



# Surrey's Big Society

a practical perspective from local government

Dr Andrew Povey



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# About Localis

## Who we are

Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to local government and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold a calendar of events and facilitate an ever growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK.

## Our philosophy

We believe in a greater devolution of power to the local level. Decisions should be made by those most closely affected, and they should be accountable to the people which they serve. Services should be delivered effectively. People should be given a greater choice of services and the means to influence the ways in which these are delivered.

## What we do

Localis aims to provide a link between local government and the key figures in business, academia, the third sector, parliament and the media. We aim to influence the debate on localism, providing innovative and fresh thinking on all areas which local government is concerned with. We have a broad events programme, including roundtable discussions, publication launches and an extensive party conference programme.

## Find out more

Please either email [info@localis.org.uk](mailto:info@localis.org.uk) or call 020 7340 2660 and we will be pleased to tell you more about the range of services which we offer. You can also sign up for updates or register your interest on our website.

# About Surrey

Surrey is special. There are many reasons why people would want to live here and businesses want to be based here. Surrey has attractive countryside, towns and villages. It has a dynamic economy with young people getting a strong start in life at our great schools. It is one of the safest counties in the UK and people in Surrey live longer, healthier lives than those in many other parts of the country.

However, Surrey's success also brings challenges: high house prices, congestion, pressure to develop and high levels of waste and pollution. Rural Surrey is idyllic for many, but difficulties of accessibility, limited infrastructure and higher living costs can compound the challenges facing more vulnerable people. Surrey also has pockets of deprivation and not everyone enjoys high standards of living.

Nevertheless, Surrey has solid foundations upon which to develop further a thriving Big Society with capable, aspiring residents possessing a strong sense of community. We have strong voluntary, community and faith organisations with long histories and firm roots in their communities. And we have commitment from partners to work together to reduce bureaucracy, improve services and deliver value for money.

## About the Surrey Strategic Partnership

The Surrey Strategic Partnership (SSP) is an important mechanism for supporting and enabling Surrey's Big Society. The partnership brings together representatives from the county, district, borough, town and parish councils in Surrey, Surrey Police, NHS Surrey, local business groups and the voluntary, community and faith sector to work together to find solutions to local problems.

A key role of the partnership is to work with communities to bring to life a shared vision for Surrey. This vision 'Standing up for Surrey' was developed from extensive consultation with residents and contains a small set of priorities that will help the vision to come alive.

The partnership is the only forum in which all these partners meet to discuss a strategic approach to coordinating services. The Big Society provides additional impetus to empower individuals and communities and rethink the way public services are designed and delivered.



#### About the author

Dr Andrew Povey has been the Chairman of the Surrey Strategic Partnership. He was nominated to this post from his role as Leader of Surrey County Council. Dr Povey has been an elected county councillor since 1993 and currently represents Waverley Eastern Villages. He has also served on Cranleigh Parish Council. He is a resident of Cranleigh and has lived in Surrey for over 25 years.

## Introduction: Does Surrey have a Big Society?

In November 2010 the Surrey Strategic Partnership (SSP) hosted a Big Society conference. An overwhelming message was that “we’ve already got the Big Society in Surrey”. People pointed to the significant amount of voluntary and community activity taking place here and concluded it was already happening.

But as I am regularly reminded by the voluntary, community and faith sector partners on the SSP, the Big Society is about more than volunteering. The Government refers to three strands which make up the concept: community empowerment; opening up public services; and social action. Community empowerment requires us to give people the knowledge and power to shape their communities. Opening up public services is about broadening who delivers services and how they do so. And social action is about people playing a more active role in society. While perhaps we are doing well at some of these things in some places, I do not believe that we have achieved the Big Society consistently throughout Surrey.

Some suggest that to talk about “developing” the Big Society in Surrey is disrespectful to those already doing invaluable work across the county. On the contrary, I am proud of residents who make a difference to their communities and the lives of their neighbours. In my own village, there are many examples of ‘neighbourliness’ that we might now label ‘the Big Society’. I’m particularly fond of Chiddingfold’s cake makers, a group of residents who bake cakes free of charge, which are then sold in a coffee bar sponsored by local churches. As there is no private café in Chiddingfold, this service provides a vital focus in the village, particularly for young parents.

