



NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY

NEWS

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THE VOICE OF THE SECTOR

FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS virtually every new government initiative has included the condition that it must “engage” with the voluntary and community sector. The nature of this engagement is rarely described in any detail. That might be just as well because the voluntary and community sector (or VCS to use the now familiar, if ugly, acronym) includes everything from the local folk club to home care delivery by paid workers employed by Age Concern under contract to the Care Trust...as well as everything in between from the local Alzheimer Society to the village hall committee and youth club. Across Northumberland they probably add up to over 3000 different organisations and community groups. The things they have in common are that they are usually governed by people who give their time voluntarily; they don't distribute profit and they provide benefits to the community.

So the knotty question remains as to how best government (that's both local and national) and the VCS should engage with each other for mutual benefit. Who or what engages with bodies on behalf of the VCS given the numbers and extent of the sector? Clearly what's needed is some sort of forum which is recognised by all as the legitimate voice of the VCS.

A starting point could be to build on what already exists rather than begin from scratch or reinvent something which is already halfway there. At the moment organisations which offer support and advice to voluntary and community groups (like the Community Council of Northumberland and the Councils for Voluntary Services in Wansbeck and Blyth Valley) have come together with other groupings, like development trusts and volunteer centres, to oversee the delivery of a number of projects under the government's “ChangeUp” programme.

This ChangeUp Consortium had no pretensions that it was in any way truly representative of such a diverse and large group of county organisations but, six months after it started to meet regularly, the demand for it to consider other issues on behalf of the sector is increasing monthly. Government and its agencies want to have input from the VCS on everything from developing policy for Local Area Agreements to strengthening communities in Defra's new Rural Programme.

This is of course to be welcomed particularly if, by recognising our existence, these agencies act on it by ensuring that adequate funds are available to continue to provide invaluable services. But what should the structure of any new forum look like? Should it be made up of special interest groups like social care, sport, older people, the arts, people with disabilities, the environment? And where do parish councils fit in - they are definitely “community” but are not “voluntary”? How can we ensure that all areas of the county are adequately covered and is that important? What role would existing networks have? Or should it be left, in the main, to those organisations which specialise in advising and supporting voluntary & community groups?

AGM 2005

OUR AGM is on Wednesday afternoon 9 November at the Hindmarsh Hall, Alnmouth.

Invitations have been sent to those groups and organisations on our mailing list. Those wishing to attend for the buffet lunch at 1.00pm are reminded that lunches must be ordered and paid for by 1 November. Contact our Morpeth office on 01670 517178.

At 2.30pm there will be the formal business of the AGM, to be chaired by our President, the Duke of Northumberland. This will be followed by presentations from some of CCN's staff and the formal presentation of awards to the 3 winning entries in the Northumberland Building Community Life competition.

Should you wish to attend and have not received an invitation please contact our office at Morpeth on 01670 517178.

Northumberland Community Life Competition - Winners Announced



THE WINNING VILLAGES in the 2005 Calor Building Community Life competition in Northumberland have been revealed.

The competition was launched by the Community Council of Northumberland during the summer, following support for the Calor Building Community Life competition from Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). Defra has provided funding in 2005 at both county and national level to enhance the newly established Building Community Life category. Villages responded well to the competition and a total of six communities went through the judging process - Gunnerton, Heddon on the Wall, Horsley, Norham, Ovingham and Wingates. They were judged on many different aspects of their community life, from the organised schemes available to provide advice and support for people in need, to the way new residents are welcomed into village life.

The judges were impressed by the standard of the entries received, particularly because the majority of the entries came from very small communities. However, after a good amount of deliberation it was decided that the village of Wingates should be awarded the first prize of £350. Wingates is a small settlement of 138 residents located within the Nunykirk Parish, Alnwick. Judges were impressed by the village because of the wide range of community schemes available to support residents. These include car pooling and transport co-ordination to ensure all residents are mobile; a rota for newspaper collection from a neighbouring village; and a babysitting/child care co-operative just to name a few. Wingates resident, Linda Wilson, commented: “As a small, isolated rural community, we can't rely on the facilities and services that are more readily available to villages in other areas. Therefore, it's very much the residents of Wingates that make it what it is. It never ceases to amaze me just how friendly and enthusiastic everyone is.”

