

GREENHEAD VILLAGE HALL CELEBRATES

CARRYING OUT a major refurbishment programme in a village hall or community building is not a task to be taken lightly and it is definitely not something that happens overnight. The management committee invariably goes through a series of highs and lows with good news and bad news but, at the end of the day, when success has been achieved there are celebrations. Greenhead Village Hall celebrated the opening of their village hall extension on 6 May. Wendy Bond, Chairman of the Management Committee recalls the day as she writes:

A truly happy day for the village of Greenhead: we were holding the official opening day for our new extension to the village hall and the sun shone and everyone turned out to see just what a splendid new facility we have now got. A local bagpiper played us in magnificently and the children from the school arrived in their smart blue uniforms to sing of buildings and what they mean to us, and the chairman of the parish council paid tribute to all the hard work that had gone into the project. Four extremely important people stepped forward onto the platform to receive their engraved scissors with which to cut the purple ribbon: the two oldest ladies in the village and the two youngest children in the school - and sure enough, they were all Greenheaders through and through, with long years of service to the community behind (and perhaps in front) of them. Then it was inside for a superb buffet for one and all, once the exploring and exclaiming in delight at the magnificent

new toilets and kitchen out-of-this-world, etc and "Just look at all those cupboards!" was over.

Just as you would expect, I suppose, for a rural community. But for all of us it was an unbelievable triumph, after decades of decline in our amenities and services. A sign that we all had suddenly acquired a future. It had indeed been hard work! Ours was a community that didn't really expect anything to succeed. Over the last fifty years, available housing had decreased, we'd lost the post office, shop, railway station, petrol station, sports field, chapel, vicarage, and, worst of all, we seemed to have lost the heart to the village as the fathers and mothers had no energy to get involved in anything any more after a full day's work - vital to maintain a car, in order to get to work! There was a completely missing generation. This, too, must be a very familiar story at the end of the twentieth century. But we didn't say die. There were still a grand bunch of retired native villagers with vivid memories of how lively a place the village had been in the pre-television days, and a super group of youngsters who loved to help and clearly wanted a future.

So, we listened carefully to the advice: there is money to be had if you can prove that you are worth supporting. The key words: "prove" "worth supporting".

For four years we set out to make our cold damp gloomy hall with its sink (cold tap) in the corner, and dreadful outside loo, the place to be. We got grants for an immediate refurbishment - re-plastering, rewiring, good heaters, hot water, etc and at the same time we ran as many events, training session etc.



*Cutting the ribbon to officially open the new extension
(photo by kind permission of the Hexham Courant)*

as we could think of, taking photographs of everything. We published a regular diary of events in the village and got ourselves regular coverage in the local paper. It all grew like a snowball. People really did begin to think it was worth coming out to join in - and we had got our evidence - to prove the need for an extension and that it would be well-used! Success - and sticking in even when there appears to be no response - does breed success - and the ways people are planning to use the hall now are amazing! Enormous energy, a cold-blooded strategy and the determination not to let filling in forms defeat you - that's all it takes! The reward, in the eyes of the full turn-out of the old-stagers, makes it all worth while - another cliché but true.

And what a party we had in the evening, with brilliant musical contributions given with great good will by our talented local performers!



ANXIOUS TIMES FOR SCHOOLS

IT IS NO SECRET that the Local Education Authority in Northumberland has come under increasing pressure from the Government in recent years to reduce the number of surplus places in local schools. These surplus places exist in all 3 tiers of school, and in our towns as well as remoter rural areas.

Over the last 20 years, attempts by the LEA to close rural schools was met with stiff opposition, resulting in almost every case in a reprieve for the schools, but causing also a considerable amount of mistrust and ill-feeling towards the LEA. Last year (2002) the LEA initiated a new approach - Area Accommodation Reviews - which would involve a variety of local interests in collectively understanding the problems and proposing solutions. One or two school partnerships (ie all of the first and middle schools, in each high school catchment area) would be reviewed at a time, over a period of perhaps 6 months, with a new review beginning each term. Where refurbishment work or new buildings were required, it was anticipated that capital funding would be made available through the Government's Private Finance Initiative.

