

# Alston Moor Community Plan 2011 – 2016



# **Alston Moor Community Plan 2011 – 2016**

## **Introduction**

Alston Moor's previous Action Plan was launched in 2002 and was extensive and rightly ambitious. Many of the actions contained within the Plan were completed over the years that followed.

There is now the opportunity to refresh the Plan to take account of the current needs and ambitions of the community. The overriding concern of the Alston Moor community is that it remains a sustainable area and that Alston town centre displays good signs of vitality and viability.

The Alston Moor community has always been sensitive to the availability of local employment and other economic issues, throughout its history. The rising price of fuel is merely the most recent manifestation, and we are hopeful that the community can survive this and remain strong as it has following previous blows. However, it is crucial to face the fact that without the presence of young families and people of working age who are fully employed, the community's character will change dramatically.

Within this context, the overall aspirations remain for a good level of facilities for its residents, a good environment for existing businesses to thrive and to attract new businesses and an attractive place to come to for its visitors. For this to happen, the community have decided that they should focus on a limited number of highly important actions which are set out below under each heading.

There are key issues to be addressed concerning the provision of local services, too often administered and delivered from far-off centres whose costs and travel time in reaching Alston Moor may result in an increasingly minimal service. The schools, the hospital, ambulance, shops and lively local activities are all essential for the thriving and sustainable community we envisage.

However, few if any of the actions in the table which follows can be carried out unless the community identify additional 'capacity' in terms of volunteers or paid support to help implement the Plan. The different organisations operating in Alston Moor need to continually build on their abilities to engage the whole community so people feel included and 'part of' improving their local area.

In addition, each of the actions set out in the table below will require its own separate project plan to develop the detail required to access funding and demonstrate all the benefits. This again highlights the need to have additional assistance within the community if the Plan is to be delivered successfully within a reasonable timescale.

The Plan was developed over 2011 and identifies some of the main issues to be challenged at the time of writing. The document is not set in stone and as new issues, challenges and opportunities arise, the Plan will be amended and updated so it is continually aligned to the hopes and aspirations of its communities.

## **Key Issues and areas for action**

### **1. Economy**

The main issues around the economy of Alston Moor centres on the availability of decent employment opportunities, supporting existing local businesses and increasing the tourism offer.

The community is keen to look into whether services currently provided through the public sector and other agencies can be delivered by local groups and individuals ensuring better employment opportunities and an enhanced economy. The following local authority services could (subject to further investigation) be delivered and managed locally, either by existing local contractors, by local groups established specially to meet a specific need or by suitably qualified individuals.

Building maintenance – repairs, decoration, cleaning, caretaking

Street cleaning – sweeping, litter

Road winter maintenance – snow clearance, gritting

Drain and ditch cleaning

Grass cutting – verges, greens, playing fields, etc

Hedge and tree cutting/trimming

Refuse collection – recycling

Footpath maintenance

Care in the home – care visiting, meals on wheels

Child care – family support services

Some of these services are already provided locally, though mainly by individuals acting as subcontractors to a main local authority contractor. This is often considered inefficient and the community feels it could potentially achieve better value for money if activities were performed differently. Direct contracts with local contractors could result in substantial savings (as the negotiations over the recently threatened toilet closures showed) and simultaneously provide a better, locally accountable service. In connection with this, local authorities have recently been encouraged to break down their large service contracts into smaller local contracts so that small contractors and community groups are able to tender for them.

