



Durham Rural

Community Council



Annual Review 2007/2008



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Introduction

This is Durham Rural Community Council's Annual Review for the year ended 31 March 2008.

We are a rural infrastructure organisation, providing support, advice and information as part of a range of services for rural communities. We represent County Durham's perspective on rural issues at county, regional and national levels, working with a wide range of partners to design and deliver services.

Durham Rural Community Council (DRCC) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We were established in 1935 and work across Co Durham, primarily in rural areas.

This review covers the work that we developed and delivered during 2007/2008, including:

- Outreach work with communities
- The establishment & development of Rural Community Action Network North East
- Support for the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) through One Voice Network
- Organisational development

Each section sets out what we did, what we achieved and how it has influenced the work that we carry forward into 2008/2009. Case studies help to illustrate the range of approaches that we use in our work with rural communities.



Executive Committee & Company Registration

The Executive Committee (Board of Trustees) for DRCC are drawn from the members of Council. The Trustees serving on the Executive Committee during 2007 / 2008 were:

Chairman	Mrs Pat Wynne CBE (until October 2007) Mrs Jenny Flynn MBE (from October 2007)
Vice Chairs	Mrs Jenny Flynn MBE (until October 2007) Mr Gavin Bestford (from October 2007) Mrs Mary Tribe (from October 2007)
Board	Cllr Joe Armstrong Dr Sarah Banks Mr Harry Barron Mr Glyn Bateman (appointed October 2007) Mrs Kate Culverhouse Mr Dennis Dunn Mr John Espiner (Treasurer) Mrs Judith Lund MBE (appointed October 2007) Mr Alex Peart Mr John Robinson Mr George Porter (resigned October 2007) Mrs Pat Wynne CBE
Secretary & Executive Director	Mrs Joanna Laverick (not a Director of the Company nor a Trustee of the Charity)
Registered Office	Park House Station Road Lanchester Co. Durham DH7 0EX
Website	www.durhamrcc.org.uk
Charity No.	229119
Company No.	309329



**DRCC's main offices at
Park House, Lanchester &
The Knoll, Wheatley Hill**

Photographs: Russell Hayward





Members of staff employed in 2007/2008

Charlotte Bates	Support Co-ordinator
Liz Charles	Rural Development Officer (seconded from Durham County Council)
Claire Creffield	One Voice Network (to 05/2007)
Linda Fenwick	One Voice Network Communications Officer (to 03/2008)
Joy Frostwick	Finance Manager
Alan Gregory	HR Manager (to 03/2008)
Russell Hayward	RSCP Manager
Ken Hazelwood	Quality Manager
Joanna Laverick	Executive Director
Anne Lewins	Cleaner, Park House
Lesley Millgate	Rural Development Officer
Rita Minnikin	Cleaner, The Knoll
Carol Moody	Hands on Health Co-ordinator
Sandra Moorhouse	Rural Development Officer (to 03/2008)
Jo Myers	One Voice Network Administrator
Lindsay Nicholson	Rural Development Officer
Michelle O'Keefe	RSCP Administrator (to 03/2008)
Ian Pillar	Village Halls Advisor
Allison Robson	Hands on Health Co-ordinator
Mark Robson	RSCP Rural Housing Enabler (to 01/2008)
Alanna Smith	One Voice Network Support Officer (to 03/2008)



Staff & Trustees from Durham Rural Community Council meet with colleagues from Community Action Northumberland & Tees Valley Rural Community Council for a Rural Community Action Network North East seminar Photograph: Ray Tough



Acknowledgements

The Staff and Trustees of Durham Rural Community Council gratefully acknowledge the support of all our funders, including ACRE, BTCV, CALOR, Capacitybuilders, Community Foundation, County Councillors Jo Fergus & Richard Bell, County Durham Foundation, County Durham PCT, Defra, Durham County Council, Northern Rock Foundation, One NorthEast, and West Durham Rural Pathfinder. We also thank our members, partners, and our customers in rural communities across County Durham for their support.

Cover photographs clockwise from top right: Every Action Counts (Liz Charles), Gainford (Elaine Stringer-Calvert), Pitlington schoolchildren (Carol Moody), Hesleden Community Centre (Russell Hayward), Eggleston Show (Sandra Moorhouse), East Durham Coast (Russell Hayward), The Talking & Listening Space (Liz Charles), Wheatley Hill Colliery Wheel (Russell Hayward), CALOR Village of the Year Awards 2007 (CALOR). Annual Review written by Jo Laverick & Russell Hayward. Design & layout by Russell Hayward. Review printed in-house at DRCC.



Executive Director's Review

The year was marked with a shift in emphasis for Durham Rural Community Council (DRCC), and for most organisations and networks in the voluntary and community sector (VCS). It heralded the start of a very significant change process, which we are still working through.

Change coming from both local and central government has been focused on how local government delivers more effective services. It has also raised significant and long term challenges for those of us working with and for community and voluntary sector organisations. These challenges pose big questions. Where is future investment going to come from to support front line community activity? How can we sustain the range of community support activities that are provided by VCS infrastructure organisations?

