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The Urban Lab of Europe!

The USE-IT! Project Zoom-in N°1

The creation of social enterprises

Project led by the City of Birmingham



**Unlocking Social and Economic
Innovation Together!**

**URBAN
POVERTY**



The USE-IT! project

Social deprived neighbourhoods – urban regeneration – poverty alleviation:

Linking large capital investments with community skills and assets to combat urban poverty

Although Birmingham is a key economic hub, the reality of poverty and underemployment amongst indigenous and migrant populations is leading to increasing social, economic and environmental isolation. Therefore, the USE-IT! project seeks to identify and connect social, cultural and economic assets already existing in poor and migrants communities to major capital and infrastructure investments, in order to reduce displacement and maximise the economic and social benefits of urban development for marginalised residents. The building of a new hospital, local social enterprise structures and universities rich in cultural and creative capital will be relied on to enable the population to self-empower in a sustainable way.

The model proposed will rely on Community Researchers, recruited among local community and trained in research methods to identify local assets. Mechanisms will be tested in order to unlock the potential of poor communities and facilitate the creation of a matching skills service to enhance employment and encourage the spin-off of social enterprises that are socially innovative and resilient. The project will provide peer-to-peer support for communities, and act as change and innovation drivers to bring out bold and sustainable solutions.

As a result of the project, people in the communities will be supported to raise their aspirations and to access affordable educational and training opportunities. They will access jobs opportunities linked to the large investment projects planned for the area (macro-assets), and new businesses will be created and developed in the area by local people.

For further information

USE-IT! UIA website: www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/birmingham

USE IT! Facebook page: www.facebook.com/USEITUIA/; [@USEITUIA](https://www.facebook.com/USEITUIA/)

USE-IT! Social entrepreneurs programme: <http://sohosen.org.uk/>
www.i-se.co.uk/news/use-it-social-entrepreneurs-programme/
<http://www.i-se.co.uk/news/use-it-catalysing-social-change-in-birmingham/>

USE-IT! 1st journal:

www.uia-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2017-12/FINAL%20VERSION_Birmingham.pdf

USE-IT! 2nd journal:

www.uia-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2018-05/Birmingham_USE-IT_UIAExpertJournal2%28April2018%29.pdf

USE IT! Twitter: <https://twitter.com/UseItUIA>; [@UseItUIA](https://twitter.com/UseItUIA);

USE IT! Instagram: www.instagram.com/useitua; [useitua](https://www.instagram.com/useitua)



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1 USE-IT! – The creation of social enterprises

USE-IT! is a £3.13m (3,56 Mio. €) project supported by Birmingham City Council and one of the “Innovative Urban Actions” from the European Commission initiative. It tests **new solutions combating urban poverty by linking larger capital investment projects (macro-assets) in deprived neighbourhoods with local community skills, talents and ideas (micro-assets)**. It does all that with the intention to unlock social and economic innovation and to improve the socio-economic situation of the deprived residents. The project strives to increase the employment prospects of the residents and migrants by generating jobs and stimulating local economy.

