Healthcheck
Data Sources Guide

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for

Kent Rural Towns

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INTRODUCTION

The guidance that follows is designed to help you complete the snapshot and worksheets for your community Healthcheck. It has been compiled on behalf of Kent Rural Towns, which is part of the South East England Development Agency's (SEEDA) programme to support small rural towns.

Some communities involved in this programme may think of themselves as villages rather than towns. The main qualifying criteria is that they had a population of between 3,000 and 20,000 at the time of the 2001 Census of Population. To avoid confusion, however, the term 'town' has been used throughout this document.

The Healthcheck was initiated by the Countryside Agency, now part of Natural England. SEEDA still recommends this model as a reliable and structured way of assessing a town's needs. It requires all towns seeking funding from this programme to form a broad partnership and to complete a Healthcheck.

The Healthcheck is divided into four sections covering Economy, Environment, Social and Community issues and Transport and Accessibility. Each includes a number of 'worksheets' containing questions about these aspects of your town, with space to record the information.

The County Co-ordinator for your area will have provided you with further information and the templates you need to complete these worksheets (they can also be found at www.setowns.org.uk). As they run to some 150 plus pages, they are not reproduced here!

The Snapshot contains factual information about existing services and facilities and will provide a background to the community's own aspirations, which will emerge from the Worksheets.

All the information required to complete the Snapshots and the Worksheets can be obtained from the published data and reports compiled by the organisations given below, or by observation and surveys within your own community.

GETTING STARTED

In compiling the information, it will be useful to recruit someone to the Healthcheck team who is already familiar with the Internet, used to looking up information, and reasonably numerate.

The guidance is in sections:

- *Where* the data comes from: an overview of the data sources;
- *What* the data contains: some specific guidance on particular datasets;
- *How* to get the data: tips on downloading the data from the major databases;
- *Which* sources can provide the data for each of the snapshot and worksheet questions;

When you've gathered the facts, you will need to consult and involve the community as a whole. The next section contains **a brief guide to surveys and survey methods** and who to contact for more information

Finally, in the **appendix** are details of how some of the more subjective questions of the worksheets can be addressed.

WHERE THE DATA COMES FROM: AN OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES

Before going into detail about the various sources of data, don't forget that probably the most important source of information is YOU or YOUR GROUP.

The programme is set up to help small rural towns and the majority of people involved in the Healthcheck will be those committed to the town and its future. So don't be afraid to invite a range of local people in to lend a hand at every stage of the Healthcheck work.

Not all statistics will need a search on the internet. Given the size of the towns involved, you will probably already know if your town has a railway station, a museum, or a library for example. Of course, if you don't know, then use the sources below to find the information.

> NB Where you have used definitive data, the sources of data should always be quoted when referring to the information
> e.g. Source: National Statistics.
> *Unless stated otherwise, all data is free to use.*

Most commonly used websites

The official sources you are likely to use are:

National Statistics: www.statistics.gov.uk

The National Statistics website contains vast amounts of data on economic and social issues from national level down to ward level. If you are not aware, a ward is the standard 'building block' for most administrative areas and the smallest administrative/ electoral area for which official data is collected. Wards are combined to form local authority districts.

A full explanation of statistical geographies can be found on this website in the geography/FAQs/ section.

National Statistics are also responsible for the **Neighbourhood Statistics** website at www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk . This can provide detailed information on your area, relating to the majority of items in the Healthcheck. This is a good place to start.

NB Output Areas have been created to allow smaller scale analysis of figures. Think of them as sub-divisions of wards. When using data from this site, you will need to check that the 'output areas' you are looking at match the area of your town and its hinterland. These Output Areas are derived by National Statistics and may not conform exactly to recognised town boundaries as you think of them.

NOMIS: www.nomisweb.co.uk

NOMIS is an on-line database run by the University of Durham on behalf of National Statistics. It is particularly good for finding data on the labour market and information from the Census of Population. It contains data down to the smallest areas for which the statistics are published. It many cases, this will be down to ward level or smaller where you can fine-tune the geographic area for which you need data. You can also generate maps for the area you are interested in. Further guidance on using this database is given below.

MAGIC : www.magic.gov.uk

MAGIC stands for Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside.

MAGIC is the first web-based interactive map to bring together information on key environmental schemes and designations in one place. MAGIC is a partnership project involving six government organisations who have responsibilities for rural policy-making and management, and although it has been designed to meet the

needs of the partner organisations, the facility is available to anyone over the Internet.

The website is a Geographic Information System (GIS) that contains data on rural Britain and the countryside. This means that all the information is provided in a map-based format that can be defined by postcode or place name. It brings together definitive rural designation boundaries and information about rural, land-based schemes in one place. A relatively new system, it is still being expanded and developed.

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
www.communities.gov.uk

This was previously the DTLR and more recently the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This department deals with a host of regional and local Government issues.

In the context of the small rural towns programme, they hold a wealth of data including that on: house prices and house price indices; the Index of Deprivation; neighbourhood renewal and community empowerment and fire services.

HOME OFFICE: www.homeoffice.gov.uk

The Home Office publish crime statistics data on-line. Data is generally available only down to regional level, so may be of limited use in finding an accurate picture of crime in your area. It will be useful for benchmarking, however.

