

MID DECEMBER 2007 - MID FEBRUARY 2008

Season's Greetings

to all the staff and trustees
at Community Action Northumberland.

The office will be closed from midday
Friday 21st December opening again on
Wednesday 2nd January.

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NEWS

Community Action
Northumberland



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CAN's AGM 2007

By Alan Hedley

NEWTON AND BYWELL Community Hall hosted CAN's Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 7 November. CAN's President, the Duke of Northumberland welcomed all and introduced Adrian Hinchcliffe, Secretary of the Hall management committee, who extended a warm welcome on behalf of the Hall's trustees and gave an interesting overview of the conversion of the former Newton WI Hall to a village hall trust involving the whole community of Newton and Bywell. The demolition of the old hall and construction of the new building on the footprint of the old was a lesson in community action. Adrian acknowledged the support that had been given by CAN from the early stages of the project.

The achievement of the communities of Acklington (winner) and Wylam and Norham (joint runners up) in the Northumberland Calor Village of the Year 2007 was recognised when CAN's President presented representatives from Acklington and Wylam with plaques. (Norham, were unable to send a representative).

In the business part of the meeting, CAN's chairman the Venerable Bob Langley, gave a report on the year, Barbara McKie, Honorary Treasurer, presented the Financial Statements and David Francis, Director explained the proposed amendments to the Constitution and CAN's President led through the election of officers and Executive Committee members.

In his report the Chairman commented on the change of name from the Community Council of Northumberland to Community Action Northumberland, which marked a new phase in the life of the organisation; changes within the ACRE network with the objective of bringing greater coherence to the work of Rural Community Councils, helping to present a more unified front and constitutional changes which became fully operational after the AGM.

The last year had seen the debate about the future of local government in the county. Now that the decision for a single unitary authority had been made there is an important framework for CAN's work in the coming year.

CAN, along with its support and development work, will have a key role in establishing empowered Community Forums. CAN's Director will be part of the Joint Implementation Team which should help to ensure that the role of the VCS is embedded in the operations of the new Council.

The Chairman welcomed 6 new trustees who had been recruited since the Spring meeting in May, and thanked all CAN staff and trustees for all of their hard work. Thanks also went to Mrs Judith Arthur and Mr John Lewis whose time as Executive Trustees had come to an end.

Our guest speaker was Ms Jill Dixon, Deputy Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council, who is the programme director overseeing the creation of the new unitary authority. Describing the aims of the reorganisation and the detailed work of the Joint Implementation Team, she emphasised the important role of the voluntary and community sector in ensuring the provision

of excellent services. The application of the Natural Communities initiative would enable communities and voluntary bodies to engage with the authority at a variety of levels, as well as opening up new opportunities for service-delivery.

Jill emphasised that the changes would be transformation, not just transition. The aim was not only to merge 7 existing authorities into one, but to transform the way in which local government works with its communities. Jill's presentation encouraged a wide and varied set of questions and discussion among all those present, and CAN trustee George Scott, of Seahouses, led the vote of thanks.



Representatives from Acklington receive their winners award. Left to right: Lorna Budge, Dave Currie, Vi Currie, the Duke of Northumberland, Derk Morris (Calor), Sharon Thorpe and Dave Hammond.
Photo by Nicky Westgate Photography

CAN Plan for the Year Ahead

EVERY AUTUMN, we begin planning for the year ahead, which for us means the year from April to March. Early in the process we survey a wide range of community groups and other stakeholders, as well as holding discussions with key funders and service-providers. By Christmas, we have agreed the 'headlines' of our strategy. By the end of January we aim to have compiled a more detailed Action Plan, identifying a range of proposals, together with key milestones, people's responsibilities and expected outcomes.

Communities Working Together

We have reported previously in Community News about the Natural Communities Initiative, which defines the geographical make-up of Northumberland as a number of 'tiers', ranging from the parish or neighbourhood through to the County level. A final phase of consultation over the boundaries of the 26 Belonging Communities and the 3 Characteristic Communities came to an end in November and it is hoped to reach a conclusion in January.

Attention is quite rightly now being given to the next steps: a widespread consultation exercise to define and agree the role, activities, composition, resourcing and development of community forums at the 'Belonging' level. This will be a major piece of work, involving a wide range of groups and organisations in all parts of Northumberland, including all parish councils, with help and support for the consultation being supplied by voluntary and community sector staff, as well as local government.