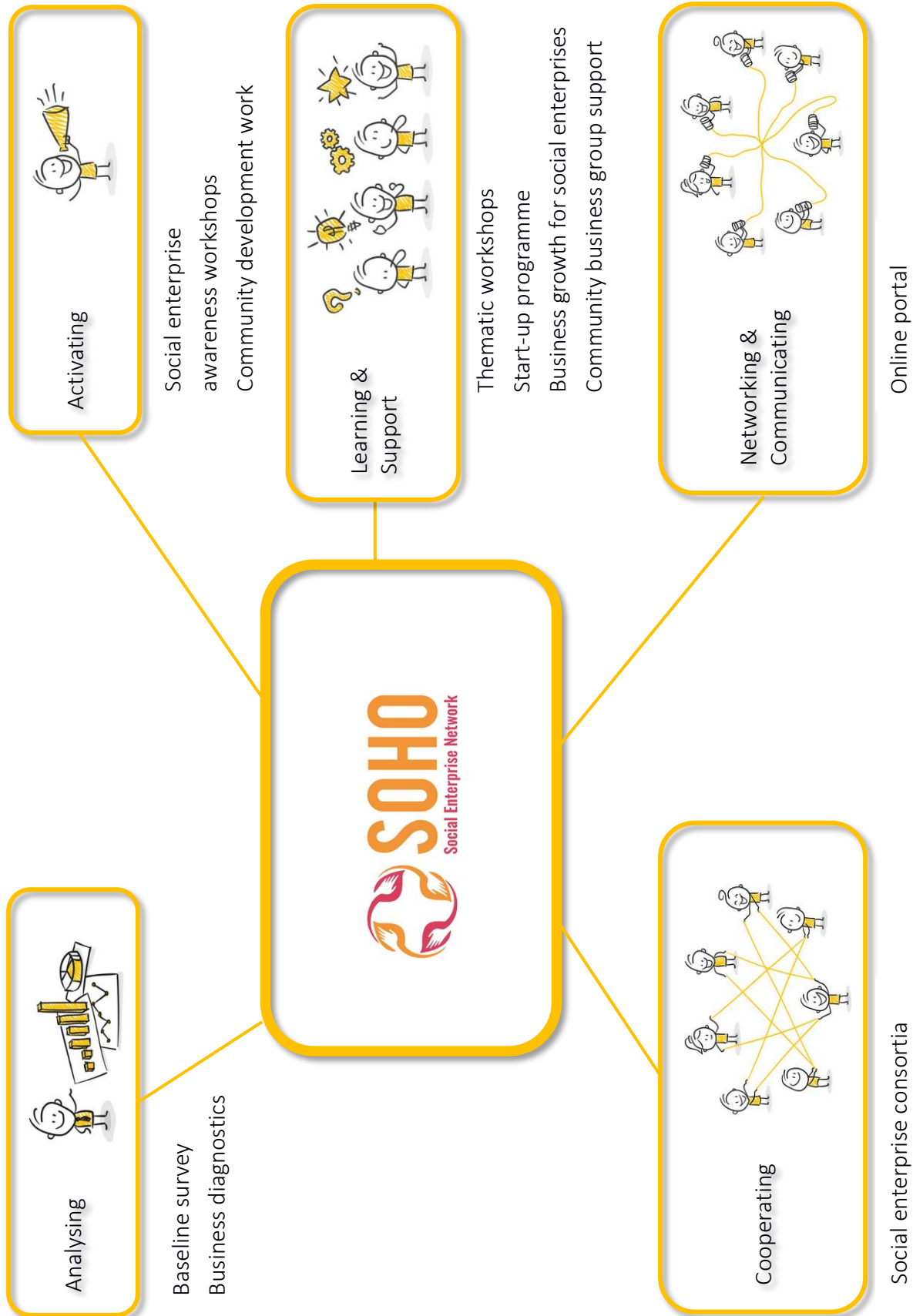
For an overview about the USE-IT! project, its background and innovative approach, its mechanism and partnership, the recent activities, challenges and achievements take a look at the [1st](#) and [2nd](#) journal of the USE-IT! project.

One **key element** of the USE-IT! project is the **creation of a community of social enterprises** to incite entrepreneurial spirits in the deprived neighbourhoods of West Birmingham [Ladywood, Soho and Smethwick]. It strives to support employment and the development of socio-economic activities in the neighbourhoods of Greater Icknield and boost the supplier side of “community services” through citizens and socially innovative producers. A local network has been created to support community-rooted entrepreneurs and social producers. The Network helps local people to develop their enterprise skills and trade their way out of poverty and social exclusion. The Network aims to support the creation and growth of social enterprises linked in particular to the new larger infrastructure developments in Greater Icknield: the new hospital and the housing developments. Consortia of Social Enterprises are being formed focusing on health, food, creative industries, construction, and tourism.

