

# COMMUNITIES PLANNING AHEAD

FOR OVER 30 YEARS, there has been a growing recognition by local communities of the validity of compiling and implementing their own plan. These community plans, variously known as community appraisals, parish plans or other names - are a means of mobilising groups and individuals within the community to get things done and to influence decisions which affect their area.

We in Northumberland can be particularly proud of our contributions to the history of community plans. It was, after all, the publication of 'Stocksfield: An Experiment in Democracy' which set the ball rolling in community planning in Great Britain, in 1971. Some years later, in 1986, the Allenheads Village Appraisal was a major stepping stone in rural community regeneration, with the formation of Northumberland's first development trust and the achievement of a

wide range of local regeneration initiatives.

In very recent years, there has been a rapid growth in new community plans, boosted no doubt by generous grant assistance from the Parish Plans Grants Scheme, within the Countryside Agency's Vital Village's programme, which is now sadly at an end.

Now, with the government's forthcoming initiative to strengthen neighbourhoods and communities within the local government system, and with the possibility that our county

and district councils will be merged into larger units, the value of community plans will become even greater. It is therefore an opportune time to take stock of community planning across Northumberland: to see how it has developed, what impact it has had, and how it might be supported in the future.

## What is a Community Plan?

The first point to make is that there is no common terminology. Community Plans are variously known as village appraisals, parish plans, community strategies, market town health check and strategies and community appraisals.

Importantly, they are compiled by, as well as for the local community. They are not only an expression of local circumstances, needs and ideas: they are also a plan of action, which demonstrates how these needs will be met and how various local bodies will work - both on their own and together - to get things done.

It is also important that they are socially inclusive: both in the range of interests and people who get involved, and in the array of issues and opportunities which are addressed. A community plan will have missed the point if it is compiled exclusively by a consultant or small steering group, or if it embraces only a narrow range of issues. A community plan should be willing to improve the way in which interests and groups within the community work together, and to identify actions and projects which the community itself can take forward. The plan must be more than just a list of demands that it hopes somebody will respond to.

Unfortunately the Government has created some confusion in recent years by requiring every principal local authority (i.e. county and district councils) to compile a 'community strategy' for promoting or inspiring the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom (Local Government Act 2000). These local authority community strategies, though valid as a means of promoting inter-agency joint working, are not the same as, nor a substitute for a community's own plans.

Nevertheless, it is conceivable that a community plan can cover a cluster of communities. Indeed, in 2001, a number of such community appraisals were prepared across much of rural Northumberland and also parts of Blyth and Wansbeck, as a contribution by local people to the European Objective 2 programme.

## What sorts of issues are covered by a community plan?

The range of issues which a community

## SPRING MEETING 3 MAY 2006

### AT FELTON VILLAGE HALL

This year's Community Council Spring Meeting will be held at Felton Village Hall, on Wednesday 3 May with our President, His Grace the Duke of Northumberland, chairing the meeting. Business will begin at 2.30 p.m.

The presentation will be made by one of the most sought-after marketing speakers in the country. Mr Geoff Ramm has helped to launch, develop and grow over 4000 businesses in four years across the North-East and Cumbria. He will appear in Northumberland for the first time at our Spring Meeting.

Do not miss this opportunity to hear his methods, which will make your organisation or business build on its foundations and grow in stature. His inspirational presentation and "19½ hints, tips and ideas..." will fulfil your ambitions to be successful.

plan address depends on whatever local people feel is important, and of course this is not known until the survey stages - of questionnaires, focus groups, public meetings, etc - have progressed sufficiently for these issues to emerge. However, they typically include:

- Concerns about the possible closure/loss of key services, such as shops, pubs, schools, bus services
- The better provision of jobs and housing to retain young people in the community
- The appearance of the area, including streetscape, litter, car parking
- Opportunities for new or better provision, e.g. childcare, village hall refurbishment, ICT training, neighbourly care, recycling
- The desire to have more influence over key decision-makers, such as the planning system or utility providers.