The decline of traditional rural services across County Durham is a growing cause for concern.

Photograph: Russell Hayward



2007/2008 witnessed the funding crisis that overtook the Northern Rock bank. This was followed by the subsequent period of uncertainty over the future of the Northern Rock Foundation, a long term champion of the myriad of voluntary and community sector organisations across the North East and Cumbria.

The year also heralded great changes in the way our public sector services are organised and delivered. At regional level One North East (the Regional Development Agency) and Government Office for the North East both underwent major internal restructuring and change.

New structures

Local Area Agreements were introduced across the country. In the North East, Northumberland and Durham were in the first wave of local authorities facing the challenge of developing Local Area Agreements, in counties with two tiers of local government, at district and county levels.

This was compounded by the move in both Northumberland and Durham towards the establishment of the new unitary authorities, which are both scheduled to be operational by April 2009. Further changes were underway with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) in County Durham, which was reorganised to provide more strategic coverage of County Durham and parts of Darlington, moving away for the previous district based model of PCT's across the county.

All these changes threw up huge challenges for VCS organisations. We were required to think about how we structure our own support services for communities, about how we sustain neighbourhood support, whilst also building a much stronger base for strategic engagement at regional and countywide levels. It also triggered the start of some careful consideration about how we promote the shift from grant dependency in the VCS towards developing stronger partnerships with the public sector; encouraging increased devolution of services into the community through thoughtful commissioning processes. All in all the year set some major challenges for us all, as we embarked on a long journey of change and development, which continues today.

Preparing DRCC for the future

These strategic challenges threw up a number of imperatives for DRCC, which included a hard look at how we sustain and respond to change, as an organisation. We began by setting out our stall in terms of the standards of service we provide, and most significantly of all we re-focused on our priorities for community support. DRCC staff and trustees worked closely together to clarify priorities and to set up a structure for providing a range of services which we can sustain through the changes in policy and funding that are happening around us.



Community Buildings provide a vital service for rural communities across County Durham

Photograph: Russell Hayward

Maintaining effective delivery

We concentrated our efforts on:

- Consolidating the operational standards and structure for DRCC.
- Providing support for groups and organisations that run community buildings in County Durham, together with development of training and support for those who provide advice for community building groups in other parts of the region and country.
- Continuing to support community led planning, local initiatives, and forging stronger networks with Town and Parish Councils.
- Building closer joint working relationships with our colleagues in Community Action Northumberland and Tees Valley Rural Community Council, our counterparts within the north-east region.
- Supporting the voluntary & community sector in County Durham through our management (as the accountable body) of One Voice Network.

Achievements:

Despite the funding uncertainties and distractions swirling around us, 2007/2008 was another period of solid achievement. During the year we:

- Delivered innovative work on Parish Planning, Citizens Juries and Rural Proofing with communities and Parish Councils in Teesdale and parts of Wear Valley, through the West Durham Rural Pathfinder initiative.
- Developed and delivered highly successful training for Village Hall Advisers working in rural areas across the country.
- Further developed Hands on Health and piloted new approaches in schools, through work with children and young people.
- Helped to establish and develop Rural Community Action Network North East (RuCANNE), providing training and workshops for trustees and staff from Rural Community Councils across the region.
- Trained and mentored Community Champions as part of the Every Action Counts Campaign.
- Continued delivery of the CALOR Village of the Year competition.
- Represented the Voluntary & Community Sector on the board of the County Durham Partnership. We also provided advocacy on rural issues at a number of county and regional partnerships and networks.
- Secured ACRE Level 2 Quality Standards, and renewal of our Investors in People status.



- Developed new initiatives such as East Durham LEADER that will continue to support rural communities at the local level in the years ahead.

Committed staff and trustees

It is fair to say that most staff and trustees who work in the voluntary sector are committed people who work exceptionally hard to deliver services that they really believe in. The previous year has been a particularly difficult time to maintain resolution and focus, as funding opportunities to support working with communities dwindled, and the strings attached to available funding became increasingly bureaucratic. However, DRCC's staff and trustees have again demonstrated an exceptional level of forbearance, innovation, imagination & skill. This has helped us to continue providing a high standard of service, and to develop realistic

ambitions for future service delivery. Our staff and trustees have worked through very trying circumstances with good humour and solid commitment, and deserve wholehearted thanks.

This review summarises our achievements and indicates our future direction. It is clear that the theme for the year has been managing and responding to change. Increasingly we have seen our work and that of colleagues across the VCS become much more process driven, dominated by public sector agendas. This is not a comfortable approach and has forced many infrastructure organisations into increased levels of introspection, pushing fragile resources into management and representational roles, rather than into outward engagement with communities and neighbourhoods.

It is to be hoped that the longer term outcomes and lessons emerging from this shift, combined with the VCS's unique understanding of neighbourhoods and communities, will develop into stronger more efficient community support structures across County Durham.