Work started on the first review, covering the Ashington and Hirst High School areas jointly, in September 2002. The process was temporarily suspended in December, pending the outcome of the LEA's bid for PFI consent, and to allow the LEA to reflect on the experience of the previous few months.

Regrettably, Northumberland has since suffered two serious setbacks. First, the Government's long-promised review of its revenue support system for local authorities in England resulted in the LEA coming off very badly: no-one locally could have expected the funding to be so poor. Second, contrary to expectation, the re-submitted PFI bid for the Ashington and Berwick areas was rejected. These two blows have put the LEA under increased pressure to close schools: not only to reduce surplus places, but to also make savings on running costs. At the same time, little money will be available to extend or build new premises to meet modern standards and to accommodate pupils displaced from closed schools.

Local communities, schools and other interested 'stakeholders' are being encouraged to find ways of addressing the twin objectives of reducing surplus places and saving money. All sorts of possibilities are worth considering. For example:

- merging two or more nearby schools on to one site
- federating several schools to form a single school organisation, under a single headteacher
- demolishing surplus buildings within a school
- finding new community uses for empty classrooms and so on.

(Continued on back page)

PHOTOS NEEDED

ARE YOU A KEEN PHOTOGRAPHER ?
Can you help the Community Council of Northumberland?

CCN provides support and assistance to various voluntary and community organisations and parish councils in Northumberland. Each year they produce their Annual Report which is distributed to many of these organisations. For the last 2 years the cover design has been based on a different photograph of a scene in Northumberland.

The Annual Report for the year end March 2003 is now in preparation and CCN are looking for a suitable photograph to use on its front cover. Have you taken a photo of a scene in Northumberland that might be appropriate? Are you prepared to donate it to CCN to use? We invite you to submit your photo or photos to CCN for consideration. In the first instance it would be preferable to email them in jpeg format to alanhedley@ccn.org.uk All photos received will be "judged" and a "winner" chosen. If you want to discuss this further ring Alan on 01670 517178.

PLANNING FOR REAL IN BELLINGHAM

ON THE WEEKEND of April 5th & 6th Bellingham, as part of its Parish Plan held a 'Planning for Real' event. Lesley Allen, Secretary, Bellingham Community Development Trust explains:

For those people not familiar with 'Planning for Real', here is a brief description, you take a large scale map of the area to be surveyed, stick this on polystyrene tiles, paint in roads, rivers etc, then add models of all the buildings, in Bellingham's case the models were kindly built by the children in both the First & Middle schools. Armed with your model you then have to find a building large enough to accommodate it, we used the Town Hall.

Set up your model, lay out all the suggestion, problem, solution and blank cards, sit back and wait for the public to flock in and provide you with material to keep any self respecting development trust busy for the next five years! They do this by placing the cards on the map in appropriate places, if they feel that the problem/solution/suggestion applies to the whole area a special box for general comments is provided.

In principle it sounds great, it was, but does take longer to set up than I expected. The 'Planning for Real' pack comes from 'Neighbourhood Initiatives' and contains the designs for the model plus the cards that contain suggestions and possible solutions, as well as blank cards to allow people to express their own ideas, (these are divided into categories e.g. health, leisure, crime etc). It also comes with a method of collating the information and taking the whole process along to prioritise the identified projects and help needed in pushing them forward.

The event was heavily publicised, with flyers going home with the school children, an article and advert in the local paper and posters all over the village. We invited other local organisations to take part, so Tynedale Housing came along with a major display of their own.

To make it a successful exercise you need plenty of people, fully briefed in the process, to help the public use the model.

Lots of tea, coffee, biscuits and balloons also help!

CASH AWARDS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

UNLTD, The Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs are actively encouraging individuals and informal groups in Northumberland to apply for cash awards from the UnLtd Millennium Awards Scheme. The Scheme enables people to turn their ideas for improving their communities into reality.

UnLtd are encouraging applications from people in Northumberland who want to develop their own skills and talents and who want to make a positive change in their communities. Awards are available from £500 to £5,000, to help make new ideas into real projects or from £5,000 to £15,000, to support projects that are already developed and can be scaled up or replicated, this may, in part pay for the living expenses of award winners.

UnLtd provide advice, training, mentoring and other support services for all award winners to ensure projects have the best chance of success.

