

**“A great place to live. Our future in our hands ”**

**SLALEY PARISH PLAN**

**Executive summary**

Introduction

This report brings together findings from a household survey, eleven focus groups and a community consultation weekend undertaken between late 2002 and September 2003. Households, families and organisations have contributed ideas, resources, suggestions and answers. Experts drawn from a wide range of public and private bodies have assisted us. Communication within the Parish has been maintained through the Parish Magazine, Slaley Notes in the Hexham Courant, the co-operation of press and by word of mouth via the extensive networking within the Parish of organisations and individuals.

A short plain language summary “Issues Report”, developed prior to the Action Plan, was distributed to every household. This formed the basis for a well attended consultation weekend in September 2003 out of which the Steering Group has developed the Action Plan, which concludes the Plan itself.

There are seven sections in the report and a methodology appendix. Section one describes the background and basic facts. Section two presents the findings on us as a population, the neighbourhoods we live in and what the key problems and issues are for us where we live. Section three presents findings on the wider environment. Section four considers findings and issues on matters that affect the community and economy. Section five summarises the main messages. Section six draws together issues and questions considered by the community at the consultation weekend in September 2003. Section seven is the action plan with implementation recommendations.

**Section One: Background and Basic Facts**

All 259 households in Slaley Parish area received a questionnaire and 89% of them completed and returned their questionnaires. The focus discussions involved 131 people. Most of the work to research and prepare a plan was unpaid and was done by

volunteers who came to be known as the Parish Plan group. Analysts recruited from outside the community carried out some analysis work. For reasons of confidentiality the analysts also opened and coded the questionnaires.

The main reasons that stimulated the work leading to the report were lack of safe places for children and young people to play especially following the closure of the First School field to the community in 2002. After two public meetings were held in 2002, a Parish Plan group was formed to look at what could be done and to examine other issues and problems. They successfully applied to the Countryside Agency for a grant to cover costs that would be incurred and had to match this with their volunteer labour.

## **Section Two. About Us and Where We Live**

### Population and economic characteristics

The report estimates that approximately 640 people live in the four and a half miles that comprises Slaley Parish. 585 of them were in households that responded to the survey and focus discussions. Slaley's population bulges in the middle, 58% of us are aged between 26 and 64 years old. We have a high proportion of children and young people indeed they make up 27% of the population, although many of them aged between 18 and their early 20s leave to go to University or college. The national trend towards having higher numbers of older people, particularly people over 80, is not as evident in Slaley although tables in the report show numbers are set to rise.

The majority of Slaley people are 'incomers'. Only approximately 35% have lived here for over 20 years and 13% for more than 41 years. Some people, whose families have lived here for generations, expressed unease that Slaley could become a dormitory village. There were concerns that a way of life and the values that go with it is being lost. On the other hand it is a very settled and vibrant community. People who move here tend to stay. Everyone pulls together to put on the annual Slaley Show and other community festivals.

There is little unemployment and a surprising level of self-employment and small businesses ownership (72 people in the survey said they are self employed or have small businesses including farming and rural industries). A well attended focus group

for small businesses revealed considerable talent and a hidden local economy.

Where we live and the neighbourhoods we live in

13% of households live in rented housing and just over 1% live in tied housing. Most live in owner-occupied housing.

There is remarkable agreement on the things people value. They include the beauty of the countryside around us, neighbours and friends, the facilities we have, the post office, peace and quiet, proximity to Hexham, Corbridge and Newcastle, the sense of continuity and tradition and, the bus service.

Problems affecting us in neighbourhoods where we live are:

Speeding, dog fouling, litter. Local children also face lack of safe crossing areas and dangers caused by parked cars on both sides of the road near school buses.

People get hot under the collar about dog fouling and litter. They were regularly mentioned by people of all ages and locations most affected are in and on the approach to the village. Litter is also found on grass verges where motorists have dumped it.

Speeding occurs everywhere. Key locations are in and on the approach to the village, the road leading up to Slaley Hall, from the village towards Consett and the Lead Road. A traffic and speed survey was carried out in the village. It was found that about one in three vehicles were exceeding the speed limit. The worst times of day and night for speeding were in the early hours of the morning, around 7pm and during 'school run' times. Sadly local police who ran the speed check found that most offenders were locals. Lack of off street parking was a problem in the village.

Local services and facilities

High to good levels of satisfaction were expressed with most facilities and services, particularly the post office which everyone attached great importance to. The churches, the Commemoration Hall, the First School and the two pubs in the Parish were also highly valued. People using the local bus service attached great importance to it, especially teenagers and older people. However, the survey and focus discussions identified needs for more services and facilities. They were:

- Play facilities for young children
- Recreation and open areas for teenagers and young people
- Places to play games and sports
- Child care facilities and services including pre-school
- Activities for children and young people in the evenings and holidays
- More services and facilities for visitors/tourists

Younger and older teenagers expressed interest in having youth club sessions. Parents with younger children wanted a play scheme in the summer.

The survey also identified a need for more recycling facilities and post boxes and a public telephone (Wooley and Riding Mill road).