The **key objectives** are:

1. **A Social enterprise network [Soho Network]:** Development of a network of social entrepreneurs with an online networking platform, meeting face to face and virtually. The network will provide an open access online set of resources for social enterprises to stimulate social enterprises.
2. **Access to market:** Set up of consortia of social enterprises and development of new services and products provided by the social enterprises around the new developments and investment projects in Greater Icknield.
3. **Social enterprise business support:** Development of a Social Enterprise Propeller business support programme to provide knowledge and new skills for start-ups and established social enterprises. This includes peer-to-peer support and business mentors and coaches.
4. **Access to employment:** Social enterprises provide work experience opportunities and access to employment for local people.

2 Key components & instruments



In April 2017 the [Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs](#) together with [Smethwick Can](#), [Co-Op Futures](#), [Citizen Coaching](#), [Localise West Midlands](#), [Birmingham Chamber of Commerce](#) and the [Health Exchange](#) started to initialise the ‘Creation of a community of social enterprises’. The main idea was to form a network of social entrepreneurs who could come together to trade both with each other and externally, access technical/business support, provide each other with peer support and access information that will help them develop and grow their businesses. Already within one year there are over one hundred members of whom 80 % are active in the network. The network is used to stimulate social and economic activity and provide a platform for the social enterprise project activity.

- a [network of social entrepreneurs](#) with 80 active members has been set up;
- a social enterprise propeller programme for start-ups and established social enterprises has been started, supporting 30 social enterprises by now;
- 3 mentors have been recruited and trained to support the social enterprise start-ups;
- 8 new social enterprise start-ups have been founded;
- 10 new services and products have been developed by social enterprises and taken to the market.

Key to these achievements is the diverse partnership (cf. chapter 3) that has been set up to deliver the **key components** for the ‘Creation of a community of social enterprises’. These have been so far:

1. **Analysing** the sector of Social Enterprises in the target area (baseline survey) and providing business diagnostics

2. **Activating** locals to become social and community and entrepreneurs and support the social enterprise network i.e. through social enterprise awareness workshops

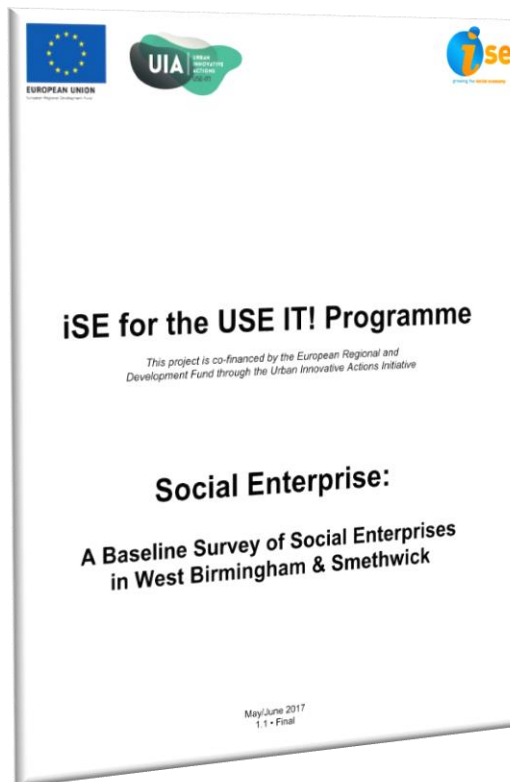
3. **Providing learning opportunities** for social entrepreneurs through workshops and **direct business support** i.e. by mentoring and peer-to-peer support

4. **Supporting the networking and communication** between social and community entrepreneurs and people that want to become ones i.e. through an online-portal

5. **Cooperating** in order to access the market together i.e. through social enterprise consortia

2.1 Analysing the sector of Social Enterprises and business diagnostics

Key instrument – Baseline survey



To identify active Social Enterprises in West Birmingham, to join a new social enterprise network, their needs and gaps, and who is working with whom a baseline survey was done. During May/June 2017 a questionnaire was circulated to 39 organisations identified as various types of not-for-personal-profit organisations in the project area.

