

MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Connected Communities

STRATEGY

2021-2041





Foreword

Malvern Hills District Council is committed to supporting communities to become **strong, resilient, and sustainable, with a focus on protecting and enhancing where they live for current and future generations. To help us to best support communities we are adopting an asset-based community development approach, which focusses on people and community. The community's response to flooding and Covid has shown us the importance of **connected communities**, with residents supporting residents, and we want to develop our relationship with local communities to strengthen those connections further. This means we will actively look to work with local communities to identify their assets, focussing on 'what's strong rather than what's wrong' and give support to local people to change things within their communities.**

When we describe connected communities, we are referring to seven specific areas of focus:

- **People** - helping people in communities to become more connected to others.
- **Services** - delivering services differently, with more services taking place in communities.
- **Neighbourhoods** - strengthening networks and partnerships across neighbourhoods, towns, and villages.
- **Voluntary and Community Sector** - developing the Voluntary Community Sector and our links to communities.
- **Decision making** - local people influencing decision making, policy and the way we deliver services.
- **Businesses** - supporting responsible businesses who are open and share what they do for society and the environment, genuinely they invest in, and become part of the communities in which they operate.
- **Education** - strengthening our networks with schools and other education establishments to help build genuine partnerships with their communities.

We believe that residents know best about their own communities. Our strategy places much more emphasis on developing stronger relationships with residents to support them to make a difference in their

communities. Building closer relationships across a wide range of communities, not only with our town and parish councils, but also with other local groups and organisations, has helped us to understand our local landscape, but this is only the start. Our voluntary and community sector partners play an immensely important role, helping to identify, give voice to and respond to needs across our communities.

Ensuring these relationships are strong, that we are both responsive but also approachable about the issues that really matter, should ensure relationships don't break down when a contentious local issue arises, as it inevitably will from time to time. We need to ensure that we are accessible and move our communication from what are often one-off consultations to a more meaningful community engagement which strengthens community power and influence. Encouraging genuine co-production of solutions where communities, council and local organisations play to their strengths. This will take effort and commitment by all and it must be founded on a relationship developed through mutual trust and respect.

We recognise that it is much easier to write a strategy than to implement one, but we are committed to ensuring this strategy has impact by embedding it across all our services. For us, helping communities to become strong, resilient, and sustainable supports our ambition of healthier, safer, inclusive, stronger, and sustainable places that are led by residents.



Councillor Sarah Rouse
Leader of Malvern Hills
District Council



Councillor Tom Wells
Deputy Leader &
Portfolio Holder for
Community Services
Malvern Hills District
Council



Contents

Introduction	5-6
Knowing our communities	7-8
Our approach	9-10
Testimonials from Our Organisational Allies	11
Making it happen – Five Year Plan	12-13
Evaluation and learning	14



Malvern Hills district - Community Assets Snapshot:



25 good neighbour schemes and 5 neighbourhood watch schemes



Over 30 youth and uniform groups



48 village halls and community facilities



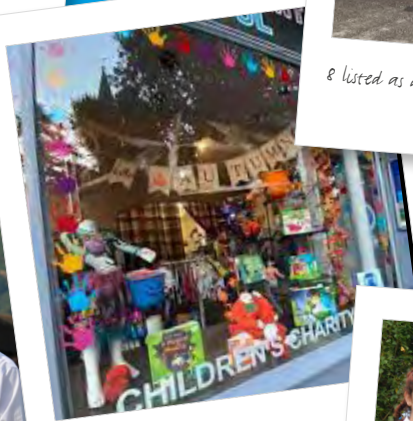
8 listed as an Asset of Community Value



26 parks and recreational spaces



Over 100 sports clubs



347 general charities with a total income of £28.8m



35 primary and 5 secondary schools



54 town and parish councils



Over 800 adopt a street volunteers and 300 green dog walkers



District volunteer brokerage service and Volunteering Forum



3 foodbanks and 3 community pantries



Introduction

Our strategy has been developed in collaboration with our statutory and voluntary sector partners. It recognises and considers existing commitments, for example, our corporate priorities as well as our role in supporting partnership objectives such as Herefordshire & Worcestershire Sustainable & Transformation Plan; Herefordshire & Worcestershire Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy, Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Strategy; Worcestershire Children & Young People's Plan; Worcestershire Housing Strategy; and South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership Plan.