Although only a small example, it is this sort of neighbourliness that is our real strength in Surrey and on which I want to build so everyone feels they have the wherewithal to help themselves and their communities. It is this potential that I am keen to capitalise, to scale up and roll out successful ideas. I believe that local communities possess unique assets and capabilities to develop solutions that work for them.

## Who is responsible? A change in emphasis

What really excites me is that by strengthening civil society and rebalancing the role of the state – in the ways demonstrated by our case studies – people will be able to improve their quality of life in a way that has not previously been possible. This is not simply about expanding voluntary efforts to plug gaps caused by public spending cuts. The Big Society requires a genuine commitment to give power to communities and utilise their abilities.

The welfare state improved levels of education, health and life expectancy in Britain in the years after the Second World War. However, even Beveridge – widely acknowledged as the designer of Britain's welfare state – recognised that his plans had both missed and limited the potential power of the citizen.<sup>1</sup> I believe that excessive expansion of the welfare state has marginalised voluntary, community and faith solutions and discouraged personal responsibility. It has in fact sown the seeds of dependency that exacerbate problems rather than resolving them.

An anecdote from the county council's chief executive's blog provides a telling example of the unrealistic expectations being made of public services.

<sup>1</sup> Participle (2008)  
'Beveridge 4.0'



On day two of the very heavy snow there was a big problem keeping one of our A&Es open. Eventually we got some additional help from the army to clear it. This went out as a news story. I then got a phone call from someone insisting on speaking to me. The conversation went roughly like this:

**Caller** I've just heard you've got hundreds of soldiers helping to clear snow from a hospital

**Me** Yes

**Caller** That's wonderful. I live just around the corner. My husband and I have a really important business meeting but our drive is covered in snow

**Me** OK

**Caller** I wonder if once these soldiers have finished they would call around to our house

**Me** I don't think so

**Caller** I wouldn't need them all

**Me** We won't be able to help, I'm afraid

**Caller** But you sent them to the hospital

**Me** Yes, that's a priority to keep A&Es open.

**Caller** Are you saying I'm not a priority?

**Me** Yes I am

**Caller** Well I think you're an "idiot"\*

\*Altered from the original dialogue to avoid offence

Such high expectations, as well as the challenges presented by an ageing population, environmental issues, a global economy and social fragmentation will not be resolved by a centralised welfare-heavy state with its silo institutions. Bureaucratic approaches often neglect individual needs and fail to resolve intractable problems such as chaotic families with multiple needs. The challenge is to invest in preventative approaches that encourage individuals, families and communities to make the most of their strengths and capabilities, rather than expecting public services to respond to problems after they have arisen.

## Opportunities to take control

The personalisation agenda in adult social care suggests that people want to take more responsibility for their well-being and to exercise more control over the services they receive. This tailored support can achieve better outcomes, often by investing in social or preventative solutions that can reduce the need for more expensive acute care.

We have a duty to continue providing high quality core services but we cannot simply retreat to these and leave individuals and communities unsupported to rediscover their capacity to do things for themselves. And of course we need to make sure that people are not left behind. Public services therefore need to help people realise their abilities and develop their independence. Surrey's two advice centres for disabled people are a great example of a new approach to the provision of services.

Young people in Surrey, like elsewhere, are experiencing the brunt of the current economic malaise and finding it difficult to get jobs. We are determined not to allow worklessness to become a way of life for a generation of young people. That is why the Surrey Economic Partnership led a scheme giving young people the opportunity to work and develop the skills needed to improve their employability. While government funding was initially used to finance this scheme, its success has encouraged the partners to explore ways to fund the scheme when the grant finishes.

### *Taking control: self-directed support*

87 year old Maureen was living in a residential home, funding her own care. She was deeply unhappy and started to refuse to eat and drink and was increasingly moving into a deep depression, expressing to her care manager that she 'wanted to die'.