LAND REGISTRY www.landreg.gov.uk

Information on average house prices down to local authority level is available from the Land Registry. They also publish a house price index.

For areas below local authority level, it will be more informative to talk to local Estate Agents.

VALUATION OFFICE www.voa.gov.uk

The Valuation Office, part of the Inland Revenue, is responsible for council tax bandings on properties, district valuations and surveys. It compiles information about retail, office and industrial rents and yields as well as the values of agricultural land and development sites.

Commercial organisations

There are a number of commercial organisations who can provide data either as a standard, pre-defined dataset or one tailored to meet your specific needs, either in geographic needs or as regards the demography. Obviously the more detailed the requirement, the more costly it is likely to be. Some of these commercial organisations are given below.

CACI www.caci.co.uk

CACI can provide a variety of information including analysis of retail distribution, health issues and socio-economic profiling using data from both the Census of Population and other sources. This includes information from the ACORN database, recognised as one of the leaders in its field. Some data is free, but you still need to register with CACI.

Binley's www.binleys.com

This company can provide location data on GP surgeries, Nursing homes, therapists and healthcare professionals.

PointX www.pointx.co.uk.

A further commercial company is PointX which provides 'Points of Interest' information for delivering location based services. Containing both addressable and non-addressable information, the data can supply "Where's my nearest…?" and "How do I get to…?" services as well as providing landmarks for applications involving navigation, logistics and spatial analysis.

County and district councils

As well as the providers of the statistics listed above, your district, unitary or county council may also publish statistics about your town. Councils are increasingly using the Internet as a means of publishing this data. All the County Councils in the SEEDA area have websites with interactive systems to enable you to find information relating to their services quickly and easily, using postcodes or place names. They are especially good for providing data on education, leisure and tourism, plus social and community issues.

Where responsibility for a service is held at a lower level of Government, e.g. District Council, the county council website will invariably contain a link to these sites, too. Should this not be the case, then simply use one of the internet search engines such as 'Google' to reach the website for your district, town or parish council.

Other sources of data

There are many other sources of data on your area, too numerous to list here and which will often only to known to you and your Healthcheck team, or, for example, to the Clerk to your Parish Council. A previous survey or appraisal, may exist perhaps, or a Parish Plan or a Village Design Statement.

Sometimes a submission to a major local planning enquiry can also provide valuable information. As we have said above, this is where local knowledge comes in, a vital ingredient of carrying out the Healthcheck!

You will also want to use publications such as Yellow Pages and business directories (usually available on-line as well as in printed format), 'A-Z's, local maps and guides, local and free papers (often a good source of finding local clubs and societies through 'What's On' pages).

There are additional links to other websites that can provide information and guidance later in this document in the 'Further Information' section.

WHAT THE DATA CONTAINS: NOTES ON SPECIFIC DATA

Census of Population

The last census was undertaken in April 2001.   Data on population, housing type and tenure, employment and a wide variety of social aspects are available down to 'output area'. An output area is normally quite small geographically (other than in very remote parts of Britain) and most towns will have a number of output areas within their boundary or hinterland. There are also 'Super Output Areas' combining several output areas together to form a geography smaller than a Local Authority but larger than a Parish (but that may not exactly match the area of your town and its hinterland).

Data is also available for counties, unitary authorities, parliamentary constituencies, health authority, districts and wards,

Data is generally available from your district, unitary or county council who will also be able to provide maps. Ordnance Survey can also provide census area maps, but will charge for these. Or you could try the local library.

On-line data can be obtained from www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk or through NOMIS at www.nomisweb.co.uk.

When comparing data over time, i.e. with the 1991 Census of Population, note that boundaries change over time especially at ward level or smaller and direct comparisons cannot always be made. The questions asked in each Census also differ from each other hampering direct comparison.

> NB Where the numbers involved are small – 5 or less – National Statistics have applied a process to prevent individuals being recognised from their data profile. Basically where the actual number falls between 0 and 5, a random number in the same range is substituted.

Economic and Employment Data

A wide range of social and economic data is compiled by the Office for National Statistics in annual publications such as: Regional Trends, Social Trends, and the Family Expenditure Survey. These principally contain information at national and regional level, but also provide an index and contacts for statistics available for smaller areas. Information from the Office for National Statistics is available at www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk.

The Annual Business Inquiry provides information about numbers of employees or jobs by industry. It is available for travel to work areas, districts and wards but particularly at smaller levels the information is subject to confidentiality restrictions.

The Annual Business Inquiry, the Labour Force Survey, other unemployment data at ward level and Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR) are available through NOMIS, the online information system operated by Office for National Statistics , at www.nomisweb.co.uk.

Indices of Deprivation 2004

These are statistical indicators of deprivation covering six domains, including income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, housing and geographical access to services, which are available for all wards in England. For each domain, and the six taken together, all wards are ranked by relative deprivation.

Information for the Indices of Deprivation 2004 is available on both the Communities and Local Government website at www.communities.gov.uk ,which gives the full index for the UK, and the neighbourhood statistics website at www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk. . This carries more detail and is probably easier to use.

SOME TIPS ON DOWNLOADING DATA

The datasets referred to above are generally quite easy to use, especially if you are just seeking a summary of data for the area or if you know in advance what you are looking for. However, "drilling down" to a more specific piece of information can take time if you are unfamiliar with the information.

