



# CHARTER FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE towards the adoption of the Charter which will develop and enhance the relationship between local (ie parish and town) councils and the new unitary authority in Northumberland. The Charter, which has been developed over a period of months since last summer, draws greatly upon the findings of a questionnaire survey which all local councils in Northumberland were asked to complete in the spring of 2007, when it first appeared likely that local government was going to be restructured. Although 19% of respondents thought this would mean 'no change' for their local council, the vast majority anticipated significant change and recognised that they would need to organise themselves accordingly. There was a 50-50 split between those who were looking to take on a direct responsibility for the devolved provision of further services, and those who wanted to be a stronger community voice but with no additional service responsibility.

Subsequently, the Government confirmed that the principal authorities would be reorganised into a single, Northumberland-wide unitary authority, with a strong commitment to community empowerment through local councils.

This in turn brought recognition from a number of local councils that an 'uneven playing field' would be created, between the parished and unparished areas. In most parishes, the local council provides and finances the local amenities where they exist (allotments, play areas, village greens, etc) but the new unitary authority would be providing and financing these types of amenity in the previously un-parished South East Northumberland. There has been increasing pressure to address these disparities.

Thus, the charter has been designed to meet three key objectives:

- *To enable the Authority to work closely with local councils and communities*
- *to accommodate the different aspirations and capacity of different local councils*
- *to achieve greater clarity and consistency in the service-delivery responsibilities of local councils and the new authority.*

A Charter was circulated for consultation in October 2008, and has been widely discussed by local councils – and area-wide meetings of councils – throughout the county. There has also been helpful input from staff and councillors at County Hall. The

Charter has been amended to accommodate many of these comments.

The Charter:

- *identifies a wide range of local issues on which local councils will be consulted*
- *clarifies those amenities which local councils will normally provide and fund, where they are needed*
- *offers the possibility of service-devolution to certain local councils, subject to agreement*
- *provides for local councils to take a leading role in community forums, and to be involved with Area partnership working*
- *encourages the fuller use of ICT (email, websites, etc) to aid communication, consultation and co-operation*
- *promotes high standards*
- *encourages local councils to reach out to the wider community, and to promote democracy*
- *opens the possibility of transferring the Authority's property into local ownership and management.*

The implementation and operation of the Charter will be overseen by a group drawn from the new Authority and from local councils. Some of the Charter's processes – most notably those concerning consultations – will be implemented from Day One, ie 1st April 2009. Others, such as transfers in responsibility for service-provision, will take longer to plan and implement, and no changes are envisaged until April 2010 onwards.

A further key development related to the Charter is the prospective creation of eight new local councils which together will cover all parts of Wansbeck and Blyth Valley: districts which hitherto have been unparished. A great deal of support is being planned to enable these new local councils, whose first elections will be held in June 2009, to put in place the systems and resources so that they can respond to local needs, and also take responsibility in 2010 for the same sorts of services already run by existing local councils elsewhere in Northumberland.

For any queries or comments, contact David Francis at Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY, telephone 01670 517178, email: davidfrancis@ca-north.org.uk

## WEST NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BUILDINGS CONSORTIUM

THE WEST NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BUILDINGS CONSORTIUM, which consists of Village and Community Halls plus other Community buildings, was formed in May 2008, now has 37 members and many more Halls are considering membership.

The benefits of membership are the discounts that the Consortium is able to negotiate on behalf of its members. So far, members have enjoyed significant savings on insurance and the Consortium is now looking at electrical and emergency systems inspection and maintenance plus electricity supply.

The Consortium is also able to offer help and advice to its members and is planning a special meeting in May at which a specialist will talk about improving the energy efficiency in Village and Community Halls and the use of renewable energy. The Consortium issued its second Newsletter to members earlier in January.

