E3M ALCHEMY GAINSBOROUGH

"Absolutely brilliant, there's so much knowledge around the table and so many ideas and experiences. We know what we want – and now we know how to get there."

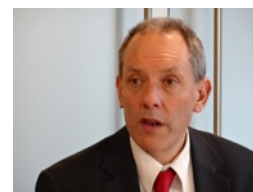**Heidi Walton, Chief Executive, LEAP Supported Housing and Housing and Tenancy Support**

INTRODUCTION

E3M Alchemy Gainsborough brought together over 70 participants over two days in July 2019. They explored ideas which could harness the power of social enterprise and social investment to help tackle some key challenges facing the town.

Jonathan Bland, E3M and Social Business International

These were:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Mental Health
- Education Employment and Skills
- Housing
- Social Enterprise Ecosystem

Participants sought to complement the extensive work which has already taken place and is ongoing in support of Gainsborough's bid to The Local Access programme.

E3M Alchemy events are catalysts for change. They involve insights and application from impactful, sustainable and mature social enterprises. They promote the reformation of community relationships and public institutions and the integration of local services, facilities, businesses and stakeholders.

We convened Gainsborough Alchemy to bring new perspectives to the challenges, defining outcomes, developing ideas for new models for social enterprise scale and partnership, exploring financial options, partnerships, co-design and collaborations.

We shared knowledge about the "art of the possible" with real, successful examples of innovation in partnership approaches to commissioning and procurement, social investment and collaborative service delivery from across the UK.

Participants were diverse. Councillors, district and county council officers, and representatives of social enterprises and voluntary organisations from in and around Gainsborough worked intensively for 24 hours alongside:

- "Bold Commissioners," senior leaders in local authorities from across the country, all pushing the boundaries with new approaches to organising local services,
- Members of the E3M Social Enterprise Leaders Business Club from some of the UK's most successful and innovative social enterprises trading in public service markets,
- Funders, social investors and the E3M Partners.

The event demonstrated the transformative potential of West Lindsey District Council and local stakeholders in working together, building on what is already there and what has already been done, to co-create sustainable social enterprise solutions to the challenges faced by the town. A number of key ideas were generated. The event also stimulated learning, knowledge sharing and new connections.

WHAT HAPPENED AT ALCHEMY?

"There's obviously a lot of energy in Gainsborough and a will to do things differently. I think Alchemy is working very well because of the mix of people with local knowledge already in the area, already working, and the E3M leaders."

David Osborne, Catalyst Choices Community Interest Company.

Several general points emerged during the discussions at Alchemy Gainsborough:

- The positive tone of the discussions and level of participation at the event indicates there is a really strong base for people to work together to shape the future for Gainsborough as prosperous town and a great place for everyone who lives and works there.

- A need for more data in relation to some of the challenges faced by the town.

- An opportunity for public agencies and the social enterprise and wider voluntary sector to collaborate more closely in relation to these challenges.

- A need for a better understanding of who is doing what.

- An opportunity for more ongoing communication between different stakeholders in the town to build (and co-design) common solutions to the challenges.

- A need for longer term partnerships between the council, community and local social enterprises to help them grow and become sustainable.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Two groups worked to address Health and Wellbeing in Gainsborough.

Challenges and problems include limited community spaces, particularly within the south west ward; social exclusion of the older population; less-than-optimal knowledge sharing of data and information between agencies; the three tiers of local government meaning some lack of efficiency in terms of how everyone is focussed with different areas of responsibility; and distinctly segregated communities.

The working groups recognise that a number of existing initiatives are already successfully addressing elements of health and wellbeing.

These include projects and agencies (for example the Neighbourhood Working Team; Benjamin Adlard Forest School; X-church; Trinity Arts Centre; Voluntary Centre Services).

Our first Health and Wellbeing working group recognised the commitment and success of existing initiatives, and hope to expand activity, collaboration and communication. They propose the development of a ***Gainsborough Life Skills Co-operative*** to foster collaboration: between organisations and agencies; and between diverse and different generations and demographics. This could facilitate life skills education, address social isolation of the elderly and mobilise people with "life skills".

Consultation would seek to identify and match the interests for learning of the young disadvantaged; the life-skill experience of the older excluded; and individual organisational and communication skills to bring them together in public spaces.

The **second Health and Wellbeing working group** considered good health and wellbeing to mean "happiness" built from improving aspirations, relationships and trust. They propose to increase these three factors through the development of a nascent social enterprise network ecosystem, Social Investment Network Gainsborough (SING), which will engage and listen to people on a hyperlocal level, funding a pot of "small and quick fix" grants and numerous small interventions.