Zulfiqar Ahmed, UnLtd Director said "the awards scheme provides an ideal opportunity for people to develop their own skills whilst making a difference to their local communities. We look forward to receiving applications from the people of Northumberland".

For information about the UnLtd Millennium Awards Scheme or an application pack call Nickala Torkington, Awards Administrator on 01274 750630 or visit www.unltd.org.uk.

A New Lottery Distributor

THERE HAS BEEN a lot of talk in recent months about a proposed merger of the Community Fund and the New Opportunity Fund, two of the current Lottery distributors.

Fuelled by some adverse media coverage there were rumors that the Community Fund was about to be abolished. There will be many grateful recipients of grants in Northumberland that will be pleased to know that that is a distortion of the truth.

The real situation is that following a review of the National Lottery, the Secretary of State at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport announced that the government would be issuing a White Paper in July 2003 which would propose the creation of a new Lottery distributor that would take over and build upon the work of the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund. The White Paper would be subject to formal consultation with the voluntary and community sector during summer and early autumn. Legislation could follow, probably in 2004/05.

The Community Fund and many organisations in the voluntary and community sector have expressed early concerns about the future funding stream for the voluntary and community sector and the independence of grant decision making for the new distributor. Those concerns have been recognised by the Secretary of State.

The Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund have subsequently made a submission to the Secretary of State setting out how a new lottery distributor could make real and sustainable improvements to the lives of disadvantaged people and to the well-being of local communities through a mix of different approaches and grant programmes.

The Secretary of State has made an initial commitment to ensure guaranteed funding for the voluntary and community sector.

CCN will ensure they respond to the Consultation material when received and would urge organisations in Northumberland to make sure they make their views known through the consultation process.

ADVICE AVAILABLE ON TAX CREDITS

THE NEW WORKING TAX CREDIT and Child Tax Credit came into effect in April this year, replacing Working Families Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit and the tax allowance for children given through the parent's tax code. In the rural districts of Northumberland it is anticipated that 1,300 more people will be entitled that were claiming the old benefits, and many of them will not be directly contacted by the Department of Work and Pensions and invited to apply. In particular, single people or couples without children who are

COMMUNITY RE>PAINT

CASTLE MORPETH DISABILITY ASSOCIATION has set up a Community Re>Paint Scheme to cover the Borough of Castle Morpeth and surrounding areas.

The concept of Community Re>Paint is straightforward. Unwanted household surplus paint is diverted from the waste stream and redistributed FREE OF CHARGE for re-use by Community Groups, Schools, Charities and Voluntary Organisations, as well as the elderly, disabled and low-income individuals.

The paint can be used on a wide variety of projects that have environmental, social and educational benefits.

Householders wanting to donate paint may take it to the paint collection facility at the Household Recovery site, Worrall Bank, Morpeth during normal opening times. It should be useable paint suitable for domestic application. Please note that the facility is not for the disposal of empty tins.

If you think this scheme could benefit your group or if you know of anyone else who would like to receive FREE paint, please contact: Judith Bell Tel 01670 510652 Ext 2.

Volunteers are used to collect and sort the paint and organise distribution. Anyone wishing to volunteer should ring Judith who would be more than happy to give more information and organise appropriate training.

CAN DO - YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY - AWARDS FOR INDIVIDUALS

THE SCARMAN TRUST continue to administer the annual Can Do Challenge, a grant scheme open to individuals and funded by the Millennium Commission.

The funder asks "What needs doing in your community that could really make a difference? Are you a can-doer?". Anyone interested in taking up this challenge is advised to apply for an application form as soon as possible, ideally before the summer holidays. The telephone number is 0808 100 2553.

working on low incomes are likely to slip through the net.

Castle Morpeth CAB therefore set up a project funded by the Rural Support Initiative Fund, within its existing Rural Stress Initiative Project, to raise awareness of the new benefits amongst people living in rural areas, and to help them to apply. The CAB has now received a further grant of £53,000 from the Legal Services Commission to extend and develop the work over the next two years.

