



# NEWS

## SPRING MEETING

## NORTHUMBERLAND After The Elections

By David Francis

ELECTIONS TOOK PLACE on 1 May to elect the 67 councillors who will both manage the final 11 months of the current Northumberland County Council, and will also be the new members of the new Northumberland unitary authority which comes into being next April. As expected, there have been some significant changes. The party mix has swung from a modest labour majority (35 out of 67) to one of no overall control: 26 Liberal Democrat, 17 Labour, 17 Conservative and 7 Independent. In the absence of any agreement between parties for formal coalition, the Authority is being run by a 'minority administration', with the Lib-Dems occupying all of the Executive/Cabinet position but a mixture of people from all parties on the various committees.

This is likely to mean that progress will require a degree of further consultation, negotiation and agreement between the parties at each significant step of the process. A high priority is being given to ensuring that the reorganisation of the County and 6 district councils to form the new Northumberland unitary authority, goes smoothly. Although there had been some doubts during the election, progress is still being made to create the 3 area structures (committees, offices and partnerships) covering the North, the West and the South-East of Northumberland, and there remains a strong commitment both to the decentralisation of services and to the engagement and empowerment of local communities. A number of initiatives are being taken to ensure that support for, and engagement with, the voluntary and community sector is a key feature of the reorganisation.

Commitment to parish and town councils

is similarly as strong as ever, and work is progressing to introduce a new version of the Northumberland Charter for Local Councils, which sets out the main commitments and rights in relation to consultation, partnership working, service-devolution and the provision of support services for local councils. Most parties also remain committed to the concept of Belonging Community Forums, but clearly further consultation is needed before the picture will be finalised of their precise role, composition and modus operandi.

Meanwhile the new Chief Executive is expected to be announced in July, followed shortly by the other senior staff appointments. This will enable a more-detailed staffing structure to be designed, and further appointments to be made over the winter, in the lead-up to next April.

A lot of news and detail is available on the dedicated website:

[www.northumberlandcouncil.gov.uk/new/](http://www.northumberlandcouncil.gov.uk/new/)

Some "pen pictures" of a range of forums which are emerging at the Belong Community level can be seen in "Not Enough Space 2803", CAN's supplement to this newsletter, which can be viewed at [www.ca-north.org.uk](http://www.ca-north.org.uk) under the Library>Publications section.

### 2008

By Alan Hedley



Peter Sampson leads on LEADER

STANNINGTON VILLAGE HALL was the venue for CAN's Spring Meeting this year, which was attended by over 70 people and hosted by the Duke of Northumberland, CAN's President.

Director, David Francis, advised the meeting that some constitutional changes would be needed next year following the change to the new unitary authority. These are likely to coincide with CAN changing its legal status to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation from its current status of an unincorporated charitable association. A request to change the current subscription basis for Associate members to that of a voluntary contribution was agreed by the meeting.

Bob Langley, CAN's Chairman, reported that in the last six months CAN had been operating in a vastly changing scene, particularly due to the changes in local government to a Unitary Authority.

He stressed it is vital that CAN continues in its role of supporting development of networks of Voluntary and Community Groups in order to give a relevant voice where needed. CAN staff will continue their present work in supporting local community groups and parish councils and also look forward to a revised way of working under the new Unitary Authority.

David Francis had been invited to join the Joint Implementation Team to bring proposals to fruition, and CAN staff were involved in consultations across the county to form new, independent Community Forums. A unanimous commitment had been made at a recent Executive meeting to the importance of the community forums as essential building blocks in the development of the new authority.

A recent press release had been issued to this effect, stressing the importance of becoming involved and encouraging participation.

CAN's intentions for the coming year were reflected in their plans to enable community engagement, strengthen the VCS, support Community Buildings and the Rural

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## RAISING THE STANDARD

By Alan Hedley



IT IS FAIRLY COMMON PRACTICE for organisations within the Voluntary and Community Sector to want to demonstrate to themselves and third parties, that their organisations are properly run. In order to give such assurance of the quality of their systems they may participate in schemes where independent assessors review their operation set against a number of Quality Standards. These standards will set out areas of good practice with defined parameters to meet, and will usually have more than one level.

