

# **The Melbreak Communities**



[www.melbreakcommunities.org.uk](http://www.melbreakcommunities.org.uk)

## **Community Action Plan**

**November 2011**



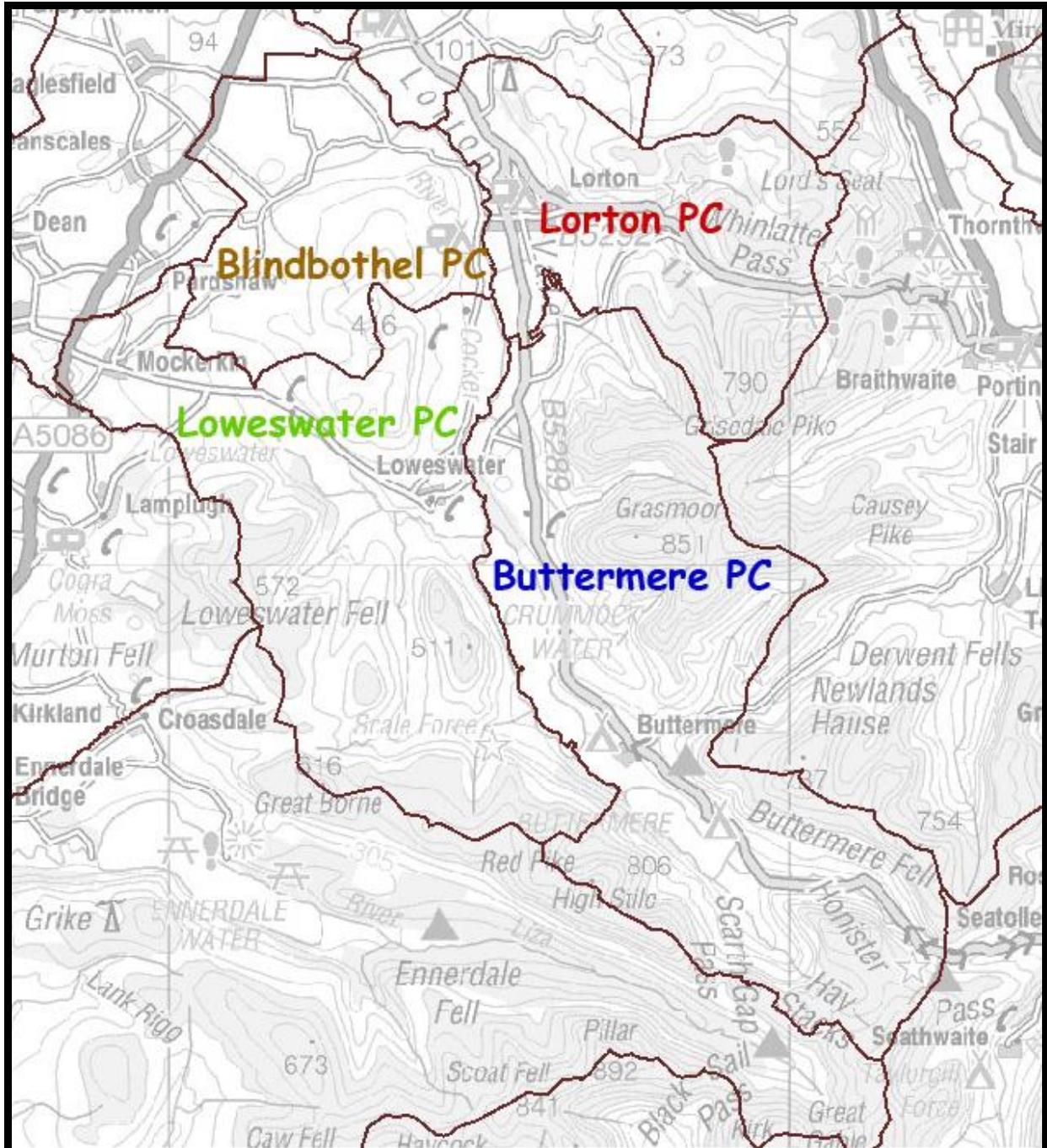
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## The Melbreak Communities

The Melbreak Communities is a cluster of four civic parishes: Buttermere, Loweswater, Blindbothel and Lorton, situated in the Vale of Lorton in North West Cumbria. The cluster was formed in 2009 to develop a Community Action Plan.



