

WEST NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BUILDINGS CONSORTIUM

(A Self Help Group Run By Members For Members)

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No.18 February 2016

Web Site - www.westnorthumberlandcbc.org.uk

MORE TRAINING FOR TRUSTEES PROPOSED

The Consortium is again proposing to organise training for Members and it is hoped it will take place in Spring/Summer of this year. We have been working with Community Action Northumberland (CAN) on this who is our natural partners to organise and deliver training. We have also been talking to the North Northumberland Village Halls Consortium to see if we can both benefit by working together on this.

The Consortium AGM in October endorsed the need for training for trustees of all member Halls and agreed that a level of subsidy should be covered by the Consortium from its revenues to enable Members to find it more sustainable.

Members will shortly be asked to indicate the likely support for training and the topic needed to be covered. A possible list is as follows:

**First Aid. Food Hygiene and Food Safety. Web Site Design. Using Social Media.
Trustees Responsibilities and Liability. Insuring your Village Hall and Operations.
Health and Safety Policies for Village Halls. Assessing Risk and mitigation measures.
Hallmark Quality Standard. Accounting for Village Halls. Automated Booking
Systems. Communicating with your Community**

[Membership of the Consortium](#)

At 30th September 2015 the Consortium had 63 members as follows. To our knowledge only two village halls in West Northumberland are not members, so we have almost 100%.

Acomb Village Hall
Allendale Village Hall & Recreation Ground
Allenheads Trust Ltd
Bardon Mill & Henshaw Community Village Hall
Barrasford Village Hall
Bellingham Town Hall
Bellingham Youth Education Centre
Birtley Village Hall
Blanchland Village Hall
Byrness Village Hall

Catton Village Hall
Chollerton Benefice Churches and Community Centre
Colwell Village Hall Committee
Corbridge Parish Hall
Corsenside Parish Hall
Dalton Village Hall
Falstone Village Hall
Featherstone Village Hall
Gilsland Village Hall
Great Whittington Village Hall
Greenhead Village Hall
Haltwhistle Social Welfare Centre
Haydon Bridge Community Association
Hearth Centre Horsley Ltd
Heddon on the Wall WI
Heddon Village Knott Memorial Hall
Hexham & Tynedale Community Trust
High Forest Community Association

Horsley WI Village Hall
 Humshaugh Village Hall
 Kirkwhelpington Memorial Hall
 Knaresdale & Kirkhaugh Community Association
 Langley Village Hall
 Matfen Village Hall
 Merton Hall, Ponteland
 Minsteracres Retreat Centre.
 Newbrough Town Hall
 Newton and Bywell Community Hall Trust
 Newton Hall Men's Club
 Old School, Ovingham
 Otterburn War Memorial Hall
 Ovingham Reading Room
 Ponteland Memorial Hall
 Prudhoe Community Partnership, The Spetchells.
 Prudhoe Parish Hall & Church
 Riding Mill Village Hall Trust
 Rochester Village Hall
 Shepherds Dene
 Simonburn Village Hall
 Slaley Commemoration Hall
 Snods Edge Village Hall
 Stamfordham Playing Field and Village Hall
 Stocksfield Community Association
 Stocksfield Tennis Club
 Stonehaugh Community Hall
 Tarsset Village Hall
 TRC Sports & Leisure Centre, Otterburn.
 Wall Village Hall
 Wark Town Hall & Mechanics Institute
 Whalton Village Hall
 Whitfield Parish Hall
 Whitley Chapel Parish Hall
 Wylam Institute Community Association

Annual Subscription for 2015/16

The £10 annual membership subscription was due on 1st October 2015. Thirty four halls have paid – (thank you very much), but this leaves 29 that are still to do so. It would be greatly appreciated if these Halls could pay their subscription and send in their Annual Return bearing the contact details for the officials.

