

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria

Annual Review 2024/25



Welcome to our 2024/2025 annual review



Our chair Jim Webster says: 'This year I want to celebrate the commitment of three people to ACT, over many years.'

Firstly, Our president – Jolyon Dodgson has stood down after over 40 years involvement with the organisation. We will miss him and wish him a well deserved rest.

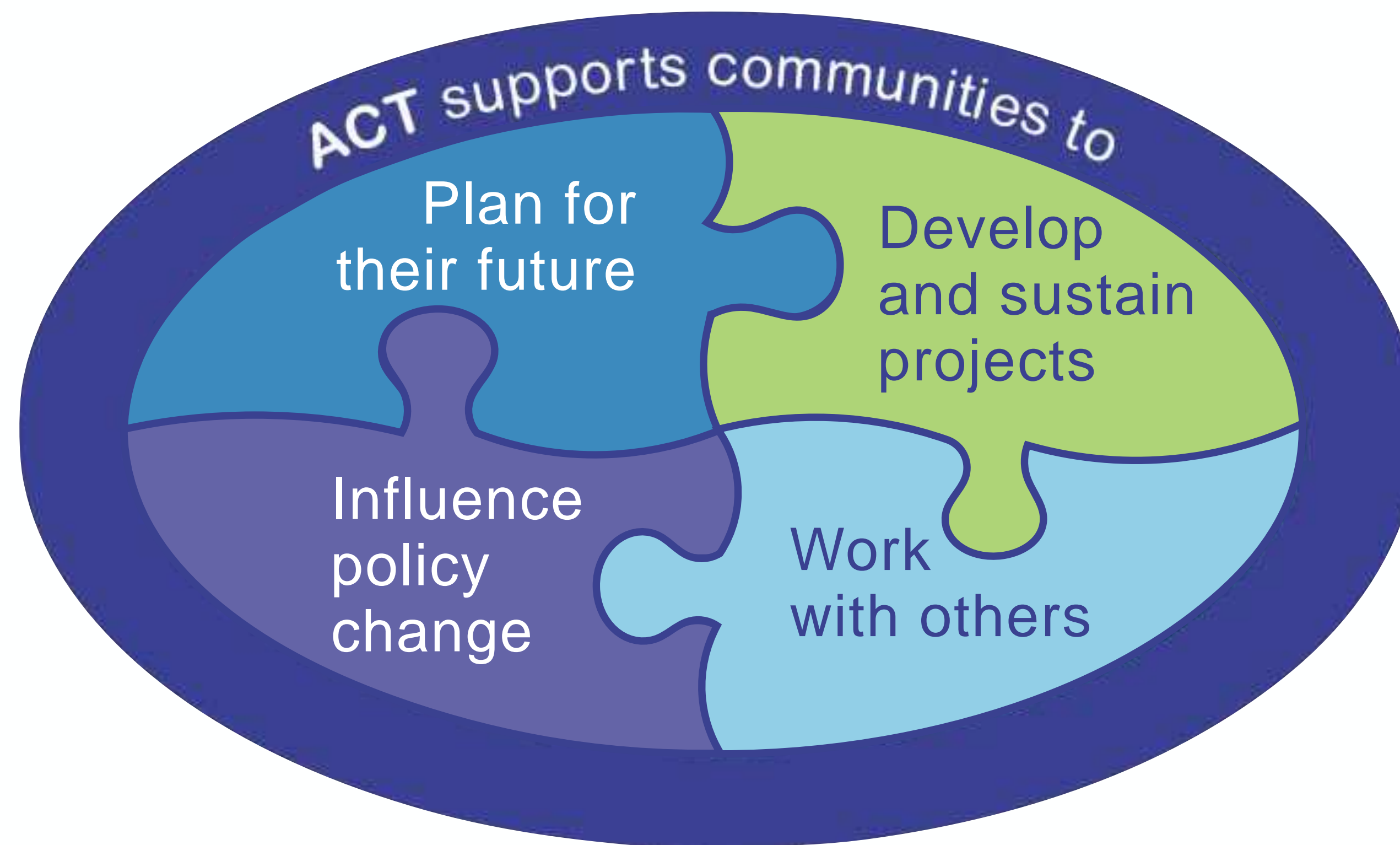
Secondly, we have two trustees standing down: Liz Clegg and Charles Ecroyd. Both have contributed to the board for over 15 years and we thank them both for their commitment.