The second prize of £200 goes to the village of Norham, situated in the Berwick District of the county with a population of 300. Judges were impressed by the large number of both recreational and educational activities available in the village hall, church and school. Douglas Ewart of Norham commented on the village's success: “We are extremely pleased and proud that Norham has been recognised as the vibrant community we know it is. There is always lots going on in the village and the village hall is in use every day by a variety of groups. We are working hard at the moment to raise funds to help with the refurbishment of the village hall so that it can be used even more and the £200 prize money will hopefully go some way towards completing the project.”

In third place, receiving a prize of £100, is the village of Horsley, a community of 328 residents situated in Tynedale District. This village illustrated numerous good practice initiatives in its entry, from the production of parish information leaflets, to encouraging open access to parish meetings for all residents. Horsley resident Elizabeth Bramwell commented: “Our village is currently undergoing a lot of change - having been very much an agricultural village in the past, it's now becoming more of a commuter village. Therefore, we are working hard to alter the community accordingly and find ways of

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PARISH COUNCILS' FILES AND RECORDS

THE RETENTION AND STORAGE OF RECORDS and other documentation is a major concern for most parish councils. This is especially so where the parish clerk's 'office' is in their own home - usually in a room which serves many other purposes as well. In recent years, this has become an even greater issue: on the one hand, parish councils have been on the receiving end of many more consultation documents and briefings than ever before; on the other hand, they are more anxious about what must or need not be retained, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

To help parish clerks decide on a documentation policy, here are some tips;

1. Some documents should be kept indefinitely. Examples included the minutes of council meetings, title deeds and end-of-year receipts and payments summaries.
2. In general, the County Records Office is able to store those records of a parish council which are of historical interest, and they can be made available for public inspection.
3. Certain finance-related records need to be retained for 6 years, for VAT purposes.
4. Some material can be discarded almost immediately: not only junk mail, but also invitations to meetings, newsletters etc. However, 'advisory' magazines (such as *Local Council Review*) are worth retaining for some years.
5. Opinions vary as to how long planning application records should be stored: some say 'indefinitely'; others say 'until the proposed development has been completed'.
6. The parish council's Publication Scheme should be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it does not list any records which are no longer held by the parish council.

The table, below, has been compiled by the National Association of Local Councils as guidance on the retention of records:

DOCUMENT	MINIMUM RETENTION PERIOD	REASON
Minute books	Indefinite	Archive
Scales of fees and charges	5 years	Management
Receipt and payment account(s)	Indefinite	Archive
Receipt books of all kinds	6 years	VAT
Bank statements, including deposit/savings accounts	Last completed audit year	Audit
Bank paying-in books	Last completed audit year	Audit
Cheque book stubs	Last completed audit year	Audit
Quotations and tenders	12 years/indefinite	Statute of Limitations
Paid invoices	6 years	VAT
Paid cheques	6 years	Statute of Limitations
VAT records	6 years	VAT
Petty cash, postage and telephone books	6 years	Tax, VAT, Statute of Limitations
Timesheets	Last completed audit year	Audit
Wages books	12 years	Superannuation
Insurance policies	While valid	Management
Investments	Indefinite	Audit, Management
Title deeds, leases, agreements, contracts	Indefinite	Audit, Management
Members allowances register	6 years	Tax, Statute of Limitations

Changes Ahead for Volunteering

FOR NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND Voluntary Action, although the future is bright, it is not necessarily Orange! Most regular readers will appreciate that NNVA has two main areas of work in both Alnwick and Berwick:

- as a Volunteer Centre across the whole of the voluntary and community sector
- as development and support specifically for health and social care organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

Over the next few months, as the traditional sources of NNVA funding come to an end, there will be a few changes but those two main areas of work will continue in one way or another.

The Community Council of Northumberland is committed to assimilating work with health and social care organisations into more comprehensive community development strategies. Already, CCN has a member of staff with county wide responsibility for health and social care issues and an officer covering Alnwick and the coastal area of the district with responsibility for the support and development of all organisations in the voluntary and community sector; and already, the Community Council of Northumberland is the Volunteering England licence-holder to provide a Volunteer Centre in the northern part of the county.

Both Ian Bell in Alnwick and Terri Bearhope in Berwick have been points of contact for volunteering in NNVA. Together with Kelvin Rushworth, they will be progressing specific volunteering workstreams including the formation of a dedicated North Northumberland Volunteer Centre Advisory Committee (to provide expertise and support), the extension and servicing of a number of 'information points' publicising volunteering opportunities and the planning of a special Volunteering Training Programme to be launched in Spring 2006.