The development work that we have tackled this year, which involves future working with communities, will continue into next year and beyond.

The outcomes of the research into shaping infrastructure services for the VCS will be developed into a longer term strategy and business plan for One Voice Network (OVN). Action will be taken to shape the report's recommendations into priority projects, to be taken forward by the OVN Steering Group.



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Building for the future

Key themes for developing work during 2008-09 are already well advanced. Forward priorities include:

- The production of a strategy for delivering new LEADER in East Durham, and the establishment of a locally owned programme of bottom up community activity for the next 3 – 5 years.
- Sustaining and developing a resource base for community led planning across the county.
- Continuing to work alongside partner organisations in the VCS and public sectors to modernise VCS infrastructure service delivery.
- Developing the role of RuCANNE to build networks and shared intelligence on rural issues at regional and national levels.
- Developing and sustaining work to support community building groups, and to provide a training resource.
- Continuing to develop a community focused response to health issues, providing support on healthy living for disadvantaged communities.



Outreach work with communities

Working with communities forms the bedrock of DRCC's work. With more than 70 years experience, we have built up a wealth of knowledge and understanding that allows us to speak with authority on issues that affect County Durham's rural communities. Here we summarise our achievements and offer some case studies to showcase our outreach work.

Community Buildings

We have supported groups who manage community buildings throughout our history. Indeed it is one of our key services for rural communities; due recognition of the hugely important role that community buildings & village halls play in community life. As public services become more expensive to deliver in rural areas, community buildings gain importance, providing a focus for local services, social activity and bringing communities together.

Our village halls advice service led by Ian Pillar, provides practical advice and information to the groups and organisations that are responsible for managing community buildings. The advice on offer covers a diverse range including book keeping, energy, fire regulations, governance, health and safety, health checks, human resources and employment law, licensing, provision of insurance cover, and even where to source a new boiler! The service is provided free of charge to any community group with a building to manage throughout County Durham. We also provide training targeted at community building groups, and at national level to other organisations that also provide support for community buildings

2007/2008 witnessed an increased interest in the potential transfer of assets from the public sector into community ownership, reflecting a new policy agenda within Government. This encouraged us to convene a community buildings consortium for County Durham, drawing in membership from Durham County Council, the District Councils and the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS's). The Consortium began by examining existing models of ownership and management for community buildings within the county. The aim is to establish a comprehensive and streamlined structure for the provision of support and assistance, supported by funding to help groups run their buildings. This is a longer term project, and work has been temporarily suspended until local government reorganisation is completed.

We continued with our local support work during the year, collaborating with Chester-le-Street & Derwentside District Councils to map buildings in their areas, and establish ownership and leasing implications for community groups and the public sector. We also continued to work closely with Teesdale Village Halls Consortium.

We worked closely with our fellow north-east RCC's to host a highly successful national conference, bringing together Village Halls Advisers from RCC's across the country. The event provided an opportunity for us to showcase examples of thriving community buildings in County Durham. Separately we also designed and delivered a training programme for Village Halls Advisers. The event was piloted in County Durham, and has subsequently been delivered by our staff to colleagues working in the south of England.



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Case Study - Community Buildings Training

DRCC's 'Introduction to Community Buildings' course has been developed to meet the requirements of Village Halls Advisers working for Rural Community Councils across England. The training aims to develop participants knowledge, skills and confidence in managing community buildings, help participants to compile a reference manual, and develop research skills, analysis, planning, team-work, presentation & report writing.

The training helps volunteers & community workers who have responsibility for managing community buildings, by providing them with formal, quality assured recognition for their learning. Each course consists of 10 units, including tutorial support for participants. Each session lasts 3 hours, supplemented by self-directed study at home. A complete course consists of 30 guided learning hours, leading to an Open College Network qualification at Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE). Course material covers a range of useful topics including constitutional and organisational matters, insurance, property management, health and safety, licensing, finance, employees & volunteers, and hiring.

DRCC delivered 2 courses involving a total of 20 participants during 2007/2008, each run over 3 days, with 'non-active' weeks in-between to allow for the completion of homework. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with further sessions planned for 2008/2009.

Delegates from across England take part in a lively training session delivered by DRCC staff

Photograph: Ian Pillar



East Durham LEADER

LEADER is a community-led bottom up approach to rural development. It forms part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). In July 2007, groups across the north-east were invited to submit bids to run new LEADER programmes. DRCC, working with key partners, identified a need for grassroots community led development across the former mining communities of East Durham.



After submitting an expression of interest, we were invited to prepare a full Local Development Strategy setting out detailed plans to address identified local priorities. The plan was submitted shortly after the year end. In June 2008, we received confirmation that our strategy had been approved, offering the prospect of real benefits for rural communities across Easington, and parts of Durham City, Sedgefield & Sunderland through to 2013.