A new trustee: Bex Stamper, from rural West Cumbria, has recently joined the board. The trustee team are a committed, engaged bunch with diverse experience of rural and community issues. We couldn't be ACT without them. ACT goes from strength to strength. I hope you enjoy reading about our year and we always welcome any feedback.'



Some of the ACT Trustees and staff

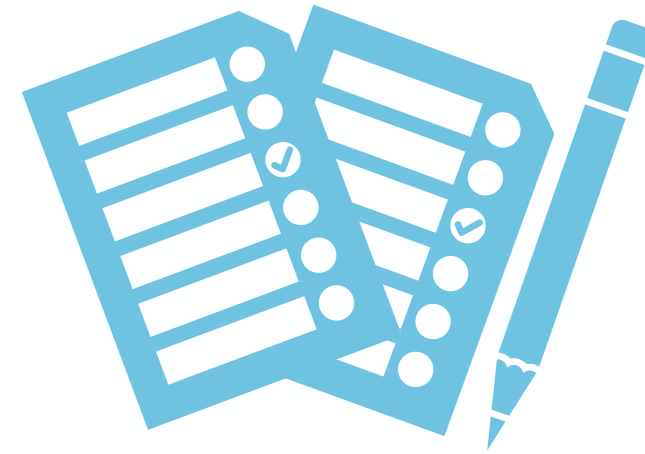
ACTion **with communities in Cumbria**
champions community and rural issues



The year in numbers



Secured for Cumbrian projects

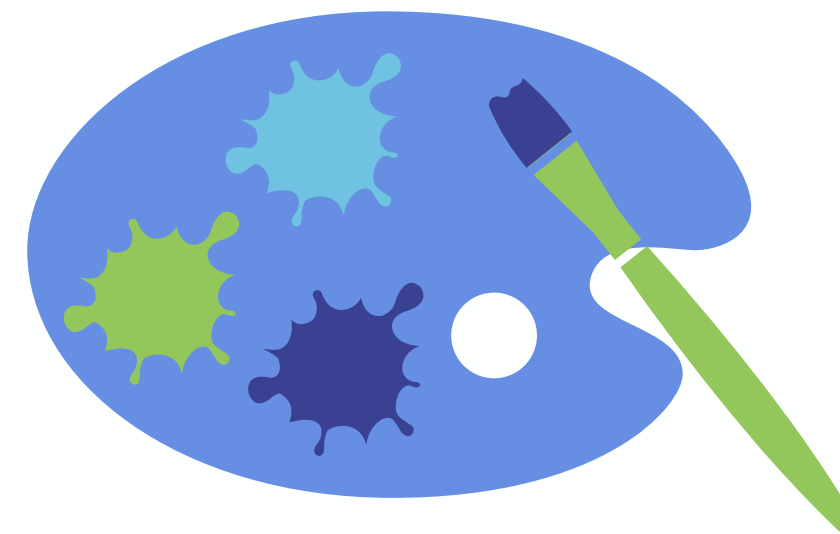


Helped develop 25 community plans



453 community building enquiries

Five groups supported to explore housing need and solutions



14,000 people involved in creative activity in West Cumbria



Eight newsletters circulated to our 2,400 ACT supporters



**Over 576
enquiries in total!**

ACT's President Jolyon Dodgson retires after 40 years involvement



Jolyon originally worked alongside ACT -VAC as it was then- on economic issues. He became a board member and then chairperson for us and more latterly became our President. Jolyon was also chair of our national organisation ACRE, -Action with Communities in Rural England- for many years.



