interval for odds ratio	
			Lower	Upper
<i>Gender:</i>				
Male	0.371	0.851	0.598	1.211
<i>Age group:</i>				
35-49	0.688	1.144	0.593	2.209
50-64	0.197	0.652	0.340	1.249
65 and over	0.227	0.641	0.312	1.319
<i>Length of residency:</i>				
3-10 years	0.977	0.990	0.507	1.932
11-20 years	0.733	0.893	0.465	1.714
Over 20 years	0.415	0.775	0.421	1.429
<i>Economic status:</i>				
In paid work	0.318	1.237	0.815	1.876
<i>VSOS involvement:</i>				
Daily/weekly	0.023	2.202	1.116	4.348
Monthly	0.986	0.995	0.582	1.703
Less often	0.886	1.030	0.687	1.545
<i>Get on better with other residents:</i>				
Agree	0.024	2.161	1.105	4.225
<i>Has better access to services:</i>				
Agree	0.000	3.767	2.400	5.911
<i>Has greater influence over decisions affecting the local area:</i>				
Agree	0.045	2.618	1.022	6.708
<i>Is more likely to participate in local groups:</i>				
Agree	0.000	3.081	1.882	5.045
<i>Is less likely to move away:</i>				
Agree	0.000	2.573	1.622	4.081
<i>There will be more employment in the area:</i>				
Agree	0.000	4.715	3.247	6.847
<i>There will be more tourists and visitors to the area:</i>				
Agree	0.000	3.265	2.272	4.692
<i>Constant</i>				
<i>Constant</i>	<i>0.000</i>	<i>0.198</i>	-	-

Model constant: Female; Aged under 35; Resident less than 3 years; Not in paid work; Not involved; Negative perceptions of impact

ⁱ This provides an indication of the likelihood that a the influence attributable to this variable can occur by chance. If this value is below 0.05 it can be considered significant. Significant values are highlighted **bold**

ⁱⁱ This provides a measure of the odds that this variable relationship should occur when compared with the model constant

7.4.3. Understanding project impact

The logistic regression model provides a relatively powerful overarching analysis of the factors associated with positive programme wide impact: that is, the belief amongst residents that the Village SOS project has made the area a better place to live. The model shows that residents' views about the outcomes the project has had for *them* and will have for *the local area* are important predictors of their views regarding its overall impact: residents who identify positive outcomes are most likely to believe the project will make the area a better place to live. By contrast there is no statistical evidence that residents' demographic characteristics predict their views on this impact.

The role of project activities in explaining impact

Of the outcomes included in the model, residents identifying *positive economic outcomes* (more employment, more tourists and visitors) for the area were the most powerful predictors of programme wide impact, followed by the perception that the project will create *better access to services*, and mean they are more likely to *participate in local groups*. These outcomes can be understood in more detail through the descriptive analyses, which provide an indication of the types of project activity that are positively and negatively associated with each outcome. The relationships between different outcomes and project activities are outlined in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: The relationship between outcomes and project activities*

	1. More employment	2. More tourists and visitors	3. Better access to services	4. More likely to participate
A place to hold meetings or events	+	+	+	+
Selling to other businesses	-	-	-	ns
Café, restaurant or pub	+	+	+	+
Shop or other retail outlets	ns	+	+	+
Services for local residents	+	-	+	+
Visitor centre or tourist attraction	-	+	-	-
Developing and promoting local produce	-	-	-	ns
Training or learning opportunities	-	-	+	-
Overnight accommodation	+	-	ns	ns

*A positive (+) sign denotes a statistically significant positive association between two factors. i.e. if a respondent is from an area whose project provides a *place to hold meetings or events* they are more likely to say there will be *more employment* in the area. A negative (-) sign denotes a statistically significant negative association between two factors i.e. if a respondent is from an area whose project involves *selling to other businesses* they are less likely to say there will be *more employment* in the area. Non significant factors are denoted **ns**.

This shows that two types of project activity, providing a *place for local residents to hold meetings or events* and providing a *café, restaurant or pub* were positively associated with all four outcomes, while providing a *shop or other retail outlets* was

positively associated with three of the four outcomes (all bar more employment). It also shows that several factors: *selling to other businesses; developing and promoting local produce; visitor centre or tourist attraction; and training or learning opportunities*; were negatively associated with three of the four outcomes.

