

Wisbech Case Study: Place-based Partnerships and Responsible Business



Ian Taylor - January 2023

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Summary

Responsible business offers an opportunity to strengthen disadvantaged places and positioning responsible activity in a place-based approach offers businesses the focus to make an impact.¹ The case of Wisbech is an example of a partnership between business and government where a business chose to play a significant role in improving the prospects of a place, in this case a mid-sized town in eastern England. This case study has been compiled from information that has been published by the parties involved. This documentary data was triangulated with data from interviews conducted with key individuals in the partnership from the private, public and third sectors. The project described covered four years of intense, strategic, activity and less intense activity that continued into 2021. Actions taken include 'quick win' activities that focus on community engagement, as well as longer term activities related to skills & education initiatives, community development and transport.

The role of Anglian Water in the joint project was an important one as it adopted the role of a facilitator or orchestrator² of the system of actors, coordinating the contributions of multiple other parties to the partnership. Anglian Water leveraged its resources, network and advocacy capacity to progress the project. Due to the importance of Anglian Water in progressing the project, a detailed profile of the company is included in this case study. The detailed profile will help to indicate the characteristics of responsible businesses that can be expected to act in this capacity.

The Wisbech case is a useful one to examine as it an example of where a business voluntarily took a leading role in a place-based regeneration. It offers insights into the advocacy and coordinating capabilities that a large business can bring to the regeneration of a deprived place, while also emphasising the significance of the government's role in making the big investments into policy that could 'move the needle'. The development of strategy appears to serve a purpose in and of itself by articulating a shared vision that can attract external funding. of the strategy building, the council stated that it 'demonstrates the real drive and passion of local partners to work together in addressing local issues'.³ Transport and Community Development are example issues, where public investment was required and private sector partners brought attention to issue from the levels of government that would otherwise not be focused on a specific place. As the long-term objectives require community support, businesses' efforts to achieve the 'quick wins' serve to offer improvements for the community as well as establish trust in the advocacy of those businesses to other community stakeholders.

Wisbech

Wisbech is a town of approximately 31,000 people in the Fenland region of Cambridgeshire. The town's governance is structured within the levels of District (Fenland District Council), County

¹ For a detailed discussion of this see; Taylor, I. (2022), 'Partnerships in Place: The Business of Levelling Up', Business In The Community. Accessed at; <https://www.bitc.org.uk/report/partnerships-in-place-the-business-of-levelling-up/>

² Alnoor Ebrahim, *Measuring Social Change Performance and Accountability in a Complex World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2019.

³ Wisbech Town Council, Fenland District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council (2015), 'Wisbech 2020 Vision: A passion to deliver a prosperous future', p.6. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/11795/2020-Vision-Strategy-2015/pdf/2020_Vision_Strategy_2015.pdf

(Cambridgeshire County Council) and MCA (the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mayoral Combined Authority).

It has been estimated that around one third of the population of Wisbech are Eastern European immigrants who are employed in low wage ‘frontier capitalism’ jobs in agriculture and food processing, which are prominent industries for the area.⁴ The sizable immigrant population has reportedly caused division in the community and a level of hostility. Efforts have been made to create a shared narrative to reduce such problems. An example includes the We Are Wisbech Facebook page set up ‘to promote small business and community events in Wisbech’ and ‘to promote the unity of the people of the town, through all nationalities, to build a strong community and a vibrant town’.⁵

Fenland District Council within Cambridgeshire⁶

The social problems of Wisbech can be identified through a national index, which ranked it in the bottom 10% nationally for four of the top eight deprivation indicators.⁷ The town’s disadvantages are in contrast to the prosperous county it is within, as an example 35% of Wisbech population have no qualifications at all compared with only 18% in the county of Cambridgeshire.⁸ Despite efforts, Wisbech was still scoring well below the national average in the COOP Community Wellbeing index for the categories of; Relationships & Trust (32 against 52), Voice & Participation (28 against 51) and Housing, Space & Environment (35 against 52).⁹ As a place that requires



action to improve it, Skipton in Yorkshire was considered as a model to emulate of a similar market town to Wisbech that has improved its situation by some working in the town. Although Skipton scored similarly to Wisbech in Relationships and Trust, it scored over the national average on Voice & Participation and Housing, Space & Environment, as well as scoring over the national average overall.

