

## ALSTON MOOR COMMUNITY PLAN 2019

### SECTION 4: WHERE WE LIVE – APPROPRIATE HOMES, SPACES AND SERVICES

#### (a) Our homes

##### A. Area of focus

A.1 Houses on Alston Moor have been built over several centuries, often adapted, repaired, and extended. Our old stone houses tend to be damp, poorly insulated and hard to heat, and most of those built more recently using brick and breeze block are little better. Among the problems this causes are health difficulties, particularly lung complaints from damp rooms with mould, which may not always be obvious. It is expensive to heat such properties, and there is a lot of heat wasted owing to poor insulation. These homes are heated using non-renewable fuel sources for the most part. 17.6% of households on Alston Moor are in fuel poverty, with the percentage less in Alston itself with access to mains gas and higher everywhere else. The average for England is 10.9% [2018 figures]. We know that we must make a considerable reduction in the use of non-renewable fuels, and establish a sustainable level of affordable energy sources here, as everywhere. We need to ensure that it is affordable for people to have homes that are suitable for a healthy life at all ages, particularly noting that the local population is ageing and people want to remain in their homes as long as possible.

A.2 The sorts of houses and flats currently available also do not always meet the needs of the present or future population. The way we live has changed

##### B. What is needed

B.1 We need new houses built on Alston Moor, homes that are better for our health, our pocket and the planet. There is often a tension between affordability and environmental soundness. We need sites and developers that can provide appropriately-priced homes for local people. Such houses must answer the needs of our local population and ensure that young and old, families, individuals and friendship groups can live comfortably.

B.2 Among the requirements of many living on Alston Moor or thinking of moving here are rooms that can be used as workshops or offices, often preferably rather separate from the main living area for reasons of noise or distraction. This means that those who are self-employed or distance- or home-working for a business based elsewhere do not have to rent separate premises.

B.3 Also, at a time when more people are living alone or are single parents, some who want to stay in their own homes in older age but need help at time, and when others are looking to bring some elements of communal living into their lives, there is an interest in housing

that creates small communities of five to ten separate (possibly terraced or semi-detached) homes of a range of sizes, with some shared space where people can eat and socialise together. This might be a meeting/living room with a kitchen, or a lounge/conservatory. This will not suit everybody, of course, but having a range of different possibilities is an important aspect of our future planning.

B.4 We need to build affordable homes to a high building and energy efficient specification as the foundation of long term sustainability. This would enable people to live more comfortably, in better health and without having to cope with spiralling fuel costs. In common with social housing developments across the UK, we must promote the best possible environmental standards both for new-build and for the adaptation and ‘retro-fitting’ (making energy efficient improvements) of existing homes.

### C. Potential actions

	<b>What could be done in 2019/20?</b>	<b>Who might do this, and how?</b>
4a1	Work with different groups and agencies to establish collective working around new build, defining the overall purpose, finding suitable development sites and guiding building.	Create a community-led housing group, co-ordinated perhaps by the parish council in relation to the potential Neighbourhood Plan, involving the Greenprint/CAfS, EDC, Eden Housing et al
4a2	Research the possibility of an innovative and energy-efficient architecture competition in relation to a specific site identified for a small cluster of homes	AMPC, Neighbourhood Plan group, group identified in 4a1
4a3	Develop a relationship with an appropriate developer to ensure the building of homes that will serve our needs	AMPC, requests from Alston Moor groups and individuals to EDC planners

## (b) Maintaining our built environment

### A. Area of focus

A.1 As times change, the specific activities and requirements change in any community. Here on Alston Moor, there are a number of buildings which have become disused or in poor repair for a variety of reasons. We also have facilities that need regular maintenance.

