

Northern Fells Group Report to Castle Sowerby Parish Council AGM

The last meeting of the trustees was on 25th April, and this was also the last meeting of its financial year.

The trustees of the NFG greatly appreciate the support they receive from the seven parish councils covering the area of their activities. It is not simply the financial support, but the active participation and promotion. This, along with private donations and collections taken at funerals, demonstrates that the group is successfully engaging with the communities. They recognise that some, such as younger families, still consider that our 'client' base is mainly the elderly, but this is not the case.

The NF plays a significant role in enabling people to retain their independent living and quality of life. The mini-bus continues to operate successfully in an area with little access to public transport. The mini-bus fares cover the operational costs but not replacement.

The 'Lend a Hand' group provide practical support in simple jobs and also companionship to people living alone. This group avoids taking any work from tradesmen and often the jobs may be things like changing a light bulb or a simple household repair.

Part of the Lend a Hand area is the work done by Antionette Ward on Benefits Awareness. In the last year this has raised £17,066 in payments to residents of our parishes. Her work has also included referring clients to other support groups such as Age UK.

The NFG workers and volunteers are an enthusiastic group that regularly go the extra mile – or even further. The activities of the Village Agents are legion and a report from Newcastle University into their work and their role gave them well deserved praise. A Steering Group meets regularly to review their activities. Their work is funded by the Big Lottery who recently visited and were equally impressed. They enjoyed lunch, which had been prepared by the men's cookery group.

Financially the NFG is strong with good reserves. Balances at the year end were £100,075. This is down some £19,000 on the previous year but puts us where funders are less likely to think we are already adequately resourced. Some funding sources, who have been generous in the past, no longer exist such as the Northern Rock and Lloyds TSB. Some funding has been lost from the Health Trust as we are no longer eligible. The loss of eligibility comes, in part, from our refusal to report confidential personal information on clients.

The NFG enjoys a high reputation and it is a shame there are not more groups of its like in other areas. This may hurt us in the future as the Big Lottery are looking for future bids from consortia of similar structured groups, rather than single organisations. We currently have no-one we could partner with in such bids.

It is a personal privilege to be associated with the NFG as its Vice Chair. I am also very happy to continue to represent Castle Sowerby Parish Council. Technically there is still a vacancy for a representative from this council as my election to Vice made me an ex-officio member.

Geoffrey Hine
19th May 2016