

Rock Reports

The Newsletter of the Northern Rock Foundation

Issue No.6 - Winter 2002

After many years of investment in **urban regeneration**, the focus is shifting to the **countryside**, where **rural development trusts**, managed by local people, are **breathing new life into their communities**.

Rock Reports has been on the road to find out what rural development trusts are all about.

'You do generate flak. It's inevitable,' admits Kirsten Francis, director of the Haltwhistle Partnership. Change can be unsettling, she says, but 'if you work with people, rather than steamrolling them, if you really mull things over, then what happens is more likely to be sustainable.'

Haltwhistle is a small market town in the South Tyne Valley, about an hour's drive west of Newcastle. It has an ancient history: there are prehistoric structures and medieval, fortified (bastle) houses here and Hadrian's Wall is a few miles to the north. Visitors are also attracted by the town's claim to the title 'the centre of Britain' which, if you draw lines from every corner of the country and mark the point where they cross, it is.

Haltwhistle has always been a self-sufficient place, providing jobs, shops, schools and even a hospital for local residents. For many years, the local economy was underpinned by a combination of agriculture, manufacturing and quarrying. Until it closed earlier this year, the biggest employer was Hadrian Works, a paint works founded in the 1930s.

At its height, it employed some 500 people (in a town with a population of 3,900). Like many small towns in the North East, Haltwhistle has had to find other ways to make a living and the Haltwhistle Partnership, a development trust made up of residents and local representatives of the public, private and voluntary sectors, is helping to make it happen.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE



Photography © Allan Glenwright

Haltwhistle's market days are packing in the crowds

Development trusts have been around since the 1970s, but in the past ten years they have really begun to make their mark. Originally created to bring together local interests to regenerate depressed urban areas, there are now dozens of trusts operating in rural areas too. Trusts are 'bottom up' organisations, run by and for local people. Different places have different priorities but typically, a development trust focuses on one or more of the following: creating jobs, providing training, increasing access to advice and information services, improving the environment, (restoring buildings, installing street lighting, maintaining footpaths) and adding to the range and quality of social and recreational facilities.

The Haltwhistle Partnership was established as a result of a report by the Civic Trust in 1993. English Heritage was concerned that the rare bastle houses might be falling into disrepair and asked the Trust to recommend how they might be preserved. The Trust's report went further than conservation issues, providing an outline plan for the regeneration of the town, including the creation of the Haltwhistle Partnership to see the plan through.

Grants were offered to local retailers to do up their shopfronts, the market square was refurbished and a large piece of local

Whinstone was placed in the square, complete with a metal plaque to explain what it was. The stone was instantly unpopular. 'That part was a bit rushed,' Kirsten Francis admits, 'and it shows. The market traders were unhappy about losing parking space and no one could understand why, when other places got interesting works of art for their public spaces, all we got was a lump of Whinstone.'

This hiccup apart, the Partnership got off to a good start. It included representatives of the town, district and county councils, the Community Council of Northumberland, the Chamber of Trade, the Tourism Association and other local groups, as well as individual residents. With the help of a facilitator, Alan Caldwell, the Partnership undertook widespread local consultation and set up sub groups to make recommendations for improvements in the local economy, health and well being and the environment. With funds from the Rural Development Commission, a regeneration officer was appointed (1995), the Partnership became a limited company (1997) and in the same year, it bought the building in which its office is based, providing it with a valuable asset for the future.

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the **NR** foundation
THE NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION

Northern Rock
Foundation
announces new
grant programmes.
Details on page 4.



The Earl of Folly leads the Dodgy Clutch Theatre Company in an evening's revelry in the grounds of Wallington Hall

Rock Follies at Wallington Hall

Wallington Hall may be best known for its outdoor classical concerts and performances of Shakespeare, but this summer the National Trust invited the long established, Tyneside theatre company, Dodgy Clutch to take up residence there.

The result was Fantastic Follies a programme that has received widespread coverage in the national press. The Northern Rock Foundation was one of the funders.