It links to other plans such as our Economic Development Strategy, Sport and Leisure Strategy and Destination Zero Plan. These plans also have a direct impact on communities, their health, prosperity, and opportunity.

Our strategy also reflects the views of the communities

who have responded to the consultative draft, and through our ongoing engagement with communities as we undertake our everyday business. We know there is much more to do to build more trusting relationships and this strategy will describe how we intend to achieve this. We also have heard the views of organisations who are involved in delivering vital services to people within our communities, who are wanting more certainty from us about how we commission and fund services and whether they are in a better position to provide such services themselves.

Our strategy identifies opportunities to help connect communities, within an environment where the way we allocate our resources becomes increasingly important. To do this we need to be focused on embedding asset-based community development within our practice, and core to this, is us being genuinely resident led, relationship orientated, asset-based, place-based, and diversity and inclusion focused.



Why do we need a strategy?

We have an important leadership role across the districts. People expect their councils to engage, listen and support communities, to be accountable, make decisions they can understand and spend public money not only wisely but also in a way which has the biggest impact within the local area. When there are so many calls upon the public purse, our strategy will enable our communities to recognise and anticipate the ways in which we will try to use our resources to best effect.

To achieve a deeper, more trusting relationship with our communities we do have to change the way we work. This means not only our systems, services, and processes but also our organisational culture so that it embodies our values. We expect our workforce to be passionate about the things they do, to innovate and be creative, always bringing forward new ideas to improve services and the relationships on which we depend.

We know that our communities have a wide-ranging set of views about the relationships they have with us. We know they have concerns about the impact of growth, young people being priced out of the housing market, the loss of local services and the implications of COVID. The consultation has helped us complete a picture of what our communities, voluntary sector and partners are telling us about the types of relationship and focus on activity that is required. In many ways the pandemic has significantly improved our consultation and engagement with communities.

The role of this strategy is to establish how we can continually work collaboratively to help deliver a coordinated and consistent approach, making full use of all the resources available, so that those who live and work within the Malvern Hills district are valued, understood, and connected within their community.

Our values
What we stand for

- Great customer service**
- do what we say we'll do and keep our promises
- Openness and accountability**
- take responsibility and lead by example
- Innovation and improvement**
- give it a go, be positive and listen to ideas
- Fairness and respect**
- treat others as we'd like to be treated

We expect to deliver a lot to our customers, so we expect a lot from our staff





Knowing our communities

Healthier communities:

75% feel friendships and good neighbours is a strength. However, 5% feel not at all.

45% look after or give help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long term physical or mental health

44% feel places for communities to come together is a strength. However, 10% feel not at all.

26% feel lonely or isolated often or some of the time. However, 29% have never felt lonely or isolated.

Safer and inclusive communities:

76% feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood

68% feel safe after dark

93% feel safe in the day

72% agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. However, 19% disagree.

Stronger and sustainable communities:

84% are satisfied with their local area as a place to live

40% agree that they can influence decisions in their local area

48% agree people pull together to improve things

52% feel local groups and agencies working together is a strength

38% feel strong community voice is a strength

55% feel active volunteering within the local community is a strength

46% feel access to services and local amenities is a strength



What you think
about us:

68% satisfied with how Malvern Hills District Council runs things

45% agree that Malvern Hills District Council provides value for money

62% agree that Malvern Hills District Council acts on the concerns of local residents

66% feel well informed about the work of Malvern Hills District Council

Our response to COVID 19

82% satisfied with advice and support

66% satisfied with help and support for individuals in need

76% satisfied with information and support for businesses

66% satisfied with funding and support for community groups



Our approach



We have adopted and intend to embed the principles of asset-based community development (ABCD) to build more effective relationships with communities, partners, and other stakeholders to meet a broad range of outcomes.