In common with most of the 38 rural community councils (RCC's) in England Community Action has chosen to use the ACRE Quality Standards which is similar to the more widely known PIQUASSO but with a rural slant.

The scheme covers 9 areas of good practice in the organisation of an RCC, called Organisational Standards. Each of these contains a number of requirements and is defined at 3 levels. These are:

- **Level 1** – basic requirements that all RCC's should be meeting as a matter of priority
- **Level 2** – more advanced requirements that all RCC's will be expected to meet
- **Level 3** – an ongoing requirement to ensure that everything in levels 1 and 2 is actually happening, and to review and

improve the way that you are carrying out the above requirements.

The 9 standards are: Basic Requirements; User Centred Services; Trustees and the Board; Managing Activities; Financial Management; Monitoring and Evaluation; Managing and Supporting Staff; Training and Skills Development; and Networks and Partnerships.

CAN achieved Level 1 in October 2007. We were further visited by two independent persons from other RCC's over the two days 16 and 17 April to assess us at Level 2.

The final report on the visit said that all areas had been fully met and in their final report on the visit the assessors highlighted 3 areas of excellence which were held up as good examples for other RCC's:

- The work of the Finance Committee and the Finance Team.
- The production of an effective, user friendly website which encompasses many areas of CAN and which has a members' section ensuring effective communication and information.
- Excellent communications and working relationships between Trustees and Staff by the creation of Area Committees. These Committees comprise staff based in the areas identified and trustees whose homes are located in the vicinity.

The ACRE Board, responsible for overseeing the Quality Standard scheme has confirmed CAN's achievement at Level 2. There is normally a period of around 18 months after achievement of Level 2 before commencing to Level 3, so watch this space around December 2009.

# NEWS FROM THE SECTOR

NORTHUMBERLAND'S LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA) is sometimes described as the delivery arm of our Sustainable Community Strategy. So to understand the LAA we need to explore what the aims of the strategy are and how they impact on the voluntary and community sector (VCS). There are seven long term visionary aims and predictably the VCS contributes to all of them.

The title chosen for the Sustainable Community Strategy was Releasing the strength of our communities. It reflects the very essence of the document, and the common theme running through it, that realising the strengths of our communities will create better and happier places to live.

The all-embracing nature of the VCS leads to problems for those wanting to compartmentalise activities into traditional fiefdoms. One of the seven visions of the strategy is: We get involved and bring about change. The four objectives necessary to achieve this intimately and directly involve voluntary and community activities:

- *warm and safe places to meet*
- *opportunities and support for volunteering*
- *encouraging enterprises which trade with a social purpose*
- *establishing an environment where communities have the opportunity and confidence to put their views forward, which are then listened to and acted upon.*

The assumption that the private sector is the sole bastion of enterprise is challenged daily by voluntary and community organisations demonstrating time and again that trading for social gain is a vital income earner for a growing proportion of the sector. Development trusts, village halls, community transport agencies, pre-school settings, and VCOs realising the contracting potential of their specialist knowledge - they all know how to read a balance sheet and most provide a triple bottom line: social, economic and environmental gain.

The new duty of local authorities to ensure that the VCS is involved in shaping policy has undoubtedly set the scene for what is hoped to be the start of a fresh relationship between the sector and local government. Hopefully the move towards a single unitary authority will provide the necessary impetus. The Joint Implementation Team, its service clusters and work streams are slowly being infiltrated by people from the VCS to provide a different perspective.

The role of the Local Area Agreement in all this is to ensure that local authorities and their partners have a system in place for delivering improved performance across a range of national priority targets. Each local authority area was allowed to select up to 35 indicators out of a basket of 198. For the new LAA, Northumberland has included two indicators which have special significance for the sector.

The first concerns volunteering: Participation in Regular Volunteering. A new postal Place Survey will include questions to gauge the proportion of individuals undertaking regular (once a month) formal volunteering. By "formal" they mean working with organisations rather than just being a good neighbour. Historically the north east, as a whole, has performed badly in comparison with other regions and so there is some catching up to do.

