

# Community Powered Warwickshire

## ‘Groundbreaker’ Pilot Candidates Shortlist

### About Groundbreakers

Initially, the Community Powered Warwickshire project planned to include a ‘pilot development’ phase. However, in working with Warwickshire County Council, we have found that community powered approaches and ideas are already underway in many parts of the council. This has shifted the focus of this phase of work. Rather than traditional pilots, we are now working on the development of highly strategic ‘Groundbreakers’.

Where ‘pilot’ implies discrete, contained, time-limited *experiments* to trial entirely new approaches and identify their value, ‘groundbreaker’ projects are about maturing and accelerating approaches and values that are already alive within WCC. These should be strategically chosen to further the core objectives of the wider project: capitalising upon existing strengths, galvanising activity, and adding momentum to areas of work that are already ripe for transformation. The intention is that this approach will yield work that offers better insights for further learning and mainstreaming, as well as reflecting the continuous, iterative, and long-term ambitions that lie behind Community Powered Warwickshire.

### How we arrived at this shortlist

In July, a longlist of 16 Groundbreaker candidate projects – ranging from specific project concepts to broad, thematic, and strategic engagement areas – were presented to WCC’s Groundbreaker Selection Panel. This list was informed by several months of interviews, workshops, and documentary research by New Local, as well as explicit sourcing for ideas within the Senior Leadership Forum. Each idea was tested against a set of individual and aggregate selection criteria, developed by New Local in partnership with the Panel.

The following shortlist of candidate projects has been developed based on several rounds of discussion and feedback with the Panel and the Community Powered Warwickshire steering group. It was agreed that most of the candidates on the longlist were worthy of further exploration, but not all within this phase of the project. Some key further selection guidance emerged at this stage, which has been particularly taken into account while working up the shortlist:

1. The aim of selecting 4-6 initial Groundbreaker projects means an even higher priority should be placed on the *representativeness* of the shortlist. Highly place-based projects have an important role to play but will not necessarily allow for strategic learning and impact across the whole county.
2. An emphasis should be placed on fostering *external engagement*, suggesting a preference for explicitly ‘outward-facing’ projects rather than those that are primarily concerned with internal transformation and processes. Each of the projects in the shortlist below necessarily involve both internal and external work.
3. Each shortlisted Groundbreaker should help accelerate within WCC at least one of the five elements of community power identified in New Local’s Analysis Report from phase one of the Community Powered Warwickshire project:
  - a. *A relationship with residents which is honest, open, realistic, and transparent – but also optimistic, positive, and collaborative. A relationship that brings communities’ voices and experiences into the heart of organisational decision-making and the design and delivery of services.*

- b. *Public services with the operational flexibility to be innovative, inclusive, and collaborative – achieving the best possible results by empowering staff and working in a context-sensitive and co-productive way with communities and partners.*
- c. *Community-building and empowerment to equip every place within the county with the skills needed to participate, lead change and flourish.*
- d. *Relationships with organisational partners and other tiers of local government in the county which place an emphasis on common cause, ongoing dialogue, and finding ways to enhance outcomes for communities.*
- e. *Place-based approaches that unlock the local expertise of residents in order to redress inequalities and genuinely level-up outcomes for all communities.*

## **The Shortlist**

### **1. Community Powered Place-Shaping**

*A joined-up new approach to place-shaping within the county, building on efforts already underway. This project is about maximising community engagement and stakeholder participation and ensuring that decisions about the future of community assets and places are inclusive by default.*

In this Groundbreaker - which should connect to and build upon the work already happening on 'Warwickshire Future Places' - a new, informal, deliberative approach will be used to develop place-shaping strategies across the County. Communities would be brought into this process directly and through meaningful, ongoing engagement with partner organisations such as parish councils, VCSE, and, post-covid, informal community groups featuring minority voices that are less frequently heard.

WCC would explore a new role - acting as convenor, galvaniser, enabler, and connector. Community ideas for places and assets would be given tangible potential, finding the best uses for various investment funds and new purposes for council-owned properties and assets. All of this work would also be closely aligned with WCC's core priorities – social inclusion, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

The Groundbreaker will include specific work to test community-powered approaches that can underpin major physical infrastructure changes through the Transforming Nuneaton programme. The Borough and County Councils will work together as convenors and catalysts, bringing partners together, identifying opportunities to engage the community in the programme, and ensuring new communities and ways of living in the town centre are underpinned by strong social and community fabric, groups and connections. This will build community capacity and social action, driving pride in the regenerated place, building community engagement in and ownership of the changes taking place, and deliver sustainable impacts in terms of levelling-up (social, economic, health, environmental and racial inequalities).