ABCD is about growing sustainable communities, building connections between people that live in the area and supporting people to act on things that are important to them – which will often be different to what statutory/public sector agencies perceive to be important.

ABCD builds on the assets that are found in the community and supports individuals, groups, associations, and institutions to come together to develop their strengths. This process is very different from a deficit-based approach that focuses on identifying what is wrong and servicing needs. The key to ABCD is to start with what is already in the community and work together to build on the identified assets of all involved.

We will apply the following five principles to our work:

- 1. Resident-led:** To help us with this principle we will:
 - Consider what it is that residents in communities are best placed to do together?
 - Consider what it is that residents can best do, with some outside help?
 - Consider what it is that communities need outside agencies to do for them?
- 2. Relationship oriented:** To help us with this principle, we will:
 - Consider what other 'people assets' are we aware of that could be mobilised here?
 - Consider who else needs to be involved / collaborate with or can add value to this work/ decision/ practice?
 - Consider what introductions could be made?

- 3. Asset-based:** To help us with this principle we will employ techniques such as 'Appreciative Inquiry' which create conversations whereby we ask residents to ask themselves:
 - What do I care about in the place that I live?
 - What do I love about my neighbourhood?
 - What would I like to help make even better?
 - How can the great things about where I live help to overcome the challenges we have?

- 4. Place-based:** To help us with this principle we will:
 - Seek place-based solutions in how we design and commission services.
 - Accept that often the conditions in neighbourhoods are different and require requisite variety.

- 5. Diversity and inclusion focused:** To help us with this principle we will ask ourselves:
 - How can we be creative and seek new ways to engage with those we may not have engaged with before?
 - Have we assessed the impact on what we are doing on communities with protected characteristics through an equality impact assessment?
 - How could voluntary and community sector organisations or other local groups support us in engaging with audiences?

Power Partnership Approach to Community Engagement

The council relies on community engagement to inform and improve policies, programmes, and services, and to increase trust and accountability. We are committed to meaningful community engagement to strengthen community power and influence.

We will partner and invest in community organisations and local groups to carry out community development and engagement. Not as agents of the council but as independent organisations and groups with skills and expertise in community building, and the trusted relationships with residents.

Framework for the Power Partnership approach



Engage early – involving communities in setting priorities, not just consulting on options, and co-producing solutions.

Use participatory and deliberative methods – supporting communities to act and encourage discussion and debate between communities and stakeholders.

Work with existing networks – identifying local community assets, Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise organisations and spaces.

Address barriers to access and participation – knowing where engagement is weakest, working with

communities to design engagement, and tackling barriers so that we can better connect and give a voice with those who are seldom heard.

Strengthen community capacity and ownership – devolve budgets or assets to communities to implement plans, where there is capacity and appetite.

Community role in accountability – build ongoing scrutiny of decisions and implementation and provide good quality feedback on how community ideas have been taken forward.

Testimonials from Our Organisational Allies

ABCD is not something that councils do alone. Rather, it's about playing a part within an ecosystem, working with partners with similar principles or desired outcomes." Nesta

"The NHS itself is undergoing a national reform which is very much around integrated care and I really believe that the power of delivery is going to be down at that local level, where we really join our services, options for people and access into timely support." Sue Harris, Director of Strategy, Worcestershire Health & Care Trust

"One of our five strategic ambitions is to support resilient, independent and connected communities." Worcestershire County Council

"We fully support this strategy and are really looking forward to working together to bring the themes and workstreams to life. This links with our local policing charter, which puts prevention at the heart of everything that we do. Working collaboratively with partners and strengthening links within our communities" Chief Inspector Jessica Loxley-Clark, West Mercia Police

