

Section One Background and Basic Facts



Slaley Millennium Cross

Background

The Parish Area

Slaley Parish Council area covers 4¹/₂ square miles. The Parish includes Slaley village and settlements such as, Colpitts, homes on the Wooley Road, Slaley Hall and Ladycross as well as small hamlets and farms.

Decision to develop a Parish Plan

The decision to develop a Parish Plan was stimulated by the closure of Slaley First School's grounds outside school hours to local children. In the past local children used the school playing field as their playground, football pitch and so on. Feelings ran very high about the closure. A public meeting was called by the Parish Council to hear everyone's views and to consider constructive ways forward. At the meeting it became clear that there was not an easy way to resolve matters. School Governors had been advised by the County Council to close the grounds.

A second public meeting was arranged to see how matters could best be resolved. A County Council speaker who came to address the second meeting referred to the opportunities that Slaley could take advantage of to draw in funds and resources that might help to provide extra facilities, for example, European funds. The best way to access such funds was to produce a village appraisal or Plan setting out the needs of people in the Parish area. Several villages in Northumberland had done this and the County Council was keen to encourage other villages to do the same.

Funding was available from the Countryside Agency Vital Villages Programme, which would help cover the costs. Everyone at the meeting, including children and young people, were given the opportunity to say what they thought was good about Slaley and what they thought were the main problems. Key problems were lack of safe play areas, lack of recreation and other facilities,

problems caused by speeding traffic, litter and dog fouling. At the end of the meeting it was decided to form a Parish Plan group and to apply for funds to develop a Parish Plan for Slaley.

A few volunteers led by Linda Norris, Chair of the Parish Council, formed a Steering Group for the Parish Plan (later called the Parish Plan group) and made an application. The application had to be supported by the Parish Council and the Steering Group had to estimate how much volunteer time and resources they would each give to match the funds they were asking for. The funding application was successful and the funds were passed to the Parish Council for the Parish Plan group by the Countryside Agency at the end of September 2002. The Parish Plan group has met ever since and will continue to meet until the autumn of 2003. The Parish Plan group reports regularly to the Parish Council on its progress.

What was done and why

It was decided to follow the approach taken by Bywell to develop their Parish Plan. Their approach was very participative and involved focus discussions and a survey as well as several opportunities for everyone in the community to comment on the plan as it developed. A topic guide was developed that would be used in all the Slaley focus discussions. A survey questionnaire was designed that would cover most of the same issues that were in the Bywell Plan but which also included issues that were important for Slaley. It was also decided to go a bit further than the Bywell approach and to include more focus discussions.

Focus groups

Eleven focus groups were subsequently held in Slaley. The focus group discussions were all organised, led and written up by members of the Parish Plan group. The focus groups were a way to capture a cross-section of interests and groups in the local community. The groups were:

- Children of Middle School age
- Church and Chapel users and people connected/interested in them
- Commemoration Hall Committee and Parish Council representatives

- Farmers, heritage, Slaley Hall management, forestry and rural interests
- First School parents
- Mothers and toddlers
- Older people
- Slaley Show Committee members
- Small businesses
- Young people (over middle school age)
- WI members

Survey Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire was delivered to and collected from all 259 households in the Parish.

Of the 259 households in Slaley Parish Council area 232 or just over 89% replied to the survey questionnaire. The survey replies covered a population of 585 people. If everyone had responded our guesstimate is that this would have involved around 640 people. Thus over 90% of the population were represented.

Overall, the response and participation rates (in focus groups) are extremely high.

The analysis work

The questionnaires were opened and computer analysed by a contractor in Hexham employed for the purpose. The focus group reports were collated (and analysed) by Moyra Riseborough. Moyra brought all the information together and wrote drafts of the report with the Group. (For more information on the methodology used in Slaley see the appendix.)