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## Setting the scene

### A Foreword by our Chairman

We felt we needed a Community Action Plan for the Valley. The world rushes by somewhere over the hills from where we live – leaving the Valley, on the face of it, very much as it has always been. By all outward appearances the pastoral and physical environment appears to have changed little since World War II. However, when you pull back the curtain and examine what is behind you see dramatic underlying changes that affect us and the things we need now and in the future.

It is clear that the traditional Cumbrian born and bred population has declined rapidly since World War II. The people who have moved in from outside the Valley have brought their own world view, culture and economic power to bear upon community organizations and relationships – without the lifelong support of a close and extended family network. Such a family network was a deeply embedded thread in traditional society, providing a sense of security and a set of rules to conduct personal and business relationships. This process of continual and fundamental change has implications for our own Valley, now and for its future welfare as a viable community.

**John Hayton**

This plan has been prepared by the Melbreak Communities Steering Group following extensive consultation in the community:

Chairman: John Hayton, Brook Farm, Thackthwaite CA13 0RP

Treasurer: Alan Hudson, The Brow, Low Lorton CA13 0RQ

Coordinator: Penny Poole, Whinfell Hall, Low Lorton CA13 0RQ

Other members:

Christine Poate, Yew Tree View, High Lorton CA13 9UJ

Derek Poate, Yew Tree View, High Lorton CA13 9UJ

Robert Baird, Park View, High Lorton CA13 9UG

Joe Crowther, Lower Gatesgarth, Buttermere CA13 9XA

Keith McNeil, Littlethwaite, Low Lorton, CA13 0RW

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Lake District National Park Authority (through its Investing in Communities project), the Cockermouth Neighbourhood Development Forum, and ACT (Action with Communities in Cumbria) for their continuing support. Thanks also to St. Cuthbert's Press, Lorton for printing the plan.

## The local landscape and the people who live in it

The Melbreak Communities occupy a valley containing Buttermere, Crummock Water, the River Cocker as far as the outskirts of Cockermouth, Loweswater and the Mosser Fells; much of the area is within the Lake District National Park. Farms and houses are widely dispersed, with a few clusters, while Buttermere, Lorton and, to a lesser extent Loweswater, have village centres.

Population figures, drawn from the 2001 census, are as follows:

Buttermere	135
Loweswater	220
Lorton	260
Blindbothel	155

The total population of 770 people comprises 315 households; 95 of these are pensioner households and among them, 50 live alone. The proportion of older people is much higher than for Cumbria as a whole and reflects both the ageing population and the attractiveness of the area as a retirement destination.

## The local economy and activities

Farming and tourism dominate the local economy, but people are also involved in other kinds of work either home-based, in the locality or further afield. Within our Valley there is a primary school at Lorton, three churches – at Loweswater, Lorton and Buttermere, shops in Lorton and Buttermere and pubs, guest houses and hotels in Buttermere, Loweswater and Lorton. Further information, including details about the numerous clubs, societies and organizations which are active in the Valley, can be found on The Melbreak Communities website:

### The Melbreak Communities

*Community website for  
Blindbothel, Buttermere,  
Lorton and Loweswater in  
West Cumbria*



[Home](#) [Community Plan](#) [Activities](#) [Churches](#) [Diary of Events](#) [Message board](#) [Parishes](#) [Photos](#) [Services](#) [Contact](#) [Links](#) [Site Map](#)

#### Home

The Melbreak Communities comprises the four parishes of Blindbothel, Buttermere, Lorton and Loweswater, just south of Cockermouth in West Cumbria, which have come together to produce a [Community Action Plan](#). As part of this programme, this community website was started in May 2010 with the aim of providing a unique, point source of information for people living or working in or visiting the area. If anyone has any comments about the website or any news to pass on, the best thing to do is to post a message on the [Message Board](#). On some pages (eg Community Plan), you can post messages specific to that subject. Alternatively, you can pass on news by email to the administrator from the [Contact](#) page.

Here's a list of recently-added or recently-amended pages:  
[Commercial Services](#), [Miscellaneous](#) for some new ones  
[Community Plan](#) for the results of the 2010 survey of local needs  
[Site map](#), showing the site structure on one page.

If you can't find something on the site, try the Search button at the bottom of every page. If you find a link that is broken, please let me know by [email](#).