Some tips are given below on getting the best out of the 3 databases you are most likely to use.

Neighbourhood Statistics (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk)

On the face of it, this database is very easy to use. You just enter a postcode (any postcode from within your healthcheck area will do) and it provides you with a range of data selections, much of it from the Census of Population

However, you first need to know the geographic area of your town. This may not match the area generated by the database (the database displays a map of the data area, so you can check). This is because this database works on a geography known as an output area that is not always directly related to parish or town boundaries. Neighbourhood Statistics gives you the option to download data for different boundaries by using the drop-down menu on the left hand side of the 'home page' screen where you may be able to find a more appropriate geographic area. In some cases, though, the range of data available will be more limited.

MAGIC (www.magic.gov.uk)
As mentioned above, this database, which relates mainly to land use and environmental features, is still being developed. Its GIS-based system makes it a powerful tool for creating mapped representations of certain aspects of your plan. However, there are a number of features you need to be aware of.

Firstly, you will need to register as a user. This means signing an agreement to only use the data internally as the copying of the Ordnance Survey maps that the system uses is strictly controlled. So you may not reproduce these directly in your report.

Secondly, as many of the datasets are very large, they are downloaded as 'zipped' files which means you will need further software (such as Winzip) before you can view the data and there may therefore be additional cost implications involved.

NOMIS(www.nomisweb.co.uk)

You will need to register to use this data. This is a simple process from the home page.

Nomis is best used to extract data on the labour market or from the Census of Population. For the labour market, you will be able to obtain information down to ward level from the claimant count or on employment, but only to local authority level from the Labour Force Survey. You will be able to obtain data and a supporting map to a much smaller area from the Census of Population. Use the 'Wizard' query facility on the right hand side of the home page and follow the simple step-by-step instructions to extract the data.

NOMIS is probably the easiest and most flexible of the databases for Census information. In NOMIS you can also extract data for your own 'user-defined' geography to better match your town and its hinterland, should it not match a boundary definition for which standard data is published.

The 'advanced query facility' enables you to do this by using the following steps (I have used the 2001 Census of Population in this example). It's quite easy once you have tried it a couple of times.

Click the advanced query button, then select
- Census of Population
- 2001 CAS (census area statistics)
- geography (on left of screen)
- user defined   "   "
- 2001 CAS wards
- create your own area (in blue in middle of screen)
- a list will appear of all local authorities. Click on the one that contains your area
- a map will appear of the LA with all ward boundaries marked

- using your cursor, click on the ward for which you need data
- a further map appears showing the output areas within the ward
- using your cursor, click on the area(s) for which you need data
- now you can select which data you need by clicking on 'cell' (on left of screen)
- a list will appear of all the Census of Population tables. Choose the one you want
- the table will be displayed, where you can choose some or all of the cells
- when you've done this, click 'review/save' to check you've picked the correct information
- click 'download data'

then the information will be extracted from NOMIS and downloaded to your PC

TIP If you are likely to use the same specific geography a number of times, you can save the area you defined for this query by clicking on the 'clear/save selections' button and giving it a memorable name. Just click on the same button next time you want to use it to retrieve the definitions.

WHICH DATA SOURCES TO USE

The Snapshots

ECONOMY snapshot	Source
Number of jobs	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Change in number of jobs	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Percentage employed by large employers (over 200 employees)	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Jobs by industrial sector	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Percentage employed in hotels and catering	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Unemployment rate	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Percentage unemployed over 6 months	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Jobs to economically-active residents ratio	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Professional e.g. public sector, medical, financial and legal services, employees as a percentage of all economically-active residents	Neighbourhood statistics or NOMIS
Number of Job Centres	Local observation
Number of new businesses registered	Customs and Excise
Members of Chambers of Trade/Commerce	Local observation
Presence of a Business Link office	Local observation
Presence of a one-stop-shop for business advice	Local observation
New industrial units built	Local authority
Average rent for industrial premises	Local Estate Agents or Valuation Office
Rent for prime retail unit	Local Estate Agents or Valuation Office
Change in rents	Local Estate Agents or Valuation Office
New shops built and/or converted in last three years	Local observation
Regular general market	Local observation
Regular farmers' market	Local observation
Number of comparison goods shops in the town	Local observation
Number of supermarkets over 1000sqm	Local observation
Number of other convenience goods shops in the town	Local observation
Number of vacant shops in the town in proportion to total number of shops	Local observation
Number of public toilets in town centre	Local observation
Residents with post-school qualifications	Census of Population

Number of primary schools	Local authority
Number of secondary schools	Local authority
Number and type of post-16 education (VI Form College, Technical College)	Local authority

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY snapshot	Source
Ranking in indices of deprivation	Neighbourhood Statistics
Number of residents	Census of Population
Change in population since 1991	Census of Population
Percentage of population over 60/65	Census of Population
Percentage of population under 16	Census of Population
Number of new homes built by tenure	Local (district) authority
Number of households by tenure	Census of Population
Percentage of single person households	Census of Population
Percentage of households with elderly people living alone	Census of Population
Percentage of housing stock without whole-house heating	Census of Population
Number of households on the local authority/housing authority waiting lists	Local (district) authority
Average house price	Land Registry
Change in average house price	Land Registry
Recorded crime rates	Police/ Home Office
Number of hospitals and which facilities provided e.g. A&E, maternity	Local authority or Binley's
Number of doctor's practices/doctors and whether private or NHS	Local authority websites
Number of dental practices/dentists and whether private or NHS	Local authority websites
All other questions in this section	Local observation, or through business directories such as Yellow Pages.

TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY snapshot	Source
All data in this section can be obtained by local observation or survey except for:	Observation or special local survey
Percentage of households without a car	Census of Population
Number of short-stay car parking spaces in the town	Local authority
Number of long-stay car parking spaces in the town	Local authority
Number of cycle paths	Local authority
Number of disabled car parking spaces in the town	Local authority

ENVIRONMENT Snapshot	Source
All	All the questions in this section can be obtained from either your local authority or the MAGIC database (see above)

The Worksheets

ECONOMY	Source
EC1 Employment	NOMIS or Neighbourhood Statistics (Census of Population, LFS; Earnings data). Local Business Link office
EC2 Business support	District and County Councils and Chambers of Trade
EC3 Training and Education	Local Education authority and local surveys
EC4 Learning and Skills Development	Local Surveys; NOMIS or Neighbourhood Statistics for statistical data
EC5 Retail and town centre services	Tourist Information Centres; District and County Councils. Valuation Office for statistical data
EC6 Commercial and Industrial Property needs	District and County Councils; local estate agents; Business Link offices
EC7 Tourism and Visitor services	Tourist Information Centres; transport providers; local surveys

ENVIRONMENT	
EN1 Character and Vitality of Town	District or County Councils; DEFRA; Natural England, English Heritage, Local Surveys
EN2 The Countryside	District or County Councils; DEFRA; Natural England
EN3 Links between Town and Country	District or County Councils; Natural England

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY	
S1 Population	NOMIS or Neighbourhood Statistics
S2 Housing	County or District Councils,
S3 Health and Public Safety	Local Health and Police Authorities; Environment Agency; local survey.
S4 Local Government and Community	County or District Councils, local surveys

Organs.	
S5 Sports, Leisure and Open Space	Nearly all this information can be obtained either from your District Council or local knowledge. Contact English Heritage for data on historic sites and battlefields.
S6 Culture and Heritage	See S5 above

TRANSPORT & ACCESSIBILITY	
T1 Ease of Travel	County or District Councils, local surveys
T2 Ease of Access to Services	County or District Councils, local surveys
T3 Ease of Movement around the town.	County or District Councils, local surveys

A BRIEF GUIDE TO SURVEYS AND SURVEY METHODS.

For many of the questions in the worksheets, you will need to obtain additional information to the purely factual data that can be obtained from the above organisations, or that obtained by observation from the community group's members.

This additional information will need to be gathered by carrying out surveys amongst the local population and, depending on the information required, in the business community.

> NB Businesses will often be reluctant to divulge data relating to the prosperity of their company and this should be accepted. You could ask for the percentage rise (or fall) in turnover in place of specific figures. All data should be treated as confidential and, unless agreed otherwise with the provider, anonymised.

There are a number of ways that information can be obtained but you should aim to reach as many of the population in the town as possible and ensure you obtain responses from a good cross-section of the community. This can be done in a number of ways depending on the time and resources available to you:

A word of realism here. It will be virtually impossible to contact everyone in your town, and even if you could you would never achieve a 100% response rate. Most national surveys undertaken by Government have a response rate of around 25% - 40%. Even when the questions are sent to people who have previously agreed to take part in a survey, often only 60-75% are returned.

So don't be despondent if not everyone replies or agrees to take part, though you obviously need to aim for a response that will enable you to make a judgement on the information you are seeking.

More importantly, try to ensure you have a representative selection of all parts of the community. You will need to keep good records to show you have done this.

It is especially important to have involvement from 'disadvantaged' groups such as young people, the elderly, the disabled, and ethnic minorities. Consider how you can achieve this. You might, for example, set up a special meeting with local youth groups, led by a community youth worker or other facilitator.

You could visit toddler and parent groups, with a display and a mini-questionnaire perhaps, to capture views of the under thirties. In towns with a large ethnic population, consider having the questionnaires translated in to other languages or have an interpreter on hand at interviews.

Overall, bear in mind that:

- it is impossible to devise a perfect survey
- it can be relatively simple if it is focused and well-planned
- it can cover a range of issues but don't try to do everything in one "hit"
- the survey should not take too long, as it puts people off
- it can be broken down into subsections so people can do a bit at a time.
- questions need to be carefully structured to allow a range of responses.

When drafting the questions:

- use plain English
- make meanings clear
- keep the questions simple
- where possible, use 'closed' questions that ask for a single response (though this may not always be possible or appropriate)
- don't using wording that is 'loaded' so that it suggests a 'correct' or favoured response
- make individual questions brief and to the point
- where a simple 'yes/no' response is not possible, consider limiting answers to a set number of choices or rankings. Four or six options are ideal. (if you use 5, respondents will often go for the middle road) 'Smiley' symbols are a good way of achieving this.
- consider the total number of questions - a balance needs to be struck between asking enough to get the information required and asking too many which may increase people's loss of concentration, interest and willingness to answer fully.