⁴ The Guardian (2014, June 16), ‘Fear and anger in once-wealthy town divided by insecurity and immigration’. Accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jun/16/fear-anger-wisbech-cambridgeshire-insecurity-immigration>

⁵ We Are Wisbech Facebook Page. Accessed at; <https://www.facebook.com/wearewisbech>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenland_District#/media/File:Fenland_UK_locator_map.svg

⁷ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A guide to community regeneration in Wisbech’, p 6. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁸ Wisbech Vision Partnership (2017), ‘Wisbech 2020 Vision’, p. 9. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/14264/171004-Wisbech-2020-Vision-2017-Final-v116/pdf/171004_Wisbech_2020_Vision_2017_Final_v1.16.pdf

⁹ COOP (2018), Community Wellbeing Index, Wisbech. Accessed at; <https://communitywellbeing.coop.co.uk/#52.666317,0.158797>

The Wisbech 'Joint Project'

Identification

In the context of the above social issues, the Wisbech 'joint project' was initiated by three local politicians: the Member of Parliament for North East Cambridgeshire since 2010, Stephen Barclay, and the local council leaders from the Fenland District Council, Alan Melton, and Cambridgeshire County Council, Nick Clarke. Supported by Dr Nicky Morrison of the University of Cambridge, discussions for improvement actions culminated in a summit of community and business leaders on the 26th of October 2012.¹⁰ The partners agreed that the Wisbech was more in need than any of their other constituents and they were united by 'a passion to deliver a prosperous future'.¹¹ The joint project was bolstered by the participation of the regional monopoly water company, Anglian Water. Anglian Water dedicated resources and attracted the participation of other private companies in its supply chain. As an infrastructure company that is used to long term planning, Anglian Water felt it brought a lengthen and broadened vision to the joint project leader, Fenland District Council.¹²

Actors

No comprehensive list of actors in the partnership exists, however, many actors from private, public and the third sector are involved in the project. As will be seen throughout the case study, Anglian Water was prominent and could be seen as acting in the capacity of an 'orchestrator' for the partnership. The below image displays many of the parties involved, examples of third sector parties being Business in the Community and the Ferry Project.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING A PROSPEROUS WISBECH:



Source: Anglian Water (2019), 'A guide to community regeneration in Wisbech', p 30.

¹⁰ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/article/6225/Wisbech-2020-Vision-reaches-Summit>

¹¹ <https://www.bitc.org.uk/place/>

¹² Anglian Water (2019), 'A guide to community regeneration in Wisbech', p 9. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

Only eight organisations are listed as participating in the project as of the 2017 revised Wisbech Vision report, with Anglian Water as the only business involved¹³. These organisations can be considered the main steering actors in the partnership. At this stage the LEP was formally a private organisation, though it was funded by government funds, and was replaced by the combined authority in 2018 as discussed below.

- Fenland District Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Wisbech Town Council,
- Greater Cambridge & Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
- Thomas Clarkson Academy (A secondary School & Sixth Form)
- Anglian Water
- Stephen Barclay MP (for North East Cambridgeshire)
- The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

The original partners were formed into a formal steering group, to provide joined-up senior level leadership, with roles laid out in a Terms of Reference document.¹⁴ In addition to Anglian Water, multiple businesses have been involved in the Wisbech project since inception in 2013. An example of a business responsibly active in Wisbech is Barclays, that began hosting a credit union set up by the Fenland District Council¹⁵. The most prominent businesses involved were the six supply-chain companies of Anglian Water that were formed into the @one Alliance. The six companies in this alliance were all tier one contractors, meaning they are large and financially secure firms that work directly with Anglian Water as the end client on contracts. The companies in the alliance are Barhale, Balfour Beatty, Mott MacDonald Bentley, MWH Treatment, Skanska and Sweco.

Local Enterprise Partnership

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) might be assumed to be a primary way for local businesses to become socially active in the community. The LEP ‘Business Board’ body, led by engineering businessman Austen Adams, is indeed involved in the joint project, such as by funding the Annual Fenlands Jobs Fair. However, in Wisbech the local LEP, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Business Board, is non-standard. The name of the Greater Cambridge & Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership is listed as a stakeholder in the 2017 version of the Wisbech 2020 Vision, which was the name for the LEP prior to its reorganisation into a Business Board in 2017¹⁶. The Business Board is an unusual arrangement for a LEP as, following an investigation by the National Audit Office commenced upon concerns raised by Stephen Barclay into the proper governance of the GCGP LEP¹⁷, funding was withheld from the GCGP LEP by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The reorganisation wound up the GCGP LEP by March 2018 and made the Combined Authority the Accountable Body for the funding streams as of April 2018¹⁸.

¹³ Wisbech Vision Partnership (2017), ‘Wisbech 2020 Vision’, p. i. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/14264/171004-Wisbech-2020-Vision-2017-Final-v116/pdf/171004_Wisbech_2020_Vision_2017_Final_v1.16.pdf

¹⁴ Wisbech Vision Partnership (2017), ‘Wisbech 2020 Vision’, p 7. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/14264/171004-Wisbech-2020-Vision-2017-Final-v116/pdf/171004_Wisbech_2020_Vision_2017_Final_v1.16.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/article/8871/Barclays-lend-a-helping-hand-to-credit-union>

¹⁶ <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/plans-for-a-new-business-board-unveiled/>

¹⁷ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Investigation-into-the-governance-of-Greater-Cambridge-Greater-Peterborough-Local-Enterprise-Partnership.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/plans-for-a-new-business-board-unveiled/>

The unusual nature of the LEP in Wisbech should be considered in relation to the expected role of an LEP in similar projects in other places. Legally distinct from the MCA, LEPs may be a channel for more activity on the part of local businesses in regeneration projects.

