

**Harriston is a small village of approximately 100 houses, located just over a mile from the town of Aspatria in West Cumbria.**

**The village was originally built between 1820 and 1830 to house miners for a new colliery but was then redeveloped in the 1970's. Harriston Village Hall was formerly used as a school during the day and as a miners social facility in the evening.**

## Background

The village hall in Harriston has been used for community benefit since the village was built in the 1800's. In recent years the building had been run by local groups with support from the housing association but without any clear governance arrangements.

The hall closed in 2015 and six months later the community became aware that the building had been put up for sale or lease. A new group formed to fight for the hall to remain a community asset and, with support from ACT, put in place appropriate governance, lease, operating procedures, and registered as a charity. The Harriston Village Hall committee of charity trustees now manage the village hall and organise events and fundraising activities.

## The Project

In 2019 the village hall committee was contacted by Julie Wedgwood at Cumbria Recycling Ltd. (CRL) to discuss the idea of starting a local Food Pantry. Millom and Harriston were selected as two county pilots for their Food Pantry Programme and the Harriston Food Pantry started that July.

Since then it's been successful in making a range of nutritious food available to local villagers on a weekly basis. Local families are also referred by other agencies and organisations.

Members of the scheme pay a small charge of £3.50 a week (not means tested) which goes to CRL to cover food costs. The food is provided by the charity Food Share, working with CRL.



*Julie Wedgwood with members of the village hall committee and the Food Pantry Scheme (Pre-Coronavirus restrictions)*

The food varies each week but there is a focus on it being healthy and seasonal. Baskets are delivered pre-packed with some additional 'extra' items which are added until they run out. As the contents varies slightly, they're allocated at random using a simple raffle ticket system.

It takes around half a day each week, with volunteers setting up the hall, receiving delivery and distributing the food baskets.

The hall receives a donation from CRL to help cover the cost of opening and also generates income by selling drinks to people staying on for a cuppa and chat after collecting their food basket. This also adds a social element to the project.

## What has been achieved?

Pre-Coronavirus a sustainable Food Pantry scheme was beginning to take shape, organised and run by local people using the local Village Hall, and supporting more than 45 households.



40+ food baskets available from the Village Hall



Harriston Village Hall

When Government announced lockdown measures on 23rd March 2020, to minimise the spread of Coronavirus, the Food Pantry was temporarily suspended. Once Cumbria Recycling was able to secure food supplies again, they asked if the hall was able to restart the scheme.

Village halls, also required to close as part of lockdown measures, were allowed to provide essential services such as food banks. However, changes needed to be made so this could be done safely.

The committee followed Government advice and carried out a risk assessment to help protect both organisers and recipients of the scheme. Social distancing is followed; members are allocated a time slot to collect their baskets; baskets are wiped down; cash payments are placed in envelopes to avoid handling money; and the coffee and chat in the hall has stopped for now.

A referral scheme via the local schools and local organisations like Aspatria Rainbow Response (a COVID-19 response group), has also developed with hall Trustees and Volunteers delivering to at risk households.

## The Learning

Local need can be met with a local response and know how. Volunteer support is essential, plus the village hall as a secure place for food delivery and a safe and welcoming place for collection.

## ACT champions community and rural issues

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The cheaper, healthy food provided by the Food Pantry is a big help to a lot of people, particularly larger families.

Making a small weekly charge helps to cover food costs, making the scheme sustainable, and gives members a sense of ownership as well as value for money.

The raffle ticket system for collection helped to avoid any issues with the perception of different sized food baskets.

Including the social element, where people meet up for coffee and a chat, is important too. Even when this couldn't happen in the hall, people would have a chat outside (at a safe distance) after collecting their baskets - particularly needed during lockdown.

The Hall Trustees and Volunteers were determined to keep the Food Pantry open during the pandemic. By using a risk assessment, having a flexible approach and making appropriate adjustments, they're able to do this.

## Contact Details

For more information on Harriston Village Hall and the Food Pantry please contact Chairman Henry Barker on:

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