To give you some feedback on use of the site over its first 12 months, there has been a little over 8,000 page viewings which makes an average of about 22 per day and just over 200 on the busiest day. Use of the website is increasing as the average viewings in the first half of 2011 (about 30 pages per day) is roughly twice that during 2010. It's not possible to tell who's visiting the site, but Prince Charles might just have had a quick look at the photos of himself visiting the new Lorton Bridge last February (see [here](#))

[www.melbreakcommunities.org.uk](http://www.melbreakcommunities.org.uk)

## The Melbreak Communities – the story so far

During Spring 2009, a group of local residents representing each of the four parishes formed a Steering Group. With funding from the Lake District National Park Authority, Action with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) and the Cockermouth Neighbourhood Development Forum we drew up a constitution for The Melbreak Communities and appointed a co-ordinator. Since then we have met regularly and organized a number of events and activities in the Valley, from open meetings and coffee mornings to a presence at the Loweswater Show. We have reported our progress in 'The Link' magazine, on local noticeboards and via the local parish councils.

The November 2009 flood, followed by severe weather during two successive winters, challenged our rural community and some residents were very badly affected. Adverse weather conditions highlighted the need for up to date, easily accessible, local information and the usefulness of a website in which the wide range of local groups and organizations in the Valley could have a presence began to emerge as a valuable resource we could develop, provided we could find the necessary expertise, preferably from within our own community.

We successfully recruited a webmaster and launched our website in May 2010. This has proved very popular as a source of local information and for its interactive Message Board and efficiently maintained Diary of Events. In the first 12 months, there were more than 8,000 page viewings and double that in the first half of 2011.

## Our Community Action Plan – the consultation process

Our evolving Community Action Plan draws on contributions from individuals of all ages and from many different groups, clubs and organizations that are active in our Valley.

Life in the Valley – and the things that really matter to people – was the theme for the 'Summer Term Project', our first consultation exercise in 2009. A group of local people were invited to Lorton School to talk with Year 6 pupils. All four parishes, plus a range of ages, were represented including teenagers and employed people to families and retired people. A wide variety of interests were identified, from farming and tourism to a long list of leisure activities in which people in the Valley take part.



During Autumn 2010 we conducted a Community Survey, distributing a questionnaire throughout the Valley. The volume of responses was very encouraging and they contained varied and interesting insights into local issues and priorities, for example:

- How can we best help each other during extreme weather conditions?
- The availability of a range of social activities in the Valley, catering for all age groups
- The provision and accessibility of local services - shopping, banks, Post Office etc
- Looking after our surroundings for everyone's benefit

## Getting together

Opportunities to meet and socialize are very popular. With support from Action with Communities in Cumbria we have held open meetings in Buttermere, Loweswater and Lorton – to get people together and talk about local issues, including those which emerged from the consultation process.

In July 2011 we launched monthly 'Coffee and Cake' sessions on Saturday mornings at the Yew Tree Hall in Lorton. This event has further potential for information exchange and the sale of goods and services.



## Emergency Planning

Our Emergency Planning Open Meeting in March 2011 prompted a group of local volunteers to form a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). The Team is developing an information database which can enable Valley residents to be alerted and informed and assisted in the event of an emergency such as severe weather, aeroplane crash, nuclear incident or power cut.

## Our Community Action Plan

The Action Plan is a summary of findings that emerged from our Community Survey, together with informal feedback given at the open meetings and events we have organized

since 2009. We have presented our findings as 'Headline Results', a 'Community Vision', 'Aims & Objectives' and suggestions for how people can get involved as 'What you can do' under the following headings:

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1. Safety, security and independent living
  2. Housing
  3. Transport
  4. Recreational and social activities
  5. Environment
-

# 1. Safety, security and independent living

## Headline Results

- ❖ The Valley has a higher proportion of pensioners than Cumbria as a whole, including a significant number who live alone.
- ❖ A majority of people responding to our Community Survey expressed an interest in the provision of more Neighbourhood Watch schemes.
- ❖ Unofficial schemes do already operate within neighbourhood groupings by means of a watchful eye being kept when people are away etc.
- ❖ Over 50% of respondents also favoured a local scheme for alerting help in an emergency or the provision of a 'good neighbour' scheme.
- ❖ Existing services such as First Responders, Mountain Rescue and Air Ambulance are greatly valued and appreciated.
- ❖ The village shop and post office provide essential services to the community and their continued existence is very important.
- ❖ The Melbreak Communities website is being very well received and in addition to the "Link" magazine provides an excellent medium for keeping people informed of activities and services available in the Valley.
- ❖ The Welcome booklet supplied by St Cuthbert's Church PCC to all newcomers to Lorton provides comprehensive details of local services, groups and organisations etc.