Chairman of the Consortium Mike Wood of Greenhead said that it is very pleasing that the Consortium is able to help many Village and Community Hall with help, advice, cost reduction and networking. He said that there are another thirty Halls in the West Northumberland area who are still to join the Consortium and he urged them to pay the modest joining fee of £10 to obtain the benefits for their halls and their communities, and at the same time enhance the Consortium's buying power.

Contact for more information - Adrian Hinchcliffe, Secretary to the Consortium. Tel 01661 843896 Email adrian.hinchcliffe@bopenworld.com

## Continuing Support for Local Organisations

THERE WERE A LOT of happy faces at Christmas and the New Year as local voluntary organisations received news of their council funding for next year. Last summer the County Council pledged to continue for next year the year-on-year support which the 7 previous authorities had been giving to the VCS (Voluntary Community Sector) from their core budgets.

This was no mean commitment. It has been known for some time that the new unitary authority's budget would be tight, not only because of the costs of LGR (Local Government Reorganisation), but also due to the nationwide pressure from H M Treasury to make efficiency savings and the state of the economy. So, the protection of year-on-year funding for the VCS is both significant and welcome.

Implementing the pledge has also been an administrative challenge, not least in identifying all of the current arrangements in all 7 authorities. They are handled through different departments. They are variously described as grants, donations, SLA payments (service level agreements) and contracts. The funds are located in a myriad of places within council accounting systems.

Over 150 letters and customised proformas were sent to VCS bodies at Christmas, with a deadline of 23 January for respondents to confirm or query the details. In March, it is planned to follow this up with an application process, to ascertain and agree the purposes of the funding, and any monitoring and reporting arrangements.

The VCS funding database has been compiled from information which was supplied and subsequently verified by all 7 principal authorities. If any voluntary body feels it has 'fallen through the net', please contact the team as soon as possible.

The main contacts for this work are:

**David Francis** - davidfrancis@ca-north.org.uk tel: 01670 517178

**Stuart Lawson** - slawson@northumberland.gov.uk tel: 01670 533935



### A date for your DIARY ...

Whalton Village Hall will host our Spring Meeting on Wednesday afternoon 13 May 2008, beginning at 2.30pm.

More detail will appear in the next issue of CAN News.

# Food & Drink Update NSP

By John Cooper of Northumberland Strategic Partnership



IN ORDER TO IMPROVE understanding and relationships between some of the food and drink activities underway in Northumberland, NSP and LEADER+ North Northumberland have taken the lead in bringing relevant organisations and projects together to share information on their aims, specific activities and future plans.

Meetings have involved a wide range of organisations and projects and have enabled organisations to get a better understanding of the aims of other projects and to make links with the organisations and projects represented.

The NSP has recently produced a document to summarise the key activities operating in Northumberland to assist those people at the meetings and anyone wanting to find out more about how to get support for a particular food and drink related activity.

At the same time an attempt was made to relate these activities to the key issues affecting the food and drink sector as identified in key regional and sub-regional strategies and plans, as well as identify the target audience of each activity (e.g. some activity worked directly with food producers, others with tourism and hospitality businesses etc).

The most recent meeting of the Northumberland Food and Drink Exchange (FADE) was held on 24th November at Stannington Village Hall. The event included guest speakers from Northumberland Tourism's Made in Northumberland Project and the English Farming and Food Partnership.

A wide range of delegates attended the event which was aimed at those organisations and groups working with and supporting food producers, retailers and the hospitality sector - for example farmers' markets, food festival organisers, environmental health officers and training providers.

The event also provided an opportunity for delegates to input into the latest draft of the "Food and Drink in Northumberland" document. Northumberland College's new mobile learning unit was present at the event for delegates to look round.

The "Food and Drink in Northumberland" document is available to download from [www.nsp.org.uk/foodanddrink](http://www.nsp.org.uk/foodanddrink). It will be updated so please get in touch if you would like to highlight any relevant activities.