She wanted to choose what to eat (being a lifelong vegetarian), tend her plant pots and see more of her friends and family and felt these choices were no longer within her control. Through self-directed support, Maureen put together a self assessment. This enabled her to move back home and get support for her personal needs. She also got a budgie to look after and now regularly sees her friends and family. She felt she had complete control of this new situation and has been able to make choices for herself. The cost of this package is £300 a week as opposed to £540 previously.



### *Empowering disabled people: community hubs*

Two pioneering hubs have been set up in Surrey that are run both for and by disabled people. The hubs provide information, advice and advocacy services and are staffed entirely by volunteers, with support from a professional manager. They promote disabled people's independence by helping them make more informed choices about the care and support available to them.

The county council worked in partnership with organisations representing disabled people to establish these pioneering, user-led citizen hubs. Epsom was the first hub of its kind opened in the country and was followed shortly after by one in Redhill.

One volunteer said: "The potential of the hub is very exciting. Not only are we empowering customers but our volunteers too. I am learning new skills and meeting new people every day."

### *Creating opportunities: Future Jobs Fund*

The Future Jobs Fund in Surrey created 350 six-month placements for 18-24 year olds who had been out of work for 6-12 months. The grant provided a basic wage for the young person and contributed to the employer's costs. This funding commitment and a comprehensive support package encouraged employers to take on young people from difficult backgrounds where they may have been reluctant to do so.

82 Surrey organisations offered a range of jobs in areas such as administration, maintenance, customer services and marketing. Young people took part in an initial seven-day training programme to help build transferable skills and were given £300 to spend on further training or equipment to improve their employability.

Following the initial six months, participants were expected to take personal responsibility to secure further employment and many have been successful in doing this. Of the 272 individuals who had completed the programme by August 2011, 136 were in paid employment and only 33 were known to have gone back on benefits. The remaining participants were taking part in further training, volunteering or could no longer be contacted. Participants benefited from gaining workplace experience, bringing improvements in communication skills and confidence.



The Future Jobs Fund demonstrates that while partners can provide opportunities, it is people stepping up and making the most of them that really counts.

## Harnessing the power in our communities: encouraging social action

We believe that people not only want more control over their lives, but are also prepared to do more to help others, especially on a reciprocal basis. It is this belief that everyone can do more – albeit with the appropriate support – that prompted me to propose a target of ‘everyone a volunteer’. This idea, which has the support of the SSP, is a way to challenge all residents to take responsibility for their community by giving back in some way.

We are starting strongly, with many residents already responding to challenges facing their communities. Take the extreme weather we have experienced during the last couple of winters. Although a small number of residents expected public services to solve their problems, the council was inundated by residents wanting advice about how

to help out. Some residents were seeking advice following scare mongering that suggested they would be liable if they cleared a path and someone then slipped. All it took was clear advice from our legal team and many residents picked up their shovels and got on with it.

Despite this enthusiasm, some communities will undoubtedly need more support to identify and access opportunities. The ‘everyone a volunteer’ project recognises this challenge and will focus on widening participation. We know that factors including education, age and gender play a part in whether people volunteer.<sup>2</sup> This normally plays out to the benefit of Surrey, a county with, for example, residents who have above average levels of education. But this reminds us of the need to focus on those groups where civic spirit is not currently strong and establishing it may be more challenging.

This was a key argument in a pioneering report from the Community Foundation for Surrey, ‘Surrey’s Bigger Society’.<sup>3</sup> It suggested that Surrey contains both the most powerful and the most powerless, raising the question of how to build the social capital that will enable more marginalised residents to participate in and benefit from the Big Society. Recognising this, the Community Foundation for Surrey has established the ‘Hidden Surrey Fund’ to create a pool of funding specifically for areas that are low on social and financial capital and may otherwise attract few donors.

The case study below shows what these communities are capable of with the right support.

We have a long way to go before we meet our aspiration of everyone volunteering but we have a strong base to build on. Although this is an ambitious aim, it is an important one where our partnership could be particularly influential. National figures show that around 23% of volunteers help out in places such as schools, hospitals and police stations,<sup>4</sup> which is why it is important that we have all partners supporting this project.