Terri Bearhope



Kelvin Rushworth



Ian Bell

Reaching The Parts That Others Can't...

INVEST 2006 regional post card campaign was launched in September at Stannington village hall and will run for three months. It is a response to the severe difficulties many voluntary and community groups are likely to encounter next year when several important European and domestic funding schemes come to an end.

The campaign aims to draw the attention of One NorthEast (the regional development agency) and the Government Office for the North East, MPs, MEPs and

local councillors to how important it is to secure adequate recognition and funding for the sector. The funding shortfall is predicted to be £50 million across the whole region and the postcard campaign hopes to act as a wake up call for Government.

OVINGHAM & DISTRICT CRAFT GROUP

EARLY THIS YEAR the Community Council assisted this new group in the drafting of its constitution. Beginning from September 29th the group will meet every Friday at 7.30pm in the Reading Room, Ovingham. It has benefited from the receipt of a grant of £2,309 from "Awards for All", which will enable members to buy a wide range of equipment and to have monthly workshops in many different traditional crafts. Some of the crafts which will be catered for are rag-rug making, various embroidery techniques, working with collage, willow, clay, lace, fabrics, card, beads and more.

Members will have the opportunity to practise a wide range of traditional crafts or they could just come along to 'do their own thing' and to chat. Some members might start by bringing any unfinished craft object from the back of their cupboards.

The committee has put together an exciting programme of monthly speakers/demonstrators/workshops led by craftspeople from the Aurora group. There will also be opportunities for members to go on subsidised courses in Cumbria and Oxfordshire. Those going on courses would be expected to share their newly learnt skills with fellow members. There are plans to make a large wall-hanging for the village hall. This will be designed by an expert but stitched by the members of the group.

This craft group would welcome donations of any unwanted equipment such as sewing machines, embroidery, sewing and lace making equipment, fabrics, mat frames and tools, beads and absolutely anything which donors might consider useful in the practice of traditional country crafts. Please telephone 01661 832695 or 01661 835728 to arrange collection (or visit the group and bring your contributions with you).

The forty people present, representing voluntary & community groups from all over Northumberland, were urged by the campaign's co-ordinator, Jane Streather, to complete the pre-written post cards and send them to government agencies and local politicians.

"The postcards are telling them that that they need to act now to plug the £50 million funding gap which threatens the good work of the voluntary and community organisations in disadvantaged communities. Voluntary organisations can reach the parts that government can't reach; they provide services and support to some of the most vulnerable people, but without adequate funding, much is at risk".

The meeting heard from Ian McRae of the Gallery Youth Project in Alnwick, Angela Elvin of the Berwick Family Centre and Monica Haigh of Links in Tynedale. All demonstrated what could happen if the predicted funding shortfalls come about. Some projects have already experienced cuts and have reduced their services accordingly.

All stressed the important contribution of the voluntary sector in transforming the quality of life in the county and how social and economic regeneration invariably go hand in hand. But research shows that the VCS share of total ONE spending has declined over recent years and that only activities linked strictly to economic priorities are likely to receive funding.

Founder members of the Invest 2006 Campaign, which includes the Community Council of Northumberland, never intended it to be restricted to a conventional "stop the cuts" campaign. Repositioning the sector as a vital partner of government and its agencies in the transformation of the region is just as important as plugging the funding gap.

The postcards can be obtained from George Courtice, 01670 517 178, georgecourtice@ccn.org.uk or from Jane Streather, Invest 2006 Campaign, jane@vonne.co.uk, 0191 233 2000. www.invest2006.org.uk

A New Patchwork & Quilting Group For South West Tynedale

A NEW PATCHWORK and quilting group held its inaugural meeting on 25th August 2005. Named "The Calico Hinnies", the group's aims will be to enjoy and explore all aspects of the arts of patchwork and quilting in the company of like-minded people, and to provide help and encouragement to every member, from complete beginners to the more advanced exponent.

A "show and tell" was held where both completed and in-progress projects were shown. This was very inspirational and was much enjoyed by everyone. Those new to patchwork and quilting were helped by other members, to see what project they would like to start with.

It is hoped that more "show and tells" will be held in the future, together with some displays by other groups and occasional special workshops, visits etc.

The group's meetings will be held in the village hall at Greenhead. The next meetings will be held on Thursday, 27th October 2005 and Thursday 24th November 2005, from 1-4 pm.

New members are very welcome and further information can be obtained from Maureen Forster on 016977 47095.