A vast majority (94 %) of the respondents wished to establish and join a new Social Enterprise Network. Further the survey revealed:

- There is little if any pre-existing understanding of what support agencies

can provide and the benefits accruing from this.

- Most social enterprises seem sceptical of offers of help.
- While the survey didn't seek to test the following issues explicitly, it seems likely that in the project area the sector has not caught up with recent developments/trends in social enterprise, such as peer-to-peer support, networking, partnership or cluster development.
- Awareness and understanding of newer policy initiatives, such as the Social Value Act and its implications, seem very low.

Based on the identified needs of the respondents, the [Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs](#) ran first workshops on social finance and pitching your business for social enterprises and people that want to start a social enterprise (cf. chapter 2.3).

Martin Hogg Citizens Coaching

"I liked the idea from the very beginning to help people to set up their social enterprise or to develop it to the next level and not make the same mistakes I did and to give them the confidence that making mistakes is part of the whole game".

Key instrument – Business diagnostics



To help existing social enterprises to grow and develop, a business diagnostic is undertaken with them. This is not with new and emerging social enterprises. A business

diagnostics is undertaken to understand each business being supported in terms of financial performance and needs, operation, planning, possible new products and services, staff and opportunities. This is delivered by the [Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs](#) and offered to social entrepreneurs for free. Each diagnostic takes about one day with at least 3 meetings and report/action plan produced. This activity helps those providing support to understand what the local business needs and to plan accordingly.

2.2 Activating locals to become social entrepreneurs and support the social enterprise network

Key instrument – Social enterprise awareness workshops



To inform locals about community and social businesses and how they operate and give them the confidence to open and run such businesses in West Birmingham the [Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs](#), [Cooperative Futures](#) and [Smethwick CAN](#) organised Social Enterprise and community business awareness workshops. At these events inspiring examples of social businesses and co-operatives were presented and information was given about the support provided by the Soho Social enterprise network for social and community businesses.

To make the participants feel comfortable the workshops had an informal atmosphere and an ‘easy to understand’ language’ was used (technical expressions were tried to be avoided). The sessions are short, held in informal locations close to where people live

and at times convenient to the target group e.g. young mothers in the morning finishing before lunchtime. Also local connectors are used to support those very unconfident individuals to walk through the door.

Initial workshops were generic sessions to inform people about the concepts behind social enterprises and community businesses. Later sessions were focused around specific themes such as food, language and creative opportunities.

Some participants brought ideas with them, but were unsure if this idea could become a business and how to start off. Such ideas were be discussed during the workshops and new ideas generated.

To inform locals about these workshops, Co-operative Futures, the Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs [iSE] and other USE-IT! partners used social media, their websites and distributed flyers with the help of community connectors and community initiatives that are established in West Birmingham.

As result of the early social enterprise and community business awareness workshops themes were identified for the future sessions. As a result of these workshops ideas around food co-operatives and a creative centre are in development.

Key Instrument – Community Development



To engage with the communities and enable them to develop solutions to local issues, [Cooperative Futures](#) has highlighted in a first step the USE-IT! programme and the support available to community activists and entrepreneurs. This by being present within the communities, recruiting from the community and participating in local activities.

This has proved to be a key step in connecting with those organisations and individuals already active in the area and gaining their trust. Conversations with community activists and groups such as the [Ladywood Job Club](#) and the [Real Junk Food Project](#) have directly led to development work around a new cooperative providing access to market opportunities within the food sector being developed.

The Use-It! project has its first 8 new social enterprises, established by local residents located across the project area. These ten social businesses have been developed by individuals who have identified a social issues and established a business solution to

address it. An example is where a group of local men have developed a basketball social enterprise to support young people to get off the local streets where they are in danger of getting involved with guns and gangs. They sell basket sessions to fund this activity. <http://frankswish.co.uk/>

There are many individuals and groups within the area who are at a pre-start up stage, in that they have identified a local issue that they would like to address but have not yet formed a clear idea of how a social enterprise or community business could present a solution. Being present in and recognised by the community has enabled conversations with residents to occur.