And we hope to extend these aspirations. The partnership is currently developing a similar challenge for employers and businesses in Surrey to encourage corporate social responsibility to really take hold. We already have effective examples of how voluntary organisations can work with businesses to the benefit of their community.

2 See, for example NCVO (2011) ‘Participation: trends, facts and figures’ and Institute of Volunteering Research (2008) ‘Who gives time now? Patterns in participation in volunteering’

3 Bowock (2011) ‘Surrey’s Bigger Society: a view from the perspective of the Community Foundation for Surrey’

4 NCVO (2011) ‘Participation: trends, facts and figures’

### *Building social capital: Spelthorne Together*

Like much of Surrey, Spelthorne borough is relatively well off but it also has the highest unemployment rate in the county and there are small pockets of deprivation. Greater levels of support are often needed to enable local people to enjoy the benefits of community action.

Spelthorne Together evolved from the Local Strategic Partnership with a clear mission to build capacity to enable residents to run projects for themselves. With a small grant from the county council, the partnership has delivered a wealth of projects to develop local leaders. The community decided the focus of projects and with support became increasingly self-sufficient in delivering them.

One of the community's priorities was to improve public safety confidence. Some money was used to install CCTV in a high crime location, resulting in better relationships between local traders and public authorities and fewer reported incidents. Additional funding enabled the Neighbourhood Watch coordinator to work extra hours and attend start-up meetings. This was instrumental in establishing nine additional Neighbourhood Watch Groups, all of which benefit from community participation.

The work of Spelthorne Together has been “hands-on” in its aim to build social capital and community capacity. Local residents have engaged as visionaries, initiators and organisers and the difference in the community is tangible. Although the grant has come to an end, most of the projects are expected to continue, demonstrating the true outcomes of the programme: to build capacity of the local community to make the Big Society happen.

In spite of these successes Surrey does not always benefit from local giving as the extent of need may be less apparent than in other areas. Encouraging businesses to become more active locally will be an important step in developing a stronger philanthropic culture.

### *Working with business: Runnymede Association of Voluntary Services*

Runnymede Association of Voluntary Services (RAVS) works as a broker service, matching businesses with local charities. RAVS provides the expertise needed to find suitable projects for the teams and ensures that volunteers are well managed on the day.

Procter and Gamble and Bupa have both committed support to White Lodge, a centre providing creative activities for disabled children, young people and adults and their families. Both companies provided staff and resources to make the play area a safe and stimulating area for the children.

RAVS also matched Salesforce.com, an enterprise cloud computing company, with The BIZ, a local community police project. During school hours The BIZ provides education to young people who are at risk of exclusion and offers them the benefits of learning non-contact boxing skills. The BIZ is also open to the wider community outside of school hours. The centre received a much-needed lick of paint and a refurbished pathway from volunteers from Salesforce.com.

### *Making use of expertise: SATRO*

SATRO has existed as a charity for more than 20 years to bring together schools, colleges and business with the aim of inspiring children in maths, science, engineering and technology. These subjects are vital for business growth and creativity and equip young people with the skills demanded by employers.

Working with business representative organisations SATRO launched the Surrey Education Business Hub portal. It offers opportunities for businesses and schools to link up on a variety of opportunities, from one-off site visits to careers events and enterprise challenges.

Year 10 and 11 students from Ash Manor School received one to one mentoring from business people to help them plan their future study or careers while others have received training in construction skills from experienced craftspeople. Some students also exhibited science and technology projects at the Surrey Science Festival, which is attended by over 140 companies.



SATRO is a great demonstration of what can be achieved when different sectors work together. We should be making use of expertise wherever it sits to get the best outcomes. In this example that means delivering more effective support for Surrey's young people.

## From provider to enabler

The SATRO case study illustrates the comprehensive shift that we are trying to bring about. The statutory sector no longer has to be the provider – or even the funder – of services. We want to work in partnership with residents to decide who should be responding to service needs and how. In some instances it will still be the council, or the police, or the NHS. In others though, as demonstrated, we might find the answer elsewhere in the community, be it residents, voluntary organisations or local businesses. To bring this about we need to change assumptions so that people no longer feel the public sector is the default answer.