In some senses this latter finding seems somewhat counterintuitive to the model findings: the model identifies economic outcomes as the most important predictors of impact, yet the project activities with the most obvious economic focus are often negatively associated with outcomes. However, these activities are missing the social element (access to services, opportunities to participate) that the model also identifies as important. As a result their impact (or their impact in the eyes of local residents at least) appears to be less positive, probably because they do not reach a broad local audience in the way that community meeting spaces, shops and cafes do.

A comparison that illustrates this point is between Ballygally (where resident perceptions of impact were highest) and Tideswell (where it was lowest). In Ballygally the Village SOS project provides the village's only shop, post office and café, and a much needed community hall and meeting rooms - although another community meeting space did exist nearby prior to the Village SOS project this was at capacity and booked-up months in advance. By contrast in Tideswell the Village SOS project was perceived to be chiefly a cookery school that primarily targets people from outside the village and undertakes a range of events and activities to support and promote local food retailers and producers. To people in Tideswell the need for the project was less evident and the direct impacts on their lives and the prospects of the area less discernible.

The importance of involvement in explaining impact

Although the project activities described are clearly important, **involvement with the project** consistently emerged as the factor with the strongest association with positive resident perceptions regarding outcomes. Residents who had *some form of involvement* with the project were more likely to be positive than those who had not, with those whose involvement was *most frequent* most likely to be positive.

Resident involvement was highest in projects that provided a *place for local residents to hold meetings or events, a café, restaurant or pub and shop or other retail outlets* and lowest in projects that involved *selling to other businesses, developing and promoting local produce*, and provided *training or learning opportunities*. In many ways this reflects the findings about project activities, as it is the types of activity that bring projects into frequent contact with local residents and have the potential to reach furthest into local communities that were most strongly associated with positive views regarding the outcomes projects have had, or will have in the future.

7.4.4. Conclusion: implications for BIG

The survey findings suggest that social enterprises in rural communities are most likely to have a positive impact on the lives of local residents and the prospects of the area in question if they have the potential to improve economic opportunity whilst also providing key services and facilities that meet the needs of local people and create opportunities for local people to make a positive contribution to the area. Projects are more likely to do this if they provide activities and services that reach and can be accessed by a high proportion of local people. By contrast projects that are more economic or business focussed and do not reach or involve significant numbers of local people are less likely to have such a broad perceived impact even if they have a successful and sustainable enterprise model.

7.5. Assessing Future Impact

This section has outlined a framework through which the impact of the schemes can be considered. Assessment of impact in the future needs to consider the following components:

- **enterprise viability:** the businesses established through Village SOS will obviously need to survive for longer-term impacts to emerge. Some enterprises may cease trading or pursue a very different course (outside the original remit of their grant funding).
- **participation and connection:** the two principal short term benefits of Village SOS were found to be around participation in the scheme (for instance through volunteering but also simply service provision) and connection with other residents (a place to meet etc.). The extent to which this has continued could be considered through a further survey of residents.
- **economic impact:** We have outlined a framework for understanding impacts using a local Keynesian open economy model. Data for a more comprehensive analysis in the future would require further discussions with scheme managers, analysis of financial accounts, some analysis of the customer base, and most likely a survey of other local businesses.
- **social impact:** Beyond the benefits of participation and connection, these were found to be limited, except for some employment effects and the delivery of support to specific groups. Such support varied considerably between the cases in terms of scale and beneficiary group. It would be necessary to understand whether additional social projects have grown (perhaps funded through service income) and the effects on beneficiaries.

However, against each of the final three components assessment will be needed around additionality, namely to what extent would they or equivalent benefits have occurred anyway. It is likely that a combination of methods would be needed, possibly including some form of comparator group. We would also argue that some exploration of the perception of impact is also required, as this appears to be a key driver behind the perceived success of schemes amongst residents.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has revealed a somewhat mixed picture as to the impact of the Village SOS schemes. This is partly coloured by it clearly being too soon to assess either the long term viability of the enterprises or their lasting impact on their areas. Nonetheless, the analysis of business plans and progress to date reveals quite a diverse picture:

- Village SOS schemes are most commonly seeking to provide a product or service to meet a local need, and therefore sell to a local market. There were some exceptions to this, with the more actively trading businesses (Talgarth, Tideswell, Myddfai and Lochinver) showing that their markets lay further afield.
- direct economic impacts were limited, with the exception of a business such as the Barge Inn in Honeystreet, which had created up to 32 part time jobs. However, even small numbers of jobs created need to be understood in the context of the local area.
- it was too soon to judge wider placed based effects, although these perhaps showed greatest potential for understanding the full impact of the schemes.
- as we highlighted elsewhere in the report, some of the market predictions have proved to be optimistic, suggesting that a longer planning period might have allowed for better and more conclusive market research to be undertaken.

However, we have also shown that resident perceptions of impact (around the question of whether the area will improve as a place to live) is important. The findings from modelling of resident survey responses confirms that important components of the schemes include the provision of economic opportunities, addressing a service need and involving a large proportion of residents. This suggests that the success of the schemes is partly linked to the development of a sound model for a viable business, but also to providing a basis for involvement and the meeting of local needs. Engagement, communication and involvement are therefore key parts of the process.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSION AND LESSONS

8. Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This chapter draws together conclusions from the research against the main research aim and the individual research questions. We have re-ordered the questions around particular themes. The final section draws together four broad sets of implications or lessons from the research.

8.2. Answering the Research Questions

The evaluation set out 15 separate research questions under three main themes, Villages and Village Champions, the Learning Campaign, and BBC. The following indicates our main findings.

8.2.1. *Village Champions*

a. What difference has having a dedicated Village Champion made to the delivery of the village enterprise?

The findings of the evaluation suggest that the overall impact of the Village Champions was at best mixed. The Village Champions played different roles in the villages, from hands on project manager to a more distant (and physically removed) coach and mentor. The role in the four Learning Award villages was more distant and impact far less: in West Wemyss the Champion never fully took up post; in Howey support was limited after the development of the business plan; in Lochinver the role was unclearly defined and additional benefits unclear; and in Ballygally the role was undertaken from afar, and did not involve residency. In the televised Village SOS projects the role needed to be more active, and indeed in most cases became a feature of the TV programme.

b. What are the perceived benefits or challenges created by the Village Champion role? How beneficial (or not) was the involvement of the Champion to the Village?

The challenges created from the Village Champion role emanate from the selection and matchmaking event. We found that the selection process faced various constraints and held some limitations which may have led to less than ideal outcomes, for the villages and champions. Respondents (Champions and Village Leads) reflected on the pressures of time to identify the champion and in particular limited scope to develop all important relationships. The compressed selection timetable and the influence of the BBC in the process were seen as limiting factors.

There was a sense given by some Champions that the relationship was in some respects contrived to provide material from the television series, rather than providing the best outcome for the village scheme. More generally, there were challenges around forging a working and mutually beneficial relationship, and in some cases where this not possible, Champions were sidelined from the schemes.

In terms of benefits, some of the Champions clearly brought expertise, skills and experience which would not normally have been available to the villages. Examples here include the input on branding for Taste Tideswell, the staging of successful live music events in Honeystreet, and advice on architecture, design and PR in Newstead. Without the Village Champions, it would have been unlikely whether these schemes would have pursued their respective business models. Similar but lesser effects could be observed in Myddfai and Caistor. The support in the other schemes tended to be at a more generic level around enterprise.

c. What are the main challenges and issues that have been faced by the Village Champions?

and

d. Have the day to day challenges that the Villages and Village Champion face as they progress through the project been captured and translated into best practice?

Issues around these two questions can be taken together.

Eight of the Village Champions became residents of the villages and it was noted for some that this did involve some personal and professional upheaval. The most common issue to face the Champions was around relationship building, with scheme leads and more widely with residents.