Jolyon's commitment to ACT has been a backbone of the organisation – from facilitating at community mediation meetings, to representing us at national level on rural issues, to chairing and advising the board.
We wish him all the best!

Influence policy change



This year the DEFRA funded Rural Housing Enabling (RHE) service has supported four communities of less than 3,000 people to understand their housing needs and look for options and partnerships to bring small housing development to fruition

- Working with our key partner Eden Housing Association, the RHE service in Cumbria is supported by an advisory group that includes all four of our planning authorities (W&F, Cumberland, LDNPA and YDNPA) and several of the Registered Providers who operate in Cumbria, including Castles and Coasts, South Lakes Housing, Home Group and Westfield.
- The Advisory Group is providing a useful platform to focus on rural, affordable housing in particular with chances to share opportunities and influence policy development.



Influence policy change



In 2024 ACT were commissioned by Westmorland and Furness Council to better understand the voices of those living with poverty in Eden, with the aim to then influence policy development and service change

- Working with partners, Citizens Advice and AGE UK, Carlisle and Eden, we gathered evidence by talking to those experiencing poverty in Eden and the agencies and groups who offer support.
- Causes of poverty centred around housing, transport, fuel and employment. It was common that poverty experiences were aggravated by personal circumstances. The key points we learnt were:
- Poverty is changing: One size does not fit all: People in rural communities are less likely to present as 'in need' and rural poverty is often hidden but no less devastating.
- As a result of this work an Eden Rural Poverty Working Group has been formed.



Develop and sustain projects



ACT's Community Buildings Service - A place to come with any community building related query

- We provide one to one support, events, networking, regular updates, and access to specialist national guidance across a wide range of subjects including: governance and charity requirements, finance and fundraising, building improvements, energy efficiency, accessibility, food safety, licensing, car parks – the list goes on!
- This year ACT awarded Langwathby Public Hall and Arnside Educational Institute with national village hall quality awards for good management. Hallmarks One and Two were awarded to both halls. The awards are a marker of the quality of a hall which says it is well run, well organised and well administered.



Develop and sustain projects



We've been working with colleagues from the Cumberland Food Partnership as part of the ongoing national Food Conversation

- We've been attending Community Panel Network events to speak to communities about their thoughts and ideas relating to the food production system
- We've heard about some of the amazing community growing projects, such as community orchards and allotments - and about some brilliant, innovative ways to reduce food waste and get affordable food to people who will benefit most
- We're using this information to help us develop the support we can offer to groups across Cumbria, helping to further reduce food poverty - whilst hopefully contributing to a better environment and increased community participation



Working with others

We support communities to develop their own transport solutions and work with others to make them happen!

- After community discussion, Greystoke now have a regular bus service again. We've discussed creative ways to encourage more users with the very active Greystoke Bus user group
- We supported Sustainable Integrated Transport for Ullswater (SITU) to become a charity, discussing charitable purpose and governance. SITU are now running two buses in the valley in partnership with Stagecoach
- The Enhanced Bus Partnership for Cumbria (EBP), is co-chaired by our CEO. The EBP offers opportunities to work in partnership with delivery and strategic partners, including open forums to discuss issues and consider potential solutions



Working with others

The Community Spaces Partnership pilot, (2023 - 2025) was delivered with partners from Northumberland and Durham. The aim was to future-proof village halls and community spaces, focusing on the transition to Net Zero and building resilience.



- We provided information, advice, guidance, events and capital funding to 124 community spaces, with a supportive, developmental approach
- 13 community spaces were supported with £375K for capital energy improvement works, supported by complete governance reviews
- 22 bursaries were awarded for professional building condition and energy surveys and national guidance 'A Guide to Surveys' – was commissioned to explain the benefits of different building surveys, and how to select professionals

'The governance check was brilliant! We didn't really understand what we didn't have until the check... getting it all sorted is great.'