Consortium Management Committee

At the AGM in October 2015 the following were elected:-

Officers

Chairman Mike Wood (Greenhead VH)
 Secretary Adrian Hinchcliffe
 Treasurer Andy Pryor (Riding Mill VH)
 Membership Secretary. Georgia Shorrock (GilslandVH)
 Web Site Manager. Michael Elphick (Slaley Comm. H)
 North'd Energy Club. Roly Taylor (Wall VH).
 PAT Testing Coordinator Matt Singleton

Committee Members

Keith Robson (Slaley Comm. Hall)
 David Easby (Wall VH)
 Margaret Weatherley (Slaley Comm Hall)
 Pam Pryor (Riding Mill V H)
 Stuart Dearlove Stocksfield Community Centre.

Neville Gray Ovingham Reading Room.

New to the Committee are Stuart Dearlove and Neville Gray who are especially welcomed.

Membership Records

The Consortium membership records are being extended to include the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of each member hall. This will enable some communications to be to the appropriate officer and for general emails to go to all officials. Hopefully this will give a better service.

History of the Consortium

Many new officials and committee members may not be aware of the history of the Consortium. It was set up in 2008 by a number of village halls with the help of Tynedale District Council and Community Action Northumberland. The owners of the Consortium are the members. Its objectives and purpose are as follows:

- To negotiate discounts and other benefits by utilising the collective buying power of members.
- To act as a voice for members in lobbying and other similar situations.
- To identify best practice for members.
- To pool knowledge and provide information for members.
- To provide training and other services (eg. PAT Testing) that are not feasible for individual members.
- To create a network of members.

The officials and committee of the Consortium are elected annually by members. All are volunteers.

Insurance Discounts Available to Members

One of the main purposes of the Consortium is to use the collective power of members to obtain better prices and discounts. The insurance of village halls and community buildings is a significant item of expenditure for all members, so this became the first item to negotiation. Since 2008 the Consortium has had a panel of insurers and all have offered significant discounts.

We have been in contact with the insurers and they have revised the discounts that they offer to members. We have reduced the panel to three companies – Allied Westminster, AON and Norris

and Fisher and we are satisfied that these companies understand the risks affecting village halls and that their policies are well thought out and appropriate.

Members are urged to look on the Consortium web site under 'Insurance Discounts' to see what each of these companies are offering. We do recommend that you obtain quotations from at least two of the companies to ensure that you get best value.

THIS SECTION OF THE WEB SITE IS NO LONGER PROTECTED BY A PASSWORD – SO YOU CAN GET STRAIGHT IN.

Insured Value of Village Halls

Village Halls and Community Buildings **MUST** be insured for a value that would enable them to be re-built in a case of total loss. This is entirely different to the actual market value of a building. The re-build value is so important yet many village halls do not know whether the insured value is adequate.

THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE - SHOULD A CLAIM BE MADE FOR EITHER PARTIAL OR TOTAL LOSS, IF THE INSURED VALUE OF THE HALL IS UNDER THE CURRENT ACTUAL VALUATION, THE INSURER WILL DEDUCT AN AMOUNT FROM THE CLAIM. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE TRUSTEES WILL BECOME PERSONALLY LIABLE FOR THE SHORTFALL.

To avoid under-insurance the three companies mentioned above have introduced, or are considering the introduction, of their own arrangements for a village hall or a community building to be valued for re-building. The schemes on offer are subsidised and can be found on the Consortium web site at the end of the section on Insurance Discounts. Although there is a cost involved in what is on offer, members are urged to consider using this service to ensure peace of mind.

Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) Programme

The 2015/16 PAT Testing Programme is now well under way with 51 members requesting the service. We are very pleased that David Pentney of Rochester Village Hall has joined the team of volunteers. David has passed the examination and will be undertaking testing in the North Tyne Valley and Redesdale.

Due to illness and the aging process some members of the team are finding it difficult to undertake jobs that involve crawling around under desks to trace long flexes back to their plug sockets. Due to this some adjustments are being made to the programme and we are looking for some agile young people who can help with the tracing activity.