Follies are not new to Wallington Hall: in the 18th century, Sir Walter Calvery Blackett created fashionable pleasure grounds and parklands here. Fantastic Follies aimed to recreate some of the magic and frivolity of Sir Walter's Wallington, through the

flamboyant and wholly fictional 'Earl of Folly'. Throughout the summer, episodes of his story of unrequited love have been brought to life in the form of temporary follies made by Dodgy Clutch and their associates.

There have also been workshops in lantern making for schools and the general public, each culminating in lantern-lit processions around the grounds and performances by each of the follies.

The final workshop and performance take place on Saturday 26 October at 2pm (workshop) and at 6pm (performance). There is no need to book. Just turn up. To find out more about the work of Dodgy Clutch call 0191 221 2079.



YOUR WAY FORWARD

On 16 July 2002, 130 of Northumberland's farmers, landowners, representatives of voluntary sector and community groups, business people, councillors and civil servants came together at Linden Hall, near Morpeth, to share their ideas about the survival and revival of rural Northumberland.

The conference, hosted by the Northern Rock Foundation, Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland Strategic Partnership, was a response to one of the recommendations of the public inquiry into foot and mouth in Northumberland. The inquiry report urged all interested parties to come together to develop a vision for rural Northumberland and to agree on how that vision might be achieved. The *Your Way Forward* conference, facilitated by David Wilkinson, was the first step in that direction.

Six themes considered by the public inquiry provided the starting point for discussion. These were: sustaining the structure of livestock farms; diversifying the incomes of farming families; adding value to farm products; creating a stronger tourism industry; promoting a diversified rural economy; and supporting the vitality of rural communities. Participants chose the theme that interested them most and spent much of the day discussing it. With the inquiry report providing a useful point of reference, the result, in every case, was an informed and wide-ranging debate about the challenges facing rural Northumberland and how they might be overcome. The discussion probed every aspect of rural life – economic, environmental, educational, social and cultural.

A seventh theme – connecting public agencies to rural people – was considered by every group. The public inquiry concluded that if rural life in Northumberland is not only to survive but to thrive, then attention will need to be paid to 'the means by which public agencies and programmes...connect effectively to needs, priorities and resources of businesses and communities at local level.' The final session of the conference, led by the chair of the public inquiry, Professor Michael Dower, invited the conference to consider three questions: what should people, enterprises and environmental groups do together at the local level to realise the vision? How should they be enabled to connect with each other and to the broad pattern of public agencies' programmes and support? What ways should be pursued following this event to take forward the discussion and what action is needed?

The need for better communication between individuals, communities and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors was raised throughout the day, together with the suggestion that much could be achieved if people could find the time to share their ideas and work more closely together. The conference provided just such an opportunity. The challenge now is for all those involved to maintain the momentum. The Northumberland Strategic Partnership has undertaken to organise a second conference in 2003 to see what progress has been made.

A report of *Your Way Forward* is available from Richard Walton at the Northern Rock Foundation.

The conference facilitator David Wilkinson may be contacted on 01525 680537 or by email at david@wholesystems.fsnet.co.uk



Evelyn and Marian Winship receive Action Station's award from sponsor BDO Stoy Hayward's Don Bawtree and actress Ruthie Henshall

WEST HARTON WINS AWARD

West Harton Churches Action Station is not an organisation that tends to blow its own trumpet very loudly, so *Rock Reports* is delighted to do it for them. Earlier this year, this dynamic community organisation in South Shields won a Charity Award for excellence in leadership and management, a scheme organised by the magazine *Charity Finance*.

Action Station's Centre Manager, Hazel McCallion had heard of the Charity Awards but had not thought of applying until prompted to do so by the Northern Rock Foundation. There is a category called 'welfare, social care and religion' which seemed to fit them perfectly, but the competition would be tough.

'The application form was simple enough,' McCallion recalls, 'and to be honest I thought no more about it, until we got the call to say that we had reached a shortlist of ten and would we go to London to make a presentation to the judges. We had 15 minutes to make a presentation and 15 minutes of questions. It wasn't long, but we just thoroughly enjoyed it. We have all been with the organisation since the beginning and we know it inside out, so we just talked.'