The second indicator is: Environment for a Thriving Third Sector. This relates to the contribution that local government and its partners make to the environment in which third sector (the term Whitehall now prefers to use to describe the sector) can operate successfully. This will be measured through a new survey of exclusively third sector organisations scored on the basis of responses to the question: How do the local statutory bodies in your area influence your organisation's success? This again will be conducted through a postal survey this autumn and Northumberland can expect about 600 organisations to be approached. Only registered charities and incorporated organisations will be sampled because of the difficulties in making sensible comparisons between different areas if unincorporated organisations and groups were included. The organisers accept that their contribution to community well-being is of course immense.

## Public Contract Tendering Training Opportunity

**Date:** Wednesday 23 July 2008

**Time:** 10am – 4.00pm

**Venue:** Wansbeck CVS, Station Road, Ashington

**Trainer:** Janet Roberts, Tendering for care

**Cost:** £50 (contribution towards cost)

Who should attend:

- VCS organisation who are, or are considering delivery of public sector contracts
- VCS organisations who are likely to sub contract through a consortium

No matter what size your organisation you may have considered tendering for public service contracts or perhaps would like more information regarding what's involved in becoming part of a consortium as a sub-contractor. This training will ensure you are in a better position to respond to future procurement opportunities.

- *completion of the Pre Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) is the essential first step. Getting this right opens the door to the invitation to submit a full tender.*
- *how to improve the techniques of tender preparation*
- *sub contracting, including implications for trustees*
- *the supply chain*
- *the opportunities which exist for organisations large and small*

Janet Roberts has delivered a programme of training 'Secrets of Successful Tendering' nationally on behalf of NAVCA so I am delighted that we have been able to secure her services to deliver a training session in Northumberland.

If you would like to find out more, or make a booking please contact: Lynda Watson Community Action Northumberland, Tel 01670 500815 or email [lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk) or visit our website: [www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk)

For your diary, there will be a further training opportunity on 22 September on Public Law Training (Empowering the voluntary sector). More details in the next issue of CAN News, or if you can not wait until then contact Lynda Watson.

## SAFEGUARDING ADULTS

ALL OLDER PEOPLE have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Helen Neilson is the new project worker for Age Concern's Safeguarding Adults' project, the first project of its kind in Northumberland and funded by Comic Relief. Helen aims to raise awareness of the mistreatment and neglect that can and is happening to some vulnerable older people living in Northumberland.

The project is important as mistreatment of older people has for sometime now been a hidden problem, particularly taboo is the mistreatment that can take place within a persons own home by a family member. Often mistreatment or neglect has continued because people spotted something which felt wrong but took no action as they doubted their own concerns or they did not know who they could contact. Through this project, Age Concern Northumberland, want to change this.

Helen Neilson is carrying out free awareness raising sessions with local groups and organisations, to explain in more detail what constitutes mistreatment of an older person and to give information on which organisations can help. If you feel you would benefit from attending an awareness-raising session please telephone Helen on 01665 510244 for further information.

# New Northern Rock Foundation Guidance

IN FEBRUARY 2008, the Chancellor announced that the Northern Rock Foundation would receive a minimum of £15m a year in 2008, 2009 and 2010 from Northern Rock, as part of the arrangement under which the bank was taken into temporary public ownership. The Foundation's Trustees intend to spend at least £11 million through their grant programmes this year.

Organisations that already have grants and those that receive them in the future can be absolutely assured that the Foundation has funds set aside to meet all its outstanding commitments. Grants awarded over several years will be paid as planned.

The Foundation has recently announced the re-opening of its Culture and Heritage grant programme.

Culture and Heritage – inspiring, enjoyable and diverse culture programmes and events that raise the region's profile and make it a better place for everyone to live and enjoy life. The programme will be worth £2 million in 2008. They are now seeking applications to support performing arts, contemporary craft, design and new media, exhibitions, festivals and collaborations, as well as professional training for people working in these areas.