Sam Ewell

resident of the USE-IT area

“People tend to have the perception that things are done for them. USE-IT! helps to change this perception and strengthen the confidence that they can improve their life i.e. by running a social/ community business. The ‘awareness workshops’ have fostered the perception that people can make a social/ community business about what they are passionate about, that their hobby can make an income for them”.

'Feeding our Community' workshop

Author: Kathy Hopkin, Co-operative Future



To address food poverty, unnecessary food waste, poor nutrition and cooking skills within the USE-IT! area Co-operative Futures, along with iSE and Smethwick CAN hosted an open workshop to talk about food within the local communities.

Activities that are already happening across West Birmingham and Smethwick to 'Feed our Community', The Real Junk Food Project Birmingham, Smethwick CAN's 'Pay as you can' café, a number of food banks in the area, growing and composting at City Hospital, and several other growing sites in the area were presented and the hopes for the future discussed. The workshop was an opportunity for people to meet, share aspirations, and plan how they might work together (i.e. as community enterprise) to

realise some of the ideas that were presented on the night. The themes that were addressed included food relief, education, waste, growing, and community.

Some of the ideas raised during the course of the evening included a 'Fuel for School' project, providing hot food to children during school holidays, food education and cooking classes within the community, batch cooking meals from food that would otherwise go to waste, identifying underused community kitchens and potential growing spaces within the area, and the possibility of foraging tours with a community meal prepared at the end. Some longer-term aspirations were shared as well, including the hope that food banks will no longer be required at all in the area, and that no food waste will end up in bins at all.

COMING SOON

BEARWOOD
CAPE HILL
LADYWOOD
SOHO



WED
30TH
MAY

BEARWOOD'S CREATIVE COMMONS

A gathering of creatives in Bearwood. Let's support each other, develop knowledge & use our creative capital positively in our own community. Come and join us for a drink & a chat.



WED
13TH
JUNE

LOVE LANGUAGE

Are you teaching languages or have you identified a need locally? Let's think about how we can bring communities closer by working together.



WED
4TH
JULY

A FOOD CO-OP FOR SMETHWICK

A follow up from our first food themed event. Together we can tackle food poverty by sourcing & supplying wholesome, affordable food. Let's create a Food Co-operative for Smethwick.



WED
25TH
JULY

CLEANING UP

You've asked us to put together an event for people who want to work or run a local cleaning service. Let's talk about what that would look like and how we can help.



WED
15TH
AUG

EXPLORING EDUCATION

Let's explore new possibilities and innovation in education for adults and children. What can we achieve together? What ideas would you like to develop?



WED
19TH
SEPT

CRAFT A BUSINESS FROM HOME

Are you a carer or at home during the day? Let's look at some ideas for retail opportunities focussed on making you money without leaving the house.

Times and venues to be confirmed, but if you're interested in any of the above events, please contact jennie.sandford@bcu.ac.uk | ring 07748 988 429 | check out our social media channels



SUPPORTED BY USE-IT! LINKING LOCAL SKILLS & TALENTS WITH OPPORTUNITIES & NEW URBAN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA



2.3 Providing learning opportunities for social entrepreneurs and direct business support

Key instrument – Thematic workshops



To develop the skills of established but also of start-up social businesses to run a sustainable enterprise the main partners of the [Soho Social enterprise network](#) (cf. chapter 3) organise thematic workshops. The workshops cover essential topics around starting and running a social/ community business which include accessing money and resources, social value measurement, crowdfunding, GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), marketing your social enterprise new product development.

One success factor of the workshops is that at each workshop has an external guest speaker/ expert and they are invited to provide first-hand information. By using these technical experts, the social enterprises being supported by the project get the best possible support to develop and grow their businesses.

The workshops are a long-term investment with some attending using the information immediately where as others are taking

advantage of the information but plan to use it at a later date. An example is the crowd funding workshop where 6 ideas were presented by the participants for crowd funding and these are in active development but the process to access money has not yet started.