A few weeks later Action Station heard that it had reached the last three and was invited to the awards ceremony at the Intercontinental Hotel in Park Lane. 'It was a bit like the Oscars,' says McCallion 'and by that time we really did not think we stood a chance. Everyone else seemed to be from London and they all seemed to know each other. We didn't know anyone, so when we won we really were amazed, but I think it was the fact that we really care about what we do that did it.'

The prize was a week's leadership training for a senior member of staff and the right to use the gold Charity Award logo on the organisation's head paper. For McCallion, the logo and the certificate now hanging in the entrance at Action Station have more value than the promised training. 'No one pays much attention to South Shields,' she says, 'but this is an award for everyone involved here - staff, volunteers, all of us. We have received so many letters of congratulation. It has made quite an impact.'

Action Station was not the only winner from the North East. The Northern Rock Foundation was equally surprised and delighted to receive the Charity Award for grantmaking.

Could you be one of next year's winners?
For more information please see www.charityawards.co.uk

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Fiona Ellis reflects on the achievements of the Foundation in its first five years and introduces the new grants programmes that will be running from January 2003.

On 15 and 16 August 2002 the Trustees and grants staff of the Northern Rock Foundation went away together to Northumberland's Matfen Hall. We wanted to take ourselves out of the office to look back at what we have been doing since we started grant-making. We also needed to decide what to do for the next several years. We ask our applicants to evaluate themselves, so it is only fair that we follow suit.

Before we disappeared to think, we had asked Steve Burkeman to do a customer survey. He questioned a great many of you and others about us. We took his report, together with enormous reports from the grants officers about our grants, to Matfen Hall to fuel our discussion.

We were generally quite pleased with the things you said about us to Steve. But he helped us to look at the way we managed ourselves and the way we communicated with all of you, and to realise that there were things that needed to be tidied up. Take our grant programmes - they all started off perfectly coherently but, as we developed, we tweaked and pushed and pulled the programmes around. Eventually they did not sit together terribly well.

One of your complaints was that certain grant programmes applied to certain parts of our territory and particular types of work, while others did not. Sorting out who could apply for what was getting very difficult. It was beginning to look as if you could only apply for a grant in some programmes if there was an R in the month and your grandmother came from Corbridge. I exaggerate, but only slightly. Frankly, we were beginning to find it hard to understand ourselves! We are going to make ourselves clearer and more coherent. We promise.

Happily, few of you had complaints but you mentioned that if you did have one, you did not know how make it or how it would be dealt with. We hope you won't need to use it but we will

include our complaints procedure in the new guidelines and put it on to our website.

The Trustees were also very pleased by the enormous number of applicants we had managed to assist over the past four years and eight months. More than 2,500 organisations have directly benefited from our grants. The Trustees believe that, overall, they had put the Foundation's money to very good use.

In reviewing our own performance, we looked at several aspects of our grant-making. On the whole, we thought we had been brave occasionally, but not often enough. We have encouraged applicants to take risks and we had taken a few ourselves. We have done a great deal of sound and unglamorous work with applicants on funding their core costs and basic services. We have resisted - and still will - the temptation to ask everyone to be 'innovative'. We have also made mistakes, lots of them. But if we had taken more risks, there might have been more. We really do subscribe to the notion that making mistakes is a necessary part of learning and developing, so perhaps we should try harder to stick our necks out.

Maybe you will think that in our new grant guidelines, which are printed overleaf, we are doing just that. We hope you will think that we have learned something from our first (almost) five years and that we are becoming a better grant-maker, so that we can serve you better and help you to serve the people whose lives we are all trying to affect. We did not expect to change the world in five years but we think that we have been effective in changing some circumstances and in helping you to improve the service many of you give.