There is also the scope to use the community plan as a means of recruiting or encouraging more volunteers in the community, of encouraging different groups to work together, of quantifying support for particular proposals and of educating people about how they can 'make a difference' in local life.

Community plans must be realistic, but this does not mean that there is no place for vision and optimism. Arguments and proposals must be based on good evidence, but this is not confined to data about 'hard facts': appropriate data can also include statistics about people's opinions and ambitions. Where a community plan seeks to influence key decision-makers, it is important to ensure that the relevant 'powers-that-be' are consulted at an early stage, when problems and ideas which have been identified through surveys are being translated into proposals and projects. This is particularly true with regards to town and country planning policies. The new Local Development Framework, which is replacing local plans and structure plans, is very demanding in terms of what is or is not eligible to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. It is therefore important to involve local

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## PLANNING FOR REAL IN BELLINGHAM

WAY BACK IN 2003 Bellingham Community Trust, working in partnership with the Parish Council, put together a Parish Plan. As with any undertaking of this magnitude, getting the views of the community is of paramount importance. Since a questionnaire had been used in the original village appraisal we looked for an alternative method and through Northumberland National Park Authority discovered 'Planning for Real'.

'Planning for Real' uses a large-scale map or model of the area to be surveyed and invites the public to comment by placing suggestion cards of both problems and solutions on the relevant area of the map. This method of community consultation was developed by 'Neighbourhood Initiatives' and they both offer training and produce a pack which contains instructions for carrying out the process.

The 'Planning for Real' event took place over a whole weekend and because of the size of the model the Town Hall was selected as being the only venue big enough. To make the best use of the event we invited other organisations to take the opportunity to use the weekend to consult or inform the local community.

The event was heavily advertised and to encourage a good turnout, refreshments were served to both young and old. The weekend was labour intensive, needing lots of helpers who had been briefed on the process to guide people through it.

The information collected over the two days was analysed to find out what people think of Bellingham, what they both like and dislike, what improvements they would like to see and equally what they don't want changing. The results were prioritised into short, medium & long term projects. The projects were divided into 3 categories; those that could be carried out by the Community Trust, those which need to be carried out in partnership with other organisations and finally those projects which needed to be passed on to outside agencies.

Any topics that were found not to have been covered by the 'Planning for Real' exercise were covered by small targeted questionnaires. Once the draft report was put together, a further consultation day was held to allow the local population the opportunity to comment on our findings.

The final plan was duly printed and a summary delivered to each house in the parish.



# CALLING ALL VILLAGE HALLS!

ALL VILLAGE HALLS and similar establishments in the Alnwick and Berwick areas are urged to send representatives to the inaugural meeting of the North Northumberland Village Halls Consortium which is to take place at South Charlton Village Hall on Wednesday, 26th April 2006 at 7 for 7.30. Light refreshments will be served.

## New Spending Limits for Local Councils

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the Government applied index-linking to the formula which determines the maximum annual expenditure permissible under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. This is the general power which enables a parish or town council to spend money on things which will benefit all or parts of the community, and for which there is not a more specific legal power.

The formula is expressed in terms of pounds multiplied by the number of electors in the parish. In 2005-06 the maximum was £5.30 per elector; now for 2006-07 the figure is £5.44 per elector.

If you need clarification, contact David Francis at NALC, Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY, telephone no: 01670 517178 or fax: 01670 511400.

The aims of the Consortium are two-fold: firstly, by sharing knowledge and experience, to sustain and improve Village Halls and similar establishments and the services they provide; secondly to promote and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these vital rural facilities by providing advice, information, training and support.

"We know what Village Halls can achieve by working together," said Clive Hallam-Baker, the interim Chairman of the Consortium, "a good example of this is the way a number of Village Halls in the Berwick area saved money by sharing the costs associated with Licence applications". Who knows what might be accomplished by tapping into the wealth of expertise and enthusiasm to be found among the volunteers who manage community halls?