A.2 Some disused buildings are associated with activities and groups that no longer need them, of which the obvious ones are the enormous old Methodist (and one Congregational) chapels which were well-used in an era when Methodism was the main religious group in the area and a population about four times the size of the current one all went to church or chapel on a Sunday. Times change, and while some buildings have been successfully repurposed (Gossipgate Congregational Chapel became a very successful art gallery for

example, now under new non-gallery ownership, and Nenthead Methodist Chapel is in the process of becoming a new local resource and tourist attraction), others have become increasingly derelict, in some cases (particularly the Methodist Chapel at the top of Alston) causing considerable concern in terms of public safety.<sup>1</sup>

A.3 Additionally, some residential and commercial properties have been left empty and deteriorating for long periods. There are many reasons why this happens, sometimes because an owner has died and the heirs have not been involved with the property, or the owner can neither sell it nor afford to repair it. Some people on Alston Moor feel strongly that official action should be taken (not clear by whom) to 'tidy up' deteriorating buildings and areas. Others prefer, as long as a building is safe, to leave such buildings unmodernised, as such work sometimes destroys the character of a place. This is clearly not an easy matter to resolve.

A.4 Play areas, the playing field and recycling centres all need regular maintenance. There are groups responsible for e.g. the Nenthead Play Area who actively work to maintain and improve their site, but sometimes the responsibility is less clear and users of e.g. the Nenthead recycling area do not always act as they should do. The dumping of items that are not part of the recycling scheme causes serious problems.

## **B. What is needed**

B.1 Keeping our community's buildings and facilities in good enough order, and safe, is the responsibility of all those who own and use them. However, as we know all too well, not everyone does behave as responsibly as we would like. It is also true that some owners may be in a difficult financial situation and are hoping to be able to do things in the future. Maintenance can be onerous and difficult, but it is essential that we do all we can to ensure good standards.

B.2 Some people object to buildings that have not been brought up to what they consider an acceptable standard, even though they are no danger. Words such as 'eyesore' are applied to buildings that are old and not conventionally 'attractive'. They may, however, have historic associations and other people see them as 'atmospheric'. Historically appropriate work can sometimes be achieved through grant work, such as through the Townscape Heritage Project which gained £1.3 million through the Heritage Lottery and more in support from our local authorities. This was explicitly only for properties within the Alston Conservation Area. Further schemes might enable work in other areas.

B.3 When a building has become dangerous in any way to passers-by, it is obviously essential that the owner is alerted. If a personal approach is not possible or gets no response, then Eden District Council will take up the matter and, if the owner does not respond, will

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<sup>1</sup> Eden District Council has worked to identify the owner of the Alston Methodist Chapel and ensure they fulfil their safety obligations, and has undertaken works in the absence of an appropriate response.

undertake the work and bill the owner. This can be a lengthy process and local efforts are always a good first step.

B.4 As with so much on Alston Moor (and in any community), small maintenance jobs on sites used by the general public could be done by volunteers. There is a feeling that ‘a council’ ‘should’ do it, but the reality is that, with funding from government so much less than it used to be, and many sites not being the responsibility of any council, local people’s willingness to deal with small problems as they arise would be appreciated. Permission of the land/site owner is obviously needed and assembling a group of people with time, tools, skills and willingness for any particular task requires a degree of organisation.

### C. Potential actions

	<b>What could be done in 2019/20?</b>	<b>Who might do this, and how?</b>
4b1	Ensure that dangerous and potentially dangerous buildings are dealt with appropriately	Individuals, parish council, communicating with owners. Report to Eden District Council if immediate action necessary.
4b2	Identify possible grant support for improvement work for those owners willing to invest in their properties	AMP, AMPC, CCC local team
4bc	Development of a maintenance team for sites owned/managed by local groups	AMPC

## (c) Keeping our links

### A. Area of focus

A.1 None of us exists in a vacuum from each other, and nor does our present community live entirely disconnected from the past of the area. Some would say that to know where we’re going, we need to know where we have come from. For newcomers to Alston Moor, it can take time to discover much about our history – even our recent history – and leave some feeling rather ‘at sea’, both with regard to that history and how things are now.