The following sets out some of the lessons which can be drawn from the use of Village Champions:

- **roles need to be clarified from the outset.** We discussed in the report the different roles could be played, and the most important aspect was to understand where there were skills gaps and needs which the Champion could address. Without this there is greater risk of conflict as respective 'territories' are blurred. Skills needed for a capital build (e.g. project management) are very different to building and developing a business.
 - **there will be conflict and relationships need to be managed.** Relationships also need time to develop. In some cases, for example Caistor, the Village Leads were aware of potential conflict but also that the Champion was bringing skills not available to the scheme. More generally, there was found to be a clash of cultures between some Champions and schemes; this partly reflects the contrived selection event and need to generate entertaining television, but also around defining what 'enterprise' needs 'social enterprise' might have. We found that greatest needs were often around financial expertise and marketing.
 - it became clear in possibly four schemes that there was **probably no need for a Champion** and perhaps this was just seen as unlocking the capital funding. Some observed that locally provided advice would have been more beneficial.
 - Village Champions also needed to **combine harder business skills with softer skills** around communication and engagement with local residents and community based organisations. This engagement seemed to work better in some villages than others, and there were probably responsibilities on the part of the scheme Leads and Champions to make this work.
- e. What has been the impact of having the extra four Village SOS Learning Award Champions sharing their experiences and lessons learnt with other villages?**

This aspect of the programme did not work as envisaged. As noted, the Champions in these villages (Howey, Lochinver, Ballygally and West Wemyss) played limited roles.

8.2.2. Villages

f. What has been the impact of creating a social enterprise on the villagers?

A somewhat obvious finding is that it is 'too soon to say', both because the businesses are in an early stage of development and because it is unclear whether they will be viable in the long term.

A clear finding from the evaluation is that there are very different models of social enterprise in operation and they have different forms of social impact. Our modelling of data from the resident survey suggests that at this stage it is important for residents to perceive that there will be some form of economic benefit (e.g. more jobs or more tourists), but also that the enterprise meets other needs, such as providing a hub for local people to become involved and engaged, and through this social enterprises reach more people. To some extent this highlights the importance of being inclusive and of effective communication, but also action in response to feedback.

Looking ahead, the evaluation raises concerns over the longer term viability of the social enterprises. They perhaps need to be seen as hybrid organisations in which financial surpluses are never likely to be great (with a couple of exceptions), but that are sufficient for sustainability and there are tangible social benefits. The contribution of volunteers to the success of social enterprise should not be underestimated and sustaining this is crucial.

A final point is around the sometimes special circumstances of rural areas. In places with smaller populations there is a need for social enterprises to be part of a portfolio of activities (with a community hub at the heart of the activity), with commercial enterprises also meeting a tangible need (for example a shop, café or meeting place). This also means that those involved in rural social enterprise are often called upon to play multiple roles and the existence of such a *civic core* is an important part of an enterprise's success. The support and development of this group is important.

8.2.3. Business Development Grants

g. How have the applicant Villages who benefitted from the Business Development Grants but were not awarded taken forward their projects?

Our unsuccessful applicants survey found that only one scheme had taken forward the project as originally planned, with five schemes having found some funding to take forward the scheme but that it had been delayed. 48 per cent of respondents were still trying to raise funding and 38 per cent of respondents had not made any further progress.

What was perhaps most striking was around what the proposed activities were for. Greatest demand was for some form of community hub, including village halls, but which had some revenue stream. A question for BIG is not perhaps whether further funding is needed for capital in this area (other mainstream programmes already address this), but how it can provide revenue support to make capital projects including village halls and community hubs more sustainable.

8.2.4. Learning Campaign

- h. How have the initial villages involved in the programme (both successful and unsuccessful) accessed support from the Learning Campaign, and what difference has this made to them?**

The Learning Campaign was delivered by the Plunkett Foundation with the Advice Line going live at the start of the television series. At this point, most schemes were largely complete and except for the contribution of publicity material and speakers at Roadshow Events were largely not engaged in the programme.

We have not analysed the applications data to the Village SOS grant programme, as decisions had not been made as the research concluded.

The Advice Line statistics showed that most enquiries had come through the Roadshow Events and not as a result of the television programme.

- i. How successful has the Learning Campaign been in helping village communities replicate the success of the funded projects?**

The Learning Campaign has obviously used material, case studies, interviews, Web 2.0 material and so forth from the funded projects. However, our findings would challenge that the funded projects have all been, or will be, successful - indeed it is too soon to use the projects in this way.

Some case studies however have reported being involved in advisory roles to other schemes, with a notable example here being Myddfai.

- j. Were there any benefits of the application process for those who did not receive funding?**

Most of the qualitative findings reported that the application process and feedback had not been that helpful to the schemes. On the positive side applicants recognised that it had not been that time consuming and the application process was less burdensome than other BIG funding programmes.