A fairly high proportion of the employment and income of Alston Moor depends on tourism, in the widest sense – including not only people who come from elsewhere in the UK or abroad to stay, but also those from the area within about 60 miles who visit for the day. Additionally, local people like to get out and enjoy their local countryside. The Pennine Way, C2C Cycle Route and various other long and medium distance routes pass through Alston Moor (Isaac's Tea Trail et al). Marketing and development of tourism is essential so that the visitors not only support the local economy, but add critical mass to use and retain services.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>E1.</b> Devolution of services to the local area/Employment opportunities.	Investigate whether residents/businesses in Alston Moor could take over a range of public services in Alston Moor e.g. grass cutting, general maintenance.	Alston Moor Community Plan Steering Group	Services delivered more appropriately for residents and potentially more local jobs.
<b>E2.</b> Develop a community income generating project(s).	This action is essential to the community. It is important as grants are only sporadically available whereas an ongoing revenue supply will enable the community to make improvements for their local area. The project may take the form of a community wood fuel project or a renewable energy project or the purchase of an asset. The cost of energy is rising and will continue rising into the future. It is essential that communities and individuals build resilience to the volatile markets wherever possible.	Alston Moor Community Plan Steering Group working with AMP	Sustainable finance to plough back into other community initiatives.
<b>E3.</b> Support and develop Nenthead Community Shop and Chapel.	This may take the form of assisting with the purchase of the old Methodist Church to restore the building and return it to its rightful place as a dynamic part of the village infrastructure. This may also include expanding the premises and renting out the upstairs space.	Nenthead Community Shop/Friends of Nenthead Chapel	Better services for local people.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<p><b>E4.</b> Develop a brand for the area with its own marketing approach which includes a website and associated leaflets.</p>	<p>This action will be aimed at increasing the visitor numbers, building loyalty for town centre services by encouraging repeat business from local people attracting new businesses and creating an attractive offer for prospective new residents. The welcome pack would be an excellent introduction to the area for new businesses and residents.</p>	<p>AMBA</p>	<p>Increased tourism, improved local economy.</p>
<p><b>E5.</b> Support local businesses</p>	<p>Run a second Support Our Shops campaign. Businesses will need to be asked if they would support this again. Possibly needs re-naming to avoid people assuming it is save rather than support? Consider visitor promotion scheme – SOS aimed at locals. Participating businesses issued with sheet of tokens identifying their business. Visitors collect a small envelope from Local Links/STR/hotel/B&amp;B etc and a list of participating businesses – collect a minimum of 5 different tokens. Return sealed envelope to L. Links to be entered into a monthly draw for a pack of Alston goodies.</p>	<p>SAM, AMBA</p>	<p>Encourages people to shop locally, economic benefits for the local area. Provides useful data on appeal of different businesses.</p>

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
E6. Support local businesses	<p>Develop Alston Moor Voucher scheme. Many shops already offer vouchers for their own goods. It would be possible to create an Alston Moor Gift Voucher. Books of vouchers printed, numbers logged as to where they are placed. The person who sells the voucher keeps the full value until it is collected by the administrator. The person who accepts it receives the value less 5%. Not a huge amount of turnover, but could be a useful additional service.</p>	AMBA	<p>Improvements for the local economy. Increased visitor numbers for the area.</p>
E7 Support the development of apprenticeships in the area wherever possible.	This action will go some way towards providing sustainable employment in the area.	AMBA	Employment opportunities

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>E8.</b> Support the plans of the South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society for expansion over the next five years	The STRPS has the potential to increase tourism and create job opportunities for the area. The STRPS has the following plans: 1. Open the extension to Lintley Halt at Easter 2012	STRPS	Increased tourism and jobs for the area.
	2. Complete the extension to Slaggyford, including the restoration of the ex-NER station building, to open at Easter 2014		
	3. Create a major environmental education and demonstration facility on the Alston site, including a range of low/no carbon energy installations; This includes the UK's first wood (waste) burning steam locomotive		
	4. In liaison with the Hub Museum and the NP AONB Partnership, open a new heritage and environmental Discovery Centre in Unit 1		
	5. Employ a permanent heritage and environmental education and development team		
	6. Re-open the Alston Station Café		
	7. Potentially provide public transport links - at least in the peak season - to Haltwhistle and/or Brampton.		

## **2. Health Service**

Our local 'cottage' hospital has been threatened with closure more times than most of us can remember, and the constant uncertainty is a serious anxiety in the community. The number of beds has been very significantly reduced, resulting in occasions when people, who would much more reasonably be cared for in Alston, having to spend lengthy periods in hospitals too far away for frequent visits by friends and relations. Not only is travelling for appointments and visits increasingly unaffordable, but it is well documented that recovery occurs most quickly in local environments where frequent family visits are easily possible.