Business Connector

Peter Simpson, Chief Executive Officer of Anglian Water Group since October 2013 and long-term Anglian Water executive, has encouraged the company's involvement in Wisbech. He championed the role of Business Connector, an initiative by Business In The Community (BITC) where a senior member of a company is dedicated to help connect business support for a place. In 2013 Anglian Water seconded Senior Operational Manager, Russell Beal, to be a business connector. Russell was a business connector for three times the one-year duration of the BITC Business Connector programme, after which he carried out the role full time within Anglian Water as a 'Corporate Connector'. In both roles Russell coordinated contributions from a group of 6 tier one suppliers to Anglian Water, who formed the '@one Alliance'.¹⁹ Anglian Water created a working group which maintained regular contact and enabled all of the supply chain companies to directly guide the project. This shared the burden of contribution between the 7 companies and provided long-term stability. Referring to a key local Charity director in Wisbech, Keith Smith, Russell's advice to organisations looking to intervene positively in a community is to 'first engage and listen to the community and find your Keith'.²⁰ Clearly the commitment of Anglian Water to the town and the role of Business Coordinator enabled the company to act as an effective orchestrator in a manner that is currently rare. BITC's 'Place' approach is an initiative that has only a few pilots, including Blackpool, Rochdale, Wisbech and Lowestoft.²¹

Strategy

Articulating the strategy for the Wisbech joint project was done in three distinct phases of increasing sophistication at 2013, 2015 and 2017. The original three themes of January 2013 were 'live, work and visit'. These were replaced after the 3rd Wisbech 2020 Vision summit in 2015 with five new themes that placed more emphasis on social issues: infrastructure and growth, town centre, skills and education, health and wellbeing and communication. A 21-point action plan was created, dominated by local government from those five themes, of which Anglian Water were listed amongst the Lead Organisation in four points centred around skills & employment.²² Communication was dropped as a theme in some communication of the 2015 themes, with definition of four themes being described below in a later document as²³:

¹⁹ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 8. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

²⁰ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 26. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.bitc.org.uk/place/>

²² Wisbech Town Council, Fenland District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council (2015), 'Wisbech 2020 Vision: A passion to deliver a prosperous future', pp. 9-13. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/11795/2020-Vision-Strategy-2015/pdf/2020_Vision_Strategy_2015.pdf

²³ Wisbech Vision 2020, 'Wisbech: beyond 2020 ...a place of great expectations'. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/11796/Wisbech---Beyond-2020/pdf/Wisbech_-_Beyond_2020.pdf.

- Infrastructure & Growth: lobbying for and delivering key transport improvements as well as bringing forward key growth sites such as the Enterprise Park and Nene Waterfront
- Town Centre: improving the High Street for residents and businesses through improving derelict buildings and environmental enhancements
- Skills & Education: providing access to learning and job opportunities for all, supporting business to grow
- Health & Wellbeing: helping residents to lead healthy lifestyles, access health services in the community and supporting residents to help each other

With Anglian Water contributing resources to the Wisbech initiative, intensive research, consultation and analysis was conducted throughout 2016 to further develop the strategy. In 2017 the Wisbech 2020 Vision was produced in a 21 page, detailed, document. The four themes from the 2015 summit were thus refined, with Town Centre being replaced by the broader Local Economy. The four inter-related themes, under the cross-cutting theme of 'Working Better Together', were laid out as a framework for a comprehensive series of actions to support the regeneration and growth of Wisbech²⁴:

1. Education and skills

- a) Equip schools in Wisbech to attract the very best teaching talent
- b) Place schools and libraries at the centre of community life
- c) Build better links between schools and regional businesses

2. Health, wellbeing and cohesion

- a) Deliver new initiatives and pilot new ideas to improve health & wellbeing
- b) Shape new and improved health facilities in Wisbech
- c) Support the community to grow together and address areas where there is a lack of cohesion

3. Infrastructure and the built environment

- a) Reduce journey times between Wisbech - Cambridge and Wisbech - Peterborough and reduce the perceived distance
- b) Redouble efforts to secure improved national road connectivity
- c) Accelerate development at existing allocations and undeveloped sites
- d) Secure further investment in Wisbech's outstanding built heritage and leave a positive legacy for future generations

²⁴ Wisbech Vision Partnership (2017), 'Wisbech 2020 Vision', p 13. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/14264/171004-Wisbech-2020-Vision-2017-Final-v116/pdf/171004_Wisbech_2020_Vision_2017_Final_v1.16.pdf

4. Local economy

- a) Position the agri-food cluster at the centre of the Wisbech economy and help it to thrive
- b) Increase engagement with businesses to help them flourish and help grow the economy
- c) Restore the image of Wisbech as the proud economic and social Capital of the Fens.

Although the 2017 revision of the Wisbech 2020 Vision was detailed, the framework has not been used to report on the success of each of the actions. Public reporting of activities has been done in a non-systematic manner and below these published activities will be discussed as ‘achievements’.

