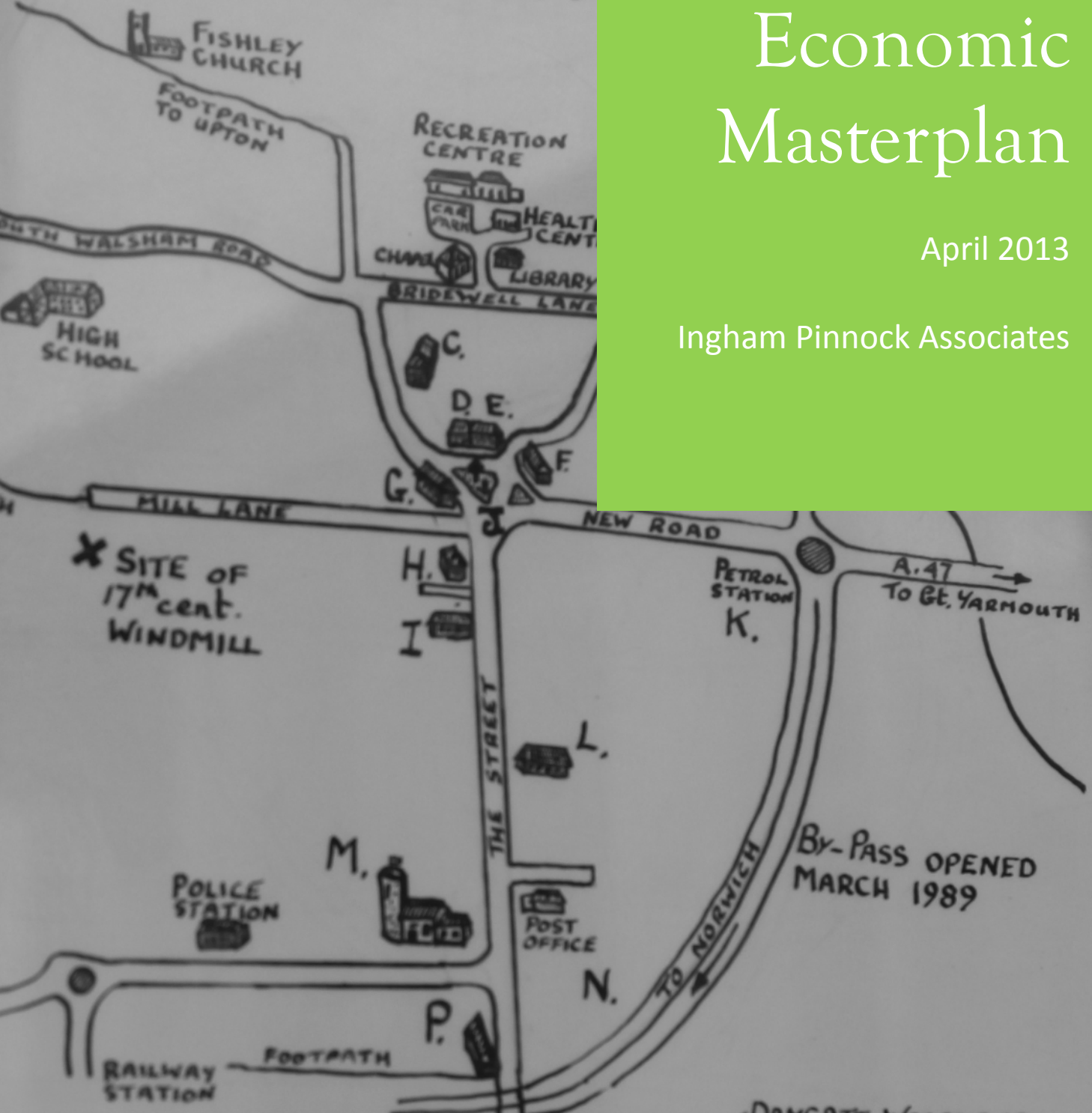


ACLE THE VILLAGE

Acle Village Economic Masterplan

April 2013

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Strategy
3. Projects and initiatives
4. Projects summary

1. Introduction

1. Introduction

Ingham Pinnock Associates was appointed in September 2012 to prepare an economic masterplan for Acle in Norfolk.

Acle is one of three main settlements within the Local Authority area of Broadland. It lies approximately 10 miles to the east of Norwich on the western edge of the Norfolk Broads. Located on an area of high-ground, settlement at Acle dates back over 2,000 years when it was one of a number of small ports along the eastern edge of a large area of wetland that is now the Norfolk Broads.

The village today is a service centre for a large rural hinterland. It has a population of approximately 2,800 (2011 Census).

The preparation of the economic masterplan was overseen and supported by a number of important local stakeholder groups in the form of a Village Team that included:

- Acle Parish Council
- Acle Academy
- The Acle Society
- Acle Recreation Centre
- Acle Social Club
- Acle Youth Club
- The Acle Lands Trust
- The Acle Archive
- The Broads Authority*
- Broadland District Council (economic development and planning)

*The masterplan area relates to the civil parish of Acle and its hinterland which extends into the Broads Authority area.

The objective of the masterplan is simply to identify a range of deliverable projects and initiatives that can help to maintain and grow the economy of Acle over the short, medium and long-term. There is no fixed timescale or deadline by which the masterplan must be delivered. Rather it is designed to contain projects that can be delivered immediately, projects that can only be delivered over the next two or three years and projects that will take much longer to implement but for which this masterplan provides an important starting point.

The outputs of the masterplan are deliberately designed to be practical with only minimal requirements for financial investment and to be deliverable by the Village Team. Broadland District Council prioritises practical outputs over high-level advice and the masterplan has been prepared with that consideration as a guiding principle.

The process of preparing the masterplan can be broken down into three stages as follows:

1. **Research:** Undertaking extensive statistical research, reviewing relevant strategies, policies and other literature, undertaking stakeholder and community consultation
2. **Strategy development:** Identifying issues that currently constrain the success of Acle, defining a vision for the village, identifying and testing a series of projects and initiatives that can deliver this vision and overcome the constraints identified
3. **Implementation:** Assigning responsibility for individual projects and delivering them. This third stage is on-going.

The remainder of this document comprises the Acle Village Economic Masterplan. It comprises the following main sections:

- **Strategy:** Outlining a vision and objectives which provide the building blocks of the Masterplan
- **Projects and initiatives:** Highlighting tailored deliverable projects and practical next steps capable of addressing issues identified in Acle and delivering the vision and objectives
- **Projects summary:** Illustrating in summary the full suite of projects contained in the strategy.

2. Strategy

2. Strategy

The Acle Village Economic Masterplan is built around a vision and set of objectives that respond to key issues affecting the village identified by this work. The vision and objectives are the building blocks of the strategy and form the basis for the development of all of the projects and initiatives set out later in the document.

Vision

The vision for Acle is for it to build an identity and role as:

‘The gateway to the Norfolk Broads’

This vision was developed by local stakeholders before the masterplan process commenced. It is a clear and strong statement that reflects the village’s physical location and aspiration to play an important part in the economy of this major tourist attraction and natural asset. It relates closely to the slogan recently developed for the Norfolk Broads: ‘Britain’s magical waterland’.

The purpose of the vision is to provide an over-arching aim or goal for the economic masterplan. It should be used for the long-term as a point of reference against which future decisions about economic regeneration or growth of the village are considered. It should be used for marketing and promotional purposes by a range of stakeholders.

