

Wetheral Parish Council is the largest Parish Council in the Carlisle district and one of the biggest in Cumbria with 2514 households and covering 5495 hectares 21.2 square miles.

The parish consists of 14 separate communities including the main villages of Wetheral, Scotby, Warwick Bridge, Great Corby, Warwick on Eden, Cumwhinton and Cotehill. Of these villages, seven have a village hall and one has a community centre.

Background

None of the halls receive any regular income from local, district or national government and are, by necessity, self supporting. They are run by committees, whose members are unpaid volunteers working for the good of their community to maintain a vital service. Some are also in need of refurbishment and are not fully utilised. Yet the Wetheral Parish Plan (2005) clearly identified the need for support for village halls specifically, and several communities identified the lack of youth facilities as a problem.

In response, Warwick-on-Eden Village Hall Committee, after recognising that other halls faced similar problems, contacted the Parish Council. They asked if the council could host a project by providing the office space for a Village Hall Development Office and help with securing funding for such a post.

The Village Hall Project

The Parish Council recognised that some of the existing committees were struggling and needed support. What was required was someone with ear-marked time to help the village halls increase usage and to encourage them to be self-sufficient.

To this end, the parish council appointed a part-time Village Hall Development Officer to work with all seven village halls and the community centre. The post was funded by the Plunkett Foundation, through the 'Strengthening Rural Communities across the North West' grant, facilitated by ACT.

What has been achieved?

• Website and Booklet

A joint website was set up and launched in March 2009, www.wetheralvillagehalls.org.uk both to promote awareness of the different venues and to increase bookings. The site is vibrant and each hall/centre has its own home page, with a diary of events and basic hall/centre information and contact details.

In addition to the website, an information booklet was produced and distributed throughout the parish.

• Equipment Bank

An equipment bank was established in order to enable the halls to share items such as trestle tables, chairs and bowling mats. Group buying of utilities and consumables has been arranged to further reduce the operational costs.

• Support for Individual Halls

The Village Hall Development Officer also worked with individual committees, helping them to plan and fund essential renovations which enabled the halls to widen their scope of bookings, and in particular to develop youth related activities.

• Increased Income

Improved buildings and resources increased committee income allowing them to become self sufficient and to maintain existing services and activities within each of their separate communities.



Information Booklet circulated to all households in Wetheral Parish

The Learning

There have been some difficulties in updating the diary information on the website as this can change frequently in the halls/centre. There have also been time delays in the communication of the timetable/activity changes. It is envisaged that the management committees will take control of their own areas of the website to update when necessary in the future.

There has been an increased understanding by the committees about how, when and where to apply for funding and the officer has given office support where it is needed. Some committees have worked collectively to apply for funding, such as bidding for health money to set up yoga and keep fit classes.

The officer has also been able to give advice on how to run committees, write constitutions and has given legal and practical advice if required.

The joint Village Hall Development Officer is now being used as an example of collaborative working, within Carlisle

District. It is hoped that joint working between Parish Councils could enable further grant funding with the aim to assist the village halls in their parishes as we have in Wetheral Parish.

The project is important to local communities and at this time of economic downturn there is a greater need to sustain the village halls and encourage the village residents to re-visit the grass roots of village life.

Contact Details

If you would like more information about this activity in Wetheral Parish, please contact Paul Martin, Village Hall Development Officer on Tel: 01228 561687 or Email: Paul.wetheral@btconnect.com

More information can also be found at: www.wetheralvillagehalls.org.uk

If you would like general village hall information and advice, please contact ACT on Tel: 01228 817224 or Email: info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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