Fiona Ellis, Director

Guidelines from January 2003

The Foundation aims to help as many people as possible. We also want to make sure our grants have a long-term impact. This means that we cannot give grants that benefit everyone equally all the time. We have made some choices for the next period of grant making. If your group or project does not fit into our current priorities, please do not apply. There are many other grant makers and, thanks to the way in which we are funded by Northern Rock plc, we will be here for a long time. Your turn will come.

Who do we want to help now?

Our primary purpose is to help disadvantaged people. By this we mean disadvantage due to:

- age - for example, younger people and older people
- disability
- displacement - for example, refugees, asylum seekers, survivors of domestic violence
- the collapse of industry or other employment providers
- geography - where people live may affect their ability to get basic services, to work together for mutual benefit or to enjoy a healthy and fulfilled life
- prejudice and discrimination, for example, against gay men and lesbians or black and other minority ethnic people

We would prefer to assist by responding to people's own views of what needs to be done and by equipping them, financially, to make changes themselves. We are much less interested in outside providers and umbrella bodies, but we will respond if they present an excellent argument for support and demonstrate a strong contribution to our objectives.

All our grant programmes, except Aspiration, are specifically aimed at tackling disadvantage. Aspiration is different - it is open to anyone, whatever their circumstances.

What do we want to do?

We want to support projects which directly and clearly do one of the following. Please resist the temptation to try to squeeze into the categories if your plan does not really fit.

Where will we fund projects?

We have decided to concentrate our efforts on Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Teesside. We will not fund organisations or activities outside these areas.

THE NEW GRANT

Programme 1

Prevention of local and regional social decline - actions which stop social problems from developing or worsening

We want to fund projects or organisations that work to prevent a decline in the quality of life of people affected by neighbourhood problems or broader discrimination.

We believe that there are some key factors that lead to a decline in community life. Here are the ones on which we want to concentrate:

- persistent crime
- prejudice and discrimination
- high rates of teenage pregnancy
- the difficulties of providing good parenting
- substance misuse and abuse
- environmental decay
- youth disaffection
- inadequate facilities for local groups to meet, including community centres and village halls

We know that some smaller groups may lack the experience and skills to gather information, manage projects and articulate their needs to others who might be able to help them. We will provide additional financial help to buy in extra expertise if needed.

While we believe that medical care and the prevention of disease are best left to others, we will support the promotion of general good health and wellbeing, for example, through schemes to encourage better dietary habits, and sporting activities in pursuit of health and fitness.

We will be looking for a clear understanding of the issue or problem you want to tackle, an argument as to why your approach is likely to help and a good plan to run, adjust and reflect on your activities.

Programme 2

Regeneration - local initiatives which improve the economic prospects of an area or a community of interest

We want to help people and communities to become economically more stable. That may mean the creation of more social businesses or money to help development trusts. It may mean looking at alternative ways of providing local jobs, facilities and services. We will consider training programmes and schemes that help people in an area acquire skills or confidence to re-enter the workplace. We are interested in supporting projects both in urban and rural areas that clearly help towards the economic development of the place. This may include capital grants for buildings or equipment where there is clear economic benefit.

Generally we will favour projects based in a particular area over those taking a broader approach. You will need to describe the place in which you are working and tell us why it needs economic rebuilding. You will need to show us that you have thought about how to ensure that any money we provide is spent as locally as possible. The request to us must be for something that is charitable though you do not have to be a registered charity to apply. If you, or we, are unsure about the charitable status of your proposal we will take advice from the Charity Commission.

Programme 3

Basics - day to day services

Not every project has to be about changing circumstances. Sometimes, people just need more of what services or help they are already receiving. We want to help organisations that add high quality services and assistance to people over and above what statutory authorities provide.

Because there are so many people in need of this help and so many organisations to serve them, we have to set some priorities. These are:

- in the field of disability, projects designed to benefit people with mental health issues or learning disabilities
- projects that help people to retain independence, remain in their own homes and benefit from the work of advocacy services
- carers' organisations
- refuges and other support for survivors of domestic violence
- money, debt and welfare advice, establishing credit unions and other schemes to help people with limited means to manage their money.