Objectives

The objectives set out below respond directly to a number of constraints to economic growth identified by this work.

The objectives have informed and guided the development of projects and initiatives set out in the next section. They provide a useful structure that is bespoke to Acle and ensure that the recommendations of this work respond specifically to issues affecting the village:

1. **Village centre:** To improve the form and function of the village centre and put it back at the heart of the community
2. **Links to the Broads:** To improve the physical and perceived links with the Norfolk Broads
3. **Aging population and housing:** To ensure that Acle is a well-balanced community and is an attractive and accessible location for all age groups
4. **Employment space:** To retain and support existing businesses and attract new companies to the village
5. **Social capital:** To build even greater levels of social capital
6. **Online presence:** Improve the visibility of Acle online
7. **Business voice:** To improve exposure and awareness of local businesses.

3. Projects and initiatives

3: Projects and initiatives

Issue 1: Village centre

Aim

To improve the form and function of Acle village centre and put it back at the heart of the community.

Objectives

- Reclaim the centre of the village from the car
- Improve the appearance and attractiveness of the village centre
- Improve orientation and understanding
- Better utilise available land.

Background

Despite being an historic village at the confluence of a number of important routes, the centre of Acle does not currently provide a focus for economic activity or community interaction and events.

The historic layout of buildings in the centre of Acle indicate that the public area or village green in the middle of the village was previously an uninterrupted and physically significant area. It is likely that this space originally hosted livestock and produce markets (before they moved south along The Street), and was the focus for retail, commerce and community events.

Prior to the completion of the A47 bypass in 1989, the volume of traffic passing through the centre of Acle and the approach to transport planning at that time, led to a large proportion of the village centre being given over to highway. When the A47 bypass was opened a large proportion of through traffic was removed but the highway was not down-graded to match the resulting lower volumes of traffic passing through. This leaves the village with a legacy where the vast majority of space in the centre is highway and only a tiny fraction is left for pedestrians in the form of pavements and two small islands of green space.

As a result of the above, unlike most towns and villages across the UK, the centre of Acle does not and cannot currently play a meaningful role in the life of the village and only has a loose collection of commercial (largely non-retail) activities taking place around its perimeter.

Projects set out below seek to respond to this issue by improving the form and function of the village centre and seek to put it back at the heart of the community.

Project 1a: Trial relocation of the Farmers Market to the Village Centre

Acle currently hosts a monthly Farmers Market inside the Church Rooms located on the Norwich Road, opposite Budgens. When the market was established a number of years ago it was intended to be located outside but due to poor weather at that time was moved indoors where it has remained ever since.

The market provides an important attraction for visitors and a resource for the community as well as an opportunity for local businesses to sell their produce. However, despite good signage and the best efforts of the organising committee, the visibility of the market is limited by its location and by virtue of the fact that it is held indoors. Footfall has therefore gradually declined and the number of traders slowly diminished.

This project proposes to trial the relocation of the farmers market to the village centre on the greenspace beneath the Folly Tree during summer 2013. This should help to improve the visibility of the market, capture higher levels of footfall and bring people back into the centre of Acle.

Lead and support

This project will be led by the farmer's market management committee. Support will be provided by Broadland District Council's (BDC) economic development team and Acle Parish Council (APC) to help address practical issues of moving the market to public space adjacent the highway.

Next steps

- Farmers market management committee to consider and agree possible dates to trial the relocation of the market during 2013. This could coincide with other events planned this year such as the Broads Festival
- Farmers market management committee to liaise with BDC and APC to make practical arrangements
- Subject to the success of the trial, this proposal could be extended to cover a longer period.

Before...



After?



Project 1b: Shop front improvements

Research highlighted the general poor quality of shop-fronts around the village centre and along The Street. Whilst this does not apply equally to every unit, some of which are very attractive, many are characterised by poor signage, unattractive window-displays or windows are taken up entirely by printed graphics and advertising.

This issue creates a confusing landscape for visitors who can find it difficult to immediately identify shops and services and cumulatively it reduces the overall attractiveness of the village. In the current economic climate and given Acle's vision to become the gateway to the Norfolk Broads, there is a need to work harder on the attractiveness of individual shops and the appeal of the village centre as a whole.

This project therefore proposes to initiate a number of simple measures to help promote improvements to the quality of shop fronts in the village.

Annual awards: The Acle Society manages the annual Produce and Craft Show, which is a major event in the village calendar. We recommend that the scope of the show is expanded to include annual awards given to retailers and businesses that have the most attractive shop-fronts and window displays. National multiples in particular should be encouraged to participate and wherever possible, remove large graphics that fill shop-front windows.

Lead and support

This project would be led by the Acle Society who would promote the annual competition and provide awards to the winners at their annual show.

Next steps

- Acle Society to consider expanding the scope of the Produce and Craft Show and promote the competition for new categories relating to shop-fronts to retailers and businesses around the village centre and on The Street
- Acle Society to provide the first award to the most attractive shop-front at their 2013 Produce and Craft Show.

Provision of guidance and support to businesses: Should the business group set out at **project 7a** become established, we recommend that this group provides a forum for discussion about improvements to their shop-fronts and sign-post for ideas and support. Subject to take up, we also recommend that this group invites high quality retailers from elsewhere or even retail specialists to meetings to provide advice and guidance on shop-front improvements.

Lead and support

- This project would be led by the business group described at **project 7a** and would be supported by the BDC economic development team.

Next steps

- Project to be discussed at a forthcoming business group meeting. Discussion should focus on identifying local examples of best practice and possibly inviting specialists to meet with the group.

Before...

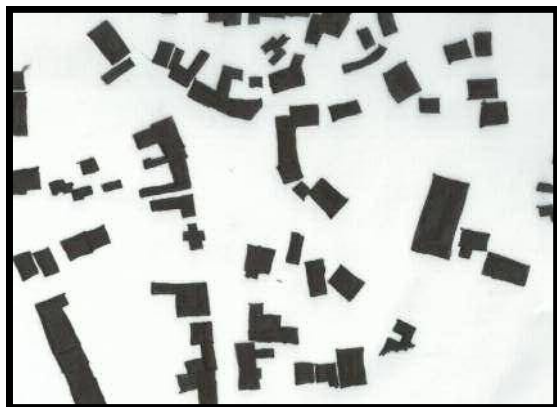


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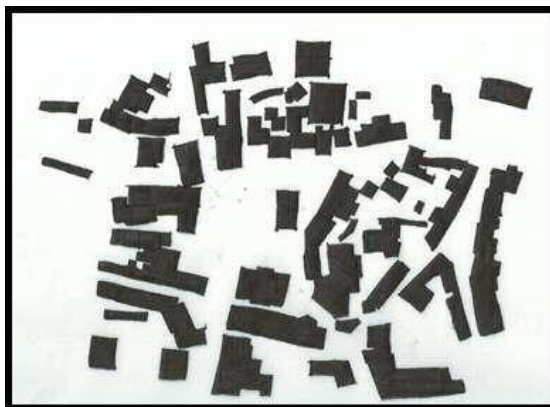


Project 1c: Intensifying development in the village centre

Research highlighted that compared to other villages and towns of a similar size, the density of buildings and development in the centre of Acle is low (see indicative plan below).