## NORTHUMBERLAND FOOD AND DRINK GROUP

A dedicated area has been launched on Northumberland's Rural Voices Network for anyone interested in the food and drink sector.

The Northumberland Food and Drink Group includes the latest news and events relating to the sector, as well as information on sources of support / guidance available to food and drink projects and activities. In addition, the Group provides the opportunity for members to network with each other.

The Group will also be used to cascade the outcomes of the work described above and includes notes and presentations relating to the Food and Drink Exchange.

The Group can be accessed via [http://network.ruralvoices.org.uk/food\\_and\\_drink](http://network.ruralvoices.org.uk/food_and_drink) or [www.nsp.org.uk/foodanddrink](http://www.nsp.org.uk/foodanddrink) (If you are not a member of Rural Voices you will need to register before being able to view the pages).

For further information contact John Cooper at the Northumberland Strategic Partnership on 01670 500 354 or [JOCooper@nsp.org.uk](mailto:JOCooper@nsp.org.uk) or visit [www.nsp.org.uk/foodanddrink](http://www.nsp.org.uk/foodanddrink)

## BELFORD GETS ITS QUARRY

TWO GROUPS IN BELFORD are celebrating the award of £20,159 of funding from the COMMA Fund.

Bell View have been awarded £12,600 to replace their ageing vehicle used to operate the Bringo transport service. The Bringo service is a demand responsive service which enables older people access to essential services.

Belford Development Trust have been awarded £7,559 to improve disabled access to Bank House and improve the flooring within the building. Bank House was donated to the community when Barclays Bank closed and is now used for a wide variety of community activities.

The COMMA Fund is a three year scheme with funding drawn from DEFRA's Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. DEFRA have commissioned Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) to deliver the scheme in partnership with Community Action Northumberland, along with 22 other members of the Rural Community Action Network.

Round 2 of the scheme is due to open in early 2009. Funding is available for communities that have been affected by aggregates quarrying activity and situated within 10km of an aggregates quarry site.

For more information contact Marc Johnson on 01289 304141 or email [marcjohnson@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:marcjohnson@ca-north.org.uk)

# VILLAGE HALLS SCOOP LOTTERY JACKPOT

THREE VILLAGE HALLS in Northumberland have been successful in the final round of awards through the Big Lottery Fund's Community Buildings programme. The three halls have been awarded a total of £711,882 between them.

## COMMUNITY GIVING

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS in Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, with community based environmental projects, are being urged to apply for the next round of Local Action on Global Issues grant funding at the Community Foundation.

Grants of between £1,000 and £20,000 are available for revenue and capital projects that have a positive impact on the environment and raise awareness/ educate people on global environmental issues. If you would like more information contact Katie Wellstead at the Community Foundation on 0191 222 0945 or visit [www.communityfoundation.org.uk](http://www.communityfoundation.org.uk)

## NORTHUMBERLAND COMPACT - VOLUNTEER CODE

THE NORTHUMBERLAND COMPACT is a short and simple agreement between the public sector and the voluntary & community sector (VCS). It is a commitment from both sides to work in partnership for the benefit and support of local communities.

We are currently requesting comments on a draft Volunteering Code of good practice. If you are signed up to the Compact we would like to hear your views. You can read the draft by visiting the news section of the VCS Consortium website [www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk) or contact Lynda Watson, [lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk) Tel 01670 500815

## HALLMARK 1

FOLLOWING THE HALLMARK 1 TRAINING undertaken in November 08, we are pleased to say that we have started to see a trickle of applications from halls/community buildings wishing to enter for the scheme.

If your hall is ready to apply for Hallmark 1, please contact me at the address/e-mail below and I will forward the application form to you. Two Visitors (assessors) will be allocated to your hall/building and they will contact you directly to arrange a mutually convenient time to come and undertake the visit. Felton Village Hall and Whitley Chapel Memorial Hall have already achieved Hallmark 1 status.

