



East Oxford Action is unusual in that it is an independent organisation and social enterprise, formed out of an SRB partnership. Becoming an independent organisation has allowed East Oxford Action to continue many of the processes and projects that were devised as part of the five year SRB scheme, in the East Oxford area as well as continue to contribute to sustainable regeneration activity both within the area and in the wider South East. By using a range of partners and associates, East Oxford Action have been able to use their knowledge of what works in diverse communities to deliver training activities across the South East. Being a social enterprise has allowed East Oxford Action to reinvest the profits of these training activities straight back into the East Oxford community and further regeneration projects. The aim of this case study is to look at the successful outcomes of the East Oxford SRB scheme and to highlight the reasons why East Oxford Action has developed to be a sustainable organisation and a contributor to lasting regeneration. The case study will:

- o Look at the background to East Oxford Action including the key outcomes of the SRB scheme;
- o Highlight the reasons why the East Oxford Action model can be seen as good practice and why an independent organisation has been developed;
- o Consider some of the future challenges facing East Oxford Action;
- o Summarise the key points raised and comment on the possible transfer of the East Oxford model to other areas.

East Oxford Action is the only SRB scheme in the SEEDA region that has developed to become an independent organisation. Over the six rounds of the SRB schemes there were over 100 SRB partnerships in the South East. The development from SRB scheme

to independent organisation and social enterprise demonstrated to the communities of East Oxford that the SRB partnership were committed to long-term involvement in the area.

East Oxford

Prior to the introduction of SRB to East Oxford in 1999, the area despite being one of the key routes into Oxford City Centre, along Cowley Road, suffered from a host of physical, social, economic and environmental challenges. Despite a willing and able population it was felt that groups and businesses were not really working together to improve the area economically or through social networks and relations. The area was therefore characterised by:

- o Vacant, boarded up and derelict shops;
- o Businesses struggling to survive;
- o A negative perception;
- o High levels of private rental tenures;
- o Areas of open space characterised by vandalism, graffiti, drug taking, litter and crime;
- o Low levels of integration between ethnic groups.

Despite these challenges, it was felt that the area as a result of its multicultural population, its existing retail and restaurant premises and the varying business ideas and knowledge of its residents could be a key area of economic opportunity within Oxford. In fact, the area was beginning to turn a corner and had an increasing middle class population. It was felt that the area just needed an external influence and associated resources to kickstart activity, and augment and increase the voracity of regeneration, especially with regards to the community and economic focus. The onus needed to be on communities helping themselves to achieve improvement.

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Lasting Regeneration - The Sustainability of East Oxford Action

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East Oxford SRB began in 1999 with a remit to tackle the specific challenges facing East Oxford, over a five year period. There were five strategic objectives of the East Oxford SRB scheme, these were:

- o Enhancing employment;
- o Addressing social exclusion;
- o Promoting sustainable regeneration, including improving housing conditions;
- o Supporting and promoting the growth of the local economy and businesses;
- o Tackling crime and drug abuse and improving community safety.

There were six key elements that East Oxford SRB sought to address in order meet these objectives and contribute to the wider regeneration of East Oxford. In particular an onus was placed on involving, joining up and integrating residents and sectors of the community to contribute to addressing physical, social, economic and environmental issues in the area. The six key priorities were:

- o Capacity Building;
- o Training Employment and Business Support;
- o Housing and Support for Vulnerable People;
- o Education;
- o Community safety and environmental improvements;
- o Culture and Leisure.

East Oxford Action was registered as a limited company in August 2003. In November 2003 East Oxford Action took over the running of the East Oxford Action SRB with a remit to continue the regeneration momentum that had been established through SRB activity and projects. Building on the skills of existing staff and associate organisations in East Oxford, and the processes and lessons learnt in the SRB projects, East Oxford Action has sought to continue their work in East Oxford and across the South East to contribute towards sustainable regeneration. East Oxford Action has a small number of full and part-time staff, who are complemented by over 40 associates who have been involved in SRB activities and are willing to participate in future activities. East Oxford Action utilises the skills and expertise of these associates when bidding for contracts and delivering training activities across the South East. East Oxford Action is funded through three key funding measures:

- o Bidding for external contracts and funding;
- o Undertaking training activities across the South East;
- o Drawing on mainstream procurement.

