

Gamblesby is one of the fellside villages north-east of Penrith, in Cumbria. Like other rural areas it has had to cope with a continuous and prolonged decay in rural services and loss of local facilities.

This was made worse in 2001 when the Village Hall, formerly a Victorian school, was deemed structurally unsound and was forced to close.

Background

The village shop, pub and one of the churches had all previously closed without being replaced, leaving the Methodist chapel and Village Hall as the only remaining community resources.

The Village Hall Management Committee was determined to re-open the hall as it was greatly valued by local people. It provides the only real opportunity to participate in social activity, particularly for those without a car.

The Activity

The committee decided to take a long term view of the hall's sustainability and energy efficiency. They chose a ground source heat pump to feed the under floor heating system, a wind turbine, and exceptional levels of insulation (made from sheep's wool).

Consultation with the community found that 98% of residents were in favour of refurbishment and 95% wanted a new extension to replace the existing cold and damp flat-roofed kitchen and toilet block.

The project was split into two phases; the main hall and installing a ground source heat pump, then installing the wind turbine and rebuilding the kitchen and toilet block. Each phase was broken down into smaller elements so the committee could divide into sub-groups. Each sub-group had responsibility for the different elements such as; financial control, fund raising, building works, heating systems, ground works etc.

The whole village was galvanised and became involved in one way or another. The majority of the work was carried out by members of the community, from removing plaster on the internal walls, laying hardcore for the new floor, installing the ceiling insulation, internal decoration, to landscaping the site. Farmers provided equipment and practical help, one resident drew up electrical specifications, another made a video.

What has been achieved?

The Village Hall has been turned into a welcoming, comfortable and low maintenance amenity for the community. It actively involved the whole community so that they feel it is their project and not just something done by "the committee".

The mutual respect between committee members has grown, everyone is respected for the contribution they can make. The newly resident professor of chemistry, for example, works together with local farmers whose families have been in the village for many generations.

The committee understands how project funding operates and recognises potential cash flow issues. They established good relationships with a number of charitable funders, 14 in all, laying the foundation for further funding in subsequent years. They had a lot of fun doing it and the project has genuinely brought the community together, including young and old, newcomers to the village and those who were locally born and bred!



*Gamblesby Village Hall
and wind turbine*

The Learning

The key factors relating to governance which provided the foundation for all of this were:

- Visible and energetic leadership, particularly from the chairman, developing a shared understanding and communication of aims and objectives
- Productive, trusting and positive relationships within the committee
- Recognition of the variety of skills available, common in most villages and communities, and effective use of these following a skills audit
- Sensible allocation of tasks within a well designed management structure
- Best practice project management and an agreed business plan, looking to long term development and community benefits from use of the refurbished hall
- Developing a funding strategy based on a portfolio of funders and sources, recognising the intense competition for Big Lottery grants
- Finding and making good use of partners, infrastructure/support agencies and experts

ACT champions community and rural issues

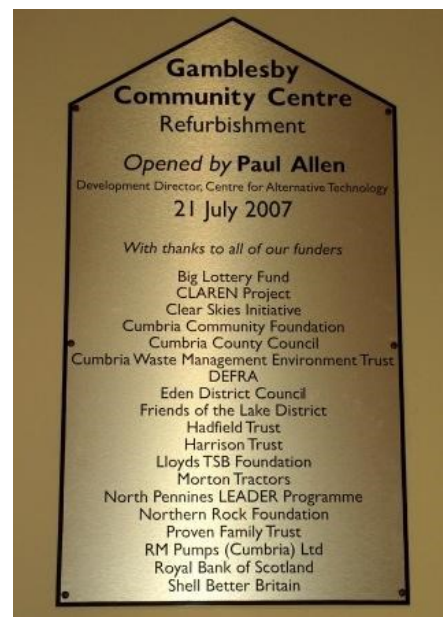
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*Commemorative plaque listing all funders
involved in the project*