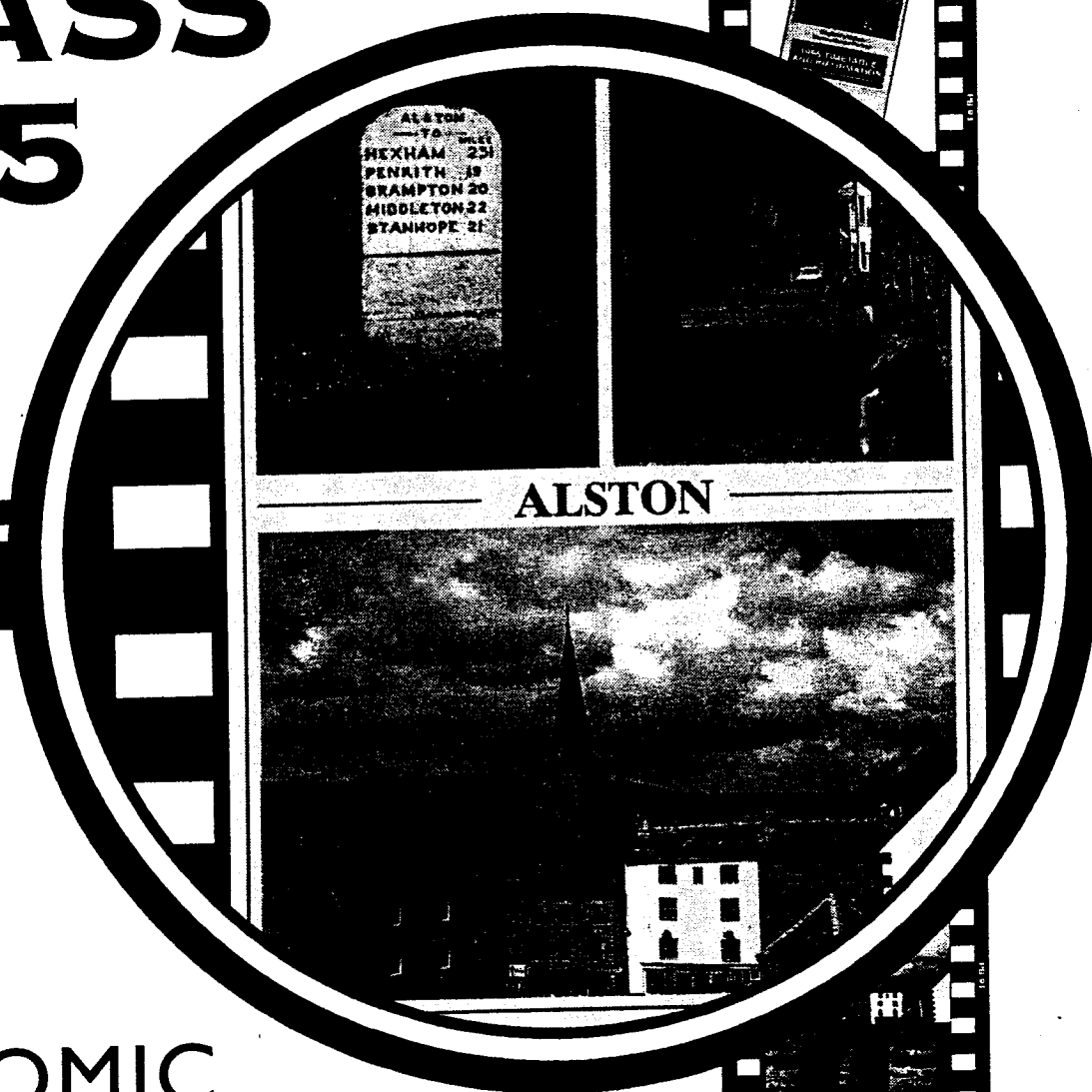


ALSTON MOOR THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS 1995



AN
ECONOMIC
APPRAISAL

FOREWORD

By world standards, Alston Moor is not a particularly remote or inaccessible place, nor disadvantaged in its climate or public services. Yet, in a British context, it is easy to portray it in this way. This is a big temptation to journalists. Editors seldom want articles stressing that ordinary people live contented lives in fairly ordinary places; so most of what we read vastly over-emphasises such factors as the likelihood of being cut off in winter - in fact a once-in-25-years' occurrence.

The truth about Alston Moor is better expressed in a comment by one of our very successful local businesses, Wildcat Films, " . . . a positive decision was made that the quality of life in the parish outweighed the disadvantages." Many incoming businessmen would echo this sentiment. We in Alston Moor relish the fact that we are in nobody's conurbation - the whole triple community is in one vast "greenfield site" - but businesses here are well placed to serve the whole of the North of England and Southern Scotland and, because of our very isolation, we have services of a standard that many larger towns might envy. Not that things could not be made, in many ways, even better, as this Appraisal indicates.

An appraisal such as this is an enormously useful tool in the hands of those seeking to influence or implement local policies that will decide our future. Although in the fifteen years since the last one we have lost several local services, there has been an overall gain. The Citizens' Advice Bureau, the taxi service, the Day Hospital, the veterinary practice, were all major gaps in what was available when the last Appraisal was produced. Long may this improving trend continue, to be recorded in the next Appraisal, in well under fifteen years!

Dick Phillips
Chairman
Alston Moor Parish Council.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this appraisal was dependent on the willingness of a variety of individuals to contribute in many cases large amounts of time to being interviewed. I would like to give my thanks to all those people I have interviewed during my research.

In particular, I would like to thank Jane Brantom, formerly of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership, for providing office space and support. Thanks also to Peter and Sonia Kempsey for their help and hospitality.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Aine Kelly is a self employed researcher: her company is called 'Aine Kelly Research in Planning and the Environment', and is based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She holds a B.Sc. Honours degree in geography, a postgraduate diploma in library and information studies, an M.A. degree in urban studies and a Masters in Town Planning (MTP) degree in town and country planning.

SPONSORS

Alston Moor Business Association gratefully acknowledges the support of the following organisations, without which this Appraisal would not have been possible:

Alston Moor Parish Council; Cumbria County Council; Cumbria TEC; Eden District Council;
Rural Development Commission.



PREFACE
by
The Chairman and Committee,
Alston Moor Business Association.

Fifteen years ago, when the Alston Foundry Company closed with the loss of 125 jobs and the future for the local economy looked bleak, Alston Moor Parish Council commissioned an appraisal to take stock of the situation and to provide a source of information to assist inward investment. The 1980 Appraisal researched all spheres of activity within the Parish, including comprehensive community consultation through a household questionnaire. As a stocktaking exercise it was not the intention that the first Appraisal should make recommendations or evolve a strategy for economic growth but, inevitably, the document uncovered a number of opportunities. The Parish Council recognised the need for a strategy and, in 1982, commissioned an Action Plan to pursue the opportunities identified in the Appraisal.

The Action Plan comprised four separate initiatives:

- A campaign to retain Development Area status which was due to be withdrawn;
- Measures to progress the provision of industrial workshops;
- Proposals to initiate a Townscheme in the Alston Conservation Area to invest in the historic fabric of the town;
- A programme of environmental improvements in the Parish to improve the quality of life and to encourage tourism.

Development Area status, with its preferential regime of grant assistance, was eventually discontinued as a national programme, so the first initiative in the Action Plan was destined not to succeed. However, the Parish of Alston Moor was included as a Rural Development Area within a subsequent initiative and has since been able to enjoy the benefits which this status confers.

The other three initiatives in the 1982 Action Plan have been successful: the campaign for workshops was the first step towards the recent development of workspace at Skelgillside; the Alston Townscheme invested £90,000 in the historic buildings of the town centre during the thirteen years it was in operation before being succeeded by the more ambitious Conservation Area Partnership Scheme; environmental improvements continue through the East Cumbria Countryside Project and the recently formed Town Enhancement Group.

Although the 1980 Appraisal did not introduce a major new employer to the parish, the Action Plan which followed achieved substantial investment and improvement which in turn has supported the local economy. It should be noted that this achievement was the result of locally-based initiative.

During the 1980s the community came to terms with the absence of any major new employer who could replace the Alston Foundry Company and in the first part of the decade a number of new businesses started, giving the impression of a more diverse economy. However, when the recession finally reached Alston Moor the local business community suffered as elsewhere, with widespread loss of employment. As the dust settles after the recession, it has become apparent that we are entering a longer-term decline in our traditional forms of employment. In common with the national trend there are fewer jobs in agriculture and mining. The local economy remains fragile.

It is against this background that the Alston Moor Business Association has formed an Economic Development Subcommittee, which includes representation from other community organisations. The Economic Development Subcommittee resolved to prepare a strategy which would aim to obtain maximum benefit from the unique opportunities in regional and national funding programmes for which Alston Moor will be eligible over the next five years. As a first step, the subcommittee commissioned this new Appraisal to take stock once again, to measure the extent of change over the fifteen years since the first study and to identify opportunities for economic growth.

This Appraisal is not an end in itself. It will form the basis of a new Action Plan which will seek to foster these opportunities with the objective of strengthening and broadening the Alston Moor economy. This objective may appear ambitious but this community has the advantage of a precedent; we are re-applying a formula that worked fifteen years ago.

We invite the readers of this document to support our present endeavours.

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Diagram 1

**Outline of the Parish
of Alston Moor**

Reproduced from 1980 Appraisal
by permission of P. Kempsey

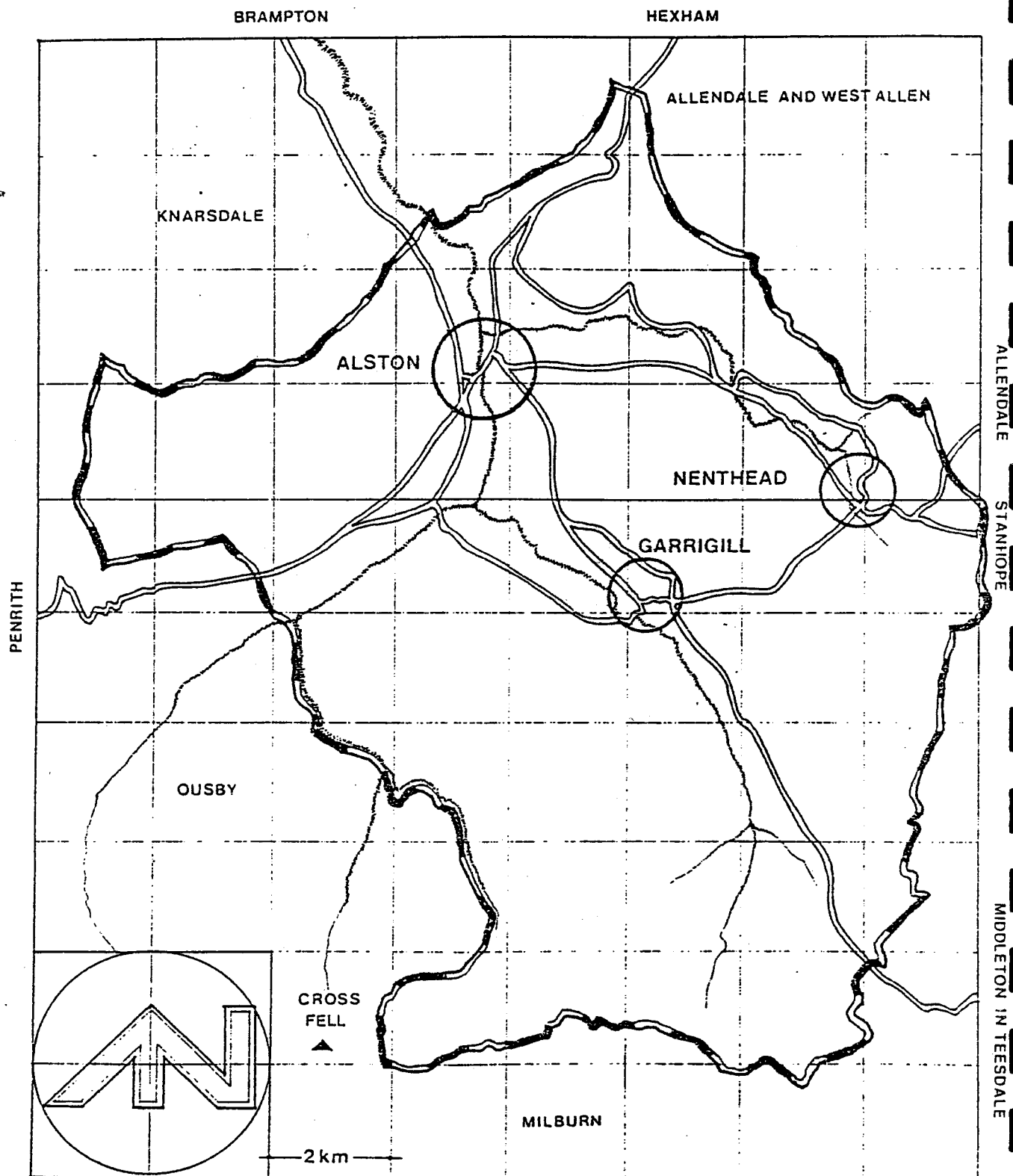
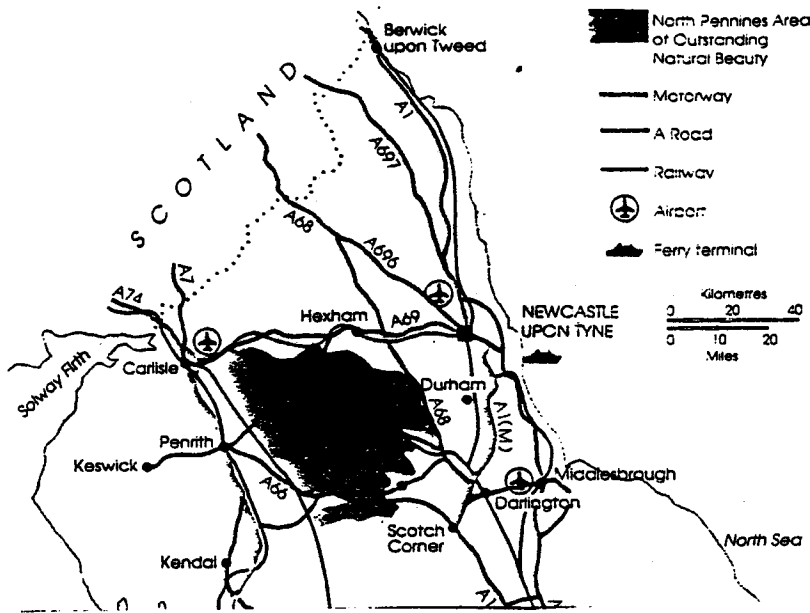


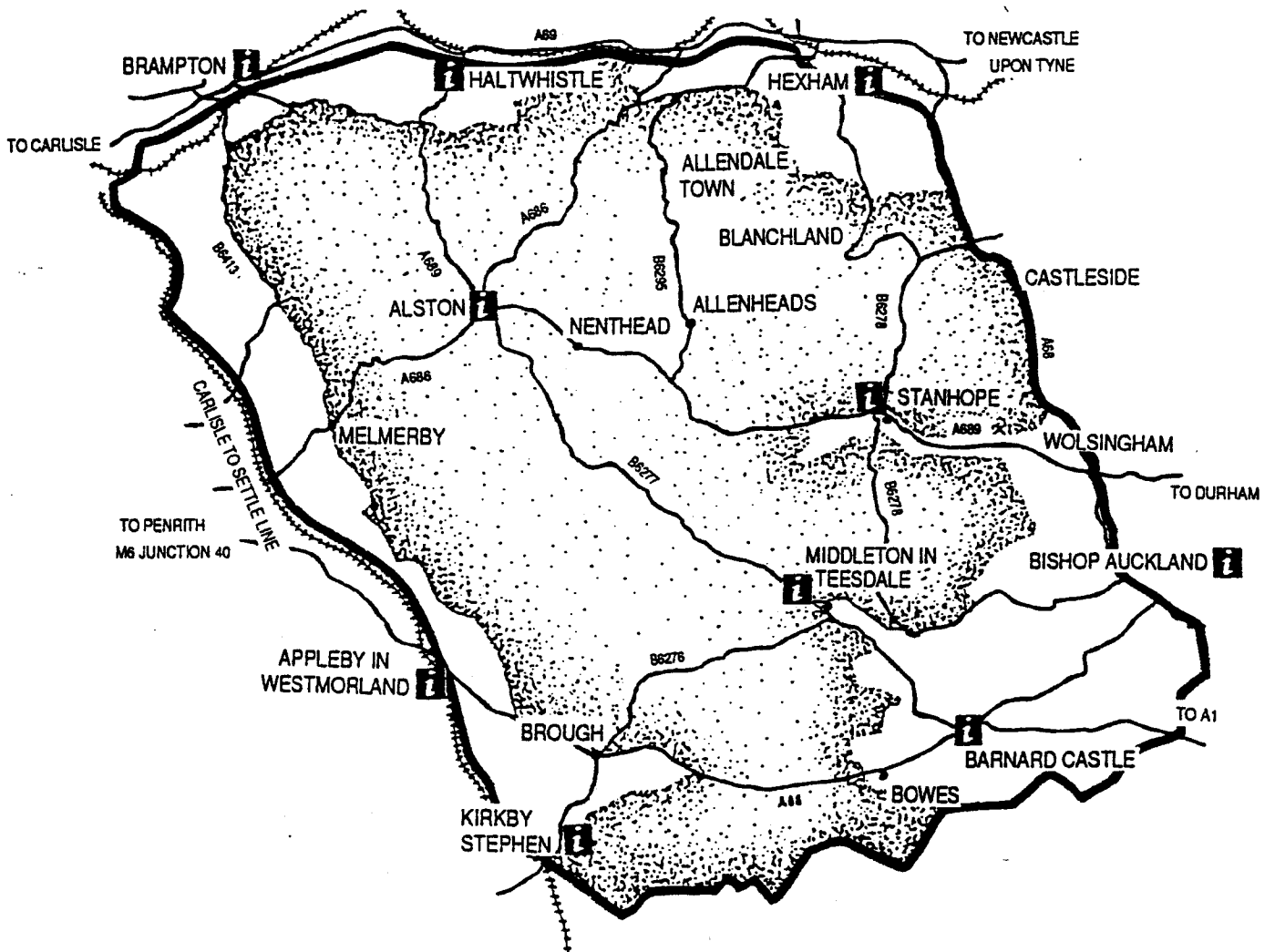
Diagram 2



Location of Alston Moor and North Pennines AONB

Reproduced by permission of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership

North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 Area of Partnership work



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

In June 1995, the Alston Moor Business Association appointed Aine Kelly, a self-employed researcher, to carry out a study of the parish of Alston Moor (diagrams 1 and 2 show the outline of the parish and its location). It was 15 years since an appraisal of the parish had been made (1), and the time was ripe for a second appraisal. Major social, environmental and economic changes had occurred within the parish and its context in Britain and Europe. It was time to take stock of the present and consider the future of Alston Moor.

The Business Association's Economic Development Sub-Committee organised the reappraisal, obtained support from the organisations listed on the front cover, and provided a brief. The work began in July 1995, and is expected to take three months.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Because this study is an update of an original appraisal, the content has a different focus. It is intended to pay less attention to basic descriptive information, but without detracting from the comprehensiveness of the study. Instead, a detailed treatment of the needs of the community and options for its future is feasible.

An appraisal is a snapshot of a community at a particular time. The data is only of value for a limited period. Appraisals therefore usually arise as a response to a circumstance. The 1980 appraisal (1) resulted from the need to attract alternative economic activity after the loss of the Alston Foundry, which was a large blow to the parish.

In 1995, the circumstance is less tangible. If anything, it is the desire not to lose out in the competition for scarce resources in the 1990s. Sources of support for rural communities are much more complex than in 1980, and there are many more of them. If the benefits of various funding opportunities are to be taken advantage of, there is pressure on all sectors of the parish community to become involved in the process of economic development. The appraisal therefore is intended to offer a clear view of all the needs and opportunities facing the parish before choices may be made.

An appraisal can fulfill a variety of functions. This one has five distinct purposes, as follows:

- To allow comparisons to 1980, which will provide some measurement of growth and decline, and enable trends to be measured
- To discover the concerns, and aspirations for the future, of a cross section of the people of the parish
- To act as a source of baseline data for use in bids for funding
- To provide some measure of social and economic need, and by adding an environmental dimension, assessing how growth may be accommodated without damaging the special qualities of Alston Moor.
- To act as a framework for an **action plan**, by providing guidelines which will inform the choice of steps to be taken.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study uses three methods, as follows:

1. A household questionnaire survey, distributed to all households in the parish. Problems in distribution to such a scattered population may mean that a few households have been missed. Local radio, the press and local posters promoted the survey. Spare copies of questionnaires were available at a number of points. The results of the survey are compiled in Appendix A.
2. An informal interview survey of people involved in the social, economic and environmental processes on Alston Moor (A list of organisations whose representatives were interviewed is included in Appendix B). Interview questions were unscheduled, to allow the widest possible exchange of information. Interviewees included:
 - members of the parish involved in decision making or development regarding the parish, and local service providers
 - officers of local government who are most intimately connected with the issues facing the parish
 - representatives of organisations involved in the area
3. A formal interview survey of 18 local businesses (listed in Appendix C). A scheduled set of questions was asked, in order to ensure comparability of the responses. The number of businesses in the parish was too high to undertake full coverage of all local businesses in the time available, so a random sample was made. It was intended to include all the larger businesses plus a random cover of the remainder.

There has been a reasonable response rate to the household questionnaire, namely 22% of households. This is in line with other comprehensive surveys in the parish. The 1980 appraisal had a slightly higher response rate, at 31%, but this was just after the closure of Alston Foundry, and the response was considered excellent by the Kempseys (the

appraisal authors). The housing needs survey in 1990 (2) achieved a response rate of about 20%.

Respondents were required to drop their completed questionnaires off at local post offices. A delivery and collection in person is likely to have achieved a higher response, but would have involved large amounts of volunteer labour, which was not available. The nature of the response means that there may be some danger of bias. For example, a very low number of unemployed people (6.8%) and a high number of retired people (29.1%) returned their questionnaires. The responses are very valuable to the appraisal, but some caution must be exercised in extrapolating to the whole population.

OUTLINE OF THE APPRAISAL

The appraisal will take the following structure:

- An assessment of the characteristics which make Alston Moor special will complete this introduction.
- There follows an examination of the major factors influencing the parish. Firstly, social factors of population, housing and parish services and facilities are discussed.
- Next environmental factors - management of built environment and countryside, traffic and transport, are studied.
- Economic and employment issues are then examined.
- The current projects and proposals which are in the pipeline or are underway are discussed.
- The key issues in the parish are identified. Options for the future of Alston Moor are then evaluated, and a set of guidelines are suggested as a basis for an action plan.

WHAT MAKES ALSTON MOOR SPECIAL?

The starting point of this appraisal is to identify the elements of Alston Moor which give the parish an identity and are fundamental to its special character. Many of these elements cannot be replaced and should therefore be protected.

Isolation

The isolation of the parish of Alston Moor is due to a combination of topography, climate and remoteness. These factors are examined more thoroughly in the 1980 appraisal (1). Diagram 3 clearly indicates the nature

of the topography and the quality of remoteness. Alston town lies at the convergence of several roads, one of which is a major route (A686) from the Tyne Valley to Cumbria. This road is very winding and crosses high moorland - up to 471 metres to the north and 566 metres to the south at Hartside. The distance of Alston from nearest towns is 19 miles from Penrith and 21 miles from Hexham.

The influence of climate appears to be dwindling, since the severity of winter weather has ameliorated over recent years. The roads to Alston can still get blocked by snow, but this has been rare of late¹, and blockages are relatively quickly cleared. But Alston Moor's isolation is a cultural characteristic as well as physical - the official guide to Alston Moor (3) says that "This element of isolation and independence is written deep into the history of Alston Moor". External perceptions of the parish are that it is more cut off than it really is. The end result is that isolation is very much a distinguishing feature of the parish.

The effects of isolation will be glimpsed throughout this appraisal. They are good and bad. For example, Alston Moor's peripherality to markets makes it hard to attract economic activity. The parish has not experienced the influx of commuters which has increased the vitality and viability of more accessible rural communities in Britain but which has also had numerous drawbacks, eg. inflated house prices and unbalanced communities.

Centrality

Alston Moor is not often associated with the characteristic of centrality. Considering the isolation of the parish, describing it as central would seem initially to be paradoxical. Yet it is probably as central as one could find in terms of the geography of Great Britain (ie. England, Scotland and Wales). This characteristic could well be made more of in promoting the area for all kinds of economic activity. For the tourist, the parish offers a centre from which to explore Northumberland and the Lakes, as well as the North Pennines. Firms can benefit from the proximity to both Western and Eastern markets. The centrality of Alston Moor may not be of overriding economic importance, but it is of interest because it is a unique characteristic.

Environmental features

Much of the landscape of Alston Moor is typical of the North Pennines - bleak moorland plateau and high fells, covered with blanket bog. The area is used extensively for sheep grazing, with grouse moors a feature of the heather moorland. But the valley landscape of the parish is distinctive: to

¹ Source: Evidence from interviews

quote from the landscape conservation policy document for the North Pennines:

"In the Alston area within the Pennine 'massif', the long, high valleys of the S. Tyne and its offshoots, the Nent and the Black Burn lie above the 800 ft contour and form the only true N. Cumbrian 'dales' landscape."(4)

The South Tyne and Nent valleys are characterised by strong field patterns of grassland, interspersed with small areas of woodland. Such a juxtaposition of green valleys and high moorland produces a landscape of considerable beauty. The area is particularly rich in wildlife. The landscape in the South Tyne and Nent valleys is also special historically, as it has been shaped by lead miners who were also farmers, and tended to enclose small fields with stone walls, often high up the hillsides.

Townscape

The townscapes of Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill, although distinct from each other, are similar in that the historic fabric and the patterns of streets and spaces between buildings combine to evoke a strong sense of place and historic identity. The relationship between architecture and local factors - the harsh climate and the availability of building materials - is unusually apparent.

In Alston, the steeply sloping main street and narrow winding side streets give an interesting urban and distinctive character. Nenthead has a particular pattern of development due to its leadmining past, with a separation of houses from the through road, where leadmining activity used to be located. Garrigill is a more traditionally pretty village, based around an extensive green. Such variety of townscape is a special feature of the parish.

