

Annual Review

2017-2018



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ACTion
with communities
in cumbria

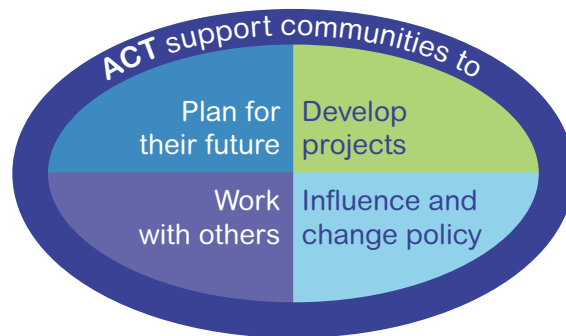
ACT's Mission

ACTion with communities in cumbria champions community and rural issues

We help people and communities achieve their aspirations and make their areas better places to live. We're particularly active in rural areas and among communities affected by economic, social, or physical disadvantage.

We support communities by:

- Providing practical advice and support
- Delivering workshops, events and case studies for community groups and social enterprises
- Linking together local people and the agencies and authorities that impact on their daily lives
- Representing the interests of communities locally, and nationally and raising awareness of local needs.



If you want to support rural communities, keep up to date with our work or benefit from our services, please become an ACT Supporter. See details on back cover.

ACTion with communities in cumbria

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Chair's Introduction

and introducing the new Chair

As the new Chair of the ACT Trustees, this is my first Annual Review. Before anything else, I'd like to thank the ACT staff team and all my fellow Trustees for enabling me to take on this role and hit the ground running.

It's been a challenging year with the changing nature of funding and increasing needs in Cumbria's rural communities but a review of our 70 years of history shows that it has always been thus.

ACT is all about supporting communities at grass roots level, bringing people together to find solutions and create a vision for their future as well as strengthening their collective voice so

that rural communities can be heard in local and national government. Over our first 70 years, ACT has been involved in creating and developing several organisations that have gone on to make a big impact: Cumbria Community Foundation, Cumbria Association of Local Councils, Cumbria Youth Alliance, the Farmer Network, Enterprise Answers and others.

I hope that this Annual Review gives you a flavour of ACT's approach, shares useful examples of our work and encourages you to support us in the years ahead.

Joanna Tate - ACT Chairperson



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PS I encourage you to become an ACT Supporter if you are not already one. Potential funders are always keen to quantify our connections among Cumbrian communities so every Supporter helps.



**“Communities
need an ability to
see the bigger
picture beyond their
village boundaries.”**

A photograph of two women in a meeting. One woman, wearing a blue shirt, is pointing at a laptop screen. The other woman, wearing a grey shirt and glasses, is looking at the screen with her hand on her chin. The image is framed in a circular shape with a blue and green decorative element in the bottom left corner.

ACT continues to work with the 26 other members of the [Lake District National Park Partnership](#) to ensure that its influence makes a difference in the area. We were part of the lengthy process of securing World Heritage Status and we are now working with others in the Vibrant Communities group of the Partnership to make sure that community engagement on the future is as much about listening as about telling.

ACT recommended use of the respected Scottish Engagement standards and we continue to create opportunities for partners and communities to meet. Discussions have covered important topics such as housing, health and wellbeing and pride of place and we are particularly looking at how these are impacted by the Lake District's new designation.





Funding review

The BIG Lottery (Reaching Communities) recognised a need to engage and approached ACT, and other ACRE members, for input to its 2017 Rural Stakeholders review process.

We were pleased to be involved in the conversation and decided to involve hall representatives so that they had direct input too. This enabled us to clarify some of the tricky aspects of rural living that are sometimes missed or misjudged from an urban perspective.

From our research, experience and local contacts, we made several contributions:

- the limited scale of volunteer involvement in small communities;
- the pockets of deprivation which do not show up in national indices;
- responses to the loss of services and the importance of sustaining those which remain rather than a race to create something new.

“ACT is a central point and umbrella for local community groups. One voice.”