The interim secretary of the Consortium, Sylvia Harrison, asks that those planning to attend the meeting let her know by phone (01670 787127) or e-mail (sylvia.harrison2@virgin.net) so that a copy of the draft Constitution can be sent to them.

*Editor's note:* By the time many people read this article it will be too late to attend this meeting. Nevertheless, any halls not represented at the meeting and interested in joining the Consortium should get in touch with Sylvia Harrison, contact details as above.

## BIG on Community Buildings

THE BIG LOTTERY launches its Community Buildings programme in June 2006. At present there is limited detail available. The budget for the programme is £50m over 3 years and it will mainly fund capital support for community buildings.

Applicants will need to demonstrate strong community involvement both in the use and management of the building.

The application process is likely to be a two stage process and more details will be known and given at the briefings mentioned below.

CCN have organised 3 training / information events in June which will be led by staff from the BIG Lottery. In an effort to provide a date, venue and time that will make the training accessible to most communities the 3 events are organised in the north, south and centre of the county with one in the morning, one in the evening and one in the afternoon and on different days in the week. Each event will last up to 2 hours, with the exact length depending on the number of questions from those attending.

Application forms have been sent to all the village halls and similar establishments on CCN's data base of community buildings. If you require an application form please ring our Morpeth office at 01670 517178.

Dates, times and venues are:

- Tuesday 6 June, 2.00 pm, the Cheviot Centre, Wooler
- Thursday 15 June, 10.00am, Wylam Institute, Wylam
- Wednesday 21 June, 7.00pm, St James Hall, Morpeth

## DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE APPOINTS OFFICER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

THE REVD DAGMAR WINTER is the new Officer for Rural Affairs for the Church of England's Diocese of Newcastle.



Dagmar took up her post at the end of March. It is a part-time post, two days a week, combined with being Priest in Charge of Kirkwhelpington with Kirkharle, Kirkheaton and Cambo.

Formerly Associate Vicar of Hexham Abbey and Training Officer for Hexham Deanery, Dagmar has in her new role, already made contact with David Francis, Director of CCN. She is keen to work with the existing rural networks and agencies and to support the life of the rural church so that rural communities may flourish.

Dagmar can be contacted at The Vicarage, Kirkwhelpington, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE19 2RT, dagmar@winternet.freemove.co.uk

## THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR JIGSAW

AN EVENT IS TAKING PLACE in early May to explore ways in which Northumberland's Children and Young People's Voluntary and Community Sector organisations can effectively influence, shape and deliver developments in the county.

Northumberland Children and Young People's Voluntary and Community Sector - putting the pieces together (10 May, 10-2, Stannington Village Hall) will include speakers from the Families and Children's Trust, the Local Area Agreement and the existing VCS/FACT Steering Group, which developed from the need for voluntary sector input to developments such as the FACT Board and strategy. Closing date for registering your wish to attend the event is Thursday 27 April 06.

"Central government is increasingly placing upon statutory authorities the requirement to work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, and have in place realistic working arrangements to ensure the sector's voice is heard in discussion and decision-making. Unless the sector works together to encourage involvement from all areas of its work, then those partnerships often rely heavily upon the larger organisations, such as national charities, which have the manpower and expertise to take on the challenge," says Sandi Downing, VCS Development Officer with Northumberland Children's Fund. "This event is intended to raise awareness of the opportunity for the whole sector to get involved, as well as highlight the benefits of doing so."

Sandi is also compiling a contacts list for the sector, which she hopes will form the basis of a communications network to keep the sector informed.

Some flyers about the event have already been circulated, but if you haven't received one and would like to attend, or would like to know more about Sandi's role in the sector, contact her at Northumberland Children's Fund, Laverock Hall Business Unit, Laverock Hall Farm, Laverock Hall Road, Blyth, NE24 4HE. Tel: 01670-707322. Fax: 01670-642875. Email: sandi.downing@nch.org.uk.

