

A recent BBC News release is below which we'd like to share with you on the BBC Big Lottery Fund Village SOS project as it's about Robert.

A Norfolk businessman is to help an enterprising local village develop its business proposals in the latest stage of Village SOS.

Last month, Hilgay in Norfolk had their ideas for starting up new community-run business shortlisted through Village SOS - a scheme to inspire a UK rural revival, run by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) and the BBC.

The village has now been paired with a Village Champion - an experienced professional who, over the next few months, will help them to develop their initial business ideas into a viable proposal. Six of the best projects will be awarded up to £400,000 from the Big Lottery Fund in May and their respective Village Champions will help the businesses get off the ground. The process will be filmed for a new BBC One series, due to air in 2011.

Robert Ashton, from Wymondham in Norfolk, is one of the UK's best selling business authors and currently runs business boot camps. Experienced in giving business advice to rural enterprises, Robert will help Hilgay Parish Growers to launch their community farm and artisan centre. His experience includes helping an award winning motor repair workshop which provides opportunities to disabled and disadvantaged people. He is also a trustee of the Norfolk Community Foundation which makes grants to emerging community projects.

Hilgay Parish Growers are looking to establish the Hilgay Village Green project which would encompass a community farm, eco-friendly artisan centre and cafe. The farm would be created on a disused Greenfield site and would produce a range of organic fruits and vegetables as well as breed livestock, including chickens, goats, pigs, sheep, ducks, and fish. The Hilgay Village Green project would generate employment and training opportunities in the village, where there is a shortage of skilled workers.

Mr Ashton said: "The village is passionate about what they want to achieve. For me the project looks at the whole community. It looks at growing, creating employment, attracting tourism and improving the local economy. I see it as turning the clock back 150 years to a time when everyone knew each other and the community was self sustaining. I'm passionate about Norfolk so there is an element of patriotism. I work extensively in the social sector and third sector and I know a lot of local and regional projects that we can link with Hilgay. I also see this project becoming much bigger and widespread. Social enterprise is the focus of my work at the moment. I see my role in the village as a facilitator and catalyst."

Sara Betsworth, Big Lottery Fund Head of Region for the East of England, said: "This is a really exciting stage in the Village SOS process. These champions will add a great deal to the villagers' business ideas, helping them to strengthen and develop them into robust business proposals."