A.2 It is not, of course, only newcomers who will not know all the detail of our area’s past and the particular stories associated with buildings, lanes, and areas. The Historical Society archive is a major resource for the community and for those who come seeking to know more of ancestors who came from here. Displays of information about the history of some of the shops in Alston, in their windows, has been very popular

### B. What is needed

B.1 Support for the Historical Society and its archive is important in many ways, including providing an understanding of the built environment of Alston Moor. Ongoing support is key to keeping our links with the past.

B.2 As part of this sense of things, there are many people who would like name signs to be put up for the old lonnings and alleys, before those names are forgotten. They often have an interesting history behind them – but sometimes that history is already lost.

B.3 Provision of information to new residents would help them to integrate and feel part of things, and ease their way into the community. It could make a real difference to provide simple information like the rubbish collection days as well as an understanding that the gash on the hillside is a hush (and what that is), and some sort of directory of local groups, websites and Facebook groups.

### C. Potential actions

	<b>What could be done in 2019/20?</b>	<b>Who might do this, and how?</b>
4c1	Create an information pack for all new residents, to go through the estate agents, housing associations and private landlords, containing a summary history of Alston Moor, information about the local authorities and services, current websites and Facebook groups etc. To be available for others on Alston Moor.	AMPC, Historical Society, AMP, EDC. Funding through AMPC small grants, EDC grants.
4c2	Support for the Historical Society	Individuals to become members, volunteer at the archive etc. Funding through AMPC and others to maintain and develop the website, physical archive, produce exhibitions and provide contribution to the information pack
4c3	Create and install appropriate name signs for lonnings, alleys, etc on Alston Moor	AMPC, AMP, Historical Society. Funding through AMPC and/or EDC

## SECTION 5: TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATIONS

### (a) Roads, travel and transport

#### A. Area of focus

A.1 From the time that John McAdam (famous as the originator of tarmac) pronounced the roads to and from the area as ‘the worst that have come to our attention’ and engineered the now-famous A686 from Penrith to Haydon Bridge (enabling horses to bring materials and supplies into and out of the area), our communication with places elsewhere, through travel and transport and through the later inventions of radio, telephones, television, broadband and mobile phones, has been a major issue.

A.2 Our roads need to be well-maintained for all road transport. We are no longer reliant on a big company (London Lead Company) in whose interests it was to contract McAdam to improve the roads. Now, Cumbria County Council is responsible for our roads and works hard to keep them in good order. However, central government funding has decreased, road traffic (including ever-heavier lorries) has increased, and it is difficult to maintain a good standard on all our roads all the time. The Town Benchmarking report of 2017 says that 56% of businesses in Alston town rated transport links as a negative aspect – compared to a national figure of 14%.

A.3 Winter road clearance – ploughing and gritting – is done extremely effectively by our local team for most heavily-used roads, and by the Nenthead snowplough group, which was established by a group of enthusiasts. Clearance of all roads is obviously wanted but not possible.

A.4 As discussed in Section 2 (c), car parking in Alston is a major problem, and many businesses in Alston believe that they lose potential customers because of the difficulty of parking in the town centre. There are local people with mobility problems not severe enough to acquire a 'Blue Badge' (permitting parking in disabled parking spaces and in other places generally not permitted) who do not use the shops in the centre because they cannot cope with walking from elsewhere, and 'passing trade' of summer visitors is lost because no parking spaces are available. The Town Benchmarking Review identifies only 13% of town centre parking was free on a quiet day and only 2% on a busy day.

## **B. What is needed**

B.1 We as a community are not able to work directly on our roads, nor to prevent the use of A-roads by heavy goods vehicles. We can, however, ensure that our County Council knows our wishes (so long as we are realistic, recognising the funding constraints), and establish new patterns of parking so those of us who are able to walk up and down the hill, and are staying longer than half an hour or so, get used to parking out of the town centre (Fairhill, public area by Spar), thus leaving spaces free for those who need them.