‘Quick Win’ Achievements

The Wisbech Vision joint project partners engaged in ‘quick wins’ to win the trust of the community and deepen engagement. Since these ‘Quick Wins’ have not been defined in published materials, in this case study they are considered as activities delivered within 24 months of the commencement of the Vision strategy in January 2013, thus before the first revision of the strategy in 2015.

- **The Queen Mary Centre: July 2013**

180 employee volunteers from across the @one alliance participated in the refurbishment of the community hub. The Renovation transformed the services being offer out of the building from just 4 in 2013 to 76 by 2017, which increased visitor numbers from 2,000 to 48,000 over the same time period.²⁵ The centre is home to the Ferry Project, a charity that helps homeless people rebuild their lives and progress to independence. The local LEP funds a jobs café out of the building that offers employment skills support such as CV improvement and jobs search.

- **Nene Waterfront Regeneration Area project: August 2013**

In late 2013 the sale a former gas works site by the Fenland District Council stimulated economic activity and created 70 homes, of which 24 were affordable homes.²⁶ The first phase would be completed in summer 2016. Although the sale was by the Council, the regeneration plan was stated as a key element in the Wisbech 2020 programme, which Anglian Water became involved in earlier in that year.

<https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/huge-support-for-waterfront-scheme-7588558>

- **First Annual Fenland Jobs Fair: April 2014**

A joint initiative by Anglian Water and the Fenland District Council, the first fair involved 30 companies, including five from Anglian Water's supply chain Grontmij (now Sweco), Balfour Beatty, Skanska, MWH and Barhale.²⁷ Other local employers that participated included Produce World,

²⁵ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 11. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

²⁶ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/article/8199/Sale-of-Nene-Waterfront-site-agreed>

²⁷ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/article/8872/Hundreds-attend-first-Jobs-and-Skills-Fair>

Nestle Purina and Lamb Weston. As of 2017 the annual Fenland Jobs Fair had supported 2000 people and helped 300 find work.²⁸

- **College of West Anglia Technology Centre: February 2014**

A £7.2m investment in a Technology Centre was made at the College of West Anglia (CoWA) with £5m and £1.5m contributions from Cambridgeshire County Council and Fenland District Council respectively who invested respectively.²⁹ The CoWA, a registered charity, opened the centre in 2014, the joint aim being an increase in silks to raise the economic and social wellbeing of the area.

- **Infrastructure for Growth (I4G): November 2014**

The Infrastructure for Growth (I4G) lobby group launched in November having engaged the local community to obtain support for rail development in 2013. The lobby group would go on to hold lobby meeting, including with the East Anglia Rail Franchise bidders.³⁰ Anglian Water's role in raising the profile of the lobby group was as a convenor (See below), bringing together business and political support, including from senior Government Ministers.

Long-term Achievements

The Wisbech Vision 2020 joint project has achieved, and attempted to achieve, some significant long-term objectives. These objectives span the entire duration of the three strategy revisions and can be analysed in reference to the 2017 framework. In addition to securing over £2m of investment in the Wisbech High Street, from donors like the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Wisbech Society,

Education & Skills

Activities in the area of education and skills addresses theme one of the 2017 framework, especially building better links between schools and regional businesses. The significant results from the ongoing Annual Fenland Jobs Fairs are one way that output has been achieved in this theme. In 2015 Anglian Water sponsored courses at CoWA, with apprenticeships schemes being the aim. The CoWA-Anglian Water courses and apprenticeship scheme saw its first cohort finish courses in 2017, of which 14 found employment at Anglian Water or one of its contractor companies. As of 2017 there were 50 students still studying the course.³¹ There has been no long-term data on retention of apprentices and employment of cohorts upon completion of courses from 2017-2021, which would be useful for evaluating outcomes.

Community Development

Multiple initiatives have been started as part of the Wisbech Vision 2020, including the Wisbech Garden Town application. This initiative was a formal application in 2018 to the Government to include Wisbech on the Garden Communities programme that supports communities to develop

²⁸ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 11. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/article/8870/Technology-Centre-a-landmark-investment-for-Wisbech>

³⁰ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 18. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

³¹ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 17. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

new housing³². Garden towns that are selected receive assistance from government as part of a drive to deliver up to 64,000 homes across England.³³ As substantial external funding awarded on the basis of bids, the Garden Communities fund is similar to the Towns Fund for eligible places such as Lowestoft. As of October 2020, Wisbech had not been added to the Garden Communities programme³⁴ despite the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority providing £6.5 million in funding for a feasibility study to progress the garden town bid³⁵. This initiative is significant as it was supported by private companies in addition to Anglian Water:

- AstraZeneca, the British–Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company head quartered in Cambridge
- International engineering consultancy firm based in Cornwall, Royal HaskoningDHV
- Non-profit advocacy group Railfuture
- Nestle
- URBED (Urbanism, Environment and Design) Ltd