## Vision – what do we want to achieve?

The Valley will be a safe place to live and work where the ethos of good neighbourliness is inherent and no one feels isolated or vulnerable in their own home. We will work together to establish a support network, which is simple and efficient to operate to ensure emergencies can be dealt with quickly and quietly giving people the comfort of knowing help is near at hand. We will also support local businesses and services to assist their long-term sustainability.

## Aims and Objectives

- ✓ To investigate the possibility of expanding Neighbourhood Watch in the Valley, including more remote areas.
- ✓ To encourage residents to register with the CERT scheme so that the Valley can be covered as comprehensively as possible. At the least it should be possible to ensure every household has support and one or more contacts they can turn to in emergencies.
- ✓ To continue to expand The Melbreak Communities website as an up to date source of information, accessible from home.
- ✓ To investigate the possibility of providing simple IT courses to enable more residents to become familiar with the Internet.

## What you can do

- ❖ Become involved with a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.
- ❖ Add your name to CERT's emergency information database.
- ❖ Be a good neighbour, particularly to those in your immediate locality and be alert to situations which might indicate a problem.
- ❖ Support local shops, the visiting post office and other local enterprises, which may be taken for granted, but which would be sorely missed if they were forced to close.
- ❖ Make use of The Melbreak Communities website and contribute items of interest.



## 2. Housing

### Headline Results

- ❖ There were 404 dwellings in the four parishes at the 2001 Population Census and permanent residents occupied over 75% of them.
- ❖ 16% were classified as second home or holiday accommodation.
- ❖ A housing needs survey conducted in 2006 for Lorton, Loweswater and Buttermere concluded that there was a need for 9 additional dwellings.
- ❖ 72% of respondents to the Community Survey supported the idea of some form of more affordable housing.
- ❖ Planning permission was given in 2009 for seven affordable units in Low Lorton.



### Vision

The Valley will have a good mix of property types and tenures, which cater for the housing needs of working families, retired people and young people.

### Aims and Objectives

- ✓ To support the parish councils in responding to planning applications.
- ✓ To support future housing needs assessments and create forums for informed and open debate.
- ✓ To work with the community to find ways to ensure the population of the Valley includes families with young children.
- ✓ To encourage any new build to meet high energy efficiency standards and minimise consumption of unsustainable carbon fuels.
- ✓ To support the community in improving the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock and public buildings (see also the Environment Vision).

### What you can do

- ❖ Take an interest in planning applications and contribute to discussion in the community.
- ❖ Identify potential housing sites



## 3. Transport

### Headline Results

- ❖ Access to adequate transport is an important issue.
- ❖ 83% of households own one or two cars or vans.
- ❖ 12% own three or more.
- ❖ 12% of households say they don't have adequate personal transport.
- ❖ Two bus routes serve the Valley – one is a seasonal service, the other operates on demand (pre-booked only).
- ❖ One taxi operator is based in Lorton.
- ❖ Residents are concerned about vehicle speeds on Valley roads.
- ❖ The impact of cyclists can be a problem.



### Vision

A community with adequate year-round transport to Cockermouth and Keswick, which meets the needs of both residents and visitors. Reduced carbon emission from local transport use. Availability of a supplementary *ad hoc* scheme by which transport can be obtained at short notice for specific purposes. Effective traffic management and 'calming' through villages and near busy locations. Improved parking facilities for residents and visitors. A positive relationship with cyclists and event organisers in order to manage impact effectively.

### Aims and Objectives

- ✓ To work with local providers of transport to ensure services match the needs of people in the community and find innovative ways of supplementing regular services.
- ✓ To establish a regular dialogue with representatives of cycling organisations to share information, raise awareness and identify solutions to reduce concentrated impact from events and along routes that are directed through the Valley.

- ✓ To present a substantiated case to appropriate authorities for speed limits and traffic calming arrangements in sensitive and vulnerable locations.
- ✓ To lobby local authorities and local landowners to increase provision of car parks and reduce roadside parking.



## What you can do

- ❖ Be aware of neighbours with limited access to transport and offer lifts and support from time to time, e.g. for GP surgery appointments.
- ❖ Support local bus services to establish demand.
- ❖ Keep track of locations where cars speed or cyclists cause concern to other road users.

