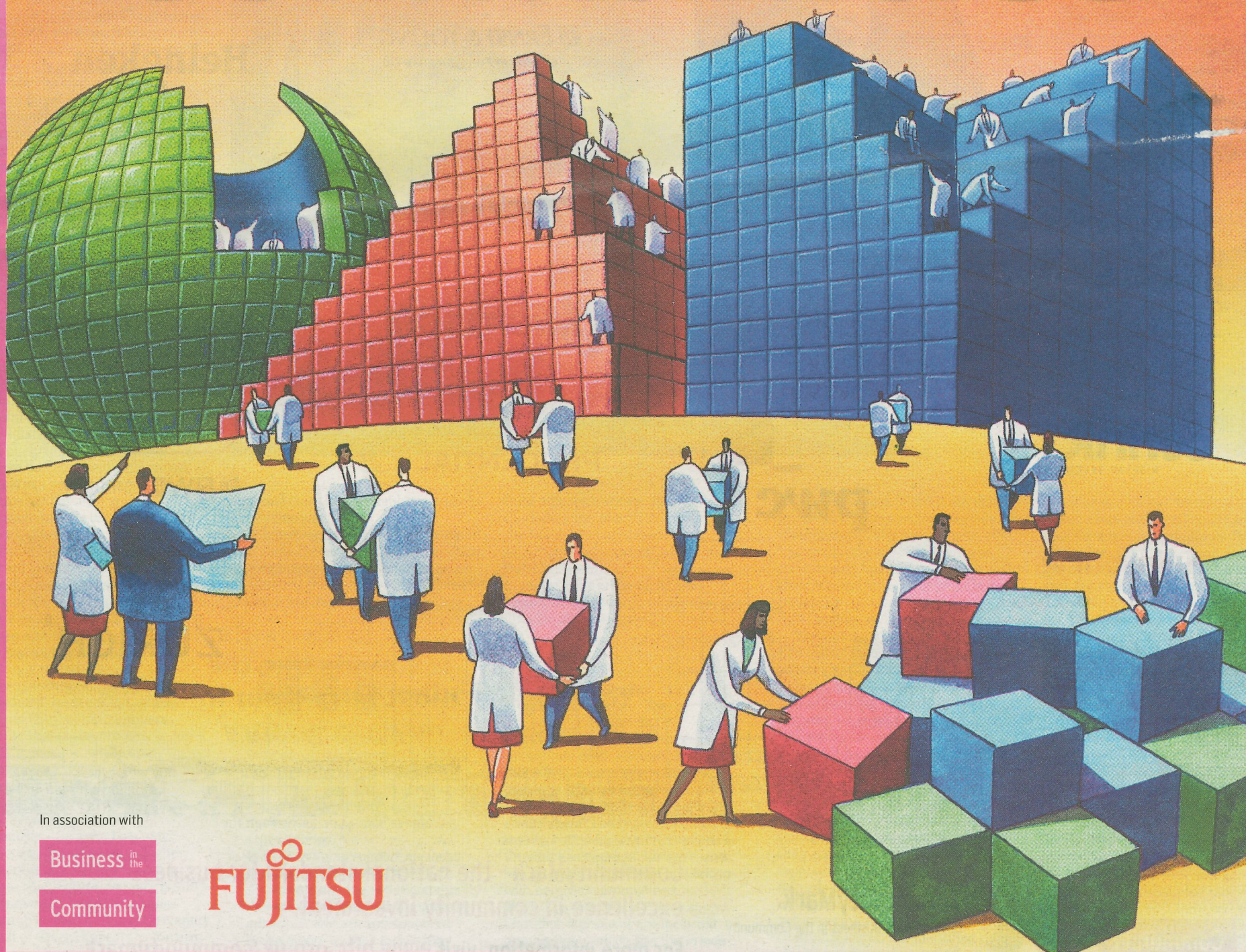


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Transforming business, transforming communities



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Local and enterprising

Community engagement is a smart move, finds Fay Schopen

Think of Greggs and what springs to mind? Sausage rolls, cream cakes and bloomers, perhaps. But the high-street bakery chain has loftier ambitions than feeding the nation cheese-and-onion pasties. Since 1999, it has been providing free healthy breakfasts for primary school children in deprived areas across the UK.

The idea is simple: volunteers including parents, teachers and Greggs staff run the clubs, and Greggs provides all the food and equipment, from cereals and bread to kettles, toasters, bowls and cutlery. Each club serves 50 children and costs £1,800 a year to run. There are now 150 clubs feeding more than 7,000 children breakfast every school day; Greggs would like to have 180 clubs by the end of 2011, with a long-term target of 300.

Ken McMeikan, chief executive of Greggs, claims the success of the scheme lies in its simplicity. "Being connected at a local level with the cornerstones of the community — the schools and schoolchildren — is a very simple, powerful way to get your organisation deeply rooted within the community," he says.

