

A Community Led Plan for Walkerburn



Walkerburn Action Plan

The selection of Walkerburn as one of three communities to take part in a project centred on the production of a local community led action plan provided a real opportunity to local residents to contribute to shaping their own future. The process encourages people to become involved in the community planning process and heightens awareness of the partners and processes involved in community planning.

Through involvement it should be possible to establish a bottom-up approach to plan, prioritise, and deliver better public services in which local authorities and the main public sector agencies work more closely with the community.

The plan is part of a 'change champion project' funded by Supporting Voluntary Action through The Bridge.

As a village established exclusively on the strength of the Tweed textile industry, the final closure of textile mills in Walkerburn in the late 1980s resulted in a village in decline in terms of both population and services.

There followed a number of community development initiatives which have successfully tackled some of the issues, however the number of residents is still in decline and service levels are a fraction of those of 30 years ago.

The development work included:

- Appointment, through Tweeddale Association of Voluntary Organisations, of a community development worker during the village's period as part of a Transitional European Union Regeneration Area
- Liaison with the neighbouring town of Innerleithen on a joint development strategy
- Consultation concerning development of a 'community mall' in the centre of the village
- Establishment of Walkerburn Community Development Trust with links to both an existing newsletter and a web site
- A range of activities linked to the Healthy Living Network which have involved up to a third of the Walkerburn population
- Appointment of a Powerdown worker in the village and discussion of allotment provision

The success of this work is encouraging, however the recent closure of the church building combined with the extent of empty buildings in the village centre has further raised the need for continued development work in the village.

The project presents an opportunity for local residents to:

- become involved in and contribute to the preparation of a community focused local plan
- better understand, participate in, and influence the Statutory Community Planning process
- make known their priorities for the village
- support Walkerburn to organise and take forward some local initiatives by itself.

The final plan is an important lever for use by the community of Walkerburn when in dialogue with providers of services. It allows an examination of how improvements might be made and it identifies a range of actions that the community itself can undertake through co-ordinated voluntary action.

There is a clear recognition that in the current climate when public sector finances are becoming ever more tightly focused, the community which will flourish will have a clear and realistic idea of its future, a commitment to helping itself, and a spirit of local responsibility.

The plan summarises community views about:

- Walkerburn now
- The issues that matter most to local people
- The community's vision for the future
- Priorities for action.

The plan outlines clearly the type of place Walkerburn residents would like to live in - and what needs to be done to achieve this. It will be used to highlight the community's needs and aspirations in discussion with public agencies and other partners, and as evidence of community support for priority projects.



Methodology

This plan was prepared following extensive collaboration with the community, which included:

- A community survey delivered to every household in the area
- A separate survey completed by children at Walkerburn primary school
- A series of focus groups/workshops to capture the views and priorities of various groups of residents
- A community "Visioning Event" to 'reality-proof' the findings from the surveys and the focus groups and to finalise the priorities for inclusion in this Action Plan.

Throughout the process it was emphasised that:

the local Community led plan is:

- An opportunity to participate and feed into a community focused Local Action Plan prepared by local residents
- An opportunity to understand, participate in, and influence Statutory Community Planning
- An opportunity to highlight the priorities for Walkerburn
- An opportunity to define what can be actioned by the community and what needs to be developed in partnership with other organisations
- An opportunity to organise and progress some local initiatives by the community itself.

and that it is not:

- A Local Authority Scheme
- A wish list of things that should but may never happen
- A promise of substantial additional funding coming into the area
- A temporary unsupported project with no future.

The plan was facilitated by a member of the community, Ian Ireland, and was supported and delivered with the assistance of The Bridge.

151 responses were received to the household survey representing a 36% return.

98 people attended focus group discussions, and a further 41 took part in the visioning event. In addition a further 19 young people took part in a survey a few months prior to the plan process starting.

The results of this survey are also taken into account.

Our community now

Many views, facts and figures were gathered about our community now, some of which are included in this plan. Additional materials are included in a follow-up statistical document that is available on www.walkerburn.com

Summarised below are some of the key findings from the community.