#### **Criteria & Possible First Steps**

This is a larger-scale Groundbreaker candidate, but one with the potential to become a longstanding and highly impactful calling card of the Council's project to become more community powered. Initial decisions about where to start should be informed by further consideration of the availability of assets/resources balanced by the scale of need/potential impact.

In the earliest stages, this project could convene an internal, multidisciplinary working group to establish an initial set of operating principles (which should then be tested and further coproduced with the community). In parallel, WCC could begin to establish deliberative relationships with communities, recruiting discussion/reference groups, and using the potential efficacy of public participation - real assets and decisions – to support inclusive and ongoing outreach. WCC could also

explore the roles of councillors in this groundbreaker – particularly through the key role of elected representatives as convenors and enablers of their communities

### **Community Power**

This project reaches across the five elements of community power identified in Phase One. It is a natural platform for place-based working, will support community outreach and skills development, and function as a highly visible way in which WCC is looking to coproduce not only its approaches but its *objectives* with the community.

## **2. “Stepping Forward Starts Here”: Community Power for all Council Employees**

*One of WCC’s greatest assets lies in the skills of its many employees, many of whom are of course also residents: members of Warwickshire’s communities. While the county benefits from these skills when they are put to use in the council’s many services, there is the potential to tap them further: unleashing staff time for the benefit of place, personnel, and professional development.*

The aim of this Groundbreaker is not only to unlock the time and skills of WCC staff and encourage them to put both to use in the interests of local communities, but to create new avenues for resourcing the ideas of those employees and facilitate an organisation-wide pivot to community power. Staff will be supported, enabled, and encouraged to set up collaborations, reciprocally share their skills and abilities, and directly engage in community/voluntary activities within the county. WCC will find new ways to give staff time to do this, reflect such activities in their professional development, and resource projects and collaborations which would not otherwise achieve their potential. Such resourcing could take many forms – financial, training, the allocation of time, or reciprocal agreements to lend a hand and put skills to use. The Council could strategically prioritise some efforts or ideas in line with its priorities – for example, projects that involve interdepartmental collaboration, or which go beyond simple voluntarism.

This work would be highly multifaceted: internally, it could enable staff to share skills with each other, train each other, and work reciprocally on innovations that cut across departmental boundaries to push ahead with the community power agenda. Externally, staff would be encouraged to model the mobilisation and place-based voluntarism needed for a mature, county-wide community power approach, becoming pillars of their local communities, ambassadors for the Council, and routes through to newer, deeper community networks.

This project is particularly likely to play an ongoing role as Community Powered Warwickshire moves into a phase of mainstreaming.

### **Criteria & Possible First Steps**

This project would involve up-front effort to embed new processes and incentives for staff but could ultimately become a self-sustaining part of a wider culture shift. Impact would similarly gear up over time.

Initial steps for the project itself could revolve around setting a WCC-wide policy for additional staff leave for community powered projects, recognition of such activities as part of recruitment, performance review, and staff development/appraisal, identifying incentives for collaborative working and interdepartmental skill sharing, and setting up ways to coordinate activity and organise outreach/voluntarism. Further development could involve explorations of the potential to build on the 'timebanking' platform, as referenced in the current VCS strategy, for systematic internal and external reciprocal skills-sharing. The Council could also explore some criteria for directly resourcing new projects and collaborations that are led by its staff.

### **Community Power**

This project would directly respond to the second of Warwickshire's elements of community power, giving autonomy and incentives to all staff to help further community power and work more collaboratively. This would also produce a long-term upskilling effect within communities, and strengthen ties with particular places and partners.

### **3. “Highways to Help”: Community Powered Road Safety and Transport**

*Highways to Help is a Groundbreaker to create a unified, community-powered, coproduced new way of working across the entire transport, highways, and road safety policy area.*

WCC is already pushing forward with a new generation of Lengthsmen, closer cooperation with parishes and community groups. By drawing these threads of effort together and bringing communities into decision-making in a systematic way, an entirely new, joined-up way of thinking about highway maintenance, transport, and road safety may emerge. This Groundbreaker would be framed as a direct response to high numbers of road fatalities and serious injuries, and a way to capitalise on the latent capacities and capabilities of communities to solve problems. WCC can also enable a self-sustaining community transport scheme to reduce loneliness, connect residents to services in rural areas, and generally reduce car usage. This would complement concerted, proactive engagement with communities, particularly those with more need of support but less history of engagement with the council.

#### **Criteria & Possible First Steps**

This project capitalises on existing work and promises a highly impactful way of galvanising many communities around the county around a high-salience family of issues. There is an environmental angle to this work that helps it to align with core WCC strategic priorities.