And McMeikan believes that these deep community roots make business sense. "For a company to be successful in its local community it must thrive and grow," he says, and for a business to grow, it must ensure the community grows around it.

"There's a saying: 'To have a successful high street, you need a successful back street'. If we can ensure that children get a good education, they're likely to prosper. That's a long-term business benefit because that leads to a better educated workforce in your local area."

Research into the breakfast clubs by Durham University showed a number of benefits for pupils. It found that school attendance rates among children who went to breakfast clubs were 5% higher than among their peers, for example. Children attending clubs also attained higher punctuality and productivity rates than children who did not attend.

There are other tangible business benefits from the breakfast scheme: McMeikan thinks staff members appreciate that their company is doing something of value, while many Greggs employees are parents or grandparents who volunteer at the clubs.

"Employees have a sense of pride that we are connected with communities," he says. This may contribute to the company's higher than average staff retention — it estimates that its turnover rate is 5-10% lower than other large UK retailers.

Research by Northumbria University on behalf of Greggs appears to confirm the feel-good factor. As one employee who volunteers on the breakfast club scheme told researchers: "It makes you

Francesco Guidicini



Sevdia Carvalho of John Lewis, right, helping Sylvia Mason at the St John's hospice shop

Best dressed

Every Tuesday, instead of going to work at the flagship branch of John Lewis in London's Oxford Street, Natasha Friend heads to the St John's Hospice shop in St John's Wood. Under a John Lewis initiative, Friend, the branch's community liaison co-ordinator, spends one day a week in the hospice shop, helping its paid and volunteer staff build retail skills.

"The time commitment allows me to work on something really solid for them," she says. Four fellow employees from John Lewis's womenswear department also put in paid company time at the shop. The hospice plans to open more branches, and Friend says that by sharing their retail experience, John Lewis staff are passing on long-term benefits to the hospice. "Ultimately, we'd like to reach the point where they don't need us."

Three years ago John Lewis employees started fundraising for the charity's day centre. Friend built on the links between the two organisations, and last autumn 30 visual merchandisers helped give the hospice shop an overhaul, using fixtures and fittings from the womenswear department, which had recently been refurbished.

"They used to hang clothes on an upturned bed," says Friend. "But the shop looks great now — really quirky. St John's Wood is a lovely place, and the shop gets some great donations — it deserved to look nice."

Christine Kasoulis, John Lewis's head of brand development, says: "We believe we're more than just a shop: we're part of the wider community. And if we achieve our goal of being more than a shop to our customers, we have their lifelong loyalty."

so proud that Greggs enables us to help out in this way."

Schemes such as the breakfast clubs also show the potential of partnerships. The company hopes to reach its target of doubling the numbers of breakfast clubs across the country by working with and securing additional funding

from other businesses. The Confederation of British Industry, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Middlesbrough Council are among those on board.

Matt Cooke is the social and economic investment campaign director at Business in the Community

(BITC). He is keen to point out that initiatives to connect businesses with their communities are not new: BITC has nearly 30 years' experience of encouraging businesses to work within their communities. But what is new, he says, is the idea of a long-term, collaborative and large-scale approach.

The numbers are already impressive. BITC says that the three companies to achieve its CommunityMark standard so far in 2011 — Boots UK, E.ON UK and Lloyds Banking Group plc — have between them invested an astounding £92m over the past year through corporate giving and fundraising, pro bono and employee volunteering time, in-kind support and commercial initiatives.

Of course, there are barriers to businesses working effectively with their communities: Cooke cites red tape, such as complex Criminal Records Bureau checks, and liability issues affecting uninsured staff volunteering with charities.

BITC research has identified that a significant factor in successful community engagement is the presence of a dedicated individual who

can act as a broker, bringing together businesses with local charities and public sector organisations. To answer this need, BITC is creating a network of such brokers — christened Business Connectors — in 20 economically disadvantaged areas.

"We want businesses to send their bright young things. The programme will stand or fall on the quality of the Business Connectors put forward," Cooke says, pointing out that the Connectors will improve their leadership qualities and build on existing skills, particularly in problem-solving and communication. Through the Connectors, BITC is also hoping to get more small and medium-sized businesses involved.

"Tens of thousands of small businesses don't know what their local social and economic issues are," says Cooke. "It's about matching needs — a business may have a spare room and a local charity may need extra space. It's not about businesses giving money to charities, but they could help with expert advice, for example on IT. The aspiration is that these partnerships will endure. It's a culture change."

Business in the Community

■ A business-led charity, Business in the Community (BITC) has a growing membership of 850 companies, including multinational corporations, smaller local businesses and public sector organisations.

■ BITC aims to support business practices that help to benefit employees and the wider community as well as minimise environmental impact. It advises and supports its members as they tackle the challenges of adopting such approaches while still working to improve business performance.

■ BITC works with its members to continue developing and to promote the concept of responsible business practice in the workplace, marketplace, community and the environment. The organisation works locally, nationally and internationally through a network of partners, and has 29 years' experience of working with deprived communities.

