

‘Local Distinctiveness’ is the essence of what makes a place special to us, that combination of landscape, wildlife, heritage, buildings and culture that makes somewhere unique.

Understanding the local distinctiveness of your area can help you to protect, enhance and benefit your community. ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) aimed to do this in Tebay and Orton with a Local Distinctiveness Project.

Why?

Every area, village or community has a special combination of characteristics that make it different from its neighbours. Understanding these may help you to:

- Plan new events or activities for local people and visitors.
- Publicise and protect those things that make your area special.
- Comment confidently on new development proposals.
- Promote new tourism or other business opportunities.
- Prepare a Community Led Plan to guide the future of your area.
- **Landscape:** Does your area have a distinctive landscape that results from the underlying geology or the way that it has been shaped over time?
- **Wildlife:** Are there colonies of special or unusual plants, birds or animals?
- **Heritage:** There may be archaeological sites or buildings that connect your area with a particular period or historical event?
- **Architecture:** Do the older buildings in your area have a distinctive look that results from the use of local building materials or construction techniques?
- **Culture:** Is there a festival, farming practice or traditional business that is special to the area?
- **Food:** Is there a local fruit, cake, biscuit, pie, sausage or cheese that is particular to the area?

Where to start?

Many differing elements combine to form the special character of a particular place. Not every single aspect may be distinctive or unique, but their combination will be.

Potential elements to explore include:

Each of these may offer something that captures the imagination of local residents, experts and the wider public. This could prompt the formation of a new local history or archaeology group, a local festival, or the development of visitor attractions such as walking and cycling routes.

Local Distinctiveness

- The combination of landscape, heritage, economy and culture that makes a place special
- A tool to help protect and enhance your community, and to share with everyone

A Team Effort

- Work together with local people with diverse interests and knowledge
- Agree and work towards shared and manageable goals

Maintain momentum

- Use a project plan to monitor progress
- Be clear about what is to be done, who will do it, and by when

A team effort

Exploring so many diverse aspects of your area means that you will need to involve people with a wide variety of interests and knowledge.

Begin by planning an event that gives local people the opportunity to share their interests and pool resources. Individuals or local groups may already have an archive of old photos, knowledge of a particular event in history, or experience of special local traditions or products.

Try to involve established community organisations, schools, churches and the Parish Council.

Next steps

From your initial meeting you will be able to identify what your neighbours are most interested in investigating, and why. You will also better understand the opportunities that investigating the local distinctiveness of your area may create.

Form a project group of volunteers who may lead work on particular topics. You may be surprised at the skills available locally.

To keep things manageable agree a limited number of topics for your initial work, and the objectives that you all share in working together - perhaps to preserve knowledge of local traditions, to develop a new event or to find new ways of promoting your area to tourists.

Egremont Russets and Cumberland sausage, Herdwicks and Swaledales, stonewalls and hedges, skylarks and oystercatchers, clog dancing and rushbearing, gingerbread and mint cake, slate and brockram...

Work together to produce a project plan. This can be a simple paper or chart shared across the group that defines:

- What you intend to do
- Who will do it
- When you intend to complete it by

Your project plan will help all members of the group to monitor and maintain progress. Meet regularly to share your growing understanding of different topic areas.

Celebrating

Don't forget that you are building upon the interests and knowledge of your community. Arrange regular opportunities to share what you are learning with residents and also share your ideas about what you plan for the future.

If you intend to propose a new event or tourist activity you need to make sure you have the broad support of your community if you are to be successful. Give everyone an opportunity to comment and advise.

Importantly, create opportunities for everyone to celebrate their growing understanding of the local distinctiveness of their area.

More information

More information about the Tebay and Orton Local Distinctiveness project can be found on the ACT website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/about/distinctiveness.

ACT can also provide guidance on starting a community group, project planning and sustainable funding.

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) provides guidance about 'Assessing and Maintaining Local Distinctiveness'. www.acre.org.uk

For more information please contact us at ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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