

Loweswater village is a small community situated between Loweswater and Crummock waters, with a population of 230. The community are very active and have joined with the neighbouring parishes of Lorton, Blindbothel, and Buttermere to form the Melbreak Communities initiative. Together they have a Community Led Plan, Community Emergency Plan, sustainable energy project and First Responders group.

## Background

In 2018 The LACE UP project, funded by Sport England and managed by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) awarded grants to 10 projects in Cumbria to build new participation in sustainable physical recreation activities in rural areas.

ACT assisted ACRE with the LACE UP project and was awarded a grant to deliver 'Getting Active in Village Halls', specifically to work with village halls to develop projects trialling new physical activities for the local community.

ACT promoted the project to village halls across the county and Loweswater Village Hall was one of those keen to try something new.

## The Project

Val Bell is one of the committee members at Loweswater Village Hall and runs a 'do it yourself' fitness club there. Between 5 and 10 people attend the club, taking turns to 'lead' the weekly sessions. Val jokes "It's usually me but when I can't, others take over".

Participants pay £2 per keep fit session, which has so far raised £700 for the hall. Other activities at the hall, including table tennis and indoor bowls, are all volunteer run.

Val also enjoys ballroom dancing and felt this would be a popular activity to introduce locally.



*Ballroom dancers from Loweswater Village Hall*

The need for a paid ballroom dance instructor would increase the running cost and in this isolated community Val recognised she needed some support to get it started:

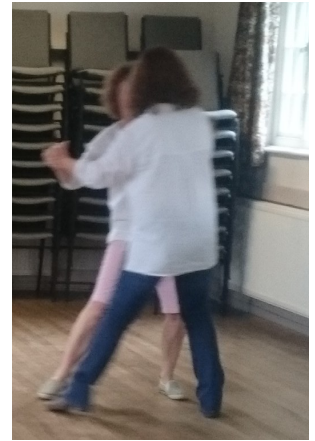
"The challenges of increased second home ownership, and a lack of public transport meaning people move into town when they can no longer drive, can make it more difficult to get activities off the ground as there are less residents to support them."

"I felt it would be a popular activity as it seems to be doing very well elsewhere - the local U3A group run a session in Cockermouth with over 100 participants and people travel from all over to join in".

The 'Getting Active in Village Halls' grant from ACT funded a series of eight sessions covering the cost of hall hire, publicity, refreshments and an experienced instructor.



*Dancers take a 'turn' around the room.*



*Having fun practicing the 'Quick Step'*

## What has been achieved?

A series of ballroom dancing sessions have been held at the hall, with between four and eight couples taking part at each.

Individuals, as well as couples are welcome to attend, with Val often pairing up with newcomers without a dancing partner. There is a charge of £3 per person, per session.

The class meets on Monday afternoons and stops for tea, biscuits and a chat halfway through.

In order to ensure numbers don't dip over the summer, participants agreed to take a break and re-start classes in the Autumn.

Feedback from one of the participants: "Its really good to get out and do some gentle exercise with others. Dancing is such a sociable activity and sometimes we move quite fast when the music takes us!"

## The Learning

- Offering ballroom dancing has attracted new users to the hall. The grant made it possible to trial this new activity in a very rural location. It's worked as a guarantee against loss and allowed the group to put the participant fees towards the cost of running future classes.

- Summer is not necessarily the best time to trial a new activity! People often have holidays booked and can't commit to coming every week at that time. But we've adapted and look forward to inviting even more people when sessions start again in the Autumn.
- Tea, biscuits and chat are an important part of the session, building neighbourliness and combating social isolation.
- Having an informal setting and atmosphere helps to attract people to 'have a go'. No special shoes, clothes, or experience required! Also, recruiting the right tutor makes all the difference!
- Sometimes you have to just try something! The LACE UP funding provided the perfect opportunity to do this.

## Contact Details

For more information about the project at Loweswater Village Hall please contact Val Bell by Email: [vebell2911@gmail.com](mailto:vebell2911@gmail.com).

The LACE UP project has now concluded but ACT will contact halls if other similar opportunities arise.



## ACT champions community and rural issues

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