## TROPHY PRESENTED

ON SATURDAY 28th JANUARY at Storey Park Community Centre, the Northumberland Branch of the Society of Local Council Clerks was presented with the Myrna Liles Trophy for the greatest growth in membership during 2005.



Pictured left to right are: Peter Basnett (Netherwitton & Pegswood), Roger Bolam (Elsdon), Monica Anderton (Broomhaugh & Riding Mill), Diana Carney (Wylam), Kate Foreman (Longhorsley), Ande Jameson (Tarsset with Greystead), Tom Spence (Past Service Member) and Gillian Turner (Morpeth Town Council).

## NEW POWERS FOR PARISHES

LOCAL COUNCILS (i.e. parish and town) have been given new powers to take legal action against litter, graffiti, fly-posting, dog-fouling and stray dogs.

Since gaining Royal Assent last year, the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 has been introduced in phases and, with effect from 6 April 2006, local councils can now issue fixed penalty notices and dog control orders.

This is a major step for local councils. The government is placing great confidence in

local councils to take on this quasi-judicial role. In turn, a local council must tread carefully before adopting and implementing these powers to ensure that it has the necessary public support, knowledge, organisational capacity and financial resources to enforce prosecutions and the payment of penalty notices.

To help local councils to understand more about the opportunities and risks of adopting these powers, DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) has published a guide: "Getting to grips with the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 - a parish council guide to environmental enforcement."

This is available free of charge by either:

- Contacting DEFRA Publications, Admail 6000, London, SW1A 2XX
- Phoning 08459 556000
- Downloading from the website: [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localenv/legislation/cnea](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localenv/legislation/cnea)

In addition, a training course is being developed by DEFRA and the National Association of Local Councils, more details of which will be available soon.

### Funding opportunities to provide activities for local young children

THE LOCAL NETWORK FUND in Tyne & Wear and Northumberland was set up by the government's Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to offer groups and organisations working with children and young people aged up to 19 years the opportunity to apply for grants of up to £7,000 to provide activities for local young people.

For an application form and guidelines on how to apply to the fund please ring 0845 1130 161.

# NORTHUMBERLAND CREDIT UNION LTD

WE HAVE AT PRESENT about £20,000 in savings and £10,000 out on loan to members. We charge 1% per month on the declining balance (12.7% APR). The income from loan interest goes first to meet the running costs of the credit union. After that, any surplus can be distributed as dividends on savings. Junior savers' accounts, for children and young people up to the age of 17, earn interest at 3% per annum, credited monthly.

## Energy Boost for REALL

GOOD NEWS was received at the eleventh hour, when a handful of government departments and agencies announced some continued financial support for REALL. The REALL project (Renewable Energy at a Local Level) was established several years ago, to advise and encourage community groups to develop small-scale initiatives in the field of renewable energy, in Northumberland and Durham.

The Government, led by the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) had been hesitating for more than 12 months, over the continuation of funding for REALL and its equivalent in other parts of England. However, following a very supportive major article in the Journal newspaper in March, about these initiatives, we received news on 30 March that a certain amount of further funding for current advisory teams would be made available, with effect from 1 April.

This has enabled REALL's host body, the Community Council, to confirm to REALL's staff and its landlords that REALL was still in business. Although this has yet to be clarified, we think that the funding will pay for about 6 months of activity. As well as giving REALL the opportunity to help more community projects in the region, we hope that this 'breathing space' will also enable the DTI and others to determine a longer-term future for both REALL and its counterparts elsewhere.

REALL's team (Mervyn Anthony and Melanie Greenwood) can be contacted at their office: REALL, Earth Balance, West Sleekburn Farm, Bomarsund, Bedlington, Northumberland, NE22 7AD. Telephone No: 01670 823706 or email [mervynanthony@ccn.org.uk](mailto:mervynanthony@ccn.org.uk)

## TOWARDS A FAIRER NORTHUMBERLAND - A CONSULTATION

LAST YEAR Northumberland County Council adopted an Equality and Diversity Policy stating that they actively oppose discrimination on the basis of people's age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation & transgender. They aim to eliminate unlawful discrimination in the delivery of their services, their policy making and in their recruitment and employment of staff.