Built form in Acle centre



Settle, Yorkshire

Settlements as old as Acle typically have at their centre a dense network of streets and lanes with high concentrations of small residential dwellings and commercial spaces for retail and other activities. This dense development pattern provides a range of floorspace types for employment activities and creates a critical mass of movement, activity and vibrancy.

This project therefore proposes to promote the sensitive development of unused and vacant sites in the centre of Acle. Any new development would be expected to include a mixture of retail and employment space at ground floor where sites are close to the village centre as well as a range of residential units further back from the street and on upper floors. Development would need to be of the highest design quality and reflect the character of the area.

Lead and support

This project is reliant on the owners of undeveloped plots to see the opportunity and promote development. This document is designed to provide a positive signal to landowners and developers to pursue development and form a material consideration for any subsequent planning applications.

The project could be supported by the inclusion of a specific policy promoting development in a Neighbourhood Plan which the Parish Council hopes to prepare over the course of 2013. The inclusion of a policy would provide a statutory basis for development and increase the likelihood of delivery.

Next steps

- Prepare and test a policy for inclusion within a Neighbourhood Plan.

Project 1d: Restoring the heart of the village

As identified at the start of this section, perhaps the single biggest impediment to the success of the centre of Acle as a place for economic and community activity is the amount of land given over to the highway.

This project therefore seeks to begin the process of making alterations to the village centre, reducing the amount of space given over to highway and increasing the amount of land given over to public space and pedestrian areas, potentially in the form of a traditional village green.

This project is perhaps the most ambitious outlined in this economic masterplan. It is likely to be one of the more complex ideas, costly to deliver and will take some time to implement. It is recognised that this is a medium to long-term project but we would stress that in places with a history as long as Acle's, a project that may take five or more years to deliver should not be dismissed because of its ambition or timescale for delivery.

Alterations to the centre of Acle could take a range of forms. More detailed work is required to progress designs and feasibility. However, there are a number of principles that could underpin future consideration of this project as follows:

- The need to maximise the creation of greenspace that can be used for formal community events, informal public use and provide an attractive heart to the village
- The need to minimise the severance effect of roads running through the village centre for example by minimising carriageway widths, adjusting surface treatments, creating shared surfaces and raised crossings
- The need to maximise pedestrian areas outside existing properties to support commercial activity and ease movement
- The need to maintain informal short-stay car parking.

Lead and support

This project will require a range of specialist inputs over an extended period of time. For that reason it is suggested that a sub-committee of the Parish Council is established and maintained to lead the process. Support should be provided by BDC's planning team and officers from NCC highways.

It is recommended that third party external input is sought to lead the process, prepare the design and negotiate with statutory agencies to ensure the creation of the highest quality project. It is vital that a 'design led' approach is taken and that an overly 'engineered' solution is avoided.

The project could be supported by the inclusion of a specific policy in a Neighbourhood Plan which the Parish Council hopes to prepare over the course of 2013. The inclusion of a policy would provide a statutory basis for improvements to the village centre, provide a basis for attracting funding such as s106 or CIL and help engage relevant statutory agencies in design development and feasibility testing.

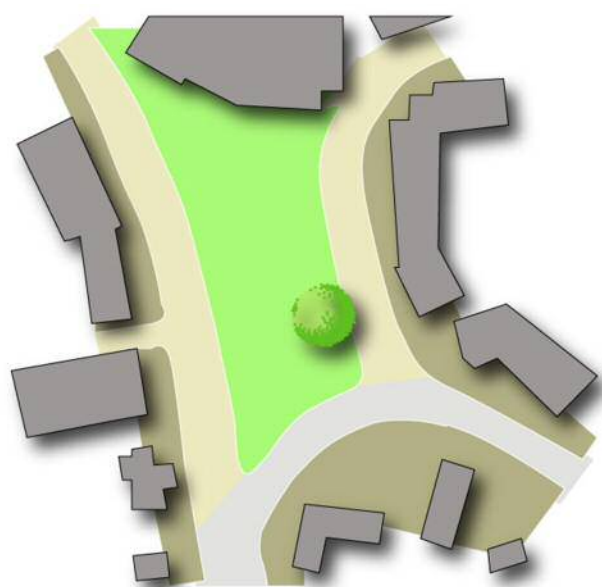
Next steps

- Establish a sub-committee of the Parish Council with a set of aims and objectives and a broad programme. The sub-committee should seek to include officers from relevant public sector agencies and third party external specialists where required
- Prepare and test a policy for inclusion within a Neighbourhood Plan.

Before...



After?



Please note: These diagrams are purely conceptual, they do not represent in any way a design and any public realm works carried out in the Village centre would require designs to be undertaken. The diagrams are intended to illustrate how highway dominant the current arrangement is.

Before...



After?



Please note: These images are indicative only, they do not in anyway represent designs and any public realm works carried out in the Village centre would require designs to be undertaken. The images are intended to illustrate how highway dominant the current arrangement is.

Issue 2: Links with the Norfolk Broads

Aim

To improve the physical and perceived links with the Norfolk Broads.

Objectives

- Capture a greater proportion of tourism from the Norfolk Broads
- Improve physical links to the Norfolk Broads
- Strengthen Acle's identity as a village within the Broads landscape, grow the 'spirit of the place' and deliver on the slogan; 'Gateway to the Broads'

Background

Acle is located on the western edge of the Norfolk Broads. Whilst it does not contain a broad or a staithe, it is close to busy moorings at the Old Bridge and has long-term moorings at Boat Dyke Lane.

The history of the village is inextricably linked to the Norfolk Broads as highlighted at the start of this report. Today, it is the first main settlement visitors to the Broads will pass if they are coming to the area via car from the south. However, research demonstrated that the relationship between Acle and the Norfolk Broads is weak.

The Norfolk Broads attracted around 7.2 million visitors who spent around £420m in 2011. It is the fourth most popular National Park in the UK and alongside the North Norfolk coast is the most significant area-based tourist attraction in the East of England. However, there is very little in Acle for tourists and little evidence that the village is capturing any economic activity linked to Broads tourism.

Acle is a gateway to the Norfolk Broads, but unlike Wroxham or Reedham, it does not have direct access to the water. The physical links to areas of water where the village can capture visitors at Boat Dyke Lane and the Old Bridge (and other local natural attractions) are relatively poor and in need of improvement.

Other than St Edmunds Church which is a fantastic example of a rare thatched and round-towered church, there is very little in Acle that signifies to visitors or residents that the village is part of the unique Broads landscape. There is little to tell visitors explicitly or sub-consciously that they are in a town with a special history and identity that is driven by its historic role within the Norfolk Broads. The village does not have any real sense of place.

Projects in this section are therefore designed to improve links between Acle and the Norfolk Broads in three particular ways:

1. Capturing tourism: Improving the role Acle plays in the economy of the Norfolk Broads as a tourist destination
2. Creating better physical links: Improving the actual physical links to the landscape

3. Improving the sense of place: Drawing out and strengthening the identity of Acle as part of the unique Norfolk Broads landscape

Projects in this section are organised under each of these three headings.

Capturing tourism: Project 2a; Reduce reliance on leaflets and invest in online media such as www.visitacle.com

This project seeks to encourage all relevant groups and organisations to reduce their reliance hard-copy leaflets and pamphlets promoting Acle and the Broads.