Central government support was sought, with Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, visiting Wisbech in March 2016 and expressing support for the project.³⁶ To move on from the 2020 Vision, to form the ‘Beyond 2020’ strategy, Anglian Water supported a large engagement programme with roadshows and canvassed the views of over 400 local people via a questionnaire.³⁷ The involvement of Manchester based, award-winning, design and research consultancy URBED brought experience of successful town regeneration projects to the community and resulted in the garden community bid funded by the district & county councils and Anglian Water³⁸. URBED have part funded similar regeneration consultancy work before, such as with Sheffield City Council and Rotherham District Council in 2018.³⁹

Transport

The Wisbech project has attempted to improve many aspects of the town and transport has been a recurring element due to the proximity of Cambridge. Although Cambridge, where more than 25 of the world’s largest corporations are based⁴⁰, is only 40 miles away the transport links were poor with Wisbech being the largest town in England not connected to the rail network.⁴¹ The town now has plans for a train service linking it with Cambridge by 2028⁴² and has improved road transport. In

³² [http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/15261/Wisbech-Garden-Town-Booklet-Nov2018/pdf/15011AWA~6ppWisbechGardenTown\(Nov2018\)PRINT.pdf](http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/15261/Wisbech-Garden-Town-Booklet-Nov2018/pdf/15011AWA~6ppWisbechGardenTown(Nov2018)PRINT.pdf)

³³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/37-million-to-fund-5-new-garden-towns-across-the-country>

³⁴ Garden Communities Programme - October 2020. Accessed at; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938355/31237_006_Map_as_at_October_2020.pdf

³⁵ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/gardentown>

³⁶ <http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/gardentown>

³⁷ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 21. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

³⁸ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 21-22. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

³⁹ <http://urbed.coop/projects/sheffield-garden-city-options-long-term-urban-growth>

⁴⁰ <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/business-board>

⁴¹ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 5. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

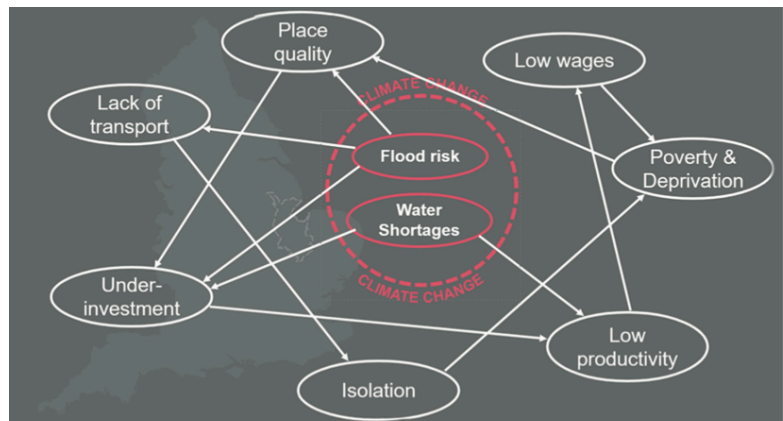
⁴² <https://wisbechrail.org.uk/>

Winter 2014 £300m was approved to be invested in the A47,⁴³ £14 million of which is to upgrade the A47/A141 roundabout in Guyhirn that is important for Wisbech to develop more housing.⁴⁴ In relation to infrastructure, the main role played by Anglian Water was one of advocate, using their network and capacity to bring the focus of influential figures and decisionmakers to the needs of the town. Reopening the rail link between Wisbech and Cambridge is seen as a strategically important development for the town, increasing the options for commuters. In 2013 the non-profit lobbying organisation Railfuture organised for volunteers to deliver 11,000 leaflets, which encouraged 5,000 people to sign a petition successfully calling for the County Council to put together a business case for the rail link.⁴⁵ Anglian Water’s supply chain partners Sweco and Skanska were also involved in preparing a plan for the rail link that kept costs low.⁴⁶

In July 2020 the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority approved the business case for the rail development, which had been championed by the mayor James Palmer who in turn had met with the Minister of State for Railways Chris Heaton-Harris to discuss the project.⁴⁷ The estimated cost of the development is £184m and the project is expected to require central government funding, such as the £20m new stations fund⁴⁸, to progress and that this funding will require further lobbying to achieve.⁴⁹ Approval of the business case by the MCA is an important stage in the development but it is not accomplished and the example demonstrates how much advocacy work is required to achieve fundamental strategic objectives in regeneration of a place. Partnerships with businesses and charities assisted in building a business case and obtaining buy-in from government that builds momentum.