More Volunteers Needed for PAT Testing

Matt Singleton and Alan Brewin are to retire from the PAT Testing team at the end of this round of testing. On behalf of the Consortium and particularly those members that have received service from them, we would like to express our sincere thanks for volunteering and to wish them all the best for the future.

We urgently need to find volunteers to join the testing scheme to replace Matt and Alan. This is ideal for someone who has recently retired and wishes to help the community. It requires about three to four days each year. Training and on-the-job experience will be given and each person will have to undertake a short on-line examination. Already Peter Vasey of Hexham has volunteered but we do need two other volunteers to make the scheme viable so that the workload is shared out reasonably equally.

If you are interested, or know someone who would be ideal for this please contact the Secretary Adrian Hinchcliffe on 01665 572888 or email adrian.hinchcliffe@btopenworld.com

Information on Member Halls on the Web Site

The Consortium web site - www.westnorthumberlandcbc.org.uk - includes a list of member halls with details of what is available, charges and contact information. The web site receives 50 visits each day and one of the common places that is visited is the information on each Hall. However, it is known that some of the contact details have got out of date. **WILL MEMBERS PLEASE HAVE A LOOK AT THE DETAILS FOR YOUR HALL AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE UP TO DATE. A short form is available on line for you to complete for the Administrator to update your entry.**

Web Site Assistant Needed

Michael Elphick has done, and is still doing, a superb job in compiling the Consortium's web site and running it for over seven years. The web site is the most important communications tool for the Consortium and without it the service that is given to members would be much poorer.

Michael needs someone to back him up and provide cover for the maintenance of the web site. This is not a very onerous job and would be ideal for someone who has some knowledge of Information Technology. If you are interested or would like to ask

more questions please contact Michael on 01434 673443 or email michael@elphicks.plus.com

Warm Hubs – An Opportunity for All Halls

Community Action Northumberland (CAN) is managing a new initiative called Warm Hubs. It focuses on village halls/community buildings across the county, offering people living in rural areas a warm and friendly environment, with the bonus of a warm meal or healthy snack and signposting users to services that may help them - such as the NHS, AGE UK, the County Council and CAB.

If your hall currently organizes a soup and roll event, a lunch club, and/or Christmas meal, CAN is able to support the work you are already doing. Or, if you are interested in offering this service to local residents in the future, CAN will be happy help you to get started.

Joining CAN's Warm Hub Scheme can offer the following benefits;

- small grants to help with small-scale energy efficiency measures
- governance support
- energy audit and accessibility audit on your building
- FREE training in Food Hygiene, dementia awareness and much more
- a register of service providers you can contact to discuss any issues affecting local residents
- support with funding applications
- general advice and support

If you are interested in your hall becoming part of the scheme and you would like to find out more about it, contact Christine Nicholls on 01289 304142 or by e-mail – christinenicholls@ca-north.org.uk

Warm Hubs Pilot wins National Award

CAN has won a prestigious national award for its Warm Hubs pilot project. The project aimed to support vulnerable and fuel poor people living across rural Northumberland, although the pilot was restricted to North Northumberland.

The Community Action Award is run by national fuel poverty charity NEA in partnership with the Department for Energy and Climate Change and British Gas. It aims to reward projects throughout England and Wales which demonstrate best practice and innovative solutions in the field of fuel poverty

and energy efficiency and is open to all not-for-profit groups and organisations.

CAN was delighted to accept the award at a ceremony at Morpeth Town Hall on 15th January 2016.

The Central Heating Fund

Providing free Central Heating Systems for low income households that have never had central heating.

Warm Up North, a partnership between nine North East local authorities and British Gas, has been awarded government funding to install FREE central heating systems into qualifying properties in the North East of England.