■ BITC is one of The Prince's Charities, a group of not-for-profit organisations which has the Prince of Wales as its president.

■ For more information on BITC programmes, visit bitc.org.uk

Benefits show up on the bottom line

There is a demonstrable link between business success and corporate commitment to social responsibility, reports **Carly Chynoweth**

Handing out money is not the most obvious way for businesses to make themselves profitable, but research by Kenexa, a human resources consultancy, suggests that strong financial returns and a willingness to contribute to community causes can, in fact, go together.

It has found a strong link between high levels of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business success. Staff engagement, customer service and even financial performance were better at companies where employees reported that the business had a genuine commitment to communities and the environment, according to its latest WorkTrends survey of staff at more than 10,000 companies around the world employing 100 or more staff.

In all, Kenexa asked 30,000 employees whether or not they thought their employer had a genuine commitment to supporting the community, protecting the environment and balancing short-term business gains against investments in local communities. It then looked in depth at shareholder return and return on assets in more than 175 enterprises where the survey results provided enough respondents to be reliably representative. It found that businesses with the highest percentage of staff agreeing that their employers were committed to CSR goals made an average return on their assets of 4.83% in 2009, compared to just 0.25% for those perceived as the least committed.

A similar result was seen in analysis of total shareholder returns over the three years from 2007 to 2009. During this time many organisations lost value but those with high scores in the CSR survey lost less; low-scoring businesses saw their stock price drop by 11 percentage points more than their high-scoring peers. The research also found that high scores were associated with better staff engagement and customer service.

But a connection between high levels of community involvement and high performance does not mean that one is causing the other, says Dr Brenda Kowske, a research consultant at Kenexa. "It cannot be determined from this research whether corporate responsibility causes higher employee, community and customer engagement, and therefore better financial performance," she says, "Or whether organisations that have robust corporate responsibility programmes are more profitable and

therefore have more options when it comes to giving charitably or investing in green and community initiatives."

Nick Wright, managing director, corporate responsibility and community affairs, at financial services firm UBS, agrees that it can be difficult to prove a direct causal link between community involvement and business benefits, but the company's own research has found that staff who volunteer (about a quarter of its UK workforce) tend to be high performers who display characteristics such as teamwork and inclusivity. "It makes sense for us to support and promote volunteering as it helps to attract more such recruits, and to keep those we have already," he says.

Globally, the bank gave away

27.6m Swiss francs (£19.5m) and 81,000 hours of staff time last year. Primarily this is because it's the right thing to do, Wright says, but there are bottom-line benefits too. Some of the most obvious concern staff. "Community involvement builds and promotes the culture within UBS for both recruitment and retention and, to a degree, the development of staff," he says.

Kenexa's research supports this; it found that 91% of staff in companies rated highly for corporate responsibility were proud to tell people where they worked and 89% would recommend a job there to a friend or family member, while the same number rarely thought about looking for a job elsewhere.

By contrast, only 21% of staff at companies without a culture of corporate responsibility were proud of their jobs and just 19% would recommend it to a friend.

But it's not just existing and potential employees whose decisions are affected by what UBS is giving back to society; shareholders, investors and potential clients also want to see what it is doing, Wright says. For example, information about the bank's

community work might be included when pitching for new business, such as managing the funds of a charity or a wealthy family.

Community work can also give staff a chance to work alongside potential clients in an informal environment. "We all achieve more in the community because we are working together, and we get to know each other," says Oonagh Harpur, director of corporate responsibility at law firm Linklaters, which works with UBS and Deutsche Bank on regeneration projects in east London.

Volunteering is also a chance for employees to develop a better understanding of the challenges faced by their clients, she adds. For example, someone who volunteers as a school governor will learn about the challenges of boardroom leadership — responsibilities that many of the corporate lawyers' clients will hold themselves.

While it's useful for companies to understand how community involvement can benefit their bottom line, it also pays to have a business-like approach to how the projects are handled. For example, UBS chooses a small number of long-term partners rather than giving money or staff time in an ad hoc fashion. This allows it to focus its efforts on areas where it believes it can make a real difference in the community — education and employability are important themes. It also looks for partnerships with organisations that will take the bank's staff as volunteers, thus helping it to make the most of staff engagement and development opportunities.

Both UBS and Linklaters assess projects to ensure that their investment will have the maximum impact. When Linklaters started working with young people in east London, it hired academics to see where the firm's contribution — £1m over the past three years — could be most valuable. "We learnt that one of the things that really helped children and gave them confidence was for them to come in and see our offices," Harpur says. Simply visiting an office helps them to see that they could one day work in one like it.

"That and having a role model gives them something to aspire to that is more realistic than being a footballer or a superstar." As a result, the firm now offers office visits, mentoring and other similar initiatives to help inspire young people.

"Checking that what we are doing for them is working is vital," Harpur confirms. "We talk about supporting communities being the right thing to do, but we are also investing a huge amount of resource. We want to be sure that investment is giving us the right return — which is the community becoming socially and economically stronger."