This change from service deliverer to service enabler is being played out in the changes we are making to the county council's youth services.

*From provider to enabler: services for young people*

Under the county council's plans, in future a local organisation or business will be appointed to run activities at each of the council's 35 youth clubs. Services will be retained but provided by a different organisation and the solution will not be the same in each area.

The council will also join up with colleges to run vocational courses in the youth centres, which are currently empty during the day. Finally, each of the council's 11 local committees will be given up to £200,000 a year for grass roots activities or projects agreed with young people from the area.

The culmination of these proposals is an approach where the council commissions outcomes rather than automatically providing services directly. These plans have been recognised by the House of Commons Education Select Committee Chairman, Graham Stuart, as "constructive and forward-looking". Rather than simply putting red lines through the budget, the council is attempting to do something different by focusing on the needs of residents.

The fundamental question for the public sector is no longer who should qualify for our services, but what do people want to improve and who is best placed to help? The role of the public sector will evolve as a wider range of suppliers provides services. We will need to consider broader issues such as whether the local market is working effectively and fairly and we will need to continue our rigorous pursuit of value for money. It is a different way of working, which will require us to commission less on the basis of the service we expect and more on the results we are seeking.

We will also need to consider how to stimulate and support innovation. Ideas are out there, but need the right conditions for them to thrive. Super-fast broadband presents one such opportunity. I believe that if the correct infrastructure is in place new service approaches and new providers will emerge. It is for this reason the county council has set a target of 100% access to super-fast broadband for all businesses and residents in Surrey by the end of 2013. It is estimated that 19% of the county will not benefit from current market-led upgrade plans so intervening and investing will ensure Surrey can reap the benefits, such as supporting new forms of service delivery.

## Opening up public services

There are benefits to letting go and allowing a healthy variety of approaches to flourish. There is a wealth of skills outside our own organisations, but also within them; we have staff who can provide imaginative solutions if only we give them the freedom to do so.

### *Making the most of staff expertise: Central Surrey Health*

In 2006, Jo Pritchard, a former nurse, and Tricia McGregor, a speech therapist, established Central Surrey Health, a not for profit, limited liability company, owned by (and employing) local nurses and therapists. Central Surrey Health demonstrates how new business models can be used to deliver services more effectively.

The social enterprise is run by the 750 nursing and therapy staff it employs, meaning that the people who are most in touch with patients' needs are also in charge of providing the services. As a social enterprise, the company does not distribute profits and any savings are put back into providing services. While staff are financially no better off than if they worked in the NHS, they are empowered to solve problems and shape the direction of the business through staff forums and an absence of hierarchy.

Co-ownership is a unique way to ensure that staff are engaged and enthusiastic about improving services. In 2010 the Department of Health found that Central Surrey Health services for children with complex needs created £5.67 in 'social value' for every £1 spent by commissioners and in the same year the organisation was the first winner of the national 'Big Society Awards'. By recognising that the skills and knowledge of staff can be better utilised using new business models, NHS Surrey has helped to improve the services being delivered to patients.

It has been hard for some to accept that the answer may lie in such innovative approaches, but we must recognise that the strength of our services often lies in the staff who provide them. These people are close to clients and understand their requirements far better than distant managers. The county council is also looking at innovative organisational models: social workers in adults social care are currently getting support to set up an independent social enterprise to provide services for deaf people and the hard of hearing.

Similarly, who better to understand the desires and capabilities of service users than the clients and the families who support them?



*Services designed for and by service users: halow*

**halow** is a charity and social enterprise company set up by the parents of five young people with a learning disability (**H**arriet, **A**mber, **L**aura, **O**liver and **W**illiam) to ensure these young people and others like them are supported to lead meaningful lives. halow demonstrates truly innovative ways of delivering personalised public services, utilising the expertise and experience of service users and their carers. Rather than waiting to see what services were on offer, these families developed their own range of services.