Residents may qualify for free central heating if:

- They are a private homeowner, or rent their home from a private landlord.
- They live in one of the nine Warm Up North areas (including Northumberland).
- Their household has a gross total income of less than £26,000, including any benefits, or they receive certain income-related benefits.
- Their home does not have, and never has had, a central heating system, or they have solid fuel central heating which does not cover all the rooms in the house.
- Installing a new central heating system will improve the energy rating of their house.

Households who think they may be eligible for help under this scheme can contact Warm Up North to arrange for an energy assessor to come out and survey their home, check eligibility and work out the best type of heating system for their property. The surveyor will then discuss these options in detail with them and explain what system could be installed.

For residents who are interested they can find out if they qualify and to arrange to have their home surveyed by contacting Warm Up North: Tel: 0800 294 8073, Text phone 18001 0800 072 8626 Website: www.warmupnorth.com/chf

Earn Some Funds for Your Hall

Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE) and Community Action Northumberland (CAN) have teamed up with Warm Up North to launch the Community Challenge scheme.

Warm Up North aims to tackle fuel poverty, whilst helping to lower energy bills and make keeping warm more affordable for thousands of homes. The partnership comprises of nine North East Local Authorities including Darlington, Durham, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Newcastle, Northumberland, Redcar & Cleveland, South Tyneside and Sunderland and British Gas.

The Community Challenge scheme can potentially help many residents in Northumberland to reduce their energy bills by acquiring a new gas boiler, and helping a local community organisation along the way.

Local community groups can benefit by referring potentially eligible people for free gas boilers, subject to eligibility and survey. This means residents can speak to someone from an organisation they trust before they move forward into the scheme.

Selected charities and community groups will be able to refer people to VONNE who will then forward to Warm Up North. For every successful gas boiler installed the selected charity or group will receive a £40 award from Warm Up North to reinvest in their community projects.

Any local charities or community groups can express an interest to be considered for the Community Challenge by contacting Christine Nicholls 01289 304141 or christinenicholls@ca-north.org.uk

Community Energy Agents and Free Energy Monitors

Offering energy efficiency advice and free energy monitors to residents within their local community

Community Action Northumberland (CAN) is working in partnership with the Community Action Partnership (CAP) - a joint initiative by charity National Energy Action (NEA) and British Gas - to help mobilise local communities to tackle fuel poverty. The scheme will employ 20 'Community Energy Agents' across Northumberland, each of whom will work within their own local community to provide support to vulnerable people and hard-to-reach groups.

Community Agents will receive free training from NEA in order to learn how to help people stay warm and well in their homes over winter, from how to

improve energy efficiency in the home, to efficient use of household appliances and advice on energy bills.

THE COMMUNITY ENERGY AGENTS WILL ALSO HELP TO DISTRIBUTE 6,000 ENERGY MONITORS, OFFERED FREE OF CHARGE BY BRITISH GAS. THE MONITORS, WHICH DISPLAY ELECTRICITY USAGE IN REAL TIME, WILL HELP LOCAL RESIDENTS KEEP TRACK OF THEIR USAGE, AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO THINK ABOUT WAYS TO RUN THEIR HOMES MORE ENERGY EFFICIENTLY. SEVERAL HUNDRED MONITORS ARE ALREADY STORED AT STOCKSFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE READY FOR DISTRIBUTION.

For more information on how to contact your local Community Energy Agent, or to find out about training to take on this rewarding role, please contact Christine Nicholls on 01289 304141 or email us via info@ca-north.org.uk.

Application for Registered Charity Status

The Consortium has made an application to the Charity Commission for it to be registered as a charity. It has been operating as an unregistered charity since its inception in 2008 but in 2014/15 its income rose above a level at which it has to be registered. The result of its application will be known within two months.