Every Action Counts

This is a national programme, delivered by the Community Sector Coalition Consortium, and funded by BTCV. During 2007/2008, DRCC took the lead on behalf of the region's RCCs in delivering locally based training courses for volunteers to train as Community Champions. We provided two training courses and other hands-on support.

Case Study - Community Champions

In Summer 2007, we invited readers of our quarterly magazine 'Community News' to volunteer for a new training course that was being planned in conjunction with Every Action Counts. In essence, readers were being invited to train to become 'Community Champions' who could then help local groups in their community to operate in a cleaner, fairer, greener and safer way.

Enthusiastic delegates attending one of DRCC's Community Champions Training Courses

Photographs: Liz Charles



We were amazed by the response! Fourteen enthusiastic volunteers from across the north-east came together on two Saturdays in early November 2007 at the Rivergreen Centre, Durham. Supported by Liz Charles & Lesley Millgate of DRCC, they worked through the accredited training programme. Armed with their new qualification, each went away to put together Action Plans for their communities, based around the five Every Action Counts themes of saving energy, saving our resources, travelling wisely, shopping ethically, and caring for your area. Demand was so great that we repeated the training in March 2008, helping to create yet more Community Champions to spread the message!



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Health

We have always addressed health issues through front line activity with communities. Carol Moody & Allison Robson deliver our highly successful Hands on Health programme which has now been working with communities in rural areas for over ten years. The programme delivers cookery & nutrition courses in local venues, providing hands on help to source and cook nutritious meals using fresh ingredients on very low budgets.

Hands on Health originally covered the Durham Dales and Derwentside, supported by a combination of funds from the PCT and from other charitable sources. During 2007-08, the re-organisation of the PCT in County Durham, triggered a review of Hands on Health and an evaluation to determine the next phases of working. Feedback from people who have taken part in Hands on Health courses confirms that the work makes a real difference to the lives of individuals. This is apparent in terms of healthier lifestyle choices, greater self esteem in those who take part, and increased interest in volunteering & engaging with the wider community.



Children at Pittington Primary School enjoy a session from the Hands on Health Team



During the year, an independent evaluation of the Hands on Health work was commissioned and carried out by Northumbria University. A planning day for the Trainers who deliver the Hands on Health courses was also held. The consensus view was that we should develop the project so that it has the capacity to deliver courses across the county. The report recommended further work to target some of the traditional 'hard to reach' groups. It also proposed building further consultation into our community led planning work, to address the provision of, and access to, local health and wellbeing services at neighbourhood levels.

County Durham PCT agreed to invest in the development work and have now provided funding until the end of March 2009. We hope to develop this into a longer term piece of work extending over the coming three years.

During 2007/2008, the Hands on Health project staff piloted new courses aimed at children and young people in schools. They also run a highly successful pilot course aimed at travelling families in County Durham which culminated in the production of a illustrated cookery book.



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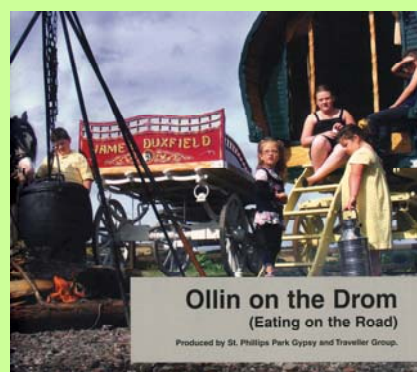


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Case Study - 'Ollin on the Drom' Cookery Book Project

The first Hands on Health cookery course was held at St. Philips Travellers site near Bishop Auckland in October 2007, in conjunction with Durham County Council's Community Development & Traveller Liaison Team. The venue was chosen because it is the only Traveller site in County Durham with a 'portakabin' facility capable of being used as a meeting place by residents. The course proved popular and was well received, leading to requests for follow up courses in 2008. During one of the sessions, residents suggested that a cookery book should be produced capturing in print some of the traditional recipes used by travellers on the road.

The importance of using ingredients with a long shelf life, maintaining traditional cookery skills, and using recipes that can be prepared with minimum equipment were all seen as essential elements of the cookery book. Residents were consulted on every aspect of the book during its development to ensure they maintained ownership of the project. DRCC's Hands on Health team were involved in all aspects of recipe design, and provided all the healthy eating and food safety advice contained in the book.



The book was designed to be accessible to all, with 16 easy to follow recipes and simple instructions, using basic ingredients that can be used whilst travelling. Step by step illustrations were provided to make the recipes simple to follow. An audio CD was also produced with residents reading out the recipes, accompanied by music which they also selected. Choosing a name proved difficult, however after several discussions, 'Ollin on the Drom' was chosen by the resident's group. It is derived from the Romany language, and literally means 'Eating on the Road.'

The book was launched at Durham Library in September, priced at £6.95. All profits from sales of the book are being ploughed back into the project to make it self funding, so that more copies can be produced in the future.