SURVEY METHODS

Plan a varied range of surveys:

Delivered or mailed out questionnaires

These will give the largest coverage and can be tailored to distinct geographic areas. They can be delivered by the Royal Mail or in some areas private delivery services. Your local newsagent may also be willing to deliver questionnaires. There will obviously be a cost for this service and the delivery date will need to be negotiated.

The questionnaire will normally be addressed to "The Occupier" unless you have sufficient time and energy to hand-address every one! This means that any response will be from the household (or the person who fills it in). You will also need

to provide a pre-paid reply service for the completed questionnaires to be returned. Obviously this will be expensive in terms of mail and printing costs.

Door-to-door surveys

These can be useful when gathering information about fairly specific issues but are less effective for gathering a wide range of data. They have the advantage of an immediate response and the target group can be limited to individual roads or estates if required. Those carrying out the survey need to be aware, though, of personal safety issues and of being led away from the subject in hand by people who see a questionnaire as a chance of registering complaints about anything!

Telephone surveys

Telephone surveys can be a quick and easy way of obtaining information but need to be carefully planned. It is also important to be clear and precise about the information you are seeking.

However, people are often reluctant to impart information over the telephone and because of the number of unsolicited marketing calls nowadays may refuse to co-operate. One way to overcome this is by asking for volunteers, perhaps as a question on an initial mail-shot or open day response form, and telephoning if they are willing to be contacted subsequently by telephone for further information.

Open days and exhibitions

Open Days are a cost effective and practical way of involving the community at large in the healthcheck. They can cover all aspects of the community or be targeted at specific groups such as young people, the elderly or businesses. They give the opportunity for the public to ask questions about the programme as well as providing you with information and are a good way of obtaining information on the more subjective questions.

Large display boards with plenty of visual information: posters, maps, photographs etc are always a good idea – a picture paints a thousand words – backed up by information sheets and questionnaires where callers can give more detailed responses or contact information that can be followed up later.

Local groups

Obtaining the support of local clubs and societies can be an excellent way of gathering information. They will have first-hand knowledge of their particular area of interest and will be able to provide details of the current gaps in facilities. Using club committees as a forum for discussion with the wider membership can also help focus discussions on specific issues.

Another method involving local groups is to undertake a 'map making exercise' of the town. This could involve school children or a diverse range of community groups e.g. church congregations, Womens' Institutes or the Chamber of Commerce. The map can be 3D or a wall hanging, anything visual in fact.

People could be asked to survey a small section of the town highlighting the most memorable aspects of the area or by taking photographs of what they like best and least about the town or something that sums up the town for them. The photos form a display as part of an event to discuss the issues. This method is especially good for some of the Environmental and Social and Community questions.

Using consultants and facilitators

The employment of a consultant can be beneficial, as they will have the knowledge and expertise to make the Healthcheck happen more easily. They may only be required for part of the work, such as drawing up a survey questionnaire, or acting as a facilitator once all responses have been gathered in and the action plan is being prepared. A person could also be employed just to prepare the final report.

A townscape or landscape appraisal and open spaces assessment are other tasks where the use of a consultant could be beneficial. For example, a landscape professional could act as a facilitator for members of the community to undertake part or all of the assessment, e.g. the presence of historic buildings, the quality of open spaces, or designations such as areas of nature conservation importance. Examples of questions that could be asked in such surveys are shown in Annex 1.

Benchmarking

Partnerships might like to consider 'benchmarking' their town with nearby towns who are also undertaking the healthcheck process. County Co-ordinators can be helpful in supporting networking and informal benchmarking between towns. Because benchmarking may be unfamiliar to some people involved in a Healthcheck project, a detailed description is given below.

> ***Benchmarking*** is a process of comparing with, and learning from, others about what you do and how well you do it, with the aim of creating improvements.
>
> *Benchmarking performance* is a well tried methodology, particularly in the public sector, that enables like organisations to identify areas of their own 'product', service or process where they are under performing and to highlight strengths which can be capitalised upon. It can also help raise standards in all the participating organisations through the sharing of best practice.
>
> A benchmarking assessment can also be undertaken in isolation, the comparisons being made between the required objectives or goals and what has actually been achieved.
>
> Benchmarking can, therefore, be seen as a tool for continuous quality improvement. Benchmarking can help organisations:
>
> - Establish a baseline of its own performance
> - Compare its performance and practice with others
> - Capture new ideas from tested and proven practices
> - Identify methods of achieving superior performance
> - Identify clear goals.
>
> There are a number of general pointers for the maximisation of benefits from a benchmarking exercise:
>
> - benchmarking provides a useful tool for the initial identification of potential issues;
> - direct benefits more often than not accrue from the follow-up action points;
> - following-up in greater detail areas of concern identified from the initial benchmarking can pay dividends;
> - longer-term benefits include the subsequent opportunity for 'networking' with other communities or organisations undertaking similar exercises or projects;
> - the greater the mutual trust between partners or other groups, the better and more productive the relationship and the greater the subsequent benefits;

- hidden objectives and lack of trust will reduce effectiveness;
- financial and management information for benchmarking can be useful in its own right regardless of a comparator;
- after a point, more time spent on interpretation adds greater value than collecting more hard data (too much detail can confuse and there are diminishing returns).