In the meantime, on behalf of the NSP, we thank all of those communities and organisations who contributed thoughtfully and enthusiastically to the consultation about the boundaries. The outcome should soon be clear.

Not surprisingly, our plans for next year focus greatly on helping the voluntary and community sector adapt to a significantly changing local government and public sector scene: the development of VCS activity at all 4 levels of 'Natural Community'; helping parish councils and appropriate voluntary organisations to be able to deliver principal authority services; brokering the transfer of property to become community assets; helping public bodies to understand and work with the VCS; enabling the VCS to engage with (and benefit from) the new European development programmes; and so on.

However, as our recent survey of 'users' showed, there is still an enormous need and demand for our direct advisory and support services: for parish councils, community buildings committees, and a wider range of both local and area-wide voluntary bodies. As well as providing expertise on funding, project development, legal/managerial issues, good-practice, constitutions etc through our offices in Berwick, Alnwick, Morpeth and Hexham, we will also continue to work in a complementary way with our Council of Voluntary Service colleagues in Blyth Valley and Wansbeck to offer some of our more specialist expertise (e.g. on community buildings, VAT and local governance) in those areas.

The current Action Plan and current Business Plan can be viewed on our CAN website www.ca-north.org.uk The new Action Plan should be available from February 2008.

NORTHERN ROCK

THERE CAN BE VERY FEW voluntary organisations or community groups in Northumberland who are unaware of the beneficial impact the Northern Rock Foundation (the Foundation) has made in the Voluntary and Community Sector within the North East in the last 10 years. The Foundation has been supported through an annual donation of 5% of Northern Rock plc's pre-tax profits, which to date amounts to £190m, enabling them to award grants to a wide range of groups in the North East and Cumbria.

The recent and ongoing crisis at Northern Rock plc has forced the Foundation to reassess its work programme for 2008 and set a reduced initial total grants budget of £7m. The seven grants programmes that have been operated since September 2006 will be reduced to three from January 2008. The continuing three programmes are: Safety and Justice, Building Positive Lives and Independence and Choice.

The Foundation also stresses, to organisations that already have grants and those that receive them in the future, that because of careful financial management and planning, organisations can be absolutely assured that the Foundation has funds set aside to meet all their outstanding commitments. Grants awarded over several years will be paid as planned.

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On 29 November 2007 the Foundation issued a full statement regarding their position and that can be read on their website www.nr-foundation.org.uk

Community Action Northumberland acknowledges the contribution Northern Rock Foundation has made in tackling disadvantage and improving the quality of life in North East England and Cumbria. We appreciate the difficulties the organisation, staff and trustees are facing and have every faith that it will continue to strive to do its utmost to continue to further the Foundation's aims.

HALLMARK SCHEME

By Louise Currie

IN MAY THIS YEAR, CAN launched a pilot scheme for Hallmark, which is an accredited Quality Standard for Village Halls and Community Buildings.

Since the launch, over forty five halls/buildings have registered to take part in the scheme. Such a great response proves that committees are keen to ensure that their buildings are managed and run well.

Training events, in November, for the twelve Hallmark Scheme 'Visitors' (assessors) were most successful. Following on from this training the Visitors will be undertaking the first Level 1 assessment of a Hall, early in the New Year. CAN then plan to invite interested representatives of halls/buildings to find out more about the assessment procedure and how to enter their hall/building for Level 1 assessment. If you are interested in registering your hall for the scheme, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you are interested in becoming a Visitor for the scheme, please let me know. CAN are particularly looking for Visitors who live in the Middle/West side of the County, - including Kielder, Bellingham, Rochester, Otterburn, Newbrough and Wark areas. (Please note, that Visitors must be, or have been, a member of a Village Hall/Community Building Management Committee)

For further information, please contact Louise Currie on 01670 500816 / 517178 or at the CAN office in Morpeth. E-mail address; louisecurrie@ca-north.org.uk

FIRE AWARENESS TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

VILLAGE HALL AND COMMUNITY BUILDINGS MANAGEMENT committees are being offered an opportunity to take part in a Fire Awareness Training Session. This valuable training has been arranged by Community Action Northumberland, in co-operation with North Northumberland Village Hall Consortium and the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and is open to all halls/buildings in the county. The session will be free of charge.