They consulted on the draft of this policy with around 100 voluntary and community organisations and were very impressed with the number and quality of comments they received, recognising that there are many people in organisations throughout the county that have done a significant amount of thinking and work to end inequalities. As a result of what people said, they changed the policy for the better.

They now want to consult with community groups and voluntary organisations on what they need to do to implement the policy. They are writing an action plan, called the Corporate Equality Action Plan - to set out how they will implement their Equality and Diversity Policy, and all the equality policies and procedures it covers. They are doing this so that all councillors, staff, partner organisations, Northumberland residents and visitors are clear about the action they intend to take to actively work against unfair discrimination and promote equality, in both their delivery of services and in their employment of people.

The consultation begins in mid May and lasts for 6 weeks.

If you would like a copy of the Equality and Diversity Policy, the draft Corporate Equality Action Plan and questionnaire for your comments, please contact Kim Taylor on 01670 533052 or e-mail her at [KITaylor@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:KITaylor@northumberland.gov.uk)

This is your opportunity to let Northumberland County Council know what you think.

You qualify for a loan after saving regularly for six weeks, or two months if saving by bank standing order or payroll deduction. Your first loan is limited to value of savings plus £100. Subsequent ones get bigger after that, up to a maximum of £2,000. This is a temporary limit. We will increase it when our pot of savings gets bigger. You can get lower rates of interest elsewhere, but generally only for bigger loans. For the amounts involved, our rates are extremely attractive and include free life insurance, albeit subject to age restrictions. The money stays in Northumberland. It does not go to some national or multi-national entity. Customers and owners are the same people, and all the profits go to them.

We have local paying-in points in Lynemouth, Morpeth, Pegswood and Prudhoe, but for people elsewhere in Northumberland there are still four ways to save with the county credit union:

- *By bank standing order.*
- *By payroll deduction if you work for NCC or DAWN.*
- *By asking your employer to make payroll deductions.*
- *By setting up a paying-in point in your town or village.*

If you ever thought of having a credit union in your town, village, institute, workplace or church, now is your chance. All you need is a group of volunteers to man a paying-in point for as little as two hours a week. The important thing is that it should be open every week at the same time and place. We supply the stationery, paying-in books, publicity material, training and full back-office support, look after the savings, and organise the loans. Northumberland Credit Union Ltd is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Savings in it are covered by the depositors' protection scheme. You could be taking out a loan within six weeks of starting to save. Where are you going on holiday this year?

# BORDER LINKS

VALUING LOCAL PEOPLE



The Border Links Team with a typical "Veggie Box"

ON 27 FEBRUARY CCN was invited to attend the launch of 'Border Links'.

Border Links is a new social enterprise based in Cornhill, a village on the English side of the River Tweed. CCN has been supporting this group with funding advice and project development and Els Nicol, CCN's local Development Officer says, 'It is great to see how much this small group has achieved in such a short time'.

Border Links Limited has been developed with additional support and advice from Enterprise for Inclusion and Social Enterprise Teams on both sides of the Border. Its aim is to provide a high quality, local service for adults with learning disabilities living in rural North Northumberland and the Scottish Borders.

Helen Hogg, the Project Manager, can see a bright future for its clients: 'Border Links will be developing new events, activities and creative opportunities with the participants - for their own engagement and for the benefit of the community as a whole. Some of our clients will be able to access services in their own community. No need to travel to day-centres far away. This will help them to become more part of the community in which they live'.

One initiative that has found great enthusiasm from all is the 'Veggie Box' idea. People can sign up for a weekly delivery, to be collected from their local Village Hall, and Border Links will buy in the vegetables and other local produce from wholesalers nearby in Milfield. Veggie Boxes will be accompanied by suggested menus and recipes and will cost in the region of £5.

