



NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY

NEWS

VOL. 24 - No. 4

Mid August - Mid October 2004

PUBLISHED BY THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF NORTHUMBERLAND, TOWER BUILDINGS, OLDGATE, MORPETH, NORTHUMBERLAND NE61 1PY. Telephone 01670 517178

REGIONAL DEBATE HOTS UP

VOTERS THROUGHOUT the North East are being asked to say yes or no to the creation of a directly-elected regional assembly (DERA). The referendum on the 4th November 2004 will be by postal vote, and people living in Northumberland will also be asked a second question, on their preference for the future shape of local government in the County. This will draw to a conclusion a regional debate which has progressed since the publication of the Regional White Paper Your Region, Your Choice, in May 2002. It may also settle the uncertainty over the future of county and district councils, which was previously reviewed in the early 1990's.

In July, the Government published a draft Bill and a Policy Statement which both clarified and beefed-up the prospective powers of a DERA.

These will now include:

- co-ordinating the decisions of various regional public bodies
- funding and steering One NE and Business Links
- close involvement with Learning and Skills Councils
- administering European regional programmes
- town and country planning at a strategic level
- strategic planning and funding social housing
- promoting and influencing transport programmes and schemes
- co-ordinating, funding and promoting culture, the arts, sport, tourism and heritage
- co-operation with Lottery distributors
- promotion (but not direct delivery) of public health services
- 'rural proofing' of public sector programmes
- promotion and conservation of protected landscapes, biodiversity, energy and the wider environment
- influencing crime and disorder strategies
- regional fire and rescue responsibilities.

In addition, further powers and functions may be given to a DERA in due course.

To promote public interest in, and awareness of, the potential of DERAs, the Government is funding two independent campaign groups: one in favour and one opposed to the idea. It is these campaigns, together with the local media, which will help to influence people in the referendum.

If there is a majority in favour of a DERA, the present system of county and district councils in Northumberland and in County Durham will be reorganised into single-tier unitary authorities. Therefore, the second question will ask Northumberland voters whether they would wish to see the creation of one, or two, such unitary authorities. Both of these options will involve a considerable amount of re-organisation and, inevitably, disruption. Only the parish and town councils will remain intact.

Despite speculation in the national media, it really is uncertain which way the referendum will go. On the DERA question, people will need to decide whether this will be an effective and efficient powerhouse for revitalisation of the North East, or a costly and toothless additional tier of bureaucracy. Certainly, the roles and powers of a DERA appear more attractive now, than they did two years ago, but how effective will it be, alongside the large and powerful Government Office for the North East? And to what extent will it draw its power upwards (away from local authorities) rather than downwards (away from Whitehall)?

The response to the unitary authority question is equally unpredictable. On the one hand, a Northumberland-wide authority would probably be more cost-effective than two smaller ones. On the other hand, many residents are nervous of the way in which the current Northumberland-wide County Council has distanced itself from local community opinions in recent years. There are signs that some people are planning to use this referendum as a vote of no confidence in one or other tier of local government.

If the referendum supports the creation of a DERA, it will take several years to be implemented: a period of change which will have significant implication for the organisation and delivery of public services in Northumberland, and therefore for local authorities and voluntary bodies as well. It may be one of the most important political issues to affect our county and region in recent years, and for once we can be assured that the eyes of the nation will be on us.

Branxton's New Pathway - Phase 1

AFTER COMPLETING their Parish Plan last year the Branxton community, in North Northumberland, set up a new committee to look at developing the Flodden Battlefield.

Many members of the community had expressed a desire to make more out of the site, because it has such historical significance. Apart from a stone cross, there is nothing to tell people more about the day of the battle.

The history of Flodden:

The Battle of Flodden, which took place on 9 September 1513 was fought between the English, under command of the Earl of Surrey, and the Scots, commanded by King James IV, on Branxton Moor. What was originally planned as a tokenistic tactic to keep the French happy went horribly wrong within the space of just a couple of hours. Although the Scots had a better position, were better prepared and had better equipment, they were caught out by the English and defeated.

King James IV had made a serious mistake and instead of standing his ground and waiting for the English to come, he led a charge downhill to meet them. His men were carrying the traditional, huge, heavy Scottish spears. These were designed to be used by men standing closer together forming a tight forest of spikes. They were too heavy. The Scots had to throw them down as they moved up and down slippery slopes while the English were able to use their shorter, lighter 'bills', spears with axes.