The training will reinforce the committee's role and responsibility in respect of fire safety topics and the actions to be taken in the event of an emergency fire situation in their building.

The session will cover

- Action to be taken in the event of a fire
- Evacuation of the building
- Fire safety awareness
- Hazard awareness
- Conduct of fire drills
- Chemistry of combustion and fire behavior
- Theoretical and practical use of fire extinguishers

There are four potential dates on offer from John Bell (Fire Service) to undertake this 2 - 2½ hour session – Tues 5th February, Weds 6th February, Tues 12th February or Weds 13th February. The actual dates and times will be finalised depending upon the response from management committees.

If you or members of your committee are interested in attending, please contact louisecurrie@ca-north.org.uk or write to Louise Currie, Community Initiatives Officer, CAN, Tower Buildings, 9, Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY as soon as possible.

New Look Local Area Agreement

By George Courtice

NORTHUMBERLAND'S FIRST LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA) Working Together, was promoted as a mechanism for ensuring that the priorities of Central Government took account of local circumstances. Each local area then negotiates its very own LAA. In Northumberland, the County Council took the lead but was partnered by the six Districts, the Local Strategic Partnerships and other key partners like the Care Trust and the voluntary and community sector.

The new look LAA, which is planned to be signed off by Ministers in June of next year, is for a further period of three years. This new agreement promises to take account of the central message of last autumn's Local Government White Paper Strong and Prosperous Communities, that decisions affecting communities are best made when those communities have a say in making them. In this respect the new look LAA also promises to challenge the "Whitehall knows best" philosophy and might even reduce bureaucracy. In theory the new arrangements should simplify some central funding, help join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions.

The current 90 page Northumberland LAA was launched in March 2006 and sets out a number of targets over a range of different themes covering health & older people, children & young people, stronger safer communities and economic development. In a way it was the cart before the horse. The vision for where we were planning to travel had not yet been discussed, shared or agreed. With the arrival this summer of the Sustainable Community Strategy, after an extensive period of consultation, the horse has arrived and should make it much easier to determine the nature of the cart. In this respect it is helpful to view the LAA as the delivery arm of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The new LAA is committed to a smaller more focused set of priorities as well as a radically reduced number of national indicators used for measuring them. An amazing 1200 indicators for assessing performance have been reduced to fewer than 200 and cover everything from childhood obesity to domestic waste. From these 200 indicators, each area must choose up to 35 plus an additional 17 statutory targets of educational attainments and early years. The absence of mandatory targets is clearly a move in the right direction. In addition a number of Central Government grants flowing to local authorities and their public body partners, hitherto ring fenced for particular purposes, will be pooled and allocated according to the LAA priorities. Again, this transfers power away from Whitehall.

A few of the 200 national indicators relate directly to the voluntary and community sector:

- *Participation in regular volunteering*
- *Environment for a thriving third sector*

Many more relate to the services our sector provides:

- *Participation in sport*
- *Percentage of people who feel they belong to their community*
- *Engagement in the arts*
- *People supported to live independently*

The targets will be selected over the next few months and the commissioning arrangements decided after that. The extent to which the VCS is involved in delivering the new agreement will be a measure of the public sector's commitment to engage the sector in both the design and delivery of services. In this respect the Northumberland Compact will provide firm foundations on which to construct new relationships between the voluntary and community sector and public bodies and will be an important component of the LAA.

And to think that only a few years ago many of us thought that LAA stood for the Livestock Auctioneers' Association!

To discover more about the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy visit www.northumberlandtogether.org.uk

"CALLING ALL CLERKS"

THE NEXT Northumberland Branch meeting of the Society of Local Council Clerks will take place on Tuesday 4th March 2008 (10.30 am) at Wylam Institute, writes Gillian Turner, Chair of the Branch. All clerks are welcome to attend – even if they are not currently members of the SLCC.