The minor injuries unit is crucial, as is the possibility of care after major or crisis interventions at major hospitals. As always, the cost of the provision is cited as the reason for the downgrading, but there seems to be no understanding of the cost-saving of having reasonable provision (for other healthcare services, for social services). For both these reasons we shall seek an increase in the number of beds available in Alston Cottage Hospital.

The Ambulance service acknowledges that the area suffers from inadequate provision, with response times frequently out of the aim of eight minutes. The reasons given concern costs (of provision) but this clearly fails to take account of the cost of not providing. There are also concerns that cost cutting in the ambulance service is leading to an over-reliance on the Air Ambulance.

Finally, there are also practical difficulties around the provision of local dentistry in Alston Moor and the infrequent availability of visiting practices, which need to be addressed to ensure an adequate dental service available to all.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<p><b>H1.</b> Ensure the services provided by the Community Hospital continue to be the most appropriate for an isolated rural community. Increase the numbers of beds available where possible.</p>	<p>Continue liaison with the League of Friends (LOF).</p>	<p>LOF</p>	<p>Better health care provision</p>
<p><b>H2.</b> Protect the provision of Ambulance Services to ensure these provide a safe and effective service.</p>	<p>As a first step LOF to arrange meeting with the Ambulance Trust to establish facts.</p>	<p>LOF</p>	<p>Better health care provision</p>
<p><b>H3.</b> Ensure the provision of a suitable ambulance response, comparable to that expected by other people in the UK”</p>	<p>This action should also combine with adequate linking of the ambulance service to potential other provision e.g. in Weardale.</p>	<p>LOF</p>	<p>Better health care provision</p>
<p><b>H4.</b> Protect the provision of Out of Hours care to ensure a safe and effective service is provided.</p>	<p>Ongoing review of community experience</p>	<p>LOF</p>	<p>Better health care provision</p>
<p><b>H5.</b> Seek to improve the availability of dentistry in the area.</p>	<p>Adequate dentistry facilities must be available for all.</p>	<p>LOF</p>	<p>Better dentistry provision</p>

### **3. Education and Lifelong Learning**

There is current serious concern about the secondary school's viability, given a declining population of under 16s. The secondary school (Samuel King's) has been threatened with closure previously and the necessity for it to remain was argued fiercely, and convincingly, resulting in its retention as an 11-16 school (having previously been an 11-18 provision). Unless we can retain our secondary school, we are unlikely to be able to attract new people to live on Alston Moor (other than the retired), and primary school provision needs to continue to be easily accessible for young children wherever on Alston Moor they live. Hence the continuation of Nenthead School is as important as that of Alston Primary. Currently, at the time of writing, it seems likely that a Federation will be set up, with all school provision under one Head Teacher, from reception class to Year 11.

For younger children, the arrival of the Children's' Centre, located at Alston Primary School has been very valuable for families, running drop-in play session for very young children and their parents, as well as various courses for parents (e.g. language development, cooking on a budget, parenting) with a crèche alongside.

Alston Playgroup is a once a week playgroup for two and half year olds where they can develop their social and language skills. It is funded by parents, community fundraising and contributions from the Fairhill Charity for parents on low incomes.

Alston Pre-School provides five funded sessions per week for children the term after their third birthday, follows a wide ranging Early Years curriculum and introduces children to school.

Childcare continues to be difficult here. There are no registered childminders or a nursery, so it is very difficult for working parents.

Support for families with children with a disability is also a concern. Although there are more opportunities for children with disabilities to have access to sports and leisure activities across the county, there are fewer opportunities on Alston Moor, and transport and access to support workers are the limiting factors.

Aims in the area of childhood education must be for a system providing security, certainty and development – particularly around broadening the cultural experience of children.