The Scots drew their swords and fought bravely. That day James IV died with 10,000 Scots on Flodden field. With them died a great number of the ruling nobles and many families were almost wiped out.

The Branxton community has now completed phase 1 of the developments: a new walkway around the field of the battle. They have put in place benches and bridges and visitors are invited to come on a walk with local guides at least once a month. The committee decided to have a special opening ceremony on Monday 19 July and invited the community to celebrate this first achievement. Phase 2 will include the erection of information panels along the route and a mobile exhibition in the Village Hall.

The developments are working towards a closer partnership with the Scottish '1513 Club' in Coldstream and other Scottish groups, who commemorate Flodden on an annual basis (Selkirk and Hawick). The Branxton committee has received tremendous support from the 1513 Club and is now returning their support by helping this Coldstream group apply for funding for a local monument in the town. Old foes are turning friends in this cross-border activity!

NEW RURAL PROGRAMMES

A SERIES OF REFORMS to rural organisations and programmes were announced by the Government in July. These reforms, under the general heading Rural Strategy 2004, are the latest and probably most sweeping in a series of changes which began with the Rural White Paper in 2000, and which have been significantly influenced by the post Foot and Mouth Disease Haskins Report on 'Modernising Rural Delivery'.

The Strategy runs to nearly 100 pages, and is supplemented by a number of Fact Sheets, which give further details about the logistics

and timing of various proposals contained in the Strategy. Two major objectives of the Strategy are to reduce and simplify the structures and programmes involved in rural development, and to put decision-making about the delivery of programmes closer to the ground. Specific provisions include:

- (1) The creation of an integrated rural agency by bringing together English Nature, the landscape and recreation functions of the Countryside Agency and the environment

(Continued on back page)



Representatives from the Coldstream '1513 Club'



Clive Hallam-Baker, committee chairman and Lord James Joicey, declaring new walkway open

Put it in your diary

The Annual General Meeting of the Community Council of Northumberland will be held on Wednesday 10 November 2004. The venue and guest speaker will be announced when known.

VILLAGE HALLS - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Health and Safety in Village Halls

VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES have many responsibilities. Coming high on the list is their "duty of care" under common law towards individuals and organisations to avoid carelessly causing personal injury or damage to property. They also have a statutory duty under Health and Safety legislation to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of employees and others who use the hall. Other users of the hall will include volunteers, members of the public and people contracted to do visit the hall for any reason e.g. plumber, electrician, glazier, meter reader etc.

Health and safety issues can be a minefield. There is much to be considered that can not be covered in an article such as this. Committees are encouraged to make use of available publications from the Health and Safety Executive. The latest issue of Village Halls Information Sheet on Health and Safety Legislation and Village Halls (published by ACRE) is available through CCN at a cost of £4.00 plus postage.

Perhaps the first thing that a Committee can do is to carry out a Risk Assessment of their premises. More detailed information is available in the above mentioned information sheet but a brief summary follows.

First consider these definitions:

Hazard: this is anything that can cause harm. E.g. chemicals (cleaning fluids), electricity (poorly maintained sockets and equipment), walking surfaces (loose carpets, polished floors), working practices (use of ladders, use of power tools).

Risk: how likely (high or low) that someone can be harmed by the hazard.

Next carry out the following steps:

Step one

Divide your premises/property into areas such as hall, kitchen, toilets, meeting room, youth club room, car park, outside of building etc.

Step two

Walk round each of your designated areas and look for hazards, concentrating on those that could cause serious harm or affect several persons. Assess the possible frequency of the hazard occurring and score from 1 (low) to high (6) as follows. 1-Improbable 2-Possible 3-Occasional 4-Frequent 5-Regular 6-Common.

Step three

Decide who might be harmed by the hazard and in what way. Don't forget to consider children, disabled visitors and volunteers.

Assess the severity of the possible injury and score from 1 (low) to (6) high as shown below.

1. Trivial Injuries; 2. Minor Injuries; 3. Major - One Person; 4. Major - Many People 5. Death of One Person 6. Multiple Deaths

Step four

Evaluate the risks and decide whether precautions are adequate or more should be done. Consider whether the remaining risk is high, medium or low.