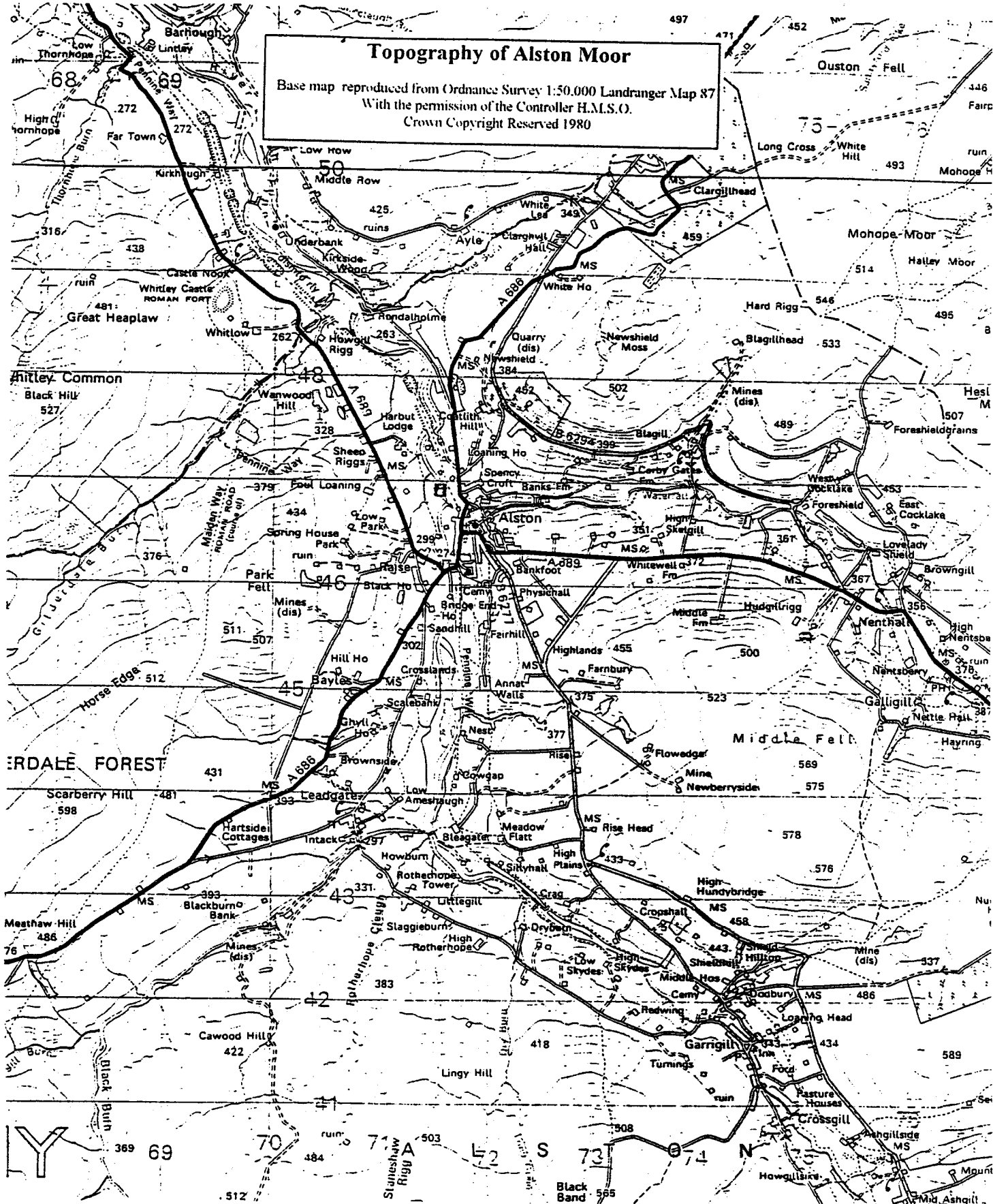
Compact nature of the built environment

None of the three main settlements of the parish have been developed on the edges to any large extent, and their physical compactness and size provide a clear sense of identity. In Alston the ability to walk the central area, the strong coherence of architecture and the pockets of neighbourhoods within easy walking distance of the core of the town combine to reinforce the impression of compactness.

Shops and services

The range of shops and services in the parish is an essential part of the parish's special character. This variety results from the isolation of the parish and the resulting need for a high degree of self-sufficiency. In an era when rural facilities generally have declined considerably, and dependence on the car is increasing, the range of facilities in Alston Moor gives the parish an independence which should not be eroded or lost.

Diagram 3



SECTION 2

PEOPLE AND POPULATION

TOTAL POPULATION

The census of population (Office of Population, Censuses & Surveys (OPCS)) shows that in 1991 there were **2065** residents in Alston Moor. Since the census of 1981, there have been two counts of total population - 'Present' and 'Resident'. 'Present' refers to those actually in Alston Moor on census night (including visitors), while 'Resident' refers to those judged usually resident in Alston Moor. The difference between the two is probably small in Alston Moor, since census night is in April, when there is likely to be very few visitors. However there may be a slight discrepancy when comparing figures between 1971-1991, as the figure for 1971 will refer to the 'Present' figure.

The 1980 appraisal (1) could not have the benefit of 1981 census statistics, and had to rely on 1971 figures, along with electoral roll data, which is not comparable. However, by supplementing this data with school roll figures, the Kempseys were able to identify an increase in population since 1971. Diagram 4 shows that 1981 and 1991 figures would confirm this rise, and that the rise has been sustained, though slight. In 1971, therefore, population figures hit an all-time low, perhaps the continuing result of the closure of the lead mines, and the decline was thereafter halted. That this increase in population has been sustained after the closure of Alston Foundry in 1980 is particularly encouraging.

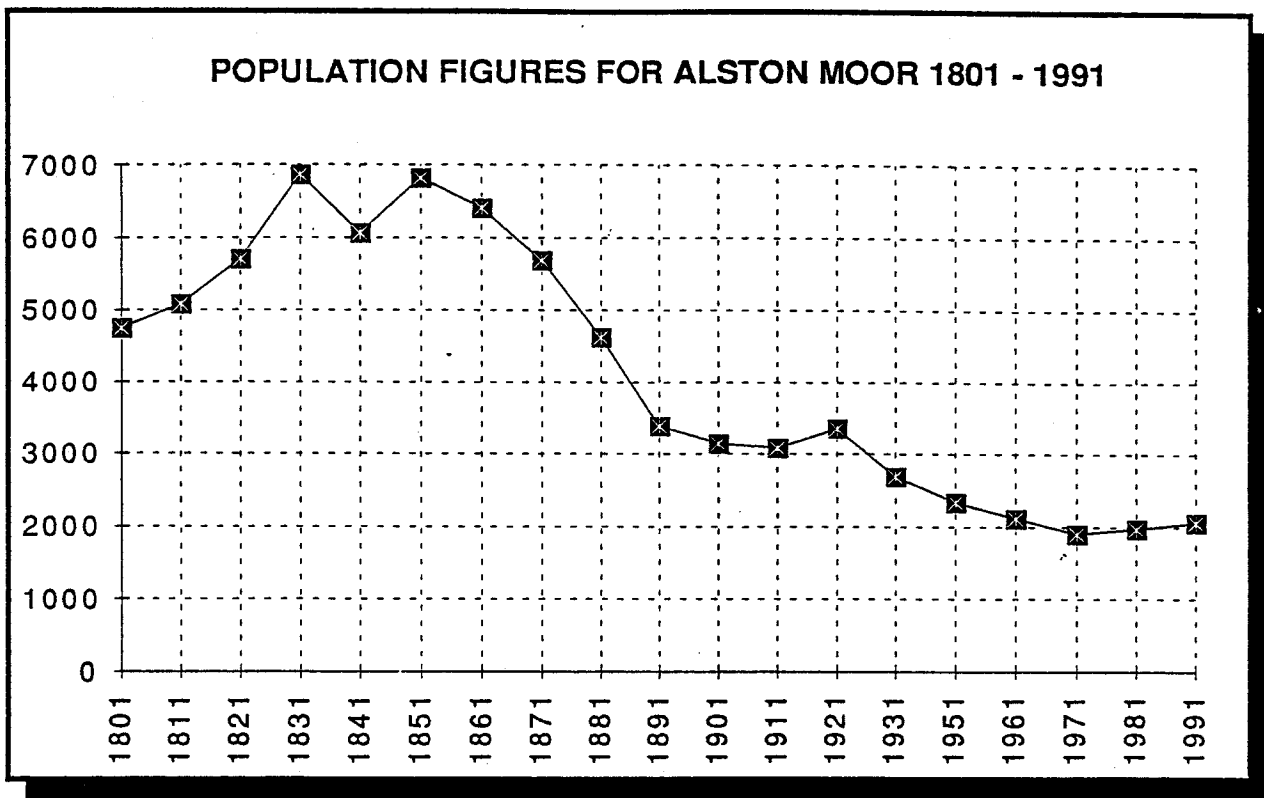
The tables below give census figures for the population between 1971 and 1991, and the percentage growth between the census decades. It should be noted however that census figures are based on the ward of Alston Moor, and this is very slightly different to the parish area. The difference is insignificant in relation to population.

Table 1: Population of Alston Moor 1971-1991

<i>Year</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>
Population	1902	1932	2065

Source: OPCS

Diagram 4



Source: OPCS, Corporate Information Unit

Table 2: Percentage Change 1961-1991			
Year	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91
Percentage change	-09.35	+1.6	+6.9

Source: OPCS

The numbers of households have also increased between 1981 and 1991. In 1981 there were 766 households, and this had risen to 835 enumerated households in 1991. In 1991, data began to be imputed (ie estimated from the evidence collected) for the first time. 16 households were imputed in 1991, which is a relatively high figure. It may be best for the purposes of comparison to look at only the enumerated figure, in which case the percentage growth of households between 1981 and 1991 was 9%. This high rate of growth may be attributed to smaller household size.

AGE STRUCTURE

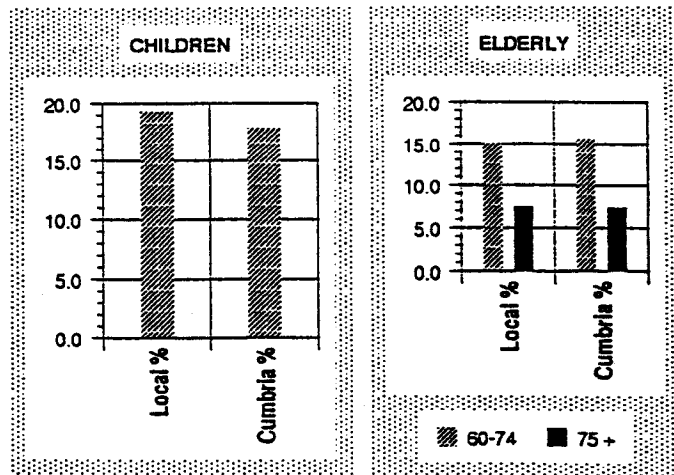
The 1980 appraisal (1), using evidence from the 1971 census, found that there was a relatively high proportion of elderly in the parish and a low proportion of the groups between 15-44. These imbalances now seem to have evened out, and the age structure charts below show that there has been a significant increase in the economically active groups between 15-69. In 1971, there was only 34% in the 30-69 age groups, compared to 37% in 1981 and 39.3% in 1991. The 60-74 group has declined slightly, but there are slightly more over 75s.

Also, although actual numbers have risen, the **proportion** of children in the population has declined significantly since 1971, when the proportion of 0-14 year olds was 22.5%. In 1991 it was 19.2%. The decreased dependency ratio is good news for the economy. The age range in Alston Moor now shows broad similarity with the age range for Cumbria, except for a slightly higher percentage of children in Alston Moor and a lower percentage of 15-29 year olds (see also diagram 5).

<i>Table 3: Age Structure</i>						
	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-29</i>	<i>30-44</i>	<i>45-59</i>	<i>60-74</i>	<i>75-</i>
1981 %	20	20	20	17	17	6
1991 %	19.2	18.9	20.4	18.9	14.9	7.5
Cumbria 1991 %	17.8	20.6	20.9	17.6	15.6	7.4

Source: OPCS

Diagram 5 Age Structure



Source: OPCS, Corporate Information Unit

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

The evidence from the electoral rolls supports the census evidence of recent population growth. But it must be remembered that electoral roll data is not comparable with census data as it does not include non-electors eg. children, foreign nationals. However it does provide a useful source of data at a level below that of ward.

Table 4 below provides data from the electoral rolls regarding population change in the major settlements in the parish between the years 1984 -1994 (1994 is the year of the most recent electoral roll statistics available) What is interesting is that the growth is not even. Both Garrigill and Nenthead have increased their populations significantly, whilst Alston's population has very slightly declined. This growth pattern has implications for the provision of services, which will be discussed in Section 4. A further factor of relevance for services is that an estimated 250 people in the Ayle/Slaggyford area of Northumberland, which is outside the parish, depend on Alston for services.

<i>Table 4: Population Distribution</i>		
<i>Year</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1994</i>
Garrigill	181	231
Nenthead	308	331
Alston	1114	1090

LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

Many rural communities have seen an influx of new residents in recent years, while local families have declined. But the census unfortunately does not provide information on length of residence. The 1980 appraisal (1) ascribed the population growth trend to "an influx of incomers rather than local people staying in the area". Anecdotal evidence from interviews would tend to support this assumption. Evidence from the questionnaire may be unreliable on this matter, due to the low response rate. However, the results show that 75.5% have lived in Alston Moor for over 5 years, and only 6.3% moved in during the previous year (see table 5 below).

<i>Table 5: Length of residence in Alston Moor (Questionnaire Results)</i>		
<i>Length of residence</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
0-1 years	12	6.3
1-3 years	19	10.0
3-5 years	13	6.8
Over 5 years	95	50.2
All respondent's life	48	25.3

SECTION 3

HOUSING

Housing is an extremely important issue for small rural communities, as the availability of housing affects the make-up of the population, and this in turn has an impact on the use of local services such as public transport, shops and schools. But the availability of housing can change very rapidly, and depends on government policy, the housing market and the economic situation, among other variables.

At present housing seem to be fairly well provided on Alston Moor, although there may be some gaps in provision. In the following, it is intended to examine housing conditions and availability under the various types of property, using data from the household questionnaire survey and from interviews. Housing need changes very quickly, and the last housing needs survey was carried out in 1990 (2). Since then, a local group of young people have conducted their own evaluation of housing provision. But without a full current housing needs survey, the appraisal process can only point to the key issues, and identify indicators of need. There may be a need for further research into specific housing issues, which will be discussed in the following.

DWELLING OWNERSHIP AND CONDITIONS

Table 6 shows the proportions of types of dwelling ownership on Alston Moor compared to Cumbria, in 1991². The proportion of owner occupied housing is lower than Cumbria's, and there is a higher proportion of private rented accommodation, which may reflect the lower level of affluence on Alston Moor. However, the percentage of owner occupied housing (66.3%) has increased in Alston Moor since the 1981 census, when the figure was 57%.

² Source: 1991 Census of Population

<i>Table 6: Type of ownership 1991</i>			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Alston Moor %</i>	<i>Cumbria %</i>
Owners/mortgagers	555	66.3	70.1
Council rented	163	19.5	16.6
Housing Authority	5	0.6	3.8
Private rented	77	9.2	7.0
Rented with job/ business	37	4.4	2.5

Source: OPCS

Table 7 below, again using data from the 1991 census, gives a comparison of levels of housing amenities between Alston Moor and Cumbria. Alston Moor has a higher level of centrally heated dwellings than Cumbria, and fewer dwellings with no inside WC. These amenities are probably more crucial in the exposed climate of Alston Moor! The last two statistics referring to overcrowding and lacking a bath or WC, on which Alston Moor compares badly with Cumbria, are pointers to the relative deprivation of Alston Moor, although the numbers involved are very small.

<i>Table 7: Housing Amenities 1991</i>			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Alston Moor %</i>	<i>Cumbria %</i>
With central heating	650	77.7	74.0
With no inside WC	2	0.2	0.6
Overcrowding	4	0.5	0.2
Sharing/lacking bath or WC	18	2.2	1.2

Source: OPCS

There is a large amount of derelict property in the parish, and the 1991 census tells us that the rate of vacant property was higher in 1991 than Cumbria's, at 7.6% compared to 4.7%. Much of the private property in the Alston Conservation Area (page 38) is in need of structural and external repair (5).

LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING

In August 1995, there were 123 council properties in Alston, 4 in Garrigill and 16 in Nenthead. 66 council properties in Alston are houses or bungalows, 45 are flats or bedsits, and 12 are sheltered units. Those in Nenthead include 6 houses and 10 flats. All 4 in Garrigill are houses. Due to the Government's Right to Buy, the stock has dwindled since 1980, when there was a total of 230 properties in the parish (1). But it is still in generous supply.

The Firs in Alston, is the biggest council development, with 75 houses. The older part was built between 1945 to 1955, with an extension built in 1975. Jolly Beard Estate, also in Alston, is the second largest, built in 1969, with 29 houses. According to a housing officer at Eden District Council, there is very low demand for council housing at present in Alston, and the Council can usually offer accommodation in less than 12 months. Accommodation for the elderly is in good supply according to interviewees.

It is possible for tenants to buy all types of council property except for old peoples' bungalows: it is council policy not to sell these. The tenant has to live in the property for two years, and then qualifies for a Right to Buy discount, which is 32% on a house and 44% on a flat. This is an attractive option if the tenant can afford it, but take-up of the Right To Buy in this area has not been high, relative to other areas in the district, despite valuations being generally lower than in other areas in the district.

The condition of council property is generally very good. All of the property has now been modernised except for the Church Road flats in Alston, which are due for refurbishment next year. Those houses which have been modernised have usually been done to a very high standard, particularly of insulation. For example, windows have been double glazed, walls cavity filled, and in some cases porches added. Due to the condition of bricks on the Jolly Beard Estate, the walls have had to be externally dry-lined, at a cost of £300,000.

HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Two Castles is the only housing association with property in Alston Moor. Two Castles has built Nent Court at Nenthead (6x2-bedroomed flats) and a new development at Jolly Beard Gate. The latter development consists of three phases. Phase 1 consists of 6x2-bedroomed flats and 4x2-bedroomed houses. Phase 2 comprises 4x2-bedroomed houses and 4x3-bedroomed houses. Outline planning permission has been given for an unspecified further development (Phase 3) on the SW corner of the former Airey housing site. Nent Court was built for the elderly but is now in mixed occupation, reflecting the lack of demand from the elderly.

The houses in Phase 2 at Jolly Beard Gate are available on a shared equity basis, ie. part purchase/ part rent, but it has been hard to interest people in them, and three houses are still unsold. Because they were government funded, Two Castles have been unable to transfer their use to rented property, despite the fact that they may be easier to rent.

Unfortunately, the failure to fill them may prejudice any decision on the part of the housing association to build more property of any kind in the area. Further housing research, as suggested above, may help to justify building more property for rent, if a need is identified.

PRIVATE RENTED

The private rented sector in Alston Moor is an important and large sector. Alston Moor is unusual in relation to the rest of Eden district in having such a significant private rented sector. It provides a source of temporary accommodation which is affordable to those who cannot or do not wish to buy property. There is a lot of private rented property in the parish because of the depression in the housing market - owners who can't sell are forced to rent out their properties. There are also many second home owners who rent out their holiday homes for part of the year.

According to Clarks, the estate agency in Alston, who also act as a letting agency, there is a large market for low cost rented accommodation, which outstrips supply. There are not enough properties in the cheaper price range to let. This may seem a paradox when related to the lack of demand for local authority housing. But council property rents, although still low, have gone up over recent years and it may be that rents in the private rented sector are often cheaper than council or Housing Association rents.

Thus the demand for further cheap private rented property may represent the most significant gap in terms of housing provision, and its existence has been supported by several interviewees. This issue of affordability in rents may require further research, and such research could be considered for inclusion in the action plan following on from this appraisal. Such research could identify accommodation which is suitable for conversion to private rented property, such as vacant space over shops, and could explore the possibility of grants from Eden District Council for landlords bringing accommodation into private rented use.

OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING

As mentioned above, there is a depressed housing market on Alston Moor. House prices are low, and there is a lot of property for sale. Because properties have been cheap in the parish for some time (probably since the '70s), this may have been a factor in attracting people to move in to the area. Prices have fallen considerably in recent years, and there is a lot of property going at under £40,000. This may mean that there is not a substantial need for building new low cost housing to buy. But further research would be valuable in quantifying the issue.

There have been four allocations by Eden District Council of new housing land in Alston. Two allocations at Garrigill and one at Nenthead have been made, but these are quite

small, with a total of 15 dwellings estimated at Garrigill and 5 at Nenthead. In Alston, the allocations are as follows:

The Raise	63 dwellings
Jolly Beard Lane	38 dwellings
The Raise Park	12 dwellings
Bruntley Meadows	30 dwellings (Phase 2)

None of these allocations hold planning permission, except for Bruntley Meadows. Bruntley Meadows is being developed by "Design and Build" on a plot by plot basis, and planning permission is being obtained for individual plots.

Eden District deposit draft local plan (6) under policy 3.37 allows abandoned housing in the countryside to be renovated in Alston Moor, contrary to the district's usual policy of restriction. There has not been a high take-up, only occasional requests for planning permission.

Somewhat surprisingly, the questionnaire results show that the category of housing which most people experienced difficulties in obtaining was low cost housing to buy (24 responses). 14 people said they had found it difficult to obtain low cost private rented accommodation. Most of those who had difficulty obtaining accommodation of any kind ticked more than one category. These figures reflect the conclusions drawn above - namely that there is a need for more low cost accommodation, but housing demand generally is fairly well-supplied. It may be valuable if further research on housing issues includes an assessment of the availability and demand for low cost housing.

HOUSE RENOVATION GRANTS

House renovation grants are available to owner occupiers from the Department of the Environment, administered by the District Council. Since 1994, these grants have been reduced to a maximum of £20,000, minus VAT and the council's own costs, which can bring the sum available down to £14,500. The grants are means tested, and a contribution from the owner towards the cost of the improvements is assessed. There is a waiting list for these grants, and this may be a serious problem to those who cannot afford to renovate a house themselves, and have to live in very poor conditions until the grant is available.

There are a few other sources of grant aid for home owners, but these are much smaller, eg. discretionary renovation grants of up to £5,000, and disabled facilities grants.

SECOND HOMES

The 1980 (1) appraisal contains a full discussion of the issue of second homes in the parish, which it is not intended to reiterate here. Garrigill is identified as having the largest

problem of second home ownership, leading to a decline in resident population, loss of services etc. It is interesting that the electoral rolls show a significant increase of population in Garrigill since 1984 (page 15) and this may mean that the problem is no longer so great.

Census information shows that there has been an increase from 126 second and holiday homes in 1981 to 142 in 1991. According to Clarks the estate agency, this increase is the result of low property prices during the late 80s and early 90s.

SECTION 4

PARISH SERVICES AND FACILITIES

With increasing mobility, there is less dependence nationally in rural areas on local services and facilities. The need to maintain local services and facilities is particularly great in Alston Moor because of the isolation of the parish and the difficulty of those without access to private transport to reach larger centres of population.

This section is a very broad one, covering a wide range of topics, including education, health, shops, social and recreational facilities, among others. It is indicated in some areas that more detailed research is required.

4.1 EDUCATION

There are three schools in the parish: Alston Primary School, Nenthead Primary School and Samuel King's School, which is a secondary school. Questionnaire results indicate a high level of satisfaction with all these schools. The figures for responses indicating dissatisfaction are the most telling: 6 people were unsatisfied with Alston Primary School, 8 were unsatisfied with Nenthead Primary School, and 8 were unsatisfied with Samuel King's School.

ALSTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

The school roll is rising rapidly and currently stands at 194. This compares to 160 in 1980 (1). The headmaster believes this increase to be due to more families moving in to Alston, and an increasing birth rate. There are 7 classes in the school, with 9 teachers, and class sizes range from 25 to 32. There is no nursery class: the lack of nursery education will be discussed under provision for the under 5s on page 29.

The school, like most, has budget problems, and transport is a particular problem, with 60% of the children bussed in. Also, the encouraging growth in numbers, although ensuring the school's viability, poses problems of lack of space in such a physically small school.

NENTHEAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

There is rather a different story at Nenthead. Here, the school roll has fallen to 28 from a fairly consistent figure of around 40 (1). The headmaster relates this loss to the housing situation, with people moving out of rented property, often to Alston. The difficulty with

such a small school roll is that it is very sensitive to minor changes. For example, if a family of three move out of the catchment area, this will make a significant difference to school numbers. Similarly, small numbers of families deciding to educate their children at home has a big impact on such a small school. The present low roll may prove to be an unfortunate fluctuation (numbers ranged between 30 and 57 in the 1980s (6)) but there would be a threat to the school's survival if numbers continue to fall.

In 1989, there was a threat to the continuation of the school when Cumbria County Council was considering (as part of a debate over the future of secondary education in Alston Moor) a middle school system for the parish. This proposal was shelved, and the threat disappeared. A convincing case for the retention of the school was at the time put forward by the 'Nenthead School Action Committee'(7), which was evidence of very strong community support for the school. Although some parents may prefer to send their children to the larger school at Alston, this survey found that very few actually did.

Nenthead Primary School has two teachers, having recently lost a part-time teacher. The school has serious budgetary problems due to falling rolls. This affects the ability of the school to provide extra equipment such as computers and transport to extra activities.

SAMUEL KING'S SCHOOL

Samuel King's School is still the smallest secondary comprehensive school in the country, as it was at the time of the 1980 appraisal (1), but may not remain so for long. It is one of the fastest growing schools in the county at secondary level. Numbers of pupils have now reached 126, from a figure of 73 in 1990. The roll was reported to be 196 by the 1980 appraisal (1), but at the time there was a sixth form included.

The school was targetted for closure in 1988, when there was a move to rationalising education county-wide. A middle school system was also suggested at the time, as already mentioned above. In the end, the school remained open, but the sixth form was closed. The age range of the school is now 11-16, and pupils do Key Stage 3 at Years 7, 8 and 9, and Key Stage 4 (GCSE) at Years 10 and 11. The school now has 14 teachers, 6 full-time and 8 part-time. Half of these live locally, while the other half travel in, mainly from the Cumbrian side.

Rising numbers reflect the rising population of the parish, but also a more positive attitude of parents towards the school. Some pupils have older siblings who were sent to school elsewhere. In 1994, when there was a particularly high year intake (34), only two children of the relevant age in the parish were sent to a school other than Samuel Kings.

The school is delighted with this year's excellent GCSE results. Unfortunately, statistics for Cumbria and national statistics will not be available until November, and will be too late for this report. 1994 figures are substituted for some comparison.

<i>Table 8: GCSE Results Samuel King's School</i>			
	<i>SamuelKings (1995)</i>	<i>% Cumbria % (1994)</i>	<i>National)% (1994)</i>
5 or more GCSE A-C	62	43.4	43.3
5 or more GCSE A_G	96	86.9	85.6

There have been major changes in the school since 1980. The school's participation in the national Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) produced extra funding and had a strong impact on teaching styles throughout the school, for example in the development of more child centred learning processes. There have been important building changes, including the establishment of excellent facilities for technology, and the installing of energy efficiency measures.

The loss of the sixth form was a major blow, but the sixth form might not have been viable under local management of schools in any case. 16-year olds who wish to continue their education (the vast majority do) have a choice of several establishments to attend - all involving long daily journeys. The most popular are William Howard School in Brampton, and Carlisle College. Some go to Newton Rigg Agricultural College, beyond Penrith, and some to Haydon Bridge. A significant development this year is the introduction of a free bus service provided by Carlisle College, which will link the parish to Brampton and Carlisle. Members of the public will also be able to make use of this bus. The main disadvantage is the timing. A pupil living at Nenthead will have to catch the bus at 7.30am, and will not return to Nenthead until 6.15pm.

Transport is a constant problem of Samuel King's School. The school has no minibus, so has to rely on hiring buses from Wrights, the local bus operators. It is difficult to attract outside groups, eg. employers for careers talks, theatrical groups, other schools' sports teams, to make the journey to Alston, so the school usually has to find transport to engage in many extra activities. In a small isolated community, these sorts of horizon-widening activities are particularly valuable. Some form of shared minibus, possibly a community resource, may be a solution to this problem, which will be discussed further.

The headteacher is keen on encouraging community use of the school. A GNVQ is offered in Health and Social Care. In the evening the school is well used for adult education (see below). Restrictions on classroom space is a limiting factor for daytime courses.

ADULT EDUCATION

A relatively low number of parish residents who responded to the questionnaire (14.2%) felt that there is a lack of choice in adult education. The parish has a small centre for adult

education, funded by the Adult Education Service of the County Council and the Further Education Funding Council. Classes are held in Samuel King's School and in the Town Hall. Ten courses were offered this term, and four are running. Common problems are finding tutors for requested subjects, and completing numbers to fill the courses. Access to computers limits the potential to run computing courses, for which a large demand exists³.

The Workers Educational Association provide a successful series of courses for people considering a return to education or employment. The basic course is entitled "Return to Learn" and is essentially motivational. It has a wide range of elements, from communication skills to confidence building. The first course was run in 1992, with a group of about 10, all of whom either went on to obtain work or to further study. A follow-up course was subsequently run, entitled "Women - Time for a Change". A second "Return to Learn" course is starting in September. The course is free, and free childcare is provided. The course is for both genders, but only women attended the last one.