THE VILLAGE HALL WITH A SPECTACULAR VIEW!

FOLLOWING AN EXTENSIVE REFURBISHMENT over the last nine months Whalton Village Hall was officially opened by Dame Margaret Barbour on 17th September.

To say the hall - the largest in the area - was long overdue for improvement would be an understatement. It was damp, dark, cold, the roof leaked and the fittings were outdated.

It is five years since the management committee began the process with a questionnaire across the Parish to gauge the level of support for such a major overhaul.

The road to success has not been easy and there have been many difficulties and setbacks to overcome.

The committee are extremely grateful to Alan Hedley and Ken Walters of CCN for their invaluable advice on a range of topics including funding and legal issues and for their encouragement when the chips were down.

Indeed, local residents know it has been well worth the long wait. They are delighted with the hall's transformation despite the tremendous effort it has taken to match fund the grants from a number of sources including Barbour Trust, DEFRA, Castle Morpeth Borough Council, the Countryside Agency and Whalton Parish Council.

Whalton Village Hall now offers superb and flexible facilities including a new kitchen, lounge bar, office, meeting room and toilets.



Inside the hall with one of the views to outside

These, together with a dedicated access and toilet for the disabled ensure that we are able to accommodate any event from a small meeting or children's party to a conference or wedding reception.

However the hall's most unique feature is the uninterrupted and breath taking view South across open countryside from a large picture window in the main hall and from the bar's double doors which open onto a patio.

All the regular users have returned and a number of new clubs and groups are emerging.

The hall is already proving to be a popular venue with outside groups and individuals who are also keen to make use of the new facilities.

Anyone wishing to make a booking should ring 01670 775411



MORE ABOUT LICENSING ACT 2003

THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT are expressing concerns about the low volume of applications for premises licences that are being received from the community and voluntary organisations, i.e. village halls and similar community buildings.

They have issued a strongly worded advert which is intended to be put into newspapers and trade magazines for pubs, clubs and similar businesses. The advert can be found on the DCMS website, www.culture.gov.uk.

The advert reiterates the information that the Community Council has been issuing for some time now:

"If your hall sells alcohol, puts on regulated entertainment, such as live music, theatre or cinema, or sells hot food or drink after 11pm, you need a new premises licence - even if you already have a public entertainment licence (PEL).

The 6 August deadline for automatically preserving any existing licence conditions (such as those in your PEL) has now passed. You must apply for a new licence NOW if you want to continue your licensable activities.

The application process will take time. You must have your new licence by 24 November 2005, when all existing permissions contained within your existing PEL and any alcohol licence will cease to have effect and the new law will come into force. If you leave it too late, and continue to carry out licensable activities after 24 November, without the appropriate licence, you risk closure or prosecution."

The DCMS advert is quite strongly worded with their reference to the threat of

closure or prosecution if you continue to trade without a licence after 24 November. However it is a fact that anyone continuing to sell alcohol provide regulated entertainment or sell hot food after 11.00pm without a premises licence will be acting illegally, unless they are covered by a temporary event notice (TEN)*.

CCN has been unable to establish exactly how many village halls and similar establishments have not yet applied for a premises licence. It is estimated that between 35 to 40% of the 180 halls in Northumberland are currently without the new premises licence. However there a good number of hall that do not provide regulated entertainment and for that reason have not needed the current Public Entertainment Licence. The situation will not change after 24 November and such halls will be able to continue their normal activities of letting rooms to their user groups

without the need for a Premises Licence.

* A Temporary Event Notice can be applied for by a hall to allow them to carry out an activity for which they do not hold the appropriate licence. For example a hall that holds a Premises Licence to cover regulated entertainment may wish to operate a bar at some of their events. A further example is a hall that holds no premises licence but wishes to hold an annual dance or perhaps a pantomime. Both of those events would be classed as regulated entertainment and such a hall would require TENs to cover each of these events. There is currently a limit of 12 TENs per annum applied to any one set of premises.

For more information about the Licensing Act 2003, how it affects halls and advice on completing an application for a license see CCN's website, www.ccn.org.uk or contact Alan Hedley, Village Halls Adviser at 01670 517178.

MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER WEBSITE

THE NORTHUMBERLAND Rural Voices Network is an internet website providing a focal point for people interested in rural affairs and issues in Northumberland. It was set up in response to calls from people in rural Northumberland to improve communication, and has been developed in partnership between agencies and organisations, and through ongoing contribution from individuals and community groups. The Community Council is pleased to be part of this partnership through its representation on the Northumberland Rural Voices Management Group and its links with CCN's own website.