Employee volunteers also want to know that their contribution is useful, she adds. "Our people want to do it, but they want to be sure that what they are doing is valuable."

Moveable feast

Last year Sainsbury's helped to provide more than a million meals for people who would otherwise struggle to find food. Rather than dumping unwanted food that is still within its use-by date, the supermarket chain gives it to FareShare, a national charity that distributes it to more than 600 charities around the country.

"It's good business sense as well as the right thing to do for Sainsbury's and other companies involved in the scheme, as it is cheaper for them to donate food than it would be to send it to landfill," says Lindsay Boswell, FareShare's chief executive. "There is a cost associated with collecting and distributing the stock, and we ask them to bear that, but that's still less than the cost of putting good-quality food into landfill."

And it helps with environmental goals as well, according to Ben Eavis, Sainsbury's corporate responsibility manager. "We are committed to sending zero food waste to landfill, so when products are edible we want to make sure that they are being consumed by human beings," he says. "Knowing that no food is wasted is one of the things that makes colleagues proud." Out-of-date food, he adds, is also used to create fuel for some of the company's delivery vans.

Sainsbury's has supported FareShare since homeless charity Crisis, which originated the scheme, began trials in London in 1994. In 1998, Lord Sainsbury of Turville, then the supermarket's chairman, launched the scheme nationally and encouraged other businesses to back it. "Sainsbury's has been good at getting other supermarkets on board — it has not been partisan," Boswell says.

Last year Sainsbury's gave FareShare £1m worth of food — this is not counted as a donation because it would otherwise have been written off — plus £135,000 towards the running costs.



Getting involved — then and now

Philanthropy in action

Old model Cash donations

New model Provide resources, expertise and assets

We know what's good for you

Old model Top down — a business decides what projects, causes and charities to work with

New model Bottom up — it consults the community to determine local needs

Green issues

Old model Greenwash — lip service paid to the environment

New model Verifiable commitment to environmental goals

Local or global?

Old model Supporting projects in the developing world

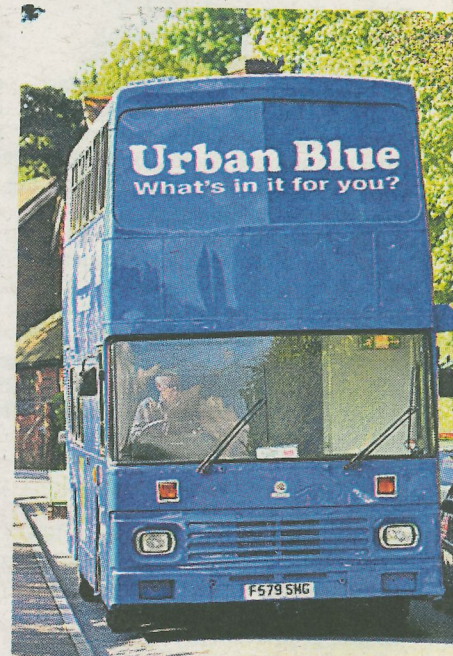
New model Location, location, location: local initiatives win the day

Collaboration

Old model Going it alone

New model Working with other organisations for greater impact

Saturday



Maidstone town centre's first aid bus

Dwayne Senior

Volunteers at the south London FareShare depot, sponsored by Sainsbury's



night's all right for volunteers

Over-enthusiastic revelry is a common cause of minor injuries: a sprained ankle on the dance floor, say, or a bump on the head from falling down stairs at the pub, writes *Carly Chynoweth*. In many town centres this would result in the pub's landlord calling 999 for an ambulance, but in Maidstone, Kent, the pub would radio for Urban Blue, a double-decker bus kitted out with first-aid equipment and staffed by trained volunteers.

Last year it handled 135 calls, freeing ambulance staff to deal with real emergencies. Its volunteers also offered Friday and Saturday night visitors to the town centre advice on everything from quitting drinking to sexual health; curiously, 762 people popped in to be screened for chlamydia while they were on a night out last year.

Urban Blue is an example of how Maidstone's town-centre management — a partnership between local businesses, police and the borough council — is finding creative ways to make the Kent town a more welcoming

place for visitors, says Bill Moss, the town-centre manager.

"The main reason for our existence is to encourage people to come into the town centre," Moss says. "We work with the council to make sure that it looks spick and span, with police on crime-reduction schemes, and we put on events to encourage people to visit." Further initiatives include widening streets to allow outdoor dining and linking businesses via radio to combat shoplifting and other petty crime.

There are more than 500 town-centre partnerships like this across the UK. They can use local insight to understand and improve the community in which particular shops operate, says Andy Godfrey, public policy manager at Boots UK, which is involved in many of them.

"Our store managers know what's needed at a local level," he says. "We could not deliver that from here at the centre."