As we have stressed in the past, our Visitors are a group of experienced management trustees. Whilst the visit will be undertaken in a professional and thorough manner, those that have been undertaken already have proved to be most enjoyable for all parties.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the Hallmark Scheme, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will be happy to discuss it with you.

Louise Currie Tel: 01670 517178. Email: [louisecurrie@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:louisecurrie@ca-north.org.uk)



*Pictured: some of the Felton Village Hall management committee*

# POINTS MEAN PRIZES FOR VILLAGE HALLS

MOST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES of village halls and community buildings should have received a letter from their local District Council inviting them to apply for what is known as Discretionary Rate Relief for the year April 2009 to March 2010.

There is a guaranteed relief for 80% of the business rates chargeable on non-residential properties if they are registered charities or are Community Amateur Sports Clubs. It's up to the discretion of the Local Authority whether it charges the remaining 20%. This is the portion known as Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR). When determining how much of that 20% should be awarded, those Local Authorities responsible for collecting rates are expected to devise policies which are consistent, fair and proportionate. In Northumberland, on the cusp of unitary local government, bringing together the DRR policies of six very different Districts each with its own way of doing things, this has not been an easy task.

After discussions with the two Community Building Consortia in the county (covering the north and west) and CAN, the criteria to determine the level of relief were finally agreed by the Council and a single policy was accepted. It has been stressed that the intention of the new countywide arrangement is to be revenue neutral. That means that the aggregate effect is not to either raise more money from rates by offering less relief, or award more relief than in the current year 2008-09.

The award of rates relief is based on the extent to which the building in question benefits the local community. This is determined by the answers to a series of questions each of which is scored. If the applicant scores over 66 points, it will receive the full 20% relief which on top of the 80% mandatory relief will mean a zero rate demand. So in a world where points mean prizes, it is important that village halls and other community buildings are able to demonstrate their worth. For the overwhelming majority, this should not be difficult.

One of the questions asks whether the "organisation is affiliated to a local or national representative body?". In the north and west of the county we are fortunate to have two consortia whose members are exclusively drawn from village halls and community buildings. They meet regularly and are very valuable sources of information about everything from obtaining discounts on insurance to where to find the best value fire extinguishers. In addition to these benefits, membership of these organisations might now win you points as well and hence reduce your rates bill.

If you have received an application form, you are advised to return it within the next few weeks. If you haven't but think you might be entitled to DRR then we strongly advise you to contact the taxation office of your District authority.

**North Northumberland Village Halls Consortium -**  
Sylvia Harrison Tel: 01670 787127 or sylvia.harrison2@talktalk.net

**West Northumberland Community Buildings Consortium -**  
Adrian Hinchcliffe Tel: 01661 843896  
or adrian.hinchcliffe@bopenworld.com



## From Shaun to Vaughan

In January our community development officer Shaun Hogg left CAN to move to a new post in Social Services. We greatly appreciated his enthusiasm and contribution to our work during the relatively short period that he was with us.

As a temporary measure, while we are awaiting confirmation of our future budget, we are pleased to be joined by Sue Vaughan. Sue has enormous experience of the grant aid scene, having worked previously for the National Lottery Charities board and the Northern Rock Foundation, among others. Sue is based, along with Jane Hart, in our Hexham office.

Sue can be contacted on 01434 607871 or by email on [suevaughan@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:suevaughan@ca-north.org.uk)



## Changes to the Awards for All Programme

'FROM 1 APRIL 2009 the Awards for All programme is changing. In the past the programme has delivered funding on behalf of Arts Council England, Big Lottery Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund and Sport England. The changes will mean that each of these lottery distributors will run their own programmes, instead of contributing to Awards for All. The new Awards for All programme will deliver funding from the Big Lottery Fund only. To find out more about these changes please come along to one of the funding events listed below;