Significant investment is made each year by numerous groups on producing new leaflets and printed material. Out of necessity, these leaflets are placed in local attractions and information points around the village and now proliferate. These leaflets do not reach a non-local audience and are very quickly out of date and in need of replacement. This is expensive and unsustainable and arguably is not reaching an audience outside of those that are already in the area and have therefore chosen to visit the Broads.

This project recommends that local organisations and attractions reduce their reliance on hard-copy material and concentrate more on online marketing and communications through the use of the visitacle web page suggested at **project 6b** and possibly through the production of QR reader adverts and Apps. Groups should be encouraged to invest the funding they would have spent on producing hard copy on developing additional pages for the website. This has the combined effect of ensuring the website is sustainable financially and that the groups are receiving better coverage for the same or less investment. These approaches benefit from being able to reach a global audience and are often cheaper to produce and are cheaper to maintain.

It is recognised that there will always be a role for hard-copy leaflets and pamphlets. Where organisations are wedded to the use of hard-copy material, they could consider focussing on using the small number of major local tourism publications that have significant and widespread circulation such as the Broadcaster, to reduce cost and increase distribution.

Lead and support

All members of the Village Team should promote the delivery of this project and encourage associated groups and tourist attractions to do the same. APC is in the process of preparing the visitacle webpage which will provide a bespoke online tourism presence for the village and could help ease organisations into a transition away from hard-copy marketing material.

Next steps

- Organisations and groups involved with the Village Team to consider where hard-copy material can be replaced with on-line marketing and communications
- APC to prepare and complete the visitacle website and encourage businesses and tourist attractions to use the new resource.

Capturing tourism; Project 2b; Develop links with Broads Tourism business group

This project seeks to forge stronger links between the Broads Tourism business group and businesses based in Acle.

The Broads Tourism group represents a large number of significant businesses and organisations involved with the sector such as boat manufacturers and boat hire companies, accommodation providers, the Broads Authority, marketing and publicity companies. It helps to deliver the strategy for the Broads and invests significant time and resource in initiatives that could benefit Acle. There is currently no real link between this group and the village and Acle will be missing opportunities.

This project therefore recommends that Acle need engages more closely with this Broads Tourism in order to benefit from its outputs. For example, investment was recently made into the production of Broads branding guidance, a quality mark and the slogan 'Britain's magical waterland'. This branding is free to use and businesses and tourism organisations in Acle could and should benefit from work such as this.

Lead and support

At least one member of the Village Team should become a member of this influential group to provide a link back to the village and mechanism for sharing knowledge and information. This representative could come from the emerging business group (**project 7a**).

Next steps

- Village Team to identify a representative to engage with the Broads Tourism group and disseminate information to APC and other local organisations
- Emerging business group and BDC economic development team to encourage adoption of branding material for all businesses in Acle.

Capturing tourism: Project 2c; Prepare 'Visit Acle' page in the Broadcaster magazine

This project seeks to promote the whole of Acle as a destination in the Broadcaster magazine (and other major Norfolk Broads-wide publications).

As noted above, there is a proliferation of leaflets and other hard-copy marketing material relating to Acle and individual groups and organisations in the area. This pattern is repeated across the entirety of the Norfolk Broads which results in visitors being presented with a huge and confusing array of material to sift through. As a result, the offer and appeal of individual attractions and destinations get lost in this morass. Visitors also increasingly plan their stays and activities on the web prior to visiting a destination, thus making leaflets received on arrival less likely to be read.

Alongside the large volume of leaflets there are one or two major publications that benefit from Broads-wide distribution, for example these are placed on every single boat and in most hotels, B&Bs and self-catering accommodation. This project recommends that as well as moving towards more online marketing and information (**project 2b**), tourism businesses and organisations in Acle present themselves as a coherent group on a single page in major publications such as the Broadcaster. The circulation of these major publications is much greater than individual organisation leaflets and the presentation of Acle as a whole would provide a simple and comprehensive message to potential visitors. It also allows Acle to promote itself as a 'service centre' for the Broads, providing practical information for visitors which would lead to an increase in footfall.

Lead and support

APC should take the lead on securing a page in the 2014 Broadcaster and any other major Broads-wide publications. It should work with the new business group to secure written contributions and sponsorship.

Next steps

- APC alongside the BDC tourism team to contact the publisher of the Broadcaster and other major relevant publications to understand the cost and print deadline for 2014 editions (the deadline for the 2013 edition of the Broadcaster was October 2012)
- APC alongside the BDC tourism team to develop a structure for a Visit Acle full-page spread and invite contributions and sponsorship from individual businesses and organisations. The page should focus on promoting Acle as the 'Gateway to the Broads' highlighting the village as a service centre for land and water based activities.

Capturing tourism: Project 2d; Create and market themed packages

This project responds to the trend in the leisure market of visitors increasingly seeking linked activities and experiences that extend over one or two days rather than visiting individual attractions for a few hours. For example, a visitor today is more likely to come to the Norfolk Broads to undertake a combination of related activities such as bird-watching and photography, buying local produce and visiting a good quality restaurant than simply visiting to take part in one or other of these activities.

The project therefore recommends that related attractions, accommodation providers, cafes, pubs, restaurants and shops come together to create a coherent themed package of activities to market to visitors.

Lead and support

This project could be led by the emerging business group (**project 7a**). Support could be provided by the BDC economic development and tourism teams.

Next steps

- Business group to identify two or three broad themed packages, for example around bird watching, boating or walking and bring together local organisations and businesses operating within each of these themes
- Related groups of businesses to design their own specific package and decide in detail on how best to market it to potential visitors
- Themed packages could be marketed on the visitacle website and in the Acle page of the Broadcaster. Businesses should work alongside BDC tourism to ensure all existing marketing material is exploited.

Capturing tourism: Project 2e; Acle hampers

This project seeks to bring together food and drink producers and retailers based in Acle to prepare hampers of goods and approach boat hire operators and accommodation providers to sell the hampers directly to their customers.

Acle has a number of fantastic food and drink producers and retailers with strong local provenance and high quality products. There is a growing market for locally sourced produce such as this, particularly among visitors and tourists and this project seeks to benefit from this trend.

This project recommends that retailers and producers in Acle come together to design a number of different hampers designed to meet the needs of different types of visitors to the Norfolk Broads such as:

- Families and small groups on day-trips and weekend visits
- Larger touring groups and coach parties on day-trips
- Longer term self-catering groups.

Lead and support

This project would be led by the emerging business group (**project 7a**). BDC economic development and tourism teams could provide support.

Next steps

- Business group to identify a group of retailers and producers that could contribute towards a range of attractive food and drink hampers
- Business group to approach individual retailers and producers and secure their support for the hamper initiative
- Individual producers and operators to design and agree the contents of a range of hamper packages
- Business group, retailers and producers to approach the Broads Tourism group, individual boat hire operators and accommodation providers about marketing the hampers directly to their customers.

Better physical links: Project 2f; Upgrade footpath between Acle Bridge and the village

This project seeks to improve the quality of the main pedestrian link between Acle and Acle Bridge.

There is currently a rough footpath on the south side of the A1064 Caister Road between the north east corner of the village and the Acle Bridge (there is also a secondary route that takes pedestrians out along the bank of the river on the top of a levee). This is the only real and proximate route between the Broads and the village. Research highlighted that during periods of prolonged bad weather the condition of the path deteriorates and because of the high levels of vegetation, pedestrians and cyclists feel safer / more comfortable walking along the busy A1064.