'We can look back on everything we've done for this project...If there's a bigger project to do next time, we now know we can achieve it.'

'Since ACT got involved it's been so much easier because someone who has the knowledge is there to help us fill the gaps. It makes the world of difference'

In early 2025 we heard that the partnership bid to continue this project was successful. For the independent review of the project see here: <https://nicre.co.uk/innovation-portal/community-spaces-partnership/>

Planning for the future



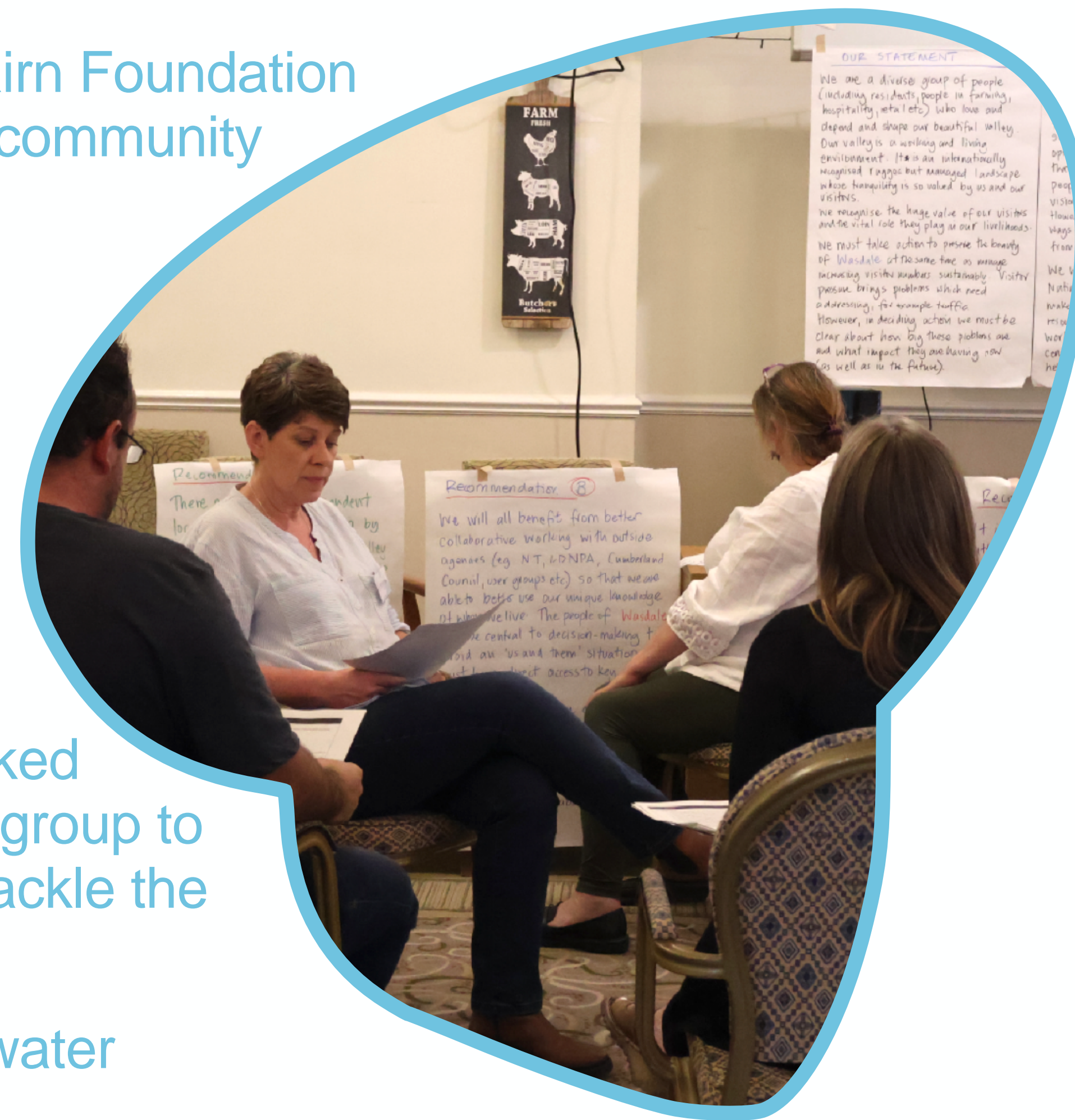
- We've continued to work closely with Electricity North West and Cumbria Community Foundation to enable communities impacted for more than 72 hours by Storm Arwen to become more resilient against future power outages and storms. We supported 35 community buildings to receive Storm Arwen funding
- Funded by Electricity North West and in partnership with Cumbria CVS and Westmorland & Furness Council, we provided two online workshops (with 70 attendees) for local community members and support staff focusing on developing community emergency plans. We've also provided 1-2-1 support to help 15 communities develop their plans