One benchmarking model that is reasonably straightforward and easy to use is the *Excellence Model.* Its full title is the 'European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model', (EFQM). Most practitioners know it either by its acronym of just as the Excellence Model.

The value of the model is that it enables users to both 'score' their performance or current standards both against other organisations but also against their own future (and/or past) performance in order that they can judge their progress and what elements of their organisation need changing.

In the context of a market towns Healthcheck the main benefits of an EFQM assessment will be against the performance of the partnership itself in completing the healthcheck, gaining support and acceptance of the action plans and any subsequent implementation.

The Excellence Model is a practical tool that can be used in a number of different ways:

- As a tool for Self-Assessment

- As a way to Benchmark with other organisations

- As a guide to identify areas for Improvement

- As the basis for a common Vocabulary and a way of thinking

- As a Structure for the organisation's management system

The model is a non-prescriptive framework based on nine criteria. Five of these are 'Enablers' and four are 'Results'. The 'Enabler' criteria cover what an organisation does. The 'Results' criteria cover what an organisation achieves. 'Results' are caused by 'Enablers' and 'Enablers' are improved using feedback from 'Results'. It is based on the premise that:

Excellent results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society are achieved through Leadership driving Policy and Strategy, that is delivered through People, Partnerships and Resources, and Processes.

For each one, data is gathered and performance assessed. In very simple terms, the results are analysed, scope for improvement identified and the necessary

actions to achieve this agreed. In analysing the results, you may find it helpful to use a model known as 'RADAR' one of the most popular ways of scoring the results from an EFQM assessment.

The self-assessment of each of the sub-criterions of the EFQM Excellence model will be marked on the logic known as RADAR.
RADAR consists of four elements:

Results,
Approach,
Deployment,
Assessment and
Review

Results: This covers what an organisation achieves. In an excellent organisation the results will show positive trends and/or sustained good performance, targets will be appropriate and met or exceed, performance will compare well with others and will have been caused by the approaches. Additionally, the scope of the results will address the relevant areas.

Approach: This covers what an organisation plans to do and the reason for it. In an excellent organisation the approach will be sound, have clear rationale, well defined and developed processes and a clear focus on stakeholder needs, and will be integrated supporting policy and strategy and linked to other approaches where appropriate.

Deployment: This covers what an organisation does to deploy the approach. In an excellent organisation the approach will be implemented in relevant areas in a systemic way.

Assessment & Review: This covers what an organisation does to assess and review both the approach   and the deployment of the approach. In an excellent organisation the approach, and deployment of it, will be subject to regular measurement, learning activities will be undertaken, and the output from both will be used to identify, prioritise, plan and implement improvement.

The logic states that an organisation needs to:
- Determine the **R**esults it is aiming for as part of its policy and strategy making process. These results cover the performance of the organisation, both financially and operationally, and the perceptions of its stakeholders.
- Plan and develop an integrated set of sound **A**pproaches to deliver the required results both now and in the future.
- **D**eploy the approaches in a systematic way to ensure full implementation.

- **A**ssess and **R**eview the approaches followed based on monitoring and analysis of the results achieved and on-going learning activities. Finally identify, prioritise, plan and implement improvements where needed.

For the purposes of self-assessment, the approach, deployment, assessment and review elements should be addressed for each Enabler criterion and the Result element should be addressed for each Results criterion.

As you can see the RADAR model is comprehensive and therefore is widely used. During the assessment if any process of RADAR is not conducted for any of the criteria then this will be an area for improvement and if the RADAR is done this is then seen as a strength.

Further information can be obtained from the European Foundation for Quality Management website: *www.efqm.org* . There are various other organisations that provide guidance on benchmarking and benchmarking models. One of the best known is the British Standards Institute (www.bsi-uk.com/benchmark/methodology) but all such organisations invariably charge for their services.

Benchmarking has also recently become enormously popular in the Higher Education sector as a way of measuring the effectiveness of their programmes, the courses and the results and standards achieved. A consequence of this is a vast and potentially confusing number of benchmarking systems and models all with different acronyms, most off which will not be of use outside the environment for which they were designed. It is mentioned here only because a search of the web using 'Google' or other such search engines will throw up literally hundreds of such sites, most of which will be of little benefit to the healthcheck compiler!

WHO TO CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you need further information or help in compiling the data for your healthcheck, then you should contact your county co-ordinator in the first instance. |Go to the South East Towns website at http://www.setowns.org.uk/sertp-members.php. which lists them.

They will be able to either help you or put you in touch with consultants or facilitators who are experts in the data in question. Alternatively, the individual websites all have a 'help' or 'contact us' area where you can obtain more information.

Other organisations and websites that can provide information and guidance include:

Action with Market Towns: www.towns.org.uk
Action for Market Towns is a membership organisation dedicated to promoting the vitality and viability of small towns. They can provide advice and guidance on self-help for your town.

English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk works with local communities on creative projects which encourage a greater understanding of England's diverse histories, and help to build strong communities through promoting sense of place and identity.

The government's **Neighbourhood Renewal** programme supports mainly urban areas with pockets of deprivation but has a huge range of supporting materials which you may find helpful. You can find it at www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Crime is an issue in many local areas. The Government's **Crime Reduction** website at www.crimereduction.gov.uk gives information on local crime statistics (not always down to the smallest level) and other Government initiatives to tackle crime and what the community can do to help.