Working with local charities makes volunteering both more tangible and more meaningful for staff who get

involved, adds Richard Foulerton, the corporate social responsibility manager at Allianz, the insurer. People at its offices across the UK build connections with hospices and schools near where they work. "People can see what they are achieving and there is a real sense of giving back to the local community," he says. It also helps staff get to know existing and potential customers, while working with schools introduces children to the possibility of a career with the business, which employs 4,000 people at 23 offices in the UK.

A local approach allows communities to find their own answers to problems rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach imposed upon them, says Tony Hawkhead, the chief executive of Groundwork, a federation of locally based charities that tackle environmental and employment issues.

He suggests that businesses that want to build connections with their community should look for partnerships with established organisations. "Getting involved locally has a whole set of advantages, but

understanding what is going on in the community takes time and effort. That means working with organisations on an equal footing, not in a command and control way.

"I would oppose trying to set up your own organisation in competition with what already exists. It sows confusion and is generally not effective."

Boots is generally happy to work with existing town-centre management initiatives as long as its checks show they are effective, Godfrey says. "Where there isn't a partnership, or where the one that exists isn't delivering as it should, we are in favour of change. There's not one single model that suits all communities."

Partnerships work best as a genuine alliance between government, community and business, he adds. Business cannot be expected to take full responsibility, and there is a risk that government cuts could see more pressure put on corporate partners.

"Our managers are very busy individuals. It is difficult to ask them to set something up from scratch."

A clearer path

Good for business, good for communities, good for society at large: that's the message politicians and business leaders alike are spreading about why business involvement in the community should be encouraged.

So, why aren't companies doing more of it? Because red tape is getting in the way, according to business leaders questioned by BITC at the end of last year. They identified four main barriers faced by companies when they want to launch a new initiative or expand an existing scheme:

Criminal records bureau (CRB) checks

Businesses want to make it quicker, easier and cheaper for their staff to volunteer, for example by making CRB checks transferable rather than needing a new check for each new site, and by minimising the time such checks take.

Government response

The new Protection of Freedoms Bill, which has had its second reading and is now being considered by a parliamentary committee, incorporates a more straightforward CRB process.

Competition law

Some businesses worry that discussing solutions to community problems with their competitors could be seen by regulators as anti-competitive behaviour, even if a combined approach is the best way to solve a particular issue.

Response

Competition law is designed to prevent agreements that distort or restrict competition, not to rule out discussions or agreements altogether. BITC is working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to develop clearer guidance for companies.

Insurance

Accountants, lawyers, consultants and so forth need to be insured if they want to use their professional skills as volunteers. If they don't, they are breaking the law and putting themselves at significant financial risk. However, there are gaps in the professional indemnity insurance that is available at the moment, and this prevents a large number of potential volunteers from being able to offer their services.

Response

BITC is working with government and the insurance industry to address this problem.

Making sure work pays

Businesses often feel that the biggest contribution they can make to the community is offering training, placements and jobs to unemployed people; the business leaders questioned by BITC want to make sure that the benefits system does not discourage people from taking part-time work or longer work placements.

Response

Welfare reforms have included new arrangements that allow young people on Jobseeker's Allowance to take on eight weeks of work experience without effecting their benefits.

Ronald Grant Archive



The most cut-throat business rivals can work effectively for the community by collaborating through BITC

Togetherness is best policy

Business Connectors will build alliances for local action, says **Bruce Millar**

Every company should ask itself the question "What are we doing for our local community?", asserts Jane James, employment regeneration director at Mitie Group plc, a FTSE250-listed facilities, property and asset management group with annual revenues of £1.7 bn and 56,000 staff.

"There's a business case, a moral case and a community case — a case at every level," she says, brushing aside any suspicion that this is an exercise in charitable window dressing designed to improve a company's image.

Significantly, her list is headed by the business case. The Mitie group has increased its revenues, profits and earnings per share for 22 consecutive years, through economic boom and bust: it is the sort of company where every decision must be justified on financial grounds. Matt Cooke, social and economic investment campaign director of Business in the Community, believes this hard-headed, practical approach is crucially important to the work of BITC: "The advantages flow in both directions — there are huge benefits for the local community, and huge benefits that flow back to the businesses taking part."

In July, BITC is rolling out a programme to appoint 20 Business Connectors seconded from member companies to operate in areas of

multiple deprivation across the UK. They will broker connections to help the community, whether through jobs, economic regeneration or the improvement of opportunities and facilities. BITC members BT, Royal Mail and Sainsbury's have already committed staff to the project; Cooke says organisations will second some of their brightest management talents to gain "real world" experience outside the company comfort zone. They will also learn valuable information about the local market conditions in which their company operates.

The international technology company Fujitsu, a member of BITC, has developed a social network using cloud computing to support the scheme. It will be part of each Business Connector's role to feed in data, information, reports and evaluations, to ensure that best practice is shared and continuity is maintained.

"This will operate as a virtual office, linking all the BCs across the country," says Cooke. "How we measure the impact of the scheme and report it back to the companies involved is incredibly important to its overall success."