Local groups and the Broads Authority have recently invested in improvements to this footpath but this project recommends that further improvement is made to encourage higher levels of use.

Improvements to the footpath should result in increased numbers of visitors moored at the Acle Bridge walking (or cycling) into the village. Improvements should also increase the volume of residents in the village going out into the Broads landscape.

Improvements could include:

- The introduction of a more durable but porous surface to the footpath such as hoggin
- The introduction of solar 'cats eye' lighting to mark the route and increase awareness to drivers on A1064
- The completion of the row of pollard Willow to provide a clear delineation to the path and some level of 'protection' to pedestrians using the route. The use of pollard Willow also allows views in and out of the pathway improving the feeling of safety, provides additional habitat and is a characteristic of the local landscape.

Lead and support

This project would be led by Acle Parish Council and the Broads Authority and could be supported by voluntary community groups.

The project could be supported by the inclusion of a specific policy in a Neighbourhood Plan which the Parish Council hopes to prepare over the course of 2013. The inclusion of a policy would provide a statutory basis for improvements to footpath, provide a basis for attracting funding such as s106 or CIL and help to engage statutory agencies, the local community and private landowners.

Next steps

- Prepare and test a policy for inclusion within a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Prepare and cost a plan that sets out proposed improvements to the footpath
- Secure funding to deliver the works and implementation.

Before...



After?



Better physical links: Project 2g; Relocate and consolidate information points at the Acle Bridge and in the village centre

This project seeks to improve the provision of information at key points in Acle in order to help increase the awareness of visitors about the facilities and attractions in and around the village and provide better links between the village and the Norfolk Broads.

As is common in many towns and villages, Acle suffers from a gradual accumulation of signs, maps, and information points. New signs or boards are added slowly over time with the best of intention but the cumulative negative impact of this build-up is often overlooked. This results in visitors being presented with a number of different information points, some of which are out-of-date or in poor condition and the effectiveness of the original objective is undermined.

This project therefore recommends that all of the signage and information provided by local community groups via noticeboards, maps, signposts etc is reviewed and consolidated. The approach should focus on providing one or two high-quality comprehensive information points in key locations where visitors will naturally arrive or collect such as the village centre, Acle Bridge and railway station.

New information points should highlight information of particular relevance to tourists as well as local residents such as:

- The location of public transport nodes such as the train station and bus stops
- The location of the village centre and essential services
- The location of major local tourist attractions such as the Old Bridge, the nearest Broads, Fairhaven, Roman Wood, Burlingham Wood, St Edmunds Church, Fishley Church etc.
- QR code linking to the visitacle website for further information
- Timings of particular routes to demonstrate that the village is easily accessible.

Lead and support

This project could be led by BDC tourism team and APC and supported by other relevant groups within the Village Team.

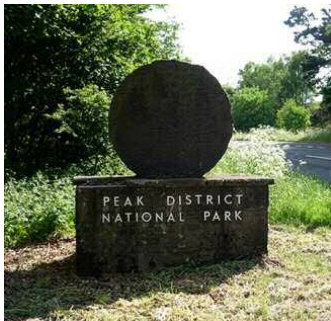
Next steps

- BDC and APC to undertake an audit of all non-statutory (i.e. highways) information points such as maps, noticeboards, advertisements, sign posts
- BDC and APC to consult on the most effective locations for the installation of new consolidated information points
- BDC and APC to procure and deliver new high quality information points and remove obsolete or duplicative signage.

Before...



After?



Better physical links; Project 2h: Secure safe pedestrian crossings over the A1064 at the Acle Bridge and village entrance

This project seeks to secure formal pedestrian crossing points over the A1064 at Acle Bridge and the entrance to the village by Boat Dyke Lane and in so doing, provide better physical links between the village and the Norfolk Broads.

The A1064 is a busy route with traffic reaching Acle Bridge and subsequently entering the village at high speeds. Whilst it is recognised that measures have been taken in recent years to improve this situation, crossing the A1064 at Acle Bridge and at the north eastern corner of the village remains difficult. As such, the A1064 creates a degree of severance, cutting off the village from the Broads, whether at Boat Dyke Lane or at the Acle Bridge and presents a barrier to pedestrians and cyclists.

This project therefore recommends that formal pedestrian crossings are implemented to improve the ability of people to cross this busy road, making it easier for visitors from the Broads to access the village and for village residents to access the Broads. This project will require the engagement and support of statutory agencies and will require funds to deliver crossing points.

Lead and support

This project could be led by APC but with support from BDC planning and economic development. Inputs would be required from a range of other agencies such as NCC highways.

The project could be supported by its inclusion in the proposed policy in a Neighbourhood Plan set out above in relation to **project 2f**. The inclusion of this project within a Neighbourhood Plan policy would provide a basis for attracting funding such as s106 or CIL and help to engage statutory agencies and the local community.

Next steps

- Prepare and test a policy for inclusion within a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Secure funding to deliver the works and implementation.

Improving sense of place: Project 2i; Broads Festival

This project proposes that existing community events and new events are aligned to coincide with the Broads Festival (usually May of each year) as a means of improving the sense of Acle being part of the Broads Landscape.

There are numerous regular community events taking place in Acle each year and a number that take place infrequently subject to the availability of volunteers. Many of these events take place at random points throughout the year (others such as the Produce and Craft Show are fixed in relation to growing seasons).

It would be beneficial if existing events (where practical) and new events are organised so as to coincide with the Broads Festival. Events in Acle could benefit from the marketing and energy created by the Broads Festival, contribute towards it becoming a major regional occasion and the village could benefit from the additional visitors it brings to the area. Amongst many others, ideas for new events could include retailers running promotions during the Broads Festival supported by online marketing via the visitacle website, special farmers markets taking place in the village centre or exhibitions and open days taking place at the Academy, primary school, Recreation Centre and St Edmunds Church.

Recognising the limited capacity of existing community groups, this project does not recommend in short-term that Acle holds a new major event; as noted above, individual groups and organisations could simply take their own initiative and seek to capitalise on the marketing and exposure which the Broads Festival brings.

Lead and support

This project could be led by the Village Team but it would be the responsibility of individual groups, organisations and businesses to take their own initiative. Should there prove to be sufficient appetite and input from voluntary groups, this project could in time become a more structured and centrally co-ordinated event.

Next steps

- Village Team to promote the Broads Festival and encourage individual organisations, groups and businesses to consider what they can do during the Festival period to promote themselves and Acle.

Improving sense of place: Project 2j; Acle Regatta

The Acle Regatta is an historic annual event inherently linked to the Norfolk Broads. It provides the village with a truly unique annual event that is currently under represented and relatively unknown outside of the Broads.

More extensive marketing and awareness of the event could help to attract visitors from around the UK to the village. Growth and development of the event could help to promote Acle as the gateway to the Broads and help to improve its sense of place within the Broads landscape. It could provide opportunities for local businesses to advertise, exhibit, trade and provide sponsorship and an opportunity for the community to come together to celebrate what is special about Acle and the surrounding landscape.

This project therefore recommends that the organisers of the Acle Regatta are engaged and supported to help promote and develop the event.

Lead and support

The Village Team could engage with the organisers of the Acle Regatta and invite them to join the group and provide a basis for considering how the event can be supported.

Next steps

- Invite Acle Regatta organisers to join the Village Team.