In order to evaluate the remaining risk you must add the frequency and the severity to give you a final score. If this score shows a Risk Rating of 5 or more it will require further action.

Frequency Score + Severity Score = Risk Rating Score

Risk Rating Example

Activity: Caretaker cleaning high level windows using a ladder:

Frequency: Possible (2); Severity: Major injury to one person (3)

Risk Rating: (5)

This activity would require further action; examples of a possible action are given below:

1. Try a less risky option,
2. Prevent access to the hazard, for example guarding,
3. Organise to reduce exposure to the hazard,
4. Issue personal protective equipment, for example gloves,
5. Provide welfare facilities, for example someone to hold the ladder, a first aid kit.

Step five

You must always record your findings as you may be asked to produce your records in the event of an insurance claim.

Your records must show that

- a proper check was made
- you asked who might be affected
- you dealt with the obvious hazards
- the precautions are reasonable and the remaining risk is low

Step six

Finally, you must review your Risk Assessment on a regular basis and revise it if and where necessary, for example if there has been an accident, if any circumstances change. If you do not have any accidents and your circumstances do not change in any way, you must review your assessment at least every two years.

If you have any questions about Risk Assessment please contact either CCN or the Health & Safety Executive (0191 202 6200), www.hse.gov.uk

FIRE SAFETY IN VILLAGE HALLS

IN JULY 2002 the government carried out consultation on the Reform of Fire Safety Legislation. The resultant proposals have now been laid before Parliament and should come into force in early 2005. Guidance for the new regime is currently being prepared by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The aim of the new legislation is to create one simple fire safety regime that applies to all workplaces and non domestic premises.

The new regime will be risk assessment based with responsibility for fire safety resting with the person responsible for the premises. There will also be a new statutory duty on fire authorities to promote community fire safety, for powers of entry for the investigation of fires, and for a power to take away samples for testing.

NOMINATE YOUR LOCAL UNSUNG HEROES

TO CELEBRATE her Golden Jubilee in 2002, The Queen announced a new annual Award to recognise outstanding voluntary activities by groups in the community.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service recognises the "unsung heroes" who improve the quality of life and opportunities of others in their community through their voluntary work. Any group of two or more people, that should generally have been operating for a minimum of three years, can be nominated, provided that the majority of its members are volunteers, and that the group's activity is not solely concerned with fundraising for charitable purposes.

Last year there were very few nominations from within Northumberland. If you know an outstanding group of volunteers who devote their time to helping others and make a difference in your community then why not nominate them for an award?

Closing date for nominations is 30 September 2004. For more information visit www.queensawardvoluntary.gov.uk, email gaward@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or call 0845 000 2002.

EURO FUND TRICKLE LAUNCHED

THE 'SECOND HALF' of the region's European Objective 2 development programme was launched in April. For community projects, the programme administration will be very much as it has been previously. In Northumberland, decisions on which projects will receive support will continue to be made by 3 community-led package partnerships, covering the target communities of Blyth Valley, Wansbeck and Rural Northumberland, respectively. In the rural area, 8 locally-based community panels will promote the programme and indicate their priorities for funding.

What has changed markedly is the amount of funding available: a reduction from about £7 million during 2001 - 2003, to £3.4 million for 2004 - 06. A number of projects which had been in the 'pending tray' at the Government Office since last Autumn have already eaten into this latter sum. This means that money for community projects will be extremely tight, for the duration of the programme and, at this stage, it is unclear whether a successor European programme will be introduced in 2007.

Nevertheless, there are still some Objective 2 funding opportunities for some parts of the county, in addition to the continuation of the GOLD grants scheme. For further details, contact:

Steve Elliott (Blyth Valley)	01670 542000
Lynda Watson (Wansbeck)	01670 532200
Els Nicol (Berwick)	01668 281188
Clare Wood (Alnwick)	01665 605540
Ken Walters (Rothbury)	01669 621770
Bill Carr (Coalfield Villages)	01670 791773
Jane Hart (North Tyne/Redesdale)	01434 220154
Chris Barker (West/South Tynedale)	01434 322766
Richard Powell (East Tynedale)	01434 607871

Village hall management committees need to keep fire safety in mind at all times. Those halls with Public Entertainment Licences will have had to satisfy the licensing authority in respect of their fire safety arrangements. The Fire Protection Association booklet Essential Fire Safety, Fire Safety in Village Hall and Community Centres was first published in 1996 and is still available from the FPA at a cost of £5.00. The FPA are currently situated at Bastille Court, 2 Paris Garden, London SE1 8ND (tel 020 7902 5300) but are moving to the Cotswolds area in mid September so any hall wishing to purchase a copy would be advised to look at their website www.thefpa.co.uk before sending an order.