Duncan Tait, chief executive of Fujitsu UK and Ireland, describes the as-yet-unnamed network as a "Facebook-style collaborative space" which will be accessible from a standard laptop PC or hand-held device. "It will be an open, extremely

useable, non-hierarchical forum," he says. "As a company, we have always believed that technology can bring real benefits to the way society develops, so this was an ideal opportunity for us."

While the network will be open, to encourage use by all the stakeholders in the project, it is not yet clear who will own some of the potentially valuable data it is likely to accrue.

Following this year's pilot, BITC intends to build an ambitious network of Business Connectors in 450 localities in the next five years, with up to 1,000 BCs involved. "This is a tried and tested model, so we know that it works," says Cooke. "What is different now is the sheer scale and the vision."

One of the original models on which the scheme is based is Helen Milligan, an executive assistant at the bakery chain Greggs, who was seconded to work full-time for six months in the blighted Teesside town of Redcar at the beginning of the year. She was not called a Business Connector — the term had yet to be coined — but she has done exactly that, brokering projects such as the refurbishment of an old butcher's shop to provide business premises for young entrepreneurs.

Milligan says she will return to Greggs enriched by the experience. "Bringing together people from all walks of life in the community to work together really tests and develops your team-building, influencing and leadership skills," she says. "It is incredibly rewarding because you can actually see how you are making a difference to people's lives."

Jane James at Mitie is another model Business Connector, having

Joined-up thinking

Business Connectors, using a purpose-built social network, will bring management know-how to deprived regions



launched an innovative Real Apprentice scheme in 2005 in response to the failure of traditional recruitment methods to fill vacancies in Canary Wharf, east London, from the nearby deprived community of Shadwell.

One of the trickiest aspects of setting up the scheme was negotiating with the local JobCentre to allow unemployed people to participate without losing their benefits — potentially a major disincentive. This is typical of the sort of bureaucratic glitch BITC Business Connectors will face.

James also showed how a Business Connector should operate by using personal contacts to draw international auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) into collaboration on the Real

Apprentice scheme. So far, there have been 197 Real Apprentices: 134 have completed the programme and 101 have been offered permanent positions, either with Mitie or other employers — a 75% success rate that dwarfs most job creation schemes.

While Mitie and PWC have a client relationship, Business Connectors should note that companies competing for the same business can set aside their rivalries to collaborate on projects. Food giants Cargill, Northern Foods and Nestlé won a BITC Power in Partnership award in 2009 for their Phunky Food programme that promoted healthy eating in 550 primary schools in response to growing concerns about childhood obesity.

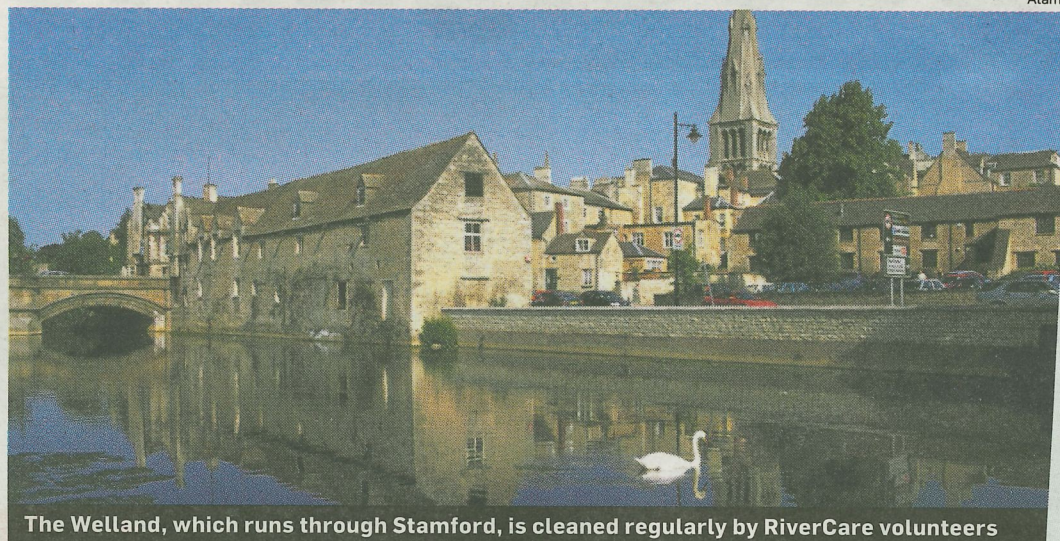
Want to go green? Make a watertight case

Environmental credentials have to be earned, finds **Nic Paton**

Twice a month, Rachel Dyson traipses around a muddy river bank, bagging up rubbish and cutting back foliage. Rachel is community relations manager at Anglian Water and a volunteer with her local RiverCare group in Stamford, Lincolnshire. The RiverCare project is run by charity Keep Britain Tidy but has been funded since 2000 by Anglian Water. There are 43 RiverCare groups across the Anglian region.