PROGRAMMES

Programme 4

Exploration and experiment - researching, trying out, thinking, finding new ideas or ways to address social problems

We want people to be clearer about when they are trying out a new idea and when they are just looking for money to sustain one that they already know works. We will treat real attempts to try out new ideas quite differently. We will encourage experiment, and acknowledge that new ideas do not always work. We realise that introducing a successful idea into a new area is also an experiment. We will be looking for ways to learn what works and what does not. Plans to tell others about the try-out will be essential to an application.

Examples - action research into new ways of treating persistent offenders, practical research into the causes of disadvantage or social problems

Programme 5

A better, stronger voluntary sector - making the sector more capable of helping itself and others, articulating its needs and fighting its corner

We believe that people affected by social disadvantage are in the best position to judge what is needed to improve things. They may sometimes find it useful to have access to advice or help from skilled, countywide or regional bodies. These umbrella bodies provide the training, advice and support that can enable smaller organisations to develop and thrive and we would like to help them to provide a better service.

We are particularly interested in organisations that promote quality, both in their own work and as an example to others. We will also use this part of our budget to support other training initiatives and programmes, of our own making or suggested by others.

Programme 6

Aspiration - assistance to cultural, environmental, heritage and sporting charities which raise the profile of our area and make it a better place in which to live and enjoy life

We will help organisations that provide enjoyable and stimulating activities, of the highest quality, to the widest population in our area. Examples include:

- arts projects
- museums
- environmental or outdoor amenities
- heritage sites
- charitable sports clubs

We will want to look at the quality of the experience you offer and to be confident that you have thought about how to make your place or activity available to as many people as possible. Sometimes activities will be, by their nature or because of the place in which they happen, restricted to fewer participants and we will fund such projects from time to time. We will look at the overall distribution of our grants to make sure that we offer a wide variety of grants in different places and for the benefit of different people.

What kind of grants do we give?

We offer core support, project grants and capital grants. Under certain circumstances we may make loans or invest in organisations in other ways.

What sort of organisations can apply?

Your organisation needs to be legally constituted. It does not have to be a registered charity, but the purpose for which you are applying must be charitable according to law and you must be allowed by your constitution to take on the task you propose.

You need to show us that you are capable of carrying out the proposal you put to us. You are more likely to be successful if your organisation is led by, or has strong representation of, the people you are trying to help.

How much can we apply for?

You should apply for the funds you need to do the job. We have a policy of funding fewer applicants properly rather than giving many smaller grants. Your grants officer will, if necessary, go through your budget with you to see if it is sound and to test whether you could manage with less if we are unable to offer all you need. We encourage you to apply to other funders as well as us, since we are rarely able to fund the whole cost of a project.

Small organisations, i.e. those with an annual expenditure of less than £25,000, are unlikely to receive a grant of more than £15,000. This is because we doubt that extremely rapid growth will have good results for the organisation.

Our Trustees meet five times a year and aim to spend approximately the same amount at each meeting. In 2001 44% of grants were for £10,000 or less. We gave 405 grants. The average grant size was £27,300.

We plan to spend our 2003 budget roughly as follows.

Programme	£
Prevention	3,000,000
Regeneration	3,000,000
Basics	2,750,000
Exploration	1,000,000
Better sector	1,000,000
Aspiration	2,500,000
TOTAL	13,250,000

Fast Track

If you apply for £15,000 or less, we can process the application more quickly if necessary.

Can we have more than one grant at a time?

We would rather organisations did not become too dependent on us for the bulk of their income, so we would discourage you from asking for too many grants to run at the same time. But we take a sensible and practical view: if your organisation serves different groups of people in different ways, you can talk to a grants officer and see if another bid might be possible. No foundation can do everything. When the guidelines are published, you will find a list of the things we never do. Please read our list of exclusions before applying to make sure that your organisation and the project you propose are not automatically excluded.

To receive a new application pack, complete and return this form to: **The Northern Rock Foundation, FREEPOST NEA 8299, Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 1BR**

Mr/Mrs/Ms/OtherName

Organisation

Address

.....

