

Midhurst Vision

Midhurst Vision Steering Group was set up to consider actions required to refresh the previous Vision which was produced in 2008, and to consider key actions for the area.

To facilitate this a Steering Group was set up consisting of main stakeholder groups in Midhurst along with support from local authorities from county, district and town. An action plan was created, with some initial actions having been achieved – these include the resurfacing and relining of North Street car park in Midhurst, the repainting of bollards in the town and additional cleaning in the town centre. It was recognised that a key action would be to engage on a refreshed Vision for the future.

CDC provided some initial funding. The Vision has then proceeded on a partnership basis, seeking contributions from partners to deliver an agreed action plan and making applications for external funding where needed.

During 2019, a campaign jointly funded by CDC, Cowdray Estate, MTC, Town Team and Visit Midhurst plus some free / reduced cost services was undertaken to encourage engagement in Midhurst to consider what the priorities for a Vision should be. This included Press, posters, banners, beer mats, social media, talks to local groups and parishes, a website was created with online survey - printed version also distributed. 1085 responses were received.

From September 2019 - February 2020 a specialist consultant was engaged to run a series of workshops bringing together all stakeholder groups and representatives from all parts of the community. This work informed by a wide reaching survey of the local community, including the town, the surrounding parishes it serves and various user groups, for example people working in or visiting the town.

The Steering Group is currently considering governance arrangements to take the Vision forward. The option being considered is to set up a Community Interest Company within Midhurst which will include membership of key partners – it is proposed that CDC will be one of these.

Partners have been asked a series of questions, with the answers summarised as below:

What should the priorities be to assist with Recovery following Covid 19?

Covid only goes to support what the Vision has been working towards to make the local community and environment the best it can possibly be. Focus more on what's local. There will be more demand for people wanting to live in areas like Midhurst. Cowdray has seen a lot of demand from people wanting to live in the area.

Midhurst Vision more relevant than ever.

Midhurst Vision has an important role as the delivery vehicle for the post COVID-19 recovery in Midhurst.

The Vision principles and concepts, developed through the Malcolm Allan workshops and work of the steering group, still holds strong.

The CIC needs to be formed and key delivery makers in place.

Priorities to assist with recovery. Not sure that is part of our role. Other than to make sure that we progress in such a way to be empathetic to the difficulties individuals and companies/organisations who we wish to work with are experiencing.

MTC will most likely be looking to its Rural Towns Co-ordinator to focus on providing help and support towards business recovery in Midhurst following the lockdown. MTC will be asking for regular reporting/figures (for example: the percentage of empty business units, numbers of business working at full/part capacity, number of businesses lost, start-ups etc) this information will help MTC understand the impact on those businesses and Midhurst's economy in general. This together with a comprehensive shop by shop, business by business study to ascertain the full damage the pandemic has had on the town would be very useful. The business community can use that information to bid for whatever support is available post C-19 by way of rebuilding. MTC thinks that this, together with the promotion of a big 'shop local' campaign is something that can be achieved at a local level.

Midhurst Vision Group could assist this work by spending their time helping the town get back to normal and suspending the vision until the town is back up and running. MTC believes the focus should be on shopping local and using local facilities. We will need that huge campaign to encourage people not to shop out of town and to try to continue the good feeling towards the shops that have done such sterling work for the community while in lockdown. We note that to date much of the Midhurst Vision has been about making the town great for visitors and residents alike, and this may need to take a back seat whilst the town recovers.

Midhurst needs to punch hard, this is a fresh start, and needs to be viewed as such, it's a chance to start again, Quality needs to be ensured. This is the kind of time that you need to invest. Focus moving forward (in the minds of shoppers and tourists) will be local first. Local shops are the way forward. Need to build up the 'entrepreneurial spirit'. Each town needs to be more localised, got to keep the identity of Midhurst separate – think of the town's USP.

Keep the economy going. Increase footfall. Support businesses. Improvements to the digital representation of the town.

What actions will you/your organisation be undertaking regarding Recovery following Covid 19?

Important to progress in areas where we can. ie set up CIC, work on strategy this can then be presented/shared with the wider group in the autumn when hopefully people are able to look beyond current situation.

