



**action**  
with communities  
in cumbria

## PRESS RELEASE

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### VAC celebrates 60<sup>th</sup> with new name

Voluntary Action Cumbria (VAC) celebrates 60 years of working in Cumbria with a hugely successful conference highlighting the current achievements of active communities and launching the organisation's new name: 'Action with Communities in Cumbria' (ACT).

At the event ACT Chief Executive, Roger Roberts, said of the new name "we want to be really clear about our role in supporting communities to plan for their futures; to make sustainable use of their assets, develop and manage local services and use business as a way to achieve their ambitions."

Cutting the birthday cake, James Cropper, ACT patron and Lord Lieutenant of Cumbria, spoke of the organisation's enormous contribution to social development in the county over the last 60 years with special mention of ACT's retiring president Andrew Humphries.

Annie Mawson's Sunbeams Troupe, assisted by ACT in accessing funding for their Concert Troupe Tour, helped to make it a truly celebratory occasion with their inspirational music performances. Annie was also pleased to announce they have raised just short of £600,000 of their £1.5million target for a new sustainable training centre for people with learning disabilities.

Speaking on to the topic of 'Active Communities' Guest Speaker Sylvia Brown, Chief Executive of ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), described rural people as an 'endangered species'. Ms Brown identified the "need for a greater role for local people in influencing their own future and delivery of public services" and the importance of "safeguarding community led planning" in order to achieve this.

Anne Hall, Coniston Parish Councillor, was the first to contribute to an 'active community showcase', giving a presentation highlighting their experience with community led planning, supported by ACT. Coniston Parish Plan, completed in 2002, has since led to an affordable housing project, self sustaining local social services 'Coniston Carers' and many other successes including "a forward looking, modernised Parish Council".

Anne commented on one of the reasons for this; "We have now got some young people on the Parish Council, Parish Council business is discussed in the pub, and the wider community is engaged". Spurred on by their success, work is underway on their new Plan, including efforts to reduce the Parish's carbon footprint.

Dr John Perkins continued with his presentation on Gamblesby Community Centre's sustainable refurbishments, including special thanks to Carl Glynn, ACT's Village Halls Adviser, for his advice and support.

Following the centre's closure in 2001 due to its poor state of repair, members of the community literally took matters into their own hands and donated their spare time to carry out as much of the renovations as they could themselves. The decision to focus on sustainable materials and energy efficiency throughout the project included a ground source heat pump, under floor heating, Thermafleece insulation and a community wind turbine.

Penny Mutch explained how The Exchange at Crosthwaite was created in response to the closure of the village shop and Post Office in 2005. The Post Office service was continued by the village pub, however, villagers identified that with the loss of the shop, there was a need for a new focal point for social activity in the village.

"We opened in February 2006 and over 2 years later we're still full of enthusiasm and coming up with new ideas all the time". The Exchange, open every Wednesday, includes a café, country market, Traidcraft stall, book exchange, children's crafts, foot care specialists and beautician, whilst also acting as a forum for organisations to promote their services.

Penny described how ACT has since helped them to "produce a blueprint of how to make and bake an exchange". A group of local people in Bolton, after reading the blueprint, visited Crosthwaite to see how it worked in practice and Penny was delighted to add that "We have been invited next week to their village to see how they have interpreted and adapted it to their own needs".

Beren Aldridge, in his presentation on Growing Well, a successful community owned project using horticulture as a basis for training and rehabilitation, explained the use of business as a way of harnessing people's enterprise to deliver social benefits. In thanking ACT for its support Beren commented on how the organisation "brings people together to create something that is new and special".

ACT's Roger Roberts, said of the event "We wished to take this opportunity to underline the huge benefit that Cumbria gains from the success that communities and their leaders are achieving"

"The adoption of our new name 'Action with Communities in Cumbria' is intended to reaffirm our commitment to supporting successful local action like that discussed during the conference"

For more information about ACT and the projects discussed at the conference please telephone 01768 840827.

**- Ends -**

**Photo:**



James Cropper, Lord Lieutenant of Cumbria, and Olive Clarke cut the birthday cake at VAC's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference



Roger Roberts, Chief Executive, launches VAC's new name 'Action with Communities in Cumbria' at their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference

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**Notes to Editors:**

**Action with Communities in Cumbria**

(Previously known as Voluntary Action Cumbria)

- ACT is Cumbria's Rural Community Council and a registered charity.
- ACT is working with people and communities to improve the quality of life in rural Cumbria.
- ACT is an independent organisation able to work with a wide range of partners on an open and equitable basis.
- Established in 1948, for 60 years ACT has been supporting communities that are socially, economically and environmentally vibrant where the needs of all are considered.
- To find out more information, please visit ACT's website: [www.cumbriaaction.org.uk](http://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk)
- **Please note, this website is currently being formed, information can be found at our old website [www.ruralcumbria.org.uk](http://www.ruralcumbria.org.uk)**