**Tuesday 10th March - 10.00am - 12.00 noon**  
The William Elder Building, Berwick upon Tweed

**Wednesday 11th March - 10.00am - 12.00 noon**  
Hexham Community Centre, Hexham

**Thursday 12th March - 10.00am - 12.00 noon**  
Stannington Village Hall, Morpeth

Places are limited, so please reserve your place by contacting Sue Andrew (CAN) by email on [sueandrew@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:sueandrew@ca-north.org.uk) or by post, to CAN, Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth NE61 1PY

## Have Your Say Over BIG



THE BIG LOTTERY FUND (BIG) is the largest of all Big Lottery distributors and has been a very welcome source of funds to our sector over recent years. Regionally we have done better than most. The North East has been awarded more than £108 million and over 4400 projects have benefited. Many of those have received funds from the popular Awards for All programme.

One of the current commitments from BIG is that at least 60-70% of its total funding should go to the Third Sector (voluntary and community sector). In many parts of England this proportion is exceeded and is a measure of the quality of the sector's applications as well as the level of demand.

BIG is now consulting about its future programmes and about its commitment to our sector. The consultation runs until the end of February 2009.

Question 4 of the consultation (there are ten questions covering the UK in total) asks: "After 2012, when our 60-70% undertaking ends, should we continue to guarantee a percentage of our funding goes to the voluntary and community sector?" The questionnaire allows the choice of only one of the following answers:

1. Funding should go to the organisation in the best position to deliver the project outcomes, whichever sector they are from
2. BIG should extend its undertaking to the voluntary and community sector beyond 2012
3. No opinion

At first sight it might be tempting to answer 1 or even 3, but we would urge you to answer 2. Only this response will guarantee the continued high proportion of funding to the sector. The Lottery is not immune from seepage (£638 million to the Olympics from BIG alone) and this tendency might increase if not tightly ring fenced.

To respond to the consultation go to [www.big-thinking.org.uk](http://www.big-thinking.org.uk) and select Consultation Survey. It should only take about 15 minutes. Your opinion really does matter and remember the closing date is February 27th.

## READER SURVEY

Please spare a little time to complete the survey issued with this edition and return it to us by 20 March. Your response will help us to improve what we do.

Thank you.

## NEW TRUSTEES FOR CAN

WE ARE PLEASED TO WELCOME two new members to our CAN Executive Committee. Cllr Robert Arckless is a long-time friend of CAN. He is an Amble man, and sits on all three tiers of council (Northumberland County, Alnwick District and Amble Town), as well as the Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee, which he chairs.



Robert is a former carer and is also disabled; he is aware from his own experience of the pressures carers face and the day to day reality of living with a disability. A keen champion of equality issues, away from Council duties Robert is an active member of his local Parish Church and enjoys attempting to improve his swimming skills at his local pool.



Venerable Peter Robinson succeeded Bob Langley in March 2008 as the Arch-deacon of Lindisfarne. He has a strong background in partnership and regeneration work, as well as urban ministry, having been the leader of the Urban Ministry and Theology Project in East Newcastle which enabled the local churches to engage with social and economic regeneration. He is already involved with the Northumberland VCS Consortium, as well as a hostel for young people in Seahouses. He lives in Morpeth with his two teenage sons and wife Sarah, who teaches adults in North Tyneside.

## "BETTER COMMUNITY GROUPS" TRAINING PROGRAMME

ARE YOU THE CHAIRMAN, Secretary or Treasurer of a voluntary and community group? Would you like to improve your knowledge, skills and abilities and run your group more effectively?

If you answer "Yes" to these questions, you might be interested in a new programme of training being organised by Community Action Northumberland. The programme starts in February and March 2009 with a series of introductory sessions for chairmen, secretaries or treasurers giving basic advice. These will be followed by more detailed training later in the year. The dates and venues will depend on interest.