Opportunities for adult learners must also be improved from its current low state, following the removal of the old evening class provision. The main obstacle is that all the AE/FE courses currently available involve travel. Public transport is not available to most venues and private transport is unaffordable to many.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>ED1.</b> Ensure all three schools remains viable.	This action is closely linked to the overall need to make the area sustainable and rests on maintaining and developing the population levels.	School Governors	Schools remain in place and provide essential service for the community and people wishing to relocate to the area.
<b>ED2.</b> Adult Education	Look to address the lack of adult education opportunities on Alston Moor. Project for workshops/skill sharing. Local Links also hope to offer workshops. Try to find out what people would like to learn – Local Links. Potential to work with SKS and Children’s Centre.		Adult learners developing new skills. Provides a source of funding for the host venues.

#### 4. Opportunities for Young People

##### Children and Young People – Social Opportunities

It has always been acknowledged that Alston Moor is not the easiest place in which to be a teenager. With a relatively low number of people in this age group, it has proved difficult to ensure good youth provision in a sustainable manner although there have been notably good periods in the past before an earlier round of cut-backs led to the closure of the Youth Club.

We now have the Club House which has met with approval all round – from the young people themselves and from the community at large, who are aware of the significant reduction in young people simply ‘hanging out’ with the potential (and actuality) of vandalism and other problems. This tremendous community asset does not have a secure base and in 2011 had to move from one site to another (was previously called the Scran Shed)..

Securing the future of this valuable provision, and developing it as appropriate over time, are clearly essential.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
YP1. Work to ensure the long term provision and development of youth facilities in the area.	Again, due to the geographically isolated nature of the area it is essential that provision for young people is protected and developed.	Eden Youth Work Partnership	Provision for young people is maintained and developed.

## 5. Affordable Homes

The community are worried about the high number of houses for sale (currently over 90) and wish to promote the image of an area welcoming 'new blood' and willing to accept help from the incoming population. A similar worry is that the planning restriction that old barns etc. can only be converted into holiday cottages to let is leading to an oversupply of holiday cottages in the area.

A housing needs survey was carried out in 2009 indicating a need for affordable and social housing. A potential site belonging to the Fairhill Estate Trustees has been identified, but no further progress made. The site could be developed in a number of different ways including self-build or through a housing association. Since 2009 many more properties in the area have come onto the market, some for less than the cost of new build, and the property market is slow. However, affordable and social housing are likely to remain issues up to and beyond 2016 and opportunities should not be overlooked.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>HO1.</b> Challenge policies on allowing the conversion of barns to only become holiday lets rather than residential housing.	Work alongside the District Council to achieve this action.		Decent, affordable housing is available for local residents and those wishing to move to the area.

## 6. Local Facilities

There are reasonably limited community facilities in Alston Moor and those that exist must be protected and developed where possible. However, there are distinct opportunities arising that the community could benefit from including the future potential uses of St. Augustine's church.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>LF1.</b> Continued support for the Local Links facility.	Classic Tourist Information sign would be useful to attract visitors in. Some visitors think it is a church.	Grant application by Town Hall Trustees/AMP/PC?	Encourage visitors to use the facility more.
<b>LF2.</b> Improve local signage/support community buildings	Potential for a sign on the alleyway to indicate the whereabouts of the Masonic Hall – possibly also which groups meet there. Potential for a sign to Tyne Willows indicating that the gym is there, Also a sign on the Fitness Club. Need a new town map for visitors	Masons sign at TW is happening AMBA walks leaflets group	Increased usage and knowledge of the different community facilities.
<b>LF3.</b> Assess whether there is the possibility of some form of transfer of the Nenthead Mines for the benefit of the community.	There is the potential for the community to play a fuller role in the use and marketing of the Nenthead Mines as a visitor attraction.	North Pennines Heritage Trust	This may prove to be a beneficial community asset.
<b>LF4.</b> Consult with the community on the possible future uses of St Augustine's Church.	The church building is a significant space within Alston that may be suited to a variety of community uses alongside its current users.	Church of England – Churches Together	A number of useful suggestions may be able to be put into practice.

## 7. Communications

Ten years ago, the cities were getting ADSL broadband and it seemed unlikely that BT would ever bring it to this area. Realising that broadband would be critical for local businesses, for people working from home, and for children studying at school and at home, the community came together to create CyberMoor to provide broadband over the whole area.