The benefits of belonging to the society and attending quarterly meetings are many – but most importantly they are an invaluable source of advice and support. Here is what one new clerk, Barbara Coulson, Heddon on the Wall, had to say:-

"A new Clerk can feel quite daunted at first by the amount and diversity of information that needs to be quickly learned. I was soon made aware of the SLCC and its aims and discovered that the Society offers friendship and practical support, which in turn provides Town and Parish Councils with the benefit of a properly trained and well informed Clerk. I soon met with other local Clerks and was made very welcome at the local SLCC meetings. I regularly contact my new colleagues for advice or information on something I haven't come across before. I have used the Clerks' Advisory Service for in-depth advice on more complex issues. Essential publications for Clerks and Councils are all available under one roof, and at special membership prices, together with information on recommended training programmes. The regular Clerks' forums allow you to find out what is going on in the wider world and also to discuss day to day issues with other Clerks in an informal and social atmosphere."

Please make a note in your diary. Gillian and other members look forward to meeting you on the day.

Your Community Building Counts

By Alan Hedley

HOW CAN YOU save energy, reduce your energy bills and have a positive impact on climate change at the same time?

This is just one of the questions addressed in a new publication, "Your community building counts" produced through the Every Action Counts programme.

This valuable booklet will be especially useful to the management committees of the many and various community buildings operating in Northumberland. Within the pages it explains the concept of sustainability and suggests five building blocks to help committees to ensure their building's sustainability. These are:

- *save energy*
- *travel wisely*
- *shop ethically*
- *save our resources*
- *care for your are*

Each of these areas is covered through suggestions and case studies in what is an innovative small booklet.

The booklet has been produced through the Every Action Counts programme with assistance from ACRE (Action for Communities in Rural England) and Community Matters. It is published in electronic format and can be downloaded from <http://www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/guides/yourcommunitybuildingv1.pdf>

More ideas, information and resources are available on the Every Action Counts website which is constantly being updated. For a piece of the action go to www.everyactioncounts.org.uk

FREE Website Training

NEED A WEBSITE? The Media Trust has been running an invaluable "Introduction to Web Design Training" under their Improving Reach Project. Amongst other things the instructor introduced participants to free, easy to use software enabling them to set up their own websites.

One of the priority groups was voluntary organisations in isolated rural areas.

The planned courses ended in December. As there is still some funding available it may be possible to arrange some training for groups such as community building committees, in Northumberland, if there was sufficient interest. The courses would be day time, in the morning or afternoon.

If you are interested in a course sometime in February or March then please contact info@ca-north.org.uk or 01670 517178 as soon as possible and no later than 18 January 2008.

Training can only be arranged if there is sufficient response.

Legal Assistance

LAW STUDENTS in their final year at Northumbria University are required, as part of their law degree, to work in the university's Student Law Office. Here they take on cases in a wide range of areas for members of the public on a 'pro bono' or free advice basis. They work under the supervision of qualified solicitors and the quality of their work is assessed and contributes to their final degree classification. Areas of legal work that are currently covered include: Consumer disputes; Welfare Benefits advice; Housing and tenancy problems; Employment; Matrimonial; Education problems including special needs; Criminal Appeals.

Renewed Compact and New Council

by George Courtice

OVER EIGHTY PEOPLE, representing a wide range of voluntary and community organisations, gathered at Longhirst Hall at the beginning of November. The second Standing Conference of the VCS Consortium discovered more about the Northumberland Compact as well as the latest developments in the move towards a single unitary authority covering the whole of the county.

Lynda Watson, the Compact and Contracts Officer, outlined the progress of our local compact and explained that an agreement setting out the ground rules between voluntary and community sector organisations and public bodies was vital if both sides were to benefit from working closer together. The Compact requires both parties to agree undertakings to ensure fair play on both sides and a better deal for the communities they serve.

Guest speaker Paul Barasi of the national Compact Voice gave the audience an insight into what the Compact can achieve by drawing on experiences from other areas. Virtually every corner of the country now has a local compact in place. In those places where both parties can see clear advantages in making sure the undertakings are kept, breaches ought to be rare. The imminent changes in local government structure will give, hopefully, new impetus to a Compact way of working.

David Francis, Director of CAN, explained that the team charged with making the county's transition from seven local authorities (the six districts and the county council) to a single unitary authority, had stressed that the new body was planning to be much more than the total of its parts. The hope was that it would transform into a completely new authority with different ways of working and new relationships with the voluntary and community sector.

At several points in the morning, Raised Eyebrow, a two-handed community theatre group, interrupted proceedings to provide their own light-hearted interpretation on the two main themes. The signing of the Magna Carta and the politics of a pirate ship might seem a long way away from the current forces acting on the voluntary and community sector but, for those who were present, there were some uncanny resemblances.