The continued focus on the importance of investment in East Oxford is complemented by the structure of East Oxford Action's board. Membership consists of non-voting

statutory members such as the City Council and elected members drawn from working groups including, amongst others, health; education; and vulnerable groups. Seats are also available for groups that East Oxford Action SRB sought to integrate into its activities, including but not exclusively, people with disabilities, BME groups and local businesses. The new organisation has carried forward two key principles from the SRB scheme, which underpin its activities and the work of the social enterprise, namely:

- o Communities hold the answer - this is about allowing communities through consultation and capacity building activities to have a key say on how projects are developed and delivered and the groups that they are designed to serve;
- o Rigorous delivery - this is about delivering projects effectively and efficiently, taking into account the need to work in partnership and view regeneration holistically.

Outcomes of East Oxford SRB

There a number of key outcomes of the East Oxford Action SRB. These can be used to highlight the success of the scheme in relation to its key objectives. These outcomes include:

The development of Public Space - One of the key successful aspects of the East Oxford SRB scheme has been its ability to bring back into use key public spaces, notably Manzil Way and St Mary's Churchyard. The development of Manzil Way, which was previously a disused and ugly open space and was being used as a dumping ground, provided an area of public open space for use by all the community. There are now play facilities for children and young people; benches and landscaping for older people; and also public art. Manzil Way has also had a positive impact on the local economy, encouraging business investment and clustering on Cowley Road. Whilst these are important physical projects it is important to look at the wider contribution of these projects to the sustainable regeneration of East Oxford. First, these developments have allowed an area comprising of several communities to act as one community and have contributed to the economy of East Oxford, drawing people to the area and enhancing the restaurant-based economy.

Cultural Diversity and Capacity Building - East Oxford Action recognised from an early stage that one of the biggest issues in the area was that community groups did not act for the benefit of the whole area. Each group had their own objectives and priorities which rarely matched those of other groups, leaving a fragmented community sector. This was not necessarily the fault of the communities but the wider culture of competition that was in place at the time, with groups having to fight each other

to get funds. However, East Oxford Action, from a very early stage required communities to be engaged and that different groups work together. Perhaps, the most successful outcome of East Oxford SRB has been cultural diversity created by the Cowley Road Carnival. The Cowley Road Carnival brings communities together and celebrates commonalities as well as difference. Again, whilst, East Oxford SRB has contributed to developing, funding and delivering the carnival, the key to the success and continuation of the carnival has been the ability of the diverse communities of East Oxford to work together to deliver a truly multi-cultural carnival.

Additionality - As a result of the methodology used in the East Oxford Action SRB scheme, and the success in integrating and engaging communities, a number of projects emerged that were not part of the original SRB bid. One example was the Cowley Road Improvements. This project used a mapping technique to identify key issues within the community and to map how various groups used the space along Cowley Road. A consequence of this consultation project has been the Cowley Road improvements and road safety scheme. Oxfordshire County Council subsequently received £1million from the Department for Transport to improve the Cowley Road. A project such as this, primarily focused on road improvements and public transport is now having a number of spin off and multiplier effects such as contributing to the night time restaurant economy of the Cowley Road. East Oxford Action played a key role in facilitating community engagement, as well as contributing towards the bid for funds.

Improved Perceptions of East Oxford - The work of East Oxford Action SRB has not only contributed to the communities of East Oxford itself, but also to the wider city in terms of perception. Whilst pre SRB the area was seen as run down, a crime hotspot and generally a place to avoid, it is now seen as an area of culture and opportunity. A lot of people will come to East Oxford to enjoy the diverse cultures thereby contribute to the local economy through the restaurants and bars. Cowley Road is now seen as an interesting area and is now often referred to as the 'multicultural, vibrant Cowley Road' in the local press.

The East Oxford Action Model

There are a number of operational and structural reasons why East Oxford Action SRB has developed into an independent organisation and social enterprise, why the East Oxford model can be seen as good practice and why there is considerable optimism surrounding the long term sustainability of the organisation:

An Emphasis on Capacity Building - the methodological techniques used by East Oxford Action

are a key factor in its long term sustainability. By focusing on communities and integrating those communities, East Oxford has a number of groups willing to become further involved in the regeneration of the area. Working with East Oxford Action in the SRB scheme has allowed community groups to develop the organisational, funding and development skills required to contribute further to regeneration activities.

Access and taking advantage of New Markets - the diverse nature of East Oxford as a place and the training and advice projects offered during the SRB scheme has allowed East Oxford Action to develop a niche market for delivery of training to for example Halal Butchers across Oxfordshire. Therefore East Oxford Action has developed the skills, knowledge and expertise required to roll forward these projects, which are not only beneficial to the people involved but also to wider regeneration efforts and the sustainability of East Oxford Action as an organisation.