CASH FROM YOUR KITCHEN!

EVER THOUGHT ABOUT selling your culinary delights but worried about all the rules and regulations? To overcome exactly these problems, Leader+ is organising a series of events around North Northumberland. "Recent local research has predicted that due to increasing interest in local produce, demand will soon outstrip supply and more producers are needed" said Mikyla Robinson of CCN. "Meanwhile jobs are still sparse and jobs that fit the hours you want to work and location you want to work from are even rarer. That's why unleashing latent local talent for cooking, baking and preserving is capturing people's imagination.

The first Cash From Your Kitchen events were held in July in Alnwick and Berwick with a programme of speakers covering Farmers Markets, Environment Health requirements, Labelling requirements and business start-up assistance. The events were deemed a great success by all who attended them and many people were pleasantly surprised to learn that, modern, clean kitchens need no modifications to make them meet the necessary standards.

More Cash From Your Kitchen events are planned for the autumn, to be held in settlements around North Northumberland. A list of people interested in attending is has been set up by Wendy Fergie at CCN (01665 606 578) due to early demand. In fact interest has been expressed from as far away as Skipton, North Yorks, where a Women's Network are now looking to host their own series of Cash From Your Kitchen.

Leader+ wants to work with the food and drink sector in North Northumberland to overcome barriers and exploit opportunities through networking and collaboration activities. Anyone interested in this should contact Mikyla Robinson at CCN on 01665 606 578 or Neil Wilson at Leader+ on 01665 603 852.

A CONSULTATION NOT TO BE MISSED

HAS YOUR GROUP in the past made an application, successful or not, to the Community Fund or the New Opportunities Fund - or have they thought about applying in the future?

As reported in the last issue of this paper these two funds have merged into the Big Lottery Fund and are currently carrying out public consultation. Your view matters. Don't say at a later date that you were not asked. If you have any views on what the Big Lottery should be addressing this is your opportunity to air them. Go to www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/consultation.

TRAINING FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Two training events organised by North Northumberland Voluntary Action are taking place in September:

Disability Discrimination Act Awareness Event, Monday 6 September at The Cheviot Centre, Wooler. An opportunity for voluntary organisations to become familiar with the requirements of the Act. The programme for the day will include:

- what is disability?
- disability etiquette
- DDA - summary
- in-depth look at part III of the Act, Access to Services
- DDA case studies

Presented by Desi Gillespie, a trainer from Disability North.

Meet the Funders, Wednesday 15 September at Beadnell W.I. Hall. Presentations and individual consultations by funders for voluntary and community groups in north Northumberland. Funders committed to attending are The Community Foundation, North East Co-op, Lloyds/TSB Foundation, Northern Rock Foundation, Northumberland County Council Small Grants Scheme and Grant Opportunities for Local Development.

Information on the events can be obtained from NNVA (01289) 308338 or (01665) 605772

NEW FACES AT CCN

BizFizz Coach in Alnwick Firing up the passion of local entrepreneurship

MARK SHIPPERLEE has recently taken up the post as the BizFizz Coach for the Alnwick district area, facilitated by the Community Council of Northumberland.

BizFizz believes that in any community there are people who want to do things and who have a passion that they could turn into a business. All they need is a little help. So the BizFizz coach is placed in the heart of the community, to help entrepreneurs to reach their potential.

Mark's role is to help entrepreneurs to either start or develop their business, especially identifying and working through barriers to business. Mark is supported by a panel of local people from the community who bring their experience and knowledge to assist with issues

that may arise for entrepreneurs.

Mark lives with his wife and three children in Amble, and prior to this post was Chief Executive of Poverty Solutions, the charitable arm of Big Issue Scotland that worked around the world setting up income generation projects to tackle poverty.