Issue 3: Aging population and housing

Aim

To ensure that Acle is a well-balanced community and is an attractive location for all age groups.

Objective

- Provide a suitable mix of housing for all age groups as part of any new development.

Background

Research identified that a high proportion of Acle's population is aged over 65 (28% in Acle, compared to 22% across Broadland and 17% across England and Wales, 2011 Census). The village is clearly an attractive location for the elderly as a result of its location, good public transport services, high concentration of services, local healthcare provision and wealth of community groups. Over time, as public and private service provision has adapted to meet the needs of the growing elderly population, the village has become increasingly attractive to this age group and the trend has become increasingly pronounced.

Whilst there is nothing inherently wrong with Acle being an attractive village for the elderly, this trend has started to have a number of negative impacts such as a declining secondary school roll and above average house price inflation as demand from elderly cash-buyers out-strips supply and younger first-time buyers are priced-out.

For Acle to remain a viable, vibrant and prosperous community, it is important that the village includes a balanced mix of residents from all age-groups. The project set out in response to this issue seeks to ensure that this balance can be achieved through the delivery of new housing.

Project 3a: Housing supply

This project seeks to ensure that any new housing development in Acle provides a range of property types and sizes and where possible, pays particular attention to attracting young families.

There are a number of housing sites in Acle at varying points in the planning process but which are likely to come forward for development in the short- to medium term. This project would ensure that development on these sites includes a mix of housing that can help to maintain a balanced community.

Lead and support

BDC and APC will take the lead on this project through discussions with the promoters of residential sites and by making representations in relation to specific planning applications. This document will also become a material consideration for developers and should be considered as they prepare individual planning applications.

Next steps

- BDC planning team to encourage developers to review this document as part of pre-application discussions
- APC and BDC economic development to make representations on any planning applications to ensure developers have paid specific regard to delivering new homes that provide for a balanced range of age-groups.

Issue 4: Employment space

Aim

To retain and support existing businesses and attract new companies to the village.

Objectives

- Provide new, high quality retail, office and industrial space for existing businesses and potential inward investors
- Grow the economic base of Acle
- Tap into the success of other Norwich fringe locations such as the Broadland Business Park

Background

Research identified that there is little vacant employment space (retail, office, industrial) in Acle. Research also identified limited provision of higher quality and larger employment space, particularly office space.

This situation is typical of places such as Acle outside of major urban centres where there is strong local demand for employment space but supply is limited by the weak financial viability of developing speculative schemes. The supply of new employment space becomes static and local economic growth is frustrated as potential tenants are unable to find premises.

Proposals relating to this issue therefore seek to find ways to incentivise new employment development by de-risking speculative building.

Project 4a: Unlock undeveloped village centre sites and employment allocations

This project seeks to promote the development of sites for employment activity. It builds on **project 1c** by supporting the development of appropriate under-used sites in the village centre for employment uses but also but also includes allocated employment sites that have not yet been brought forward for development.

As noted above at **project 1c**, there are areas of underused land in the village centre. The development of these sites would help to increase levels of activity and vibrancy in the village centre and support local economic development. This project complements **project 1c** by promoting these sites for development but specifically seeks to ensure that an appropriate proportion of any new space built, is provided for employment generating uses such as small retail or office units.

In addition to unallocated land in the village centre, this project highlights that there are a number of allocated employment sites that have remained undeveloped for a number of years. This project seeks to support the development of these sites by suggesting their inclusion in a Neighbourhood Plan and by providing a starting point for working with landowners to help kick-start development.

Lead and support

The project as it relates to undeveloped employment allocations would be led by BDC's economic development team. Officers from this team would build a relationship with landowners to understand in more detail the reasons for sites not being built out and help to identify targeted remedies to address this. This element of the project could be supported by the inclusion of specific policies in a Neighbourhood Plan which the Parish Council hopes to prepare over the course of 2013.

In relation to the unallocated town centre sites, it is also recommended that a policy is included in a Neighbourhood Plan as set out above at **project 1c**.

The inclusion of policies in a Neighbourhood Plan would provide a statutory basis for development of unallocated land, support existing allocations, increase the likelihood of attracting funding for enabling works and provide a platform for working with private owners.

Next steps

- Establish dialogue with the owners of allocated employment sites to understand constraints to development
- Prepare and test policies for inclusion within a Neighbourhood Plan
- Identify sources of funding and / or specific measures that can help unlock stalled allocations.

Project 4b: Promote Acle as part of the Norwich Fringe for inward investment

This project recognises the significant success that business parks on the immediate edge of Norwich have had in recent years and seeks to direct further growth out, along the A47 to Acle.

Acle benefits from similar locational advantages to the Norwich fringe business parks such as access to the A47 and therefore regional markets, but also close proximity to Norwich.

In the Local Plan site Acle 3 is designated for mixed use development including employment uses. The site benefits from excellent access to the A47 and Acle Railway Station and is well positioned for the type of businesses that might locate on the Norwich fringe. This site, alongside Acle 2 is the principal location for new employment development.

This project recommends that Acle is marketed as a comparable location for inward investment to other Norwich fringe employment areas such as the Broadland Business Park. Where possible, any new employment accommodation should include an element of 'grow-on' space for local growing micro-businesses that are otherwise forced to leave Acle due to the lack of suitable premises.

Lead and support

BDC's economic development team will lead this project and will engage with relevant landowners and potential inward investors to promote investment in Acle.

Next steps

- Prepare prospectus for Acle 2 and 3 (possibly alongside other sites in Broadland) highlighting the locational advantages and attractiveness of Acle
- Distribute the prospectus to key local commercial property agents and BDC's business database and undertake promotion work as part of BDC's programme of business networking events.
- Manage inward investment enquiries on an on-going basis, directing possible new companies or developers to Acle.

Issue 5: Social capital

Aim

To build even greater levels of social capital in Acle.

Objectives

- Grow the pool of existing community leaders and volunteers
- Improve relations between the young and old members of the community
- Establish more 'all community' events.

Background

Research demonstrated that Acle benefits from a large number of small community groups. These groups manage and deliver a range of vital community services such as running the youth club, writing and distributing community newsletters, maintaining websites and putting on annual events such as the Produce and Craft Show.

However, over recent years the pool of volunteers involved with these groups has gradually diminished with few replacements joining existing community organisations. The remaining community leaders and volunteers are increasingly fatigued as few new volunteers come forward, and as a result, a number of important local voluntary services are at risk.

Research also identified real and perceived tensions between the increasingly elderly population and local young people and between the local community and the Recreation Centre. Many of the issues raised during research were found to be the result of a lack of communication and public perception and are not necessarily accurate. Whilst these are social issues and tangential to an economic strategy, in a community as small and closely knit as Acle these sorts of issues have a real impact on, for example, use of public sports facilities or providing facilities for youth groups which contribute towards the overall attractiveness and vibrancy of the village and therefore its economic success.

All of the proposals set out in relation to this issue therefore seek to strengthen local social capital, ensuring that voluntary community groups in the village can be sustained and that any misperceptions are addressed and overcome.

Project 5a: Trial Youth Ambassadors at the Parish Council

This project seeks to improve communications between young people from in and around Acle and APC. The creation of a more direct link between young people and APC will improve the flow of information between the two groups and help to identify any tensions or issues early on and identify responses to those issues.