This "co-ordinated but loose" network could then provide small scale but big impact improvements in aspiration/enjoyment of life and environment that would feed a virtuous circle in engaging communities by giving people what they want, demonstrating results, increasing happiness - and incubating ideas which may be replicable across Gainsborough.

"The last couple of days have been really inspiring." **Claire Credland, Neighbourhood Lead for Gainsborough.**

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental ill-health can be related to poverty, poor quality housing, lack of employment, lack of opportunity, disability, and many other factors: it's multi-faceted and many of the factors which can contribute to and affect mental health exist in Gainsborough.

Our working group recognised the need to address contributing factors – and recognised there is already a "patchwork" of initiatives aiming to "patch up" people's mental health in Gainsborough.

The group want to understand, better, what people in Gainsborough who are affected by mental health want, in order to create the conditions for people to have good mental health.

They propose the creation of a physical space featuring a building and an outdoor space, featuring inclusive mentoring, skills development and business incubation services. It would be a "playful" space too, welcoming children and with access to fun life and work-related skills development activities for children.

The space would be inclusive, open to all and free to use and access; and the building would also house some existing voluntary and community sector services and some businesses, generating an income stream. It would require the use (and asset transfer) of an unused, council-owned building, with the working group identifying three potential suitable buildings.

The site would become a hub with co-working space, businesses, community and voluntary sector organisations, business incubation, a café, and a variety of support services provided by the NHS, the council, social enterprises and the voluntary sector.

It would require agreement to co-locate existing services and the development of a new entity to manage the building for the benefit of the community. Perhaps this could be a community land trust, constituted as a Community Benefit Society or as a Community Interest Company limited by Guarantee.

Our working group also paid considerable attention to community engagement and consultation and discussed an ongoing process of engagement and co-production.
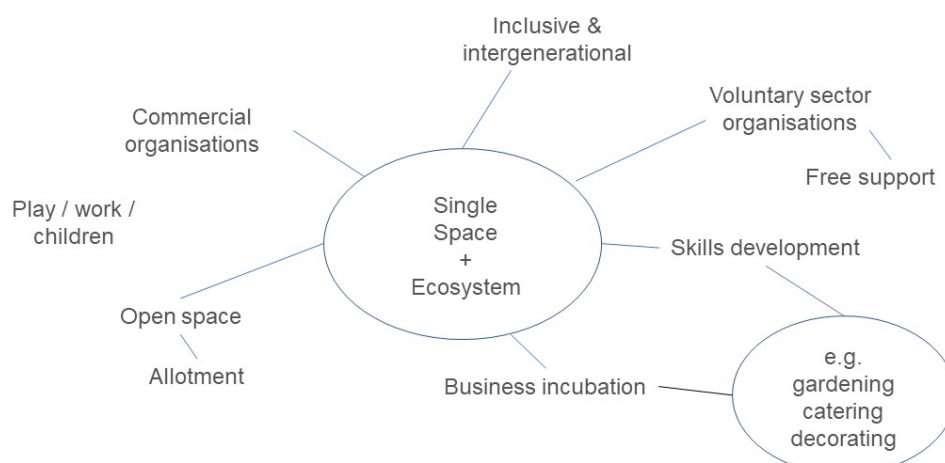
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

Gainsborough's challenges include high youth unemployment, a diminished broad further education offer, and a low-paid and low-skilled workforce. Our employment and skills working group recognised that for the town's employers, developing a highly skilled and productive workforce is really important. It will be better for the town, its people and employers if these skills can come from "growing our own" rather than needing to bring skills in from outside.

Alchemy Gainsborough also featured a presentation from Onion Collective CIC covering social enterprise development in Watchet, Somerset. After the loss of a major employer which had provided around 30% of the town's jobs the Watchet Coastal Community Team was formed. This is a partnership organisation made up of local organisations, businesses, community groups and Town, District and County Council. The team work collaboratively to help further initiatives that help to benefit the town, including skills development and education.

An existing "Made in Gainsborough" model works well and has been run and led by local employers. Our working group examined how to develop, build on and progress this to increase the provision and availability of Level 3+ Education in the town.