The original aim of halow – to provide charitable services – is now supported by halow care, a social enterprise company which is registered as a domiciliary care agency. In addition, halow care also provides brokerage and support planning services for young people taking on self directed support. Services are chargeable and available to self-funders and those in receipt of personal budgets or direct payments. These elements support halow’s charitable services including Buddies, which helps young people gain independence skills, and Building Futures, which provides life skills that enable young people to make informed choices about their future. With halow’s support several young people are now living independently and are in part-time employment.

A Building Futures Graduate, said: “This year I am really busy. I do lots of volunteer work and go to ‘Adult and Community Learning’ and cookery, computer skills and pilates courses. I have a very busy week and I’m really glad my buddy helps me to get to everything.”

Surrey’s Community Film Unit is another example of the multiple benefits of working in new ways and empowering service users to design their own solutions.

Efforts to open up public services are not a cover for privatisation as some have claimed. That is not to say there is not a role for private businesses in delivering public services. I encourage the role of enterprise in service delivery and support its expansion to new areas where that is appropriate. But the suggestion that large corporations will be taking over all elements of public service delivery is simply inaccurate. In particular I am keen to explore the role that local small and medium enterprises, of which there are an abundance in Surrey, could play in delivering services.

### *Abilities, not needs: Surrey Community Film Unit*

Surrey's Community Film Unit was established by the Youth Development Service taking a "risk". It employed over 30 young adults and empowered them to identify their skills and abilities. Rather than telling them what services they needed, the young people were empowered to design innovative programmes that they felt would use their skills to the benefit of their community.

The Community Film Unit – now operating as a social enterprise and well on the way to achieving financial sustainability – was established to raise awareness of local issues and promote change within communities. As well as using and developing the skills of those who started it, the Unit also aims to create educational and developmental opportunities for young people through apprenticeships, work experience and university placements. It is based at one of the County Council's youth centres in Staines and has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the centre. In conjunction with the social enterprise mark criteria, the unit is required to donate a percentage of net profits back to the youth centre for the direct benefit of young people.

## Better meeting the needs of communities

Diversity of ideas, solutions and providers are central to delivering the concept of the Big Society. We require bottom-up, grass roots approaches that make the most of different communities to develop innovative solutions based on local priorities and capabilities. Local people should be defining what they want to achieve for their communities and enlisting public agencies to help them deliver solutions that work for them.

The county council's concept of community-run libraries is not just a solution to keep libraries in the face of funding constraints, but an opportunity to better serve each community through local innovations in the way the facilities are run and used.

A Big Society approach may also increase choice and control for local people. The community might choose to provide additional services to those provided by statutory agencies, or by taking responsibility for certain issues might free up public service resources to address other priorities. Community speed watch is an example where residents have been helped to address a priority for their neighbourhood.

### *Handing over power: community libraries*

Eleven local communities have been given the opportunity to take over their libraries by forming innovative ‘community partnerships’ with the council. A number of innovative ideas – which would be difficult for the council to deliver on its own – will be explored to make the most of the local knowledge of volunteers and ensure the services provided match the wishes of the local community.

In Virginia Water library users are keen to tailor opening hours so residents can use it during the commuter rush. Locals identified this as a key time for library use, but currently the library does not open before 10am or after 5pm during the week. Paul Kardos-Stowe from the Virginia Water library steering group said: “Virginia Water Library is embracing the community partnership idea as a way of securing the long term future of the library. It will provide the opportunity for the community to shape its library and increase its services to genuinely have an involvement in something of value for current and future users. We will be delighted to work with the council to provide a library that the community can be proud of.”

Under the proposals the county council would continue to provide the building, stock, IT equipment and other services to support communities to take over the day-to-day running of their library so it can reflect the individual needs of local communities.



### *Supplementing services: Community Speed Watch*

Community Speed Watch was introduced in 2006 under the 'Drive Smart' programme, a partnership initiative between the police and county council. The council provided funding to develop local initiatives that would be supported by Surrey Police. This scheme enables residents to address their concerns about cars speeding through their neighbourhoods. To set up a Community Speed Watch requires a minimum of six volunteers willing to contribute at least of one hour a week. Volunteers are supported by the police and given training. They then work in pairs at identified locations to monitor the speed of vehicles and send warning letters to those drivers identified as traveling too fast.