Flood management

The Fenland area that Wisbech is within is prone to flooding due to being low lying and flat terrain. The risk of flooding damage acts as a barrier to house building and infrastructure development in the area, which can prevent growth. It has been identified as a root cause of multiple problems in Wisbech. To overcome this challenge Anglian Water also coordinated a group of stakeholders, including the Dutch Government, local planners, the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency to explore world-class flood management techniques, which led to Wisbech



⁴³ Wisbech Vision Partnership (2017), 'Wisbech 2020 Vision', p 6. Accessed at; http://www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk/media/14264/171004-Wisbech-2020-Vision-2017-Final-v116/pdf/171004_Wisbech_2020_Vision_2017_Final_v1.16.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/a47-junction-upgrade-gets-go-ahead-for-february>

⁴⁵ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 18. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁴⁶ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 19. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁴⁷ <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/capital-of-the-fens-back-on-track-mayors-plan-for-wisbech-rail-gets-green-flag>

⁴⁸ <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/passengers/station-improvements/new-stations-fund/>

⁴⁹ <https://wisbechrail.org.uk/>

winning a £50,000 grant from the Dutch government towards the cost of piloting the technology.⁵⁰ The flooding risk was so fundamental as an underlying factor that it is the focus for long term intervention. A group of organisations came together to form the Future Fens multiagency collaboration, with Anglian Water as a key member. Future Fens works on a 15 year, three phase, timeline starting in 2020 and it outlines the management of £1.8bn of investment in flood management over the next 100 years which is projected to realise £17.7bn in economic benefit.⁵¹

Orchestrator

As the major private company involved in facilitating or orchestrating the Wisbech joint project from the private sector, it is instructive to understand Anglian Water to draw lessons for other place-based cross-sector partnerships. The company’s business, context, approach to social responsibility and advocacy capacity offers insights into what might be expected of similar private sector orchestrators.

Anglian Water

Anglian Water is a large regional water company operating in the east of England between the Humber and Thames estuaries. It is the largest water company by geographic area and also supplies water to Hartlepool, which is an exclave of the rest of the company’s region.⁵² Anglian Water are a leading socially responsible firm, being awarded BITC Responsible Business of the Year in 2017 and twice been given the Queen’s Award for Enterprise: Sustainable Development in 2015 and in 2020. The water industry regulator, Ofwat, oversees the 32 privately owned water companies in England and Wales, with Anglian Water being one of the 11 large regional water and sewerage companies that hold monopolies over regions.

Anglian Water’s service regions⁵³



⁵⁰ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 23. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁵¹ Future Fens, Planning together for a sustainable flood risk future: Summary Document. Accessed at; https://www.ada.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Future-Fens-Flood-Risk-Management-SUMMARY-DOC-Final_web.pdf

⁵² <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are/hartlepool-water/>

⁵³ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/help-and-advice/drinking-water-advice/where-your-water-comes-from/>

Political Context

Public opinion and political decisions are very important to water companies, meaning that the reputational benefit of a positive social role is vital. Concerns have been raised that the privatisation of water provision has been exploited to extract dividends for shareholders.⁵⁴ In addition, the water industry is subject to various forms of regulatory pressure to maintain operation. For example, Ofwat's 2019 reduction in permitted leakage⁵⁵ can have consequences in increased maintenance and capital expenditure budgets or the risk of fines running into the millions of pounds, with Thames water being fined £8.55m in 2017.⁵⁶ The regulator's requirement for a 12% price cut by water companies from 2020-2025, representing hundreds of millions of pounds for Anglian Water alone, was appealed against in referral to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) for resolution in March 2021.⁵⁷ Anglian Water's CEO Peter Simpson, in the submission cover letter to the CMA, has referred to social responsibility as a central characteristic of the organisation, claiming the company is 'highly regarded both within and beyond the sector as a responsible business acting in the long-term interests of customers, communities and the environment'.⁵⁸ Considering that England and Wales are the only countries in the world to have a fully privatised water and sewerage system, nationalisation is an existential threat to the water sector and was felt to be realistic enough under the 2017 plans from the then Labour Party that a group of four water companies, including Anglian Water, even commissioning a report on the costs of renationalisation.⁵⁹ In this political context it is unsurprising that demonstrable responsible conduct is a strategically important objective for water companies. This association of regulatory pressure and responsible conduct aligns with a public purpose. A major study by the British Academy has called for regulation to enforce responsible purpose in public service companies; 'alignment of corporate with public purposes needs to be made explicit in the case of corporations that perform social and public functions, such as utilities and corporations with significant market power'.⁶⁰ The conclusion of the association of the responsible business conduct noted below and the governmental pressure outlined above indicates that these conditions may make businesses are more likely to be enthusiastic to engage in responsible behaviour and, if this is the case, then society should leverage this enthusiasm by being open and engaging as partners to achieve improved social outcomes for places.

Responsible Conduct

Anglian Water is an exemplary company in the area of responsible conduct, it has taken a leading role by adopting socially responsible measures. Anglian Water made a commitment in 2019 to serve the public interest and become the first company to put a socially responsible purpose into its company's legal constitution. In reporting on water companies, Ofwat stated that 'the vast majority of boards have already taken steps to establish or refresh their company purpose' but that 'most companies did not provide a clear explanation of the role that the board has played in developing or

⁵⁴ The Guardian (2013, August 3), 'The water companies and the foul stench of exploitation'.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/03/water-industry-exploitation-pollution>

⁵⁵ <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/nonhouseholds/supply-and-standards/leakage/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.businessgreen.com/news/3011939/thames-water-hit-with-gbp85m-fine-over-unacceptable-leaks>

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/provisional-findings-published-in-cma-review-of-water-price-controls>

⁵⁸ Peter Simpson (February 2021), 'Anglian Water Cover Letter Submission to the Competition and Markets Authority: Price Review for 2020—2025', p. 2. Accessed at;

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602162f18fa8f51478436950/2021.02.03_Anglian_letter_to_Ki_p_Meek_Redacted_----.pdf

⁵⁹ The Social Market Foundation, 'The cost of nationalising the water industry in England', February 2018, p. 5.