Their ideas examined at Alchemy included:

- Build the Made in Gainsborough brand alongside the provision and develop further products and services under this banner.
- Build on Gainsborough's historical engineering achievements and significance. Develop an engineering museum and a link with a University engineering department.
- Use the brand and its association with engineering innovation - in the past and for the future - to unlock excitement about opportunities and desire to increase skills.
- "Normalise" the brand to create pride, invested employers, enable business confidence and expansion, create ownership by the local community, and attract further inward investment.
- Launch a social purpose / value-based recruitment agency, specialising in engineering and manufacturing. This can provide a revenue stream.
- Create higher level skills links with a University.
- Develop creative ways to increase the range and level of skills provision available so it's accessible. Some ideas included digital courses, shared premises with multiple providers, and peripatetic tutors (joining up with other providers in neighbouring districts/counties).
- Launch a Made in Gainsborough (MIG) card, enshrining and building on shared principles which offer tangible benefits to employers and individuals.
- Ensure all individuals across Gainsborough that are unemployed, inactive, low paid or low skilled have access to targeted and relevant provision focussed on enabling them to move into, or progress to, sustainable employment.
- Develop a highly visible building in a prominent position, such as near the marina, or an asset transfer of a former school, as a physical hub, a cultural space, unlocking positive employment, skills, and education opportunities.

HOUSING

The South West Ward of Gainsborough's high deprivation levels and high dependence on (remote) private landlords mean many people live in poor quality housing. A high level of churn in tenancies and the low availability of wraparound support to people housed by private landlords contribute to further instability for vulnerable people, and mask the true level of housing need. Some data has already been collected and analysed around selective licensing levels in the South West ward, giving evidence and a business case for a new approach.

Two working groups were convened at Gainsborough Alchemy to examine ideas to improve housing provision. During the event, participants also heard a vignette presentation from Jen McKevitt of Sunderland's community-led housing provider, Back on the Map, and Lisa Ketly, Sunderland City Council's Empty Property Officer. A subsequent vignette presentation featured the work of Hull-based Estuary Homes CIC with Lisa Hilder describing its multiple revenue streams and how it is creating community assets.

Initially working as two groups, Alchemy participants examining housing then combined into one super-group to further progress their ideas and how these could be realised.

Their key idea is to acquire, refurbish and let around 50 properties in the South West ward through a new and sustainable SPV (special purpose vehicle). A social lettings agency would also be created through which these properties *and* other privately owned houses meeting an appropriate standard could be rented.

This SPV could use the (established and successful) local registered provider, Leap, as its foundation. A key part of Leap is the charity Housing and Tenancy Support (HATS); Alchemy's working groups included housing and governance experts who were able to advise on appropriate restructuring which may be necessary for Leap / HATS. The council could then make an investment (from unused empty homes monies) into Leap.

The model will be financially sustainable based on income from rent, housing benefit payments, capital appreciation of properties and potentially from a Social Impact Bond. It requires initial working capital of around £3m to buy and refurbish the 50 properties and to employ a coordinator. This capital could come from the Council's access to the as-yet-unused £500k empty homes funding alongside Homes England grant and investment from social investors.

The benefits to Gainsborough would include:

- Reducing dependency on (and exploitation by) private landlords.
- Creating a strong "social contract" and better alignment between people, the community and the council.
- Increasing access to homes let and managed at affordable rents.
- The "local multiplier" effect: rents and housing / universal benefit income would be recirculated and recycled within the local community and economy, rather than extracted.
- The surpluses generated through both the SPV (which owns the homes) and the social lettings agency can also support / fund other community initiatives.
- Modelling the behaviour of "good" landlords and effecting a behaviour change in the market.
- Employing a coordination worker to enable wraparound support services to tenants rather than the basic and short-term support they currently access.
- Saving the council considerable money on enforcement.
- Creating employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities around a homes refurbishment programme.
- Creating and investing in civic space(s) and community hub(s), with tangible improvements in physical amenities.
- Creating incentives to landlords to improve standards and to rent their own properties through Gainsborough's new social lettings agency.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ECOSYSTEM

Two Alchemy working groups examined how to support and develop new and existing social enterprises in Gainsborough.

The sector faces challenges which Alchemy delegates from elsewhere are familiar with: demand beyond contracted levels; perceptions of some commissioners and procurement officers that contracting with social enterprises is higher-risk; awareness and understanding of social enterprises' capacity; skills; short-term contracts; a lack of mapping; a lack of good quality advisory and technical support to social entrepreneurs; a low visibility of the sector; disconnection from community; limited human and financial resources to develop.