Key Instrument – Community Business Group Support Sessions

The ‘Community Business Group Support Sessions’ are designed for groups of people who are setting up or are already involved in community businesses. These are tailored to build on the existing skills and experience of the group and identify any gaps.

This approach proves successful as the support is delivered in a way that enables collective ownership and understanding by the group. I.e. this approach has enabled a local food growing project to explore options of widening their product range and become more financially sustainable.

Key instrument – Start-up programme ‘FUSE’



To support the growth of new social enterprise start-ups and help them to develop their enterprise idea into a sustainable business, the ‘FUSE’ Social Enterprise start-up programme has been set up.

Recruitment is through an application form and short interview with the applicants. The decision regarding who has places on the Fuse programme is made by a panel of social enterprise experts brought together by iSE

The FUSE programme consists of workshop modules held monthly with additional support provided through mentors, business coaching, expert interventions. In addition each participant has access to a free ‘hot desk’ at a choice of 2 locations.

The workshops introduce the difference aspects of running a business such as business planning, finance, marketing, product and service development, board recruitment, legal planning. Also, information about further support for (social) businesses is provided.

As result of the FUSE programme 8 new social enterprise start-ups have been founded. The knowledge of the founders about running a business, organisational structures and legislation has been enhanced and practical information, hints and tips provided.

Crucial for the success of the programme has been that the start-ups work as a group through the workshop modules, supporting each other, sharing experience and worries. The workshops and “homeworks” also helped the start-ups to be focused, disciplined and structured in the development of their business.

The success factors of the fuse programme are as follows:

- 6 months dedicated support where the social entrepreneur can launch their business at any stage.
- Mentors that understand social enterprise sector [mentors receive training and package of support]
- Dedicated very experience business advisers
- Feedback to the social entrepreneur concerning the likely success or otherwise of their proposed business idea.
- A dedicated ‘hot desk’ or incubation space to start their business.
- High quality workshop using experts where necessary.
- Encouragement of peer to peer support between participants
- Use of technology between sessions to maintain support and communication.
- Support with business registration and the legalities of a social enterprise.

Key instrument – business growth for social enterprise

The social enterprise development element of USE IT has a dual focus. It not only focuses on the needs of new start up social enterprises but on growing those that already exist. The national research identifies that often SE's stall between 3 -8 years old due to lack of confidence, lack of financial investment, little or no business support and lack of experience.

The project has identified that access to new market opportunities is one of the key approaches which can be provided to the SE's operating with in the project area.

This has been approached in a number of ways.

- Research into market opportunities e.g. health, food, retail, construction and tourism
- Consortia formation and encouragement of partnership working
- Establishment of better relationships with key stakeholders e.g. city council departments, health, corporates, local businesses, Hs2 etc to understand the pipeline of new opportunities.
- Pop up markets to test our new products and services and get access to 'buyers' eg

construction market place with 8 large construction companies and 25 social enterprises aiming to sell to them.

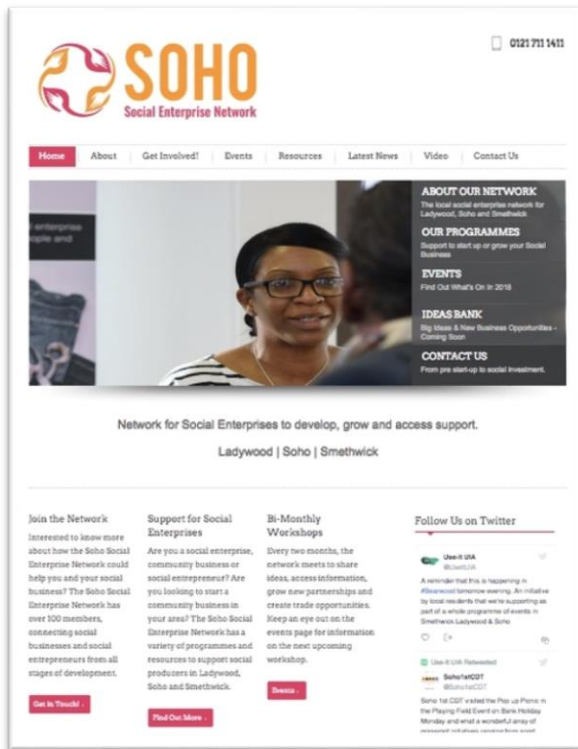
- Links to 'local assets' – e.g. hospital, new builds, prison etc to understand new opportunities.
- Providing advice on procurement and social value to SE's
- Access to finance for new product development, marketing, new staff , new premises etc to support access to new markets