ACT Client

All these conversations gave us scope to remind the Lottery that no-one should be disadvantaged by where they live. It was good to be involved in shaping the future of the Reaching Communities programme as we know that many of our clients have just the sort of projects that need this pool of funding.





Supporting communities to influence and change policy

Influencing and changing policy is a slow, laborious and often frustrating process but ACT is uniquely placed to conduct research, explore approaches from elsewhere and bring the right people together to make a difference.

“ACT can be proud of continually doing its best to support Cumbrian communities.”

ACT Trustee



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A key area of research in the past year was the **Rural Services Survey**. This involved ACT in online surveys as well as street interviews in several small market towns and face-to-face discussions at five agricultural shows. In all, 1300 responses were collected and analysed and the results have been informing our work as well as that of other organisations ever since.

There were no big surprises – the clear priorities were access to healthcare, public transport and affordable rural housing. However, now that we’ve gathered clear views and facts, we can have more impact

when using the findings as an evidence base for decision making or advocacy. We’re already seeing outcomes with the NHS **North Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group** using the results in the development of their care at a distance approach.





Desk research can also be invaluable. When Border TV news wanted a local angle on the national bank branch closures, ACT was in a position to gather the numbers and speak with authority. When 28 bank branches in Cumbria have closed in just 6 months, it's clear that access to services is an issue!

Similarly, our contacts with home-based “lifestyle” businesses meant that we could make a useful contribution to **Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP)** Industrial Strategy. We spoke up for the many micro-businesses in our rural communities that contribute to Cumbria's economy but are often invisible.

Having identified a particular issue with local transport for Millom, we got involved alongside **Millom Town Council**, and, with the additional resources of a university student on placement and a small grant from **Cumbria County Council**, we were able to explore the detailed local needs.



Then we could move things on by suggesting options and approaches from experience elsewhere.

“Whether we're collecting and collating data, collaborating with other organisations and simply making sure that we have the right conversations, we're convinced that our work in 2017 will support communities to influence and change in 2018/2019 and beyond.”

Lorraine Smyth, ACT CEO





Supporting communities to plan for their future

Planning can make a big difference to rural communities. Not only does it bring people together with a common purpose but it also creates a framework that can be applied to a range of situations.

“Supporting ACT is all about getting good things done together.”

ACT Team

Communities in Control

As part of the BIG Lottery funded **Rebuilding Together** project, ACT has been working with communities across Cumbria to support resilience and emergency planning, as well as promoting preparedness to households and individuals.

We produced a Household Emergency Plan leaflet which suggests practical actions people can take at home to be better prepared for emergency situations. To date this has been distributed to over 40,000 households across Cumbria.

In November 2017, ACT convened a Community to COBRA conference, bringing together emergency services and communities and enabling them to plan how they will work together during an emergency. ACT also chairs the **Community Resilience Network (CRN)** of agencies and we are working with **Cumbria CVS** and other partners to embed community involvement in county emergency planning, response and recovery plans.





Rebuilding in ACTion

Flimby on the coast of West Cumbria was badly affected by the December 2015 storms with over 100 households flooded in the days before Storm Desmond hit other parts of the county.

Through **Rebuilding Together**, ACT offered to support Flimby residents to form a Flood Action Group. The aim was to enable the community to liaise with the Environment Agency, local authority and emergency services as effectively as possible and improve the community's resilience to future flooding. ACT has provided support to **Flimby Flood Action Group** with a range of activities and ongoing conversations with statutory agencies.

Joy Chivers, who lives in Flimby, was directly affected by the flooding and is the Treasurer of the Flimby Flood Action Group:

“ When ACT got involved, they understood what was needed and what could be done. Rose accompanied us to meetings, supported our work on grant applications and she's also helped people to understand the differences between us and the bigger towns that flooded. ”



“ In Cumbria, the recent planning emphasis has been in response to flooding but enabling and encouraging planning for the future is an important part of ACT's Mission. There is a constant challenge to support communities in being more strategic and we're already seeing how the lessons from Rebuilding Together are being applied to village hall business plans and other scenarios. ”

Lorraine Smyth, ACT CEO



Developing projects

Our community buildings service

Encouraging communities to do things that develop activity and social connectivity is key to ACT's work. Back in 1948, we did this by supporting people in Lowther and Nicolfrest to help finance new village halls. And that sort of practical support to create hubs for local communities continues.