Other grant programmes now open for application are:

**Independence and Choice** – services for people with mental health problems, people with learning disabilities, older people and carers;

**Building Positive Lives** – one-to-one help for young people at risk, homeless people, substance-misusers and groups that face prejudice and discrimination;

**Safety and Justice** – reducing the incidence and impact of domestic and sexual violence, abuse and hate crimes.

The Trustees have also decided that as part of their support for older people's projects in Independence and Choice, they will now invest in organisations providing welfare benefits advice and targeted benefit take-up campaigns. For more details see [www.nr-foundation.org.uk](http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk) or ring 0191 284 8412. (CAN also holds copies of the new guidance which you can obtain from any of their offices)

## John Grundy supports North Northumberland Village Halls

by Louise Currie

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND Village Hall Consortium (NNVHC) is going from strength to strength and has its second Annual General Meeting coming up on 26th June in Creighton Memorial Hall, where John Grundy will be guest speaker. All are welcome to attend, (whether your hall is a member of the consortium or not) for what will undoubtedly be a great evening. Come at 7.00pm for networking and a prompt 7.30pm start to the meeting. Refreshments will be provided. For further information contact Sylvia Harrison on 01670 787127, or by email on [Sylvia.harrison2@talktalk.net](mailto:Sylvia.harrison2@talktalk.net)

CAN wishes to express thanks to the consortium for the continuous support it provides in the advertising and organisation of the various training events arranged for Village Hall Committees right across the county – such as the Fire Safety Training (February 08) and the Hallmark Scheme (ongoing). Articles about each of these projects were in the last edition of Community News but CAN overlooked referring to the assistance that NNVHC has given in the success of these and other training events offered. The organisation is fundamental in supporting CAN's village hall/community buildings work within the county.

(Continued from front page)

support Community Buildings and the Rural Voice, and also to work in tandem with the other two RCCs in the region.

Despite facing a great deal of uncertainty at the beginning of the year with regards to funding, the outlook for CAN now looks more positive –although there were still some decisions awaited. This would enable local community engagement and support in such areas as the current threat to post offices and phone boxes. Staff were praised for their commitment in times of trouble and this had been officially recognised by the comments of the recent ACRE Quality Peer Review team which recommended achievement at level 2, and additionally identified three areas of excellence to be held up as examples to other RCCs in the country.

In relation to staffing, sadly CAN had recently lost Julie Crocker to Groundwork. Her huge impact in the Morpeth and Rothbury area would be greatly missed. Our thanks go to Julie for her hard work and dedication. Despite the loss of some experienced members of the Executive during the year, subsequent new appointments have ensured the Executive Committee had continued to work well. New trustees are always welcome to keep the energy strong and to demonstrate that CAN was making a difference to the quality of life in our communities.

Peter Samsom, guest speaker, from the North Pennines AONB Team, gave a presentation on LEADER programmes, past successes and future opportunities.

LEADER – a French acronym – is a series of European-funded programmes which promote and develop 'bottom-up' approaches to rural development in local areas. Several parts of Northumberland and the region had benefited from successive programmes since the mid-1990s. Drawing on examples from the North and South of the county, he praised the way in which local communities, businesses and interest-groups had come together to plan and run their own initiatives, ranging from craft and tourism initiatives, to village halls, training and networking.

Work was now well advanced to create 3 LEADER programmes which together would cover most of the rural parts of Northumberland: the Pennine Dales, the Uplands and the Coast and lowlands. There would be plenty of opportunities for locally-led projects to support communities, businesses, land-based industries, the environment and economy. Local Action Groups were being constituted, which would be representative of the broad range of local interests.

Following a lively question and answer session, the meeting finished with a banquet of cakes, scones and tea.

# Arts Charity MAKES A DIFFERENCE



*Imi Mauffe in her studio*

VISUAL ARTS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES is a registered charity which supports an artists' residency in the community programme in Tarsset, Northumberland. It has been established since 2000 and has enabled eight artists to each spend twelve months living and working at Highgreen in Tarsset.

VARC's aims are to:

- offer a unique opportunity to an artist wishing to develop his or her practice by working and living in a remote rural community
- promote interest, awareness and understanding of visual arts in a rural community through engagement with an artist.

The artist spends 30 days over the year planning and hosting studio open days, workshops or projects that enable people, groups and schools to participate creatively or gain an insight into an artist's work. To date the artists have worked with groups and individuals from the locality and from further afield including schools, Bill Quay Community Farm Gateshead, youth groups, Newcastle University, and local community groups.

VARC is always open to ideas from people or groups who would like to visit or work with the artist in residence.