.....

PostcodeTel.

I am planning to apply for:

A grant under £15,000 ☐

A grant over £15,000 ☐

Please send me a free copy of the next issue of Rock Reports..... ☐

Need for a rethink

Development trusts pride themselves on being representative of the local community, but inevitably there are different views of what representative means. Towards the end of the 1990s, the Haltwhistle Partnership went through a sticky patch, when two of the partners decided that the organisation was no longer listening and they stepped down. Alan Caldwell was brought back to facilitate a review of the plan and to look at the town's current needs. The conclusion was that while the Civic Trust had helpfully focused on the town's bricks and mortar, attention now needed to be paid to community health and social care. Access to advice, information and support services was poor and with 40% of households having no car, many people were losing out. There had been no District Council office in town for ten years and the only advice service available was four hours a week from the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Photography © Allan Glenwright



**Haltwhistle Partnership Director
Kirsten Francis**

A comprehensive new plan was published, setting out the Haltwhistle Partnership's ambitions, and recent awards from the government's Market Towns Initiative and the Northern Rock Foundation are supporting its implementation. The four-storey Partnership office on the main street is now packed with organisations offering advice, information and training. The Employment Service, the Basic Skills Unit, Victim Support, Tynedale Voluntary Action, Citizens Advice Bureau, Escape (drugs advisory service) and the National Park are all represented. There is a debt advice service and a lone parent adviser and the ground floor window has become a rapidly changing noticeboard of opportunities.



**Haltwhistle's main street
and market square**

A centre for the community

A 90-minute drive north, the market town of Wooler is the base of the Glendale Gateway Trust. The Trust, which comprises representatives of ten local organisations and up to eight individual residents, services an area of almost 250 square miles and a population of 6,000. (Wooler itself has a population of just 1,800). The Trust was established in 1996 and four years later, in autumn 2000, it achieved its first major goal, the completion of the Cheviot Centre.

A 'village appraisal' had identified a need to bring together a disparate range of community services and facilities under one roof. It took three years to raise the half a million pounds needed to undertake the work and months were spent making and revising plans to match the budget. The plan was to convert the former offices of Glendale Rural District Council (originally a Victorian workhouse) to provide a community centre. The Cheviot Centre, as it is now known, boasts meeting rooms, advisory services, a crèche and play area, a computer room and a training suite, where classes are run by Northumberland College. There are offices for rent and the tenants include Northumberland National Park, Berwick Family Centre, the Community Council of Northumberland and the Glendale Gateway Trust itself. Part of the first floor is used by Wooler Tourist Information. 'This is the ideal combination,' says the Trust's development officer, Tom Johnston. 'The

Centre is used by local groups – dance and music groups, the local history society and the University of the Third Age – and it provides visitors with a place to come for information at the start of their visit.'

Visitors are vital contributors to Wooler's economy. The high street is struggling against the competition from nearby Berwick and the local businesses are all very small. The lack of local employment has resulted in young people moving away, leaving behind an increasingly elderly population. Part of the Trust's remit is to try to increase the employability of local people of all ages and courses on offer at the Cheviot Centre include word processing and accountancy. Other initiatives include the management of a drop-in centre for 11–18 year-olds, Christmas lights for the town centre and a small grants scheme to enable local groups to undertake arts and other projects.

Public support for the Trust has been strong from the outset. Johnston, a former youth hostel warden, chaired the original village appraisal and ensured that a questionnaire was delivered, by hand, to every household. A summary of recommendations was circulated in the same way, so that everyone could have their say. To date most of the Glendale Gateway Trust's activities have been concentrated in Wooler, but as another beneficiary of the Market Towns Initiative, it will be able to branch out more. The visibility of its activities is important to its continuing support locally. Most people know someone who is involved and the lines of communication are short. If any part of the community is unhappy about the way things are going, Johnston or one of his colleagues will soon get to hear about it.