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) at www.acre,org.uk is an Umbrella organisation for the 38 rural community councils and can provide a range of guidance, advice and information on rural issues. This site will also provide a link to the rural community council website for your area.

The **Up My Street** website www.upmystreet.com is a mixture of on-line directory and retailing survey (you can find out everything you could want to know about an area, from actual property prices to the neighbourhood's favourite newspaper for example). It is location-driven using area names or postcodes.

Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk) has been formed by bringing together English Nature, the landscape, access and recreation elements of the

Countryside Agency and the environmental land management functions of the Rural Development Service. Its remit is to work with people, places and nature, to enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas; promoting access, recreation and public well-being, and contributing to the way natural resources are managed so that they can be enjoyed now and in the future. Their website contains useful material on these issues

Common Ground www.commonground.org.uk is an organisation involved in the arts and environmental fields, linking nature with culture, focussing upon the positive investment people can make in their own localities, championing popular democratic involvement, and by inspiring celebration as a starting point for action to improve the quality of our everyday places. They can offer ideas and information and are responsible for the campaign for local distinctiveness.

Green Space www.green-space.org.uk is a registered charity which works to improve parks and green spaces by raising awareness, involving communities and creating skilled professionals. They offer a free national support network for community-based groups working with parks and green spaces. They can also provide help in identifying and obtaining funding for improvements to parks and other open spaces and examples of what has been done in other communities and how they have achieved success.

The **Rural Housing Trust** www.ruralhousing.org.uk works with Parish Councils in providing affordable housing in rural areas.

Living Streets (www.livingstreets.org.uk) is an organisation that helps communities evaluate the quality of streets and public spaces from the viewpoint of the people who use them rather than those who manage them. By bringing together local people's knowledge of their own neighbourhoods with the expertise of Living Streets, they identify the issues and challenges and generate options and ideas for improvement.

In Kent, **Kent Farm Line** (www.kentfarmline.org.uk) collates and publishes information on local and national organisations who are able to advise on the complexities of rural living and working.

OBTAINING INFORMATION ON MORE SUBJECTIVE ISSUES

Economic issues

Assessing tourism benefits to the local community

Most of the statistical information on tourism will be monitored by the regional tourist board. However, in addition the local community may be interested in finding out whether the presence of visitors in a town and surrounding area results in any benefit to the community. It should be possible to construct a simple questionnaire and the responses could be graded from strongly agree to strongly disagree as a simple tick box design.

Comments could be sought on whether tourism results in:

- Increasing the range and viability of local businesses:
- helps to keep essential food and non-food shops open
- promotes a better range of goods on sale
- promotes specialist shops
- helps sustain local markets
- provides a greater choice of places to eat and drink
- supports other businesses such as garages
- presents opportunity for new businesses
- leads to better quality of service and customer care.
- supports clubs, societies, charities etc.
- results in additional leisure/recreational opportunities
- makes sports/leisure facilities more viable and better equipped
- leads to improvements to footpaths and bridleways
- improves access to and presentation of local history and heritage

These are just examples – there will be others.

If tourism development is a major issue, Tourism South East can offer advice on carrying out a Tourism Healthcheck. See
http://industry.visitsoutheastengland.com/site/developing-the-region/regeneration-projects/rural-areas

Local Food issues

The quality and origin of the food that we eat is currently high on the social and political agenda and increasing concerns about the globalisation of the food trade lead to questions about the cost imported food and 'food miles. The Government is also encouraging schools and other public services to increase the local content of the food they provide.

A **'Local Foodcheck'** has been developed by the former Countryside Agency which provides a mechanism for supporting and enhancing a town's local food economy.

You may want to consider carrying out a healthcheck of the availability of local food in your town. A free guide to carrying out such a healthcheck, including case studies, is available from Action for Market Towns.
(http://www.towns.org.uk/publications/foodcheck-handbook.htm)

Other publications are also available from the same organisation
http://www.towns.org.uk. There is a small charge for p+p.

Environment issues

Assessment and appraisal of townscape, landscape and open spaces.

The concept of parish level community action planning was introduced nearly 30 years ago in response to the loss of facilities and services in rural areas. Up until recently these were called Village Appraisals. These were renamed Parish Plans following the government's Rural White Paper (2000).

Many communities will have also carried out surveys of the built and natural environment, such as a Village Design Statement and as such are well placed to comment on their surroundings. As has been noted above, a professional consultant or planner could be engaged to carry out a townscape or landscape appraisal or an assessment of local open spaces.

Village Design Statements (VDS) were a parallel development with Parish Plans but with greater emphasis on influencing land use planning at parish level. They enable communities to draw up design guidelines to help manage new development. New planning regulations introduced in 2006 mean that VDS can no longer be adopted as supplementary planning guidance by the planning authority, but they may still be taken as material consideration in planning decisions. Your local authority planning officers can advise more on this.

Guidance on these and other Parish and Community Plans can be obtained from ACRE at (see above in Further Information section). Some very useful reports & detailed 'how to' guidance on Parish Plans is also still available from the Natural

England website www.naturalengland.org.uk. which succeeded the Countryside Agency.

The following topics are examples of what could be covered in such assessments – there may be others relevant to your area.