B.2 We are lucky enough to have a Traffic Management Group for Alston Moor, unique in Cumbria. This body meets every three months and considers and prioritises all the issues and plans concerning our road network.<sup>2</sup> Where appropriate, representation can be made to them via the Clerk to the Parish Council. Contributing positive suggestions to the group would be welcomed, as well as raising problematic issues.

B.3 The Nenthead snowplough needs support, including volunteers, to ensure that the non-main roads in and around Nenthead are kept clear and useable for local traffic. Garrigill

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<sup>2</sup> The Group has representatives from Cumbria County Council Highways, Eden District Council Environmental Health, Alston Moor Parish Council, Alston Moor Business Association, and a community representative, and thus can look at problems and future intentions in the round.

residents do not currently have ‘their own’ snowplough as Nenthead does. To establish one would need the same enthusiasm by local people to make such a service possible.

### C. Potential actions

	What could be done in 2019/20?	Who might do this, and how?
5a1	Encourage use of non-town centre parking in Alston	AMPC, Traffic Management Group, individuals
5a2	Use appropriate channels to ensure that the Traffic Management Group are apprised of problems and receive appropriate suggestions	Individuals, presenting issues and ideas to the Clerk to the Parish Council
5a3	Establish a Garrigill snowplough	Local residents, in consultation with Cumbria County Council

## (b) Public and social transport

### A. Area of focus

A.1 Individual ownership of cars is expensive, causes more air pollution than public transport, and represents a strain on the world’s resources. Public transport is the way that many communities manage to reduce the pollution and avoid as much consumption of carbon-based fuels as possible. One of the results of the decrease in local government funding has been the decision to reduce local bus subsidies, leaving Alston Moor with very little bus transport. The railway, of course, was closed long ago and has been redeveloped as a narrow gauge line by enthusiasts who hope to complete the whole route at some future date. However, as narrow gauge, its speed will always be very slow and it is unlikely to provide a transport link for those getting to school, college, work.

A.2 There are alternatives, transport possibilities that lie between full public transport and purely individual car ownership. Some are already available and some are likely to become more common over the next decade. Here on Alston Moor, we have the Community Minibus and a social car scheme.<sup>3</sup>

### B. What is needed

B.1 Many people on Alston Moor want to see our Community Minibus providing a scheduled service between the main centres on Alston Moor, and to other centres such as Carlisle, Penrith and Hexham. Unfortunately, this is not possible because of legal restrictions on the provision of public transport. A second, reserve, minibus would be

<sup>3</sup> The Community Minibus is owned and maintained by Cumbria County Council, and based on Alston Moor. It is available for pre-arranged trips and for hire by groups. The minibus is driven by trained volunteer drivers and is charged on a per mile basis to cover costs. The social car scheme, also a Cumbria County Council-run scheme, is available to anyone who has no other means of reaching hospital or dental appointments, or a train. It must be pre-booked and is charged at a rate to cover fuel and ‘wear and tear’ on the driver’s car. All drivers are volunteers, co-ordinated by a local person. Details are available in many places around Alston Moor.

required so that in the event of breakdown, the service could be maintained. One option would be to attempt to raise money to purchase and maintain a second vehicle. However, this would be a very major undertaking, in terms of finance and ongoing management, and pre-booked trips are likely to be a more feasible approach, even if this cannot have the regularity of a scheduled service, nor the possibility of spontaneous decisions to travel.

B.2 The Community Minibus can be hired by any constituted group. We need to ensure it is used often enough to retain it, as it can be recalled by Cumbria County Council who own and maintain it.

B.3 It is often believed that it is impossible to run a lift-sharing scheme because of insurance issues. However, if the driver takes no more from passengers than the cost of fuel and ongoing car expenses (using the HMRC mileage rate), there is no problem. <https://liftshare.com/uk> provides information including statements from leading insurance companies that they are happy with such arrangements and it does not affect insurance.