As well as the new Tax Credits, the CAB is also able to help people get Pension Credit which will be introduced in October. This addresses two important criticisms of the present Minimum Income Guarantee, that pensioners are unfairly penalized for having savings and for having paid into occupational pensions schemes. Because of the changes, approximately 11,000 extra pensioners in rural Northumberland will be entitled to payments. The Pension Service will write to all pensioner households inviting them to apply, but in some cases this will not be until October 2004. All pensioners can apply now.

Castle Morpeth CAB is sending a leaflet to all 25,000 houses in rural Northumberland inviting people to call a dedicated help line. Andrea Green, the adviser, will then be able to calculate entitlement to Tax Credits, Pension Credit and other means tested benefits such as Council Tax Benefit. She can then make on-line applications for Tax Credits and advise people how to apply for Pension Credit or other benefits. Andrea can refer people to their local bureau for further help if necessary.

The help line is currently open from 10am to 3pm Mondays and Wednesdays. The number is 01670 516254.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT FUND

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION launched this fund in May 2001 to enable rural communities to run recreational projects which would help to rebuild community spirit and reconcile personal differences following the foot and mouth crisis. Grants were to be awarded from July to October 2001, for projects which were to be completed by the end of December 2001.

The scheme was subsequently extended beyond the envisaged dates and was closed as of the 31 March 2003 by which date some 26 grants totalling £25,616 had been awarded. A valuable contribution has been made to the rebuilding of community spirit in Northumberland after the devastation left by Foot and Mouth Disease.

The Community Council is proud to have assisted the Community Foundation in the administration of the scheme.

QUALITY AND SKILLS IN PARISH COUNCILS

IN EARLY JUNE, the Government formally launched the Quality Parish Councils initiative. This scheme, which was heralded in the Rural White Paper in 2000, is designed to give parish councils further responsibilities if they want them, as well as demonstrating to the outside world the council's achievements and competence. NALC (the Northumberland Association of Local Councils) is devising a programme to promote the scheme and to support parish councils who are seeking 'Quality' status. NALC has also formed an accreditation panel, to handle submissions for Quality status from parish councils in Northumberland and Newcastle.

The scheme is accompanied by a new initiative to promote the development of local charters, to encourage principal local authorities to involve parish councils in decision-making and the provision of local services. Initially, these charters will be voluntary, and the Local Government Association is encouraging the authorities to respond favourably to the idea.

For parish councils in our area, NALC is providing the following:

- training and conferences, both to develop skills and to promote awareness of these new opportunities and issues
- advice and monitoring for individual councils and their clerks
- access to, and administration of, the AQA Certificate in Local Council Administration (the competent clerks' test)
- access to, and administration of, the Quality Parish Council scheme
- development of opportunities and services linked to a charter for principal authorities and parish council.

Further details are available from David Francis at NALC, Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth NE61 1PY tel 01670 517178.

BENEFIT TAKE-UP DRIVE AIMED AT RURAL SELF-EMPLOYED

ONE OF THE MAIN sources of stress in life is money worries.

Many farmers and rural self-employed people are not aware of their entitlement to claim financial help to top up their incomes, or they may have tried but found the paperwork and proof of income requirements off-putting.

Advice and business support organisations in Northumberland are now working together to offer information, advice, support and guidance to successfully negotiate the maze.

Coinciding with the introduction of new tax credits, the Northumberland Rural Stress Network of helping agencies has produced a leaflet encouraging people to check potential entitlement to not only the tax credits, but also help with rent and council tax.

As well as a tax credit 'ready reckoner' the leaflet includes the contact details of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, Citizens Advice Bureaux and Business Link Business Advice Centres who are all ready to provide assistance with the rules, regulations and forms.

The help is free and confidential so there is nothing to lose by asking for a wealth health check. For further details about the leaflet contact Susan Cross, Northumberland Rural Stress Initiative. Tel 01670 505 278 : Email : susancross@ccn.org.uk

FROM THESE PAGES IN

1984

Sub-Post Office Threats

Broomhaugh & Riding Parish Council have recently complained to their MP, Geoffrey Rippon, QC, about the pressure being put on mothers to have their family allowances paid by Giro instead of collecting cash from the local Sub-Post Office. The Parish Council fear that if the Sub-Post Office loses this business - along with payment of other benefits, whose recipients are being similarly pressurised by DHSS - its whole future will be endangered. And the Sub-Post Office is needed for other purposes - cashing Giro cheques amongst them!