- k. Did Village SOS and the Learning Campaign help to prompt a wider policy debate and move rural issues up the agenda?**

The Village SOS television series received relatively high viewing figures and audience appreciation measures suggested that it had been positively received. The television programme with Learning Campaign material was also readily picked up in national and local media, especially around the launch of the series.

Village SOS was also subject to an Early Day Motion proposed by Greg Mullholland (Liberal Democrat MP for Leeds North) in the House of Commons on 14 September 2011:

"That this House welcomes the Big Lottery Fund's Village SOS initiative, launched in conjunction with a BBC1 series broadcast from 10 August to 14 September 2011; recognises that community enterprises make a significant contribution to the well-being of rural communities across the UK; further recognises that rural communities with the right support can save local services including village shops and pubs as well as enable people to take action on broadband provision, local healthy food, affordable housing, transport provision and preservation and development of heritage assets; urges the Government to promote

community enterprise in rural areas; and calls on the Government to reduce regulation and administrative burdens so that it is as easy to start a community enterprise as any other form of business."

The Motion received cross-party support although it is unclear what impact it had on subsequent parliamentary debates and on government policy.

Analysis of Web 2.0 data suggests evidence of activity at two levels, from the individual schemes (primarily seeking to market their activities) but also nationally and on Twitter, primarily led by Tweets by the Plunkett Foundation as part of the Learning Campaign. As might be expected Twitter activity has peaked around specific events such as the national conference at the end of February 2012.

What the Learning Campaign appears to have done primarily is to create a rich base of material on the potential of rural social enterprise and to market this actively through a variety of channels, including the use of rural voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations.

In conclusion there is some evidence to suggest that rural issues, and in particular rural enterprise, has moved up the 'policy' agenda and contributed to a public debate. It is also perhaps too soon to comment fully, given that the Learning Campaign is still live and that the policy process takes longer than the few months since the broadcast of the television series. Finally, there was a missed opportunity in that the profile of the Learning Campaign and BIG's role did not feature strongly in the television series.

I. Were there any innovative approaches to engaging the community or project delivery that proved successful and could be replicated elsewhere?

One of the most innovative aspects of Village SOS is that it has provided a range of business models which might be used in developing rural enterprise. However, it does not (and nor did it seek to) provide an exhaustive list of activities. There are some gaps, notably around schemes which were led by local food producers and farmers, although some of the schemes including Howey and Taste Tideswell touched on this. Similarly, none of the schemes sought to do anything on a large scale around renewable energy production (although this was an original intention of Howey and Talgarth Mill). Other omissions were around community land ownership, community housing provision and place based marketing (particularly for tourism), although many of the schemes did have attracting tourists as a goal.

Specific examples of innovation included the idea of place based brands, with Tideswell leading this with Taste Tideswell (*Made in Tideswell*), but also this being part of the Myddfai, Honeystreet and Talgarth approaches. However, the lessons from this are that, for this strategy to be successful, brand recognition needs to be strong and identity built over time through effective marketing. Taste Tideswell is the only scheme that fully tried to do this. However, a challenge which was not fully addressed here was the engagement of local residents.

Newstead provided a very different example of innovation. It successfully engaged residents including what might be seen as hard to reach groups of young people. It engaged people in volunteering activities with immediate benefits and potentially with a longer term impact of improving individuals' employment prospects and the area's economic prospects.

Finally, the resident survey data suggests that the most successful scheme in engaging residents was Ballygally. It provided a needed and commercially viable local shop and a community hub. As such it was very popular and perhaps provides lessons for other places. It was not necessarily innovative, just very effective.

8.2.5. BBC

m. How did BBC involvement affect the project's delivery? Was it deemed as a positive or negative addition?

The BBC production team made a high quality television series which was aired in a peak viewing time and achieved reasonably high viewing figures. The series was positively reviewed in local and national media.

Whilst the programme was designed to be entertaining and presented by a high profile presenter in Sarah Beeny, it was commented that it did not provide much information in terms of how a local social enterprise might be developed. There was some criticism that the choice of Sarah Beeny as presenter meant a different focus to the programme to the one originally intended. It was also noted that the change in executive producer meant that a different focus was taken to the programme, which was not as originally discussed between BIG and the BBC.