Working Group 1 acknowledged the nascent Social Investment Network Gainsborough (SING, also referred to within the Health and Wellbeing case study). Its ideas included:

- Support and develop this network for social enterprises, enabling the sharing of information and better collaboration.
- Create an incubation / hub space for social enterprises to develop and grow.
- Use the network and the hub to attract social investment to scale-up Gainsborough's social enterprises.
- Use community shares, crowdfunding and social investment tax relief (or community investment tax relief) to capitalise a community endowment fund.
- Adopt a get things done approach: consult, test, measure, iterate.

Working Group 2 acknowledged the need for a social enterprise "fixer or connector" and for a physical space for social enterprise activity and increased visibility.

This group proposed a "Good for Gainsborough" network which may be linked to or associated with the "Made in Gainsborough" brand proposed by the Skills and Education working group (see case study). This network would initially be funded through local authority and foundation grants, and social investment, before developing its own revenue streams from trading and creating "the best form of money: surplus on activities, yours to do with what you want." Their ideas included:

- Access currently unused data and the "word on the street"
- Co-production of a community led, people and evidence based ecosystem
- A shared space
- Progression routes for individuals and organisations
- A social lettings agency
- Porosity – there's no wrong entry point
- The *Good for Gainsborough* network is a statement of social good; and of quality; and a celebration. It's also a call to action.
- House a social enterprise fixer in a physical space, ideally a shop-front, along with other people with social capital.
- Develop community business commissioning so social enterprises can be commissioned and supported to bring the town's ideas to life.

LOCAL ACCESS PROGRAMME FUNDING BID AND WIDER OUTCOMES

Learning, knowledge sharing and developing new connections were significant elements of Gainsborough Alchemy. These will support further development of ideas worked on at the event and feed into Gainsborough's "stage 2" Local Access programme bid (to be submitted by 31 October 2019).

Local Access (see also p 12) requires a broad-based partnership with strong social enterprise and charity sector involvement, and a *"strong approach to wider engagement and co-design, reaching frontline charities and social enterprises."* The extensive preparations for Gainsborough Alchemy and the event itself have involved a collaborative, consultative and partnership-building approach.

Gainsborough Alchemy stimulated thinking and created tangible ideas in support of other essential criteria for a successful Stage 2 bid to Local Access, including:

- *"Identification of activities which demonstrably build social enterprise behaviour and thinking in organisations.*
- *A clear articulation of how growing social enterprises and other aspects of the social economy could contribute to the collaborative vision for the place.*
- *Identification of activity which builds local capability to offer enterprise support – (networks or local infrastructure etc.)*
- *An understanding and vision for how social investment could help achieve your vision and support the enterprises in your place."*

The event also provoked ideas around:

- Partnership and collaborative approaches to procurement and how tools such as the Innovation Partnership can be applied.

- The use of social investment and how the nature of commissioned contracts can shape the opportunities for accessing investment – and how social investment can support the development of sustainable business models. Some positive links were made with social investment organisations at the event.

PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS

- It's provided a 'how' to previous, existing ideas!

- Alchemy created greater purposeful links with other organisations.

- We need to make sure we take these ideas forward and build on the momentum created.

- Learnt from the vignettes and will seek to develop.

- Lots of new insights and ideas to develop new forms of social finance.

- Impact on my work: to kick start a visionary plan and build upon what we've started in our employment and skills group. Let's make this happen – I'm impatient!

- Why shouldn't this happen – it's a no-brainer!

- It's been a very good process. Working together in the small teams, we've built up a good understanding of the problem, we've got all the right levels of expertise there, and the ideas feel really tangible and actionable.

- So much investment in the community from so many skilled and able people who were willing to give their time, funding and skills. A rocket booster, empowering people to go off on their own trajectory, enabling and controlling their own lives.

WHAT NEXT?

The Gainsborough Investment Network (GIN) has been invited to provide a Full Outline Proposal to progress from Stage 2 to Stage 3 of the Local Access Programme, a place-based blended capital initiative.

If successful, Gainsborough could secure a significant investment of grant and loan funding from Access and Big Society Capital.

Gainsborough Alchemy has facilitated partnership development, collaboration, co-design and the identification of specific activities and initiatives which could be enabled through the Local Access Programme, and GIN and SING (Gainsborough's social enterprise network) will now progress the bid to The Access Foundation.

E3M partners are ready, if required, to support any ideas which the Council and its local partners wish to take forward.

E3M will carry out an initial evaluation of the impact of the event later in 2019 to assess the changes it has generated.