⁶⁰ British Academy (2018), 'Reforming Business for the 21st Century', p. 22.

reviewing the company purpose'.⁶¹ Anglian Water, Wessex Water and Yorkshire Water did, however, clearly explain how their social purpose was developed, even if legal direction for board executives is not yet clear. Anglian Water's actions in incorporating the social purpose into its Articles of Association is a significant lead for the industry since it addresses a major issue in responsible conduct for publicly owned businesses. The Ofwat report goes on to say: 'We found very limited examples of boards taking action to embed the company purpose and values into the culture of the business. This is important for ensuring that the culture delivers the purpose throughout the organisation.'⁶²

By incorporating a Social Purpose into its Articles of Association, Anglian Water utilised the DCMS supported advice tool Purposely.⁶³ The company adopted a modified version of the articles from Purposely Model 1 and 2, creating a responsible purpose that avoided the requirement of Model 2 for Directors to place equal weight on shareholder, social, and environmental interests.⁶⁴ This was said to be done to ensure the stability of dividend returns to the shareholders, which is essential for the business. The legal integration of a responsible purpose was driven in board-level discussions since 2017 onwards by the Chief Executive Officer, General Counsel, and the Director of Strategy and Regulation, but was implemented with support from the shareholders that included pension funds and long-term infrastructure investors⁶⁵. The adoption of a formal responsible business purpose thus post-dated the responsible initiatives in Wisbech by at least 3 years, indicating it was not the cause of the engagement in the partnership.

Anglian Water's Board has committed to employ a six capitals model to further drive the company's social and environmental commitments into business operations, one of which is Social and details a commitment to the value of their 'relationship with stakeholders, including customers, communities and other organisations'⁶⁶. Metrics for tracking and reporting on performance against the six capitals was said to be developed in 2019 and the 2020 annual report has stated that the metrics will be developed and reported over the following five-year Business Plan from 2020-2025.⁶⁷

Responsible Activities

Socially responsible programmes run by Anglian Water include:

- An educational programme established in 2007, which has engaged with 481,166 people. Community ambassadors were trained drawn as volunteers from across the company to engage in two-way communication with community groups about challenges.
- An apprenticeship programme with bespoke training to improve employment opportunities in its region's communities. Meeting the skills required by Anglian Water and its suppliers.
- A year-long 'Love to Help' employee volunteering drive contributing over 2,500 hours of support to communities and maintaining 4,428 hectares of public access recreational space.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Ofwat (January 2020), Board leadership, transparency and governance – Report on companies' preparations for meeting the 2019 principles, p. 6.

⁶² Ibid., p. 7.

⁶³ <https://getpurpose.ly/>

⁶⁴ Metzner, M., Sadler L. & Stroehle J.C. (2020), 'Anglian Water: An Economics of Mutuality case study', Saïd Business School, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁷ Anglian Water (June 2020), Annual Integrated Report 2020, p. 15.

⁶⁸ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/about-us/odi-positive-impact-on-communities.pdf>

The impact of the educational initiatives by Anglian Water are measured using the London Benchmarking Group framework. On the educational intervention Anglian Water make a distinction between a company ‘sponsoring’ an initiative and being truly involved by providing resources such as specialist lecturing, materials, equipment and staff.⁶⁹

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Anglian Water allocated £1m in a Positive Difference Fund, the first £500,000 of which reached over 88,000 people through funding over 120 community organisations.⁷⁰

Anglian Water work with Cambridge University and BSI (the British Standards Institute) in an effort to develop a PAS Standard for adopting responsible business purpose. It is envisaged the PAS will lead to a full ISO standard for use against internal or external assessment to create ‘credible verification of what it means to be a purposeful, sustainable company’.⁷¹ This would therefore complement the ISO 26000:2010 Standard that provides guidance rather than requirements, so it cannot be certified to.⁷² The ambition is consistent with Anglian Water’s 2016 success with playing a role in developing PAS 2080, the world’s first standard for managing carbon in infrastructure.⁷³

Place-based Focus

In the past Anglian have focused on improving one place to maximise impact, as CEO Peter Simpson has stated; ‘Ultimately, by concentrating on improving a single town in a collaborative way, we believe that we can make a lasting difference to local people’s lives’.⁷⁴ As well as partnering in Wisbech, Anglian Water have been supporting the town of Lowestoft. The company has allocated £2.3m in flood management investment in Lowestoft, where it is partly responsible for flood management. In Lowestoft a BITC style Business Connector has been appointed, Jason Benham, who is a project manager seconded by Kier Group to work on community support initiatives.⁷⁵ Kier are an alliance partner of Anglian Water and both organisations have assisted with setting up a Place Board for Lowestoft to develop a Town Deal application⁷⁶, since Lowestoft was eligible⁷⁷. Anglian state that ‘the regeneration of Wisbech has become a model for placemaking, and we have been sharing our experience with Lowestoft’.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 16. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁷⁰ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/in-the-community/charity-work/positive-difference-fund/#>

⁷¹ Metzner, M., Sadler L. & Stroehle J.C. (2020), ‘Anglian Water: An Economics of Mutuality case study’, Saïd Business School, p. 8.