What we like

The peace of the local countryside, location and the views

The friendliness of local people

The good village primary school

Opportunities for country sports and outdoor activities

'We feel safe, it's a friendly place to bring up children'

'... a feeling of timelessness'

'The view, proximity to Edinburgh, post office, bus route, fishing, tranquility of countryside'



What we don't like

The poor appearance of the village, the empty and dilapidated buildings

The speed of traffic through the village

The poor state of some roads

The poor provision of facilities for young people in the village

Problems with parking



'Empty properties make the village look uninviting from the main road'

'Nowhere for youngsters/young mothers to congregate'

'Dull in appearance, tired looking buildings and no doctors' surgery'

Background and environment

Lying nearly equidistant from Galashiels and Peebles in the Tweed Valley, Walkerburn was established during the mid nineteenth century by the Ballantyne family as a new village surrounding a textile mill built from 1846. Prior to that date the only settlements in the area were farmhouses. The village grew to become a thriving community having shops, a school and a railway by 1867, the last initially only accessible from the village by ferry over the river until a bridge was built in the following year.

At its peak the village had over 1200 residents, double its current population. It was the site of the first hydro-electric scheme in the country in the 1920's, pumping water to provide electrical energy to meet increased demand for the growing textile industry. The railway closed in 1961, and the last mill closed in 1988 and the population of the village has fallen over the last 30 years.

Built on the steeply sloped north side of the valley in order to give homes the maximum benefit of the sun and the views, the village is spread along the River Tweed, with stunning views southwards and along the valley from much of the village. The local countryside is one of the main appeals of the village to local residents, with excellent local walking and easy access to the Southern Upland Way.

Closure of the mills has removed the major employer and benefactor from the village and further recent decline of the textile industry continues to hit the village. The mill sites provide premises for a number of small businesses, and the village's major employer occupies part of the main mill complex alongside the A72. The Church of Scotland building was closed in 2009, adding to the number of empty and underused buildings in the village. Along with the fact that much of the village presents its back to the main road, this gives a run-down feel to much of the village, again one of those matters highlighted during the preparation of this plan.

Social and community

The village has a regular bus service to both Galashiels and Peebles and onwards to Edinburgh. There is a good primary school with nursery provision and a village hall which is a centre for many activities including those provided by the Healthy Living Network. Walkerburn Community Development Trust was established in 2005, its aim is to make Walkerburn



a good place to work live and enjoy, and it leads on a number of local initiatives. There is a long established rugby club and a social club, as well a hotel and local shop/Post Office, which is a major hub for local information sharing. The village has a number of local groups providing a variety of activities, but some struggle to find enough people to take on positions to maintain them. A well established local monthly newsletter is delivered to all homes and is linked to a village website.

Population

Walkerburn village has a declining population, there being 620 residents in 2008 compared to 647 in 2001. A growing proportion of the population is of pensionable age (24.8%, c.f. 18.6% in Scotland in 2001.) As with the whole Borders area, the 20 – 24 group is under-represented at 4.1% (4.4% Borders, 6.3% Scotland), and while there has been very recent growth in the 0 – 4 age group, there has been a corresponding drop in the 5 – 9 group.

Employment

The village has higher levels of unemployment than the Borders generally (5.5% c.f. 3.1%.) The loss of textile related employment is a continuing factor in the village. There is a range of small businesses that provide employment on a small scale. Of those in employment, 16% are in skilled trades, 26% in managerial and professional occupations with 31% in process operations or elementary occupations. This last figure is far higher than the corresponding figure for Scotland at just 22%, contributing to the lower-than-national average salary level of the Borders generally.



Housing

The village has a mix of housing types, from large country houses to flats and maisonettes, reflecting the range of the original planned village and there is a small number of properties in the surrounding countryside outwith the village yet within the EH43 postcode area. 60% of the residential property is in Council Tax band A. Much of the housing in the village is rental property owned by SBHA (75 properties) and Eildon HA (9 properties.) A number of houses are second homes, particularly at the west end of the village.



Time for Action

The community identified numerous issues needing to be tackled in the village. These were separated into issues within their own control as a community and those outwith their control but within their influence. Issues were then prioritised according to the overall views expressed in the surveys, the focus groups, and at the visioning day. A group of people have already come forward to pursue the issues in this plan, and to encourage others to become involved in those projects which the community can initiate for itself, and also to generate strong communication links with the necessary agencies dealing with those aspects of the plan outwith our control, requesting their assistance and cooperation.

In Our Control – High priority

1 Ensuring the plan is actioned

Walkerburn has many active groups including the Development Trust, as well as an effective newsletter and website for communication. Key to progress will be ownership of the plan, and communication of that progress.

Actions: Identify a group of people to take ownership of the plan
Organise initial meetings to begin work on the identified actions
Ensure any action is reported in newsletter and on website

2 Facilities and activities for children and young people

This need was identified by all age groups; suggestions to meet it included some form of shelter, improved and wider range of park equipment and skatepark. Youth group activity currently extends to two evenings per week.