This kind of course is extremely significant to the economic development of the parish. Firstly, it is a valuable form of locally provided training, notably lacking in the community (see page 54), and secondly it gives people the confidence and motivation they may need to eventually become economically active.

HEALTH

Health facilities are provided in a central building comprising the Alston Cottage Hospital and the Alston Medical Practice. The hospital has 13 beds, and one maternity bed (there are about 10 deliveries a year at this hospital). Nursing care and terminal care is provided at the hospital, and the medical practice provides 24 hour medical cover and casualty. The hospital provides treatment and day care for the elderly as a day hospital. The hospital also provides chiropody, physiotherapy and dental services.

Hospital cars are available to take local residents to hospital in Penrith or elsewhere, for example for specialist appointments. A small pre-fabricated building has been built recently in the hospital grounds for those with Alzheimers disease although users now include anyone with some form of confusion. The service is run by the Alzheimers Society.

The medical practice is run by two GPs, who provide 24 hour cover without the use of a deputising service. Normal surgeries are held without an appointment system, and extra services include well-woman, antenatal, elderly and diabetic clinics, minor surgery and ultrasound scanning. The GPs also run clinics three times a week at Nenthead and once weekly at Garrigill. District nurses, a health visitor and three community midwives are all attached to the practice. There are 2,300 patients on the list.

In addition, the GPs cover road accidents. There is an agency ambulance service, but no trained paramedic - the ambulance crew are volunteers with basic training who receive an honorarium. The medical practice has equipped the ambulance and provided training, with

³ Source: Evidence from interviews

help from an outside instructor. This ambulance service is vital because an ambulance from Penrith could take 40-50 minutes to arrive. But the service depends on local people being prepared to take on the role of volunteer.

The above description is testimony to the breadth and quality of local health services and facilities. 90% of questionnaire respondents were satisfied with the medical services in the parish. Due to the isolation of the parish, the high quality of services is particularly important. The rising population hopefully means that these services are likely to survive.

MENTAL HEALTH

The extent of mental health problems is particularly difficult to discover in a close knit community like Alston Moor, according to the organisation MIND. People with problems may do their best to hide them because of the risk of being talked about. The same reason makes it difficult also to provide means of help. The organisation MIND ran a drop in information centre but this closed due to low uptake of the service. As listed above, a psychiatric nurse is available part-time at the medical practice, but a MIND representative believed that people may not know this service is available. MIND is now offering help with meeting public transport costs for those wishing to travel to their Penrith service.

One of the best ways of helping those with mental health problems is probably by improving services and facilities generally. For example, better facilities for the under-5s will help lonely young mothers. The sports and leisure facilities proposed for Alston Town Hall, particularly if a drop-in centre is included (see page 79), are likely to be a significant development for those with mental health problems. Improved public transport may also alleviate problems of isolation.

SOCIAL FACILITIES

FACILITIES FOR THE ELDERLY

Facilities for the elderly continue to be centred on Grisedale Croft, a home providing Part III residential care for 11 people and sheltered accommodation for 7. The need for sheltered accommodation has declined through the advent of Care Line in peoples' homes, and the balance of residential to sheltered accommodation at Grisedale Croft has shifted towards more residential.

The catchment area is potentially the whole country - the home is not exclusively for local people, for whom there is more than adequate provision. With 30 members of staff, the home is one of the largest employers in Alston Moor. All the staff live locally, although many have moved into the area.

Grisedale Croft is run by Cumbria Care, a non-profit making business contracting to Cumbria County Council. Any profits made are invested in the business. There is considerable potential to expand the care at the home to take on residents from other

areas, eg Northumberland, and more private residents. With the planned refurbishment, numbers could go up to 25. Such expansion may provide further employment in the parish.

Grisedale Croft also runs a day centre for part of the week at the Cottage Hospital. This is well attended.

The staff benefit from in-house training and specialised courses are run at the home, for example on group dynamics, confusion and HIV. Some of the staff take Open University courses and some are on day release to take the GNVQ in Health and Social Care available at Samuel King's School.

As for many institutions locally, transport is a major problem. The home has a need for a minibus, particularly with a tail-lift. Taxi firms operating to Penrith often cannot take sufficient numbers.

Other facilities for the elderly include the hospital facilities already mentioned, home helps, and social gatherings organised by Age Concern. There is a weekly lunch at Samuel King's School which is well attended by the elderly. In general, the elderly seem to be well provided for in the parish, although transport is a particular gap. There are strong support networks in such a close community as Alston Moor. However, a study on elderly people in Eden District (8) identified those living in isolated parts of the district without access to facilities as being particularly disadvantaged. The study pointed to the need for small localised support groups and effective communication networks which would reach these groups of people. Research at the parish level would be necessary to establish whether there is a need for more support for the elderly in Alston Moor.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Facilities for young people are focussed on The Topp, Alston, and Nenthead Village Hall. The Alston Youth Club runs two weekly sessions at The Topp. Nenthead Crusaders, a small Christian youth club, use the Nenthead Village Hall. The County Council provides funding for The Topp and for staff. There are two part-time youth workers. The Topp, which has a large hall, is also hired out to other users, for example, the playgroup, Adult Education, Brownies etc. and is well-used. Usage by other groups is necessary to offset the costs of such a building, which might not otherwise be able to be used as a youth centre.

The Alston Youth Club is open to those above school year 9, but attempts are being made to open a junior club. The club does not operate in August which leaves a gap in services during the summer holidays.

47.6% of questionnaire respondents believe that Alston Moor needs more youth facilities. The age structure (table 3, page 14) shows that young people are under-represented in Alston Moor's population, and the proportion has declined since 1981. In a county council review of services undertaken recently (9), it was found that young people are lacking in access and choice. For example, advice and information is difficult to obtain because young people are highly visible and may not wish to be seen approaching the CAB (see

page 31). Access to training, employment, and leisure activities are all restricted by the isolation of the parish. These problems may be factors in leading young people to leave the parish.

On the basis of the review, an application was made this year by the Youth Services Department of Cumbria County Council to the Rank organisation for funding to set up a three year youth project at The Topp. The application was for £39,000 over 3 years. The money was to provide two part-time project workers who could develop services such as an advice and information service and a personal development programme for young people. A programme targetted at girls, young women and young mothers was included.

This project would boost the provision of services for young people in the parish, and could help to attract young people to stay in the parish. The Youth Services Department say that they have been asked to resubmit the application in 1997, but the situation does not look hopeful. There may be scope for incorporating this application for funding into a larger scale bid for funding, if such a bid emerges from this appraisal process (see page 91).

CHILDREN

In the following, the aim is to take a broad view of facilities for children in general so that opportunities for linking the different elements are not missed.

Facilities for young children include a well attended Mother and Toddler group held at The Topp once a week, and a playgroup held three times a week (two mornings plus one afternoon for 4 year olds), also at The Topp. The Toddlers group which used to meet at Nenthead Village Hall has closed. The playgroup struggles to survive, and has had to put fees up to £1.80 per session. This is a deterrent to some parents who cannot afford three sessions a week, particularly if they have more than one child of eligible age.

Childcare is a gap in services in the parish, according to a research study conducted by Delvin Research Associates (10) and the evidence of interviewees during the course of this research. There is a lack of registered childminders (there are now three in the parish), although many childminding needs may be catered for already by informal childminding arrangements. However anyone specifically wanting a registered childminder may have a difficult time finding one. There is no state or private nursery. No after school club exists, and no holiday playschemes currently. This means that parents have to rely on informal networks for most of their childcare needs. Children are missing out on the kind of stimulating activities which are freely available in larger or less isolated communities.

There are two needs in terms of provision for children: firstly, educational input for three to five year olds and secondly, all day childcare. Delvin Research Associates' study (10) in 1992 found that both needs were significant to local parents. This study involved an interview survey of all households with under 5s. Only 33% said childcare provision was adequate, and 56% said provision was inadequate. Large numbers of comments were

listed in the report regarding the lack of choice in childcare. One respondent gave the reason she was leaving the area as the "appalling" lack of pre-school childcare.

The majority of respondents (40.2%) said they would like a full-time nursery in some form. There was a strong desire for a structured educational input. 54% of women were in paid employment, yet the majority had to rely on friends and family for their childcare needs.

If more women are to become economically active, and there is a high unemployment rate for women (see page 52), more childcare provision needs to be available as an incentive. This would include after school and holiday provision for older children. It must also be remembered that there is an increasing population, with rising rolls at Alston Primary School, and this may signal increasing need for childcare provision.

An attempt was made by the playgroup to obtain a nursery class at Alston Primary School. The bid failed to attract funding for a variety of reasons. Space at the school is one of the major problems as a building programme would be needed to provide a nursery classroom. Nursery education is something of a political football, and Alston Moor would have to battle on a political level in order to obtain a nursery class at the school. This may not prove feasible. The government's voucher scheme will certainly change the goalposts for the future, but until specific details are available it is hard to anticipate what the opportunities may be for the parish.

What would be undesirable is that vouchers for nurseries are provided when the nearest nursery for Alston Moor is 20 miles away. Ideally, facilities should be put into place now in readiness. What kind of facilities and where they should be located is something the community would have to decide. This complex issue demands a full study in itself. But firstly, a real commitment will be needed from the community. One of the major choices to be made is whether to go for nursery education at the school or at a comprehensive childcare centre. Although there are many advantages attached to state nursery provision attached to a primary school, this simply may not be an option in the near future.

It may be feasible to obtain funding for a comprehensive childcare centre, including an educational nursery element, possibly to tie in with the facilities already proposed for the town hall. These facilities could incorporate the existing playgroup, who are somewhat dissatisfied with their present location at the Topp. There are many advantages to be gained from sharing such linked premises, eg the sharing of equipment, toilet facilities etc.

The advantage of having a nursery input within an all day childcare centre is that both can be linked to provide full-time day care and education for all ages until school age. A nursery at the school would only provide part-time day care. The disadvantage of course for parents is that it would have to be paid for. But government vouchers may eventually provide help with payment.

A childcare centre could be a community managed facility, and as such is likely to attract support from the Rural Development Commission (RDC). The RDC could provide start-up costs of up to a maximum of 50% of costs. The County Council could be approached

for further support through the Under 5s Area Committee. The RDC may also be able to provide some revenue funding for the first two years.

A centre would have the potential to provide out-of-school playschemes and possibly, if there was the demand, an after school club linked to Alston Primary School. There is a Training and Enterprise Councils/Department of Employment initiative which provides funding for clubs for the first year to support the Kids' Clubs Network scheme. The amount of funding is negotiable, and depends on a variety of factors including numbers and costs. The scheme runs out in March 1996 but it may be extended or the format may be changed. The RDC is also a potential source of funding for clubs, and professional assistance may be obtained from the Rural Kids Club Network.

Unfortunately, a centre in Alston would not easily meet the needs of those in Nenthead and Garrigill, or outlying areas. A minibus to pick children up was suggested in Delvin Research Associates' report (10), and perhaps this idea could be examined in more detail. Otherwise, some form of car-sharing scheme could be adopted.

Provision for children is a very important and emotive issue, and an initial evaluation of the need is all that can be accomplished in this appraisal. Perhaps the questions raised here should be taken forward as part of the Neighbourhood Forums (see below). The issue of childcare is identified in this appraisal as a key one in terms of the overall needs of the parish for social and economic development, and solutions should be included in any action plan which emerges from this study.

Other Social Facilities

There is a **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** which operates from the Town Hall on Monday afternoons from 12am-4pm. The CAB is attached to the Penrith CAB, and it is staffed by three volunteers. The service is well-used, and will benefit from the refurbishment of the Town Hall. Staff say that improved accessibility will help their clients.

A **Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS)** has begun in the parish, which allows members to trade goods and services without exchanging formal currency. The establishment of a **Credit Union** is currently being considered in the parish.

New **toilets** have just been built in Alston by Eden District Council. The toilets are likely to improve the image of the town and contribute significantly to the quality of facilities available. The design is of high standard, and is very much in keeping with the qualities of the Conservation Area.

Neighbourhood Services, a county council service, offers funding and advice to the local community, and networks with national and county-wide bodies. The unit runs Neighbourhood Forums, a series of public meetings.

LEISURE FACILITIES

If a variety of leisure and recreation activities are a sign of community spirit, then Alston Moor must be bursting with it. A database kept by the Parish Clerk reveals about 80 clubs and societies. Many of these are small, and the actual number will fluctuate from time to time. But this level of activity reflects a rich cultural life in the parish.

Sports

Sports facilities include playing fields at Tyne Willows and tennis courts (in need of renovation) at Fairhill. There is a bowling green at Fairhill and a golf course between Alston and Garrigill.

There is no public swimming pool, and this gap is sorely felt by many residents in the parish, who have to go to Penrith for a swim. Many questionnaire respondents (23.8%) suggested the need for a pool. A pool would be a useful facility to offer visitors, and would fill some of the gap in wet-weather activities identified in section 7 under tourism. Potential funding could come from Eden District Council, Lottery funding from the Sports Council (Lottery funding can cover up to 65% of the capital costs). Local fundraising would also be necessary.

The viability of a swimming pool for such a small community is the key question. It may be possible to obtain funding for building a pool but revenue costs would be the main problem, with a low demand. Before writing the idea off however, it may be worthwhile to examine the economics involved, as part of an action plan.

Library

There is a library on Front Street Alston which is open part-time. Also, a mobile library from Carlisle supplies the housebound, the Cottage Hospital and Grisedale Croft with books. 67.7% of questionnaire respondents said they were satisfied with the library service, and 10.5% were not. Comments related to short opening hours and lack of choice in books.

Play areas

Both Alston and Nenthead have high quality play areas. The Nenthead play area has a particularly good range of equipment, and is very recent. It is the result of persistent efforts on behalf of the Nenthead Play Areas Association, who fundraised and obtained funding from Children in Need, the Community Areas Initiative and the Parish and County Council. The Association still fundraises for maintenance costs, and they police the area and perform the maintenance work themselves. This is an excellent community initiative which Nenthead is proud of. The Nenthead play area is very visible and does not require signposting but the Alston play area needs to be signposted, as it is tucked away at the top of the town.

TOWN/ VILLAGE HALLS

Alston Town Hall

The main discussion of the Town Hall is placed in section 9 on projects and proposals. The Town Hall is at present not used because of an extensive programme of renovation work. The hall was used as a social club and bar for a long time before structural problems were discovered. The Parish Council discovered serious problems with underpinning, and have been faced with enormous costs to refurbish the hall. Plans for the town hall have developed and changed over several years, with the work of a fundraiser who has taken on the role of project coordinator.

A report was commissioned by a partnership of organisations in 1992 (11), known locally as the Touchstone Report, which identified the Town Hall as a potential "multi-purpose centre" both a centre for tourism and for community uses. The ideas in this study have been adapted and changed into the present project, which has now obtained funding from European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) under European Objective 5b. (See page 79 for further details).

Garrigill Village Hall

In 1990 the Church Institute was purchased for use as a village hall. £70,000 was raised from various sources, and an additional £10,000 was raised by the village itself, a remarkable achievement for such a small community. Kitchen facilities and changing rooms were added, and Eden District Council then built high quality public conveniences as an extension. The hall was officially opened in 1993.

The hall is not heavily used for regular activities, but is particularly valued by the community as a location for events, such as wedding receptions, leek shows and high teas for tours. The Alston Medical Practice uses it for a weekly surgery. The hall fulfills an important social function for the village, as a venue for occasional dances, meetings, the children's Christmas party. Annual fundraising is still required to cover costs.

Nenthead Village Hall

This hall was originally a school, but became the village hall in the 1950s. It provides the second largest hall space in the parish, after Samuel King's School. Fundraising is continually being organised by the Village Hall Committee, often by donating the profits from providing catering at functions. Grants have been obtained to pay for a suspended ceiling and repairs to the roof.

Like the hall at Garrigill, Nenthead Village Hall does not hold a large number of regular activities, but is well used for functions. It can be difficult to find people to start up activities, and most people use Alston a lot for leisure activities. The hall has a lot of potential for extra use, but may require some improvements such as energy efficiency measures and improved heating.

PARISH INFORMATION

There is a local newsletter, which is quarterly, and provides discussion of local issues and news. There are also parish noticeboards - two in Alston, one in Nenthead and one under construction in Garrigill. These tend to suffer from neglect, and could be more useful if more meticulously kept up to date and well-supplied. The Parish Council has plans to install a new noticeboard at the Town Hall in Alston, and possibly replace the board at the Co-Op in Alston. It is suggested that a town map of Alston would be a useful addition to assist visitors, and could be located at the Town Hall.

SHOPS

There are about 23 shops in Alston, 1 in Nenthead and 1 in Garrigill. These offer quite a variety of goods available, but there are some gaps, notably in clothing and DIY. The shops in Nenthead and Garrigill are post offices also, and offer a limited range of foods. There is a post office in Alston, and two banks. Shops offer employment to an estimated 30 people full time, 25 of whom are owners of the business, and 28 part-time staff. The questionnaire response was fairly evenly divided between those satisfied with local shops (43.9%) and those unsatisfied (44.9%). Many comments were to the effect that the Co-Op is too expensive.

Voluntary Action Cumbria, in a survey of rural shops (12), found that the most important customers were locals without cars, then locals with cars, and then passing trade. However, the shopkeepers in Alston seem to be suffering significantly from a downturn in tourism in the area. Almost all the retailers and cafe owners reported that business has been very poor this year, with both a lack of tourists and tourists not spending very much.

Uniform Business Rate has hit the shopkeepers very hard, and many feel that they obtain little in return for their high rates. Councils can offer rate relief to shops suffering financial hardship where such relief will benefit local ratepayers (12), but Eden District Council does not offer such relief. The Parish Council together with the Alston Moor Business Association could possibly engage in a dialogue with the local authority regarding such a policy.

The RDC offers help to retailers, such as grants to shops where there is only one in a village (this is a new grant scheme and full details are not yet available), and retail advice. The shops in Nenthead and Garrigill would be eligible for this funding, which could help to improve the range of goods available. For example, the Nenthead shop is on the Sea to Sea (C2C) cycle route established by Sustrans from the West coast to the East coast. This is a new long distance cycle route and is attracting many cyclists. The Nenthead shop could provide for the specific needs of cyclists, for example take away sandwiches.

Retailing is an area in which assistance is needed to find ways to improve the welcome offered to customers or potential customers. Display windows could in many instances be made more attractive. The appearance of some shop fronts could be improved. Funding

opportunities may be available through the CAP scheme (page 38). Also the Town Enhancement Group could be asked to include a "shop front scheme" in their proposals, in order to gain funding. Ideas for improvements should be included into the action plan emerging from this appraisal.

The Business Association may be able to help by promoting business advice to retailers, and by encouraging them to examine the potential for the provision of office use or accommodation on upper floors. Office space is in short supply in the parish, and the town centre is the ideal place for provision. Eden District Council is involved in a "living over the shop" initiative, and Policy SH5 in the deposit draft local plan (6) supports the use of such space, in order to improve the vitality and viability of the town centre. Finance through the CAP Scheme may be available to assist with repairs. The quality of retailing is very visible and important to both local people and visitors. It is worth paying attention to seeking ways of improvement.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In the following, gas, electricity and water supplies will be discussed in turn, followed by sewage disposal. The issue of energy efficiency will be examined, and recycling facilities. The treatment of these subjects is aimed to provide a broad overview, and it is therefore intended to be concise.

GAS

In the parish, there are about 350 domestic households using mains natural gas. Mains gas is not available at Nenthead or Garrigill. The demand for gas is increasing, and it is planned to install a reinforcement main at Townhead in Alston, which will service the Skelgill workshops. British Gas say that if there is further growth of industry, further reinforcement may be required, depending on the size and location of demand.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity is supplied by Norweb. There is a substantial network in the area, with an 11,000 volt transformer supplying electricity to ground mounted transformers in Alston and pole mounted transformers in the rest of the parish. Norweb say that there is good back-up from the ring network if severe weather causes failures. The supply is at present more than adequate, but can be reinforced if necessary.

WATER

North West Water supply water from a gravity spring from Springfield to Alston. The only treatment necessary is chlorination. This supply needs to be augmented from Garrigill's mine adit source (water collected in the mine) at Fewsteads. This water needs bone charcoal filtration to filter out zinc and cadmium. Nenthead is also supplied from a mine adit source at Hayring, but this water only requires chlorination. There is also a smaller mine adit source at Hardedge, but this is currently under repair.

The distribution system in Garrigill was replaced two years ago to plastic mains, and many people replaced their own pipes at the time. In Alston there are still some iron mains pipes which can lead to slight discolouration of the water. Long term plans are to replace all iron mains. A further problem is that according to North West Water, many people still have lead service pipes on their property, and it is their responsibility to replace them if they wish.

SEWAGE TREATMENT

There are sewage treatment plants run by Northumbrian Water in Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill. Sewage is dealt with by Northumbrian Water because of historic divisions based on river drainage patterns. The former settlement tank in Garrigill, which discharged effluent as field irrigation, and which was identified as unsatisfactory in the 1980 appraisal (1), has just been improved by installing a reedbed system. This is a natural treatment system in keeping with the area.

Those in outlying areas not connected to mains sewers have to rely on cesspools or septic tanks. These can be costly to run, particularly cesspools which have to be emptied and the contents tanked away regularly. This can be a significant additional cost to businesses.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Alston Moor's landfill site closed two years ago when the Environmental Protection Act led to the county council having to put the operation of sites to tender. Higher standards were demanded by the Act, and it was decided that it was not economically viable to operate the Alston site (at Newshield Quarry) as it would have had to be lined to prevent pollution.

Those wishing to tip now have to travel to a landfill site at Penrith, and the journey, along with charges for tipping, are a deterrent. Eden District Council collect domestic bulky items free, but businesses have to pay. Flytipping, particularly of industrial and construction waste, is a problem, and an incident was reported in the local papers recently.

The County is now aiming to provide two new Civic Amenities Sites in the county per year for waste collection, which may help to alleviate the situation. These provide facilities for people who wish to dispose of waste quickly without waiting for the district council's collection service. The sites also provide ideal recycling points. Alston has been identified as a high priority area for a site, and should be one of the next two to receive one. However, this depends on funding being available next year. There will be a competitive tendering process to decide who operates the selected site.

RECYCLING FACILITIES

Until now there have been very limited recycling facilities in Alston Moor. Eden District Council are now proposing "Village Recycling Centres" (VRCs) in Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill, based on community management, where the local group who caretake the site receive payments for recycling credits (currently £10.28 per tonne). This could act as revenue for local causes. The Council is at present about to hold a meeting with the Parish Council regarding the scheme.

Locations for sites have been proposed at Nenthead and Garrigill, but at Alston, the situation is more complicated as the Council has had difficulty in finding a suitable site. The proposed Civic Amenity Site will be the most appropriate site, but this may take some time to be installed. Eden District Council is still investigating the matter with the help of the Parish Council.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Energy efficiency is a particularly significant issue in an area like Alston Moor, where energy costs can be very high. This is firstly, because the buildings are usually constructed of cold stone, and secondly, because of the exposed climate, with penetrating south-westerly prevailing winds. But in an area of economic deprivation, many people cannot afford to install energy efficiency measures. Also small businesses may be losing a lot of money through paying more than they need for heating and lighting or energy for industrial processes.

Government help is available for those on low incomes through the HEES scheme (Home Energy Efficiency Scheme). This scheme provides free loft insulation, draught proofing and energy advice for those over 60 or on certain benefits. The work is done by 'Network Installers', in this case KNW based in Penrith. According to KNW the uptake of HEES in Alston Moor has been low. KNW has publicised the scheme, but feel that local people are suspicious that there is a "catch" because it is free. They say that what is needed is a concerted campaign which would draw in different local bodies to promote the scheme. This is something that could be taken up as part of an action plan.

There are two other means of help which may be of benefit to householders in the future. Firstly, Norweb is gradually working through sites of 3-4 square miles in their area providing free energy efficiency measures, including cavity wall insulation (where buildings are suitable), to householders who use electricity to heat their homes. It is not known when Alston Moor will be selected. Secondly, the government is currently working on a voucher scheme to encourage people to take up energy efficiency measures by helping with the cost. Details are not known as yet.

Businesses often need energy advice, and this is an area in which the Business Association could provide assistance, by for example liaising with the Energy Efficiency Office, and organising promotional meetings.

SECTION 5

BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

CAPS SCHEME

Alston's town centre was designated a Conservation Area in 1976 to protect the historic central area. The 1980 appraisal(1) recommended that there should be a Town Scheme set up which would allow the restoration of groups of buildings. A scheme was actually put into effect in 1982, and ran until 1995, when English Heritage ended the schemes nationally. A CAPS (Conservation Area Partnership Scheme) replaces the town scheme, and is more proactive, aiming at a broader programme of works. The justification for a high level of grant aid is that the relatively high cost of restoration in relation to the property values would otherwise lead to neglect (5).

Funding is provided for both buildings and environmental works. The scheme will run initially until 31st March 1996, and will then be renewed annually (subject to reassessment) for a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of 5, ie. up to the year 2000. Funding may be altered from year to year.

This year, £40,000 has been allocated to buildings (to provide up to 70% of costs) and £18,000 for environmental works (for up to 50% of costs). In the case of environmental works, the other 50% would be provided by the appropriate agent, the landowner, Highway Authority or the District Council. Funding is available for structural and external repair, and for external enhancement.

An action plan has been prepared by the District Council, and discussions with prospective property owners have been entered into. No applications have been received as yet. St Pauls Methodist Church was identified as being in a poor condition and needing improvement. It should be eligible for CAPS funding. Also repointing on the Town Hall would attract CAPS funding.

A related development is the recent formation of the **Town Enhancement Group**. The group arose out of the attempt by a nucleus of residents in Alston to obtain improved street lighting. They formed a group which eventually decided that it was necessary to tackle a much wider range of issues to improve the appearance of the town. Working with an architect from Eden District Council, the Town Enhancement Group have put together a list of proposed improvements to the built environment in Alston, and are now at the stage of refining this list and examining sources of funding. This is an excellent initiative, with the community taking a strong lead, and every effort should be made to foster its

development. It has strong implications for economic growth in the parish, impacting on the encouragement of tourism, and the attraction of investment.

The CAPS scheme will be a useful initial source of funding for town enhancement in Alston. The money set aside for environmental works could go to a number of the improvements on the Town Enhancement Group's proposals. If a "shop front scheme" is included in the enhancement programme, the group could encourage and assist retailers to seek CAPS funding. The criteria for support are that the scheme has to have some form of historical precedent. How this will be interpreted remains to be seen. Further funding for enhancement work could come from a variety of sources. This need for funding should be considered as part of the action plan emerging from this appraisal.

DESIGN

The issue of rural design is enjoying a lot of publicity currently. The present Secretary of State for the Environment, John Gummer, is calling for new and better design initiatives and many local authorities are responding. In the Cotswolds and Suffolk, local design guides, or "Village Design Statements" have been produced by the planning authorities and these have been adopted as supplementary planning guidance. In North Norfolk, a local authority architect is involved in every planning application.

The situation in Alston Moor is that the local plan for Eden District (6) does pay attention to design matters. Policy BE19 states that it is expected that design should "maintain or enhance the quality of the landscape or built environment within which the proposal is located" (6) If proposed development is in juxtaposition to traditional buildings, the policy says that designs will normally be required to make use of traditional materials, and have regard to scale, massing, character, architectural features and materials of the existing development.

In addition, Plan Action 2.1 of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding National Beauty management plan (13) is to "Encourage good design and management of buildings and settlements which reflects vernacular traditions". These policies are a significant step forward, but are they enough in the distinctive local context of Alston Moor? A further obstacle to good design actually being implemented is the lack of staff resources at Eden District Council. There are not enough architects to be involved in every planning application.