⁷² <https://www.iso.org/iso-26000-social-responsibility.html>

⁷³ Anglian Water (June 2020), Annual Integrated Report 2020, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Anglian Water (2019), ‘A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech’, p. 2. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁷⁵ <https://www.bitc.org.uk/impact-story/lowestofts-business-community-getting-food-to-those-in-need/>

⁷⁶ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/about-us/odi-positive-impact-on-communities.pdf>

See also; <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Business/Regeneration-projects/Lowestoft-Investment-Plan/Lowestoft-Town-Investment-Plan.pdf>

⁷⁷ Ministry of Housing (November 2019), Communities and Local Government Towns Fund Prospectus, p. 6. Accessed at; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towns-fund-prospectus>

⁷⁸ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/about-us/odi-positive-impact-on-communities.pdf>

In terms of their own best practice Anglian Water list 6 first steps for successful engagement with a place⁷⁹:

1. Immerse yourself into the local community, ask questions and most importantly listen. Through this you'll create strong, trusting relationships where all parties are treated equally.
2. Understand the current situation and challenges. Hearing this from local people will help you really understand what is going on and create emotional investment from key stakeholders. This is extremely useful when moving things forward.
3. Be honest from the beginning about what you can offer as an organisation and what you can't. This will help you to gain the respect of the local community and local stakeholders.
4. Look out for opportunities, both quick wins and ongoing opportunities to advance the long-term vision. Build on what's already being done.
5. Be prepared to invest time. The changes that will have the biggest impact over time will require long-term investment and might not be measurable in the short term.
6. Understand your long term vision. Can you find connections between your business strategy and supporting community change? This will help move you from quick wins to long-term change.

Advocacy

Political advocacy of large businesses can be a considerable asset to disadvantaged places since these organisations are likely to have capacity and can be seen as politically neutral and competent when speaking between political parties and levels of government. Anglian Water has played an important role in the place-based social regeneration project in Wisbech as an advocate for the area. The company has a significant capacity in political influence across governmental levels, maintaining relationships from parish councils up to the 75 Members of Parliament that represent the company's regional footprint. The company's 2020 annual report outlines public affairs engagement;

'Anglian Water sponsors a number of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, think tanks and policy development forums, including the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum, the Aldersgate Group and the Broadway Initiative. In 2019/20 we took part in 29 policy consultations and parliamentary select committee inquiries on issues such as future domestic land use and environmental policy, water resources management, problem plastics, green finance and skills.'⁸⁰

It can be expected that all large utility companies have a similar advocacy capacity and thus it is a strength that can be brought to partnerships. Advocacy within their supply chain is another strength that Anglian Water have brought to the Wisbech project that could be seen by similar organisations in similar projects. Bringing the attention of other actors to a place in need can deliver short term improvements with hands on resources dedicated by suppliers or through campaigning to secure public infrastructure to transform the prospects of a place.

⁷⁹ Anglian Water (2019), 'A Guide to Community Regeneration in Wisbech', p. 7. Accessed at; <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/in-the-community/community-regeneration-in-wisbech2.pdf>

⁸⁰ Anglian Water (June 2020), Annual Integrated Report 2020, p. 25.

Conclusion

The case of Wisbech is a useful one to learn from since the town's size and relative deprivation in a prosperous county would suggest it as a representative example for both the needs of the UK⁸¹ and as an important category for the government's levelling up agenda. The Wisbech 'joint project' is an example of a voluntary partnership in a place where the cross-sector actors were working towards the regeneration of the town. The prominent role of government throughout the project is evident in the case of Wisbech, however, the importance of business in facilitating action and bringing attention to the town is undoubted. The part played by Anglian Water as an 'orchestrator' coordinating the other private organisations and advocating for action is one that was inspired by pilot initiatives from the charity 'Business In The Community' and it is a model that appears to be effective in instigating action. The unique suitability of a utility company, especially a water company, would indicate that these organisations could be the focus of further pilots in other places. The particular corporate culture of Anglian Water, reflected in the 2019 changes to the cooperate constitution, may have influenced the company's actions in being a partner. The adoption of an orchestrator position by Kier Group, a construction company with a total group revenue of £3.5bn, in Lowestoft could be a promising case for comparison with the role played by Anglian Water in Wisbech.

⁸¹ P. Collier & J. Kay (2020), *Greed is Dead: Politics after Individualism*, Allen Lane. See also the UK2070 Commission Reports at <http://uk2070.org.uk/publications/>