MTC will have the immediate task of concentrating on getting its operation and staff back to a state of business as usual – Council will need to look at what activities have been suspended during the period of lockdown and which of those can be resurrected and still delivered. As such, MTC will aim to continue to deliver work it has in progress as and when

possible but for now it is of the opinion that genuine support for an ailing town to help it get back on its feet is what is needed.

Additionally, MTC will have a 'post C-19 de brief' and analyse what it has done and, if anything, what it could've done better to support its residents during this period. Some of the suggestions in the response to question one may change as a result of this work.

Would like to see Vision become the PAT – Plan Ahead Team co-ordinating body. Midhurst Vision needs to constitute itself as a CIC, then become for a period of time, the co-ordinating body in the town for the recovery. The Vision is well placed to do this, as it will form a broad partnership from all sectors and will not be shackled by local authority structures.

Town Team is currently co-ordinating a photography of businesses project (supported by CDC before the crisis) using a local photographer, with the emphasis on quality.

Some of the vision work might need to shift to become recovery. Good idea to have Vision at the heart of co-ordinating recovery as it is a broad and neutral group and can soon be an incorporated organisation (CIC in this case) able to accept funding.

People locally are more aware that there are many in the community that need help. Work of Midhurst's 'Covid-19 Angels', for example. Would be good for a group to continue working with their data and contacts/volunteers moving forward.

Communication is key.

Will your organisation still be able to commit to the Vision moving forward? Any issues re Actions / Resources / Finances?

Yes

Yes - ready to support and add value to the projects that deliver its purpose and duty. The success of the Vision is crucial for Midhurst.

We already have an issue with finance - we need resources to enable us to start seeking partnership funding for at least one project - improvement and greening North Street? Also as things progress with projects towards the end of the year finance to pay a part time administrator.

Those Councillors already participating in the vision will continue to do so if they are able (Council/Employment commitments permitting), there may be a change in individuals from time to time.

MTC would prefer to be referred to by the term 'stakeholder' of the vision rather than partners.

As far as funding goes, MTC is unable to provide funding for the financial year 2020/2021 as the budget has already been set. For future financial years MTC will expect a full business plan to be prepared by MVG for individual projects it proposes to run and specific requests

for funding to MTC, if required, to be submitted no later than the 1st November of the year preceding the new financial year.

What does the Vision need to include in the future, how should vision / actions should be amended to reflect the coronavirus in the future?

Importance of Vision.

What will change post COVID is the action plan for the next 12-18 months, which will be recovery focused.

MV could fill the gaps left by recession/austerity, etc. as it could independently bid for funding on a partnership basis, and through project delivery sub-groups deliver different aspects of the economic and community recovery.

It is important through the recovery period, to ensure that the environmental improvement side of MV is woven into the action planning for recovery.

It might be prudent to revisit the vision statement to add in some kind of social responsibility in terms of distancing, other than that we don't see the group holding any authority or responsibility over measures that need to be taken following a national emergency.

Midhurst Vision Group could assist recovery by spending their time helping the town get back to normal and suspending the vision until the town is back up and running.

We need to expand the business groups and the Vision group

Maybe communicate using the 'Midhurst Rants' idea (where many people get their local information).

Looking at all elements of how they operate, from suppliers, to staffing, and ways of doing daily business

Lots of support for a 'local delivery service' with pick-ups and deliveries from all town centre shops to addresses within a 5 mile radius.

From your perspective, what are the next steps in creating the Midhurst Vision?

As previously planned strategy for town, CIC set up, focusing on recovery first few years.

Very important that MTC understands its role in the Vision and is able to view the Vision as a delivery vehicle for activities and projects in the town, also that the Vision is seen by them as a focus for the delivery of post COVID-19 recovery.

There needs to be a 'united front' in Midhurst.

The MV provides a rare and valuable baseline, as it sets out the aspirations and needs of the local community.

Set up CIC, strategy for future of the town with plan for years 1 & 2 and longer term, projects (prioritised).

Once incorporated via a community interest company, MVG will have the ability to raise funds and apply for grant funding towards its projects, Council expects MVG to then become responsible for those projects. Council would like to see MVG produce an Action Plan from which to choose projects to work on. MTC has already shared a comprehensive list of its activities, initiatives and projects with MVG to ensure there is no duplication of effort.

Once MVG have formulated their action plan we encourage them to share this with MTC to confirm there is no overlap and to enable MTC to assist with an indication of any areas where, and who, MVG may need prior consultation with.