"It's not always about pulling on wellies," says Rachel. "It could be co-ordinating activities or helping with our RiverCare Facebook page. We also meet in the pub every third Monday of the month."

Water companies are under pressure to help keep rivers clean, and Anglian Water environmental performance scientist Lisa Taylor explains that the company felt it made more sense to back an expert organisation in this



The Welland, which runs through Stamford, is cleaned regularly by RiverCare volunteers

Alamy



field than to strike out alone. "We have a joint steering group and it is very much a partnership, but Keep Britain Tidy is the point of contact with volunteers. If you want to encourage people to help clean a watercourse, they are more likely to do it for a charity," she says.

For any business about to dip its toes into community-based environmental initiatives, the first word to keep in mind is "greenwash" — the suspicion that a company is merely talking a

good talk on green credentials. In March, a poll by the Carbon Trust found only 7% of respondents believed companies when they claimed to be environmentally responsible.

In some cases, such as with BP and the Gulf of Mexico, it's clear why a perceived gap between rhetoric and reality might arise. But for most companies, the key is to ensure that you put your own house in order, set measurable targets and a clear time frame, and outline the extent of your

involvement, advises Hugh Jones, managing director of Carbon Trust Advisory, the organisation's consultancy arm. "It can require a fundamental change in outlook and a real commitment to execution and investment," he says.

It is important to plan carefully, agrees Trewin Restorick, chief executive of environmental education and volunteering charity Global Action Plan. "Companies really worry about greenwash these days; most are aware

of the dangers of doing something that could backfire. So there is more planning and more desire to do things that are valid," he says.

To this end, forging partnerships with organisations that already have a track record is constructive, advises Anglian Water's Taylor. "For us, working with Keep Britain Tidy means there is no potential for greenwash criticisms. You have to be in it for the long term, be embedded and really believe in what you are doing."

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Small but significant

Rural communities must work hard to get the engagement they need from big business, finds Rory Stewart MP

My first encounter with business and philanthropy took place in 2007 in California's Silicon Valley; my most recent, in 2011 in a Lake District valley. Near Palo Alto, between the Google complex and Steve Jobs' wife's charitable trust, were dozens of foundations set up by technology billionaires. Each aimed to redefine philanthropy. High-tech CEOs focused on poverty-alleviating applications for mobile phones in Kenya; bankers backed micro-credit in Bangladesh. Venture capitalists aimed to bring metrics and measurement to the voluntary sector. If you could fit yourself to these models, money seemed limitless.

But Cumbria is not California. Our average income is £16,000 a year and some of our upland farmers earn just £6,000. Volunteers do an extraordinary job raising funds for the air ambulance, for mountain rescue or for the hospice-at-home service. We have a long tradition of self-reliance, but a new project might struggle to raise in three years what a Californian fundraiser could do in a night. At the same time, 90% of our businesses are very small and cannot make grand philanthropic gestures; while larger national companies often seem indifferent to local community needs.

So, when I was looking for support for Cumbrian communities I was anxious. Would businesses really help us bring superfast broadband to rural areas? Or save the Penrith cinema or our agricultural college?

The answer in all cases is yes: but not because we are Californian. Our business champions do not provide cash, nor ask communities to be more business-like. They support what communities want, with things they already own or do. Sometimes, as when the local agricultural supplier, Carrs Billington, allowed us to write a business plan which saved the local agricultural college, or when the



The MP Rory Stewart once hiked across Afghanistan; he now walks the hills of his Cumbrian constituency to learn about his electors' needs

cinema owner Graves (Cumberland) last month responded to a community campaign and agreed to keep the Penrith Alhambra open, the businesses were not transformed by the relationship. But often they are.

Take superfast broadband, which we need to keep rural businesses and

villages alive and which depends on installing miles of expensive fibre-optic cable. Companies such as BT couldn't make such an investment pay and government couldn't afford the subsidy. Cumbrian communities, led by local residents, installed their own fibre-optic cables and discovered how

much useful infrastructure was already in place, from cable to pylons to sewers.

As a result, the telecoms companies opened up access to their infrastructure and gave advice on new technologies, such as microwave transmitters. They also offered shared ownership of the network, access to their cabinets on

street corners that house fibre-optic cable junctions, and came up with new ideas for how communities could use the internet, such as consulting medical specialists via videolink.

This was not simply business: some of the enterprises involved were sometimes barely breaking even. But nor was it simply philanthropy. They were developing relationships, generating publicity and positioning themselves for other profitable markets in the future. And under the insistent questioning of Cumbrian people — who asked, for instance, what could be achieved with electronic tags on upland Herdwick ewes, or whether a high-speed connection could reach the remote village of Great Asby — the businesses were also learning and being forced to improve.

If I could take a message back to California it is this: businesses and communities can be transformed by such relationships.

Rory Stewart is MP for Penrith and The Border

What your MP should be doing

A good MP should be able to make a big difference when it comes to encouraging businesses to get involved in community initiatives. Business in the Community is launching an online guide to corporate responsibility for MPs to show them how to identify the best people and organisations in their constituency to take community initiatives forward (find it at bitc.org.uk/tbto).