Now we are again seeing the cities moving ahead. This time it is Superfast broadband over fibre. The government is making grant money available for Cumbria (and other rural areas). Alston Moor needs to be proactive in obtaining some of this grant money for Superfast Broadband.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>C1.</b> Welcome to Alston Pack for new residents and businesses.	Action: Revise and reprint Alston Directory to include a volunteer opportunities list, local business directory and an annual list of key events with dates. Electronic version to be put on Cybermoor, hard copies would be useful initially for people to keep for reference. Could be run off at Local links – encourage people to access all information from there.	AMBA with help over event dates from Local Links	New residents and businesses are made to feel welcome to the area and opportunities for new people to get involved with their community are highlighted. The inclusion of a local business directory would help people to shop and do business locally.
<b>C2.</b> Ensure the community secures super fast broadband alongside the Cumbria-wide initiative.	The availability of super fast broadband will be a key consideration when people or businesses are deciding whether or not to relocate to the area.  In addition, a consistent means of communicating useful information to community members needs to be developed.	Broadband Champions Cybermoor	Better connectivity and will appear to businesses wishing to relocate to Alston Moor.

## **8. Environment**

In the past, maintenance of footpaths was undertaken by East Fellside and Alston Moor Project (EFAMP)/East Cumbria Countryside Project (ECCP), although the responsibility lies theoretically with the landowners – the County Council having enforcement responsibility. However, the enormous length of footpaths within the county and the burden such responsibility places on landowners means that without additional input, few footpaths can be expected to remain in good order. Hence there is a need for some management system to ensure that this bedrock of local tourism provision is adequate to the expectation.

Most visitors have expectation of the provision of interpretation so that they can enjoy the countryside more fully, and few are able to use Ordnance Survey maps on their own as a source for days out. There have been a number of leaflets published in the past for walks on Alston Moor (mostly, but not exclusively, by EFAMP and ECCP) but many are now out of print. There is some provision through the Area of Outstanding Beauty administration, but these are not always well-focussed for the needs of Alston Moor.

There has in the past, nationally, been a tendency to assume that ‘panels’ are the answer to all a visitors’ needs. However, these are intrusive on landscape and useful only for the time the visitor is facing them; additionally, they are not a once-and-for-all provision and frequently become seriously damaged over a few years (by weather and wildlife as much as by vandalism). Their use should only be considered where it is possible to ensure replacement as they deteriorate. They can be helpful in built-up areas (e.g. on the side of a non-historic building or in a car park), to provide orientation and information about the availability of certain walks/points of interest, for example.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>EN1.</b> Develop a management system for the footpaths that are in existence in Alston Moor.	The footpaths provide a great attraction for many visitors to Alston Moor but due to their significant lengths require continual significant maintenance. Ways in which the maintenance can be achieved in an efficient manner will need investigation.	CCC/AMPC, CCC Maintenance	Maintaining and increasing tourism and improving the environment.
<b>EN2.</b> A careful and considered approach is needed for the minimal use of interpretation panels in appropriate places only.	The Panels require regularly replacing so this should be borne in mind when considering their long term use as there are cost implications.		Improved tourism offer.

## 9. Agriculture/Farming

Farmers have highlighted that there appears to be significant opportunities around the use of renewable energies.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>AF1.</b> Investigate opportunities for farmers to benefit from renewable energy schemes.	Information on renewable energy schemes to be collated from the District Council and shared with local farmers to raise the awareness of the positive benefits.		Energy costs are reduced and less CO2 is produced.

## 10. Transport

It is highly unlikely that Alston Moor will benefit from increased public transport provision in the near future. It is therefore necessary to look for other possible solutions such as co-ordinated car clubs, car sharing, greater use of community vehicles etc. In addition, it is necessary to highlight the various schemes that are already in existence to improve the usage.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>T1.</b> Investigate different ways of providing community transport for the area.	It is highly unlikely that the community will benefit from an increase in public transport so it must investigate other means of transportation to benefit the local residents. This may take the form of co-ordinated car clubs etc.	AMPS Community Minibus Group	More transport opportunities are generated.
<b>T2.</b> Support and encourage use of the schemes already in existence i.e. Rural Wheels, Social Car Service, Community Minibus and of course the buses.	It would seem easier to promote better take up of existing schemes than to create new schemes.	CCC, AMPC	Greater awareness of a range of transport opportunities in the area.