Opening day at the Cheviot Centre



**Northumberland National Park wardens,
grounded during the foot and mouth
outbreak, doing up the Centre's back yard**



Project Director Laurie Short with Victoria Kruse, Chair of Allenheads Trust in front of Beaumont Hall and Garden House which may have a future as a residential field centre

All change

The Allenheads Trust provides a good illustration of the kind of imagination and flexibility that rural development trusts need in order to achieve their aims. Set up in 1987 in response to a doom-laden newspaper article entitled 'The Death of An English Village', the Allenheads Trust's remit was simple: to improve the quality of life of the people of Allenheads, by whatever means.

Allenheads has physical beauty on its side. Set high in the hills, to the south west of Hexham, the village shows all the signs of a prosperous past. The houses are squat and handsome in the sunlight and the village pub is a popular staging post for walkers and cyclists heading over the hills towards Cumbria.

Allenheads' wealth was built on lead mining and the village benefited from company managers who saw the advantages of treating their employees relatively well. The village had electricity before Newcastle, and the pumps in one of the mines boasted an Armstrong beam engine, a striking innovation for its time. The founding trustees of the Allenheads Trust concluded that the village's history was its main selling point and so it opened a heritage centre. For three years the centre did well, attracting some 19,000 visitors, but while their spending in the pub and the shop was welcome, the Trust could not raise the money to pay staff. Before long, the heritage centre and another potential attraction – a trout farm – were closed down. Fulfilling the Trust's objectives was not going to be easy.

Local disagreements about the best course of action followed and many local residents simply preferred not to get involved. A new group of trustees was recruited and with a lot of time spent overcoming past prejudices, the difficult period passed.

Today, the growing public interest in environmental issues and in local history has provided the Allenheads Trust with a new 'hook' and there is an exciting plan on the table. It is dependent on permissions being secured and on the Trust's ability to raise sufficient funding. This time it is not going to rely so much on grants, earned income will be an important part of the equation. 'It is very important that anything we do brings business to Allenheads,' explains project director Laurie Short. 'We have a shop and a pub and an internet café, all of which need customers. Our job now is to persuade more people that they have a reason to come to Allenheads and to stay for a while and when they are here, to spend money.'

Ambitious plans on the table

The first step is to smarten the place up a bit. Many of the houses are empty and the heritage centre is looking neglected. The plan for Allenheads includes new play and picnic areas and an existing nature trail is being redesigned. The village square is being landscaped and seating installed; the heritage centre is to be converted into a village hall, with two much needed meeting spaces, and subject to negotiations with Allendale Estates, two other buildings – Beaumont Hall and Garden House – will become a residential field centre. Financing the scheme, while maintaining the momentum of the programme, will remain a challenge but it is one that Short is convinced the Trust is now well placed to meet.

The three rural development trusts featured here are going about the regeneration of their communities in different ways – ways most appropriate to local circumstances. What they have in common is an approach that places local people, whether as individuals or as representatives of others, where they should be at the heart of the planning process.