The Use of Associates and the Development of Partnerships and Networks - the focus on partnership with both voluntary and community organisations in East Oxford and statutory agencies at the wider city and regional levels has laid the foundations for East Oxford Action to contribute further to the regeneration activity in East Oxford. The Regeneration Arc, for example, involves community groups from East Oxford, the City Council and other organisations to maintain regeneration momentum in the City. East Oxford Action are seen as key drivers of this regeneration momentum and have received grants from the South East of England Development Agency to draw up Area Investment Programmes to guide future regional investment in the City and Oxfordshire.

The retainment of associates used in the SRB scheme and the appraisal process used for deciding upon SRB projects, provides East Oxford Action with in depth knowledge and expertise across a number of themes and groups. With East Action continuing to coordinate these associates, they play a key role in identifying areas where there is need for funding and action and the varying needs of different groups. The availability of these associates to deliver training and advice services relating to their knowledge of groups and themes is contributing to the sustainability of East Oxford Action as an organisation.

A forward-thinking Strategy - East Oxford Action sought from the original SRB bid to develop an independent community orientated organisation by the end of the scheme. Whereas regeneration activity often grinds to a halt once SRB funding has been completed and specialist staff are lost, the proposal to develop the independent organisation allowed East Oxford Action to develop the projects and skills required to sustain the organisation.

Future Challenges

East Oxford Action faces a number of key challenges if regeneration activity in East Oxford and the organisation is to be sustained in the long term:

Government Policy - East Oxford Action has been able to develop as it has done partly as a result of its ability to pre-empt Central Government thinking. There is currently a focus on local decision making and locally delivered services through policies relating to social enterprise, local procurement, local consultation and capacity building. East Oxford Action needs to make sure that the community consultation, community cohesion and capacity building approaches are fully embedded in order to re-position itself if Government focus changes. East Oxford Action also needs to be able to contribute to the strategic priorities identified in Oxfordshire's Local Area Agreement, which will be implemented from April 2006.

The Principles - questions exist over how locally focused East Oxford Action remains. With the organisation, in effect, becoming a consultancy offering training and advice services across the South East it remains to be seen what impact the new organisation will continue to have in East Oxford. There are also concerns over how the regeneration principles of East Oxford SRB will transfer to a different type of body.

Financial Survival - the ability of East Oxford Action to maintain contacts and contracts to deliver training and advice services across the wider South East is paramount to the sustainability of the organisation, as is its ability to successfully attract external funding and private investment into the East Oxford area. It remains to be seen how successful these efforts will be. Sustainability also depends on the staff and associates of East Oxford Action contributing to regeneration locally and throughout the county. The independent organisation is all the more unusual in that East Oxford Action have no physical assets. Regeneration efforts have been based on a knowledge based approach, something which East Oxford Action are now capitalising on in future regeneration efforts. However, there are questions as to whether this focus on knowledge is sustainable in the long term.

Tackling Gaps - Whilst East Oxford no longer sits amongst the most deprived 10% of areas on the

revamped Indices of Multiple Deprivation, there are key pockets of deprivation locally and key sectors of the population, which the SRB scheme did not fully address. These include the living environment, and poverty affecting children and older people. East Oxford does however score highly on the Index for housing and housing conditions reflecting a need to develop projects and programmes in partnership with Oxford City Council and associated partners.

Summary

This Local Work: *Case Study* has showcased a number of key outcomes of the East Oxford SRB scheme and highlighted a number of reasons why the SRB scheme has developed to become an independent organisation and social enterprise. East Oxford Action can be viewed as a successful delivery model which has contributed to lasting and sustainable regeneration. Whilst East Oxford Action developed a number of successful projects in the area, it is the process by which these projects were implemented, appraised and delivered that has primarily contributed to the sustainability of regeneration and the sustainability of East Oxford Action. A focus on capacity building and collaboration between local groups and communities has formed a key part of this process. However, there remain key questions as to the transferability of the East Oxford Action model as much of the success of the scheme was a result of the nature of the locality. Comparing East Oxford Action to other SRB schemes both within the city, the South East and nationally highlights differences in the number of people willing to participate, the diversity and number of community-based organisations in the area and the leadership skills of the different SRB teams.

Resources

East Oxford Action, SS Mary & John Church Hall, Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1UR info@eastoxford.com

Oxford Brookes University (2004) Regeneration that lasts: Final Evaluation of the East Oxford Action Single Regeneration Budget Programme

East Oxford Action (2004) Evaluating five years of action in our community
http://www.eastoxford.com/images/EOA-A4-newsletter_2.pdf



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