- historic routes, building block patterns, building heights, street patterns, skylines
- land use patterns and function
- quality and image and perceptions of the area
- inappropriate development and use of materials
- relationship with adjacent areas
- focal points
- visual clutter - intrusive signage, adverts, street furniture
- the visual quality of the open space
- trees and structures of prominence in the town/ landscape
- cultural affiliations or historical local associations
- presence of important buildings or structures
- elements of high/ poor visual quality
- significant views into and out of the area/town
- landscape and wildlife designations (e.g. SSSI)
- traditional field patterns or parkland
- important groups of trees and hedgerows
- use of local materials and building styles
- types and levels of activity
- quality of open spaces.

Other assessments that can help with improving the environment include: Street Audits (follow the link in the information on 'Living Streets' above) and 'Planning for Real', a community consultation process developed by the Neighbour Initiatives Foundation (see www.nif.co.uk for details).

Social and Community issues

Housing needs assessment

Housing Needs Assessments are complex and need to be done thoroughly if they are to provide meaningful and accurate data. They are best done by the local authority for that reason. However, the local community can be actively involved in

undertaking local surveys where research into particular housing issues is required and imparting local knowledge. If there is no prospect of a Housing Needs Assessment within the time-frame of the healthcheck, consultants could be appointed to undertake the study.

Most areas will have a Rural Housing Enabler who can help. See your local rural community council for more on this (visit the Acre site for contact details). Rural Housing Enablers work in conjunction with parishes and local authorities on projects to create rural affordable housing.

Transport issues

Local transport survey

A survey may be particularly useful in rural areas where it is less likely that services are within walking distance. Local walking groups can help with this. In particular, the survey should ascertain how easy is it for people to access the following services using both their usual form of transport and public transport as well as cycling and walking:

- corner shop
- supermarket
- post office
- bank
- doctor
- local hospital
- job centre
- green space e.g. park
- recycling facility.

Answers can be graded into categories by ease of access:

- very easy
- fairly easy
- fairly difficult
- very difficult
- does not apply.

Public and community transport

An indication of public and community transport usage and customer satisfaction levels and an assessment of whether new or alternative routes are needed will also be useful.

In respect of bus services, local authorities are required to provide details of bus services originating in their area to the Department of Transport (www.dft.gov.uk) on an annual basis, who publish detailed statistics on public transport usage. They have also recently published a report on estimating bus usage, including a suggested methodology. That can be found in the Transport Statistics section of their website.

Information on train service usage can be obtained from your local Train Operating Company.

See the section below on monitoring traffic levels.

Defra have also carried out some customer satisfaction surveys relating to rural areas and you may find some of the information useful. The survey also relates to other rural issues.
(http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/research/cust_satisfaction.htm)

Other sites that can provide indicative information include
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee
http://www.dptac.gov.uk/research/act/index.htm
Many local authority websites also have a community transport page.

Traffic and pedestrian counts

Guidance on how to undertake traffic counts is available in a publication called Monitoring Local Traffic Levels by the Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP). See
http://www.clip.gov.uk/Documents/Resources/trafflev.pdf

Data on traffic volumes on major roads are available at local authority level from the Traffic Statistics branch of Defra. Separate information is available for built-up and non built-up areas.

Local authorities monitor traffic flows for the requirements of the Road Traffic Reduction Act and for local transport plans. Most authorities carry out their own traffic counts, although not necessarily on all local roads. Should further traffic counts be required, the local authority should be approached in the first instance.

Pedestrian counts can be undertaken by enrolling members of the local community to do them or by commissioning the district or unitary council to undertake them.

> NB The safety of volunteers carrying out roadside surveys is important. Before carrying out any such survey, it is suggested you discuss your plans with the Police and the local highways authority.

These should be undertaken:
- on different days of the week including a weekday, Saturday and market day, if there is one
- at different times of the day
- at different times of the year to take account of seasonal variations in tourist activity.

Further guidance can be obtained from the Department of Transport (www.dft.gov.uk) . The information in the next section on local travel surveys will also be relevant.

Travel to work/school Surveys

Travel to work

Some information on the distances people travel to work is available from the Census of Population but in certain cases more detailed and specific information will be required, for example in relation to an industrial estate.   Many authorities will be also developing work travel plans as part of their local transport strategies.

It may be possible to encourage local employers to carry out surveys of their staff which identify their current mode of travel to work, and the distance they travel.

A simple questionnaire could be designed for this purpose. The Department for Transport (www.dft.gov.uk) who produce an annual National Travel Survey based on 'travel diaries' submitted by individual participants may be able to provide advice on this. They have also produced a Local Travel Survey toolkit in conjunction with the national centre for social research (www.natcen.ac.uk/lts) to enable local authorities to carry out similar exercises.

Travel to school

Data for this indicator will need to be collected via a local survey. Your local education authority should be able to provide you with sample survey forms and advice on carrying out a survey.

Local authorities are being asked to implement School Travel Strategies and plans, which in many cases involve local schools carrying out surveys of their students. The surveys will identify childrens' main mode of travel to and from school.

A FINAL WORD

While the Healthcheck may seem daunting at first, many towns have successfully carried out the exercise before you, both with and without professional support. Take a look at what they have produced, then find out what they have achieved as a result, and you will see that it is worth it.

Good Luck with your Healthcheck!

This document was produced by **Kent Rural Towns**
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