The timing of the programme, late in the Summer, also meant that some of the marketing benefits which villages had hoped to receive were limited. This was cited in Honeystreet and Tideswell (who purposely developed their project at a very rapid rate to be ready for the original transmission date of March 2011).

At an operational level, BIG's involvement in a high profile television series with large scale PR campaign was demanding on resources across the organisation. It handled the campaign very well and exacting deadlines were all met. Nonetheless, stakeholder respondents at Board and officer level reflected on the time consuming nature of programmes of this sort.

n. What benefits or issues has the TV series being aired brought to the Villages?

The clearest benefit to the villages was the provision of 'free' marketing, with many villages reporting greater visitor numbers as a result of the series. Whether this proves to provide a one-off boost was raised as an issue, although most noted that it will become a reference point in village history.

It was noted in many villages that the television series provided only a very selective lens on the issues faced by residents and the development of the scheme. This was most acutely seen in Tideswell where the series misrepresented village life and suggested that the village was in decline, when the opposite is true. This could potentially be damaging to the village. As noted earlier, the timing of the programme was perhaps also a missed opportunity in terms of Summer visitors.

A similar comment was made around the portrayal of different local stakeholders in television programmes. Scheme stakeholders noted that the programme tended to focus on particular individuals and created a dramatic narrative around possibly only a small handful of residents. This was not always the case in reality. Moreover, the Talgarth programme largely excluded the Village

Champion and Lead despite her active involvement in the scheme. The converse was true in other schemes.

o. How did the Communities find the experience of being filmed and working with the BBC?

Despite the concerns that some villages had with their portrayal, the resident survey revealed a largely neutral to positive impression amongst residents of the experience of working with the BBC.

Those most closely involved in the schemes also felt that the production team had engaged them well in the filming and sought to portray key aspects of the scheme in a positive light. Those involved had also received feedback on how they were coming across. Nonetheless, Village SOS was an entertainment programme and not, as one respondent commented, public information broadcasting. It was therefore necessary to focus on aspects of drama, conflict and jeopardy.

8.3. Reviving Communities and Enriching Residents' Lives?

The aim of the evaluation has been:

To examine how the innovative approach pursued by Village SOS projects has helped revive rural communities and enrich residents' lives (*Big Lottery Fund, Evaluation Specification 2010*).

The full impact of Village SOS will only become apparent in the longer term: many of the funded schemes are in their early stages and yet to become fully viable. It is too soon to comment on whether rural communities have been revived. The following set out our main findings from the study:

- different business models (of social enterprise) have been supported with differing types of social and economic benefits. There is no single successful model.
- the socio-economic contexts of the ten schemes vary markedly, and with this the needs the schemes are seeking to address. It is questionable the extent to which certain schemes were operating in areas of significant need and deprivation. With the exceptions of West Wemyss and Newstead, none of the schemes are operating in severely deprived localities. This is not to suggest that the other areas did not have needs, particularly with respect to access to services, nor that they were necessarily prosperous.
- schemes which provide some form of community hub (a village hall) and meet an immediate service need (e.g. a shop) were unsurprisingly most effective at engaging residents, who also perceived them to be having the greatest effects in terms of improving the village as a place to live. Those schemes offering something less immediately tangible, and without a community hub role, were perceived less well. This is not to say that they would not produce economic benefits in the longer term.
- the viability of the schemes was still to be proven. In all cases they were still in a stage of development. Most reflected on the need to reduce costs (typically staffing) and to improve revenues. The scale of turnover also varied markedly between the schemes, from a few thousand pounds to half a million pounds. It is likely that not all the enterprises will be viable on commercial revenues alone in the long term. Many were looking at further grant funding and most required volunteers to remain trading. A concern in a couple of schemes is around the

burnout of volunteers, and in particular those playing management committee and trustee roles.

- perhaps paradoxically, those schemes which generate most of their revenues through external trade, that is, their customer base is beyond the village, will have the greatest economic impacts on the villages in the long term. They are not displacing local activity and are bringing new revenues to the area. Moreover, some schemes showed the potential to have wider place based effects, for instance attracting visitors who spend money in the local economy.