"This has empowered me to drive forward with making improvements required for the hall."

ACT Client

This year our Community Buildings Service responded to 196 enquiries:

- How do we include a new user group rep on our Trustee committee? This is usually covered in your governing document.
- Do user groups need their own insurance? Almost certainly, yes.
- Can we donate money to our local village fete? Probably not.
- Where can we get money to do.....? We will send you the Funding Guide and go from there.

Often enquiries are not especially complicated but that's because the ACT team deal with these issues regularly. Having access to our experience can be invaluable, saving time, avoiding duplication and building the confidence of local groups.

As well as our regular community building events this year (see page 13), we have also had three workshops where a group of halls' reps have helped us develop the Managing Risks Toolkit. The Toolkit, which is funded by the **Prince's Countryside Fund**, is available on our website.





Supporting communities to get **ACTive**

LACE UP is a new initiative in partnership with the Sports Council, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), our national network body and Active Cumbria, the Cumbrian sports council.

LACE UP encourages rural communities to try new recreational and sports activities and existing sports and recreation groups to get involved and attract new participants to their activities. The project started in January 2018 and we are supporting four community groups across Cumbria to develop their ideas and access targeted funding.

Getting involved in ACT is all about supporting communities at grass roots to come together to find solutions and create a vision for their future

ACT Trustee





“Good to network and see what other village halls have done.”

ACT Client

Working with others

Workshops and networking events

“ACT events are really valuable to share ideas and get the team’s input and support.”

ACT Client

Bringing people together is an important part of ACT’s role and is particularly relevant for those who have taken on responsibility for some aspect of local village life.

Our community buildings events give the volunteers running village halls and other community buildings the opportunity to share their experience, hear about new ideas and keep up to date with changing legislation. This year, successful events were attended by more than 60 village hall volunteers.

They were held in:

- Parton (Copeland)
- Bothel (Allerdale)
- Warcop (Eden).

A Community-Led Planning event in Egremont provided guidance to help five Copeland communities who were keen to start or renew their community plans - the process of consultation was described by one group as creating ‘a manifesto for our community’. The ability to present a unified voice can make a big impact, reinforcing local views on services and facilities, strengthening lobbying and helping to raise funds.

A common issue is housing and over 40 people from across the county attended the Embleton launch of the Community-Led Housing Fund, an event organised with Allerdale, Copeland and South Lakeland District Councils. This brought together a wide range of groups, organisations and individuals, all with a keen interest in developing locally-led housing solutions and making things happen in Cumbria.



Credit: Eden District Council Leisure and Communities Team

Eden community-run swimming pools

Eden District is unusual in having a number of community-run outdoor swimming pools in Askham, Greystoke, Lazonby and Shap plus a club pool at Hunsonby. We recognised the potential benefits of helping them to work together and initiated connections with the pools and Eden District Council (EDC). EDC funds ACT's community support activity in the district and has given grants to the pools.

We set up the first meeting early in 2017 and it was immediately appreciated. The group continues to meet every 6 – 8 weeks, to share the highs and lows of running these facilities, and to discuss how they can work together. We coordinate and host the meetings,

researching shared issues on their behalf and, together with the Tourism and Leisure and Communities teams at EDC, provide a source of information and advice on everything from governance, funding and policies to shared events, publicity and training.

“ Operating such a unique facility is always a challenge. The support of ACT, EDC and the other Eden pools through the joint meetings gives us an opportunity to share ideas and consult with others to benefit our local communities and visitors alike. ”

Gemma Askham,
Shap Swimming Pool Committee



CEO's perspective...