## 11. Fuel

There is enthusiasm, but not currently the person-power, for the development of a fuel-wood scheme – growing wood on directly owned and/or managed land, bringing in wood from small areas in private ownership (even single trees), etc, and having a sawmill which could render this into fuel for community use, whether in specialist pellet boilers or for wood-burning stoves.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>F1</b> Feasibility study for fuel wood scheme. This action is strongly linked to the economy section.	There is willingness in the community for this to happen but the capacity to carry out this action needs to be identified.	AMP	Helps to alleviate fuel poverty faced by many.

## **12. Elderly and disabled people**

As a hilly area, Alston Moor immediately provides challenges to those who are less physically agile. However, there is no reason for life to be made even more difficult for elderly or less physically able people. Additionally, there is the same proportion of hearing-impaired and visually-impaired people in our community as elsewhere, and their needs should be considered.

There are many possible areas which might be addressed, from the difficulties caused to those using mobility aids (not to mention those pushing children's buggies) by pavement parking to the provision of simple things like handrails and seats.

Awareness among all those responsible for or influencing public provision would go a long way to ensure that a difficult situation is not made impossible. Similarly, awareness could enable those with sensory impairments to have an easier time.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<p><b>EP1.</b> The mobility needs of individuals must be given due consideration particularly around Alston Town Centre. This may include ensuring cars do not park on pavements and shops considering layouts to ensure there is adequate space for people to move around.</p>	<p>Simple moves like providing handrails and seats may make all the difference</p>	<p>CCC, EDC, AMPC, AMBA</p>	<p>Better environment for elderly and disabled people.</p>
<p><b>EP2.</b> Ensure an ongoing growth in awareness among all those concerned with the planning of public space</p>	<p>Planning applications for shops etc should be considered in the light of the needs of elderly and disabled people. Those doing road- or building-work in the centres of Nenthead or Alston should be encouraged to ensure they do not obstruct walkways.</p>	<p>EDC, Utilities Companies</p>	<p>Better environment for elderly and disabled people.</p>
<p><b>EP3.</b> Work to ensure greater awareness about the needs of those with sensory impairments</p>		<p>Age Concern plus other relevant groups</p>	<p>Better understanding of those people with sensory impairments.</p>

### 13. Community Plan Activity

Delivery of the Community Plan will require significant commitment from a range of volunteers in the community. However, although there is a good level of commitment to the delivery of the community plan, additional assistance in the form of some paid support to the Group would be highly beneficial.

Once the Plan has been finalised, it will need to be disseminated throughout the community and to other key stakeholders. The reason for this is that all members of the community must be given an opportunity to come forward to help deliver the actions and to become involved.

Other key stakeholders need a copy of the Plan so that they can be made aware of what is important to the community and how they can help with the delivery of the Plan.

Action	Comment	Responsibility	Outcomes of Actions
<b>CP1.</b> Employ the services of an individual to assist the Community Planning Group to take forward actions within the Community Plan.	Although several community members are committed to delivering the Community Plan actions, there is a lack of capacity within the Community to take on significant streams of work. The individual would need excellent project management skills and a track record of successfully bidding for funds.	Community Planning Group	Actions within the Plan are delivered in a timely manner.
<b>CP2.</b> Ensure the Plan is widely disseminated within the community and to other key stakeholders who may be able to help deliver the Plan.	It is important that the community supports the Plan and that people are encouraged to come forward and help deliver actions in the Plan.	Community Planning Group	This action is aimed at raising awareness and encouraging greater involvement in delivering the Plan.

Thanks to all the members of the community, past, present and future for their help and involvement in this Plan. Also thanks to the officers from Eden District Council who have given us enormous support to bring this together.