The current artist in residence, Imi Mauffe, has been involved in many local community events as well as leading a print and book-making workshop for adults locally, workshops with two local schools and with visiting Fine Art students from Newcastle University. At the same time she is developing her own work for a completion exhibition in September with an opening party to which everyone is welcome.

VARC has also set up a fund open to applications twice a year (May and October) to support local projects that directly involve an artist or artists and are of benefit to the Tarsset, North Tyne or Redesdale communities.

Applications are welcomed from groups or individuals based in Tarsset, North Tyne and Redesdale for projects that:

- result in a new piece of artwork or series of works that wouldn't otherwise have been made.
- directly relate to the landscape or community in some way
- include some direct benefit to a sector of the Tarsset, North Tyne or Redesdale community or as a whole, whether this is through the outcome or through creative participation.

VARC would be interested in funding either an arts project or the arts component of a locally significant project.

To date the Fund has supported the following projects:

- Bell City Youth Project for artists to work with young people to create artwork for display on the walls of this drop-in centre for 13-19 year-olds in Bellingham
- Wark C of E First School to run felt-making workings with children and community members led by artist felt-maker Omi Pharcote and create a large felt panel to reflect the locality
- Tarsset Art Challenge, an exhibition of artwork by Tarsset residents taking place at Tarsset Village Hall in February 2008

The next deadline for applications will be 31st October 2008.

If you would like to talk to VARC about ideas for a project, either in relation to the artist in residence or in relation to a possible application to the Fund then do get in touch with Janet Ross, liaison manager, janet.ross8@btinternet.com Tel: 0191 266 6857. For more information about VARC, past artists and forthcoming events check out [www.varc.org.uk](http://www.varc.org.uk)

# CO-HOUSING: A different way of living

COLIN BRANIGAN is a keen advocate of Co-Housing - a form of collaborative living which was developed in the Netherlands - and with the help of the UK Co-housing Network is looking for like-minded people to launch his own group in Northumberland.

He is aiming at those over 50 who would like to live in a small community which provides companionship, helps each other and joins together to share common aims.

As the development of this idea becomes a possibility participants will make plans, take decisions together and be involved in approving the design of the houses.

They may decide to share some common facilities such as a café, manage outings, share a transport system. The possibilities are endless and it will take time and commitment to realise their goals.

Once set up the group would get together to organise such things as social activities, general maintenance, internal and external relations as well as recruitment of new residents when properties become available.

People join a co-housing group because they want to continue to be active and involved with other people. Perhaps their partner has died, they are left alone and they need friends and support.

Members of established groups found the mix of casual and organised social activities to their liking. They also appreciated the security from having neighbours.

If you are interested in this concept contact Colin Branigan. Tel: 01434 602387.

Books on the subject include: Thinking about Co-housing by Martin Field (Edge of Time Ltd. Tel: 0800 083 0451) which includes a chapter by Maria Brenton on Co-housing for Older People; and Senior Co-housing: A Community Approach to Independent Living by Charles Durrett (available from Amazon and others).

## A NEW COMMUNITY BUILDINGS CONSORTIUM



*Mike Wood explaining  
the constitution before it's  
adoption*

*by Adrian Hinchcliffe*

A CONSORTIUM has been formed to benefit village halls and other community buildings in West Northumberland including Tynedale. The consortium will negotiate discounts and other financial benefits on expensive items such as buildings insurance and energy costs. It will also provide a forum for representatives of village/ community halls and other groups responsible for community buildings to come together to share good practice and discuss common issues.

The Consortium was formed by the approval of a constitution at an inaugural meeting which took place at Humshaugh Village Hall on 14 May 2008. The meeting was attended by representatives of twelve halls from throughout Tynedale and a further six have indicated their willingness to become members. The Consortium will be known as the 'West Northumberland Community Buildings Consortium.

Mike Wood of Greenhead Village Hall was elected as the Chairman of the Consortium and a Committee was elected.

The meeting set a joining fee for each Village/Community Hall of £10 per annum which is very modest when, by becoming a member most are likely to save possibly hundreds of pounds per annum by accessing the discount arrangements organised by the Consortium.

Mike Wood said that the new committee would be contacting many other organisations responsible for Halls and Community Buildings in West Northumberland and encouraging them to become members of the Consortium. Mike also thanked representatives of Community Action Northumberland who had helped a Steering Committee to establish the Consortium and negotiate the first set of discounts.