There has been very little modern development in Alston Moor, so the parish has escaped the worst ravages of suburbanisation found in so many English villages. But there are large tracts of land allocated to new housing development. With potentially increasing economic activity and possibly, new housing development as a consequence, now is the time to take action to achieve good design solutions. A **parish design statement** for Alston Moor, which describes the architectural tradition in the parish, and, without being over-prescriptive, gives developers an awareness of the quality of design expected by the parish, could provide the best way forward.

COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

The management of the parish countryside is a very broad subject, which overlaps with aspects of economic development. In the following, the focus is on the impact of the Area Of Outstanding National Beauty designation of the North Pennines, the work of the East Cumbria Countryside Project and access to the countryside. Issues related to countryside management and agriculture, woodland or minerals, will be treated mainly in section 7 under the relevant sub-headings.

Conservation work enjoys large support amongst the local community. 79.8% thought it was either very important or worth doing to enhance the environment, and only 17.4% said it was unnecessary. The provision of access similarly is well supported: 76.7% thought it very important or worth doing to improve access, whilst 19.5 % said it was unnecessary.

THE NORTH PENNINES AONB

A Designation Order for the AONB was first submitted in 1978. Due to opposition from some local authorities and local interests, the confirmation of the AONB was delayed until 1988, after a Public Inquiry in 1985. The opposition was centred on the fear that designation would stifle economic development, and the counter-argument was that designation could bring economic benefits by the creation of conservation and tourism related jobs.

Landscape and related policies regarding the Alston Moor area of the AONB are contained in the county structure plan and local plan. (A plan of the AONB will be found in Diagram 2) A management plan for the whole AONB (13) has just been published by the AONB steering group, after a lengthy preparation time. The AONB area falls within the boundaries of Northumberland, Cumbria and Durham, and is in the jurisdiction of six district councils. The Steering Group comprises all of these councils plus the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission. Decision making is a complex process with this diverse management structure.

The Countryside Commission has also published a statement regarding its own issues and priorities for the AONB (14). Cumbria County Planning Department have produced a landscape conservation policy (4) for their area of the North Pennines. This contains policy guidance regarding pressures on the landscape, for example tourism, afforestation, minerals working, and identifies several landscape zones with separate policies. This guidance is non-statutory.

The three objectives of the AONB (taken from the management plan (13)) are worth stating in full:

- *The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.*

- *In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development which in themselves conserve and enhance the landscape.*
- *Recreation is not in itself an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.*

The management plan (13) sets out an action programme divided into three areas - management of land, management of historic buildings and features and promotion of enjoyment and understanding. Many of the suggested ways forward would have an extremely positive impact on Alston Moor if carried through, eg. encouraging the development of arts and crafts as an interpretive medium, and exploring future measures for grant-aid and advice for farm diversification. But it is a non-statutory document and depends on the concerted action of all interested bodies and individuals.

The effects of the AONB designation are threefold. Firstly, it has had an impact on the management of farming. The management plan (13) favours traditional methods which conserve the traditional landscape and encourage biodiversity, and seeks to promote schemes with these aims, eg the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme, Countryside Stewardship, and the Moorland Scheme (all on page 59). The plan says that the AONB designation has enabled such schemes to be targetted to the North Pennines (13, p. 5).

Secondly, it has had an impact on the development of tourism, although this is harder to define. The North Pennines is very different to most other AONBs in that there is a need for **more** tourists, rather than to deal with problems of tourist **pressure**. The designation has undoubtedly, according to interviewees, increased visitor awareness of the area and generated interest in the area for recreation. But so far visitor numbers to the AONB are low, and there is no threat of mass tourism. The problem is generating more of the appropriate sort of tourism, ie low key or green tourism, based on activities such as walking and cycling. The North Pennines Tourism Partnership, which has been very influential in the area, is a direct result of the AONB designation putting the area on the map.

Thirdly, the AONB has had an impact on economic development generally, although the fear that designation could limit economic development has been assuaged. Policy NE2 of Eden's deposit draft local plan (6) says that

"Some development within the AONB is both necessary and inevitable, however, in the interest of protecting its unique landscape character and quality it is intended that developments will normally take place in established settlements. Exceptions to this may be made for agriculturally related development and to accommodate infrastructure and other development which cannot be located within settlements and from which social and economic benefits derive which outweigh their environmental costs."

Changes in planning control due to designation are limited, eg. the threshold size of an extension at which planning consent is required. Designation may have brought more positive than negative impact on economic development, since it may be an additional factor in the attraction of investment. The impact is hard to quantify in these terms however.

EAST CUMBRIA COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT

The East Cumbria Countryside Project's (ECCP's) area includes all of Eden District east of the M6, and therefore the whole of Alston Moor parish. The Project was formed in 1985 as an employment scheme with the Manpower Services Commission, and is now a joint venture between Cumbria County Council, Eden District Council, Carlisle City Council and the Countryside Commission. Funding has become more of a problem now that the Countryside Commission is reducing their contribution.

The ECCP's work centres on three areas: countryside access, improving the countryside character, and promoting enjoyment and understanding of the countryside. The project is involved in many landscape improvements eg. farm woodland management schemes, management of hay meadows, the protection of ancient woodlands which are not SSSIs. The ECCP aim to work with local communities and encourage schemes which are community-led.

ENGLISH NATURE

English Nature have designated two Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the parish. These are Alston Shingle Banks and River South Tyne and Tynebottom Mine at Garrigill. The former is important for the unusual and species rich vegetation on the riverside shingle banks and the latter is an unusual example of well preserved river terraces.

ACCESS

The Countryside Commission has set a national target that "all rights of way should be legally defined, properly maintained and well publicised by the end of the century". Most highway authorities, including Cumbria, have adopted this target and are working towards it. The County have three permanent rights of way officers, and four grant-aided posts. The definitive map is kept "reasonably" up to date, and the county is preparing their 'milestones statement', which is intended to show to the Countryside Commission the progress made so far.

The parish is receiving some of the most concentrated attention in the county on its footpaths. It has an exceptionally large number of public rights of way and has been identified by the Countryside Commission as a priority area. This year the ECCP's projected output includes 21 footpath improvements at a cost of £5000. The ECCP team is opening up three obstructed paths, at Galligill, Hadgill and Blackband Fell. They are now tackling the most contentious paths, having improved the most popular ones already.

One of the problems is that some of the paths on the definitive map may not have been in general use since 1953, and landowners and farmers may not know of their existence. Also, a high proportion lead through domestic space and some paths have been built over. Landowners can apply for a legal diversion, but a substantial fee is demanded by the county council (up to £800 in total plus VAT) to cover legal costs. The council used to apply leniency, either reducing or doing away with this fee, but are now more stringent, and this can lead to problems for local people.

The ECCP produce a series of walks leaflets, and there are now several covering walks in Alston Moor. These fulfill a useful purpose, since there is a dearth of literature on walks in the area. One shortcoming is a lack of documented circular walks - many of those documented are linear walks.

A further improvement is the provision of better seating throughout the parish. Better seating is an important means of helping people enjoy the countryside, particularly for the elderly. Seating is particularly useful at the edge of settlements, where people might come to have a picnic and enjoy the view. For example, a prime place would be on the path to the Firs, just beyond St Pauls Church. It may be useful for the Parish Council to address the issue of seating in the parish. The first requirement may be to catalogue existing seats, and identify obsolete positions. Funding for the repositioning and the provision of more seats could then be examined. Sports Council lottery funding is one possible source of finance.

Because of their tourism potential, long distance paths will be treated in section 7 under tourism.

SECTION 6

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

In the following section, the situation of private, community and public transport will be discussed before going on to outline the current traffic and parking issues. Although winter clearance of roads is a service, it is included in this section where it has most significance.

PRIVATE TRANSPORT

The pattern of car ownership in the parish is interesting. The table below shows that Alston Moor has slightly higher car ownership than Cumbria as a whole, and that car ownership has grown faster in the parish than in Cumbria. This is to be expected in a rural parish. But relative to Eden District, Alston Moor has low car ownership, and this reflects the relative levels of affluence. The difference indicates relative deprivation, particularly since the isolation of Alston Moor means that there is greater dependence on the car.

Table 9: Households With No Car

	<i>Alston Moor %</i>	<i>Cumbria %</i>	<i>Eden District %</i>
1981	36.0	37.0	26.0
1991	27.1	30.8	20.3

Source: OPCS

In addition, in 1991, 21.2% of households in Alston Moor had **two or more** cars, compared to 21.5% in Cumbria, a very similar level. Yet the need for two cars is probably greater in Alston Moor, due to isolation. The relatively low figure may mean that there are large numbers of women and young people in Alston Moor with no private transport to access the full range of services and facilities during the day. In Eden District, 30.2% of the population have two or more cars, again reflecting a significantly higher level of affluence in the rest of the district.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

With increases in car ownership such as those shown in the table above, a downward spiral results for those without daytime or without any access to a car - the elderly, young mothers, the disabled and young people. At the same time as increasing car ownership, public transport tends to become less viable because of decreasing numbers using it, local services are jeopardised, and many services become centralised.

17.9% of questionnaire respondents ticked poor bus services as a problem causing concern to them. Many local interviewees pointed to inadequate public transport as one of the major difficulties of life in the parish. But the central stumbling block is that rural bus services need subsidies in order to be sustainable, and adequate subsidies are not available under present government policy.

Almost all the local bus services are operated by Wrights, who are based in Nenthead. Wrights have been going since 1919, and have a rich history. They began as a taxi service, at a time when there were very few motor cars, and later expanded into buses. Wrights are a significant local employer with 10 full-time and 6 part-time staff. Their services are advertised in the "Across the Roof of England" brochure, produced by the North Pennines Tourism Partnership, in conjunction with a variety of partners. This brochure represents a successful marrying of two differing forms of bus and train provision - services for tourism and services for local people.

Bus services in the area are fluid. Two shopping trips run by Wrights to Penrith and Carlisle have recently ceased. Also a post bus operating in the parish has ceased. There is a trip run by Wrights to Keswick which is now seasonal, from Easter to the end of September only. At present, the service to Newcastle is in jeopardy because it is running at a loss, and needs support. This is an important service for those who use it, even though it is not used by sufficiently large numbers to be commercially viable.

On the bright side, there is the new service already mentioned (page 25) to Carlisle College, which is free to scholars. Also, Cumbria County Council are starting a trial service to Newton Rigg College, via Penrith. This is funded by the Rural Transport Development Fund run by the RDC, and the contractor is J.H. Henderson and Sons, motor engineers, at Alston. This will be a useful addition, since there is a gap in services to Penrith, and the bus could be used for people travelling to jobs or training. It will also connect with trains to Carlisle.

Wright's also run school contracts in the parish, and private hire. They have branched out into continental and UK pop group work, using sleeper coaches. But it can be difficult for the company to keep some services running. Only two services are subsidised, (to Haltwhistle and to Hexham) both by Northumberland. Cumbria County Council is not subsidising any services currently. The company's fleet of Bedford coaches is ageing, and it now costs over £100,000 for a new coach. The Rural Development Commission now offers the "Rural Transport Development Fund", and there may be potential for Wrights to access support through this fund in the future.

The bus shed which Wrights operate from in Nenthead is acknowledged to be an eyesore - it is very large, in a prominent position in Nenthead, and is dilapidated. Wrights have looked into refurbishment or replacement, but the costs are prohibitive, without grant aid. Although the Land Reclamation Programme run by English Partnerships to replace the former Derelict Land Grant may cover the costs of clearing the site (under new rules, private sector funding may only be granted if a partnership of interests applies), the company could not afford the costs (in the region of £80-£100,000) of rebuilding facilities. This is a problem for the village of Nenthead as well as for Wrights, and should be examined in the context of the follow-up action plan to this appraisal. The issue is also discussed on page 81.

Bus services to bring in tourists are a further issue. The Countryside Commission, the NPTP and the South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society are organisations with interests in this matter, as well as local councils. South Tynedale Railway have helped to fund some bus trips to improve connections with the railway. Durham County Council sponsor bus services X88 and X89 via Alston to Durham, Penrith and Middleton in Teesdale, and these services are aimed primarily at visitors. However it would be artificial to make a rigid split between visitor and local services as they are interdependent.

An "Explorer" ticket now exists, which entitles holders to unlimited use of buses in the North East, and which could be extended to include some of Wrights services. Anecdotal evidence shows that the ticket is boosting visitor numbers on rural services. There are significant disincentives to Wrights joining the scheme, but this may represent a missed opportunity. There is a current move from the North Pennines Tourism Partnership towards instigating an appraisal of North Pennines-wide public transport, involving all interested parties. The Explorer ticket issue, plus the threat to Wright's Newcastle service, would signal the need for this appraisal sooner rather than later.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

A social car scheme is in operation in the parish. This scheme is run by the County Council. Drivers under the scheme are volunteers, but are paid a mileage rate which is comprised of a small fare from the passenger with the shortfall being made up by the County Council. The regulations have now been relaxed to include social trips. Alston Moor's service is barely used, and this may be partly due to people being unaware that it exists. Although there appears to be a good informal network of volunteer drivers for the elderly, there may be gaps in provision which the formal social car scheme could fill, if it were better publicised.

Because of the existence of Wrights, it would not be appropriate for a community bus in the parish, along the lines of The Fellrunner in Langwathby, which is run by retired business people.

WINTER CLEARANCE OF ROADS

Snow ploughing used to be performed by Moredun garage in Alston, but is now done by the county council's contractors. The county council's contracting body, D.S.O. undertakes snow clearance and salt treatment of roads and since April 1995, this has been done under contract. D.S.O were in April 95 given a four-year maintenance contract.

There is a system of priority routes for salting. Pre-treating on major roads is done on the basis of forecasting when the temperature will drop below freezing point. Minor roads are not pre-salted, only post-salted when impassable. There is a statutory obligation to clear all roads of snow, but this is also done on a priority basis.

One problem is that snow ploughing will often be done up to the Cumbrian border, but not on the Northumbrian side. Cumbria are now ploughing as far as Slaggyford, but this may still mean the section of the A686 to Whitfield is unploughed. Greater cross-border cooperation on this issue could improve matters.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

There are two related issues leading to significant congestion, lack of pedestrian safety and comfort on Alston Front Street. The issues are complex, and it is intended to briefly summarise them here, without attempting to pinpoint solutions.

The first issue is the routing of heavy lorries. This is largely a result of Blue Circle at Eastgate in Weardale changing their distribution of cement from rail to road transport in 1993. This decision now leads to 50 lorries per day currently making their way up and down Front Street.

There is no significant accident history, largely because the lorries have to travel very slowly over the stone setts (cobblestones) on the steep hill. Serious congestion problems can result due to parked cars obstructing the lorries' path. Lorries frequently become stuck because they cannot get going again after having to stop. Even without blockages, the combination of lorries, badly parked cars, the narrowness of the footway and the steepness of the hill can make the negotiation of the street an alarming and uncomfortable experience for all pedestrians.

Shopkeepers are concerned about the effect on tourism. Businesses worry about delays and the damage to the town's environment. The county council have to foot continual repair bills for damage to stone setts. Emergency vehicle drivers are also concerned that they may be delayed. Questionnaire evidence shows that the largest area of concern among the listed transport problems was the routing of lorries (31.7%) - see Table 10 below, which shows the percentages of those concerned by the problems listed.

Table 10: Transport Problems in Alston Moor

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Congestion in Alston	48	25.4
Lack of car parking	29	15.3
Routing of heavy lorries	60	31.7
Poor bus service	34	17.9

Source: Questionnaire results

The nearest suitable alternative road would add on roughly 30 miles to the lorries' journey. Blue Circle threaten that any ban on lorries in Alston would add on significant costs which would make them less competitive. Local hauliers are used as sub-contractors, and there is a powerful local lobby which would not be in favour of a ban. The Blagill road, which is at present being used voluntarily by early morning lorries, would not take significant two-way traffic, and the costs of widening it would be prohibitive. The Parish Council have passed a unanimous resolution to press for initial action to obtain a one-mile relief road south of Alston. The problem is that present county council criteria mean that current volumes of traffic would not warrant the cost involved.

The county council's policy is not to take action which local people are against. However, there has not been any study of local opinion, therefore it is not known what proportion of the population would be in favour of a lorry ban. Further research on practicable solutions to the problem of lorries on Front Street is a pressing need.

The second and related issue is that of car parking. The parish council has recommended that because of the congestion problems, there is a need to extend the waiting restrictions on Front Street between 8am-6pm. The proposal is for a one hour limit on parking spaces, with protected spaces for disabled people and Front Street residents. Shopkeepers would only be able to park for more than an hour if resident on the street. The parish council approved the plans in June, and there was a subsequent Neighbourhood Forum on the issue, which has aroused considerable controversy in the town. At the most recent parish council meeting, it was voted to retain the proposed parking measures.

By removing many of the parked cars, the situation will be improved for lorries, which are causing much of the congestion plus environmental damage. Tourism will continue to suffer, and the danger to pedestrians could possibly increase if lorries can travel faster. The question of alternative parking has not been examined, and this is a vital part of the equation. Shopkeepers are very concerned about the harmful effects to their businesses which may be caused by lack of car parking. The effects may be mitigated if better off-road parking were provided as part of an integrated package of proposals regarding car parking in the town.

The county council are responsible for on-street parking and the district council for off-street parking. This division may result in the opportunity being missed to improve parking generally. The district council needs to be drawn into producing, along with the county council, a comprehensive policy framework for car parking.

At the moment, the railway station car park and the yard at Henderson's garage provide the main sites for off-street parking. But both of these sites are at the bottom of the hill, which may be a significant obstacle to their use by visitors or shoppers. The railway site is often full in the summer, and Henderson's site badly needs improvement in order to be an attractive stopping place for tourists and local people. The site is at present only leased by the district council and has to be renewed each year, which means the council will not commit funds to its improvement. But this situation needs to be remedied.

One solution, which has been called for time and again, is to create a new parking site at Fairhill, at Townhead. This proposal was made by the 1980 appraisal (1) and was reiterated in the report on tourism by Denman and Green in 1990. (15). The latter report went into great detail regarding the selection of alternative sites. The proposed restrictions on Front Street, and the resulting pressure on alternative parking sites, suggest that this is the time to take positive action on this issue.

SECTION 7

EMPLOYMENT AND THE ECONOMY

EMPLOYMENT

It is difficult to obtain reliable data on employment at the parish/ward level. Census figures provide the main source of data on employment in the parish. But the relevant census data is based on a 10% sample, and because of the small numbers involved, this data suffers from unreliability. It is nevertheless interesting to compare 1991 figures with the 1971 figures given in the 1980 appraisal (1). Different classifications by type of employment mean that we can only compare figures for agriculture, manufacturing and construction.

Table 11: Employment in Alston Moor by Type

	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Manufacture</i>	<i>Construction</i>
1971	12.6	28.8	8.9
1991	10.6	16.5	16.5

Source: OPCS

These figures show that there has been a decline in employment in agriculture between 1971 and 1991, and an even more marked decline in manufacturing. Employment in construction had risen significantly, but this figure is now likely to have declined due to the closure of Kearsons construction business in 1994, which employed most of the construction workers in the parish.

Table 12 overleaf shows the percentages engaged in different types of employment using figures from the questionnaire survey. The figures are expressed as percentages of the economically active.

<i>Table 12: Employment Types (Questionnaire Results)</i>		
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Farming	8	7.4
Manufacture	16	14.9
Services	37	34.5
Tourism	12	11.2
Extraction	Nil	Nil
Transport	8	7.4
Building	4	2.1
Other unspecified	9	8.4

Source: Appraisal questionnaire survey

Table 13 below shows the patterns of employment for men, using data from the 1991 census.

<i>Table 13: Patterns of Employment 1991 (Men aged 16-65)</i>			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Alston Moor %</i>	<i>Cumbria %</i>
Full time employees	256	46.6	71.6
Part-time employees	9	1.6	2.2
Self-employed	220	40.1	16.7
Unemployed	56	10.2	8.0
Govt. Scheme	8	1.5	1.5

Source: OPCS

It is significant that the numbers of self-employed almost equate with the numbers of full-time employees, and the percentage of self-employed is far higher than that in Cumbria. There is also a very high number of self-employed women in the parish (see table 14).

<i>Table 14: Patterns of Employment 1991 (Women aged 16-60)</i>			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Alston Moor %</i>	<i>Cumbria %</i>
Full time employees	107	27.8	47.2
Part-time employees	162	42.1	37.5
Self-employed	72	18.7	8.4
Unemployed	40	10.4	5.5
Govt. Scheme	4	1.0	1.5

Source: OPCS

Unemployment

The level of unemployment fluctuates markedly. For example, in April 1995, male unemployment was 15.5% and by August 1995 it was down to 12.7%. This variation may be due partly to strong seasonal variations, and partly to a high level of turnover of the unemployed, according to staff at the Penrith Job Centre. This would fit with observations by local interviewees that many of the jobs in the parish are on a casual or temporary basis, and there is a high rate of redundancies. Many of the employers interviewed for the present appraisal employed a very small core of staff in secure jobs, and had temporary or casual staff to cover the rest of the work.

The unemployment rate quoted by the 1980 appraisal (1) for 1979 was 8.9%. After the Foundry closed, the rate went up to around 25% (1). There has been significant improvement of the economic situation since then, therefore, but the rate of unemployment has still not returned to the 1979 rate, which was considered already high by the 1980 appraisal (1). Total unemployment in 1991 according to 1991 census figures was 10.3%. Table 15 shows the unemployment figures for Alston from 1994-1995. The fluctuating trend is evident from these figures.

<i>Table 15: Unemployment Alston Moor 1994-95</i>						
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%Male</i>	<i>%Female</i>	<i>%Total</i>
Aug 1994	105	24	129	18.0	5.9	13.0
Aug 1995	74	30	104	12.7	7.4	10.5

Source: Central Statistical Office (crown copyright reserved)

The percentage figures in the above table are percentages of the economically active, using data from the 1991 census. The equivalent Eden district figures for the total percentage unemployed was much lower, at 3.9% in Aug 1994 and 3.4% in Aug 1995. It is interesting that over this one year period from 1994-95, male unemployment dropped

significantly, whereas female unemployment rose. Table 14 above shows that female unemployment in Alston Moor was higher in 1991 relative to Cumbria than male unemployment.

One factor of concern is that long term unemployment is high, with 54.3% of those out of work having been unemployed for six months or more (July 1995). 72.4% had been unemployed for over 13 weeks, and 40% for over a year.

The Delvin Research Associates/HOP report (16) on teleworking points to the lack of full-time "real" job opportunities in the parish. Many parish residents commute to towns and cities such as Penrith, Carlisle and Newcastle. But they tend to be in well-paid positions which will cover the high commuting costs. The report (16) identifies a "Catch 22" situation where because of difficulties of transport, including the high cost, the unemployed of the parish cannot access the further education and training which would enable them to find well-paid employment in towns outside the parish.

There are many different groups of non-economically active or unemployed in the parish - women who cannot easily work or train outside the parish because of childcare responsibilities, those taking early retirement, travellers who move in temporarily, people involved in casual work whilst claiming unemployment benefits. A variety of solutions is therefore necessary. There are national structural problems with the benefits system and the related disincentives to taking work or training, to which local solutions are hard to find. Better public transport would undoubtedly help many of the above groups, and the bus service to Carlisle College and the trial service to Newton Rigg should be a significant step forward.

Questionnaire results indicate that of the low number of unemployed who responded, 61.5% found that lack of information was a problem in obtaining a job. This is an urgent problem which should not be difficult to solve (see next paragraph). The next largest category found the lack of childcare was an obstacle (53.8%). Transport problems (46.1%) were a significant problem, already discussed above, and 30.7% indicated that not enough skills and despairing of trying were obstacles.

Transport also is an obstacle to the unemployed in the parish in getting to the Job Centre and Job Club in Penrith or Hexham (People can choose which job centre to attend). There is still no job vacancies board in the parish, although the Hexham job centre have been considering setting one up in the parish since the 1980 appraisal (1, page 10). Many jobs are filled very quickly, and job-seekers need to have daily access to such information in order to be effective in finding work.

There is an urgent need for job vacancies from both Hexham and Penrith to be advertised in the parish. It is proposed to have a vacancies board in the refurbished Town Hall. Ideally a computerised link would be established, to enable instant transfer of information, without relying on the post, which is too slow, or faxes, which are less convenient.

TRAINING

Training is a key element in economic development. But the problems in access to training and further education reflect vividly the problems of isolation of the parish of Alston Moor. Training is needed by the unemployed to help them obtain jobs. It can help to encourage young people to remain in the parish. Training is also important for small local businesses, and provision may improve their competitiveness and encourage them to expand. In addition, training can encourage new businesses to start up and assist in the starting up process. But training is very much lacking in the parish.

Training is a catch-all word, and can mean long term accredited courses, the employment of trainees or half-day workshops. But to access almost any training from Alston Moor, it is necessary to travel at least to Penrith, and probably further. Some training provision is based at Alston Moor, including business training in the past and the Springboard course run by Cumbria TEC for women returners. WEA's course for returners also exists (page 26). But there is a need for follow-up courses of a more specialist nature. The North Pennines Tourism Partnership runs courses and workshops for people engaged in tourism businesses. There is also the GNVQ in Health and Social Care run at Samuel King's School. These locally based courses tend to be very successful.

The Rampgill Visitor Centre (see page 80), a project initiated by the North Pennines Heritage Trust, had their first year's work restoring the building to be used as a visitor centre done with the help of a training agency, CTF Training, with funding from the TECs involved in the North Pennines. The rules of the programme meant that large numbers had to be trained on the training base, and up to 50 people were training at any one time. These numbers were not available locally, so many had to be bussed in, which was costly. Less than 25% came from the North Pennines, which was disappointing, although perhaps not surprising in terms of the population. Although the training programme benefited the project, the failure to attract local people reinforces the need for the **right** training provision, ie appropriate to Alston Moor's needs.

Further research is required to identify accurately what those needs are. The present appraisal's business survey shows that many businesses are interested in locally provided training, but mainly in short, very specific courses or workshops. Computer skills and business skills were a common interest among most of the businesses in the survey. Staff training can be expensive, and most of the employers interviewed in the business survey conducted on the job training. Only two had taken up the TEC grants available for taking on trainees on a training programme.

The results of the questionnaire survey show that although only small numbers of respondents had experienced difficulty in obtaining training, the largest problem was lack of local provision (ticked by 8.4% of the total number of respondents). Lack of information and transport problems were both experienced as difficulties by 4.2% of respondents, and 5.2% felt there was not enough incentive. Lack of childcare was the least significant of the difficulties listed (2.1% of respondents). The low number of unemployed people responding to the survey (13) must be borne in mind in interpreting these figures.

A major problem is the lack of premises for training - there are few premises in the parish suitable as training premises, or occasional office spaces which might be appropriate for training. The Town Hall may be able to provide some suitable accommodation in the future.

New Training Initiatives

New opportunities in training are opening up with competition between the training colleges to attract students, and new funding opportunities. A major new initiative which is already in progress from Carlisle College may be pointing the way forward for the future of training in Alston Moor. The College has received approval for a bid from the European Social Fund to provide three rural outreach centres, one in Brampton, Longtown and Alston. The bid includes £7,500 for the Alston centre.

The outreach centres will operate using an ISDN telecommunications link to allow the use of a videolink by computer to the college. A small video camera attached to the computer will enable the student to interact with the tutor, with text on the VDU (computer screen) which can be highlighted and manipulated by either student or tutor. Self-study material will be available in Alston, and the student will have access by computer to tutorials and to the large CD ROM library at the Independent Learning Centre in the college. A tutor will be available to assist with the start-up.