He previously spent eleven years founding and developing a significant charity working in Romania and the Balkans, which had associated trading divisions working in tourism and international haulage. His initial work was running his own tree surgery, forestry and rural management business for ten years in southeast England.

If you would like to have a chat about your idea, or your current business, please contact



Mark in Alnwick - Tel: 01665-605977 Email: markshipperlee@ccn.org.uk

Address: Russell House, Greenwell Road, Alnwick, NE66 1HB

RESPECT - PROTECT - ENJOY

A NEW COUNTRYSIDE CODE to update the original 1950s' country code and help prepare everyone for the introduction of the public's new right of access_ to the countryside was launched in July by the Countryside Agency promoting the overall messages of Respect - Protect - Enjoy.

Aardman, the Academy-award winning animation company has created new 'Creature Comforts(tm)' characters to help the Countryside Code reach the widest-possible audience. Animated public service broadcasts, featuring the new characters in coastal, farmland and moorland scenes, have been screened on TV channels across England and Wales, and at selected cinemas and outdoor venues. Educational materials, specially developed for teachers and youth leaders, will be available from January 2005.

For the first time the Countryside Code includes a special section for land managers.

The full Code text is available in leaflet form or online at www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

The updated Countryside Code - messages for the public:

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

Pam Warhurst, chair of the Countryside Agency said: "We have all grown up with the Code and most people can remember at least one line. Just as Norman Thelwell created popular cartoons to illustrate the original Code in the 1950s, we've teamed up with Aardman to create a 'Creature Comforts' campaign. We want to encourage everyone to get out and enjoy our countryside whilst giving them confidence in their new rights and responsibilities and respect for those who depend on it - respect, protect, enjoy."

To help people plan where to go and what to do in the countryside, a new website has also been launched - www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk not only has advice on the new public right of access to open country and registered common land, but also provides details of national trails, national parks, rights of way and links to many related organisations. The website also features a special section on the Countryside Code, including the Aardman animation sequence which has been produced in English and Welsh.

Copies of the Countryside Code leaflet with full explanatory text will be widely available but people can get a free copy by logging onto www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk or by calling 0845 100 3298.



CHRIS BARKER took up the role of CDO, covering Haltwhistle and the surrounding areas, in July. Chris lives locally, in Bardon Mill,

Community Development Officer in Haltwhistle Supporting communities in Western Tynedale

with his wife Andrea, and their 2 children Jamie (9) and Katherine (3). Brought up in Newcastle Chris, after leaving school, went into a retail career ending up as a department manager in Harrods for a number of years. After returning to the Northeast in 1998, and seeking a career change, he went to university to learn about things other than trying to get people to part with their money. A spell working for Tynedale Council brought home to him the importance of local communities in rural areas. Having been involved in many community projects it gradually dawned on him that

community development was where his interests lay, so it was back to college again to learn more about what is involved. Chris said "When this post came up it seemed a perfect opportunity to engage with local groups and hopefully help to make a difference in our area".

Not surprisingly most of Chris's spare time revolves around his children, but if there is any left he enjoys walking, reading, music and making the most of living in such a beautiful area.

Chris can be contacted on 01434 322766; Email christopherbarker@ccn.org.uk

Project Officer based in the Durham area Promoting the development and awareness of renewable energy initiatives by local groups

LINDSAY NICHOLSON joins CCN as project officer for the REALL project (Renewable Energy at Local Level). REALL is Northumberland and County Durham's Countryside Agency initiative to encourage community groups to incorporate renewable energy into community schemes. She is actively assisting groups such as village hall committees, voluntary groups of all kinds, parish councils, schools new businesses which play an essential economic role in a rural area, groups of residents and new groups which have been set up to run schemes.

Lindsay moved to the north east five years ago to study Countryside Management at Newcastle University. Being an avid horse rider she fell in love with the stunning Northumberland landscapes immediately. This combined with the Newcastle's nightlife and Stotties has resulted in Lindsay finding it impossible to leave ever since.

Since graduating she has worked for the Heritage Lottery Fund within the north east team. She is now thoroughly enjoying working with REALL's projects in the County



Durham area. If anyone would like to discuss a potential project she can be contacted at DRCC's offices in Lanchester on 01207 529621.