Rural Social & Community Programme (RSCP)

2007/2008 marked the second and final year of the Rural Social & Community Programme. This initiative, funded by Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), was established in April 2006 to deliver three high level objectives:

1. To improve opportunities for socially excluded individuals
2. To build the ability of rural communities to shape their own futures
3. To develop the VCS, Parish & Town Council sectors.

Despite its limited 'shelf-life', the RSCP proved to be a positive and worthwhile experience for everyone at DRCC. During the year we continued to draw on the expertise of our staff and partners to deliver accessible 'user friendly' advice and support. We were able to speak with increasing authority on a range of topics, including asset transfers, capacity building, climate change, community-led planning, fundraising, housing, legal and governance issues, and social enterprise. Follow up support helped to 'differentiate and add value' to our offer; enthusing local people to 'get the job done' after the initial rush of enthusiasm has worn away. The mantra of the RSCP was always to support people, not to 'do it for them'; an important distinction from previous community support initiatives, and an approach that can be expected to deliver practical and lasting benefits for local communities in the years ahead.

During 2007/2008, we continued to provide 'hands on' advice and support to develop and nurture local community partnerships. In Witton Park & Escomb for example, Lesley Millgate helped to equip local volunteers with the confidence and skills to apply for, secure, and manage project funding. Lesley encouraged the creation of volunteer sub-groups to tackle transport, leisure, community, and environmental issues. She also provided advice and funding to help establish a local community newsletter, and even helped to deliver the first few copies to households! These communities are now strong enough to move forward without our hands-on support, however we're only a phone call away!

Our experienced team of staff includes trained paralegals, and a professionally qualified fundraising adviser. Their expertise once again paid handsome dividends for local community groups and organisations. Teesdale Day Clubs is typical of the types of groups that we were able to support through the RSCP in 2007/2008. With Lindsay Nicholson's help, they successfully applied for and secured £100,000 funding over 3 years, safeguarding a vital service for older people in an isolated rural community. Our help didn't end there. Lindsay also provided their Staff and Trustees with advice on legal, governance and business planning issues, equipping them with the confidence and skills to seek out and secure continuation funding, when current resources expire.



Over 50 delegates attended DRCC's Community Planning workshop at Murton. A follow up event in Annfield Plain produced an equally enthusiastic response.

Photograph: Russell Hayward

Community Planning is enjoying increased recognition as a tool that can help rural communities influence their future development. During the year we delivered two high profile workshops to promote the benefits of community planning to an enthusiastic but

largely uninformed audience. Over 50 public, private and voluntary sector representatives attended each event, and a follow up session just after the year end attracted a similarly high turnout. The events helped reinforced DRCC's efforts to mainstream Community Planning as an effective alternative to traditional neighbourhood management models.

Effective publicity, enthusiasm, and a solid reputation for delivery continued to stimulate demand for DRCC's services from Parish & Town Councils across the county. We use innovative approaches including community bingo, the 'washing line', and themed activities linked to Valentines Day, Halloween & Christmas to help secure broader community participation. Lesley Millgate & Lindsay Nicholson are also trained to deliver Planning for Real®, practical hands-on sessions using maps and three-dimensional models to help bring the local community to life. These sessions prove particularly popular with local schools, helping to engage and enthuse young people who might otherwise have little interest in the planning process. During the year we completed and launched four Community Plans, including Gainford & Willington; we also provided advice or commenced work in a further 14 locations, including Hetton-le-Hole, Pittington and Startforth.



'The Washing Line' of key local issues, and 'Planning for Real®'; two of the most popular tools that DRCC uses to support Community Planning.

Photographs: Russell Hayward

Research and influencing work by Mark Robson, our Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) helped to highlight affordability issues and youth homelessness in west Durham, and poor housing quality in parts of east Durham. During 2007/2008, Mark responded to a wide range of consultation documents helping to inform policy development at the highest levels of Government. Mark also chaired the Housing Thematic Group of Teesdale Local Strategic Partnership applying local knowledge and experience to help identify solutions to the shortage of affordable housing across the District. Following extensive research, he helped to launch a pilot Teesdale Rent Deposit Scheme towards the end of the year. This initiative is helping people who are homeless or in housing need move into private rented accommodation, by providing a rent deposit guarantee to the landlord.

The transition to a unitary council in Durham, coupled with the growth of public procurement presents huge opportunities for Town & Parish Councils if they can prove that they are 'fit for purpose.' During 2007/2008, we continued to work closely with CDALC (County Durham Association of Local Councils) to identify training opportunities that improve the quality,

effectiveness and influence of Town and Parish Councils. Our efforts were rewarded with renewed funding from Durham County Council for the Bursary Scheme which provides financial assistance for Town & Parish Clerks to study for CILCA qualifications, the cornerstone of a successful 'Quality Parish Status' assessment.

Although the RSCP has now drawn to a close, we continue to build on our achievements and the lessons learned over the past two years. We already have a healthy 'order-book' for Community Planning, and continue to provide practical advice and hands-on support to community groups across the county.