The starting point for this work is working to establish a big reset of how this whole policy area will be handled among communities. This could then lead to identification of assets: the enormous reservoir of spare capacity in the form of widespread car ownership within communities, and residents with views and concerns about road safety, parking, and highways policy in their immediate areas. The council could make progress by developing a strategy to then join need with availability, roll out support for Lengthsmen in all Parishes, drive up participation in lower-engagement areas, and ultimately facilitate a self-sustaining, community-led approach. Ultimately, the connections developed in this Groundbreaker could also create a strong basis for a county-wide conversation about public transport.

#### **Community Power**

This Groundbreaker would deliver on the first, third, and fifth of WCC's elements of community power: supporting the organic development of community assets and capabilities, coproducing for better overall outcomes in some key policy areas, and making the most of local expertise in particular places.

#### **4. “Wellbeing Neighbourhoods”: Community Assets & Development to Support Social Care**

*Wellbeing Neighbourhoods would be dynamic, community-led, and partnership-supported ways to holistically create the conditions for better wellbeing in a place-based way, making the most of available assets to reduce the need for acute interventions in adult and children’s social care.*

WCC is deeply invested in enabling the deeper wellbeing of residents. At present, a huge amount is being done to push forward coproductive approaches, focusing on direct engagement with individual service users, at-risk individuals, and their families. This groundbreaker, building upon and expanding the work of ‘Start with Strengths’, will explore how WCC can set about actively supporting particular communities of place to further the wellbeing of people in the neighbourhoods where they and their families live. This represents a shift of emphasis, from the individual or household to the wider relevant place or network of relationships. By fostering neighbourly relationships, reciprocal and trusting types of informal voluntary support, and finding good use of local assets and partnerships, the focus of ‘early-intervention’ and ‘prevention’ would shift to the scale of whole neighbourhoods or places.

##### **Criteria and Possible First Steps**

This project would build on a great deal of work already underway within WCC, learning lessons from ‘wellbeing for Warwickshire’ hubs and ‘Start with Strengths’. While partnerships would represent an important aspect of this groundbreaker, the core idea is to foster an immediate relationship between the council itself and the neighbourhoods in question. A key metric of success would be a medium-term ability to increase subjective perceptions of personal wellbeing and a long-term effect of reducing acute demand on services. While an initial investment of time and resources will be required, effectively establishing community leadership should ultimately make these neighbourhoods self-sustaining.

The key to this Groundbreaker would be to crystallise a set of specific objectives for the new approach, establish a multidisciplinary team to develop these further in particular places, identify and coproduce the best uses of local assets, and drive up the autonomy of frontline social care workers to work informally and flexibly in-context.

##### **Community Power**

This groundbreaker would support a community-powered new way of thinking about public services – one that is community-led, and complementary to the efforts of statutory and commissioned service providers. This work would also help to foster a different kind of relationship with residents more broadly.

#### **5. Community Supermarket/s**

*A community supermarket or supermarkets represents a way to galvanise communities while combatting inequalities in specific places. This groundbreaker would lead to the creation of new community supermarket/s in targeted parts of the county, with the aim of establishing a lasting mechanism for council support when other communities express an interest in launching them.*

A community supermarket can make a tremendous difference in the community where it is introduced. By providing affordable foods and essentials as well as building resilience they can offer a lifeline and improve prospects for poorer families and neighbourhoods subject to inequalities. By operating on a membership basis they can further help build up community resilience. And, when coproduced or led with communities, they help to create the skills and mobilisation crucial for longer-

term community power. This groundbreaker would see the development of policy and community mobilisation to launch Warwickshire's first community supermarket/s, building relationships with potential partners and suppliers to create sustainable interventions in targeted parts of the county.

### **Criteria and Possible First Steps**

A community supermarket stands out as a highly place-based way to involve communities in addressing the local inequalities that affect them. Initial impact would be contained to a single or possibly more targeted places, but with the ambition to support the expansion of the programme wherever communities show an interest in taking the lead.

The specific aim of this groundbreaker would be to develop Warwickshire's take on the community supermarket concept based on learning from similar projects in other places. WCC could explore the potential of coproducing and incentivising community leadership of the scheme, targeting it to places based on need, mobilising neighbourhoods around the project, and driving up local financial resilience over the long-term.

The groundbreaker would also seek to establish benchmarks for impact evaluation and explore how other communities could be supported and resourced to lead on new community supermarkets.

### **Community Power**

This project would reflect WCC's ambition to mobilise and upskill its communities, coproduce and facilitate good outcomes in line with its strategic objectives, and work with particular attention to the needs generated by specific places and contexts.