## Shaun Hogg CAN's new Community Development Officer

Hi - I would like to introduce myself - my name is Shaun Hogg and I am the new Community Development Officer for West Northumberland. I was born and raised in the Tynedale area of rural Northumberland. In 1990 I moved to Scotland where I lived in rural Perthshire, Argyll and the Scottish Borders.

My previous experience includes working in local authority in the fields of Mental Health and learning disabilities (community support). This entailed helping vulnerable people to live independently in their own community, and enable them to access community resources and services with minimal support. I have also owned and managed a rural Post Office and village store.

Prior to joining CAN I was employed as a Development Worker for a local charitable organisation in Hexham, working to improve services to people who have a learning disability.

I returned to Northumberland eighteen months ago and I am still reacquainting myself with the area and the many people I have not seen for quite some time.

My interests include property renovation, walking, swimming and reading. I look forward to meeting you all in the near future



# iKnow

THE NORTH EAST BEACON PROJECT, iKnow, is a joint partnership initiative with Newcastle University and the Centre for Life. The scheme enables local people to inform key research issues such as ageing, the environment and social justice.

The idea is to make universities more open to learning from people's own life experiences. This might be as homemakers, workers, patients or carers, all of whom can bring a fresh perspective and who will often ask the questions academics would not think to ask.

Bringing the 'everyday experts', together with academics, can get the best of both worlds and really make a difference to the issues that affect all of us living in the North East and beyond.

There are several ways for the "everyday experts" to get involved.

- The University is currently looking for fifteen people to make up a steering group that will oversee the initiative. You do not need to have any experience, either of research or of sitting on a steering group.

The group will meet four times a year, providing advice and strategic direction. A brochure setting out the project the role of Steering Group members and the training they will receive prior to joining the group will be sent out to anyone who responds to this invitation.

- In the summer the University will have a hundred mobile phones and tens of thousands of free minutes of use by people who sign up to our iKnow project.

- In the autumn they will be holding a series of events to get an iKnow Team together, who will be twenty four people paid for a day each month to help us design the iKnow initiative.

If this sounds like something you might be interested in then contact Tom Wakeford, Director, Beacon for Public Engagement (iKnow), Newcastle University, FREEPOST: RRJG - XRLE - BBKB, PEALS, Citygate, St James Boulevard, Newcastle, NE1 4JH or telephone 0191 222 8312 to speak to Joanne Walker, Acting Co-ordinator, or email beacon@ncl.ac.uk.

(A longer version of this article can be viewed in CAN's "Not Enough Space 2003" on [www.ca-north.org.uk](http://www.ca-north.org.uk) under Library > Publications)

## CONGRATULATIONS to Shilbottle Village Hall

As we go to press the news has come in that Shilbottle Village Hall have been successful in their grant application to the Big Lottery's Community Buildings programme. They have been awarded £413, 992 to demolish the old and build a community centre. Committee members have worked hard and long towards their object of replacing the old hall. Congratulations are due to all those involved.

## Northumberland Compact - Has your organisation signed up?

by Lynda Watson

THE NORTHUMBERLAND COMPACT is a short and simple agreement between the public sector and the voluntary & community sector. It is a commitment from both sides to work in partnership for the benefit and support of local communities. Both sectors agree to comply with a series of undertakings.

The Compact:

- Provides a framework, or ground rules, to ensure fair play on both sides
- Promotes understanding of each other's scope and limitations
- Supports best practice and value
- Acknowledges that voluntary & community organisations/groups benefit from having local public bodies that are enabling and supportive
- Values the differences that the VCS makes and recognises the expertise within the sector.

Success depends on individual and organisational commitment to a healthy relationship as well as the extent to which the principles of the Compact are adopted by both sides.

To find out more visit [www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk) and click on to the Compact link in the left hand column of the page. A simple form has recently been added to the website to enable organisations to sign up electronically.

Please do get in touch if you require further details or would like your organisation to become a signatory of the Northumberland Compact.