"We are committed to the Connected Communities Strategy. All of our community house connectors are trained in the ABCD model, and we want to work with communities on what's strong in communities, looking at their skills and working alongside them and supporting them to develop positive outcomes for children, families, and young people." Ness Cole, Service Manager, Action for Children

"Community Action is pleased to support Malvern Hills District Council's Connected Communities Strategy for supporting communities to become strong, resilient, and sustainable. We're looking forward to working together to ensure our own projects addressing loneliness and isolation are linked to the overall strategy and make a significant contribution towards improving the lives of people within the district." Kate Walton, Chief Officer, Community Action Malvern & District

"I'd like to applaud Malvern Hills District Council in adopting asset-based community development as their core route to supporting and growing the strength of communities across the district. I recognise that this is a bold and challenging initiative, partly because it demands creative thinking and partly because it demands the local authority hands control and decision making to local communities where decisions can be made as close to the ground as they possibly can. Community First is happy to be allied to this initiative". Roger Britton, Chairman of Community First Herefordshire & Worcestershire

Key Partnerships and Networks

There are several key partnerships and networks that contribute to the key objectives, including:

Healthier Communities:

Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board
Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership
Active Partnership Herefordshire and Worcestershire

Safer and inclusive Communities:

Worcestershire Safer Communities Board
South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership
South Worcestershire Hate Crime Partnership

Stronger and Sustainable Communities:

Worcestershire Voices
Worcestershire Community Action Network
Herefordshire & Worcestershire Waste Management Board



Making it happen – Five Year Plan 2021-2026



People Make Places Fund

We need to ensure that our strategy is resourced, embedded, communicated, and delivered. To achieve this, it will need to be embraced by our councillors, partners and communities and absorbed into our ways of working across the council. Our new approaches will help us to focus, to prioritise and set out a common statement of purpose that people can understand and to establish the supporting roles that are vital for the strategy to be successful.

We have committed £500,000 towards a Connected Communities Fund to support the following investment priorities:

PLACES: empowerment and investment for local communities

What we will do: Continue to invest in communities through crowdfunding and invest in an online engagement that connects people to the places they live, work and play, helping them to shape and influence changes in their neighbourhoods.

PEOPLE: enabling a lifetime of contribution

What we will do: Support the continued development of a district volunteer service to promote volunteering opportunities and support our voluntary agencies. Continue to support community support groups such as Malvern Hills Good Neighbour Network and Community Watch Schemes.

THE SOCIAL SECTOR: supporting charities and social enterprises

What we will do: Actively work with and support the social sector to tackle crimes most affecting communities, poverty, health inequalities, and improve the district's youth offer.

This will result in changes at many different levels, for people, local communities, and our relationships with other public and voluntary organisations. We know the district is likely to look and feel different in 20 years' time, so it is important that we adapt our approach now and plan.





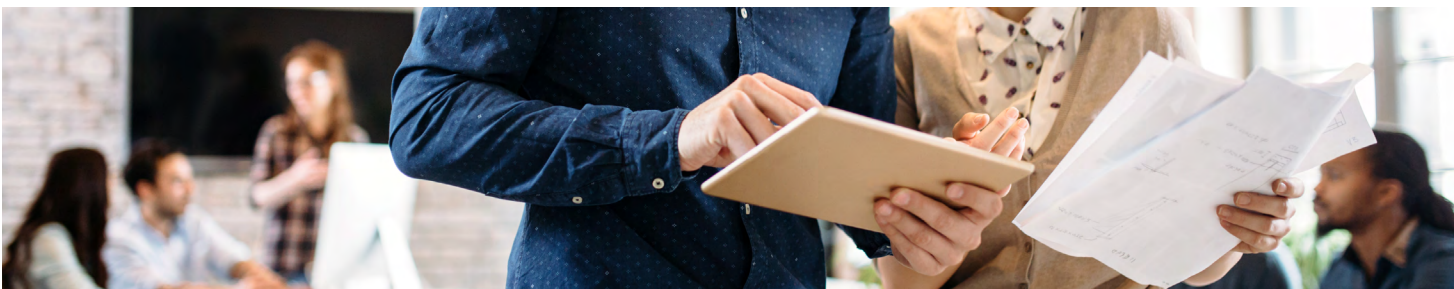
Healthier Communities workstreams:

- Support our most vulnerable neighbours
- Ensure investment in our community facilities and open space
- Support services that promote good mental health
- Support services that reduce social isolation and loneliness
- Help to tackle health inequalities
- Ensure health and social care is connected to local communities



Safer and Inclusive Communities workstreams:

- Support local mechanisms and communication networks that take positive action to reduce the risk of crime
- Support community response to and recovery from emergency situations such as flooding
- Actively engage and support groups that promote and celebrate diversity and inclusion within our communities
- Connect people to the right services and support when they need it
- Grow our digital community
- Ensure services for survivors of domestic abuse and exploitation are connected



Stronger and Sustainable Communities workstreams:

- Support the development of local solutions to meet community needs
- Facilitate local partnerships and actively be part of community conversations
- Design our services together through coproduction and co commissioning
- Fund ideas together – crowdfunding and funding local people with good ideas
- Volunteering as a key part of feeling connected to our community



Evaluation and learning

Capturing our progress

“People who are better connected to each other will take the actions they see as being important for their communities, but it takes time to see evidence of the creation or repair of social processes.” Nesta

Stories inspire others

Capturing stories of change and success will inspire others to join in and act on the things that are important to them. Stories will be captured about specific communities and programmes that showcase connected communities and grow momentum throughout the district.

Stats influence others

Meaningful change takes time and detecting and measuring change is challenging but monitoring progress is essential. Using Public Health ABCD Monitoring Framework we will continue to inform the approach along with other credible data sets.

Creating a learning mindset

It is important to understand what works and what doesn't work and explore what factors helped or hindered progress. Reflection and learning will be embedded within every aspect of our work. We will support our growing network of community groups, clubs, volunteers, facilities, venues, and voluntary and

community sector organisations to celebrate and share when things go well and learn and try again when things don't go as planned.

To support the growth of asset-based community development, we will host a series of ABCD events, bringing practitioners together to share learning. We will also work with elected members to facilitate ABCD conversations in their local communities.

Capturing the ripple effect

Ripple effect mapping helps discover the impacts of a community project by encouraging reflection, capturing what relationships can lead to, and motivating people to continue their work. We will use this method to support the communities growth.

The period covered by the strategy is 20 years from 1 December 2021 to 31 March 2041. It is envisaged that the action plan will be reviewed annually and the strategy itself reviewed after 5 years.





Find people with interests, skills or passions

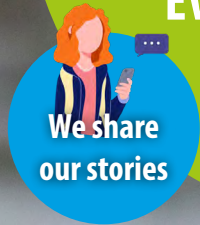
Connect people with shared interest

Make a connection across the neighbourhood



MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

EVERYONE WELCOME



We share our stories



We have a voice



We take action

Support people to take action

Connect to local assets

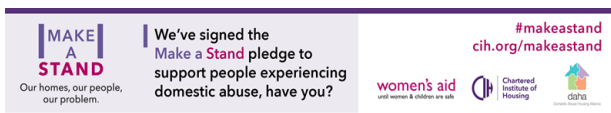
Our pledges:

Malvern Hills District Council has made several pledges in support of our three central themes of:

Healthier:



Safer & inclusive:



Stronger & sustainable:



Connected Communities Further information

COMMENTS ABOUT THE STRATEGY

Comments about the strategy should be addressed to:

Amanda Smith

Head of Community & Parking Services

Malvern Hills District Council

Email: communityservices@malvernhills.gov.uk Tel: 01684 862250

A copy of this strategy is available on the Malvern Hills District Council website:
www.malvernhills.gov.uk/community/connected-communities