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Photographs:
Martha Laverick

Liz Charles, Sandra Moorhouse, Michelle O'Keefe, Ian Pillar & Mark Robson also made an invaluable contribution to the work of the RSCP during 2007/2008.

The CALOR Village of the Year

Durham Rural Community Council is delighted to organise the CALOR Village of the Year competition in County Durham. Each year communities with fewer than 5,000 residents from across the county are encouraged to enter the competition. Entrants are judged on key aspects of village life, including the people, the environment, communications and business. The judges are encouraged to seek out 'well balanced, pro-active, and caring communities' that have made the best of local opportunities to enhance the quality of life for all inhabitants.

CALOR sponsor the annual competition, and come along to our Annual Meeting held each October to present the prizes. Each year we continue to be amazed by the quality of entries and the enthusiasm of local residents; 2007 was no exception! North Bitchburn was awarded £400 as overall winners, using the money to buy a new community noticeboard. Lunedale received £200 and a commendation for efforts to improve the community hall; the prize funds were used to continue the local community newsletter.



West Cornforth, North Bitchburn & Lunedale (respectively national Young People's awardwinners, and 2007 CALOR Village of the Year prizewinners) receive their awards at DRCC's Annual General Meeting. Pictured from left to right: Dorothy Henderson & Christine Nevins (North Bitchburn), Chris O'Bee (CALOR), Tracy Robinson, Anne Currie and Tony Cutmore (West Cornforth), Mary Wilson & Margaret Dent (Lunedale) Photograph: CALOR

West Durham Rural Pathfinder (WDRP)

WDRP was established in April 2005 with Defra funding, to improve the quality of life for people in west Durham by:

- Supporting vibrant and sustainable communities
- Giving communities a stronger 'voice'
- Understanding and responding to needs

During the year, Liz Charles worked closely with the Pathfinder team to 'rural proof' Wear Valley's Community Strategy. Liz Charles also delivered an innovative project entitled 'The Talking & Listening Space' which was critically acclaimed by senior policymakers across the region as an example of best practice. In Teesdale, Sandra Moorhouse & Russell Hayward worked closely with colleagues from 2D, Durham County Council, Teesdale Community Network & Teesdale Local Strategic Partnership to deliver 'Quiet Voices, Big Noise' combining community planning with efforts to promote more community engagement.



During 2007/2008 we worked closely with Pathfinder to deliver three projects benefiting rural communities across west Durham

Case Study - Quiet Voices, Big Noise (QVBN)

During 2007, DRCC joined forces with 2D & Durham County Council to deliver the Quiet Voices, Big Noise project. The project was funded by West Durham Pathfinder, with extra member's initiative funding from Durham County Councillors Jo Fergus & Richard Bell.

The project set out to provide local policymakers with better information about local issues and concerns, through additional Community Planning work across Teesdale. This built on work previously undertaken with seven Parishes in mid and upper Teesdale. In addition, the project resourced a 'co-ordinator' to develop and support community engagement with the Local Strategic Partnership and its processes. This proved to be a more protracted piece of work, and this aspect of the project wasn't able to make conclusive progress within the limited timescale. Sandra Moorhouse of DRCC handled the community planning work, whilst Bill Pike of Durham County Council handled the coordination role.

Given the tight timescale, it was decided to concentrate efforts in communities where results could quickly be achieved. Three parishes were chosen - Brignall, Egglestone Abbey & Rokeby; Gainford; and Staindrop. Questionnaires were sent out, meetings held, and lots of fun activities organised, including a Halloween party to encourage as many people as possible to get involved. Thanks to the hard work of everyone, the plans were completed and launched on time to an enthusiastic audience. Many people commented that they had 'learnt new things about their own communities'. Each parish now has a better idea of what issues are important to the community, and each has drawn up an action plan of projects and activities that they wish to undertake. All in all 'hard work, but well worth it'.



Front covers of the three Parish Plans produced by the Quiet Voices, Big Noise project

(Gainford Parish Plan cover photograph courtesy of Elaine Stringer-Calvert)

Case Study - The Talking & Listening Space

This project was funded by West Durham Rural Pathfinder, and undertaken by Liz Charles of DRCC. The aim was to enable local residents to comment on the statistics of their area and to start to discover how local assets can be part of the solution to implementing improvements. The exercise proved to be an effective method for community engagement, and the informal environment created during sessions was clearly conducive to information sharing, by giving participants time and space to express their concerns and interests.

Invites were made to members of the communities of Middleton, Stanhope and surrounding villages to attend a series of four workshops. The mood of the events was low key with a social focus rather than that of a structured seminar. Those who attended agreed that the 'over dinner discussions' created a relaxed, informal environment which was a key

factor in their effective contribution, and activities worked very well. DRCC made sure that all comment was recorded in a thorough and conscientious manner throughout. A report of the proceedings has received critical acclaim from policymakers in the region & beyond.