#### Perfect place to live?

Many people attending focus groups commented that Slaley is or is nearly perfect. The missing ingredient tends to be a focal point for the village or, for young people, somewhere to play and meet one's friends. As a linear village Slaley does not have a natural village centre. The nearest to it is the area near the post office. We are surrounded by countryside but young people commented that there is nowhere to play.

### **Section Three. The Wider Environment Around Us**

#### *General matters*

Everyone had positive things to say about the wider environment. The survey showed that knowledge about the countryside, opinions about the upkeep of footpaths, way markers and signs to places of interest is very variable. People working in rural industries, including forestry, commented that there was a level of ignorance about rights of way, how to behave when walking through the countryside and the 'country code'.

In general people want more done to take care of the wider environment. Opinions are divided on the need to improve footpaths and signage with a sizeable minority being unsure.

The benefits of *Slaley Hall* are contested. Some value the good golf and other facilities (if people can afford them) but others are unhappy. Most frequent criticisms involved noise, the effects of additional traffic, light pollution and too frequent firework displays. Fears were expressed about possible plans to increase the number of time-share properties.

### *Forests*

There was interest in protecting the forests. Key problems were given as litter and rubbish dumping, dog fouling, unexpected dangers from husky racing, off road vehicles including motorbikes and visitors' whose dogs are not on leads.

### *Roads*

The survey found that most households think Slaley's roads are in a fair to good condition. A sizeable minority strongly disagree. Specific spots were identified where work needs to be done. They are listed in detail in the report.

## **Section Four. The Community and Economy**

Slaley has several different neighbourhoods, age groups and identities depending on where people live, how long they have been here and interests/ages. A lot of work goes into keeping the community vibrant and many people contribute. There is a good local economy and much more could be done to promote it to visitors and locals.

The survey showed that there is considerable voluntary work ranging from formal volunteer committees to informal work such as the medicine run which brings people who need them essential prescriptions. The survey identified 12 people who would like to do voluntary work on top of the 72 who already do.

We have a plethora of community groups and friendly, kind neighbours. All of these make Slaley a pleasant place to live.

### *Communication*

However, communication is not straightforward. The survey found that people look everywhere for information on what is going on. Many people have computers and access to the Web. The survey

asked people to suggest methods to improve communication. Responses included, fewer and better notice boards, a widely circulated newsletter, a mobile phone mast a website for the community and, broadband access.

### *Our Parish Council*

The survey found that people are generally well informed about the work the Parish Council does and who represents them on the Parish Council.

### *Low cost housing for rent or sale*

The survey found that there is widespread support and interest in having low cost housing for rent or sale in Slaley. 40% of households see a need for housing for rent while 46% see a need for low cost housing for sale. Focus group discussions involving farming families and people in rural industries also referred to the need for such housing partly to encourage young people to stay here and carry on rural/farming work.

### *Supporting older and disabled people in the community*

The survey and focus discussions looked at several elements that would enable older people, disabled people and those caring for others to have better options for living independently in the community. In general the survey found that most of us have excellent access to health care and essential care services but access is not so good for people who do not have access to a car and/or whose mobility or ability to leave the home is restricted. The bus is a great boon but some older people commented that they need help to get to places and transport on its own is not enough.

The key findings were:

- People would like to do more to keep their mobility in older age
- There is a need for services that help people to live independently including advice and information on grants for adaptations, care and support services, domestic and gardening services, help preparing meals, social activities, help to get to social activities and respite care to give carers a break.

*Doing more to help others*

The survey found there is capacity in the local community to do more to help others. People offered a variety of skills that would make a difference including, cooking for frail older people, help with respite care and shopping, help to organise activities for young children, gardening.

*Leisure and learning interests*

Finally the survey asked what people were interested in learning or pursuing as leisure activities. The survey identified high levels of interest in local classes. Main barriers for people attending classes elsewhere are lack of childcare and costs. If classes were held in Slaley people said they were interested in many things from learning a language to sports coaching.

## **Section Five: Conclusions and Options for the Future**

Section five draws conclusions and summarises main messages.

## **Section Six: Slaley Parish Issues – Towards a Plan for the Future**

Section six organises issues arising from the research and considerations under seven main messages. These were intended to help focus the community's attention on the next steps.

The main messages are:

- Message 1 Slaley is special but can't stand still
- Message 2 We value the services and facilities we have but need more
- Message 3 There is a need to improve the opportunities for young people and families to live and work here
- Message 4 We want to protect & improve the environment we live in
- Message 5 We want to maintain and strengthen our community and local economy
- Message 6 Improving communications and how we come together
- Message 7 Protecting the wider environment around us.

## **Section Seven: The Action Plan**

Section seven introduces and sets out the Action Plan, which is recommended in response to the issues of greatest concern to the community. From these issues clear messages were defined. The Action Plan is set out under the seven message headings of section six but reordered to reflect views expressed in subsequent consultation.

It is an ambitious plan with both long and short-term objectives some of which may take up to 10 years to achieve. Some action is already underway. A key proposal is to establish a Community Trust, which will help resolve problems and keep the community looking to the future.

Importantly we make a number of recommendations for implementation, for we believe it is essential that the Action Plan complements the community role of the Parish Council, supports existing voluntary activity and widens community participation.