When MVG are in a position to start working on project plans we ask that they engage with MTC to share each individual plan with the town council as stakeholders of the Midhurst Vision. MTC ask that like its own Business Plans, their plans include; an outline of the purpose/scope of the project, the reasons, benefits, options, any risks, issues, assumptions, dependencies. Proposals need to be costed (breaking down the sources of funding), have a timescale and a named project owner for implementation, including how and who will be responsible for delivery.

For the Town Council's part, it can then decide which committee is best placed to discuss the proposals and it can, where and if necessary, invite a representative from MVG to come and explain further. This will give MTC an opportunity to discuss and make any suggestions to assist MVG's progress.

Should the Town Council have any plans for items appearing on MVG's action plan, where appropriate it may ask a member of MVG to join a working party or invite representatives to a meeting where MTC can suspend 'standing orders' to discuss the plans or suggestions in more detail.

This process can be integrated into the councils work and is how MTC expects to see all project proposals presented to it from MVG, regardless of the size of the proposals.

Are there any other organisations who should be involved to assist with the Vision?

As previously groups involved plus any new organisations set up eg. Task Force?

MTC, SDNPA, Cowdray, WSCC, Midhurst Town Team and Business Network, Visit Chichester - other Midhurst organisations MRC etc.

Possibly a more representative group from the towns traders if indeed, MVG do change their immediate focus to supporting business/economic recovery, otherwise, none that are not already involved.

What level of support do you consider is needed from partners moving forward?

Continued support from CDC - possibly more short term.

Continued support from Steve Hill and Tania Murphy plus funding for admin person later in year and for initial project as mentioned previously.

Support from CDC is crucial to enable Midhurst Vision to resume and actually achieve some of its aims.

MTC thinks that CDC should remain as partners or 'stakeholders', however as this is not a district wide initiative MTC wonders if it is fair and equitable to provide the support to MVG in the way it has to date. We are sure that CDC will have much more work in terms of assistance to the district following the C-19 pandemic.

Needs CDC to invest in 2 things:

- revenue funding for a staff member (part-time, maybe one day pw) to set up and administer the Midhurst Vision Partnership CIC. CDC needs to realise that revenue funding will be more important than project funding for the recovery period.

- invest in a website to give the town a co-ordinated business and community identity - the website would include all shops and enable online ordering and local delivery to take place.

At least initially, some shoppers would be reluctant to visit physical stores now the Visit Midhurst site was several years old, the whole idea needed to be built from scratch using the latest technology, the website would complement the photography project, helping to provide a platform to project a high quality image for Midhurst.

Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

Will it change things forever in a town this size - not sure it will. Retail businesses must realise that they have to be able to operate effectively on-line too which many small businesses do not.

If anything Covid has hi-lighted the growing realisation of the importance of well-being and community. People have really enjoyed less traffic and may be less resistant to pedestrianisation or shared space. Greening areas etc all come to the fore.

The vision group has agreed to be an action group, not a lobby group, once through C-19, it is probably therefore time for the talking to stop and the action begin. A fair amount of money has been spent on the vision to date and MVG needs to show residents what value they are getting for that money.

A document could be put together by the MVG similar to that of the last vision which the various stakeholders could continue to reference when planning their own initiatives and to progress elements of the vision as and when considered appropriate.

MTC consider that the emphasis should be more about how we live with Covid-19 going forward rather than a 'post' Covid -19 situation.

Sadly, we will not be living in a post Covid 19 era for the foreseeable future. As such, we should be seeking to ask how we live with Covid 19 and how Midhurst can thrive in this situation - at least until we do move into a post Covid - 19 era. We need to seek the energies

and imagination of shop keepers, business people and all of us to develop ways of living with Covid 19.

CDC, WSCC and all with greater authority than that of MTC should be pressing the Government for more regular testing of people who interface with public. Locally we could look to develop policies which use measures to keep our residents and business people as safe as we possibly can by looking into the provision of hand sanitising, regular mask wearing (at the very least inside businesses), and maybe even the introduction of temperature testing when entering shops and buildings. Our Community & Environment Committee have been asked to look in more detail at how Midhurst can be seen, and be, as far as possible, a safe place to be.

How keen are staff going to be to return to work? Will they feel safe? Can they be afforded by businesses?

Size of most premises means that social distancing will be difficult.