VILLAGE OF THE YEAR 2008

Calor are again sponsoring the Northumberland Village of the Year competition in 2008.

The entry process involves participating villages or communities completing a written report covering 4 categories prescribed by the competition. Entrants will need to write no more than 500 words in each category of People; Business; Environment and Communications. In addition they need to say, in not more than 500 words, why they consider their village to be special.

More details will appear in the next issue of CAN News. In the meantime if you need some advance information please email northumberlandvillage-of-theyear2008@ca-north.org.uk

CAN's NEW TRUSTEES

COMMUNITY ACTION NORTHUMBERLAND has six new trustees. In our last issue we featured two of those. We now profile Richard Poppleton and Sue Ashmore and welcome them to the governing body of CAN.



RICHARD POPPLETON

Richard was born and educated in Sussex, went to university in Nottingham, reading Biology, and taught in Nottinghamshire for 35 years, the last 12 before retirement as head of a large comprehensive school.

Having retired to Northumberland in 1997 with his long-suffering wife Jane, in 2002 he joined the governing body of an Alnwick middle school and is now chairman. At about the same time he became clerk to the Hedgeley Parish Council and began to get involved with local community activities. He and his community produced a parish plan in 2005 and he then led the effort to raise £25,000 to replace the community play equipment in Powburn in 2007.

These activities brought involvement with the Alnwick Panel which made decisions on GOLD and other community grants. When this panel metamorphosed into the Alnwick Rural Area Network (ARAN), Richard became its chairman. ARAN looks for ways to support local communities in what is now the Alnwick Belonging Community area. At

the same time he was in at the creation of the successful North Northumberland Village Halls Consortium and serves on its management committee.

His other great interest is Northumbrian wildlife and he is very active in the strongly-supported Alnwick Wildlife Group, contributing text and drawings to its monthly newsletter. Richard's daughter and her husband have recently moved to the Bellingham area which cements the family presence in the county.

CAN has been very supportive of many of the community activities in which Richard has been involved and so he was delighted to accept the invitation to join the CAN Executive Committee.



SUE ASHMORE

Sue has lived in Northumberland since the 1980s. Her three sons went to the local schools in Morpeth – St Aidan's/Chantry and King Edward's. When they were safely at school, she resumed her teaching career by teaching French at both Ashington High Schools, then for ten years at Hirst Park Middle school-being a teacher governor. For the past 12 years Sue has taught in the junior department of Central High in Newcastle where she was also the librarian. Sue says she is particularly interested in children's literature, but sadly, appears to be the only person alive who dislikes the Harry Potter stories. But as a life long Aston Villa supporter living in Northumberland she is used to being alone - especially being married to a Birmingham City fan.

Having taken early retirement last year Sue is pleased to have more time to spend in the caravan and to travel abroad. This year she has been to Hong Kong and New Zealand as well as Scotland and France.

For the last 27 years Sue has been a member of Morpeth BPW - which aims to help women achieve their full potential at work and in public life. She is currently a national director with the job of helping members lobby about issues which affect working women. In addition she is also Chair of the North East Women's Forum which has similar aims for the North East of England. Sue says "I am delighted to join CAN and hope to have the time to offer my skills to the organisation".

STREET LAW

Street Law is a concept which began in the USA and has been developed over the last few years in some British university law schools and colleges of law to extend 'pro bono' (i.e free) legal work into local communities and give them a better understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities and the legal and advice structures which support them. At Northumbria experienced students, working in small groups under academic supervision, offer to research an area of general or particular interest to community groups and come to give them a presentation. Since the presentations can be tailor made to suit the groups' needs, the university has found this service can be of real mutual benefit. Students get the chance to research and present law in a useful way to a public audience, and the community group can find out a bit more about their rights, how to safeguard them, and any services which might be available to help them if they have difficulties.

For more information on the free services offered contact Judith Lloyd at the Student Law Office on 0191 227 3909 or by email; la.studentlawoffice@northumbria.ac.uk

BARNARDOS - Believe in Children

"BARNARDOS' Supported Lodgings Scheme finds Supported Lodgings for youngsters needing stability in their lives after leaving care, or who are homeless. The project is looking for people who have a room to spare and can offer temporary accommodation to a young person aged 16 – 21 years of age.