A second bid for ESF funding by the college involves sending out tutors to Alston to provide training sessions in any subject where there is sufficient demand. The college has yet to investigate the demand and the potential for this new initiative. Some payment would be required for this training, but the aim would be to make it affordable even for marginal businesses. The two separate initiatives could eventually dovetail.

The funding bids have had approval in principle, but still require matching funding. Funding problems are giving rise to some delay, but it is still hoped to do begin piloting work in October.

The courses offered by computer from the outreach centre will initially be computing courses, for example 'GO For It'. Go For It is a course specially adapted by Carlisle College from the more detailed RSA CLAIT course, to suit the needs of businesses. But as the video-conferencing method is developed by the college, a greater variety of courses will be available. A large demand for computing courses in the parish has already been identified by the Adult Education Centre, which the centre cannot supply currently because of the lack of computing facilities. Some people are travelling as far as Newton Rigg to obtain adult education classes in computer training.

Courses offered by travelling tutors could include courses as wide ranging as business training, retailing and the tourist trade, exporting and construction skills. Accreditation will be available for both kinds of courses, through the Open College. It is hoped to avoid competition with courses offered by Business Link by working out a different focus to business courses in collaboration with Business Link.

The need at present is to find appropriate premises in Alston for the outreach centre, and to begin marketing the courses on offer. Much work will need to be done to be successful

in marketing, and personal contact is vital. There is a need for Carlisle College to draw in other relevant organisations, such as the business advice agencies, and local groups, to network on this important development.

Other opportunities may be available in the future from Newton Rigg College and the Cumbria Credits scheme (page 94). With a potential plethora of training opportunities being made available in the parish, it is important for local people to become involved in selecting and directing training provision which is appropriate to Alston Moor's needs.

BUSINESS SUPPORT

Because of the nature of most businesses in the parish, the most significant agency offering business support for the parish is Business Link Rural Cumbria. Business Link nationally aims to provide a global service for business support, involving accessing funding for business start-ups and developing existing businesses through business counselling and training, among other services. Business Link Rural Cumbria is an arm of Business Link Cumbria. The idea behind Business Link's "one stop shop" is that it will reduce confusion and increase effectiveness.

Business Link Rural Cumbria, which was set up in 1995, developed out of the Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency. Its initial task is to market its services, and all businesses in the parish are currently being approached to discover their needs. Business Link are able to offer specialist business advice in all areas, including farming and tourism. After an initial consultation, specialist counsellors will be sent to visit the business, and three hours of free business counselling are provided. Two levels of service are provided depending on whether the business employs 5-200 staff, and is classed as a Small to Medium-sized Enterprise (SME), or 1-4 and is classed as a small business or sole trader.

Another business advice service is offered by the Rural Development Commission. The RDC generally aim business support services at SMEs of over 5 employees. Since there are so few firms of this category in Alston Moor, and most have below 5 employees, the RDC grant aid Business Link Rural Cumbria to provide business support to these smaller companies. Free advice is given, but if access to specialist services is required, a subsidised charge is made.

Other support services offered by the RDC are assistance from their Sales Promotion Unit, which will provide various kinds of help for firms attending exhibitions or trade fairs. Also, the RDC's Productivity Centre will provide technical assistance to firms requiring specialised equipment.

Business Link's proactive approach may pay dividends, depending on their success in finding clients. Many local businesses do not have a business plan, and Business Link will encourage and assist businesses to develop them. Banks are becoming much more demanding in requiring business plans and a business plan may be a valuable tool in helping a business to evaluate their potential. Most of the business people interviewed said

that their prime need was to access grants: Business Link say they will be able to help them obtain them.

Many of the business people interviewed for this appraisal were sceptical about the value of business advice generally. The free counselling service offered by Business Link is limited, and may not be adequate for small businesses, who may benefit from more contact, a little and often. A business advisor based in Alston Moor is preferred by many local people, who point to the success of an advisor who was formerly based at the North Pennines Tourism Partnership (see also page 75). The rural action plan prepared by Cumbria County Council (18) says that the establishment of Business Links Cumbria will improve the delivery of advisory services to many small rural firms but, the report says, "there are concerns that it will not address - and could actually divert services away from - the needs of the smallest firms." But it is early days yet in assessing the performance of Business Link.

Voluntary Action Cumbria has started a Business Ambassadors scheme throughout the county. Ambassadors are intended to provide a first point of call, signposting local businesses or prospective businesses to the most appropriate agency. VAC have recruited about 60 volunteers, and there is one based at Alston. The scheme is limited in its scope, as most Business Ambassadors are working full-time themselves, but it is likely to be most effective if it works hand in hand with the other business support agencies.

Business Start-Ups

Business Link Rural Cumbria aims to help new businesses starting up by accessing funding for start up grants and free business training. The agency has bid for European and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to provide such support, and after some delay, this support is now available.

ECONOMIC SECTORS

In this section, the main economic sectors will be examined in turn, so that a picture of economic activity may be built up before examining economic problems and opportunities at the end of the section.

AGRICULTURE

Data on agriculture is now harder to obtain than when the previous appraisal was conducted, because of the Data Protection Act. The requirement that publicly available data should not allow the identification of individuals has since 1988 resulted in agricultural data at the parish level being amalgamated into groups of parishes. Alston Moor is in a relatively small group, as it has only been amalgamated with Dufton, but this still precludes data on the parish alone being obtained. The amalgamated data is still of use however in looking at trends.

At the time of the 1980 appraisal (1) there were 87 holdings in the parish, 46 of which were part-time. In 1994, data from the Agricultural and Horticultural Census shows that the number of holdings for both Alston Moor and Dufton was 118. This in itself is meaningless, but there has been little change in numbers since 1988, when there were 117 holdings.

Employment in farming has declined in Alston Moor and Dufton between 1988-1994. In 1988 the total agricultural labour force in both parishes was 241 and in 1994 it was 222. Because of the amalgamation of the two parishes by the census, the data must be treated with caution. But the decline shown in Table 16 is also supported by the data in Table 11. Particularly significant is the data on regular full-time workers, the numbers of which have almost halved between 1988-1994 (see table 16 below). Also the numbers of full-time farmers have declined significantly. Numbers of livestock however have increased, as the table below shows. These changes may be partly due to the introduction of All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) - four wheeled motorbikes - which allow more stock to be looked after by less people.

<i>Table 16: Trends in Agriculture (Figures for Alston Moor and Dufton)</i>				
	<i>Breeding ewes</i>	<i>Beef herd</i>	<i>Fulltime regular workers</i>	<i>Full time farmers</i>
1988	32458	1156	25	103
1990	34329	1194	25	94
1992	34745	1274	13	96
1994	35054	1359	13	84

Source: Agricultural and Horticultural Census, MAFF

Farming in the parish is very dependent on government support. One farmer who was not in the ESA scheme (see below) reckoned more than half his gross income came from subsidies. The parish is a Less Favoured Area (LFA) and farmers receive a premium per head of livestock. Livestock rearing is the principal type of farming, with sheep predominant, followed by beef cattle. Many farms are now run by families, who bring in seasonal help when needed. Despite the unemployment situation, farmers reported that it can sometimes be difficult to find casual help.

Some farms already supplement their incomes by providing B&B. The Denman and Green report on tourism development identified some potential for further agri-tourism. The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund is available for farm diversification schemes. Advice is now available from Farm Business Link, a new business support service offered by Business Link Rural Cumbria.

Since the 1980 appraisal (1), three major national schemes, all sparked off by increasing awareness of and concern for the environment, have impacted on the agricultural situation, and the ESA scheme is by far the most significant. The other two are examined first.

Countryside Stewardship

This scheme is run by the Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage as a pilot scheme. The eventual scheme will be run by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), who are due to take it over at the end of the current financial year. The scheme's aim is to include conservation as a fundamental part of farming, and it does this by offering 10 year management agreements, made up of a package of measures, to enhance and conserve landscape and wildlife. Payments are made to farmers per measure selected as part of a package.

The North Pennines are a target area for the scheme, but the scheme cannot double up with the ESA scheme. Measures for heather regeneration, hay meadow enhancement and dry stone walling have been most popular. According to the Countryside Commission, take-up of the scheme in the area has been good.

Moorland Scheme

The Moorland Scheme is a new scheme launched in April 1995 by MAFF. It is an EU Agri-Environment scheme, so it is designed to encourage farmers to conserve and enhance the rural environment. The scheme area covers all of the moorland grazing area of the parish. The aim of the scheme is to reduce numbers of livestock, as heavy stocking can damage the heather moorland. An annual payment is made of £25 per ewe removed.

The scheme sets stocking density limits, and assesses how many sheep need to be removed in order to achieve these limits. The payment is aimed to compensate for the loss of income involved, and does not allow farmers to make extra money. The economics of the scheme depend on the individual farm circumstances. Where farmers are leasing quota to claim sheep premiums, the scheme will reduce these costs as the need for the quota will be removed or reduced. The common factor is that the scheme will reduce the amount of work involved in the farm.

The situation for farmers with grazing rights on common land is complex, but briefly, agreement would have to be obtained from all those with rights over the land. The scheme is easier to apply to large landowners.

The Moorland Scheme is at present at an early stage. Not much interest has been shown as yet from the parish. It may require more proactive marketing to gain a greater response. One potential advantage is to allow farmers more time to put into farm diversification schemes, or work on conservation projects under the ESA scheme (see below).

ESA Scheme

ESAs were introduced by the EU in 1986. MAFF designated the Pennine Dales as one of five ESAs in 1987, and in 1992, the ESA was extended northwards to include Alston Moor and East and West Allen Dale. The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS) are contracted by MAFF to run the ESA scheme, and one staff member is responsible for Alston Moor and the Allen Dales. The Pennine Dales was designated because of the way farming has combined with nature to produce a unique landscape. The survival of hay meadows is seen as of particular importance and also the protection of historic features.

The scheme works similarly to the Stewardship scheme - it is a voluntary scheme, and payments are made to farmers depending on a 10 year management agreement. But unlike Countryside Stewardship, the ESA is a whole farm scheme, and the farmer cannot select particular measures to follow. Payments are made according to the number of hectares and quality of land involved. A large number of guidelines are laid down for farmers joining the scheme to follow. Some examples include

- do not cut grass for hay or silage in any year before 8 July
- do not apply slurry or poultry manure
- do not use fungicides and insecticides
- maintain stockproof walls and hedges in a stockproof condition using traditional materials

The area of the ESA in Alston Moor is called the South Tyne with Nent Valley, and covers all of the valley areas (see diagram 6). The scheme has been very successful so far, and the level of uptake is about 60% in Alston Moor (this compares with 63% for the Pennine Dales ESA overall).

Farmers who have not joined the scheme probably belong to one of the following four categories:

1. Those who have a high stocking rate on improved grassland, probably with a slurry system and do not wish to reduce these standards. This category would particularly include farms with larger numbers of cattle.
2. Those who do not want any interference in their methods.
3. Farmers who have only a part of the farm in the ESA area, and would only receive small amounts of payments.
4. Those who farm licensed land, where the financial benefit would go to the landlord licensing the land and not to the farmer.

This last category represents a complex problem which requires investigation by MAFF and/or ADAS, as there are a number of farms on licensed land in the parish. The system seems to be preventing some farmers from joining the ESA scheme, and there may be an arrangement possible which would allow sufficient incentive for the landlord and for the farmer. Joint agreements are possible in the scheme between landlords and tenants or licensee. But the difference is that a **tenant farmer** will receive the ESA payments but a **licensee** will not necessarily receive the payments. The licensee may receive a reduction in rent, but this is at the discretion of the landowner.

Under the present system, even if a farmer only has some licensed land, this may be enough to deter him or her from joining the scheme, as the benefit from joining the scheme may not be sufficiently large, if no payment would be received for the licensed land. The problem is that licenses have to be renewed annually, and this may put the 10 year agreement in jeopardy. However an agreement can be set up which would bind the landowner to only license to farmers who agree to continue with the management agreement.

There are other payments available under the ESA scheme. Firstly, the **conservation grants scheme**, which is voluntary, allows the farmer to obtain an 80% rate of grant for such works as repairing barns and walls, planting hedges and trees, and restoring stiles and footbridges for public access. About half of current agreement holders in the parish are operating a conservation plan. Plans last for two years, and can be done on a rolling programme basis. Many such conservation works are in the farmer's interests, for example walls provide shelter and shade in summer for livestock.

An important element in the ESA scheme is the preservation and replacement of woodland. Without a replacement programme many existing trees will be lost in another 50 years with no succession. The ESA scheme is designed to encourage farmers to regenerate small areas of woodland. Again 80% of costs are paid by the scheme, and if it is gill woodland, the farmer is reimbursed for land taken out of grazing.

Access is a further element of the ESA scheme, and farmers are encouraged to set up permissive paths to supplement the existing network, particularly where they would link other routes or create a route to a landscape feature. A payment of £170 per kilometre applies, with an 80% grant for essential works.

Conservation plans are now generating work which is often given to contractors. Contractors have to be brought in from outside the parish as there is too much of this work for the local contractors available. Restoration work therefore has the potential to provide work locally and keep traditional skills such as slating alive. The scheme involves the farmer having to pay for works initially and then being reimbursed. Inevitably, there is a delay between claiming a grant and receiving payment which may be an obstacle for some farmers. A Credit Union, if one is established, would provide a useful service for these farmers.

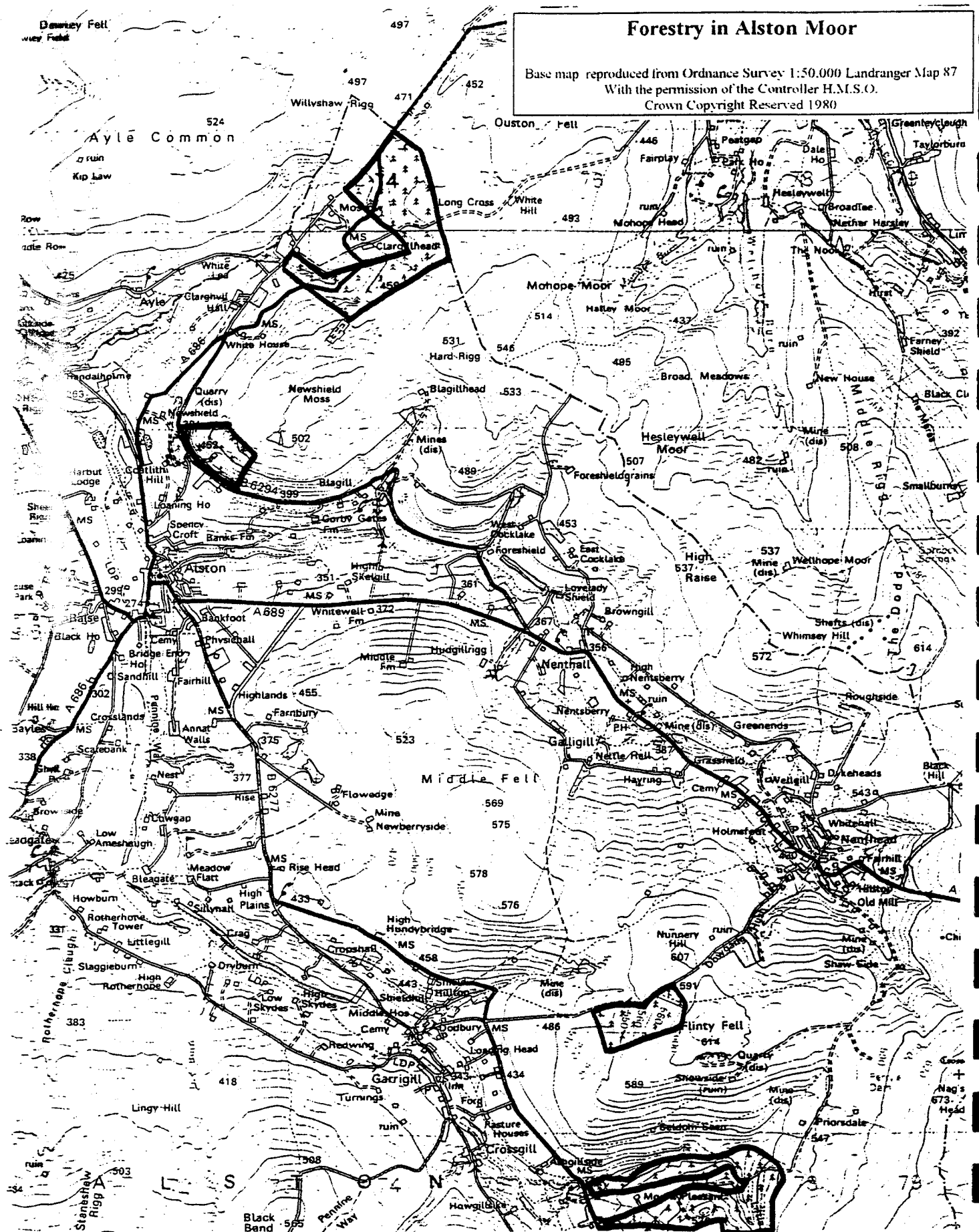
The ESA scheme is having a real impact on the countryside in Alston Moor, and provides the means to protect and enhance the local landscape and wildlife on a large scale. The payments provided are now a significant part of local farmers' incomes, and depending on the previous farming system, the payments may be additional to farmers' existing incomes or may represent compensation for income foregone because of reduced stock carrying capacity.

FORESTRY AND WOODLAND

The situation for forestry is very similar to that described in the 1980 appraisal (1). As diagram 7 shows, there are very few forestry plantations of any size. Those that do exist are managed by Tilhill Economic Forestry (formerly the Economic Forestry Group) and owned by landowners. Any potential for afforestation, as discussed in the 1980 appraisal (1) has been precluded by the 1988 Ridley statement which constrained the planting of conifers on upland areas above the 800 feet contour.

Standards of forestry management have improved considerably, for example, managers have to comply with rigorous landscaping if clearfelling. The area on Mount Hooley above Alston suffers badly from poor clearfelling, and the sight is visible for miles around. Hopefully, this kind of clearfelling will not happen again, with stricter controls. The area

Diagram 7



has been replanted, but it will take some years before the trees restore the visual amenity of the area.

Unless government thinking on the issue changes, the future for forests in the parish seems to lie with planting and managing small areas of woodland. The long term economic viability of such tree planting, with grant assistance, is good in terms of timber production. But because of the high exposed land in the parish, the landowner might have to wait 30-40 years before realising any financial rewards even for conifers. There is no real economic potential for timber in broadleaved trees, according to interviewees.

A complex array of grants are available - grants under the ESA scheme, the Countryside Stewardship scheme, and the Forestry Authority's Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS). The WGS includes several different forms of grants, for example, the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, and the Woodland Improvement Grant. The WGS scheme has changed frequently, causing some confusion and lack of confidence. ESA agreement holders can obtain grants under the WGS and may then be eligible for supplementary ESA payments.

Conservation and amenity are probably the major reasons for woodland in the parish now. Woodland is also important to farmers for shelter. Increasing the amount of woodland will improve the environment of the parish considerably, and most questionnaire respondents believed this was important or worth doing. Native broadleaved species such as beech and ash are preferred by grant providers, although sycamore is acceptable because it grows so well in these conditions.

Woodland may fulfill an important function in improving the appearance of spoil heaps. A planting scheme at Overwater has been successful, and has considerably improved the appearance of the area. This would indicate the need for further such schemes. But the potential is limited because trees will only grow successfully on unreworkeed spoil.

The regeneration and management of small woodlands could provide local employment. According to Tilhill Economic Forestry, it is in the company's interest to use local sub-contractors, but sub-contractors are hard to find in the Alston Moor area. This lack of local sub-contractors in agriculture and forestry has been supported by several interviewees, and there may be some untapped potential here for employment in the parish.

MINERALS

The extraction of minerals is still an important part of the local economy, despite long-term decline. Coal mining has declined in the area since the 1980 appraisal (1). Clarghyll Colliery is closed temporarily and numbers employed had declined from 12 to under 10, including the three partners. Lower demand for coal was given as the cause of the decline. The mine at Barhaugh, which is outside the parish, but was employing people from the parish, has also closed temporarily.

The colliery at Ayle is now the largest in the parish, employing 14 men and 1 women full-time. Employment at this colliery has increased since the 1980 appraisal (1), when it was employing six people. The Ayle colliery sells coal to an extensive area in the north of

England, but reports that demand for coal has been declining since 1985 and prices are low. This means that the colliery is vulnerable to competition.

The parish is still classed as a Coal Assisted Area. Grants are not available from British Coal, but a loan scheme is available from British Coal Enterprise to new and growing businesses in traditional coalfield regions, with the aim of creating permanent jobs. Both manufacturing and service sectors are eligible.

There are three small stone quarries in the parish of about 1 hectare each, but only one, Hodgson's, is operational full-time. Hodgson's employ 6 full-time men. They process the natural local stone (buff sandstone) and sell the stone as far afield as Sheffield.

There are no applications for further mining activity at the moment. The planning context for mining is that the AONB forms a kind of half-way house between a normal area and a National Park. The council is more rigorous in the examination of applications. Policy 29 of the consultation draft of the minerals and waste local plan (July 1995) (19) states that planning permission will not be granted for open cast mining in the Alston, Nenthead and East Fell area. Also in that area, the plan says that there are sufficient reserves of coal with planning permission to meet market needs beyond the plan period.

However, the plan (19) also states that the development of drift mines would be supported in the area. Policy 30 states that planning permission will be granted for underground coal mines subject to adequate precautions being taken to avoid subsidence damage, and no significant adverse effects on local communities or the environment. Policy 40 says that planning permission will be granted for the extension or reopening of building stone quarries, provided there are no significant adverse effects on the local community or the environment.

Conditions to minimise the impact of operations are applied, but whether these conditions are too onerous or not is currently a matter for debate. In order to allow mining operations to be more viable, and retain levels of employment, there is an argument that there is a need for compensatory grant aid to assist operators in complying with conditions.

MANUFACTURING AND SMALL BUSINESSES

There has been considerable change in manufacturing businesses in the parish since 1980. Precision Products, the oldest manufacturing business in Alston, continues, but the three other businesses listed in the 1980 appraisal (1) have left. There has been a definite trend towards diversification and the growth of small specialised businesses, as the following examination will show. The discussion is based on the appraisal business survey, which does not attempt to be comprehensive. However, most, if not all manufacturing and related businesses should have been covered.

Precision Products is still the largest employer in the parish, and numbers employed have risen from 53 full-time and 5 part-time in 1980 to 65 full-time and 2 part-time in 1995. A full history and description of the processes of the company are given in the 1980 appraisal (1). Briefly, the company was founded in 1948, and chose to locate in Alston primarily

because the owner lived there, and also low cost premises and labour were available. The company uses a unique casting process to produce a variety of precision cast metal products. The foundry business (30,000 square feet) is located in old stone buildings off Alston Front Street, and has premises at the top of the town. Precision Products has contemplated moving to another site, but have not found anywhere suitable. They are in the process of extending their present premises.

Precision Products experienced a decline in the 1980s, when employment dropped to about 40. They report that a general depression was felt throughout the parish in that period, after the Alston Foundry closure. In the 1990s, business has picked up. Precision Products does not receive any financial support, and the company's view is that there should be more grant aid available in the area for existing and new businesses.

KMC Industrials, who trade under the name Mountain Range, is one of the only other two manufacturing companies who employs more than 5 staff in the parish, to my knowledge (Total Postweigh is the other). The company has an office and warehouse at the Brewery in Alston, and a manufacturing plant and warehouse at the Skelgill Workshops, which were built by English Estates for the RDC. They have 6,000 square feet of space at Alston Moor, but they also have a manufacturing plant at Workington. They employ 25 full time staff in the parish (23 of who are female) and 26 at Workington. 9 have been made redundant this year, as the company has experienced some loss of demand.

KMC Industrials was set up in Alston in 1979, mainly because the directors lived there. They report that largely because of difficulties in finding the workforce, but also due to the existence of a Regional Development Grant at Workington, the company moved part of their manufacture there. This company, not surprisingly since the employees are mainly women, were the most emphatic regarding the lack of childcare available in the parish.

The company has potential to expand significantly, but an upturn in the national economy is needed to make that expansion possible. It will be up to Alston Moor to provide the conditions to ensure that at least some of the potential expansion is in the parish. Better childcare provision is one obvious method. The company's long-term aim is to have a single site at Alston Moor and this could be borne in mind when considering future development in the parish.

Total Postweigh Ltd. manufacture and distribute mail room equipment, and also are involved in printing and distribution. The company moved from Manchester in 1987 because the director was returning to live in the parish. The availability of staff was also a factor, and the move was expected to save costs. There are 6 full time staff, 4 male and 2 female. But up to 12 are employed irregularly on a casual basis. The company has benefited from small amounts of assistance from the RDC, and a local authority grant for new employment.

This is another example of a local firm which chooses to expand outside of the parish. Total Postweigh are about to develop new ranges of machinery in Newcastle, because of the availability of Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) from the Department of Trade and

Industry. This does seem to indicate that without some form of assisted area status, Alston Moor cannot hope to compete for this sort of investment.

The smaller businesses include:

- **Portabowl Products**, a company comprising two partners who work full-time producing water feeding bowls mainly for pets. This business moved earlier this year from Haydon Bridge into the Rampgill workshops., because the partners lived in Nenthead. The company is planning to employ one full-time employee, and is applying for the local authority grant for business expansion which is linked to new employment. They are also benefitting from an RDC marketing grant.
- **Bart Phillips Designs** who make specialised wooden boxes and other wooden products. The company uses Moredun garage workshop facilities, and occupies about 750 square feet. The company wishes to take on more staff, but is satisfied with the workshop space already available. Bart Phillips Designs has taken on trainees using TEC grants, but has had no other assistance.
- **Cumberland Mustard** who set up in 1984 in Alston, also at the Moredun garage. They rent 700 square feet of workspace. There are two full-time partners in the business, and 4 people are employed on a casual basis. Mustard is made up as required, and there are several varieties, including a new whiskey vinegar using a single malt!. The firm has expanded into other high value food ranges such as raspberry vinegar and pickled cherries. This is an important industry for Alston Moor as it has significant benefits for tourism as well as employment potential. The firm are considering a move to the proposed RDC workshops at the former Keartons Yard (see page 85). They are trying to obtain assistance with a repackaging project, which will help them to expand, but so far have been unsuccessful.
- **Moorland Candles**, a well-known candle-making business in the area, which has been going since 1981. This firm could be discussed under the crafts section below, but has been included here for simplicity. The firm uses one of the Phase 1 Skelgill workshops, with 1,050 square feet, and is expanding to use a second workshop next month, giving a total of 1,800 square feet. There is one full-time director and the firm employs two part-time workers. It is hoped to take on more in the near future. A related workshop has been set up in Nenthead making rainbow candles. The company benefited from a three month rent free period on moving into Skelgill.
- **Wildcat Films** was set up in 1986 and produces television films. The business located in Alston because of a decision by the director to move to the area to live. Wildcat Films employs two full-time staff, both women. It is necessary for the staff to travel to make the films, but editing is done locally. The firm's potential for expansion is limited by being in this area instead of London, but a positive decision was made that the quality of life in the parish outweighed the disadvantages. A problem for the firm is the lack of continuity in the Carlisle to London air service, which frequently closes. Another problem, which is significant in terms of economic development in the parish, was experienced when the firm was setting up. This was the lack of available office

space. It took 6 months to find an appropriate location (at the Brewery, which the firm has had to convert).

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Alston Moor is gaining a reputation for its role as a centre for arts and crafts, and there are many people now producing high quality art and craft work, either on a full-time basis or as a means of supplementing their existing income. Much of the market for these products comes from visitors, so any measures to develop tourism will increase the potential for arts and crafts businesses to expand. The major centres at present for the sale of arts and craft work are Gossipgate Gallery and Pinehaven, both in Alston. Pinehaven is a workers cooperative, where shop space is shared amongst members of the cooperative.