1988

Last Lap for Infobus

The Community Council's Rural Information Service, which took to the road in October 1986, will end on 29 July this year. The project was due to finish in September, but in recent weeks the elderly Infobus has become both expensive and unreliable. The MOT is due in August and we have decided to stop the service a few weeks early, rather than spend the last of our slender resources on keeping the bus on the road for the final month.

1993

First 'Deposit' in the Northumberland Land Bank

A new venture to help the plight of village people seeking housing in the countryside was launched on 21 June. The Community Council's Land Bank has been set up to help tackle the issue of providing houses in villages which local people can afford, and it aims to encourage Northumberland's landowners to come forward with offers of free or cheap land. The availability of cheap land is more likely to achieve housing at an affordable price.

1998

What Are We Doing for the Millennium?

In recent times one of the most oft asked question in organisations of all types, sizes and descriptions must be "What are we doing for the Millennium?". In many instances the organisation responds in the time honoured fashion by forming a Millennium Committee or Working Group.

UNSUNG HEROES

THE QUEEN'S Golden Jubilee Award for voluntary service by groups in the community is now searching to find the unsung heroes in your community - groups of people who volunteer their time to help others.

If you know a group of volunteers who:

- Regularly devote their time to helping others in your community
- Improve the quality of life and opportunity for others
- Provide an outstanding service

Then why not nominate them. Further details and nomination forms can be obtained by:

- visiting the Golden Jubilee website on www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk
- emailing gaward@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
- phoning The Queen's Golden Jubilee Award Office's information line on 0845 000 2002

The closing date for nominations is 15 September 2003

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE PROFILES

THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL welcomed two new trustees at the March Annual General Meeting.

KAY MORRIS

Kay is Chairman of East Chevington Parish Council and has been a Castle Morpeth Borough Councillor since 1987 - serving the Chevington Ward. This Ward consists of Broomhill, Hadston and Red Row. Kay is Chair of the management team of Hadston House Youth and Community Building.

Kay was Mayor of Castle Morpeth in 1996-97 and she is delighted to have been nominated as Deputy Mayor this year, and hopes to become Mayor of the Borough again in 2004-05.

Kay is spokesperson for Regeneration on Castle Morpeth Borough Council. She regards it as a real challenge and welcomes the opportunity to serve on the Executive Committee of the Community Council of Northumberland.

Kay is an Hons Graduate. She taught for 22 years in Primary Education - and retired in January 1994. Although she still serves on the Governing Bodies of Red Row First School and Druridge Bay Middle School.

Kay's husband John is presently Chairman of Northumberland County Council - so they have a busy year ahead. They are married with 1 son and 3 daughters and they have 10 grandchildren. 3 in Bridlington, 3 in Alnwick, 2 in Bedlington and 2 in Northern Greece.

Kay lives in Red Row. She was born and educated in Newcastle upon Tyne and is proud to be a Geordie.

RAY MALECKI

Ray Malecki is a born and bred North-Eastern lad, who grew up in Ashington, Northumberland. His father was in the Free Polish Forces, fighting with the 8th Army and settled in England after the war. Ray is married to Lynn and has two sons Gavin and Danny and lives in Ellington near Morpeth.

The early part of Ray's career was with British Coal where he was part of the personnel team at Ellington Combine. After eighteen years in the industry he left to join the Training and Enterprise Council in Northumberland. He has now been with this organisation for ten years, although it has now reformed into the local Learning and Skills Council. Ray is responsible for co-ordination of literacy/numeracy programmes and community based learning initiatives.

For quite a number of years Ray has been involved in locally based community activities. His particular interest is young people's activities and currently works as a youth worker in the resource centre in Lynemouth. Prior to this Ray spent a lot of time involved with youth work in his own village of Ellington. He is the chair of governors at Ashington Alexandra Middle School.