Contact: Lynda Watson, Compact & Contracts Officer, Community Action Northumberland. [lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk) Tel: 01670 500815

## All Together Now

by Alan Hedley



The village hall advisers take a break for a group photo session

THERE ARE 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) throughout England, including Community Action Northumberland (CAN). These are charitable local development agencies, generally based at county level, which support and enable initiatives in rural communities. Each RCC provides a variety of services to support communities in their respective counties.

One service provided by all the RCCs is the provision of support and advice to the management committees of village halls and community buildings.

Village halls are public buildings run by dedicated groups of volunteers, who have the responsibility for all aspects of management of the building in line with current legislation. Village and community halls play important roles in their community as they provide a facility for social, recreational and cultural activity. With the support of its parish council, an active hall can greatly improve the quality of life for the community.

Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) is the national umbrella body for the 38 RCCs throughout England. The country is divided into 8 regions. These 8 regional bodies together with ACRE are known collectively as the Rural Community Action Network.

Each year the village hall advisers from one of the 8 regions organise a national conference for village hall advisers. In the year 2008 that opportunity fell to the North East region. Alan Hedley and Louise Currie (CAN) together with Peter Bryan (Tees Valley RCC) and Ian Pillar (Durham RCC) were the four VHAs organising the conference, which was held between 28 April and 1 May at Slaley Hall, Northumberland.

The Conference included presentations and discussions on a variety of topics relating to community buildings, including Land Registration; Legal issues on governance matters; village halls as employers; the Charities Act 2006, including Charitable Incorporated Organisations; parish councils, how they can help village halls; Value Added Tax – basic principles and how it affects village halls. Visits to Newton and Bywell Community Hall and Mickleton Village Hall (Teesdale) introduced an opportunity for hall trustees to address the VHAs. At Newton, Adrian Hinchcliffe spoke on setting up a village hall trust and managing a new-build project. He was followed by Malcolm Newton, Architect who spoke on the relationship between architect and client when transforming their Brief into an actual plan.

At Mickleton Village Hall their chairman spoke on the setting up of the Teesdale Village Halls Consortium in 1995 and its development since then. This was followed by presentations from VHAs on the Hallmark Scheme in Northumberland and coverage of the Charity Commission's requirements for the Trustees Annual Report.

The last day of the conference was spent on Marketing the Hall, specifically through the setting up of a website. Toby Hunt, from Media Trust, took the delegates through the Introduction to Website training, a course already enjoyed by some halls and parish councils in Northumberland.

There were two innovative additions to this year's conference. Firstly the visiting delegates were introduced to some Northumbrian culture through a concert party put together and compered by Ernie Coe, chairman of Middleton Village Hall. Northumbrian tunes, played by Robert Whitehead (accordion) and Roddie Matthews (fiddle), songs from Jean Davidson and clog dancing from Shona Harper all contributed to a memorable evening such as not seen in previous years.

Secondly, inspired by Toby Hunt's tuition on how to produce a free website, a website has now been developed to assist those present to remember what went on during the 2008 Conference in the North East. <http://vhaconference2008.googlepages.com/>

Next year the West Midlands are organising the conference and Louise, Alan, Peter and Ian can relax a little and enjoy their hospitality.



Roddie Matthews (fiddle) and Robert Whitehead (accordion) introduce some Northumbrian music to the conference

## 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](mailto:alanhedley@ca-north.org.uk).

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

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

## HOW TO CONTACT US

### MAIN OFFICE

David Francis, (Director)

Alan Hedley, (Assistant Director)

George Courtice, (Sector Development Officer)

Lynda Watson, (COMPACT and Contracts Officer)

Louise Currie, (Community Initiatives Officer)

Christina Hall, Sue Andrew (Administration)

Linda Frater, Margaret Tweddell, Carol Megson, (Finance)

Tel. 01670 517178 Fax 01670 511400

Email [info@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:info@ca-north.org.uk)

### NORTHERN AREA

Julia Plinston, (CDO Alnwick) 01665 605540

David Brettell, (Leader+) 01289 388680

Marc Johnson (CDO Berwick) 01289 304141

### WESTERN AREA

Jane Hart, (Senior Development Officer) 01434 607871

Shaun Hogg, (CDO, Hexham) 01434 607871

Sue Hacking, (Information Officer) 01434 607871

Lesley Allen, (Bellingham Community Trust) 01434 220714