## 4. Recreation and Social Activities

### Headline Results

- ❖ Our communal buildings & facilities are key to the success of social activities.
- ❖ Ad hoc events such as the Royal Wedding Street Party, Open Gardens and Cream Teas are popular with local residents and visitors.
- ❖ The Melbreak Communities' monthly 'Coffee and Cake' events on Saturday mornings have been well supported and offer potential for further development as an information exchange.
- ❖ A wide range of groups and clubs for adult residents exists. While activities designed for young people are available (for example coaching sessions at Lorton Tennis Club and Lorton After School Club) the range is limited.
- ❖ Public transport for young people to access Cockermouth's resources is poor.
- ❖ Volunteers are needed to pilot new ideas such as the revival of a Valley sports day.
- ❖ Community lunches are regularly held at Lorton School



### Vision



To encourage the use of communal buildings & other facilities, to extend the range of activities to meet the needs of all sections of our community. To achieve improved public transport to enhance access to the facilities of our local towns.

### Aims & Objectives

- ✓ To instigate or support initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of less well catered for sections of our community.
- ✓ To represent our community needs, & where appropriate, to support /influence the objectives of the Cockermouth Area Plan.
- ✓ Support initiatives to maintain and develop the fabric of community facilities for the benefit of all, included the provision of disabled access.

### What you can do

- ❖ Represent the needs of a section of the community that you believe need meeting.
- ❖ Provide transport where appropriate.
- ❖ Increase your involvement with community life.

## 5. Environment

### Headline Results

- ❖ There is a high degree of local interest in environmental and sustainability issues.
- ❖ Parts of the Valley are flood-prone and were affected badly in the November 2009 floods.
- ❖ Most of The Melbreak Communities lie within the Lake District National Park and span the scenic Buttermere, Loweswater and Lorton valleys with notable landforms, geology and vegetation.
- ❖ Large areas of the Valley are owned by the National Trust and parts of the river systems are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest/Special Areas of Conservation.
- ❖ Significant environmental issues affect the community including water management and flooding; the impact of tourism; renewable energy; and management of waste.



### Vision

An active community that engages with local government, statutory authorities such as the Lake District National Park Authority and organisations such as The Environment Agency, Natural England and The National Trust to promote environment-friendly and energy efficient investments and policies. A community where landowners are actively involved in land and water management and where residents and visitors act responsibly towards the environment.

### Aims and Objectives

- ✓ To work with local forums and national bodies to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Environment Agency and Natural England to ensure that watercourse management builds on historic practices and meets the evolving needs of the area.
- ✓ To maintain contact with initiatives such as the Loweswater Care Project.
- ✓ To undertake a survey of the green energy and energy efficiency potential in the Valley.
- ✓ To support the parish councils in active monitoring of footpaths, ditches, walls and stiles, and help landowners plan and manage maintenance.
- ✓ To work with Allerdale Borough Council to continue and develop waste collection and recycling services.
- ✓ Forge links with other communities in our region to learn from their green policies and communicate within the community.

## What you can do

- ❖ Adopt more energy efficient and green practices at home.
- ❖ Keep informed about environmental issues and renewable energy opportunities in the Valley.
- ❖ Join in meetings about key issues such as managing flooding and improving water quality.



## COMMUNITY PLAN SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Time frame	Priority	Funding	Comments
<b><i>Safety, security and independent living</i></b>						
How to improve response to extreme weather events and major incidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) &amp; appoint a coordinator and nominate lead contact(s) in each parish</li> <li>Develop the CERT database of residents</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities	Ongoing	High	Could apply to funders via ACT, LDNPA, (?) county council	Sub-group formed Draft plan in progress Database being developed
Address community concerns about security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further develop Neighbourhood Watch schemes locally</li> </ul>	All	Ongoing	Medium		
To improve communications within the Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit and pay for a webmaster to maintain and develop The Melbreak Communities website</li> <li>Participate in and promote Cumbria County Council Broadband Project; identify local links</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities Parish Council representatives	Ongoing	High Medium	The Melbreak Communities	Will need to apply for further funding Current broadband service is of variable quality
Timely ambulance response is a challenge in our rural and isolated area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the Vale of Lorton First Responders</li> </ul>	Vale of Lorton First Responders	Ongoing	High	Community fund raising	The Melbreak Communities to support Vale of Lorton First Responders via website and local events &