CAB PRISON PROJECT

CASTLE MORPETH CAB has recently been awarded funding to place a resident advice worker on the Acklington Prison/Castington Young Offenders Institute site for 3 years to work as an integral member of the resettlement teams there. The adviser will provide help in the social welfare law areas of debt, housing, employment, family and welfare benefits with the aim of encouraging prisoners to lead a crime free life after release. An important part of the work will be ensuring that prisoners' families are supported through their local bureaux, solicitors or other source of help while the offender is in prison. Imprisonment of the breadwinner can potentially leave the family in financial difficulties, and there may be housing problems if a tenancy is in the name of the prisoner.

The project is the outcome of a partnership with the Prison Service, Government Office North East, Shelter, the Youth Justice Board and several other agencies. The funding comes from the Treasury's Invest to Save Budget via the Legal Services Commission. The idea of this budget is to provide money which can be spent in the short term to avoid larger calls on the public purse in the future. In the context of the prison project, it is hoped that the CAB work will help to re-settle offenders in the community on release by helping them to get secure housing, jobs, and deal with things like outstanding debts. In the North East up to 45% of prisoners are released into homelessness, and very few of them have jobs to return to. They are therefore released into circumstances which are likely to lead to re-offending. By also ensuring that their families are supported, the possibility of the family relationships breaking down will be reduced.

Much good work is already being done at Acklington and Castington, and the CAB looks forward to adding its expertise to the existing resettlement teams.



NEW PREMISES

DEFRA

Several of the services provided by DEFRA (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) have relocated from their previous Kenton Bar address to new premises at The Quadrant, Newburn Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 8NZ. Contact telephone numbers at the new premises are:

RDS (Rural Development Service) 0191 229 5500 SVS (State Veterinary Service) 0191 229 5500 PFSI (The Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate) 0191 229 5500 EMI (The Egg Marketing Inspectorate) 0191 229 5500

LEADER+ AND CCN AT SEAHOUSES

The Community Council staff based at Seahouses are relocating to Alnwick in July. The new address will be:

Russell House, Greenwell Road, Alnwick, NE66 1HB

At the time of writing the new telephone numbers are not known. Email contacts remain unchanged and are shown on page 4 of this issue.

A DAY OUT BY THE SEASIDE

Friends, families and visitors joined members of Northumberland Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) at their annual county day held recently in Newbiggin by the Sea. Glorious weather was a bonus on the day, which was a huge success. An added attraction was the presence of the Wansbeck Youth Band, a group of very talented local school pupils. Early September sees the general release of "that" film, "The Calendar Girls". WI members will be arranging events at local cinemas screening it. Not to be missed!!

NEW STAFF

ADRIAN VASS



ADRIAN VASS has joined CCN as a part-time Community Development Officer for Mid-Northumberland. Adrian comes to the organisation with a background in Agricultural Marketing which he graduated in from Harper Adams University College. He has held senior management positions in a number of agriculturally based companies.

Adrian has worked with small businesses in Northumberland, often rural, to help them develop and create a market strategy for new markets outside the North East and in overseas markets and the subsequent raising of funds to carry out their expansion plans. Many of the businesses he helped to support were concerned with tourism and his interest in mountain biking and all things cycling has meant that he has great interest in developing cycle tourism in Northumberland. In his spare time he is a Sustrans Ranger for a section of the Coast & Castle route (Alnmouth section), a member of the County Council's Rural Stakeholders Group, a member of the Alnwick Peoples Trust and supports Alnwick Scouts as an outdoor activity leader and is completing his MA in Marketing part time at Newcastle Business School.

ACCESS TO THE WORKING COUNTRYSIDE

THE ORIGINS of the Access to the Working Countryside project go back to 1989 when a Farm Visits Scheme was initiated for Food and Farming Year. On its cessation in 1990 the need for a similar scheme was considered essential and thus was born the project Access to the Working Countryside. The project's aim has been to help community and school groups, mainly from the urban areas of Tyneside and Northumberland to visit farms and other rural land based enterprises. Help has primarily been in the form of 50% grant aid to cover travel expenses, plus expertise in connecting groups of young people with rural venues.

From the beginning the scheme has been run by voluntary co-ordinator Charles Spink as a project of and with the continuing support of The Community Council of Northumberland.

Without Charles's time and commitment this annual benefit to some 3000 children, would not happen. Access to the Countryside now needs to engage other interested volunteers to support Charles and so ensure the continual success of this project.