Through the Network people interested in rural development issues can promote their work, news and events to a wider audience; receive up to date information; discuss and post their thoughts in the discussion forum area; network with people, organisations and businesses with experience of doing similar work, and be a part of an innovative and exciting network of individuals committed to the well-being of rural Northumberland.

The website is regularly updated and is shaped by its users through their contributions, ensuring that it meets their needs and interests in relation to commu-

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND VILLAGE HALLS CONSORTIUM

VILLAGE HALLS are important buildings at the heart of communities in the countryside. The potential of these buildings as multi-purpose venues in otherwise under-resourced and sometimes isolated communities is increasingly being recognized by government and funding agencies. However, there is also great scope for village halls to gain significant benefits from working together in networks and consortia. This could include sharing expertise, gaining benefit from joint advertising and marketing and joining to form projects which might attract funding for a group of halls.

The Community Council of Northumberland is launching a new initiative for village halls: the North Northumberland Village Halls Consortium.

With the help of a number of keen village hall committee members in the area, the three Community Development Officers in Alnwick, Berwick and Rothbury, and CCN's Village Halls Adviser, Alan Hedley, are planning to facilitate the formation of a steering group to push forward a network of village halls in North Northumberland.

There are few village halls in the region which don't face the same problems. Most halls were built in the first half of the 20th Century and struggle to comply with new regulations, and everyone is looking for funding and revenue streams to keep the buildings viable.

The potential benefits from village halls working together are enormous, as demonstrated by other successful consortia in the North of England, such as the Teesdale Village Halls Consortium and Tynedale Village Halls Consortium.

The two initial meetings of hall committee members held in June showed that there is strong support for a hall network in our area. The first step is to ensure that the steering group which will be set up to move the project forward, is as widely representative of the village halls across the region as possible.

The first Working Group Meeting is to be held at the Watson Memorial Hall, Lucker on 15th November at 2pm. If you are interested in being part of this exciting new initiative, contact Alan Hedley, Village Halls Adviser on 01670 517178.

nities, regeneration issues, and activities in rural Northumberland. If you would like to promote some news, an event, your organisation, or if you have suggestions for Rural Voices then please get in touch with the editor who will be very happy to help.

For more information on Rural Voices please visit the website:

www.ruralvoices.org.uk

and see the About Us section. Amy Rust, Project Officer, can be contacted by telephoning 01670 533900 or by e-mailing Amy@ruralvoices.org.uk. Further contact details are available on the Rural Voices website.

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integrating new residents and welcoming them to the village. Having lost our school and shop, it is now up to us to find new ways of ensuring a sense of community is very much alive in the village."

As the winner, Wingates also had the added honour of being nominated to go forward and represent Northumberland in the prestigious national English Calor Village of the Year® competition, with the opportunity of gaining recognition at national level as well as a share in the £36,000 prize fund. Wingates is competing in the North England region of the competition against villages from Cheshire, Cumbria, Durham, Humber & Wolds, Lancashire, North Lincolnshire, Redcar & Cleveland, Tees Valley and Yorkshire. The Calor Village of the Year® competition judges communities on a total of six aspects of rural village life, one of which is Building Community Life. The other five categories cover Business, Young People, Older People, the Environment and, judged separately, Information Communication Technology (ICT). Wingate is competing in all categories except ICT and has submitted its entry. The village is due to be visited by the North England judging team during October.

The Community Council of Northumberland would like to thank all of the villages that participated in the competition this year and congratulate the three winners. We would also like to wish Wingate the best of luck with the next stage of the competition. We're sure the village has got what it takes to do well at national level and look forward to finding out how it has done at the Calor Village of the Year® for England awards ceremony in December.

The winning villages in the Northumberland Calor Building Community Life competition will be presented with their prizes at the Community Council's AGM which is being held on Wednesday 9th November at the Hindmarsh Hall, Alnmouth. For further information please contact Alan Hedley at the Community Council on 01670 517178 or email alanhedley@ccn.org.uk.

A New Resource Centre in Morpeth

THIS PROJECT is an Information and Resource Centre, which was officially opened on World Mental Health Day, Monday 10 October 2005, and which is based in the Sanderson Arcade.