...looking forward

We've been using our 70 year milestone as an opportunity to review what we do, how we do it and where we can support Cumbria's rural communities to survive and thrive in future.

"They are very supportive and helpful, especially with sourcing grants."

ACT Client

And we've learnt two things:

- We're doing a lot of the right stuff already – there's still a need for a champion on community and rural issues and communities still need support to help them plan, develop, influence, change and work together to make a difference where they live.
- A problem at the root of many issues in rural communities is loneliness, isolation and a feeling of powerlessness to change anything.

Our 70 years of history show that this isn't new – veterans returning from World War II felt isolated and needed our support to make connections.

Looking forward, ACT will be putting a particular focus on addressing isolation in rural communities and encouraging neighbourliness. We will work with a new partner, **Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch**, to support neighbourliness and community participation and we'll be working with its existing network of people who already feel a responsibility for the wellbeing of their communities.





Neighbourliness may be a slightly old fashioned word but it's one that people understand. What happens will depend on each community – neighbourliness can be interpreted in lots of ways - but that's how we've always worked and it's what will create sustainable change. We've already seen good examples in Cumbria, from the Kirkby Stephen Good Neighbours Scheme to the Exchanges taking place across the county. We'll be learning from those examples and supporting the creation of new approaches elsewhere, I'm sure.

As this Annual Review went to press, we were just finalising the speakers and agenda for our October AGM. I very much hope that this will reflect our emphasis on connections and neighbourliness. I am excited about what we may be able to achieve, taking ACTion with communities in Cumbria into the year ahead.

Community-led housing

One issue arises in discussions across Cumbria all the time and that's a lack of affordable local housing in our rural communities. Our report on page 12 mentions the new Community-Led Housing Fund and we're using our background in bringing people together to make things happen.

We've already made a start with the launch event. We brought together local authorities, parish councils, existing community-led housing groups, community groups, third sector organisations and individuals to explore what's available, what's working and to see what can be done here in the foreseeable future.

This is looking like an area that will combine everything that ACT is known for: championing an important issue; helping communities to plan for the future and to develop local projects; encouraging different parties to work together; and also aiming to influence and change policy.

Watch this space for news.

Financial report

Through tight management we have achieved another small surplus this year, alongside increasing our services on specific issues such as community-led housing and providing more support in communities on the west coast of Cumbria.

The funding regime continues to be challenging with these increases in services only possible due to sustained investment of ACT reserves into partnership working. This has proved its worth with a couple of new contracts during the reporting year.

The year ahead, and beyond, will be challenging. We are reviewing all our costs and are developing plans to sustain services with the leanest, most efficient overheads possible.

Charity Income	17/18	16/17	15/16
ACRE/DEFRA	59,972	68,254	67,312
Local authority service level agreements (SLAs)	57,350	34,950	57,048
Big Lottery Rebuilding Together (through Cumbria CVS)	84,371	49,725	5,598
Big Lottery ACRE Village SOS	-	11,300	-
ACT investment	34,098	49,000	49,000
Other grants and donations	8,000	14,042	7,636
Bank interest	4,169	4,716	7,606
Miscellaneous	13,876	4,600	2,700
TOTAL	261,836	236,587	196,900

Charity Costs	17/18	16/17	15/16
Staff costs	163,598	138,536	131,532
Direct project delivery	38,711	11,619	6,135
Travel	9,477	8,288	8,523
Premises, office and IT	32,272	30,416	28,114
Audit and legal	6,687	6,470	7,212
Memberships	4,260	4,559	4,850
TOTAL	255,005	199,888	186,366

Funders

Each year, our list of funders shows lots of consistency with a few changes. We were delighted to receive funding from the Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner's office and from ACRE/Sports Council for the first time in 2017/2018 but equally pleased to receive significant support from all four rural local district councils in Cumbria and Cumbria County Council.

The continued support from the local authorities, especially when they themselves are under huge funding pressures, is crucial to our continued work and we also appreciate their practical support, advice and partnership.