There are two initiatives designed to promote locally made products, particularly giftware and crafts. The first is "Made in Cumbria" a Cumbria County Council initiative, which has been running since 1989. "Made in Cumbria" has helped several local companies, including Moorlands Dipped Candles, the Pennine Pottery, Chameleon, Cumberland Mustard, and Walter Gundrey, by producing attractive promotional leaflets. The second initiative is "Made in the North Pennines", which is a recent initiative of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership. Both initiatives aim to encourage the sale of locally produced goods. It may be important in future development that the North Pennines initiative seeks to avoid duplication with the Cumbria initiative

This economic sector has much potential to grow, and increase its profitability. There is a need for consideration of how best to encourage this growth. Conventional training is not appropriate, for skills such as pottery are not easily or quickly transferable. Formal workspace facilities may provide one means of allowing small businesses in arts and crafts to expand, following the excellent model provided by Moorland Candles (see page 68), and this idea is taken further on page 86. A home for crafts workshops will be found in the refurbished Alston town hall, and these will provide a valuable series of events for local people and visitors, and will add to the list of wet weather activities in the parish.

TOURISM

A large amount has been written on the subject of tourism in both the North Pennines and Alston Moor. The following discussion will be limited to a brief description of the development of tourism, followed by an examination of present concerns and initiatives, focussing on trends and future development. Further information will be found in the references cited.

Alston Moor's performance in tourism development is very much bound up with the North Pennines as a whole. The area has suffered greatly in the past from neglect in terms of promotion. In the 1970s, the North Pennines was identified as a growth point by the English Tourist Board. Progress was very slow throughout the 70s and 80s, despite the formation of a North Pennines Consultative Group. A landmark was the Roger Tym report (20) in 1989 on tourism, which resulted in a tourism development action programme. At around the same time, the AONB designation was confirmed.

Widespread concern at the time that the AONB designation would result in a worsening of the already fragile economy of the North Pennines led to a desire from such agencies as the RDC and the Countryside Commission to show that economic development and conservation could work hand in hand. Tourism development was seen as a vital element in the economy, and one in which the agencies involved had mutual interests. This led to the formation of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership in 1990.

A further landmark in tourism development was the winning of an award from a joint English Tourist Board/ RDC competition in 1989. The award enabled the town to appoint consultants - Denman and Green - who prepared a tourism development plan (15). Many of the proposals in this report are still of relevance and much of the information in the report may be of value in preparing a parish action plan.

Local Attitudes to Tourism

The questionnaire survey results showed that only 12.7% would like to see **no** growth in tourism, 45.5% want **low to moderate** growth and 29.1% wish to see **moderate to high** growth. So 74.6% would like **some** growth in the tourism industry and this figure compares to 71% of respondents to the 1980 appraisal questionnaire survey (1) in favour of tourism development. But it is significant that a large majority would prefer low to moderate growth in tourism.

Those who wished for no growth in tourism tended to be those who have lived longer in the parish. Of those who have lived 0-3 years in the parish, 12.9% wanted no growth in tourism. Of those who have lived in the parish for more than 5 years, 18.8% wanted no growth in tourism. Comments arising from the present survey mainly relate to concerns about the damaging effects of tourism, and the need for sensitive development which is appropriate to Alston Moor's needs, and which provides 'real' jobs.

Many interviewees expressed concern about the promoting slogan "England's Last Wilderness", which was coined by David Bellamy, and used by the North Pennines Tourism Partnership. Local people are anxious that this kind of image reinforces the existing image of the area as remote, difficult to get to, and cut off in winter. Alternative images focussing on the area as a thriving, culturally interesting centre were preferred.

The questionnaire survey showed the highest amount of support for the provision of more wet weather activities (37.0%), followed closely by small locally owned developments (13.2%). Many wanted more events (23.2%) and a smaller number wanted more provision of outdoor activities (13.2%).

Market Weaknesses

The Single Programming Document for the Northern Uplands Objective 5b programme (23) points to a long list of market weaknesses in the Objective 5b area, many of which are relevant to Alston Moor today. These include:

- the low income base and net worth of small businesses which leads to low levels of investment in the business

- investment in facilities, business advice, promotion and awareness of customer care quality standards, tourism information services and marketing all require public sector investment.
- limited facilities in terms of farm based attractions, visitor centres, car parking, catering services, and wet weather facilities.
- seasonal activity limiting potential for permanent employment
- gaps in business skills and low levels of training
- under-exploited regional produce and culinary traditions
- unexploited potential in new and expanding markets.

The North Pennines Tourism Partnership

The North Pennines Tourism Partnership does not have a large budget, and concentrates on small-scale projects in areas such as marketing, business advice and training, upgrading quality and customer care, and developing individual attractions. The Tourism Partnership is working on a number of initiatives which will benefit Alston Moor. These are contained in the Rural Development Programme's Operating Plan (24) and include:

- developing local information points (LIPs) attached to local businesses around the area
- developing interpretive plans involving local communities
- establishing an annual North Pennines Festival
- developing a walking and wildlife project
- producing newsletters about tourism in the North Pennines
- researching and developing the leisure potential of public transport in the North Pennines
- developing farm tourism
- new marketing campaigns

The Partnership has strong support locally, which was articulated by many interviewees. In 1994, a survey by Jerry Dronsfield on the effectiveness of the Partnership (21) found that nearly 60% of operators on the North Pennines had been in contact with the Partnership at least once. 64.9% of respondents thought that the Partnership was either very or fairly effective in achieving its aims, and only 9.7% thought it was fairly or completely ineffective. The North Pennines AONB management plan (13) says that the Partnership is a "model of good practice for the sensitive development of tourism through cooperative working".

Some local interviewees suggested that the partnership's role should be based on economic development as a whole, rather than focussing on tourism. The concern is that

the emphasis on tourism may distort the potential for wider economic development in the North Pennines. If the Partnership's remit were wider, it could seek to promote and develop the area as an economic entity.

Eden District Council also has responsibility for tourism in the parish, and joint working is adopted with the Partnership to attempt to avoid duplication. Joint marketing activities may be beneficial. Operators can choose which Where to Stay guide to be included in - Eden District's or the North Pennines publication. The district council reports that marketing is fiercely competitive and that the last five years for all tourist destinations has been difficult. The district council represents Alston Moor at trade and travel fairs and holiday exhibitions, but their attendance is restricted by funding limitations.

Issues and concerns

Some operators in the parish report that visitor numbers and bookings are down this year. Retailers' impressions strongly support this view, as already mentioned, and some pessimism was expressed about declining trends. Tourism in Britain generally is in decline, (only 45% of UK residents now take their holidays in Britain compared with 60% in 1987 (quoted in 22)).

Alston Moor is suffering from this general trend, but in spite of this, the area has much unexploited potential for tourism development. It is notable that although overseas holiday operators have been experiencing a downturn this summer (widely reported in the press) and the good weather persuaded many British people to stay in Britain, evidence from interviewees reveals that Alston Moor does not seem to have particularly benefited from this.

However, the survey by Jerry Dronsfield (21) found that 45.1% of respondents North Pennines-wide reported their business turnover had increased from 1990-1994. 23.9% said it had remained unchanged, and 21.8% said it had decreased. 44% report increased visitor numbers to the area, and 43% say that repeat bookings have increased. On the other hand, there was a decrease in families visiting the area noticed by 36% of respondents, and also a decrease in the length of stay noticed by 16% of respondents.

Evidence on occupancy rates from the North Pennines Tourism Partnership shows that rates in 1992 and 1993 for the North Pennines were broadly similar to those for Northumbria Tourist Board rates and Cumbria Tourist Board rates. Unfortunately data is unavailable on Alston Moor. There is a need for more data on tourism at the parish level, which could be addressed by the Partnership.

Services and facilities

There is an overall need to improve the quality of tourism facilities and services. Raising the quality of retailing, cafes and pubs will make a large contribution to improving the welcome which visitors feel when they come to the parish. A training course for retailers on provision for tourism may be beneficial. Minor details can make a large difference to tourists' impressions of the parish. For example, some comments from the appraisal questionnaire survey related to shops having too many half-day closings and being too long closed at lunch-time.

Most pubs in the parish are closed from about 6-7pm. With cafes closed by this time, it is difficult to find anywhere to eat in the parish during this period, which is when families with younger children may be looking for places to eat. Solutions could include instituting a rota system among the pubs for closing times, and/or putting up a sign pointing visitors to the pubs/hotels which are open. The lorry problem in Alston has already been mentioned as one which may be giving tourists a bad impression. Solutions need to be explored with the County Council. It is notable that such improvements in facilities and services will generally improve the quality of life for local people also.

Accommodation

Evidence from interviews suggests that visitor accommodation in the parish is well-supplied, if not over supplied, but there is scope for improved standards. Training courses run by the North Pennines Tourism Partnership have helped to raise business acumen and standards. The amount of self-catering accommodation is adequate, based on current demand, but there may be room for expansion in farm tourism.

However caution on this area is raised by Denman and Green (15) who suggest that levels of investment in providing self-catering accommodation may be prohibitive, even with grants. B&Bs are already well-supplied in the area. The development of camping barns in the parish is an unexploited area which could have extra viability with the development of Sustrans' Sea to Sea (C2C) cycle route (see below) and other long distance trails in the area.

Activities

The main activities in the parish are walking, cycling, riding, climbing, watersports, golf and fishing. There is also potential for adventurous sports such as mine exploration, paragliding, downhill and cross-country skiing. There is a dearth of guidebooks on the area, for example only one or two guided walks books on the North Pennines exist (The ECCP's walks pamphlets help to fill this gap, but are not available generally in bookshops outside the area). A large bookstore for example in Penrith stocked shelves and shelves of books on the Lakes, but practically nothing on the North Pennines.

There is potential for developing activities in conjunction with high quality serviced and self-catering accommodation. There are activity holiday centres in the parish but such facilities require large amounts of investment, which may not be available where there is a low income base. The same problem applies to the golf course. Contrary to popular belief, the availability of grants for upgrading small-scale tourist facilities is limited.

Opportunities in particular activities include:

- **Cycling** This is an important area to capitalise in, as the market is expanding. Accommodation providers on the Sea to Sea (C2C) route report large upturns in business. New facilities for example, a bunkhouse at the Miners Arms in Nenthead, are being opened, and one operator (not in the parish) reported to Sustrans that cyclists were keeping his business open.

Now that Sustrans have won their bid for Millenium funding for a national network of

cycle routes, the market is likely to expand further. New business opportunities exist, for example, one enterprise is ferrying cyclists and cycles to their starting point. With the possibility of the northwards extension of the Pennine Bridleway (see below), it may benefit the parish to ensure that this trail is convenient for cycle use, and links in with the Sustrans routes. Also, an examination by the County Council of locations for cycle parking would be of value.

- **Skiing** The 1980 appraisal (1) proposed further development in the skiing industry, but this has proved difficult. The snow is unreliable, and has become increasingly so, with milder winters. When it does fall, access to ski areas is difficult, because minor roads may not be open in time. The County Council do not see it as a priority to improve access for skiing. Cross-country skiing may have more economic potential than downhill, and is more environmentally friendly.
- **Walking** The North Pennines Tourism Partnership is developing the potential for organised walking trips linked to wildlife. Walking activities for families is an area which could be explored. There is scope for town and village trails with interpretive signs in both Alston and Nenthead.
- **Horse Riding** The Pennine Bridleway is now under construction to the vicinity of Kirby Stephen. The Countryside Commission is at present negotiating an extension of the route northwards and the route proposal is to come down from Hartside into Leadgate, and continue to Garrigill, Nenthead and then to Ayle. When negotiations are complete, a submission will be made to the Secretary of State. The bridleway could bring considerable economic benefit to the parish. There are implications to consider for possible requirements for increased farmhouse accommodation and provision of car parking at Nenthead, which could be one starting point for the bridleway.

Attractions and Initiatives

There are few existing tourist attractions in the parish. Questionnaire responses showed strong support for the development of wet weather attractions. The major attraction in the area is the South Tynedale Railway (see page 93). Minor attractions include:

- The **Hartside Nursery** produces and sells hardy alpine plants. This is a long-standing business, opened twenty years ago. Because of the difficulty of attracting sufficient customers for the retail side, the business sells two-thirds of its stock through horticultural shows and mail order.
- A new minor attraction is the **Bill and Beak** open farm, but this is at an early stage in development. No grant aid has yet been found, and plans for expansion depend upon obtaining a grant.
- The **Pennine Pottery** is a high quality attraction, open since 1993, comprising pottery, retailing and teas. The spectacular location on the A686 brings in large numbers of visitors. A Redundant Building Grant from the RDC helped to convert the barn into a pottery.

- The **Gossipgate Gallery** in Alston provides a large gallery, coffee shop, and an outlet for locally produced craft and art work. The gallery is well signposted and promoted, and draws many visitors through the Butts towards it.
- **Thortergill**, just outside Garrigill, offers a shop, tea room, wrought iron workshop, former mine and walk.

Major initiatives and opportunities for development, namely the Rampgill Visitor Centre, North Pennines Orchestra centre, South Tynedale Railway Visitor Centre and the Pennine Way Visitor Centre will be discussed in the next section.

The North Pennines Tourism Partnership have just received approval for extended funding of about £100,000 until March next year from the European Objective 5b programme. The continued uncertainty over the funding of the Partnership does present problems, as it will be obvious from the above that there is much work to do to foster growth in tourism in the area. The work of the Partnership is a lynchpin in the process of developing a high quality tourist industry which supports the local economy and contributes to the conservation of the area.

For example, a tourism business advice service based at the North Pennines Tourism Partnership was funded by Cumbria TEC and the RDC for three years, with a local project officer locally based in Alston. This service was highly valued by many local tourism businesses, and shows the advantages of having an advisor actually in the area. The success of tourism development in the parish hinges on nurturing existing businesses, as well as encouraging the exploitation of new potential. Some means of doing this have already been suggested, but will be discussed further in the final section.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The loss of large employers such as the Alston Foundry, Falmech and Keartons (Construction) has increased the fragility of the economy of Alston Moor and also increased its dependence on tourism, which can be a fickle source of income. The level of affluence in the parish is relatively low, particularly in comparison with the rest of Eden district. The **z score** for the parish is .06. (z scores relate to the Index of Local Conditions, which is a statistical analysis of a range of indicators, covering social, housing and environmental issues. These indicators are combined into a single deprivation score for each area and the scores are then used to rank areas). Alston Moor was ranked in 33rd place out of the 34 wards in Cumbria with positive scores. There are 181 wards altogether in Cumbria. Although not one of the highest positive scores (the highest is 8.66), Alston Moor is the only ward in Eden District with a positive score, and this is an indicator of relative deprivation.

The only subsidies offered in the area now are small employment subsidies and an interest relief subsidy. (This is related to Objective 5b status, and is administered by Business Link Rural Cumbria. Where a certain amount of expenditure is committed, loans may attract

2% relief on interest charges.) The peripherality of the parish is a strong disincentive to the location of SMEs in the area. The consensus from interviewees is that it would be very difficult for Alston Moor to attract large-scale inward investment, without large scale grant aid. At the same time, the problems for many local businesses lie in a lack of resources, which means significant investment in the business is impossible, and the risks of obtaining loans are discouraging. The difficulties of obtaining grant aid is one of the largest obstacles to growth for many of the existing small businesses in the parish.

A common thread to emerge from the above discussion of local businesses is that almost all are located in the parish either because the owner already lived here or moved in. The attraction is the quality of life to be obtained in the parish. The isolation of the parish is not viewed as an obstacle to most business people. Some report occasional problems with transport, but none that caused significant concern. Many are concerned about the parking and lorry issue in Alston.

Increasingly, the economy of Alston Moor is diversifying, and the economic strength of the parish is in its small businesses, many of them highly specialised. The opportunities for the parish's economic development may lie in building on this strength. This involves seeking further economic diversification, the encouragement of new businesses and increasing the profitability of existing businesses in all economic sectors. At the same time the conditions must be created for existing small businesses and SMEs to expand and, what is most important, stay in the parish. These issues will be discussed further in section 9.

SECTION 8

PROJECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section will include the major projects underway in Alston Moor, and opportunities for development. A section on the Alston Moor Teleworking Initiative is included, as this initiative may hold much significance for the future, even though it is inactive at the moment. Significant new development is in the process of springing up in the parish, and this section is intended to provide an overview and offer suggestions based on the research findings of this appraisal.

ALSTON TOWN HALL

A brief history of the development of the Town Hall Project has already been outlined on page 33. The aim of the present town hall project is to provide a multi-purpose community centre, which complements but does not compete with existing local groups and businesses. Extensive consultation has been carried out to determine which needs of the community might best be met in the refurbished town hall. The aims of the project encompass encouraging involvement of local businesses, and use by visitors (eg. providing wet weather activities) as well as by local groups. The trustees of the town hall are the members of the parish council.

The kinds of use envisaged include:

- facilities for indoor sports, which would be available for casual hire
- participatory workshops, demonstrations, and exhibitions held by local crafts groups
- adult education classes
- provision for the under 5s, including a soft play facility, occasional creche and play group facility
- arts and social events
- information including tourist information display boards, job vacancy information, careers and training information
- community office services and meeting space

Questionnaire responses indicate that live performances would be the most popular activity in the Town Hall (see table 17).

<i>Table 17: Popularity of Proposed Town Hall Activities</i>		
	<i>Number</i>	<i>percentage</i>
craft workshops	24	12.7
soft play	18	9.5
live performances	51	26.9
film club	38	20.1
job/careers/employment information	18	9.5
sports facilities	40	21.1
private hire	27	14.2
occasional office space	3	1.5

Source: Questionnaire survey

Work to the clock tower and first floor of the town hall are already being carried out. Much work is needed to provide the potential for the multi-purpose use envisaged, for example, sound proofing, staging and seating, energy efficiency measures, and sports and kitchen equipment.

A key question is whether an extension is necessary. The only way to provide disabled access to the first floor is to include a lift in an extension, which could also link to the new municipal toilets which have been built by Eden District Council adjacent to the main building (this would also provide a disabled toilet, which is missing in the main building). The site is part of the Alston Conservation Area, and the design of this extension would be an important consideration.

The variety of activities proposed for the town hall would suggest the need to seek the maximum amount of space possible at the outset. This would obviously have revenue implications, and it is critical to keep these low, but the success of the whole venture may depend on having adequate space available. Adding a lift for the disabled will raise the start-up costs considerably for the project, but the funding package will probably depend on it. Legal requirements must also be borne in mind, as the law on disabled access is becoming increasingly stringent. A feasibility study is about to go ahead, which is likely to explore these issues.

The Town Hall was suggested on page 30 as a possible location for an all-day childcare/educational facility for the under 5s, with potential for playschemes and kids club. Funding would be available from the County Council and the RDC for start-up costs, which could contribute to the funding package already identified. If this proposal is to be

taken forward in the action plan resulting from this appraisal, space considerations in the Town Hall would be a significant factor.

A further useful community facility would be the establishment of a community drop-in centre. It is important that this is not seen as competing with local cafes, so an informal, volunteer run facility may be appropriate. But such a centre at the town hall could serve a very useful function in complementing the activities going on. More youth facilities were seen as a need by 47.6% of questionnaire respondents. A drop-in centre could be important in providing for young people during holidays and evenings, and has potential in improving the quality of life for a number of groups such as the unemployed, young mothers etc.

The confirmed funding package in September 1995 is as follows:

ERDF	£56,000 Capital
ERDF	£6,000 Revenue
RDC	£26,000
English Heritage	£13,500
Parish Council	£22,500
Local fundraising	£4,500
Eden District Council	£38,000
Neighbourhood Forum	£500
Charities	£4,300
North Pennines Tourism Partnership	£700
RIBA	£1000
Value of voluntary work performed	£4,500

The total estimated of confirmed funding is £182,000 to date. Some matching funds are being sought. Projected sources of funding include English Partnerships, Arts Council Lottery, Heritage Council Lottery, and further charities, RDC and ERDF funding. The total projected amount required if the extension is to go ahead is estimated to be £446,000 (including the confirmed funding above). Revenue funding has been obtained for the work of a project coordinator.

The parish council, acting as trustees for the town hall, is examining the possibility of a local management group which could more single-mindedly devote itself to taking the project forward on a strategic basis, the the continued involvement of the parish council.

The Town Hall has significant implications for both economic and social development in Alston Moor. It has the potential to provide a wide range of facilities which are currently lacking. In particular, the possibilities for under 5s provision, job/ training information and community services offices have a role in improving the economic situation. There are many important considerations however still to be ironed out. A key question to decide is how the town hall will be managed. It is important for a number of the activities mentioned that it is open all day. At the same time, revenue costs must be limited. Some combination of part-time manager plus volunteer assistance may be a possible means of providing the necessary staffing.

RAMPGILL VISITOR CENTRE

The North Pennines Heritage Trust was started in 1987, with the aim of preserving the industrial remains of the North Pennines. The Rampgill site is probably the most significant in the area, and was scheduled by English Heritage as an ancient monument in 1988. The whole site extends to about 300 acres, and includes traditional industrial buildings and mining remains. The land is owned by the County Council, who leases it to the Trust at a peppercorn rent. The North Pennines Heritage Trust aims to restore a large stone building which was a carpenters' workshop as a visitor centre, which will also supply a permanent office to the Trust.

The training scheme discussed on page 54 is now at an end, and the trust is employing 4 staff to complete the work. A set of 6 workspaces has just been completed on the site, and these are intended as low rent, starter units for small businesses. Rents range from £50 per month to £85 per month, plus a service charge, and sizes are about 500 - 800 square feet. One of them is already rented out, and the rest are vacant. These workshops are attractively designed, in keeping with the adjacent visitor centre.

The phases of the project are as follows:

- Phase 1 Workshops
- Phase 2a Visitor Centre (building)
- Phase 2b Fitting out Visitor Centre and Interpretation
- Phase 3 Further projects on the site

A management plan is being prepared at the moment by a firm of consultants which will involve plans for further development of the site. Further projects include the refurbishment of a water turbine which has been obtained from Beamish. The turbine could generate enough power to heat the visitor centre. Pipework and stone conduits from previous water power installations are being cleaned and restored now. It is hoped to provide an "underground experience" of a lead mine for visitors. This may cost a considerable amount but would add greatly to the attraction of the site. Two possible mines exist: one at Rampgill itself and one a small distance away at Smallcleugh.

A brief is being prepared by the Heritage Trust regarding the interpretation of the site. The proposal is to provide visitors with a flavour of life in Nenthead at different times, for example in the 1600s, the 1800s and now. The social history slant would distinguish the centre from the nearby Killhope mining centre.

There was some concern that views amongst the Nenthead community were not being given adequate recognition by the Trust in its plans. Delvin Research Associates were commissioned to conduct a survey (25) to assess public opinion in Nenthead. The findings were that 70% were favourable to the development of the visitor centre, and only 9% were unfavourable. 57.7% were favourable to an increase in the number of visitors to the area, although there was some concern relating to traffic and litter issues.

Details of funding are as follows:

Workshops and Visitor Centre

RDC	
County Council	
Derelict Land Grant	
ERDF	
District Council	
Fundraising	<u>Total</u>
	£170,000 (confirmed)

Interpretation

ERDF	
County Council	
Countryside Commission	
Lottery funding	
Fundraising	<u>Total</u>
	£110,000 (approved in principle)

Major projected sources for further projects include English Heritage, Lottery funding, Countryside Commission, and further Objective 5b funding.

The Rampgill Visitor Centre will act as a counterbalance to the South Tynedale Railway, and co-operative ticketing arrangements may be possible. Perhaps Wrights could arrange an old restored bus to provide transport between the two sites. There are possible linkages to be made too to the potential Nent Force Level project, which will be discussed on page 87.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT IN NENTHEAD

The Rampgill project has major implications for the village of Nenthead and for tourism development in the area. The project may act as a stimulus for improving the Nenthead built environment. It has already been suggested that a village enhancement project could be linked with Alston's Town Enhancement Group proposals. The wider issue of the degradation of the Upper Nent area is implicated in the Rampgill project. There are problems of contamination of land and undermining of land by the river. The Rampgill project has the potential to include a large-scale restoration project and integrate village enhancement.

Nenthead could become the subject of a village interpretation scheme in the future. This could include an interpretation of the history of Wrights, already mentioned. Environmental enhancement plans could include the creation of a new bus terminal for Wrights (page 46).

Environmental improvement in Nenthead would involve a long term plan, and the costs will be considerable, but the further development of the present visitor centre project may present the chance to address the area's wider needs. Several comments from questionnaire respondents related to the need to do something about Nenthead's spoil heaps. Research into contamination problems is going on at present. There is a need to

draw all the different problems and opportunities of the area together into a comprehensive action plan for the future.

ST PAULS METHODIST CHURCH

This fine old church at Townhead in Alston is now up for sale. There are now two groups bidding to buy it. One is a bid by leaders of the North Pennine Concert Hall Project, with the aim of establishing a concert hall and music centre in the North Pennines, which could act as the home of the North Pennines Orchestra. The other bid is by a private individual.

The concert hall project dates from 1994, when the then newly formed North Pennine Orchestra was looking for a home base. The church was known to be acoustically excellent, and had seating of up to 400. The idea is that as a music centre, the project could encompass a wide range of activities, including a recording studio, music tuition, workshops, retail sales of musical merchandise and a computer database on musical resources and listings in the north of England. The aim is to attract audiences from the North Pennines but also to provide a regional centre for music for the north of England. All kinds of music would be included, and there would be particular attention paid to musical provision for schools.

A feasibility study has been planned for some time, at a cost of £11,000. Consultants have been chosen and a funding package has been agreed, with £5,000 from Objective 5b, £4,000 from the RDC and £1,5000 from Eden District Council. The remainder can be made up with sponsorship. St Paul's Church is for sale in two parts, namely the church building and the church hall with adjoining house. The total cost of buying the church and church hall is estimated to be £98,000. Refurbishment costs are estimated to be about £350,000 (not including the church hall), and a funding package has yet to be identified. Business sponsorship, fundraising and grant aid are the proposed basic elements. Fundraising has already produced about £8,000 in pledges.

This project would ensure the survival and enhancement of the historic St Paul's Church, the fabric of which is deteriorating. It would provide a major visitor attraction, and could draw in large numbers, particularly given its potential to provide facilities for groups. It would significantly add to the scale of wet weather activities available in the parish, and would offer leisure occupations for local people as well as for visitors. There are also important implications for local employment. If successful, it is estimated that the project could employ 5-6 people. The situation at the top of Alston is good in that it would balance the other main tourist attraction, the South Tynedale Railway at the foot of the town.

The central issue will be whether the project can establish sufficient demand, and generate enough income in the summer to ensure the survival of the centre. It is envisaged that activities could carry on all year round, but income generated in the winter is likely to be small-scale. Many of the extra activities proposed have the potential to act as significant sources of revenue. The revenue costs are likely to be large, and users will have to be correspondingly large in number. One possibility to increase economic viability would be

to widen the function of the centre to become more of a multi-purpose centre embracing the arts in general. The market assessment provided by the feasibility study will be valuable, although it may be somewhat difficult to measure the likely demand, since there are no equivalent facilities for comparison.

SOUTH TYNEDALE RAILWAY VISITOR CENTRE

The rail link between Haltwhistle and Alston was closed in 1976. In 1983, the South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society opened a small section (1 mile) of the former line to Gilderdale, using preserved steam and diesel engines. The service is run almost entirely by volunteers (one trainee was employed in the high season using a TEC grant). The railway is very important to the economy of Alston Moor, as it draws large numbers of visitors - up to 200-250 per day - throughout the summer.

The Railway Preservation Society hopes to open a further section of the line to Kirkhaugh, (2.25 miles) next year. A further plan is to extend to Slaggyford, (4.75 miles) over the next five years. Beyond that, the service could go to Burnstones (6 miles) but after that there are the physical obstacles of the Lambley Viaduct and Lambley Station site. These problems are not insuperable, but the cost of extension past Burnstones will be high.