Michele Rickitt, a local life coach and NLP practitioner with experience of working in the public and voluntary sectors, has undertaken the development of this project for Contact. Michele has personal experience of mental health issues. She experienced postnatal depression when her son was born in 1997, and spent several weeks in the Mother and Baby Unit at St George's Hospital, Morpeth. Michele has also experienced being the carer of family members with depression.

The Information and Resource Centre gives mental health a window on the world that we hope will break down barriers and remove the stigma associated with it. The Centre will provide:

- * A "shop front" to publicise the activities and services of the Charity,
- * A library of mental health information relating to the diagnosis and treatment of mental ill health, and of the support available from the voluntary and statutory sectors,
- * An internet service giving public access to useful mental health websites,
- * The creation of an active carers network to reduce isolation and make relevant information available,
- * Assistance to users of the project with form filling and other paper work.

Alan Hall, Chief Executive of the Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health NHS Trust, formally opened the Centre. Amongst those attending were local politicians, including the Mayor of Castle Morpeth Cllr Milburn Douglas, local Church leaders, and medical professionals.



Guests at the opening including the Mayor of Castle Morpeth Cllr Milburn Douglas

FLY TIPPING

FLY-TIPPING is the illegal dumping of waste. It is a problem that is on the increase. Fly-tipped waste is unsightly to the environment and threatens human life and wildlife.

The most commonly dumped items are household waste, white goods, construction waste, garden waste and waste from businesses. Some people may be unaware that they are responsible for disposing of waste correctly; some are unwilling to spend time and money to do this, and are acting illegally some are professional criminals.



Most district councils have a procedure for reporting fly-tipping and once notified will call to collect the illegally dumped rubbish, though it may take several days.

In rural areas it is not uncommon for residents and community groups to take action themselves. The photo shows Featherstone councillors clearing Pinkins Cleugh, Featherstone, Haltwhistle. A large skip was filled with the rubbish left by the fly-tippers.

Charities, Community Buildings & VAT

ALTHOUGH VAT has been with us for some considerable time now (all Fools Day 1973) there is still a certain element of confusion in the minds of most people on how it works and a lack of understanding of the basic principles.

There is a generally held misconception that charities do not have to pay VAT and all too often projects, particularly those involving building work, run into difficulties when a group realises that the costings on which they have based their grant applications have not included an element for VAT.

Over the years the Community Council has been able to assist a number of groups in resolving their VAT problems and in other instances, where VAT could not be minimised have at least assisted the group in fully understanding why they must pay the VAT involved.

The VAT liability of the construction of a new building depends on the type of building in question. Guidance from the VAT section within Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs states "A zero rated building is constructed when :

- * designed as a dwelling or number of dwellings, or
- * intended for use as solely for a "relevant residential purpose"
- * intended for use solely for a "relevant charitable purpose"

Looking further into the guidance you will find that the clarification for bullet point 3 clearly states that the construction of new village halls and similar establishments, meeting certain criteria, can be zero rated.

The problems more often encountered by a village hall project relate to refurbishment projects including, in some cases, the building of an extension. An extension to a village hall that merely enlarges the existing building will not qualify for zero rating unless it can be classed as an annexe. The main criterion for qualifying as an annexe is that the new section must be capable of functioning independently from the existing building and without reliance on the existing building.

A refurbishment project will attract VAT but there are a few ways of minimising the rate and therefore amount of VAT if certain conditions apply. Some examples of supplies that may be zero rated when supplied to a charity for the benefit of disabled people are:

- * the construction of a toilet designed for disabled access
- * the construction of a ramp to facilitate access by disabled people
- * the widening of a doorway or passage to facilitate access by disabled people
- * the installation of an Induction Loop system

There is a reduced rate of VAT, currently 5%, which is applicable to certain goods and services. The installation of energy saving materials, such as insulation, central heating and water heating system controls, solar panels and wind turbines may be charged at 5%.

More detail can be found in VAT Notices 708 (Buildings and construction), 701 (Charities) and 708-6 (Energy saving materials) which can be obtained from HMRC's website www.hmce.gov.uk

VAT is complex and can cause problems if not considered at an early stage in the planning process of a construction project. If you need to talk things through, CCN will listen and wherever appropriate advise you or sign post you to the appropriate professional help. Contact Alan Hedley, Village Halls Adviser on 01670 517178.

WHAT WE DO

THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF 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

CCN 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.

Northumberland Community 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@ccn.org.uk.

Copy deadline for the next edition is Tuesday 22 November 2005.

For more information on the Community Council check out their website at www.ccn.org.uk

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