Sam Ewell, resident of the USE-IT area

"The SoHo Social enterprise network supports to upscale projects to a self-sufficient social business that provides social services, market products and jobs with Greater Icknield. It moves meaningful activities for the community to business activities that provide income and jobs".

2.4 Supporting networking and communication between social entrepreneurs

Key instrument – Internal online portal



Besides the bi-monthly networking and thematic workshop meetings (cf. chapter 2.3) the networking and communication between the social entrepreneurs is supported through an internal online portal.

The online portal enables the network members to exchange, share and collaborate with each other enabling them to retrieve and exchange helpful documents for running a social business.

The online portal, PSIAMS, a sophisticated CRM system, allows the recording of the interventions made by programme partners with individuals interested in

running a social or community business and those who already have their idea up and running. This enables programme partners to know who has done what and keeps a record of event and training attendances.

In addition to the online portal, a 'behind the scenes' tool, there is also a public facing website SOHOSEN.org.uk (SOSHO Social Enterprise Network) that is regularly updated with news, events, video and resources.

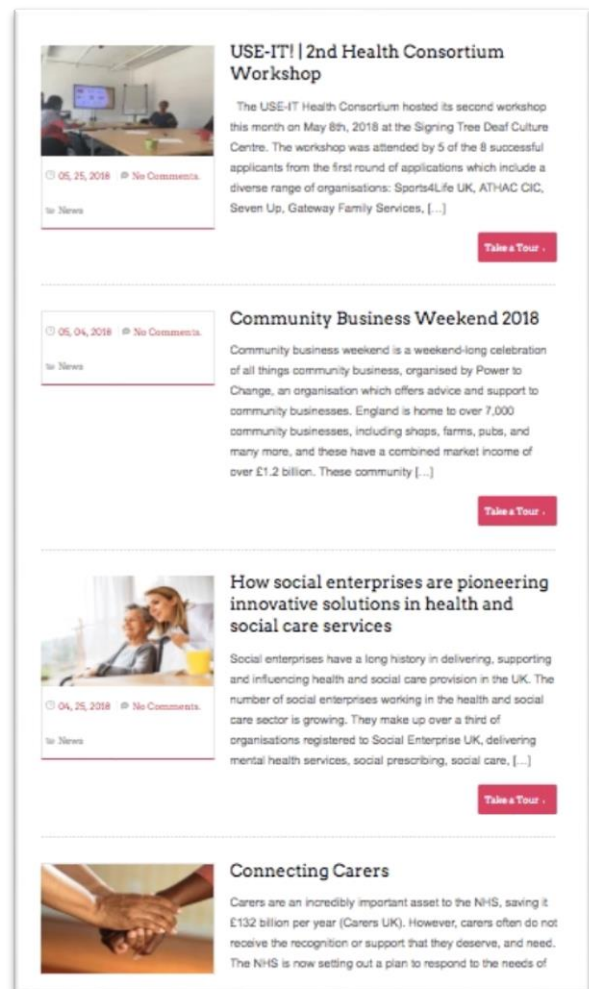
Nate Sheridan at Citizen Coaching is responsible for the development of the portal and website and is supported by PSIAMS Systems and the key partners of the network (cf. chapter 3). The other network members can dynamically add relevant resources through uploading documents, blogs, reports, templates and research materials, creating accessible knowledge wealth.