The project needs a number of "Lodgings Providers" for the scheme – single people, couples or families with children – to help them provide homes for these vulnerable young people.

Accommodation providers receive a fee paid directly from the project; the young person also makes a contribution from their income, the amount they can expect to receive in total will be around £140 per week. The financial rewards may seem small but this is an opportunity to make a big difference in a young person's life.

Barnardos offers support and training for the Lodgings providers as well as support groups. Anyone interested in learning more about the scheme can contact:

Carol Preston, Scheme Co-ordinator or Fiona Brown on 01670 714400.

ANOTHER SUCCESS FOR CAN

COMMUNITY ACTION NORTHUMBERLAND (CAN) has once again hosted a series of Meet the Funders events in various locations around Northumberland.

The events are designed to help community or voluntary groups in their quest to raise money for various projects within their local area. These groups work hard to make a difference and are often unsure about who to approach for financial help.

The events were held in Hexham, Morpeth and Belford and were attended by a wealth of funders: The Big Lottery Fund, Community Foundation, Greggs Trust, ESH Charitable Trust, The Banks Community Fund, Northumberland National Park Authority, Unity Trust Bank, Coast AONB, BBC Children in Need, Comic Relief, Sir James Knott Charitable Trust, Tynedale District Council, Tynedale Lions, The Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Joicey Trust, and Castle Morpeth Community Fund.

Funding Information North East and J4B were also in attendance to help with funding advice.

Feedback, from those who visited the events, has been very good. The funders were extremely helpful and informative and the Successful Funding Application workshop, presented by Jim Mackison of the Community Foundation, proved to be popular.

Sue Hacking, Information Officer for CAN, who helped organise the events said: "The events at all venues were hugely successful. By providing people with an information leaflet about making the most of their visit prior to the event, everyone had more idea about what information they needed.

"We are also very grateful to the Funders, FINE and J4B who came along and gave their time and expertise to help the representatives of the many community groups who are looking for funding for their projects."



Nothumberland Compact

Building Relationships Between The Sectors

By Lynda Watson

NORTHUMBERLAND COMPACT was launched in July 2005 with an initial 24 signatories. This is an agreement which contains a commitment from both the Public Sector and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to a guiding set of principles as to how they will do business, and how to behave towards one another.

Issues between the sectors will arise from time to time. The following two recent examples both concern Discretionary Rate Relief. (DDR). Local Authorities have the discretion to grant rate relief from all or part of non domestic rates payable. This is a valuable concession to the voluntary and community sector. Charitable organisations receive 80% mandatory relief but the remaining 20% is discretionary.

EXAMPLE 1 - Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council

In March of this year voluntary and community organisations based in the borough of Berwick were informed by the Council that due to significant financial challenges full discretionary rate relief would discontinue from April 2008.

On behalf of the sector, the Northumberland VCS Consortium took up

this issue and wrote to Berwick Council referring to the Northumberland Compact, and pointing out that there had been no consultation with the VCS over a decision which impacts on the sector.

In August 2007 members of the sector were invited to attend Berwick Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explain how this would affect their organisations. As a result, the initial decision to withdraw discretionary rate relief has been reviewed. A recommendation to re-introduce a budget allocation for the next financial year and to introduce an application procedure to enable voluntary and community sector organisations to apply for discretionary rate relief, has been approved by full council.

Budget decisions will be made at the end of January 2008. If this budget allocation is successful then VCS organisations, currently in receipt of rate relief, will be contacted by Berwick Council with full details of how to apply for discretionary rate relief under a new application process.

EXAMPLE 2 - Castle Morpeth Borough Council

Whilst discussing issues surrounding withdrawal by Berwick of Discretionary Rate Relief, VCS organisations pointed out that Castle Morpeth too had adopted a new policy to reduce the level of discretionary rate relief. Starting April 2007, the level of relief for each community building was to be judged on its contribution to the district's community plan.

The VCS Consortium wrote to Castle Morpeth Borough Council and once again invoked the Northumberland Compact.

Following several meetings with representatives of Castle Morpeth Borough Council it was agreed that concerns regarding discretionary rate relief, particularly in relation to village halls, would be fed into a report to the Executive Board in January 2008.