“We value the continued expertise available from the team – advice on funding for community projects and joined up thinking about sustainability of village schools, halls, shops, pubs and other facilities.” *ACT Client*

Thanks go to:

- ACRE / DEFRA
- Cumbria County Council
- Allerdale Borough Council
- Copeland Borough Council
- Eden District Council
- South Lakeland District Council
- ACRE – Sport Council
(for the LACE UP programme)
- Copeland Community Fund
- Cumbria CVS – Big Lottery
- The Prince's Countryside Fund
(for the Managing Risk Toolkit development)
- Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner



ACT People

“ Getting involved and supporting ACT is all about loving where you live ”

ACT Trustee

Our Trustees

ACT is a membership organisation and a company limited by guarantee. We have a Management Board of up to 12 people (and no fewer than eight) and they are called our Trustees. They are elected annually at the ACT AGM in the autumn and up-to-date details are kept on our website.

Joanna Tate (Chair) - Jo has a range of valuable work experience in the private, voluntary and academic sectors and she is an expert in bringing people together.

Sam Bramwell - Sam has spent her working life in a variety of roles including working for ACT's Rural Women's Network. She has a keen interest in sustainable rural development.

Sue Castle-Clarke - Sue has been actively engaged in her community for over 30 years. She is passionate about encouraging local people to influence the future of their communities.

Liz Clegg - Liz works closely with the NHS and other public sector organisations to ensure that accessibility and the views of local communities are considered when delivering services.

Charles Ecroyd - Charles lives in the Eden Valley where he runs the family's agricultural and sporting estate. He is actively involved in a number of key rural organisations in the area.

Alan McViety - Alan is a partner in a Cumbrian firm of Chartered Accountants and he also has a keen interest in rural affairs making him the ideal Chair of ACT's Finance Committee.



“ ACT has always provided effective, objective and accurate advice. Its publications, events, template policies and guidance are a lifeline for voluntary groups to save them time and energy.

ACT Client



“The support was knowledgeable and comforting... very much the catalyst in putting us on the right path.”

ACT Client

Ron Munby MBE - Ron has lived in Cumbria for 30 years and was awarded an MBE for services to the community in 2010, recognising his work with a wide range of organisations.

Des O'Halloran - Des has spent most of his working career as an environmentalist. His love of landscape and heritage informs a strong commitment to rural places and people.

Ian Payne - Ian has worked in Cumbria for over 35 years in a variety of roles in local government, most recently in resilience and recovery, including community planning.

Jim Webster - Jim has farmed in South Cumbria all his life and brings that essential perspective to the ACT Board.

plus **Lorraine Smyth (CEO)**.

We also have a President, **Jolyon Dodgson MBE**, who has been active in the field of rural affairs in the North West for over 40 years and brings a tremendous amount of expertise and experience to this role.

Our Staff

The ACT team is a small one but that doesn't stop us making a big difference. We have three Development Officers - each covering a different part of Cumbria and also with different specialist knowledge - Lorraine Smyth (CEO), Julia Wilson (part-time Development Manager) and the voice at the end of the phone, our Office Manager, Dani Hall.

Those Development Officers, Hellen Aitken (north and east), Rose Lord (west) and Fran Richardson (south), are behind a lot of the projects described in these pages – and you'll spot them in several event photographs too.



www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT People - You!

It is of huge benefit to ACT to have a network of Supporters who understand what we do and who will share information and news with others in and around Cumbria.

As we mark 70 years, we are focusing our efforts on maintaining and growing our Supporter list and, if you are not already included, we'd love to keep in touch with you.

Supporters receive electronic copies of our ACT Gazette updates three times a year as well as other news, event invitations and links to publications via email. In return, when making funding bids, ACT can include details of the scale and scope of its support across Cumbria.



**It's easy to
become a
Supporter**

Either **phone** the office on

01228 817224

or **email** us via

info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

and let us have your email address as well as permission to store it securely and use it to keep in touch.

It really is that simple.

Thank you.