Making connections with individual

employers is key, often initially at chief-executive level.

Your MP should also be developing contacts with community groups, voluntary organisations and charities to define their needs, and encouraging effective community involvement through constituency links with local and national business organisations such as the British Chambers of Commerce and the Confederation of British Industry.

In Parliament, your MP can promote issues and raise the profile of business involvement in the community. This could be by introducing an initiative within a Parliamentary debate, presenting petitions, putting forward early day motions to highlight issues of concern, writing to other MPs, working with committees, ministers and government departments, or submitting written questions.

Westminster clout boosts local initiatives

She may have come under a lot of media pressure during the scandal over politicians' expenses two years ago, writes Nic Paton. But Labour MP and former secretary of state for communities and local government Hazel Blears has lost none of her enthusiasm for getting employers and businesses involved in community

projects at her Manchester constituency of Salford and Eccles.

Initiatives she has promoted include Salford Money Line (now Moneyline Greater Manchester), set up in 2000 to provide loans to people unable to access mainstream forms of credit. It had support from Barclays Bank, which seconded a member of staff to help for two years.

Blears has also worked closely with the Salford Shared Apprenticeship Scheme, a project led by Salford City Council and Salford College and including building firms Seddon Construction and Cruden Construction, among others.

"It is a two-way street," says Blears. "Businesses can find themselves better connected with their local

communities and so, for example, experience less vandalism and attract better applicants for jobs."

As an MP, Blears has also been able to raise associated issues in Parliament. In February, for example, she tackled the Treasury over tax incentives to encourage businesses to engage in CSR activities. "Sometimes a community group might be working

effectively on the ground but will not have that many business connections or much expertise," she observes. "So a local employer might well be able to help with things such as their accounts or seconding people to share their expertise."

"Rather than just doing something as a one-off it can be about developing ongoing relationships."

Back to the classroom

Companies can work well with schools, if they are willing to learn, says **Nic Paton**

Construction company Wates launched its Business Class education programme in 2008 to bring businesses together in local "clusters" to work with secondary schools in three-year partnerships. The scheme aims to help students with interviewing skills, work placements, apprenticeships and general mentoring and support.

Paul Drechsler, Wates chief executive and chairman, said: "Schools do not have a lot of experience working with business and may not have the confidence to do so. Plus businesses have little experience of schools. This system helps them collaborate effectively." He was speaking at a BITC event last month in Manchester, introducing a dozen or so fellow business leaders to the mutual benefits of getting involved with schools. "Research says schools involved in

partnerships with business see a 38% improvement in academic achievement. Employability rates are up 40%."

The day included a series of mock interviews for students from Manchester's Whalley Range High School, an all-girls secondary with more than 1,500 pupils, many of them from ethnic minority backgrounds and with English as a second language.

A-level student Farihya Osman, 18, said she had learned a lot. "Everyone has flaws, and they have given pointers that will help me do better in interviews next time."

Deputy head teacher Greg Barnes added: "Programmes like this give students confidence when going for jobs in the future."

For businesses looking to get involved in their local communities, a school-based initiative can appear an "easy win". It'll be high profile, it's the sort of thing local media love and, as



Paul Drechsler of the building firm Wates with pupils from Whalley Range High School, Manchester

children of at least some employees may be being educated there, getting "buy-in" from staff may not be difficult.

But the business has to be adopted by the school, not the other way round, or it can be a disaster, warns Christine Hodgson, chairman of consulting firm Cag Gemini UK and a leader of BITC's work experience programme, Work Inspiration. "It is about asking the school where it needs help. Unless the

school has the resources, the process can be overwhelming," she says.

The danger is that it becomes more about corporate public relations than the school, cautions Jeremy Moon, professor of corporate social responsibility at Nottingham University Business School.

"Community support activities do need to be thought through carefully. One criticism is they can become little

more than a team challenge for the company. It is something you do not want to be accused of," he warns.

"Particularly within education, there can be a labyrinth of rules and regulations, and it can help to have someone such as BITC to hold your hand and guide you through it. They can act as the broker and handle all the necessary checks," says Hodgson. *Additional reporting by Philip Cardy*

More than just words

As a building society, giving back to our communities has always been at the heart of our business and part of our history.

In 2009 we committed £3million to our MoneyActive scheme, to help Citizens Advice recruit and train over 1,000 volunteers to advise people with money worries. Through this scheme we hope to make a real difference to financial education.

In 2007 we launched our website, NationwideEducation.co.uk which helps children (as well as their parents and teachers) get to grips with money. With fun and engaging content targeted at different age groups, it has since won four premier industry awards and received over 15 million hits and downloads.

And it was way back in 1848 that a group of people got together to help each other buy homes and save for their futures. An enterprise that eventually became known as Nationwide Building Society.

We now help over 14 million members with their money and support thousands of people through our charity partners and community programmes.

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