It is recognised that young people cannot become Parish Councillors or benefit from the same rights at Council meetings as elected Councillors. However, this proposal recommends that youth representatives are given a regular agenda item to raise any issues or relevance to them and their peers and discuss these with Councillors. In return, members of APC could reciprocate and attend meetings of the Youth Council.

Lead and support

This project would be led jointly by Acle Academy and the APC.

Next steps

- APC and the Acle Academy to consider and agree the detailed scope of the Youth Ambassador role in terms of issues such as frequency of attendance, placement on the agenda, ability to speak and contribute. The scope will need careful consideration in relation to APCs legal requirements and protocols
- Acle Academy to establish an approach to identifying suitable youth representatives to become Ambassadors.

Project 5b: Use annual events to recruit new members and leaders to community groups

This project encourages local community groups to take advantage of annual events to publicise their activities and directly recruit local residents to become new members.

Residents need to know that many of the events, services and organisations provided by volunteers are fragile and that without new members, they will ultimately cease. Experience of community groups has shown that people are often more willing to sign-up to volunteering for discrete clearly defined tasks or events rather than providing open-ended support.

This project therefore recommends that local groups identify specifically where they need support and work hard to secure new volunteers on this basis, focussing efforts on community events where they can meet and discuss opportunities with the local community.

Lead and support

Individual community groups will be responsible for leading their own publicity and recruitment. However the project should be supported by groups such as the Acle Society and Acle Academy that arrange major events which provide a platform for recruitment activity.

Next steps

- Village Team, Acle Society and APC to encourage local groups and organisations to exhibit at events such as the Acle Open Day and directly seek to recruit new volunteers and leaders.

Project 5c: Improve public gateways and perceived barriers at the Recreation Centre

This project seeks to remedy a range of perceived issues around access to the Recreation Centre and use of its facilities.

For a village of its size, Acle is fortunate to have such comprehensive and high-quality sports and leisure facilities. However, consultation and research identified that there is confusion amongst the local community about access and rights of use. Community consultation also highlighted that the physical layout of the Recreation Centre is found to be confusing and unappealing and the building itself presents a barrier between visitors and the public sports facilities beyond.

This project therefore recommends that the Recreation Centre undertakes a concerted marketing campaign to provide clarity to the local community about what is and is not open to public use and that it undertakes works to improve the appearance and legibility of the front of the building.

Lead and support

The Recreation Centre management committee would lead this project with support from the wider Village Team.

Next steps

- Recreation Centre to publicise facilities via a range of local media specifically clarifying community facilities that are free to use and those that require membership
- Recreation Centre to consider and deliver improvements that could be made to the front of the property. This would include pedestrian routes, building frontages and entrances / exits to the building.

Project 5d: Establish or resuscitate one major all community event

As noted above, Acle benefits from a large number of relatively small community groups and organisations. All of these groups work hard to contribute to the life of the village and deliver fantastic events and activities. However, the majority of groups are relatively specialist in nature and do not necessarily seek to stage events and festivities for the entire community of Acle.

Most towns and villages across the UK hold some form of major all-community event or festival each year to bring residents together and celebrate being a part of that community. This can range from obscure festivities such as bog-snorkelling and cheese rolling to more conventional summer carnivals, May Day celebrations, autumn fireworks and fairs to Christmas lights ceremonies.

Acle has in the past held annual events but for a variety of reasons, not least a lack of voluntary support (see **project 5b**), these events have dwindled and no longer take place.

This project therefore recommends that the Village Team consider how it could develop sufficient resource and capacity to re-introduce one major all community event each year or support existing events such as the Acle Regatta. This could form a strong and discrete basis for recruiting new volunteers as suggested above, a project for the business group to take on or something that could be implemented by the Village Team as a whole. It could be planned to occupy a date in the calendar when the tourist trade is low to help local retailers or piggy-back onto much larger events such as the Broads Festival.

Lead and support

The Village Team should continue to consider this project and secure the support of a wide range of local groups and organisations.

Next steps

- Village Team to monitor the success of voluntary groups efforts to recruit new members and the progress of the business group over the course of 2013 in order to establish whether or not there are new community members willing to take responsibility for organising a major event.

Issue 6: Online presence

Aim

Improve the online visibility of Acle.

Objectives

- Communicate more directly and clearly with potential visitors and tourists
- Help local groups and businesses to get on-line and use the internet to their advantage
- Improve the quality of existing web presence.

Background

Research identified that Acle's presence and visibility on-line, particularly in relation to local businesses and tourism attractions is relatively poor.

A relatively small proportion of local businesses have websites and a smaller proportion still, have attractive high quality websites or websites where people can purchase goods and services online. Online marketing and sales is increasingly significant for businesses, particularly those outside of major urban areas. This trend is likely to continue and it is vital that businesses in Acle recognise this and improve their online presence in order to benefit.

Information available to visitors and tourists about Acle is also particularly poor. Whilst the Parish Council and the Acle Society websites provide excellent databases of information, they are designed primarily for the community. Place-marketing for towns and villages with obvious tourism potential such as Acle, is increasingly important as the leisure market becomes increasingly internationalised and competitive. The village needs to respond to the approach taken by towns across the East of England, UK and Europe that are directly competing for tourism trade.

All of the projects set out in relation to this issue therefore seek to improve the online presence and visibility of Acle businesses and of Acle as a tourist destination.

Project 6a: Get Acle Online campaign

This project seeks to encourage businesses and community groups in Acle to develop an improved online presence and use social media to their advantage.

The project responds to the relatively low use of company and organisation websites by local businesses and groups and the growing importance of the internet to all parts of modern life. The project is intended to provide business and groups with an improved base to advertise, communicate and transact business and improve their exposure to a global audience

The project therefore recommends that specialist training and advice (arranged by BDC) is promoted to the growing Acle business group and to community groups. Training will respond to the specific needs of local businesses and community groups and could be held in facilities at BDC offices. It could include topics such as:

- Advice on how to build a website
- Examples of best practice in website design
- How to make the most of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc
- How to retail online.

Lead and support

BDC's economic development team will lead on the provision of specialist advice and training on websites. However it is reliant on sufficient interest and uptake from local businesses and community groups. The new business group (**project 7a**) would be responsible for promoting this initiative to local businesses and the Village Team would be responsible for promoting it to community groups.

Next steps

- The new business group to promote the idea at a forthcoming meeting and advertise locally over the first half of 2013 to test the level of interest
- Business group to liaise with BDC on the level of demand and specific areas of focus requested by local businesses and groups.

Project 6b: Create the visitacle website

This project seeks to deliver a high-quality website promoting Acle as a whole specifically to potential tourists and businesses from outside of the area. It will operate alongside existing websites designed primarily for the local community.

This project therefore recommends that a visitacle website is set up and that it should be highly attractive, user friendly, easy and cheap to maintain. It should include a section specifically for potential visitors, positioning the village clearly as the gateway to the Norfolk Broads and highlighting the wealth of local land and water-based attractions. It should include sections on working and living to provide opportunities for local businesses and community groups to reach wider audiences and a calendar of events. The website should include an element of interactivity and connectivity allowing people to post news items, blogs and links to Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites.

The presence of a high-quality website will increase the visibility of Acle to a much wider audience than at present. It should help to generate increased visits from tourists and shoppers and therefore increased spending on local goods and services.

Lead and support

This project will be led by APC and supported by the Village Team. Particular input should be sought from tourist attractions and local businesses.