In addition to individual input, Access to The Countryside is seeking expertise from partner organisations wishing to facilitate opportunities for young people to enjoy, understand and respect the working countryside. These organisations would present an opportunity to develop and expand the experiences available to young people and help strengthen the long-term financial viability of the project.

Anyone individual or organisation interested in volunteering or assisting the project should contact Alan Hedley at the Community Council of Northumberland, Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth NE61 1PY. Tel 01670 517178. email alanhedley@ccn.org.uk

NORTHUMBERLAND'S FIRST COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE VISIT

HALTWHISTLE will be the first Northumbrian community to benefit from the unique North America/UK Countryside Exchange Programme when it plays host later this year to a party of North American specialists in rural issues. The study visit is a first for Northumberland but one which if successful will probably trigger other such visits to the County.

In a study visit scheduled for October 2003 eight Canadians and Americans will be arriving at the small Tynedale market town for an intensive week of briefings, visits and discussions. At the end of their trip the visitors will present an action plan to the local community for further discussion. The focus of the study will be an assessment of how Haltwhistle could better exploit its geographical position, being located so close to Hadrian's Wall, a National Park and an AONB. The North American team will have been selected - at Haltwhistle's request - for their special expertise in selling, Heritage development, National Parks, Sustainable transport, walking and cycling holidays, town centre management and tourism vision.

Although conclusions are not likely to be revolutionary, elsewhere communities have found that the exchange projects can furnish communities with new perspectives and fresh ways of looking at old problems. The underlying dynamic is that a community can benefit from some "out of the box" thinking from overseas experts who can focus on the problems of the community without any preconceptions or awareness of the constraints which may excessively condition the ideas of local experts.

PARTNERSHIP

The Community based Haltwhistle Partnership is hosting the exchange. It has already identified key local issues and has planned a programme of meetings and visits for the exchange week. It has also arranged for the necessary computers, printers and other office materials to enable the team to produce their report at the end of the exchange.

The visit is taking place under the auspices of the North America/ U.K. Countryside Exchange, a unique international programme which aims to help rural localities find ways of addressing current countryside problems and provide a challenging learning opportunity for experienced professionals and volunteers.

The United Kingdom and North America share many concerns about the future of the countryside and rural landscapes, and those who live and work in them. Helping local people and organisations respond to these challenges, through the timely input of practical advice, is the mission of the Exchange.

The Countryside Exchange developed from a memorandum of understanding between the United States National Park Service and the Countryside Commission in the U.K. to co-operate "on the conservation and management of cultural, natural and recreational resources". It now encompasses a much broader perspective on countryside issues including the sustainability of the communities who live there. Since 1987 over 100 localities have benefited from hosting exchange teams involving in total over 900 professional staff. The Exchange is supported in the U.K. by several major government agencies, employing CEI Associates as a secretariat. They in turn work closely with North American partners, the Glynwood Center, who manage the Exchange on their side of the Atlantic.

WOMEN SHEPHERDS IN THE CHEVIOTS

DURING THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, Bridget Gubbins has been photographing women shepherds at work in the hills of Upper Coquetdale, Northumberland. The farms are in the Northumberland National Park, most of them on land owned by the Ministry of Defence.