The guidance, application form and scoring criteria have been altered and aligned to ensure that those applying in 2008/09 have the information they need to understand the process and make a good application. The guidance will also give details of how to appeal and how long the process will take.

VCS organisations have responded to the bills for 2007/08 in a variety of ways, ranging from lodging an appeal or simply just paying up. Many organisations are run by volunteers and these volunteers are faced with the decision either to invest vast amounts of time on bureaucracy or pay up, even though it creates a financial burden.

If you would like Castle Morpeth Borough Council to reconsider your discretionary rate relief application for 2007/08 then please contact Gillian Caisley, on 01670 794729 or gillian.caisley@castlemorpeth.gov.uk

POSITIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION CODE

The Northumberland Compact has a Positive Dispute Resolution Code which was launched at the 2nd VCS Standing Conference on 6th November 2007. This sets out the steps you should follow if there is an issue between your organisation and a public sector organisation, and gives contact details of those who can assist if your own endeavours are not productive.

If you wish to discuss any of the above items please contact: Lynda Watson, Compact & Contracts Officer on 01670 500815 email: lyndawatson@ca-north.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

CAN is anxious to ensure that it effectively supports local communities and therefore operates a process of continuous evaluation. This requires feedback from our users. Any comments on services provided 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.

Community Action Northumberland 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 at Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY or email items direct to alanhedley@ca-north.org.uk.

Copy deadline for the next edition is Tuesday 22nd January 2008.

For more information on Community Action check out their website at www.ca-north.org.uk

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Sue Hacking, (Information Officer) 01434 607871

Lesley Allen, (Bellingham Community Trust) 01434 220714

ALLENDALE CELEBRATES



ALLENDALE HAS BEEN IN QUITE A STATE OF CELEBRATION over the past month, after it garnered the coveted Calor Village of the Year 2007 for all of England, in a ceremony at the Skinners' Hall in the City of London. The prize money (some £10,000 covering a variety of categories at regional and national level) is slated to go towards continued development of the Recreation Ground, but everyone was really more delighted at the exposure and kudos than the tangible cheque.

It's not easy to say what makes a village great, but people do seem to know when they experience it. Allendale's challenge during this past year of judging (there were three separate sets of judges on separate visits to the village, in addition to the assessment at county level) was to present itself positively, constructively, and meaningfully.

As Larry Winger, coordinator of the effort, remarked, "It's always easy to see the negative, and by contrast nobody really quite believes puff pieces either, so we thought it was important to try to present the village fairly, so we ourselves could understand something of the strengths and weaknesses of our community. We really entered into the spirit of the competition and tried to provide the judges, and ourselves, with a realistic picture of Allendale and we were amazed, of course, and delighted at the picture that emerged!"

After the ceremony, and a week of semi-stunned shock that the friendly village really was rated by independent assessors as the best in the country in 2007, the action group behind the effort organised a community-wide party to celebrate. During the delightful three-course buffet spread (served to 150 representatives of local organisations by local catering outfit Pennine Picnics, and featuring a variety of 'Made in Allendale' products), Margaret Stonehouse, local and district councillor, noted that 'Celebration' was expected to be the dominant theme in the village over the coming year, as the 25th annual May Fair would also reprise some of the display effort that went into the presentations to the judges - and the Reverend Jonathan Russell announced a special Christmas Tree Festival at St. Cuthbert's Church to showcase the community organisations that make Allendale such a vibrant place in which to live.

Everybody in the local community hopes that the awards will help to stimulate a revival of interest in Allendale, as a very special village in the centre of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as a delightful place to visit, to experience the deep countryside, so that local tourism businesses (holiday cottages, B&Bs, cafés and tea rooms and public houses) may benefit throughout 2008. Certainly the village has experienced some big regional publicity (clips on the BBC's Look North programme, as well as on Tyne Tees, major pieces in both the Hexham Courant and the Newcastle Journal) on the heels of the awards, and continued exposure in such glossy magazines as the new Tynedale Life, or perhaps Living North, or even Country Living, may be in the offing.

But for now, of course, Allendale is still the friendly little village that works really hard to be welcoming, and to maintain a great spirit of community which everyone expects to last long after transient awards and kudos are forgotten. In a sense of that sort of spirit, the organisers have already sent their good wishes (and a few friendly tips) along to Acklington, this year's Northumberland village of the year.