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Time frame	Priority	Funding	Comments
						fundraising
<b>Housing</b>						
Lack of affordable housing in the Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support for existing schemes</li> <li>○ Periodic surveys of community needs</li> </ul>	Parish Councils in conjunction with relevant local authorities	Ongoing	Medium	Housing Associations	A scheme in Low Lorton is currently underway
<b>Transport</b>						
Only limited public transport is available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage use of existing schemes such as Dial-a-Ride, Honister Rambler</li> <li>○ Encourage informal car sharing</li> <li>○ Support local taxi business</li> </ul>	All	Ongoing	Medium		
Local Community Travel Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review identified tasks and nominate new transport concerns</li> </ul>	Parish Councils and Melbreak Communities	Report on existing plan due by January 2012	High	Cumbria Highways	
Perceived negative aspects of cycling activity (individuals and major events)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Promote cycling as a sustainable and healthy activity</li> <li>○ Liaise with Sustrans</li> <li>○ Provide information to visiting cyclists</li> <li>○ Encourage dialogue with event organisers</li> <li>○ Liaise with village hall committees to</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities  Village hall committees  Parish councils	Ongoing	Medium		Village halls can gain income from cycling events

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Time frame	Priority	Funding	Comments
	ensure efficient management of events					
Residents are concerned about vehicle speeds, and safety along our narrow roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to residents' concerns as appropriate, participate in dialogue with Cockermouth/ Cumbria county council transport group</li> </ul>	Parish Councils	Ongoing	Medium	Cumbria CC Highways Department	Parish Councils to liaise with Cockermouth Traffic Regulation Order Reviews
Lack of car parking in key locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore possible sites</li> </ul>	All	Ongoing	High	Landowners or charitable benefactor	
<b><i>Recreational and social activities</i></b>						
Some residents are at risk of social isolation, especially during the winter months and in adverse weather conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Melbreak Communities has launched a website</li> <li>Monthly 'Coffee and Cake' events are held in Yew Tree Hall, as suggested and now facilitated by local residents. Consider offering transport to people who might not otherwise be able to attend.</li> <li>The Melbreak Communities also supports events organised by other groups in the Valley</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities, local clubs, societies and organisations	<p>Monthly</p> <p>As required</p>	<p>Funding will be required to maintain website</p> <p>Self-funding &amp; funds raised go to local charities</p>	Self-funding	<p>A concert was held at Loweswater Village Hall featuring local artistes and children from Lorton School.</p> <p>Invited local Age UK representative to distribute information at 'Coffee and Cake' event</p>

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Time frame	Priority	Funding	Comments
Perceived lack of facilities for young people in the Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicise existing facilities &amp; events</li> <li>Explore opportunities to develop new activities alongside parents of children in the Valley, the local school and local clubs and organisations</li> </ul>	Young people and their parents in conjunction with local clubs, societies and organisations	As required	Medium	Self-funding	
Access to village halls and community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure access is available to people with mobility issues and families with prams and buggies</li> </ul>	Hall management committees  The Benefice	Ongoing	Medium	Funding is needed to meet access requirements	Yew Tree Hall has commissioned a feasibility study with regard to access issues & a sub-committee has been formed to progress this
<b>Environment</b>						
Extreme weather conditions can affect people in our Valley (e.g. flooding, snow & ice, high winds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise awareness raising events to inform the community</li> <li>Develop and maintain CERT Database</li> <li>Link into agencies such as county council and emergency services during extreme weather</li> <li>Promote dialogue with and follow-up actions by the Environment Agency and Natural England to develop more sustainable response to floods and</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities and Parish Councils; statutory agencies and utility companies; Local Authorities	Ongoing	High	Environment Agency and Local Authorities	Dialogue with EA and NE is currently underway and will be continued

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Time frame	Priority	Funding	Comments
	improved river management					
Energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Promote dissemination of information about energy efficiency</li> <li>○ Explore opportunities to commission research into the green energy and energy efficiency potential in the Valley</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities working with local and regional organisations	Ongoing	High	Seek grant support	Invited ACT rep to 'Coffee and Cake' event
<b>General actions</b>						
Lack of employment in the Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage suitable opportunities allied to possible employment sites</li> </ul>	Allerdale Borough Council  Applicants	Ongoing	High		
New issues in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maintain a watching brief across all four parishes</li> </ul>	The Melbreak Communities	Ongoing	High	Need to maintain funding	Importance of The Melbreak Communities website as communication tool
Wellbeing of local retail businesses and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage residents and visitors to support local enterprises wherever possible</li> </ul>	All	Ongoing	High		