SUPPORTING LOCAL GROUPS

WORK HAS STARTED on the preparation of a strategy to improve and extend the support services which are available to voluntary and community groups throughout Northumberland. The work is being steered by a consortium which currently includes the Community Council, the 2 local councils of voluntary service (Blyth Valley and Wansbeck), the 2 volunteer bureaux (Tynedale and Castle Morpeth / Wansbeck), North Northumberland Voluntary Action (a part of CCN), the Government Office, Northumberland Strategic Partnership and Countryside Agency.

We are looking at the current array of services: general and specialist advice, training, opportunities to learn from peers, premises, project management, links with statutory bodies, advocacy and so on. As well as considering how these current services may change in the future, the strategy will also identify and promote new opportunities. For example, to

ensure a complete coverage of locally-based community development support throughout Northumberland, and to offer support on computers and related technology.

All of this comes under the heading of 'Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure'. This is not a new idea: the Community Council, for example, has been providing many of these services in Northumberland since 1951. What is much newer is the Government's recent interest in infrastructure: to achieve a more effective and efficient coverage of such services, and to persuade local public sector bodies to support them. To help effect any improvements, the Government (through the Home Office and DEFRA) has made available a significant grant fund, amounting to some £90 million. Northumberland infrastructure bodies will bid for a share of this, when the strategy is finalised in September. Regrettably, current indications are that this money will have

to be received and spent by March 2006, which is a very short period.

The strategy will need to be flexible, in case the November 'Regional Referendum' leads to a local government reorganisation in Northumberland. Various parts of the voluntary and community sector and its infrastructure are currently aligned on council boundaries which may well disappear. Also, many existing infrastructure services are supported by short-term external funding (e.g. the National Lottery, Single Regeneration Budget and European programmes), which may not be available in future. Surprisingly, little support currently comes from local government, the NHS, LSC or other local public bodies: the Government hopes that this situation will improve in future.

The work in Northumberland is being supported by consultant Philly Bell (formerly

of the Shilbottle Skills Centre and Community Service Volunteers), who is also ensuring a close co-ordination with similar work in Tyne and Wear, Durham and Tees Valley.

For further information, contact David Francis at Tower Buildings, or Philly Bell on 01665 606429 (email pbell@tsne.co.uk)

Parish Clerk's Salaries

New recommendations have been published for the salaries of parish council clerks, which take effect retrospectively from 1 April 2004. As before, they are based on parts of the National Joint Council scales for Local Government Services. A second set of recommendations is also available, which will take effect from April 2005. Copies of both papers are available from Tower Buildings.

(Continued from front page)

- functions of the DEFRA Rural Development Service.
- (2) Government Offices for the Regions will be given a central role in planning and co-ordinating rural policies and programmes within their regions.
 - (3) The national policy and advocacy role of the Countryside Agency will remain (as the New Countryside Agency), to advise Government departments and agencies on rural issues and to promote good practice.
 - (4) Regional Development Agencies (such as One NE) will be given additional money and powers to support economic and some socio-economic initiatives in rural areas. They will lead on many aspects of the European-funded England Rural Development Programme.
 - (5) Local authorities will be given further responsibilities regarding countryside access and public service delivery in rural areas. A handful of authorities (one per region) will be involved in new 'pathfinder' arrangements to develop a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of services.
 - (6) The number of separate DEFRA funding streams (said to exceed 100) will be reduced to 3 major programmes.
- Of particular interest to rural communities will be the chapters in the strategy which relate to Economic and Social Regeneration, and to

Social Justice for All. ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England, the national body for rural community councils) has published a digest of these

Chapter 1: Economic and Social Regeneration (Sections 16 to 46)

The content of this Chapter is largely focused on two economic objectives - sustaining prosperity in all rural areas and specific intervention in those areas termed 'economically lagging', where targeted programmes, including promotion of social enterprise (19, 33) and priority on public transport provision (35c) will be relevant. Defra intends to build on the existing role of the RDAs in delivery of these social and economic regeneration objectives (34, 35) through transfer of the existing Countryside Agency socio-economic grants programmes to the RDA single pot programmes and supplement these in January 2007 with the transfer of responsibility of England Rural Development Programme initiatives (see Annex D for more details).