Actions: Work to secure funding for increased young people's facilities in village
Investigate possible sites for a shelter for young people

3 Dog fouling and litter

65% of people identified dog fouling as a concern and 46% were concerned with litter

Actions: Press for more bins for dog mess
Increased poster placement to raise awareness
Consider fencing off a section of the park to exclude dogs
Advertise dog warden activity and promote contact details

4 Community meeting place/café

Walkerburn lacks an active daytime social centre. There is a successful lunch club for part of the year, but it does not run in the summer months. Also, Healthy Living Network one stop shop activity is popular with young mothers.

Actions: Promote current activity through newsletter and website
Investigate opening the village hall for afternoon social meeting

In Our Control – Lower priority

1 Childcare provision

A proportion of residents raised costs and availability of suitable childcare in the village as an issue.

Actions: Support for the development of the Walkerburn Out of School club
Lobby the support agencies for some form of provision

2 Uncared for gardens

Physical appearance of aspects of the village was high on the overall scale of concerns. A small number of unkempt gardens add to this concern.

Actions: Dialogue with SBHA on care for gardens of their properties
Promotion of a best kept garden competition
Organisation of volunteers to assist in gardening for those unable to manage their own gardens

Outwith Our Control – High priority

1 Drab appearance of the village

The visual impression of Walkerburn from the A72 was a major concern for residents.

Actions: Work with the Housing Associations to improve appearance of their properties
Provision of hanging baskets along the A72
Planting areas should be worked on especially surrounding the new allotments site

2 Lack of employment opportunities

Decline of the textile industry continues to affect Walkerburn.

Actions: Dialogue with owners of empty properties on possible development
Investigation of viability of a community owned facility for local people and tourism

3 Empty and dilapidated buildings

Concern was expressed not only about the appearance of the empty buildings but also the possibility of increased danger as deterioration increases.

Actions: Dialogue with owners of empty properties on development
Support for Scottish Borders Council action in relation to empty buildings

4 Cost of public transport and service levels

While the daytime service is good, cost is an issue, and evening service is poor – this particularly affects the younger age group.

Actions: Work with First Bus to improve provision
Raise awareness of Tweeddale Community Transport – encourage volunteer drivers

5 Accommodation for the elderly

Little suitable accommodation is designed for the elderly, and the geography of the village creates additional mobility problems.

Actions: Work with SBC on acquiring and developing suitable premises for conversion
Support suitable housing development

6 Parking on Tweedholm Avenue

Illegal parking is creating safety concerns by blocking pavements. Recent work has improved access to off road areas.

Actions: Investigate changing the design of the parking area at the east end of the avenue
Liaison with community police to discourage dangerous parking
Discussion with SBHA concerning provision of street parking areas



Outwith Our Control – Lower priority

1 Condition of roads and pavements

Some areas of the village have badly maintained road and other surfaces. The timing of the survey highlighted difficulty in poor weather.

Actions: Continued contact with SBC

2 Traffic speed on A72/Parking on Peebles Road section

As a major route through the Borders, the A72 has some large vehicles. There was recognition that road parking does help in slowing the speed of traffic in some areas.

Actions: Investigate traffic calming measures on A72

3 Health service provision in the village

There is no provision of any health service within the village. A number of residents have to rely on public transport to access their GP, nursing or other confidential services.

Actions: Consultation with NHS on provision of services within the village



Action

A committee will be established to lead in the delivery of this action plan. It will work closely with Community Planning Partners and existing local organisations in particular the Community Development Trust. This group will be run by ordinary members of the community with the main purpose of achieving improvements to Walkerburn by progressing the actions identified in this Plan.

9 people at the event to prioritise the issues offered to join a group to take matters forward.

Main Contacts

If you would like further information with regard to this plan or its advancement contact the Village Office on 01896 870522.

Supporting these actions

Few of these actions can be achieved without the strong support and involvement of local people and collaborative working with other organisations. If you are interested in assisting with any of these priority projects, please contact us.

Reviewing the Action Plan

We will from time to time review our progress in implementing this plan, inviting the whole community to attend a meeting and assess the progress we are making in carrying out the actions set out in the Plan. A review meeting will be held a year after the launch of the Plan, to take stock of our achievements and set goals for the future.



Development work in Walkerburn will continue to be supported by The Bridge.
The Bridge may be contacted on 01896 755370
www.the-bridge.uk.net