Ovingham Old School - Flooded

Ovingham Old School, a well used facility in Ovingham and a member of the Consortium, was severely flooded in December. This will cause a significant disruption for users of the Hall along with the many residents who live around the Hall who were also flooded. We hope that the damage is repaired quickly and the Hall returns to normal use as quickly as possible. Our thoughts are with those who are sorting this out.

Northumberland Energy Club

Since the launch of the Northumberland Energy Club (NEC) in 2011 some members of the Consortium have benefitted by having the lowest possible electricity and gas prices negotiated by our partners LSI Energy. In addition, due to having common end dates for the expiry of the contracts, LSI has been able to negotiate even better deals for subsequent contracts as a result of bulk ordering.

At 31 December 2015 64 contracts existed under the Club. The Consortium and its members also benefitted by the receipt of over £1.000 worth of

fees that has been received since 2011 and this has been used to subsidise training.

The Management Committee of the Consortium was not able to promote and market NEC effectively and considered that it would be better run by a community organisation with a wider marketing ability.

Agreement was reached for Community Action Northumberland (CAN) to take over NEC and this took place on 01.01.16. The agreement provides for the Consortium's income from the existing contracts to be ring fenced and safeguarded. Also, the Consortium will continue to receive 50% of the commission fees that CAN receives for any new contracts taken out by members.

CAN is to re-brand NEC and it is to be known as EnergyCAN. EnergyCAN will be launched in February.

The Consortium Committee is hoping that Members will continue to take out their electricity and gas contracts through EnergyCAN. The Consortium will continue to receive commission on these contracts and the funds will be used to support Members.

Threat to Council Tax Relief for Charities

Following the recent autumn statement, the Chancellor reported he is planning to transfer the revenue raised by commercial rates from central government, to the Local Authorities.

Though in theory, this sounds favourable, it is highly likely to result in an equivalent cut in Central Support Grant; so therefore, Northumberland County Council will not end up being any richer!

It was assumed that the autumn statement would refer to the position of mandatory Rate Relief under this new arrangement and though the withdrawal of the 80% relief is probably unlikely, any reduction would hit all property owning charities – including community buildings - very hard indeed. Trustees of community buildings/village halls truly value the discretionary rate relief they receive from the county council.

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) has been aware of the business rates issue since a review carried out last year. The review report has not been published yet but ACRE is keeping up to speed and informed, through their membership of the Charity Tax Group (a key forum for monitoring and influencing a range of taxation matters that affect charities)

Though it is likely that we will not know the impact until the March budget, there will be some consultation. Charities in Northumberland – particularly the community building networks – have demonstrated that their lobbying has been very effective in showing the impact of these decisions in the past. We would encourage groups to be prepared to respond in due course and we will keep you up to date with news.

OilCAN – Save Money on Heating Oil

OilCAN is Community Action Northumberland's bulk buying scheme for heating fuels including Kerosene, LPG, LPG bottles and Coal. The aims of the scheme are to:

- combine the purchasing power of organisations – such as village halls - residents, and businesses in order to achieve
- the lowest possible prices for heating fuels.
- benefit residents, organisations and businesses, primarily in rural areas, who do not have access to mains gas.
- offer other products to members at discounted prices.

CAN has an agreement with A F Affinity Ltd (Affinity) to deliver the scheme and their role is to negotiate with suppliers across the UK, to get lower prices and a better service. When your hall (or you as an individual) signs up as a member you will be linked to a local co-ordinator.

There is a small membership fee to cover CAN's costs in organising the scheme; however they are kept to a minimum because volunteers act as local co-ordinators. Last year CAN supplied 818,000 litres of oil – saving members £33,000 compared to average oil prices.

Although the price of oil has dropped dramatically recently, it is a scarce resource and the price is sure to rise again when the World Economy begins to recover. So, for a small annual membership fee it is well worth joining the OilCAN scheme and benefitting from collective ordering. You can find more information and join up by complete an on-line application form on CAN's web site at <http://www.ca-north.org.uk/sign-up> or alternatively phone 01670 500812.

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