For further information on Border Links, please contact our local Development Officer, Els Nicol, on 01289-304141.

## WRVS (Hot) Meals on Wheels

WRVS helps people maintain dignity and independence in their homes and communities particularly in later life

Volunteers (Drivers and Helpers) are urgently required for a number of our Meals on Wheels Rounds. Anyone interested please contact Mrs Christine Mackins on 0191 4274700 for further information.

WRVS Northumberland Food Services would like to take the opportunity to thank all our Volunteers who so generously give their time and effort to the Meals on Wheels Services throughout Northumberland, as without Volunteers there would not be a WRVS. We would also like to thank everyone who donated to our scheme funds which were used to provide free meals for recipients in Northumberland at Christmas.

## WRVS Meals with Care - (Frozen) Home Delivery Service

The WRVS started delivering frozen meals in October 1999 and this has proved to be very popular. The service is available to everyone not only for the elderly; anyone may purchase these convenient and delicious meals for a modest price. Our friendly, reliable, trained delivery staff offer help and guidance where needed. WRVS Volunteers and staff are dedicated to giving care and support to your local community. All profits are used by WRVS to support local communities unlike other providers.

We offer an extensive choice of meals including the traditional dishes such as Roast Beef & Yorkshire Pudding and Roast Chicken with Stuffing as well as the more exotic curries served Naan Breads. A wide selection of special dietary meals are available i.e. Gluten Free, Low Fat, Low Carbohydrate, Soft Diet, Super Soft Pureed Meals etc. There is no charge for delivery

Anyone requiring more information or one of our free brochures please contact us on 08450 621122 (Lo Call Rate) Demonstrations may also be arranged for groups (Daytime only) by ringing the same number.

## ADVANCE NOTICE OF NEW PROJECT STARTING...

### BACKFILL PROJECT

Does your organisation struggle to allow staff time to attend training courses or other events? Could you do with an extra pair of hands? Would you like to increase your skills and knowledge of working in the Voluntary and Community Sector?

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations often run on very tight resources, which can mean that staff - whether paid or unpaid - are unable to take part in training, networking, the work of strategic bodies and partnerships, and other workforce and career development opportunities, because they cannot be spared from the day-to-day running of their organisation or group.

A new pilot project, (funded through the Change Up programme) aims to help to alleviate these problems by offering practical assistance to organisations to cover the temporary absences created when a member of staff attends training courses or other events. Small grants will also be available to cover training related costs, such as care costs for staff that attend training or other events outside their normal working hours. Excessive travel costs can also be funded.

Wansbeck CVS are looking to develop a register of suitably qualified and experienced workers who would be available on a short-term basis to provide cover to organisations. We are also looking for organisations to register an interest in using the services of a skilled worker to allow their staff time to attend training or other events.

