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| Your name and agency: | Marilyn Mason and Jo Butcher  Kingston Environment Forum |
| Your partner’s name and agency: | Kingston Environment Forum (KEF) is a good example of the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to self-organise and coalesce around a shared goal, in this case to promote healthy and sustainable communities in Kingston.  KEF is itself a long established partnership of various local green groups and volunteers with different but overlapping areas of interest and expertise, sharing information and working together on issues such as local biodiversity, sustainable transport, health and well-being, energy, climate change, waste and over-consumption. KEF is a Kingston Strategic Partner, its co-chairs and other representatives attend KSP meetings, and relevant Council officers and interested Councillors attend our meetings. Our aims include influencing Council plans and advising and assisting on the implementation of the first theme in the Kingston Plan: "A sustainable Kingston: protecting and enhancing the environment for us and for future generations", with its objectives of tackling climate change, reducing our ecological footprint, ensuring sustainable development and transport in Kingston, and protecting and improving the quality of our local environment.  KEF’s key principles and approach reflect the aims of and core themes within the Kingston Compact and the VCS strategy such as community development and engagement, and communications, through:   * Coalescing around a shared message and common goal whilst valuing and working with diversity of views and approaches, seeing this as a strength to deliver objectives. Speaking as one voice we can effectively engage with stakeholders about key issues and concerns. * An inclusive and participative approach, working together and in new ways. We promote inclusivity by inviting anyone interested in and/or working on environmental issues to get involved. Through co-production KEF can pioneer new ways of doing things, drawing from or building on existing evidence. * Connecting and integrating issues in order to mainstream environmental action, for example articulating the wider social, environmental and economic outcomes that can be achieved and making the links to other issues such as health and well-being. For example, increasing the energy efficiency of homes will reduce impact of cold homes and fuel poverty on health and reduce carbon emissions. Supporting people to interact with natural habitats and green spaces can improve well-being and facilitate greater connection to their environment, and their propensity to care for and protect it. * Connecting local ‘on the ground’ knowledge and experience in order to build a picture of need, shining a light on issues that are less understood or highlighting unmet need. It’s not just about connecting issues but also connecting people in order to build capacity for change. * Framing messages in ways that makes sense to people’s daily lives and encourage engagement. * Using digital technology and social media to support our work and extend our reach, keeping people informed about what’s happening, being transparent, highlighting opportunities to get involved and enabling co-production. |
| What were you working on together? | We worked with Council officers on Kingston Green Pledge – see <http://www.kingston.gov.uk/info/200300/sustainability_initiatives/735/the_kingston_green_pledge>.  We worked with the Council on producing the community magazine, KingstonON.  We have also successfully lobbied for the Council to leave areas of long grass and wild flowers on some roadside verges and have offered to help with associated public education.  We regularly work in sub-groups to respond to Council consultations, for example, currently, on the green spaces strategy and provision for cycling.  We have recently set up an E-voice website, <http://e-voice.org.uk/kef/> with the help of KVA.  A forerunner of Kingston Environment Forum, the Eco-footprint Working Group, contributed to the formulation of the Kingston Community Plan. |
| What did you do? | A sub-group of KEF worked on the content and language of the Green Pledge, and variations on possible names for the Pledge were tested by our representative at a KSP meeting. All of us publicised and distributed it as widely as we could – in our newsletters, on our websites, to our members, at meetings we attend.  We regularly contributed articles to KingstON, and took over editing for the last issue, in 2012.  A sub-group, led by Transition Town Kingston, organised a half-day "Living Landscapes?" event on local biodiversity in October 2012, with speakers from the RSPB and River of Flowers alongside Marie-Claire Edwards, the Council’s environmental lead, and John Fellowes from KEF/TTK. More recently, Kingston Environment Centre has formed a Kingston Biodiversity Network (KBN) which takes a lead on biodiversity issues and has hosted open meetings with relevant council officers. A couple of KEF/KBN members met with Marie-Claire Edwards to make the case for leaving some grass verges long and sowing them with wild flowers and to raise some concerns about local trees. Through these discussions, KEF and RBK have been able to collaborate on helping to promote biodiversity in Kingston. |
| What did your partner do? | Kingston Council designed and printed the Pledge document and KingstON, put them on the Council website, and distributed them via its networks.  Kingston Council has undertaken to prepare the ground and sow wild flowers on some roadside verges, and to leave them to naturalise in future years. |
| How did working together make things better?  Eg did it save time/did they have skills you didn’t/ did you reach a wider audience etc. | Working together involves a good combination of ideas and time from committed and knowledgeable people in KEF, with skills and some investment of time and funding from the Council. We doubt that any of us would or could have created the Green Pledge or KingstON or distributed them on our own.  We think that the Council's officers and contractors have changed their sowing and mowing regimes because we made a good case for change.  Working with the Council and sharing information with each other usually means we are alerted to and well prepared for local consultations on environmental issues, and we know who to speak to about particular environmental concerns. |
| Is there anything else you would like to tell us? | We see it as one of our tasks to encourage and support the Council and its other partners to maintain and improve its environmental policies and practices on, for example, waste and recycling, green spaces, transport, and energy-efficient housing. To an extent we comprise a unique horizon-scanning advisory group, since our members have good familiarity with the energy, resource and climate factors that will increasingly affect life and the economy in Kingston. |