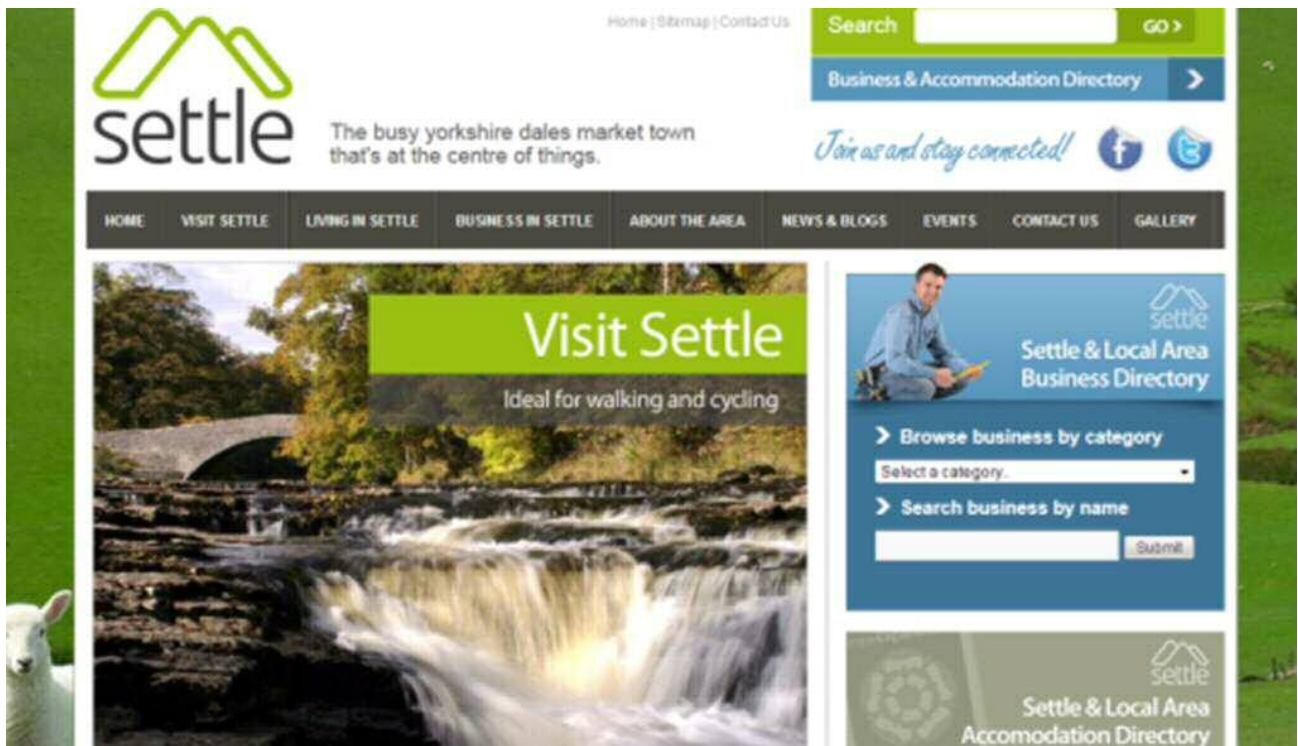
Next steps

- Village Team to develop website brief
- APC to purchase appropriate domain names
- APC to procure website design and construction
- APC and website designer to work with Village Team to create an agreed style and schedule of content including high-quality images
- APC to invite local organisations and businesses to take space on the website
- At completion, APC to widely publicise the new site and market its launch.

Before...



After?



Issue 7: Business voice

Aim

To improve joint working between local businesses.

Objectives

- Improve knowledge-sharing between local businesses
- Improve links between local businesses and business support infrastructure
- Improve links between the community and tourists and local businesses.

Background

Despite presence of nearly 150 businesses in Acle there is currently no organisation or infrastructure that brings them together to share opportunities, knowledge and exploit local connections.

Many large villages and market towns similar to Acle benefit from the existence of chambers of commerce, business networks or other formal and informal structures that bring together businesses. These groups provide a positive platform for small often isolated businesses to come together and pursue a range of activities as a group such as:

- Informal knowledge sharing through discussion and networking
- Formal training and guidance through the commissioning of specialist business support
- Formal links to Local Authorities and other agencies to access information about grants and other forms of business support
- Local procurement initiatives.

There are obvious benefits to individual businesses from coming together in some way as suggested above. This project therefore simply recommends that a local business group is established in Acle.

Project 7a: Establish a local business group

This project seeks to establish a flexible group representing local businesses based in and around Acle.

The focus of this group will be determined by its members but could include:

- Providing advice to members on business support programmes and grants offered by BDC
- Knowledge sharing through 'show-and-tell' sessions highlighting individual local businesses
- Local procurement initiatives to build local supply chains and local economic capture
- Packaging up local produce and services to sell into Broads tourism operators
- Working with BDC to commission specialist advice and guidance on issues such as website development, employment law and finance
- Managing and sponsoring a local event to promote Acle and individual organisations.

Early work on setting this group up has demonstrated a mixed response to the proposal but in February 2013 a successful meeting was held where attendees expressed a willingness to continue to pursue the idea.

Lead and support

A number of local businesses have agreed to lead the development of this project for the immediate future. BDC is committed to supporting this group as it becomes more established.

Next steps

- Existing nucleus of the business group to arrange dates for further meetings in 2013 and invite local companies and organisations. Existing participating businesses to bring at least two other business representatives with them to the next meeting
- Meet to discuss the economic masterplan and agree a small agenda of useful issues for discussion over the next six months
- Where appropriate, liaise with BDC to invite a member of the economic development team to present information on the BDC business support programme.

4. Projects summary

4: Projects summary

Issue: Aim	Projects
1: Village centre: To improve the form and function of Acle village centre and put it back at the heart of the community	1a: Trial relocation of the Farmer' Market to the village centre
	1b: Shop front improvements
	1c: Intensifying development in the village centre
	1d: Restoring the heart of the village centre
2: Links with the Norfolk Broads:	2a: Reduce reliance on leaflets and invest in online media such as www.visitacle.com
	2b: Develop links with Broads Tourism business group
	2c: Prepare 'Visit Acle' page in the Broadcaster magazine
	2d: Create and market themed packages
	2e: Acle hampers
	2f: Upgrade footpath between Acle Bridge and the village
	2g: Relocate and consolidate information points at the Acle Bridge and in the village centre
	2h: Secure safe pedestrian crossings over the A1064 at the Acle Bridge and village entrance
	2i: Broads Festival
	2j: Acle Regatta
3: Aging population and housing: To ensure that Acle is a well-balanced community and is an attractive and accessible location for all age groups	3a: Housing supply

4: Employment space: To retain and support existing businesses and attract new companies to the village	4a: Unlock undeveloped village centre sites and employment allocations
	4b: Promote Acle as part of the Norwich Fringe for inward investment
5: Social capital: To build even greater levels of social capital in Acle	5a: Trial Youth Ambassadors at the Parish Council
	5b: Use annual events to recruit new members and leaders to community groups
	5c: Improve public gateways and perceived barriers at the Recreation Centre
	5d: Establish or resuscitate one major all community event
6: Online presence: Improve the online visibility of Acle	6a: Get Acle Online campaign
	6b: Create the visitacle website
7: Business voice: To improve joint working between local businesses.	7a: Establish a local business group