Government Offices will lead the development of regional arrangements to broker relationships and arrangements for assessing rural priorities (36, 37) to achieve the function proposed by Lord Haskins for Rural Priority Boards. They will also oversee the arrangements for evaluating the performance of RDAs against the agreed Defra targets, and the capacity for undertaking the new rural delivery channels will benefit from transfers of staff from the existing Countryside Agency (38).

In addition, there will be a number of local authority-led pathfinder projects (39) to deliver innovative approaches, jointly with partners at sub-regional and local levels. These will investigate both targeting of resources and integrating economic and social programmes across both Defra and mainstream funding streams. This will also link with countryside access and environmental issues and work with second generation local public service agreements to focus delivery and evaluate outcomes.

Defra is looking to build on the existing role of Regional Rural Affairs Forums (42) to better connect local delivery organisations with policy makers and ensure rural proofing of mainstream policy (43). The Regional RAF will benefit from a strengthened relationship with Ministers, whilst the England Rural Affairs Forum will be disbanded to be replaced by an annual national conference, bringing together local, regional and national stakeholders (46). A smaller focused New Countryside Agency will engage contacts at regional and local level to deliver advice to government, making rural disadvantage a priority, and monitor the delivery of sustainable solutions (43).

Chapter 2: Social Justice for all (sections 47-67)

Two strands underpin this chapter and both are relevant to all rural areas, ie they are not just spatially targeted interventions. The first is fair access to public services and affordable housing, which will be underpinned by measures to monitor and rural proof service delivery and promote multi-service delivery solutions. Promotion of innovative solutions to delivery of public services and monitoring performance will be enhanced through better rural evidence and work with the Local Government Association and Audit Commission (56). In addition, a new annual Rural Service Review will be produced in the autumn to support the ability of local communities to take action themselves on improving access to service provision (56). Moves to increase the availability of rural housing will entail working with Regional Housing Boards and with ODPM in regard to the Barker Review. The role of rural housing enablers is specifically mentioned, as is identification of grass roots housing needs (58).

The second strand focuses on tackling social exclusion and the needs of those who are most disadvantaged. It is recognised that this has to be a universal programme, given the dispersed nature of rural social exclusion, and that rural disadvantage often has higher impact in the most affluent areas. The voluntary and community sector is seen as a primary

deliverer of social inclusion initiatives and support (59), and Defra will 'fund the sector' across all rural areas to improve its capacity to address grass roots needs. Alongside this, Defra will also fund a £1.5 million programme of action research (63) to explore approaches to supporting the potential role of social enterprise in delivering local solutions to service provision. This supplements the other strands of rural work in which Defra is currently engaged (63), for instance:

- in increasing the uptake of financial entitlements by pensioners in rural areas
- investing in the voluntary and community sector to strengthen local capacity in conjunction with the Home Office investment in infrastructure
- the Quality Parish programme in conjunction with ODPM
- Increase funding from Rural Enterprise Scheme funding to local business and the voluntary and community sector.

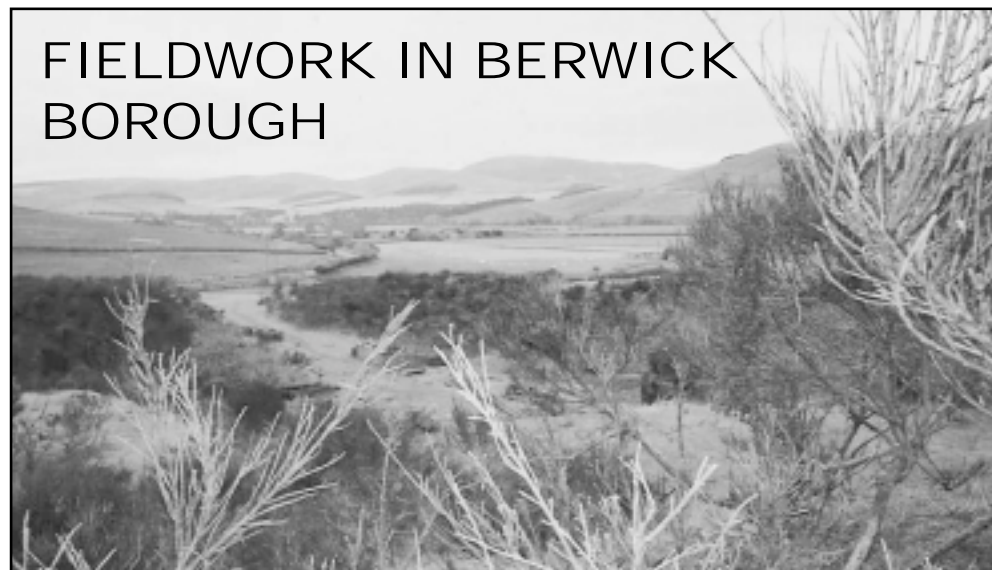
The current Countryside Agency social and community programmes will be brought together into a single funding programme and it is expected that RCCs will play an important part in these future programmes (64). Government Offices will look to maximising the available resources from funding streams, including those from Defra and the Home Office (66). Proposals will be published by December 2004 (66) on how this strand of funding will support:

- Community capacity building, including the role of parish councils
- Multi-service outlets
- Use and state of community buildings
- Infrastructure and capacity of the voluntary sector

Despite the amount of verbiage within the Strategy, much of the detail still has to be worked out. Even though these national structural reforms may be important, local communities are more likely to be interested in questions such as 'will the Vital Villages programme be re-instated?'; 'can we get funding for our village hall?'; 'will our farmers be able to stay in business?' and 'will this stop the County Council from closing our schools?'

The Community Council is part of a wider group, convened by GONE, to develop and refine the detailed application of these proposals within the North East, and we will be able to report on progress in future editions of Northumberland Community News.

The Strategy can be viewed on the DEFRA.gov website.



FIELDWORK IN BERWICK BOROUGH

WHAT DO THE PARISHES of Easington, Cheviotside, Bewick, Akeld, Ewart, Earle and Kilham all have in common? Answer: None of them have Parish Councils. Without this point of contact an important channel for communication is missing, putting the local population at a disadvantage if information and services therefore find it difficult to reach them. With this in mind, Els Nicol from the Community Council of Northumberland has been visiting some of the most rural parishes in the Berwick Borough in an attempt to make contact with these communities and to explore any local issues or ideas that they may have.

Els was well received by the many people she met during July and found various reasons for the absence of Parish Councils ranging from practical issues such as sparse populations meaning there are less volunteers to choose from, to lack of interest, to a desire not to pay the precept to Parish Council, to previous bad experiences of ineffective Parish Council and finally, outright cynicism 'it's always the same people and nothing gets done anyway'. Added to these, there often appeared to be a lack of understanding of what the benefits a Parish Council could bring. "Sometimes parishes without Parish Councils are losing out" Els commented. "The Vital Villages Programme is an example of a funding scheme available to Parish Councils and many parishes in the Berwick Borough have managed to attract funding from this programme to undertake a Parish Plan and are now in a position to use this to develop and fund further projects in their community" explained Els.

Exploring the issues around the absence of parish councils was just one of the aims of Els' walkabout, another aim was to see if there were any community projects, or even just ideas for which people needed the help of a Community Development Officer (CDO). "A group makes more of an impact than an individual and has the potential of really getting their voices heard and making things happen". Els is available to work with any community group (however small) in the Berwick Borough and can support the formation of new voluntary groups, aid project development and offer funding advice to name but a few of her abilities.

It is hoped that with the new contacts made in the Berwick Borough Els will be able to keep even the most isolated areas involved with what is going on.

For further information, please contact the Northern team of the Community Council of Northumberland on 01665-606 578

CCN'S RURAL WORK

Part of the Community Council's community development work in rural Northumberland came under the spotlight recently, through an evaluation exercise which was conducted by consultants Community Viewfinders on behalf of the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP). The evaluation, which was led by London-based Mark Patchett, has thrown up a series of recommendations covering the future funding, organisation, management and delivery of our work:

not only in the rural areas, but across the whole county.

The findings, some of which are already being implemented, are reinforcing a wider strategic review which CCN's Executive Committee initiated in January and which is linked to various external quality standards such as Investors in People and PQASSO.

A summary of the report can be found on the NSP.org website.

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

Copy deadline for the next edition is Tuesday, 21st September, 2004

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