

## **Blueprint for an SOHS public meeting**

- the Combe Martin Public Meeting, 10 October 2016

### Before the meeting:

**Date:** We chose a date that, as far as possible, did not clash with any other SOHS events, village events or regular village activities (e.g. darts/pool/skittles nights). We got a bit lucky; we didn't realise that the Parish Council had a scheduled meeting, but they immediately agreed to cancel so they could support us.

**Venue:** We chose the Village Hall as it has a good capacity and is both physically and, in many ways, symbolically at the heart of the village. It did entail a cost, but we were offered a very good reduction.

### Personnel:

- We enlisted two members of the SOHS campaign team (Ian Williams and Phillip Wearne) to attend the meeting with the specific role of answering audience questions during a Q&A and after the meeting.
- We invited an experienced person to chair the Q&A (Pete James, an SOHS supporter and chair of Combe Martin Parish Council).
- We asked a local resident if she would be responsible for selling badges and handing out literature after the meeting.
- We personally invited Devon County Councillor Andrea Davis, chair of the Devon Health & Wellbeing Board, to attend the meeting and to meet with us in advance to discuss her position on the proposed cuts to hospital services.

### Publicity:

- We advertised in the monthly village magazine (we had to hurry to make the upcoming edition; it would have been unthinkable not to advertise there).
- We set up the event on Facebook and immediately began continuous promotion on the SOHS group page and on our own timelines, personally sharing the event with friends in Combe Martin.
- We put up posters (attached; essentially the same as the Facebook ad) around the village, targeting pubs, shops, public notice boards, prominent public spaces and individuals with windows facing the main road.
- We put up posters in the other parishes making up Combe Martin Ward (Berrynarbor, Martinhoe, Parracombe and Trentishoe).
- We delivered letters to the 3 churches in Combe Martin asking if they would advertise the event in their Sunday services.
- The day before the meeting we put SOHS/Public Meeting placards at all entrance points to the village and centrally within the village.
- On the day of the meeting, we texted friends with details of the meeting and invited them to forward the invitation to five of their friends.
- On the day of the meeting, we placed a chalk board outside the venue advertising the meeting.

### Materials:

- Ray and Barbara both prepared what we were going to say.

- We drew up a single-page Action Sheet (attached) informing people what they could do to support the campaign.
- We drew up an Information/Question Sheet (attached) that people could fill in at the end of the meeting if they wanted to receive a copy of the STP, be added to the Facebook group or ask any questions that were still unasked/unanswered.

Other:

- The day before the meeting, Ray sent out a plan for the meeting (attached) to all those involved (Barbara, Ian, Phillip and Pete) inviting comments.
- On the day of the meeting, Ray met with a member of the Village Hall Community Group at the venue to check out the PA system and verify where tables and chairs could be found, how we could set up the hall, etc.

The meeting:

- We (myself, Barbara Nicolson-Martin, Ian Williams and Phillip Wearne) met up for a quick strategy discussion and walked to the venue together at the earliest opportunity.
- Barbara and Phillip talked to Councillor Andrea Davis for the best part of an hour while myself and Ian worked on setting up the hall, with the support of various locals.
- We put out all the chairs and a table at the front with 5 chairs.
- We positioned 1 microphone in front of the table at the front and set up a 2nd microphone on a long lead ready for the Q&A.
- When the hall was almost full, we sound-checked both microphones.
- We were ready to start at the advertised time of 8.00pm but waited 5 minutes longer to allow everyone to arrive and settle.
- Just before we started, we began recording with a digital recorder as we did not have a minute-taker.
- Barbara opened the meeting with some practical matters (toilets, fire exits, thank yous). She then outlined the informal agenda for the meeting. She then talked about how she personally came to be involved with SOHS and gave her personal opinions on the proposed cuts to hospital services.
- Ray spoke next and read out a 2-page explanation (attached) of the Wider Devon STP, giving the background and then, specifically, what it says about and implies for hospital bed closures and SPAM (stroke, paediatrics, A&E and maternity).
- This opening section (Barbara and Ray) took no longer than 20 minutes.
- Ray then handed over to Pete James, who Q&Aed using a roving mic. All members of the audience were invited to ask questions or voice their concerns. Answers were mostly given by Ian and Phillip with occasional support from Barbara and Ray.
- The Q&A lasted around 1 hour and was concluded when there were no more questions from the audience.
- As the audience left, they were each given (as far as possible) an Action Sheet and a leaflet for See Red Day. They also had the opportunity to buy badges, make donations (we used a red bucket with the SOHS logo), take additional leaflets/posters and use the Information/Question Sheet provided.

## After the meeting:

The day after the meeting, we e-mailed the STP to those who had requested it, added people to the Facebook group and answered any written questions.

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Where did we do well and where could we have done better?

- The advertising and publicity was generally good and the Village Hall was just about full to capacity (we estimate that there were 150 people who attended). The advertising placards around the village were a late thought and we needed something much bigger.
- We could have been more organised about putting up a large banner at the venue.
- The PA system worked excellently and was crucial to the success of the meeting. As far as we know, everyone was able to hear everything. You can't dodge this issue – if people can't hear what is being said, you may as well not bother saying it!
- The timing was good. We began on time and deliberately kept our opening section short to allow maximum time for audience participation. 1.5 hours was a good amount of time to allow everyone to have a say while ensuring that the meeting was focused throughout.
- The Q&A was excellent; people wanted to talk and wanted to ask questions.
- We deliberately did not hand out or display any literature until the end so that people were not distracted away from the speakers.
- We sold a lot of badges and took a lot of donations (£260.31 total).
- We handed out a lot of literature but needed to have maybe 4 people ready at the back of the hall as we were suddenly swamped as people left. It would have been good to have the Action Sheet and Information/Question Sheet in pairs ready for handing out.
- The Information/Question Sheet was popular but it should have been much clearer (i.e. "please tick" for Facebook group and STP).
- We should have asked everyone to leave an e-mail or mailing address; it would have made follow-up much easier.
- In retrospect, our biggest "failure" was not attracting younger people to the meeting. I cannot recall seeing a single person under 50 - with one exception (just) 😊
- The feedback from attendees has been excellent without exception and we have had lots of offers of help.
- The main desires of the attendees in terms of action were to sign a physical petition (it was clear that there were many present who do not use computers/Facebook) and to write letters to relevant people.