Participants at The Talking & Listening Space hard at work discussing issues of local concern in workshops and over dinner

Photographs: Liz Charles



Rural Community Action Network North East (RuCANNE)

There are three Rural Community Councils in the North East, covering Durham, Northumberland and Tees Valley. We have always enjoyed close working relationships, sharing information and providing support for each other. The changing climate in funding and within the public sector triggered an increasing need to collaborate, and build stronger links as demand for a regional level of engagement with the RCCs grew.

During the year, we came together to develop our network, establishing RuCANNE. A steering group of Chief Officers and Chairs from each RCC was established to agree a plan of action and manage activities undertaken through the network. RuCANNE successfully secured support funding for its first 10 months, via One NorthEast and the Community Foundation.

In June, we appointed Sue Shaw to work on behalf of RuCANNE and to help us develop and deliver our objectives. Sue is a freelance community support and policy consultant with a long standing track record of rural policy and community development. She has worked with RuCANNE for the past year to help us develop a much stronger representation of the rural issues in the north east at a national level. RuCANNE has been working directly with government departments and has established a strong regional role through our national umbrella organisation, Action for Communities in Rural England.

Sue Shaw works on behalf of RuCANNE across the region and at national level
Photograph: Sue Shaw



The first objective for RuCANNE was to build a stronger understanding and closer working relationship with colleagues in the public sector. This was supported by efforts to involve our trustees and staff closely in briefings and debate about how new and emerging policy is affecting rural areas. We agreed a longer-term objective to develop and pilot shared initiatives, and joint working between our staff to deliver services for the rural areas of the region.

During the year we ran an Action Learning Set delivered over an eight week period for RCC staff and trustees. The work also drew in colleagues from the public sector, including representatives from Durham and Northumberland County Councils, Government Office North East and the North East Rural Affairs Forum.

We also ran a series of workshops, briefing events and training days, embracing topic areas as diverse as Climate Change, Every Action Counts, the Local Government White Paper, Planning for Real®, Social Auditing, and Sustainable Village Halls. Our trustees were also able to attend and take part in a wider range of conferencing opportunities with other trustees, stakeholders and staff from rural areas across the country.

RuCANNE continues to develop as we collaborate at regional level to align our work with emerging research and policy coming from the Commission for Rural Communities and the North East Rural Affairs Forum. We intend to collaborate further on community led planning, our support for Town and Parish Councils, and our work to support community buildings.



VCS Support & Partnership - One Voice Network

One Voice Network (OVN) is the consortium of VCS organisations in County Durham. The Network has been working with and on behalf of voluntary organisations and community groups across County Durham since it was established ten years ago. OVN has remained an informal network, whilst delivering a substantial portfolio of developmental support for the VCS in the county, and representing their interests at regional level. DRCC has continued to act as the accountable body for the work of OVN, employing staff and managing contracts on behalf of the Network. We have also remained an active and committed partner in the management of the Network.

During 2007/2008 One Voice Network commissioned, and was involved in a critical piece of research and consultation, undertaken by Dr. Rob Macmillan of Sheffield Hallam University. His recommendations are outlined on a report published in July 2008, entitled '*The Shape of Things to Come*' – the future of CVS and Volunteer Centre services in County Durham.



Dr Rob Macmillan addresses delegates attending the annual One Voice Network (OVN) Conference at Chester-le-Street

Photographs: Gordon Jones



Within OVN and its membership, scarcely a day has passed when there hasn't been mention of Rob Macmillan's research into the future shape of VCS infrastructure service delivery. The research focused on how VCS infrastructure support services in County Durham can modernise, become more streamlined and provide a more efficient service for front line VCS organisations, in the context of rapid changes in public sector services and how they are structured to serve communities across the county.

At times it seemed that we and our public sector partners were putting everything on hold whilst we awaited the solutions to the very difficult questions of long term sustainability. Of course the final report doesn't contain the magic formula for how we can retain our independence, and simultaneously pay for more and better infrastructure service delivery at a local level. Instead it points to the need for a more collaborative approach between all VCS infrastructure bodies.

The need for increased collaboration is a message that has been delivered many times before. However the actual practice at times seems to be more difficult than the term might suggest. We have learned that true partnership working requires unconditional trust in one another to deliver. It requires us to share both strengths and weaknesses with partners; this is challenging, particularly when funding is difficult, and competition between organisations for diminishing resource is increasing. True partnership working is not easy. However it was the key to OVN's successes over the past year, which continue to bear fruit and move us towards a much improved shared structure for working. Developing comparative methodology for service delivery and adopting a common approach to demonstrate quality assurance will be key features of partnership working, with infrastructure organisations providing CVS & Volunteer Centre functions during 2008/2009.

DRCC, along with the CVS's in County Durham received 'transitional monies' from the PCT and County Durham Local Area Agreement at the end of the year, to take us through 2008/2009 and allow further development work with the public sector to take place. This work will allow us to negotiate and agree a longer term and more sustainable investment strategy for VCS infrastructure support services in the county. OVN has also received investment from Capacitybuilders. This will enable us to work with VCS infrastructure partners to plan a more collaborative approach, which will ultimately result in better support services being delivered to frontline VCS.