An interesting and innovative aspect of Village SOS is its wider impact on rural development. It has clearly contributed to a wider movement around rural revival and the role of community ownership. Both the television series and Learning Campaign have had an impact here. However, it is only one part of this wider movement, and significantly there are marked variations in this across the countries and regions of the United Kingdom.

8.4. Lessons for Future Programmes

The following four main lessons can be drawn from the evaluation.

Role of Champions

Advice, support, the sharing of experience and mentoring and coaching are all necessary parts of supporting social enterprise, and in particular community owned businesses in rural locations. The evaluation identified needs in business development around finance and marketing and support is required in these areas. Village Champions are perhaps an extreme form of support and advice, and it may be that other models, such as peer support, mentoring and coaching alongside more technical advice may be as important in building stronger social enterprises.

BBC

Village SOS allowed BIG to form an innovative and challenging programme in partnership with BBC. It was not without its risks, but on the whole the relationship was well managed. There are some concerns that the BBC did not always meet BIG halfway in the making and broadcasting of the television series. Staff turnover at BBC probably did not help this process, nor did the commissioning and programming processes. Whilst Village SOS attracted good viewing figures and high levels of audience appreciation, some opportunities were missed on the part of the BBC to produce a programme which was as informative as it was entertaining. The televised programme also misrepresented some individuals and villages in what should have been factual programming. The potential for the BBC programme to raise awareness of the Learning Campaign and opportunities from BIG in a further grants programme was also missed.

Social Enterprise

There are lessons which BIG can draw from its support of social enterprise. Village SOS provides evidence on the different models of social enterprise and the range of impacts enterprises may have: from purely economic benefits through to social benefits including the role of rural community hubs. The social enterprises supported by Village SOS are unlikely to generate significant surpluses for reinvestment in community activities: if these opportunities existed it is likely that private companies would already be operating in these areas. Nonetheless social enterprises can be viable, albeit with on-going support from volunteers and grant based assistance which supports their community infrastructure role. Perhaps especially in rural areas, social enterprises are hybrids combining many roles in meeting needs, providing a

community hub and promoting some small scale business activities. Areas which should perhaps be explored further include the role of producer co-operatives, of place-based development and of branding. These all require support.

Rural policy

Rural policy as it exists in the United Kingdom has largely been fragmented, caught between agricultural policy, access to services and housing provision, and more recently caught in the shadow of territorial economic policies focused on urban areas and 'city-regions'. There are nonetheless examples of more integrated rural development policies, particularly through EU programmes such as LEADER and in specific areas such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Such examples are characterised by a long standing commitment to bottom-up economic development across spatial units larger than individual settlements. Village SOS missed opportunities in not engaging with a more integrated approach to rural policy as a means to revive rural communities. Nonetheless, Village SOS does provide examples for rural enterprise development in the future.

Annex 1: List of Consultees

Big Lottery Fund Staff

Peter Wanless, Chief Executive

Paul Capelin, Programme Manager

Amy Jones, Head of Functions

Linda Quinn, Director of Communications and Marketing

Suzanne King, Head of Strategic and Corporate Policy

Joanne Leech, Head of Programme Management

Jessica Taplin, Head of Communications and PR

Andrew Civil, Programme Development Manager

Marion Nash, Head of Programme Management

Eric Samuel, Senior Policy Officer (Scotland)

Graham Brand, Policy Officer (Wales)

John Fellows, Policy Officer (Scotland)

Oswyn Hughes, Media Relations Officer (Wales)

Mick McGrath, Head of East Region

Amanda Doherty, Head of Communications and Press (Northern Ireland)

Anne Marie O'Hara, (Scotland)

Big Lottery Fund Committee and Board Members

Sanjay Dighe, BIG Committee

Anna Southall, BIG Committee

Mike Theodoulou, BIG Committee

Judith Donovan, BIG Committee

Margaret Hyde, BIG Committee

Alison Magee, BIG Committee

Julie Harrison, BIG Committee

Mark Cotton, Head of Region (South West)

BBC

Meredith Chambers, Executive Producer

Nick Shearman, BBC Network Commissioning Executive for Welsh and Independents

Jo Ball

Peter Lawrence, BBC Executive Producer

Plunkett Foundation

Peter Stimpson, Head of Finance and Accounting