

Annex A - Background on Market Town Healthchecks

What is a Healthcheck?

Healthchecks are community led programmes to review, prioritise and hopefully implement projects to meet the needs of communities in and around market towns. The Market Towns Initiative was a national programme initiated by the Countryside Agency between 2001 and 2004, now taken over by regional authorities in England. The programme focused on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of market towns and their surrounding hinterland. Central to the programme is the Healthcheck process. The term Healthcheck coined by the Agency is a useful way to describe and define how people feel about their community, and how it might be improved. The process involves:

- Gathering the facts relating to the community
- Producing a snapshot of the community
- Public consultation & data collection
- Creating a vision
- Prioritising issues & identifying actions
- Creating the draft action plan
- Finalising the plan and its launch
- Implementation
- Keeping the community aware

The review process is undertaken following the guidelines produced by the Countryside Agency. This is a well tried and tested process developed and refined from the experience of more than 300 Healthchecks undertaken nationally to date. The Healthcheck is structured into the four broad perspectives of economy, environment, transport and social and community. Individual workgroups are formed to focus on each area. Detailed standardised data capture worksheets, originally produced by the Countryside Agency, and part of the Market Towns Healthcheck Toolkit, are used to capture all relevant data. This data may originate from existing published sources, surveys or other local consultation exercises. Data capture in a consistent format will allow structured and methodologically sound analysis to provide a firm factual baseline against which to identify and evaluate potential improvement projects. The output of the process is an evidence-based analysis of the key aspects of the market town and the relationship with its hinterland, leading to an action plan for the town's revitalisation. This will build a strengthened and shared vision of how the town can develop in the medium term to the benefit of all its community stakeholders. The work is managed and undertaken by volunteers, typically supported by one part-time paid project co-ordinator.

In Surrey, the Market Towns Initiative is led by Surrey Community Action. Surrey Community Action provides assistance to those leading local projects as a required condition for some external funding, notably from the South-East England Development Agency (SEEDA), which currently operates a grant scheme for the regeneration of market towns in the South East. The Healthcheck is recognised as a requirement to qualify for funding under the SEEDA Small Towns Regeneration funding programme. This is a 7 year programme operated by SEEDA with funding allocated to Surrey for Healthcheck towns over this period. The Healthchecks work hard to remain sufficiently autonomous and apolitical, so that people,

who might not normally communicate in local government consultations, such as youth (18-24yr olds) and young families, will feel able to join in and express their opinions in this locally driven initiative.

In the South East 39 Healthchecks have been completed. In Surrey four towns have completed Healthchecks; Haslemere, Cranleigh and Farnham, all in Waverley; and Leatherhead, who launched their final report in January 2006. Other towns currently working on Healthchecks are Caterham, Godalming, and Cobham.

How the Healthcheck came about in Dorking

This process began in Dorking in late 2005 with the formation of an ad-hoc steering committee and links made with local organisations and stakeholders. An achievable project plan was put in place, the appropriate resources identified to facilitate delivery and the name *Dorking DNA – Dorking Needs Action* decided upon. A part-time coordinator began work at the beginning of September 2006, and a launch event was held later that month.