The Railway Preservation Society also runs the Tourist Information Centre at the station and Eden District Council part finance the Centre along with the Preservation Society. The Tourist Information Centre is open from 1 April to 1 October, and employs seasonal workers - one person full-time and three part-timers.

Cumbria County Council own the land around the station and have agreed to a long leasehold. This excludes part of the station buildings which is leased by the cafe, a separate enterprise. The land covers a large area, including storage land and facilities, and car park. An advance factory also exists on the site and this is rented by the Preservation Society from a London-based landowner. They have now reached a deal to buy the factory. Kearton's Yard, now sold to the RDC, is adjacent to the railway site, and Bells coal merchant has a coal yard between Kearton's Yard and the main road.

Current plans are to build a visitor centre which would house the ticket office, the Tourist Information Centre and the shop. It would provide facilities for interpretation of the railway, and would also include facilities for showers for railway workers and a meeting room. These last facilities are badly needed. The funding package (partly approved) consists of:

ERDF	£129,000
RDC	£59,000
District Council	£26,000

The location for the Visitor Centre is undecided, but the decision is now tied in with a development opportunity for a Pennine Way Visitor Centre, which could be linked to the Railway Visitor Centre. This idea is explored below.

PENNINE WAY VISITOR CENTRE

The possibility that a Pennine Way Visitor Centre could be based in Alston has recently been suggested by the ECCP and the North Pennines Tourism Partnership. A visitor centre could act as a focal point for walkers, and provide interpretation, booking facilities, and promotional material. It could also provide a management facility, acting as a point of contact for walkers and landowners. Interpretation could include the North Pennines as well as the Pennine Way.

There are many reasons why Alston is a good choice of location for a Pennine Way Visitor Centre. On the northern section of the walk, Alston is an obvious place to start and finish, and many people already do so. Alston is a public transport node, and there are no significant communities North or South on the Pennine Way for some distance - Bellingham and Middleton in Teesdale are both about 30-40 miles away.

The Centre would be an excellent development for Alston, as it could draw many more walkers to Alston, and provide a leisure activity for other visitors. In conjunction with the railway, it would significantly increase the attractiveness of the town to visitors, and may persuade many passers-through to stop and have a look. A town trail could then lead them further into the town. Extending the tourist season is a possible spin-off.

The development of Sustrans' Sea to Sea (C2C)) route and their forthcoming Inverness to Dover route, which will cross Alston, suggest that it may also be possible to exploit links between long distance walking and cycling routes. As already mentioned, cycling is a rapidly expanding market, and Alston is at an ideal point to capture the benefits of this market. Similarly, the possible Pennine Bridleway extension through the parish provides opportunities for linking. Perhaps the visitor centre could act as a central interpretive and bookings point for several long-distance routes.

The situation on these current development proposals is changing very fast, and it must be borne in mind that information given here could completely change as soon as it is written. But the current state of play is that the Railway Preservation Society is interested in the idea of managing the South Tynedale Railway and the Pennine Way visitor centres concurrently.

This arrangement would have certain advantages. Staffing the two centres, always a large revenue cost, could be on a joint basis, possibly with a central reception point. The reception could become the provider of the Tourist Information Centre facility, which would bring in revenue funding if Eden District Council continue to fund the Centre. This would have the additional benefit that the facility could be open all year round. A centrally staffed facility would also have the potential for other add-on functions. The Durham Dales Centre in Stanhope would provide a useful model of a variety of functions centred on a reception/Tourist Information Centre.

Refreshment facilities would have to be examined in detail. The present cafe may be able to serve this function adequately, but may need to gear up for the likely increased demand. Car parking needs will have to be considered closely also. An extension of the present parking site will be necessary, as it is already operating to capacity at high season.

The location of the proposed visitor centres is a key question, and this will obviously depend on their ultimate management structure. Possible sites are as follows:

1. Storage land used by the railway beyond the car park
2. The advance factory
3. The goods shed at the RDC-owned former Kearton's Yard (see below), if the RDC were interested in this usage

The first suggestion may be the most suitable. A feasibility study will be needed to establish the pros and cons of possible locations.

The Pennine Way Visitor Centre could form the nucleus of a Rural Challenge or Single Regeneration Budget bid, with matching funding potential from Objective 5b and Lottery funds. It has much potential to fulfill the criteria of a wider Rural Challenge bid, (see page 95) for which Cumbria is eligible to bid next year. A wide partnership could be established to take this idea forward, including the ECCP, Eden District Council, the Cumbria Tourist Board, Countryside Commission, and the South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society.

FORMER KEARTONS YARD/ RDC WORKSPACE PROJECT

Kearton's Yard recently came on the market because of the closure of Kearton's construction business. Some local businesses were interested, but only the RDC was prepared to pay near to the asking price of £98,000. The RDC paid £85,000 for the site, but the costs of restoration are expected to be large. The goods shed is a listed building, which poses potential problems in redevelopment.

The RDC's plan is to create small-scale workspaces, at a range of sizes somewhere in between the sizes of the Skelgill units and those at Rampgill. The RDC's policy is to build flexible, standard units, with the possibility of expansion into another unit, which will encourage business start-ups(26). Such units are likely to be attractive to a wide range of business types. Their preference is for the conversion of existing buildings rather than newbuild, so Kearton's Yard is seen as a good site.

Skelgill has been relatively successful. Phase 1 has been sold to a private landlord, and two units from Phase 2 have been rented out of 6. The RDC only examines the supply side when examining a new workspace project like Kearton's Yard: there is no market testing of the demand. Because the units are flexible, it is assumed they will find users. In the case of Kearton's Yard however there may be a case for a different approach. The yard is in a prime site for tourism, adjacent to the railway. Also, the goods shed has potential for more unusual development than the standard workspace, and this is recognised by the RDC.

It may be possible to develop the sites in two phases, with the goods shed last, giving time to establish what kind of development would be appropriate. The goods shed has space for two floors (possibly three if the large roof space is utilised), and there is a large area of land on the site, with some newer buildings. The ideas developed in discussion with various interviewees are as follows:

- Some form of arts and crafts usage. Shared workspace and facilities could be developed in conjunction with communal space for exhibitions/craftspeople at work displays and possibly retail outlets. Elements of the development could be accessible to the public, which would further expand the range of visitor attractions in the area. Alston Moor is already developing an arts and crafts focus, and an arts and crafts usage of this site may relate more to the needs of the parish than general purpose workspaces.

Types of uses could be widened to encompass firms such as Cumberland Mustard, whose products have tourism implications. Consultation with local people involved in this sector would be important in establishing the exact nature of the scheme. Keeping rents low is likely to be crucial for the success of such a scheme, and workspace sharing may be one means of accomplishing this.

- Use of the goods shed for multi-purpose office based projects, incorporating
 - * a) a business advisory service
 - * b) Carlisle College outreach centre using telecommunications (ISDN) link (see page 55)
 - * c) facilities to form the nucleus of a teleworking/telecentre initiative (see below)
 - * b) office space to rent
 - * e) general training premises

A multi-functional office centre could offer large economic benefits to the parish, by providing a focus for small local businesses. A locally based business advisor/development officer, providing a local focus for Business Link Rural Cumbria, and acting as project manager for the other functions on-site, would fill a very valuable role for the community. It would be particularly useful if this advisor were orientated towards the needs of small businesses with 1-5 employees. This kind of project could, at one stroke, satisfy many needs identified in this appraisal -for example, the need for locally provided training, for office space, for locally based business advice, for Information Technology facilities (see below).

Could the two projects operate side by side in a single site? This question would need to be considered as part of a detailed examination of the space available and the demand. It may be that the office-based project could occupy the first floor of the goods shed, with public access to arts and crafts based uses on the ground floor and arts and crafts workshops on the rest of the site. It must be emphasised that the RDC is anticipating income-generating uses on the site. The RDC is undertaking a feasibility study of the site at present, which is at a late stage. The usage of the goods shed however has not yet been decided and it is therefore not too late for the above ideas to be considered by the RDC.

NENT FORCE LEVEL/ FOUNDRY SITE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

The site of the former Alston Foundry and Falmech is now semi-derelict. It is situated (see diagram 8) on the major road (A686) going through Alston, and lies opposite the South Tynedale Railway and the former Kearton's Yard RDC site. Present uses consist of a scrap yard and two small business premises. A large steel building now up for sale used to be the Falmech building. The site includes an old stone built woollen mill, and former foundry building. It also contains one end of the Nent Force Level, a tunnel built to drain the leadmines at Nenthead and prospect for new veins.

The site offers a significant development opportunity, particularly considering its location opposite the last three proposed development sites described above. It is a prime location for tourism development, and could become a positive feature in the built environment of Alston, instead of a rather noticeable eyesore. The surrounding area is pleasantly wooded. The river Nent flows through the site and the Nent Force waterfall lies to the rear of the site. A footpath link to the town centre through the Butts could be incorporated, which would also link to Gossipgate and the footpath to Blagill.

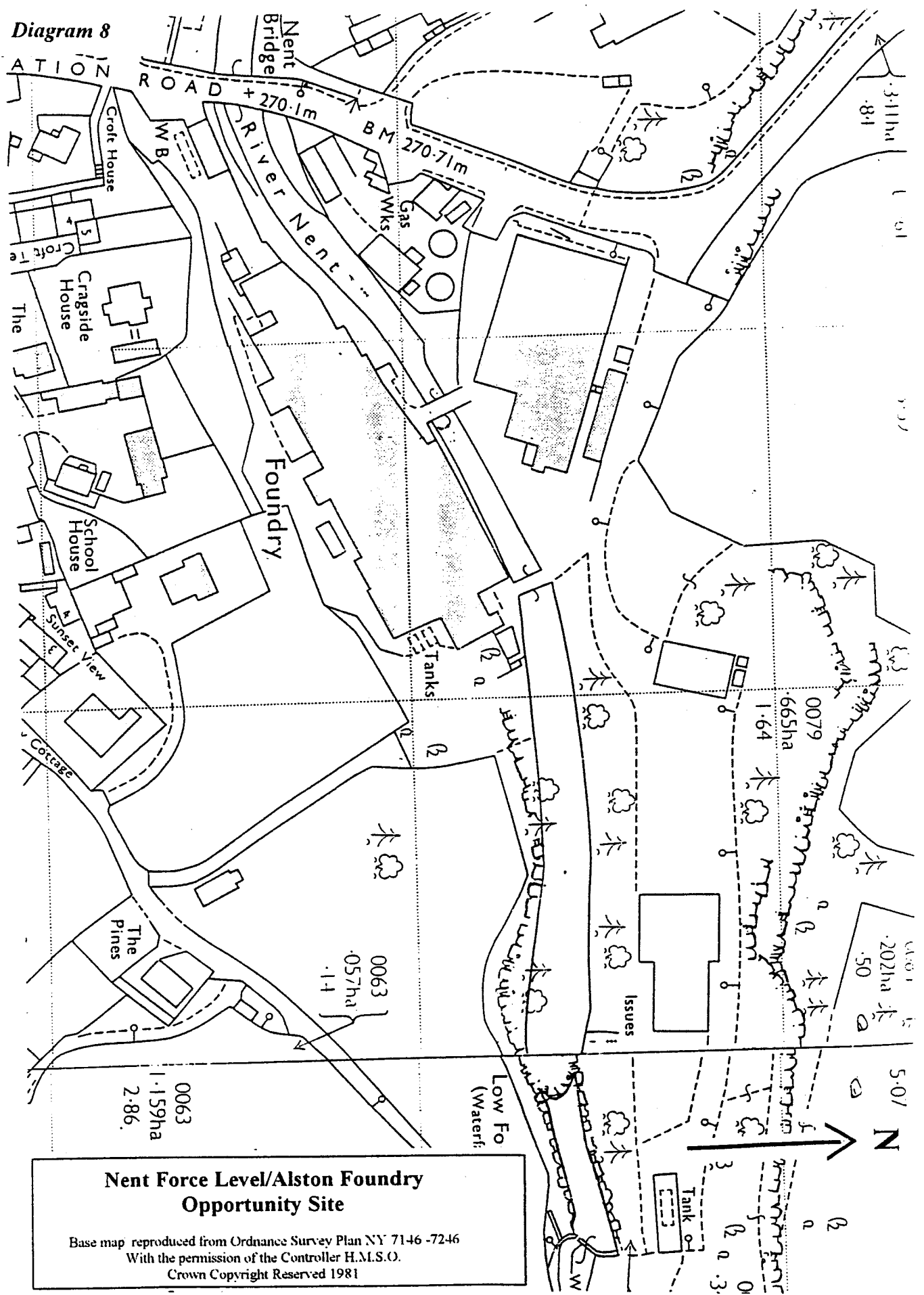
There is much support in the parish for opening up the Nent Force Level as a tourist attraction. The idea was suggested in the 1980 appraisal (1). A small section of the tunnel could be used as an underground experience for visitors, and would provide a flavour of the rich history of the Level. But exploiting this opportunity may depend on leverage of private sector investment.

Several suggestions have been made in the course of this research for the rest of the site. These are not mutually exclusive, and include:

- ◇ A recreational picnic site
- ◇ Landscaped car parking area
- ◇ Holiday time-share apartments
- ◇ Self-catering accommodation
- ◇ Countryside centre

There are pros and cons for all of the above suggestions. It must initially be decided whether it would be preferable to keep the area as industrial land. The intention for this site needs to be examined in detail in the action plan based on this appraisal, and much work is required on the detail of land clearance and the means of providing a high quality site. Land Reclamation Programme funding through English Partnerships is likely to be available, but to obtain this it would be necessary to specify a broad intention for the land. This site has now been in a poor condition for some time, and is likely to remain so if a lead is not taken by local people to open up this important development opportunity.

Diagram 8



Nent Force Level/Alston Foundry Opportunity Site

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ALSTON MOOR TELEWORKING INITIATIVE

In 1993, a local parish group obtained £3000 of funding from Cumbria County and Eden District Councils to conduct a feasibility study into the viability of establishing a teleworking facility on Alston Moor. The research was done by Delvin Research Associates (16). This research is summarised here briefly.

The local group involved was called the Alston Moor Teleworking Initiative (AMTI). It was decided by the group that the aims of the initiative would centre on commercial profitability but would encompass the wider social aims of providing community facilities. The research looked at different models of working elsewhere, but the model which came closest to the aims of AMTI was provided by the Home Office Partnership (HOP).

HOP is an independent non-profit making involved in researching and developing new ways of working and opportunities for employment. HOP proposed to form a group of franchised offices as part of the European MITRE project (Market Implementation of Teleworking Initiatives in Rural Environments). Under HOP's scheme, franchisees would pay a fixed fee and a percentage of their revenues in return for a supply of work provided by the central organisation. The scheme included potential for a multi-purpose community service.

But this was as far as the idea was taken, as doubts were held by members of AMTI about the risks involved in joining the HOP scheme. Funding was not available for further market research, and Delvin Research Associates (16) had found it difficult to assess demand for a service which does not exist, and about which people generally have very little knowledge.

The rationale behind the attempt to provide a teleworking facility on Alston Moor still stands. Information technology provides a means of overcoming problems of isolation and distance to markets experienced in the parish. Most businesses can benefit from some form of computer services. A high proportion of jobs require computer literacy. Many people in the parish are already working in some form of computer services, and Delvin Research Associates (16) identified a large pool of lower skilled individuals in the parish, plus a pool of under-utilised highly skilled and qualified individuals. These factors all indicate the value in a teleworking facility.

Potential now exists for a teleworking facility to be established as a small-scale project using, as a nucleus, the Carlisle College training initiative (page 55). With a social, training focus to start with, a business initiative could evolve. Evidence from interviewees and from Delvin Research Associates report (16) is that to survive, a teleworking facility must be commercially viable. The experience of Brampton's Union Lane Centre is that although funding has been available from Carlisle City Council for the present telecentre, which is very successful in achieving social goals, plans for a new telecentre facility at a proposed rural resource centre will involve a more organised system of income generating schemes.

Three parallel means of development may be envisaged for a viable teleworking facility.

- Firstly, community awareness of its own needs and the potential of teleworking needs to be built up. The provision of training is the key to this stage, and both training initiatives of Carlisle College (described on page 55) offer excellent opportunities to underwrite initial training activities of the facility.
- Secondly, networking of local people who already do some form of teleworking could begin by building up a register of people and equipment.
- Thirdly, ways of providing services initially to local businesses could be developed, advertising the skills available and developing links by Internet and E-Mail. The advantages of networking are that people with overlapping skills can take on a wider range of work and assist each other in raising the quality of the finished product.

A funding bid for equipment could be made, with the aim of obtaining provision for computing facilities mainly for training, and a number of add-on facilities which would be useful for local businesses and those already engaged in teleworking, such as scanners, laser and colour printers, desk-top publishing packages, colour photocopier, E-Mail and Internet links. A teleworking facility has the potential in Alston Moor to provide encouragement to business start-ups, assistance to local businesses, training opportunities and a means of providing work for a variety of people in the parish.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Voluntary Action Cumbria will shortly be publishing a comprehensive guide to funding for community projects. This will include advice on putting together bids for funding and detail on sources of funding. The guide will be invaluable to local people to help them through the funding maze which currently exists.

Instead of duplicating the information which will be contained in this forthcoming publication, it is intended to focus here on information which is pertinent to Alston Moor, and which may be of use in relation to the projects and opportunities listed above. The major sources of funding are listed below, and relevant details included, but the aim is not to act as a comprehensive guide.

EUROPEAN FUNDING PROGRAMMES

Alston Moor is in the Northern Uplands Objective 5b area, attracting:

- ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) - funding for capital works, infrastructure, buildings, revenue support
- ESF (European Social Fund) - support for training
- EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund) - support for modernisation of farming

Objective 5b relates to the development of rural areas. Projects have to fit the criteria laid down in the Single Programming Document (SPD) which provides an action plan for the

Objective 5b area. The strategy is split into measures which relate to the four priorities identified - economic development and diversification, tourism, community development and environmental enhancement and conservation. Certain projects cannot be funded, for example, where the aims would cover an existing statutory requirement of local authorities. For example, a bypass for Alston would not be eligible. Mobile infrastructure such as buses cannot be funded.

A wide range of bodies are eligible for funding, but private sector projects can only be funded if the project is of wide relevance to the community, for example promoting tourism. Partnerships are often the best way to take projects forward. Projects are scored according to SPD criteria, and a project may be able to score more points if it can integrate the use of both ERDF and ESF funds. For example, the proposal regarding Carlisle College using facilities at the RDC project at Kearton's Yard could allow the project to attract ESF funding as well as ERDF.

The programme will run to the end of 1999. Applications are processed by the Secretariat in Manchester, and a sub-regional committee selects projects for approval. Generally, as is the case with many funding programmes, approval is given in principle for some or all of the funding period, which may be spread across several years, but exact amounts are allocated for each year separately.

All of the projects listed in the above sections have the potential to attract ERDF and/or ESF funding. Farm diversification schemes relating to agri-tourism, which have been discussed under tourism, could attract EAGGF funding, which is managed by MAFF. Objective 5b funding may be used to match other funding bids, for example Rural Challenge, and this can increase the value and the opportunity of obtaining such bids significantly.

Present bids for Objective 5b funding are the Town Hall (including revenue funding for a project coordinator), Rampgill, South Tynedale Railway, and the feasibility study for the North Pennine Concert Hall Project. Most of these hinge on matching RDC funding. Other bids with implications for Alston Moor include the North Pennines Tourism Partnership bid, and several TEC bids including a bid for rural business skills training and a bid for funding business start-ups. The County Council is bidding for a community development fund which is designed to allow small-scale community projects to access European money. This fund could be of great value for the parish for some of the small-scale improvements suggested in this appraisal.

Leader II

Leader II is a new European programme which seeks to complement but not duplicate Objective 5b programmes. A business plan is at present being set up. The emphasis is on local development groups submitting projects to meet the objectives, particularly those which show innovation and are community-based. £4.4 million has been allocated to the Northern Uplands Leader II programme from 1995-1999. North Pennines communities form a particular project under this programme, and the project has had approval in principle for £1.5 million. One Leader II objective worth noting here is to link cross-border communities.

New opportunities for funding in Alston Moor are opened up by the Leader II programme, which will supplement existing sources. The Town Enhancement Scheme, and a teleworking/computer training initiative are possible contenders.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Rural Development Programme was set up in 1984 to devolve decision making and planning powers to the associated Rural Development Areas. The aim is to encourage a partnership approach. £15 million pounds a year is provided nationally. The programme has undergone considerable change, and community consultation and needs analyses have become important elements. In Cumbria, a ten year development strategy has been prepared (17)), which sets out aims and objectives for rural Cumbria. These are taken forward by the operating plan (24), which documents the projects to be incorporated over a three year period from 1995-1998, relating the projects to the strategy aims and objectives.

The operating plan includes 140 projects with a total value of £4.5 million pounds, of which the actual bid to the RDC is £1.3 million. The first consideration for any project is whether it meets the aims and objectives of the strategy. These are:

- A diversified and sustainable economy
- A protected and enhanced environment
- A skilled and knowledgeable population
- A modern service and communications infrastructure
- A housing stock meeting the needs of the local population

It is recommended by the RDC that discussions are undertaken with the agency before an application is made. The budget has not been reached for this year's projects, so there is scope for supplementary bids available, particularly of a community or social nature. Because of the wide ranging aims, RDC funding would be applicable to any of the projects listed above.

The RDC also provides a series of complementary funding programmes which are specific to particular kinds of projects. The relevant ones are listed below:

- Redundant Building Grants: These fund up to 25% of costs of using existing redundant buildings for business purposes.
- Rural Transport Development Fund: This funds up to 50% of start-up costs and 50% of any first year deficit. Transport Needs Surveys may also be supported.
- Village Halls: A new scheme offering advice and grants for work leading to extended use of halls.
- Rural Shops: A new scheme to improve the viability of village shops, limited to shops which are the sole shop and main grocery outlet, in the village.

SINGLE REGENERATION BUDGET

Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) is the main form of government funding for economic regeneration. A partnership approach is generally looked for in SRB bids, plus a comprehensive programme, which could include infrastructure projects alongside business training and development

A competitive bidding process is conducted every year. The time-scale is that outline bids are received in mid-July, with a full application by September. This year, over five bids have been made to the Government North West Office from Cumbria. There are no bids from Alston Moor, but two Cumbria-wide bids have significance for the parish. These are as follows:

- **Cumbria Credits** The aim of this bid is to provide adult training using advanced information technology. If the bid is successful, primary schools will be used as training premises, although not exclusively, and training will be aimed at women returners and the unemployed.
- **Cumbria Works for Business** This is a bid from Cumbria TEC which aims to fill gaps in the provision of business assistance using a variety of means. The bid will seek to complement the work of Business Link, particularly targetting the needs of small businesses employing less than 5 people, and could therefore have distinct relevance for Alston Moor.

The outcome of the present bidding process will not be known until around the end of 1995.

Alston Moor has the potential to put forward an SRB bid. The bid could include several of the elements which might emerge from the action plan guidelines suggested on page 100. It is not possible to go into detail here about what could be included in such a bid, since the action plan based on this appraisal should be the first step towards the formulation of the content.

RURAL CHALLENGE

The Rural Development Commission since 1994 has received extra funding to launch a competition to promote partnerships which impact on rural economic and social problems. Each year six prizes of £1 million pounds is awarded to the selected bids. Eligibility criteria mean that Cumbria is eligible to bid in next year's competition. Bids are invited in different categories, but a bid may relate to more than one category. The categories in 1995 may be summarised as:

- action to regenerate an area affected by problems of industrial decline
- action to improve the ability of disadvantaged groups to gain access to employment, services and facilities
- action to combat rural crime
- action to make rural areas more attractive to young people

Selection criteria include leverage of private sector investment, value for money, involvement of partnerships, innovative approach, environmental enhancement, and the promotion of good design. Rural Challenge funds can be used to provide matching funding for EU funding programmes.

There is potential to develop a Rural Challenge bid from Alston Moor, which could run concurrently with a bid for SRB funding. A number of the initiatives described above could be themed and packaged into a bid. As an example, the category selected could be economic regeneration, based on the attraction of visitors, with the Pennine Way Visitor Centre as a central focus, and the fostering of local business. Again, the action plan which emerges from this appraisal should be used as a basis for formulating a bid.

LOTTERY AND MILLENNIUM FUNDING

Lottery funding is managed by five bodies, and applications may be made to any of them, depending on the nature of the project. These are the Sports Fund (administered by the Sports Council), the Heritage Fund (administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund), the Arts Fund (administered by the Arts Council), the Charities Fund (administered by the Charities Board) and the Millennium Fund (administered by the Millennium Commission). Details of each need to be obtained from the relevant organisations.

All lottery funding is intended to be used to promote the public good, and not for private gain, but private or commercial interests can receive lottery funding. It is primarily for capital costs. Lottery funding is already contemplated for the Alston Town Hall scheme, and could have relevance for a wide variety of the projects and improvements mentioned in this appraisal.

For example, the Town Enhancement Scheme and/or a potential Nenthead village enhancement scheme could attract Millennium funding, which is particularly appropriate for schemes which are a) supported by the community, b) the results of which are provided free to the public, and c) do not involve ongoing revenue costs. A Millennium Fund bid regarding the provision of sustainable village facilities has been submitted by the Cumbria Countryside Forum and if successful, this will have significance for Alston Moor. The Forum is an informal partnership of around 60 organisations, and Voluntary Action Cumbria acts as secretariat to the Forum.

OTHER SOURCES

The above sources are the major ones relevant to the parish, but there are many other significant sources which it is not possible to go into detail about here. These would include county, district and parish council funding, and these sources are highly valuable as supplementary funding to larger bids, or sources of funding for studies or feasibility studies. English Partnerships provide an important source, and administers the Land Reclamation Programme, which replaces Derelict Land Grant. There are also charitable trusts which are a useful source. More specific grants are offered by Rural Action, Countryside Commission, Civic Trust.

The VAC publication will provide further details on all the sources above and more. This publication will provide an overview of sources of funding, with a current application form, and there will be a facility to regularly update the information.

SECTION 9

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A diversity of issues, needs and opportunities has emerged from this appraisal. In this section, the aim is to pull the various strands together, and create a coherent framework on which to base decision-making about the future of the parish. The first step will be to identify the needs or pressures that are impacting on the economic and social development of the parish. These are listed below under **key issues**, and the choice of issues is based on questionnaire results and the interviews conducted as part of this appraisal. A useful base for decision-making is to set out the major **options** which relate to the broad directions the parish might take in the next 10 years. This is a simplifying process in order to assist the choices of measures from those set out later in the section as **guidelines**.

It must be stressed that the options used here are not the only choices. Different options could be explored, having viewed the implications of those discussed below. Similarly, in setting out guidelines, the aim is to present choices, not recommendations. The guidelines were based on the selection of a particular option and this selection is in turn based on the results of the questionnaire and interviews. It will be part of the follow-up process to this appraisal to decide which elements of the guidelines to take forward into an action plan for whatever timescale is decided on.

LIST OF KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

-
- *The built environment in Alston and Nenthead is suffering from lack of resources and deterioration, impacting on the potential to attract economic activity and the potential for tourism development*
 - *Danger of development on the edges of Alston without due regard to local patterns of design, impacting on architectural coherence and townscape quality*
 - *Lack of general childcare facilities and pre-school education, impacting on the available workforce*
 - *Inappropriate use of Alston Front Street by heavy lorries, causing severe congestion and environmental damage*
 - *Pedestrian/vehicular conflict on Alston Front Street with impact on pedestrian comfort and safety*
 - *Pressure of vehicle use affecting availability of parking in Alston*

- *Inadequate public transport impacting on choice of and access to opportunities and facilities*
 - *Continuing decline in traditional industries of minerals extraction and agriculture, impacting particularly on employment levels*
 - *Further decline of economic base since the closure of Alston Foundry, with the closure of Falmech and Keartons (Construction) among others, impacting on general economic well-being*
 - *Lack of training provision locally, impacting on levels of skills in the community, and the availability of a highly skilled workforce*
 - *Low income base of many businesses, causing short-term, insecure employment, and lack of investment in the business*
 - *Low visitor numbers in relation to the supply of accommodation and tourism-dependent businesses*
 - *Under-exploited tourism potential*
-

There has been much change on the positive side however, since the 1980 appraisal (1). Some of the major changes are summed up in the following.