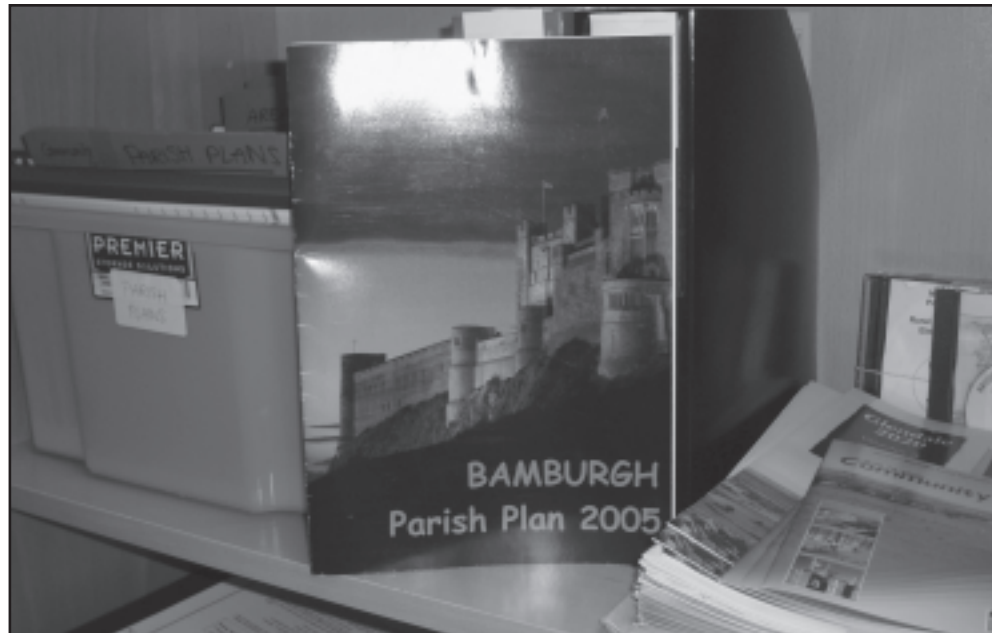
Workers may already be employed by an organisation which, for the person's own career development, may be willing to release them, to provide cover to other organisations. Alternatively, volunteers wishing to increase their skills and knowledge could be given the opportunity to gain experience of working in the sector. The scheme could be beneficial for unemployed people who wish to gain recent, relevant experience, or people who are working part time and wish to increase the number of hours they work.

To register an interest in the project, or request an information pack, please contact Helen Shand, Project Co-ordinator, or Jenny Tindale, Project Administrator on 01670 858688. Alternatively, you can call into the CVS offices at 107 - 109 Station Road, Ashington or email Helen at [learning@wansbeckcvs.org.uk](mailto:learning@wansbeckcvs.org.uk)

# A PARISH PLAN FOR BAMBURGH

BAMBURGH PARISH COUNCIL had been considering the production of a Parish Plan for some years. The council felt it was time that the needs and aspirations of the residents of the parish are heard; therefore in 2004 they decided that the process of producing a Parish Plan should begin.

An incredibly well attended meeting, organised by the Parish Council, was held. Els Nicol from the Community Council attended the meeting and took us through the process of producing a plan. A vote was taken and the overwhelming opinion was to produce a plan. It was decided to form a committee outside the Parish Council, giving a voice to a greater number of residents. Mr Allan Newton took the role of Chairman and a committee was formed that would apply for a grant from the Countryside Agency to fund the process.



Consultation and community involvement was most important to the group. They sought the views of local people by conducting a survey of local residents. A questionnaire was circulated to all households in the parish and children of the village were involved in a photography competition. The committee also consulted all the local businesses and organisations. Following the consultation period the statistical data from completed forms was presented at a public meeting and an editorial group formulated the proposals into a Parish Plan which they then submitted to the Parish Council and distributed to major organisations within North Northumberland.

The group felt that we needed something tangible to remember our plan. Katriona Porteous was asked to write a poem to celebrate the production. After many happy hours spent with locals, who had lived in the village all their lives, Katriona did us proud and produced two poems which can be found in the publication.

Now that the plan has been produced, presented to the Parish Council and an action plan formulated, the Council have had time to reflect on the benefits of 'The Parish Plan Process'. The Action Plan has given the Parish Council a focus to their deliberations and an endorsement from the public as to the work the council are undertaking and has given weight and substance to requests for action from local authorities. Parish Councillors now have an aim and have been given the responsibility to work towards the completion of the plan to the satisfaction of the local community.

Most importantly, it has brought the community together enabling them to 'have their say', enjoy a few nights of fun together and also given them ownership of what goes on in their Parish.

The Parish Council would like to thank Alan Newton and his group for the effort, energy and endless hours extended to complete our Parish Plan.

Finally we would like to thank Els Nicol, without whose support our Parish Plan, of which we are rightly very proud, would not have happened.