Each social/ community business involved in the network is presented with basic information in the portal: business (ideas), contact details, owner and other demographic information. When a new social enterprise enters the network, it is automatically requested to provide this information so that the programme partners can see who has joined. As the programme develops, social and community businesses will have their profiles added to the SOHOSEN website.

To support the work of the key delivery partners of the network (cf. chapter 3) and to avoid double work with the (potential) social/ community businesses, they add their information, which they collect via the work with the social/ community businesses, to the business profile in the portal. Through the updated information they delivery partners of the network know what each (potential) social/ community business is about, potential linkages to other businesses (relevant for building the consortia), which support is needed, what has already been done with them, which support they have received, when, meeting notes, etc. To this information only the key delivery partners have access to this data. The system has recently been updated to ensure it is GDPR compliant.

The online portal has enabled partners to easily track client progress and avoid duplication: saving time and resources. The information provided by the portal has identified the common needs of clients enabling responsive and timely interventions. The SOHOSEN network is

enabling members to interact outside of meetings enabling trading and sharing knowledge.



2.5 Cooperating in order to access the market together

Key instrument – Social enterprise consortia



This picture shows a market place event for over 50 social enterprises held in April 2018

To bring related social and community businesses together to enable to access new markets and business opportunities as well as to support each other in their business activities, five business consortia have been found focusing on health and social care, creative industry, food, construction and tourism.

Social enterprises self-select whether they want to join a consortium and if appropriate can join all five. Up to date no organisation has joined more than two consortia. The social enterprises decide based on where

they think there are opportunities, however they also have to meet some criteria dependent upon the sector e.g. health and social care – they need to have experience and expertise relevant to the consortiums activities.

The enterprises in the consortia cooperate by jointly presenting their products (i.e. at pop-up markets), doing joined marketing, testing product ideas, etc.

From the construction consortium already over 10 new business contracts for individual members have been identified as a result of collaboration.

They come together through separate workshops which facilitate the development of the five new consortia. E.g. the health consortium has held three workshops to support the development of their partnership and to consider new service delivery. Similarly workshops to explore ideas concerning food co-operatives have been held and work continues to link this activity with Icknield Port Loop and the new residences being developed by Urban Splash.

3 Key success factor and outlook

Key to the current success for the 'Creation of a community of social enterprises' is the **diverse partnership of delivery partners** that has been set up to deliver the key components (cf. chapter 2) and the connections that are being formed with new market opportunities that will provide sustainability .

Martin Hogg from Citizen Coaching, one of the key delivery partners, puts it as follows:

"The partnership brings different and complementary organisations and skills together, which helps a new way of thinking and bringing different resources and skills together for the provision of the diverse services and expertise provided for the network."

Gareth Brown from Smethwick CAN, another key delivery partner, emphasises:

"The network helps to connect with institutions and organisation, with which normally I would not come together: private, local, public institutions. This partnership helps to break down the typical barriers between these institutions and opens new opportunities and another way of thinking at local level. The partnership provides new expertise, different resources and skills. The partnership helps to learn from each other and get a new horizon and understanding."

Key delivery partners of the SoHo social enterprise network

- Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs
(social enterprise experts)
- Cooperative Futures
(business development consultancy for co-operative and community owned businesses)
- Birmingham Chamber of Commerce
- Health Exchange CIC
(social enterprise providing health services)
- Citizen Coaching
(expert for running social businesses)
- Smethwick CAN
(network of churches in the target area)
- University of Birmingham
- Localise West Midlands
(think-tank, campaign group and consultancy for sustainable economy)

Outlook

The Soho social enterprise network will continue to work to extend the network of social entrepreneurs, to support the establishment of further social business start-ups and the development of established social enterprises. This to develop further new services and products to be taken to the market for the communities of Greater Icknield.

An additional focus will be the development of work experiences and the creation of jobs in social businesses.

The challenge for the future is how to ensure the structures and tasks of the network after the official end of the USE-IT! project. One of the main challenges will be securing the necessary financial resources.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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