B.4 More ambitiously, a community vehicle or vehicles, preferably electric, could be available to be booked by all members of a community car club. Such a car club could be set up locally or we could explore becoming part of a larger organisation such as co-wheels.co.uk

### C. Potential actions

	<b>What could be done in 2019/20?</b>	<b>Who might do this, and how?</b>
5b1	Increase awareness of the availability of the Community Minibus to groups and the booking methods, and encourage groups to use it.	AMPC, Community Minibus management group.
5b2	Support the social car scheme as a volunteer driver and ensure those who might need it know how to access it.	Individuals, contact with the scheme co-ordinator
5b3	Establish a liftshare scheme, using Liftshare or establishing a local system.	A small group is needed to consider the options and establish whichever system is preferred.
5b4	Investigate and, if feasible, set up a community car club.	Small group needed to explore and, if deciding to go ahead, raise funding to establish a car club.

## (c) Broadband and mobile phones

### A. Area of focus

A.1 Many people on Alston Moor, particularly those not living in the areas served by superfast fibre broadband, complain bitterly about their broadband speed. Almost everyone is unhappy about the mobile signal to a greater or lesser extent, no matter which network

they are on. Visitors are frustrated by the poor mobile service (which is not to suggest that cities have perfect mobile signal, as they do not, but will not have long stretches of road without availability) and some expect a town centre free wifi service.

A.2 There is no doubt that rural areas have been seriously neglected in the general roll out of digital services, but some communities have found ways to improve at least broadband.<sup>4</sup>

## **B. What is needed**

B.1 Superfast broadband is difficult to deliver to all properties. Broadband for the Rural North, or B4RN, has harnessed volunteer labour to bring fibre optic broadband to rural communities, but as yet nothing in our area. A number of other projects have been developed in the Eden Valley. However, for fast broadband to reach all the scattered homes outside the centres of Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill would require a great deal of (volunteer) work and more research is needed to establish the best means of providing this key tool to more remote homes.

B.2 A free town centre wifi service in Alston would be a benefit, particularly to visitors who have come to expect such provision, but of course, while it is free to the user, it is not free to provide. Research is needed to establish the viability of such a service and how it might be implemented if viable.

B.3 Mobile phone signal improvement across the country has been repeatedly promised by government, but congratulating the industry on covering 85% of the country or 95% of homes or whatever does little to help those in the areas still not receiving a decent signal. Rural areas like ours, with low population, are not a top priority. Local people and visitors need a better service, with particular concern often expressed about being unable to summon help when a car breaks down, there is a road traffic accident or someone falls seriously ill. While 999 calls will be routed to any mobile network available, if none is possible then such calls cannot be made, and this is the case in some areas of Alston Moor. This causes understandable concern.

	<b>What could be done in 2019/20?</b>	<b>Who might do this, and how?</b>
5c1	Research the possibilities for getting superfast broadband to all – or at least many more – properties on Alston Moor.	AMPC, AMP, AMBA might form a working group to investigate what might be possible, or a group of interested individuals might undertake the task.
5c2	Investigate possibilities for free town centre wifi in Alston (and possibly Nenthead in conjunction with the Nenthead Chapel Project)	AMPC, AMP, AMBA, Nenthead Chapel Project – sources and costs, long-term

<sup>4</sup> Cornwall is often cited. This relied on EU money under the Structural and Investment Fund, awarded on the basis of Cornwall's poverty and poor infrastructure. The county received more than any other English region and the same as West Wales, Scottish Highlands and Northern Ireland. Such funding will no longer be a possibility and there is no information about what may in the future be provided by the UK government.

5c3	Work with the MP, mobile phone companies and others (?) to raise concerns and encourage much better provision of mobile phone signal.	AMPC, district and county councillors and appropriate departments in those councils
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First draft