MAJOR CHANGES SINCE 1980

-
- *The increase in the population, along with a more balanced age structure*
 - *Diversification and specialisation of the economy, with the growth of small indigenous businesses*
 - *The AONB designation, which is enhancing the image of the region, and has led to the development of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership*
 - *The development of significant tourist attractions, particularly the South Tynedale Railway and the Rampgill Visitor Centre.*
 - *The introduction of major national schemes in the parish, in particular the CAPS scheme and the ESA scheme, which have the potential to have a major impact on the economic, environmental and social development of the parish.*
 - *The potential for better social and leisure facilities offered by the town hall project in Alston.*
 - *The emergence of many more opportunities to attract public sector funding*
-

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

There has not been scope within the timescale of this appraisal to attempt to quantify the impacts resulting from the different options listed below. The evaluation of these options might therefore be somewhat over-simplified. At least, this method can provide a qualitative view of the optimal future for the parish. The aim is to assist in an assessment of what is both desirable and feasible for the future of Alston Moor.

Four options have been selected for evaluation:

- **Minimal change option** This involves an active restraint policy, aiming to retain the status quo, assisting existing businesses to stabilise, but reducing active promotion of tourism. There would be no further provision of additional tourist facilities.
- **Major change option** This option would seek to promote an economic role for Alston Moor as the regional heart of the North Pennines, aiming to attract significant inward investment and particularly to encourage SMEs. Alston Moor would be developed as a major tourist centre.
- **Trend change option** This option maintains and enhances Alston Moor's existing role as a location for small and specialised businesses in all sectors, mainly springing from the local population or individuals moving in to seek greater quality of life. Activity would be focussed on creating the conditions for small businesses, including those in the tourism sector, to grow and flourish. Facilities for tourists would continue to be developed, but with a preference for those which provide a leisure resource for local people also. The aim would be for low to moderate growth in tourism.
- **Selective change option** This option maintains Alston Moor's role as a centre for small businesses as above but extends its position as a centre for tourism on a larger scale, aiming for moderate to high growth of tourism. Small businesses would be fostered. Tourist facilities and attractions would be sympathetic to the principles of the AONB designation, but the emphasis would be on attracting significantly larger numbers of tourists to boost the economy.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the options selected, or any additional ones as established, should be based on

- protecting and enhancing those features which make Alston Moor special
- providing for the economic and social needs of the parish
- balancing issues which compete
- allowing the flexibility to fulfill the wide range of aspirations of the parish whilst protecting the environment

Although some comments in the questionnaire and some interviewees laid emphasis on the need to keep the parish "unspoiled" by development, and 17.9% of questionnaire respondents favoured no growth in tourism, the **minimal change option** would have worrying implications for both the economic well-being and the historic and environmental fabric of the parish. For example, this option is likely to lead to a decline in the investment needed to maintain buildings and this could result in significant deterioration of property. It would become more difficult to maintain the range of shops and facilities that is at present a special characteristic.

The **major change** option may not be sustainable in the long-term. Although tourism pressure is small at the moment, a major increase could lead to pressures which would be detrimental to the special character of Alston Moor. The growth of SMEs would require a much larger workforce than currently exists, and a large increase in population may not be appropriate in an AONB, where the quality of the natural environment requires particular protection. A majority of questionnaire respondents preferred the development of small housing and employment sites (53.1%) rather than large (12.3%). Traffic problems, already causing concern, would reduce the quality of life for many existing residents if large-scale growth were to occur. As well as the undesirability, this option is likely to prove impracticable, given the remoteness of the parish and the competition from other more accessible areas.

Trend change and **selective change** options are similar in terms of aiming to create the conditions for the growth of small businesses. The difference is that the selective change option would aim at a more targetted approach towards the development of tourism. Again, there are implications in this for sustainability and quality of life issues, as in the major change option, which must be balanced against economic gain. The trend change option may give the most balanced approach, with the emphasis on assisting small businesses to become more profitable, whether they are in the tourism, manufacturing or services sector. However significant investment will be needed in order to encourage more people to visit the parish, and make this option viable.

The **trend change** option could be extended to give Alston a regional role as a centre for economic development in the North Pennines. The location of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership in Alston would reinforce such a position. In addition, the administration of the Leader II programme is likely to be based at the North Pennines Tourism Partnership, while reporting to a separate steering committee. No final decisions have yet been made on this.

This regional role therefore could include an administrative focus for Alston, and the enhancement of the town as a centre for small businesses. Efforts could be focussed on improving the quality of existing tourist provision. An arts and crafts focus, which is already germinal, could be enhanced, and the proposed North Pennines Concert Hall project would reinforce the regional role in the arts sphere if successful. A positive approach could be adopted to attracting specialist businesses. Active promotion could help to detract from negative images of inaccessibility which are often exaggerated. These ideas are food for thought at this stage but could be taken further in the action plan to emerge from this appraisal.

GUIDELINES

The following guidelines form the conclusion of this appraisal, since they are the culmination of the research which has gone into the appraisal. The guidelines will summarise much of what has already been discussed in the appraisal, and are intended as suggested principles to inform the planning of an action plan. They are based on the trend change option. Under each guideline, measures are suggested and different packages of measures could be selected to accord with a different choice of option.

This document may be seen as a wide base in a refining down process. Firstly, it will be up to a local economic development body to consider the guidelines, choose an optimal timescale, and decide which measures are feasible and will contribute to a coherent action plan. More specific bids for funding may then be refined from this action plan.

It is difficult to separate the measures into neat categories, and there is overlap between measures under the following guidelines.

Guideline 1: Enhancement of the built environment

The enhancement of the built environment in Alston Moor will make a positive contribution to improving the quality of life for residents and increasing the attractiveness of the parish for both new and existing businesses and for visitors. Such enhancement should form a major part of an action plan. Measures could include:

- The work of the Alston Town Enhancement Group should be assisted and encouraged, particularly when at the stage of accessing funding.
- A shop front scheme could be suggested to form a proposal of the group. Also, a training course for retailers on catering for tourists could include shop enhancement measures.
- A related environmental enhancement scheme in Nenthead is suggested, and could be linked to Alston's for the purposes of accessing funding. An action plan could include the development of a new bus terminal for Wrights and a long-term strategy for the restoration of spoil heaps. These plans could be linked into the North Pennines Heritage Trust's plans for Rampgill's future, under guideline 5 below.
- A parish design statement is suggested as a means of protecting the unique character of the built environment of the parish. The details of such a statement could be determined by district council planners and architects in collaboration with the Parish Council, and in consultation with local people by means of an exhibition inviting responses.

Guideline 2: Finding solutions to transport problems

The present transport problems, including parking, routing of heavy lorries and congestion give rise to environmental damage, inconvenience to local businesses, pedestrian discomfort and risk, and poor visitor impression. Inadequate public transport leads to reduced opportunities particularly for disadvantaged groups who do not have access to

cars. A comprehensive policy framework is required. Measures to alleviate the problems include:

- A comprehensive policy for on and off-street parking needs to be established and implemented.
- Research is suggested into the lorry problem, and this would involve consultation with local people regarding the solutions to this problem.
- A commitment to improving public transport is needed. A transport needs survey could be undertaken to establish the nature of any unmet need. This could link in with the proposed multi-agency review of visitor public transport services in the North Pennines (see page 46).
- An investigation into the requirement for a minibus by Samuel King's School, Grisedale Croft, and Nenthead and Garrigill under 5s, would be valuable, with the intention of exploring the feasibility of a shared minibus. It would be important to ensure that such a minibus would not significantly reduce the viability of Wrights' services.

Guideline 3: Increasing the attractiveness of the parish to young people

Evidence from many interviewees suggests young people are a group who require particular attention in the parish. Increasing training and employment prospects (see below) will be major improvements in provision, but other unmet needs for housing and social facilities need to be examined.

- Targetted research may be required to define the nature of housing need. The findings of this appraisal that there may be a shortfall in the amount of low cost private rented accommodation available is particularly relevant to the needs of young people.
- The initiative of Youth Services of the county council to establish a youth project in Alston could be explored in more detail, with the aim of including the project in the follow-up action plan to this appraisal.
- A drop-in centre at the refurbished town hall in Alston would be an important facility for young people, and the proposal needs examining and refining.

Guideline 4: Creating the conditions for economic development and improving employment prospects

Under this guideline a number of wide-ranging measures may be grouped. Social and economic goals are integrated under this guideline. There is considerable overlap between both guidelines above and this one.

Training opportunities locally need to be increased in order to improve the quality and flexibility of the workforce, and increase the prospects for job creation. Providing a local **business advice** facility is a further opportunity for the development of businesses in all sectors. **Childcare** facilities are needed in order to increase the economically active population, and therefore increase the opportunities for economic diversification. The provision of **office space**, both occasional office space and permanent, is required to

encourage both new and existing businesses. The opportunities for **teleworking** should be exploited further, and a range of computer related facilities is required which has the potential to provide a basis for business start-ups, local business services, and opportunities for income generation.

Measures suggested under this guideline are:

- A local body (see guideline 6) could act as a focus to encourage networking between Carlisle College and relevant agencies or groups to assist the College in finding short-term/long-term premises for its VideoLink training initiative. Also networking is needed to find the means of encouraging take-up of the College's second training initiative involving visiting tutors.
- Consultations with the RDC and Business Link Rural Cumbria are needed to examine the possibilities for the provision of a multi-purpose business development and training centre, staffed by a project manager, possibly on the former Kearton's Yard site. It could be requested that the present feasibility study takes these ideas on board.
- Linked with the above measures, there is a need to explore further with the RDC and with members of AMTI who are still interested the feasibility of a teleworking facility as part of the above centre.
- An exploration into the feasibility of an all-day comprehensive childcare facility is needed. Playscheme provision and after school kids' club are proposed as elements of such a facility.
- The idea of providing job vacancies information at the Town Hall needs to be taken further with Hexham and Penrith job centres. Possibilities for computerised information transfer should be examined.
- A means of tapping into the potential for increased employment in contracting work in agriculture and forestry/woodland management in the parish could be explored.
- It is suggested that a future economic development body explores the means suggested in the appraisal to increase energy efficiency standards in the parish.

Guideline 5: Increasing visitor numbers and enhancing local leisure opportunities

An increase in visitor numbers has the potential to allow a range of tourism-related businesses and retailers in the parish to increase their income base. Visitor numbers may be boosted by the provision of further large-scale attractions in the parish along with the ongoing work of the North Pennines Tourism Partnership. The Partnership has most of the other areas of need in terms of tourism development well in hand and therefore the focus of the measures below is on current development projects and opportunities.

The potential for overlap between tourist attractions and sources of leisure provision for local people should be exploited as far as possible. Many disparate projects are underway or proposed, and a comprehensive, forward looking action plan is needed, which could comprise the following measures:

- The development of the Town Hall project requires a more strategic approach, to incorporate all the activities proposed, and to raise further funding. In particular the questions of the extension/disabled access and the method of future management need to be resolved.
- The proposals for a South Tynedale Railway Visitor Centre and a Pennine Way Visitor Centre should be incorporated into an action plan, and a formal partnership approach adopted on the latter. Location, degree of connectedness between the two and management structure are the key questions to be resolved.
- The Rampgill Visitor Centre and related plans for the site need to be brought into an action plan for the parish, and linkages exploited between the other development opportunities in Nenthead and Alston.
- A tourism related development of arts and crafts workspaces could be explored with the RDC with the aim of including these ideas as part of their feasibility study for the Kearton's Yard site.
- The clearance of dereliction and the provision of an attractive landscaped area for exploitation as tourism/leisure related facilities should be considered in the former Alston Foundry/Falmech site. The development of the Nent Force Level could be a significant part of such plans. One aim in developing the site in this way would be to attract private sector investment. Intentions for the site as a whole would have to be clarified for inclusion in the action plan.
- Proposals for St Pauls Methodist Church should be included in an action plan. The Concert Hall Project feasibility study results must be awaited and the outcome of the bid to buy the church, before a more concrete strategic approach may be developed. Ideas for extending the purpose of the project could be considered.
- There is a gap in provision of the following specific tourist facilities in the parish, which could be explored in the action plan. These are
 - ◊ picnic areas - the development of a number of small-scale sites will enhance tourism and leisure provision
 - ◊ camping barns and campsites - these may tap into the walking and cycling market.

Guideline 6: A parish-wide economic development body

The action plan which is the result of this appraisal process will require much work to be done. Putting forward a successful bid for large-scale funding such as Rural Challenge will require effective networking by a body of local people who can take a strong lead role in a partnership structure. There is a need for a concerted, clear voice to represent the social and economic interests of the community, in an integrated way.

The framework for such a group needs to be examined. The group could consist of the Alston Moor Business Association Economic Development Sub-Committee, particularly if it were able to recruit a wider number and range of members. The Sub-Committee has the

advantages that it already exists as a group, and has appropriate aims. But it may be decided that a newly constituted group is the best forum for attracting fresh support from a wider section of the community and for finding new ways of working to increase effectiveness.

- The economic development group should attempt to involve as wide a cover as possible of local interests, in particular drawing in representatives from the major development projects and the parish council. Similar groups elsewhere could be examined for models of best practice.
- An initial project of the group formed could be the production of a business directory, an idea suggested by a number of interviewees. A business directory could provide the means of reaching all local business people, and stimulating interest in the group. A directory would be helpful to visitors and local people in providing guidance on the range of services and products available in the parish, and could prove to be an invaluable business promotion tool.

Alston Moor in 1995 is at a time of significant change. The covering letter to the appraisal questionnaire survey was entitled **"Is Alston Moor at the crossroads - or just another bend in the road?"**. This appraisal offers a chance to reflect on the answer to this question, and consider the way forward. In seeking to manage and direct change, the action plan which will be based on the work of this appraisal will provide a means of ensuring that Alston Moor really is at the crossroads in 1995.

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APPENDIX A: RESULTS OF HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Percentages in brackets

1.	How many are in your household?	over 18	90 (47.6)
		under 18	33 (17.4)
2.	Where do you live?		
	Alston		119 (62.9)
	Nenthead		29 (15.3)
	Garrigill		24 (12.6)
	other(please specify)		16 (8.4)
3.	How long have you lived there?		
		0-1 years	12 (6.3)
		1-3 years	19 (10.0)
		3-5 years	13 (6.8)
		over 5 years	95 (50.2)
		all my life	48 (25.3)
4.	Have you, or any members of your household, found it difficult to obtain accommodation of the following kinds?		
		council	13 (6.8)
		private rented	5 (2.6)
		low cost private rented	14 (7.4)
		low cost housing to buy	24 (12.7)
		Housing Association	5 (2.6)
5.	Are you generally satisfied with the following services?		
		Yes	No
	medical	115(60.8)	5 (2.6)
	police	171(90.0)	7 (3.7)
	Alston Primary school	23(12.1)	6 (3.1)
	Nenthead Primary School	28(14.8)	8 (4.2)
	Samuel King's School	61(32.2)	8 (4.2)
	library	128(67.7)	20 (10.5)
	local shops	83(43.9)	85 (44.9)
6.	What additional leisure facilities do you think Alston Moor needs, and could realistically support?		
		more youth facilities	90 (47.6)
		indoor sports hall	98 (51.8)
		countryside centre	22 (11.6)
		local history centre	22 (11.6)
		music venue	29 (15.3)
7.	Do any of the following concern you and/or your household members directly regarding the provision of education?		
		transport problems to place of education	12 (6.3)
		lack of choice in adult education	27 (14.2)
		lack of choice in pre-school education	8 (4.2)

8. Have you any of the following problems in obtaining training?		
	lack of childcare	4 (2.1)
	transport problems	8 (4.2)
	not enough incentive	10 (5.2)
	lack of information	8 (4.2)
	lack of local provision	16 (8.4)
9. Which problems of transport cause most concern to you?		
	congestion in Alston	48 (25.4)
	lack of car parking	29 (15.3)
	routing of heavy lorries	60 (31.7)
	poor bus service	34 (17.9)
10. A variety of facilities are planned for the refurbished town hall. Which of the following would you be most likely to use or attend?		
	craft workshops	24 (12.7)
	childrens' soft play	18 (9.5)
	live performances	51 (26.9)
	film club	38 (20.1)
	job/careers/training information (open office hours)	18 (9.5)
	sports facilities (for casual bookings)	40 (21.1)
	private hire (with catering available)	27 (14.2)
	occasional office space	3 (1.5)
11. Do you think it is important to improve access to the countryside by improving footpaths, bridleways, and cycle paths?		
	very important	76 (40.2)
	worth doing	69 (36.5)
	not necessary	37 (19.5)
12. Do you think it is important to make the countryside of the parish look better?		
	very important	100 (52.9)
	worth doing	51 (26.9)
	not necessary	33 (17.4)
13. Are you currently employed or self-employed?		
	yes - part-time	29 (15.3)
	yes - full-time	78 (41.2)
	no	81 (42.8)
14. If not, are you		
	retired	55 (29.1)
	student	1 (0.5)
	unemployed	13 (6.8)
	on a training scheme	3 (1.5)
	other non-economically active	8 (4.2)
15. If you are employed or self-employed, what is your job?		
	Professional?managerial	37 (19.5)
	Skilled	43 (22.7)
	Unskilled	4 (2.1)

16. <i>If employed or self-employed, what is your area of work?</i>		
farming	8	(4.2)
manufacture	16	(8.4)
services	37	(19.5)
tourism	12	(6.3)
extraction	0	
transport	8	(4.2)
building	4	(2.1)
17. <i>If you are not currently employed or self-employed, have you any of the following problems in obtaining a job? (Percentages are percentages of unemployed)</i>		
lack of childcare	7	(53.8)
transport problems	6	(46.1)
not enough skills	4	(30.7)
despaired of trying	4	(30.7)
lack of information	8	(61.5)
18. <i>Would you like to see further growth of tourism in the parish, as one element in a comprehensive programme of economic development?</i>		
none	34	(17.9)
low to moderate growth	86	(45.5)
moderate to high growth	55	(29.1)
19. <i>If you do want further growth in tourism, what sort of growth?</i>		
small scale locally owned developments	68	(35.9)
more wet weather activities	70	(37.0)
more outdoor activities	25	(13.2)
more events	44	(23.2)
20. <i>What would your attitude be to the development of new sites for housing or employment in your nearest town or village?</i>		
	Unfavourable	Favourable
small housing site	35 (18.5)	102 (53.9)
large housing site	68 (35.9)	10 (5.2)
small employment site	29 (15.3)	99 (52.3)
large employment site	64 (33.8)	37 (19.5)
21. <i>If European or government funding is available for Alston Moor, do you think the greatest need is for</i>		
economic development (job creation)	73	(38.6)
social need (supporting voluntary organisations)	23	(12.1)
environmental improvement (caring for resources, land, buildings)	59	(31.2)

Appendix B: Organisations Consulted and their Acronyms

Organisation	Acronym
Adult Education	
Age Concern	
Agricultural Development and Advisory Service	ADAS
Alston Medical Practice/Cottage Hospital	
Alston Moor Business Association	
Alston Moor Parish Council	
Alston Moor Teleworking Initiative	AMTI
Alston Primary School	
Alston Town Hall Trustees	
Association of Northern Teleworkers	ANT
British Coal	
British Gas	
Business Link Rural Cumbria	
Carlisle College	
Citizens' Advice Bureau, Alston	CAB
Countryside Commission	
Cumbria County Council	
Cumbria Rural Housing Group	
Delvin Research Associates	
Durham Dales Centre	
East Cumbria Countryside Project	ECCP
Eden District Council	
Energy Efficiency Office	
English Nature	
English Partnerships	
Forestry Authority	
Garrigill Village Hall Committee	
Government Office NW	
Grisedale Croft	
Job Centres Penrith and Hexham	
KNW (formerly Keep Newcastle Warm)	KNW
Made In Cumbria	
Mind	
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	MAFF
National Childbirth Trust, Alston	NCT
Neighbourhood Energy Action	
Neighbourhood Services Unit	
Nenthead Primary School	
Nenthead Village Hall Committee	
North Pennines Heritage Trust	
North Pennines Orchestra	
North Pennines Tourism Partnership	
North West Water	
Northumbrian Water	
Norweb	
Rural Development Commission	RDC
Samuel King's School	
South Tynedale Railway	
Tilhill Economic Forestry	
Training and Enterprise Council	TEC
Two Castles Housing Association	
Union Lane Centre, Brampton	
Voluntary Action Cumbria	VAC
Workers Educational Association	WEA

Appendix C: List of Businesses in Interview Survey

Business Name

Alston Training and Adventure Centre
Ayle Colliery Company
Bart Phillips Designs
Bill and Beak Farm
Clarghyll Colliery
Cumberland Mustard
Hartside Nursery
High Loaning Head Adventure Centre
Hodgsons Stone Quarry
KMC Industrials
Moorlands Candles
P. & L. Dent
Pennine Pottery
Portabowl Products
Precision Products
Total Postweigh
Wildcat Films
Wrights Buses

APPENDIX D (excerpt taken from 1980 appraisal (1))

3. THE CHANGING ROLE OF ALSTON MOOR

3.1 Alston Moor's past history is inextricably involved with mining. Lead and silver were mined here as early as the 12th century although it was not until the end of the 17th century that mining activities were intensified, leading to the rapid development of the area over the 18th and 19th centuries.

3.2 The estate of Alston Moor was settled upon Greenwich Hospital in 1734 after its forfeiture by the Earl of Derwentwater on account of his part played in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715. The estate remained with the Greenwich Hospital until its recent acquisition by the Catholic Trust who thus own large areas of land within the parish and also retain most of the mineral rights.

3.3 In 1750 the London Lead Company, created by a group of Quakers in 1692, started to develop the lead mining industry at the head of the Nent valley on a scale previously unprecedented, and Nenthead grew from a sparse scattering of dwellings to a properly serviced village.

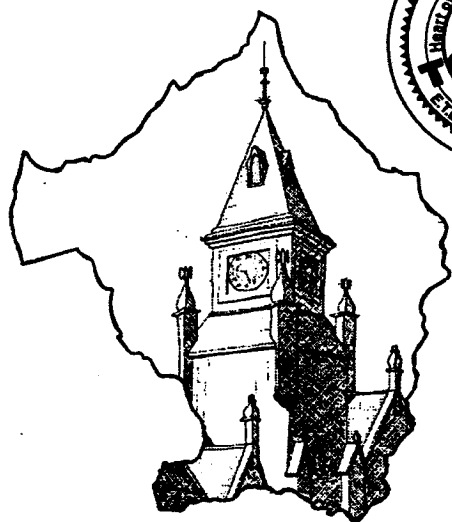
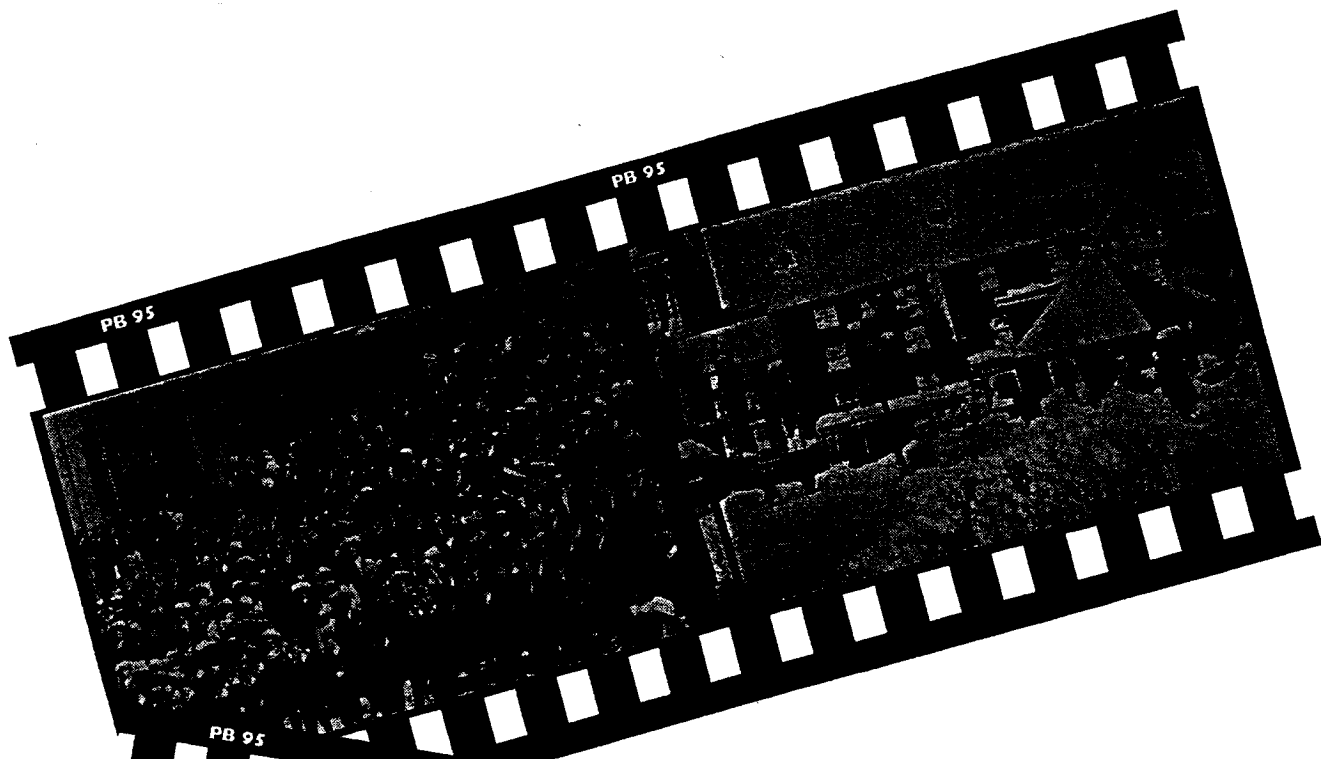
3.4 Mining reached its peak of prosperity in the early 19th century, by which time it had become the principal economic support of the area. Alston was an essential service centre for its mining hinterland, providing the areas' foodstuffs imported from the neighbouring fertile areas of Brampton, Hexham and the Eden Valley.

3.5 The population grew with the flourishing mining activity and a wealth of services developed including a grammar school, National School, Town Hall and Library. The London Lead Company retained hold of their leases throughout the main period of mining activity in the area, finally relinquishing them in 1882. During this time the area benefitted from the philanthropic attitude of the company who provided services for the miners not normally associated with 19th century enterprise. In 1825 the company planned the rebuilding of Nenthead and subsequently provided a wide range of services, namely a school, chapel, market hall, reading room, public baths and wash-house.

3.6 As the area prospered, communications improved. The road over Hartside, engineered by Macadam, was opened in 1828 by which time most of the main roads servicing the area had developed along their present routes. The Haltwhistle railway link was completed in 1852. This constituted a considerable engineering exercise, as the line drops 500 feet from Alston to Haltwhistle. The railway provided an efficient means of communication and was used for the transport of lead and later fluorspar, which was mined in the 1950s.

3.7 Towards the end of the 19th century, lead-mining suffered from foreign competition and this, together with the gradual exhaustion of the veins led to the eventual collapse of the local industry with a parallel decline in population.

3.8 Various attempts have been made during this century to revive the lead mining industry, but none of these have flourished for long and the final closure of the mines took place during the 1960s.



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