## RURAL ADVICE SERVICES TO CONTINUE

ALNWICK & DISTRICT Citizens Advice Bureau has cause to celebrate after being awarded a three-year grant totaling £197,821 from the Big Lottery. The funding will allow the Bureau to continue its Rural Advice Project which began in July 2004 and employs three advisers to provide

## RECENT MOVES

NORTHUMBERLAND CHILDREN'S FUND recently moved to new premises in Blyth. Their new contact details are:

Northumberland Children's Fund  
Laverock Hall Business Unit  
Laverock Hall Farm, Laverock Hall Road,  
Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 4HE  
Tel: 01670 707322  
Fax: 01670 732489  
Email: necfn@nch.org.uk

The Big Lottery Fund's Newcastle office has moved to brighter, bigger premises:

Big Lottery Fund  
2 St James' Gate  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4BE  
Tel: 0191 376 1600  
Fax: 0191 376 1661  
Mini com: 0191 376 1776

telephone advice and an appointment and home visiting service, to people from across Alnwick District.

Marjorie Craig, Chair of the Trustee Board said, "This is fantastic news for the local community and we are extremely grateful to the Big Lottery for funding these key services. Every year demand for our help increases, with more and more people turning to us for advice about their problems. Many people in the area, particularly those who live in rural parts of the District or those who are housebound, are unable to get into our offices and this grant will make an enormous difference to our ability to provide people with the help they need".

Telephone Advice Line: 01665 604135

(Open: Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 4pm)

Home Visiting and Appointment service: 01665 604714 (Open: Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 4pm)

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authority planning staff at an early stage, if the community plan has any hope of influencing development control decision-making.

### Help for community plans

Staff in the Community Council have always been happy to advise and support the community plan process, and this will continue even with our now-reduced staff team. Also, with DEFRA's help, we have a fund which can offer grants towards some of the costs of compiling a community plan. Our library includes a number of examples of community plans, and also a range of useful guidance material.

We are currently planning some conferences to promote, celebrate and support both past and prospective community plans. We think that they are an important building-block in the growing world of partnerships and strategies, and they are also important in ensuring that communities can look forward, as well as backwards.

### Help is at hand

Even though a Community Plan can take many different forms, it is not an easy process. They can easily run into problems if part of the community feel excluded, or the appropriate issues are not identified and addressed, or the questions are asked in the wrong way. A community plan is also pretty worthless if it fails to progress beyond listing the problems or if it does not include a programme of projects and improvements which can be taken forward by the community itself.

For all of these reasons, it pays to seek good advice. This is available from our staff at the Community Council, who can advise on such topics as:

- Questionnaire design
- Including harder-to-reach groups
- Turning ideas into action
- Identifying printers
- Securing money for projects
- Influencing decision-makers..... and so on.

In recent years, funding has also become available to meet some of the costs of preparing a community plan. These funds for parish plans ended in March 2006. However, subject to external confirmation, we hope to reinstate a grants scheme for community plans during spring 2006, throughout Northumberland where there are new or existing community councils.

For more information about advice and funding, contact your local Community Council staff, or CCN headquarters in Morpeth.

## INCORPORATING AN ELEMENT OF VILLAGE DESIGN?

THE CONTENT, style and presentation of Parish Plans normally evolve through the process community consultation. The open format of designing a successful project allows for consideration of the comments and ideas of all sections of the community and permits the final product to be unrestrictive. To many people one factor with which they are concerned is the physical character of their community - the distinctive features of their village and the surrounding area, the landscape setting of the village, the shape of the settlement and indeed the design of the buildings themselves. All these factors give help to define the distinctive local character.

A Parish Plan is the ideal document in which to record what is in effect a Village Design Statement. Change is an inevitable factor that all communities have to face. A parish plan incorporating a section on village design highlights those elements of the local character that are important to the local community. In essence the statement is a tool for managing long term change and could enable planned development to be carried out so that it is in harmony with its setting and can contribute to the enhancement of the local environment.

## 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 23rd May 2006.

For more information on the Community Council check out their website at [www.ccn.org.uk](http://www.ccn.org.uk)

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