To register your interest, please contact: Jane Hart, Senior Community Development Officer, Community Action Northumberland, Community Centre, Gilesgate, Hexham, NE46 3NP Telephone: 01434 607871 Email: [janehart@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:janehart@ca-north.org.uk)

DAVID FRANCIS WRITES... CAN has had a very long relationship with the Northumberland Pre-School Learning Alliance (formerly, the Pre-School Playgroup Association). NPLA/NPPA has provided the expert support and encouragement to local groups throughout the county. These groups provide vital childcare services in local neighbourhoods and communities which are not directly served by council provision. They also enable the provision of key networking and support for otherwise-isolated parents, especially mothers, and they form a key link between young families and the wider community. Numerous research studies over several decades have demonstrated the contribution which the voluntary pre-school sector makes to community empowerment, confidence and responsibility within communities.

Due to the little-publicised cessation of council funding in 2006, there are doubts about NPLA's future, so CAN News has invited NPLA's Anne Raine to contribute this article on NPLA's activities and achievements.

# A CUT TOO FAR

by Anne Raine

FOR OVER 30 YEARS the Northumberland Pre-school Learning Alliance (NPLA) has worked with pre-school playgroups – OfSTED registered groups caring for children age 2-5 years old and baby & toddler groups, where the parent/carer stays in the group with their child.

However this might soon end if no new funding can be found. The NPLA local support services to Alliance member pre-schools and all baby & toddler groups, whether members of the Alliance or not, will cease after the end of March 2009.

Currently these services include:

- Support to 62 voluntary managed pre-schools with governance and management options and 'doorstep' training to help volunteers and staff carry out the work needed to manage a pre-school group.
- Support and advice to 100 baby & toddler groups on management options, health & safety and practical activities for very young children. We also help with the promotion of these groups as the first opportunity for fun, friendship and learning outside the home.
- Annual Songs at Christmas events – unique to Northumberland these events bring together children, childcare practitioners and parents/carers to celebrate Christmas through song. Events are held in Alnwick and Hexham (now in their 16th year) Berwick, Morpeth and Blyth.

We have many strengths as an organisation. We understand the issues faced by pre-school communities, have a proven track record of working across the county, and deliver close to the point of need. Our volunteers and staff have a breadth of skills and knowledge and are committed to the pre-school community ethos and most importantly the promotion of parental involvement in all aspects of delivery. These strengths have shaped our current activities. We believe that without the specialist guidance and assistance we offer, groups, organisers, and in particular, children, could be at greater risk.

There have been considerable changes in childcare during the last seven years but the key and consistent elements are the commitment and enthusiasm of the hundreds of volunteers who run and manage local pre-school and baby & toddler groups. We firmly believe that voluntary managed community pre-school groups are at the heart of every community and deserve specialist support, advice and guidance and recognition for the valuable service they provide.

## BACKGROUND

In the early years (1970's) it was volunteers from playgroups across the county who met and organised events and training courses, and gained the financial support to employ development workers to support the growth of local pre-school playgroups. Community Action Northumberland was also very supportive, helping to secure funding from rural development and European sources and providing a small office rent free until funding was found.

In 1989 with childcare provision becoming an increasingly higher priority on the local government agenda, a grant was secured from Northumberland County Council Social Services Directorate. This enabled us to recruit additional development workers, pay for our central office, employ an administrator and expand our successful Special Needs Project which had been set up in 1985 in South East Northumberland, to cover the whole of Northumberland. We successfully worked with the County Council's Social Services Directorate up until March 2004.

The late 1990's saw us using our specialist knowledge and experience of supporting childcare provision and children with additional needs to help establish the County Council's Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership (EYDCP). We secured the development and support contract for the pre-school sector and our Early Years Inclusion Service (as it was now called) and was awarded the DfES contract for the Area SENCO pilot scheme, the only voluntary organisation out of the four pilot projects across England. In April 2004 we secured a further small grant from the EYDCP to develop our baby & toddler 'Get Stuck In!' project.