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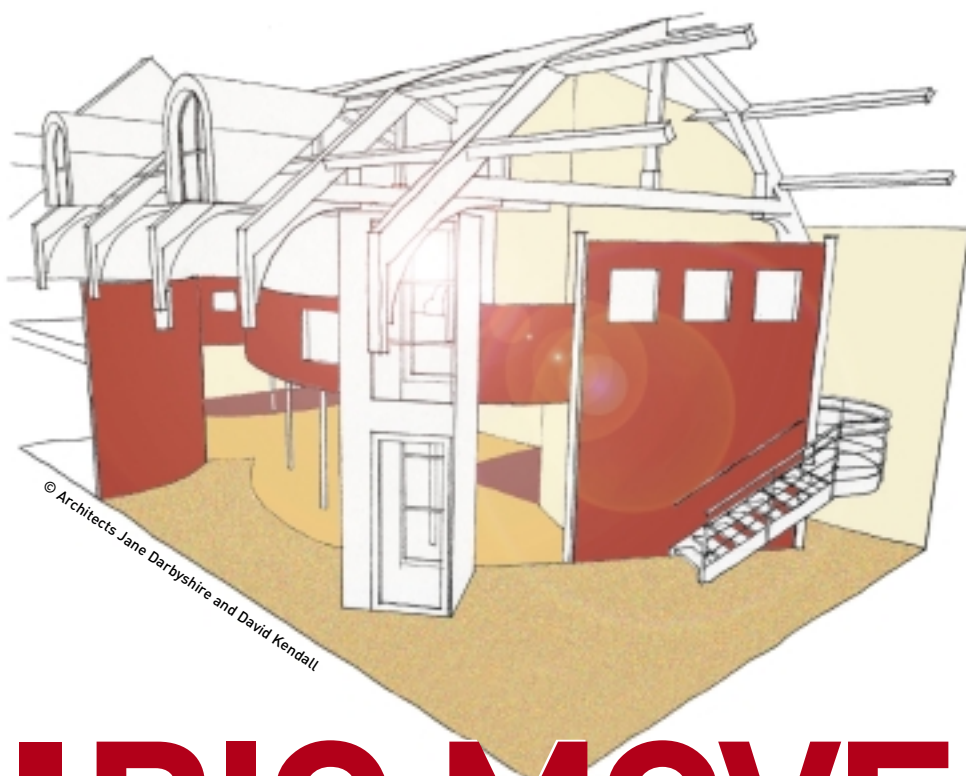
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THE BIG MOVE

The introduction of new grant programmes (p4) is not the only change about to take place at the Northern Rock Foundation. Just before Christmas, the whole operation will be moving a few hundred metres down the road to a former Methodist chapel at the junction of Woodbine Road and Gosforth High Street.

The Old Chapel, as it is to be known, was bought by the Foundation in October 2001 and since May this year, it has been undergoing extensive building works to turn it from a place of worship into a modern office designed by architects Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall. The purchase was the culmination of a two-year search for a building big enough to house the full staff team, that would be fully accessible to disabled staff and visitors and that was affordable. With modern, purpose-built office accommodation dominating the market, finding a building with a bit of character was a bonus.

The Foundation's current offices in Lansdowne Terrace are on three storeys and the rooms are small. The top floor is chilly in winter and stifling in summer and only the ground floor is accessible. The new offices are rather different. The original ground floor has been lowered and a mezzanine floor, staircase and lift have been installed, to create a second storey. The overall feeling is open plan, although there are areas where staff can work alone or have meetings in privacy.

The Old Chapel has two entrances. The main one is at the front and leads to the reception area and behind it, the general office. The ground floor has two small meeting rooms, one big enough for four people and the other for six. To the left is a lift and to the right a staircase

leading up to the director's office, the Board room - big enough for 20 people - a library, a quiet area and a kitchen.

At the rear of the building is a second entrance, leading to a small parking area. This is ideal for disabled drivers and there is a parking space reserved for their use. Next door is a large City Council car park, and the Regent Centre metro station and bus station are only a few minutes walk away. In designing the parking arrangements, the Foundation and the architects have been careful to ensure that the residents of Woodbine Road will not be troubled by any extra traffic that the use of the office might create.

The Old Chapel has become a light and airy building, with windows set into the roof. While Susan Leonard, the Foundation's office manager and the director, Fiona Ellis have taken the lead on the practical discussions with architects and suppliers, staff have been consulted on every detail, from the dimensions and positions of the workspaces to the colour of the blinds and carpets.

As a funder of the arts in the North East, the Foundation was keen to involve artists in the building project. It invited proposals for small-scale pieces of work and commissioned three glass artists - Effie Burns, Gavin Marshall and Kathryn Hodgkinson to make cast glass panels for the wooden front door, to sandblast the internal entry doors and to produce decorative glass pieces for the balcony, for the screen beside the staircase and for a row of small eye-level windows.

The Old Chapel will be open for business in the New Year and we look forward to showing you round.

WORK IN PROGRESS



Photography © Barry Deans

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