This initiative is an excellent example of how communities in Surrey are taking control of services to meet their own priorities. Surrey Police continue to provide a standard level of service in terms of monitoring motorists, but in those communities where speeding is a particular concern residents can address this themselves without placing additional pressure on the police. The scheme has had a significant impact in re-educating motorists regarding speed and the impact of anti-social driving, and it has also reduced the level of threat to individuals.

## Community empowerment

In addition to opening up public services and promoting social action, I believe in the value of empowering communities by embedding strong local decision-making. Residents are most likely to engage with the political process if they believe they can make a difference. Surrey County Council was at the forefront of creating local committees and delegating to them budgets for local decisions. The transformation of the county's youth service will increase local budgets and powers and the county, borough and district councils are working to create joined-up decision making to tackle key local issues.

Giving residents a greater say in matters that affect their lives and neighbourhoods will take this to next level. In Surrey we support community-led planning as a means for local people to articulate their needs and priorities and to develop a shared action plan. The Localism Bill provides opportunities to take this further.

*Communities designing their future: neighbourhood planning in Mole Valley*

Mole Valley District Council wants its communities to get more involved in planning so that people can influence the decisions that affect where they live. In Bookham, the council and community are working closely together, to develop a neighbourhood development plan.

As one of the Government's Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners, Bookham has many characteristics that are conducive to neighbourhood planning. It is facing issues common to other villages in the south east constrained by green belt, not least pressure for housing. It also has established groups who are enthusiastic about the village and about developing a plan.

There is already a community led document – the 'Bookham Vision' – in place. This was developed following a survey with residents and businesses. A Bookham Neighbourhood Development Plan will enable the community to address its housing issues and plan for them itself. The plan is a practical way for the council to give the community some responsibility for identifying sustainable locations for housing that people are happy with. Peter Seaward, Chairman of the Bookham Residents Association, says people see it as an opportunity to shape the future of their village and recognise that it will involve some hard choices.

Residents are also more likely to get involved if they know how their area compares with others and how resources are being deployed. The Community Foundation for Surrey have found that many of our residents willingly support local community groups if they are aware of the extent of local need. This is one of the reasons I am so keen on increased transparency. Opening up information for the public is one of the aims of our new Local Information System, Surrey.

### *Open data: the Surrey Local Information System*

Partners in Surrey have developed a Local Information System (LIS) we call Surrey, which aims to provide better quality and more accessible data and strategic analysis. Surrey is improving the way that data is used and shared to provide a better understanding of the key issues in Surrey and help create innovative solutions.

Surrey will also give residents open access to the public data that is held by a range of Surrey's public organisation. This will include, for example, data from the census, crime statistics from the police and information about health issues in the county. This will make decision-making processes more transparent, while empowering the public to challenge decisions and to produce local solutions to local problems.

Surrey will inform residents, visitors and businesses about their local area, providing new insights that are not available by other means. As Surrey is developed and rolled out, the choice of public facing software tools will be expanded to enable public users to search for information most relevant to their area of interest, for example: planning applications, community safety, local consultations or information about local Members.

## Conclusion

I hope I have given a flavour of the broad range of ways in which partners and the public are seizing the opportunity to build on existing community spirit within the county to build Surrey's Big Society.

By definition, we do not have a tightly coordinated programme of projects to deliver the Big Society. What we are doing is establishing a mindset that allows space for individuals and communities and organisations to develop creative responses to address challenges and improve quality of life for all people in Surrey.

The public sector is evolving and we will develop new skills to play our part. This will include supporting people to get their ideas off the ground; spotting what works and helping others to adapt this to meet their requirements. New technologies such as social media, new structures, and new social finance models will all be part of the mix. Introducing variety and building upon what is successful is the basis of evolution. Similarly the Big Society is not just a solution for now, it will build resilience into our communities and the capacity to keep themselves and Surrey special for future generations.