We worked in partnership with Northumberland County Council until March 2006, when our grant was withdrawn. Although it had every right to decide to discontinue funding us, it was the lack of consultation and opportunity to present our case which was most frustrating. Little wonder that many are convinced that the reason why some infrastructure childcare support services delivered by the VCS have gone 'in-house' had much more to do with concentrating control than improving services for children.

Despite this huge blow, our volunteers once again took a central role in shaping the way forward for the Alliance here in Northumberland, working towards the continuation of our support services, albeit in a reduced way. We obtained a two-year grant from the NSP via the Northumberland VCS Consortium to continue our services. This year we have been operating by using our reserves and been busy preparing funding bids.

Hard work, resourcefulness and a positive can-do attitude has helped NPLA, continue from year to year. Unfortunately unless we are able to secure further funding then we will have to close down at the end of March 2009.

We have long been the voice and support of our children's early years. If you want that to continue, please write to your local councillor and/or MP expressing your concerns and explaining just why that is worth a small investment.



Making shakers at the Music and Movement session at Lancaster Park Baby and Toddler Group

## Innovative networking website launches in Northumberland



By John Cooper of NSP

A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITE, designed to support the development of rural Northumberland, has been launched.

The first of its kind in England, Rural Voices is an interactive resource for anyone who lives, works or is interested in Northumberland, with the added aim of encouraging the rural development of the county and was originally developed by Northumberland County Council in response to calls from the county's businesses and communities following the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Thanks to an investment of £40,000 by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP), with support from One North East, the redeveloped site uses new technology to allow users to share news and events with each other, create groups, take part in online discussions, upload photos and provide a web presence for their organisation or group.

Janice Rose, acting executive director with NSP, said: "The launch of the new Rural Voices website is an important development in our bid to encourage and promote rural activity in Northumberland.

"It's a highly interactive, free resource which keeps people up to date with local news and events and enables them to interact with others across the county – no matter how remote their location."

John Hamilton, economic development officer at Northumberland County Council, added: "Rural Voices provides Northumberland's communities with the latest in e-based approaches. It gives users access to what's happening nationally, but more importantly to what is happening locally and how they can work within their communities and groups to tackle their needs.

"We hope it will enable them to work together with other partners and agencies; it is an important part of efforts to use new technologies for the benefit of Northumberland's communities."

To become a member or to find out more, visit the Rural Voices website: [www.ruralvoices.org.uk](http://www.ruralvoices.org.uk).

## WHAT WE DO

Community Action Northumberland provides a range of advice and support services for community and voluntary groups to enable people throughout Northumberland to overcome disadvantages and improve their quality of life. These services include:

- Funding advice
- Management committee development
- Advice on constitutions, charity law and legal structures
- Support for village halls / community buildings
- Project management support
- Local regeneration
- Support for parish councils
- Employment services
- Production of community newspaper

Additionally CAN seeks to

- work in partnership to facilitate the development of new, and to support existing networks of local voluntary and community groups, in order to enable them to be a mechanism for developing collaborative work across the sector.
- influence and work with decision-makers to provide, with partners, conduits for the diverse views of the local voluntary and community sector to be voiced and heard within the decision making structures, regionally and nationally.

CAN is anxious to ensure that it effectively performs these roles and therefore operates a process of continuous evaluation. This requires feedback from our users and partners. Any comments on our performance are not only welcomed but essential to help us to make sure that we are meeting the overall needs of users and maintaining our quality standards.

CAN News is published bi monthly. It contains useful information on sources of advice and funding, helps to alert people to changes in legislation or service provision which may affect them, and passes on ideas and news from one community to another. Contributions and items of informative and newsworthy value are welcomed. Please get in touch with the editor, Louise Currie, at Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY or email items direct to [info@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:info@ca-north.org.uk)

Copy deadline for the next issue is Friday 20th March 2009

For more information on Community Action check out their website at : [www.ca-north.org.uk](http://www.ca-north.org.uk)

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