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Organisational Development

We continued to place a high priority on staff and trustee development during 2007/2008. As outlined earlier, RuCANNE provided a useful opportunity to bring staff and trustees together from the three north-east RCCs to share information and good practice. Our staff continued to benefit from in-house and external training on a range of topics. Members of the Rural Social & Community Programme for example, continued to hold bi-monthly training sessions. These included events with community representatives in Willington and Day Club members in Staindrop, each designed to identify local issues as part of the community planning process. Our staff continued to develop their professional expertise, securing qualifications in fundraising management and paralegal studies during the year.

Our success in securing ACRE Level 2 Quality Standards, and the renewal of Investor in People accreditation, represented an undoubted highpoint in a busy and successful year. DRCC's staff and trustees all worked exceptionally hard, with expert help from Ken Hazelwood, our Quality Manager, to secure these awards. We aren't resting on our laurels, and continue our efforts to ensure that we deliver the best possible service for all of our customers.



The following summary has been extracted from the Audited Accounts of Durham Rural Community Council for the year ended 31 March 2008. This summary may not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of DRCC's financial affairs. If you would like a full copy of our 2007/2008 Audited Accounts, please contact Charlotte Bates at Durham Rural Community Council, Park House, Station Road, Lanchester, County Durham DH7 0EX.

Policies and procedures

We operate all of our activities on a full cost recovery basis. The Board of Trustees will only endorse activities, projects or programmes of work, which are fully funded. Our financial planning follows an annual cycle, linked into the Business Planning and reporting rounds. The financial year runs between April and March. All activities planned for the year ahead are set out in an annual Business Plan and Work Programme for DRCC.

The annual budget for DRCC's core costs is set by the Board at the start of each financial year. Income and projected expenditure for programmes / projects and work streams during the year are factored into the budget as overheads. Project / programme funding is ring-fenced within our accounts, ensuring that monitoring and auditing systems are transparent. Against a backdrop of rapidly changing policy and funding cultures it continues to be difficult to plan or develop services for the long term. The trustees & staff work together to minimise the impact of reducing income streams for infrastructure support organisations such as DRCC.

Principal funding sources embrace:

1. Core activity - enabling the organisational management structure. It includes strategic planning, information & consultative activities with partners and stakeholders in the rural areas of County Durham. During 2007/2008 we operated core services through Service Level Agreements with Defra and Durham County Council, generating incoming resources of £89,811 and £23,000 respectively. Expenditure was maintained within budget.

2. Programmes / Projects / Workstreams - these form the basis of our linkages with community and locally based organisations. Broadly the work areas cover community buildings, community planning, health, housing, and social inclusion. The work is funded through a combination of Service Level Agreements, grant aid, or funding linked to public policy rounds. Some resources are brokered through consortia arrangements with partners in the VCS (Capacity Builders, Change Up, Infrastructure, RSCP); others are targeted into specific geographical areas, or areas of interest, which DRCC develops with communities. Expenditure is undertaken in accordance with agreed principles. We only undertake fully funded projects & programmes, and monitor activity against agreed budgets.

We continue to work with a wide range of funding sources and systems including Charitable Trusts, European, Government, and Local Authorities. We also draw some income from our capital assets, which comprise two buildings at Park House in Lanchester & The Knoll at Wheatley Hill. The buildings house our staff, and a small number of tenants, from whom we draw rental income. Surplus cash balances are invested on deposit to earn interest at the best available rate, having due regard to the balance between risk and reward. DRCC also provides administrative and printing services for community organisations, which generate a small income. This includes printing newsletters, conference room hire and training facilities.

**Durham Rural Community Council Limited: Statement of Financial Activities
(including Income & Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2008**

	Note	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds £
INCOMING RESOURCES				
Incoming resources from generated funds:				
<i>Voluntary income:</i>				
Grants	4	136775	-	136775
<i>Activities for generating funds:</i>				
Rental income		39341	-	39341
Insurance commissions		11220	-	11220
Other income		23041	-	23041
<i>Investment income</i>	3	11492	-	11492
Incoming resources from charitable activities:				
Grants receivable	4	-	576736	576736
TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES		221869	576736	798605
RESOURCES EXPENDED				
Costs of generating funds		3280	-	3280
Charitable activities		121288	559400	680688
Governance costs		15211	-	15211
TOT. RESOURCES EXPENDED	5	139779	559400	699179
NET INCOMING RESOURCES BEFORE OTHER RECOGNISED GAINS AND LOSSES	6	82090	17336	99426
Gains on revaluation of fixed assets for charity's own use	7	-	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS		82090	17336	99426
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Balances brought forward		517399	105685	623084
Balances carried forward		599489	123201	722510

Notes refer to the main Audited Accounts available on request from DRCC (see page 18-26 for details)

Durham Rural Community Council is supported by:



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01207 529621

www.durhamrcc.org.uk