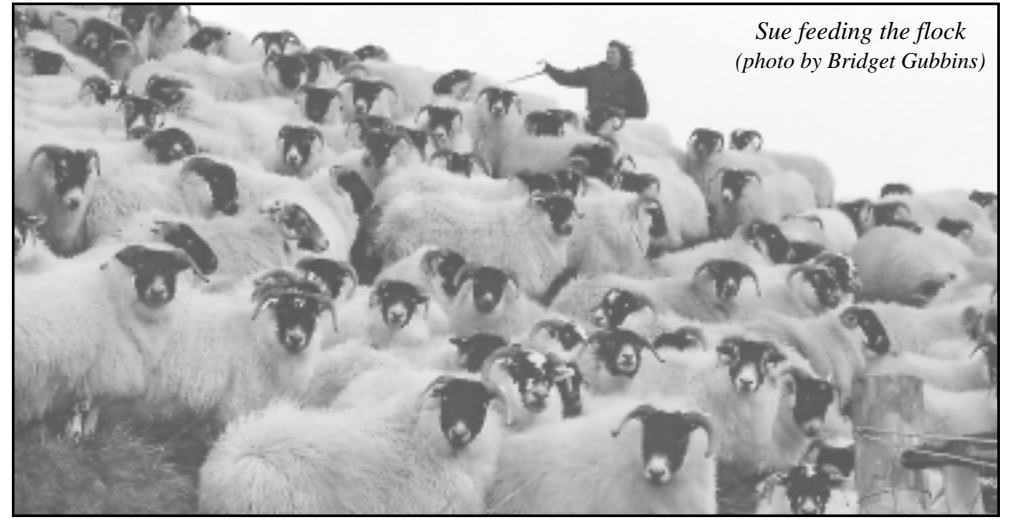
"It's nothing out of the ordinary to them, rounding up a flock of several hundred sheep, manipulating skittish ewes for horn branding, skinning a dead lamb to make a jacket for an orphan. But to me, it's amazing. You have to be tough to catch a ewe on a steep hillside, sometimes in the most appalling weather, so that she can be helped with a difficult delivery. Their work is about producing meat for people, but it is done with concern for the welfare of their animals. I've seen the care they take to match an orphan with a ewe whose lamb has died; and the sense of satisfaction when the flock is calmly grazing on the hill, on a quiet spring evening".

Bridget has now put together these photographs into an exhibition that illustrates the skills and caring of these women. You can view this exhibition at:

WOOLER - The Cheviot Centre, Padgepool Place, Wooler - Sunday 6 July to Friday 30 August 9am - 5 pm (Exhibition room is sometimes in use - tel 01668 282406 for information).

NEWCASTLE COLLEGE SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN - Ryehill Campus, Scotswood Road, Newcastle upon Tyne - Monday 3 November to Monday 24 November - Monday to Thursday 9 am - 6.30 pm Friday 9 am - 4 pm. Closed Saturday and Sunday tel 0191 200 4203 for information.

For further information on the project contact Bridget on 01670 515790.



Sue feeding the flock
(photo by Bridget Gubbins)

(Continued from front page)

For these ideas to come forward, there has to be dialogue: between schools, and between a school and its local community.

In the Ashington and Hirst Review, three schools have already been identified for possible closure (Coulson Park and Linton First Schools, and Alexandra Middle School) and the statutory consultation process has started. Nevertheless, the LEA are still receptive to further ideas, but time is tight. In that area, surplus places are set to rise from 11 to 17% over the next four years, and so 'doing nothing' is not an option.

Now, work has started on the next review, covering the Berwick High School catchment area. There, surplus places across the 3 tiers are set to rise to 18% by 2007, with up to 26% surplus places within the area's first schools.

If they have not already done so, parish councils and other interested community groups in this area should make contact with their local schools to discuss the implications of the review, and to identify any possible opportunities.

One term at a time over the next few years, the schools in every part of Northumberland will be reviewed. Even if we do not yet know the sequence of these reviews, it is not too soon for communities to be thinking about what they might do to underpin the viability of schooling in their area.

Details of the review are available from
Mr Mike Trimming at County Hall
Tel 01670 533611
email mtrimming@northumberland.gov.uk

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PUBLICATION DETAILS

Northumberland Community News is produced by the Community Council of Northumberland. The first edition came out in October 1981 and it has appeared every two months since then. The newsletter should be of interest to anyone who is working to benefit their local community. We use it to circulate useful information on sources of advice and money, to alert people to changes in legislation or service provision which may affect them, and to pass on ideas and news from one community to another. There are regular items on Parish Council affairs, community halls and funding as well as other items of informative and newsworthy value; but our hope is that most people read the whole paper as a means of keeping in touch with voluntary activity and the rural parts of the county.

Northumberland Community News is distributed free to Parish and District Councils, the County Council, village hall and Age Concern committees, the rural clergy and many voluntary organisations. Copies are also available in public libraries. If you belong to one of the groups mentioned and do not see the newsletter, find out why not. If you would like more copies contact the Community Council.

Contributions and ideas are welcomed. Please get in touch with the Editor, at Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth NE61 1PY For information on the Community Council check out their website at www.ccn.org.uk

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