Planning for the future



We secured an additional five years of funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for our Collaboration Hub in a great endorsement of our work to raise community voice in the Lake District National Park

- “How do we get the best out of our visitors in Wasdale, so we thrive as a community?” This is the question the Wasdale Citizens Panel discussed last year
- Working with ACT and Shared Futures the Citizens Panel explored the issues in depth and listened to commentators who shared experiences and solutions from other areas
- The Panel presented their recommendations to stakeholders and asked how they could deliver against them. The community have formed a group to continue these conversations and are working with stakeholders to tackle the issues together
- Other Collaboration Hub projects have included continuing work on water quality, transport, engagement and planning policies



Everyone Here (EH)



Our Arts Council England, Creative People and Places project, Everyone Here (EH) reached 14,000 people in West Cumbria this year!

- We made history in May 2024 by holding the first long term citizen's jury controlling a budget of £100K for cultural engagement. Their question was 'How can Everyone in West Cumbria be Creative Together?'



The Jury for Joy members and staff

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- In their first year the Jury for Joy wanted to reach many of West Cumbria's smaller communities and developed the idea of a 'Spark Bus' that would tour 10 rural locations, bringing art to these communities and finishing with a Festival. The Spark Bus reached over 300 people with visual art, theatre and music.



The Spark Bus on tour

Everyone Here (EH)



- In December 2024 EH worked alongside Cumberland Council to deliver 'Hall Park Light Works' in Workington, a spectacular outdoor arts festival reaching 12,000 participants (see image)
- 'Sensory World' by local artist Natalie Sharp proved a huge success reaching over 300 learning disabled and neurodivergent members of the west cumbrian community with support from Lakes College and EH
- The Green Creative Hub, in collaboration with Ground Work, saw regular engagement with local people, using nature and art based creative activities at the Settlement in Maryport



ACT staff and trustees



Our Trustees are:
Jim Webster (Chair),
Alan McViety
(Treasurer),
Sam Bramwell,
Juan Shimmin,
Sue Castle-Clarke,
Debbie Freake,
Charles Ecroyd,
Liz Clegg,
Nigel Curry
and
Bex Stamper

From left to right: Dani, Lorraine, Jozi, Carole, Hellen, Fran, Kieran (top) and Jamie

Looking ahead

In the next year we will continue to work with communities and aim to:

- Deliver against our new strategy, working towards people not being disadvantaged by where they live
- Use the responses to our Rural Survey to campaign for local people to be heard on local housing need and access to affordable transport
- Explore ageing in rural places and what communities can do to support older people to stay in the places they identify as home
- Promote wellbeing through physical activity with Active Cumbria and over 330 village halls/community buildings and through community resilience with community planning and access to local, healthy food



Lorraine (CEO) at Appleby summer Crafty Trail

Looking ahead



- Continue working on community voice projects, helping people to have their say in influencing the decisions that affect their lives
- Support the new organisation Everything, Everywhere, Everyone to further develop the Creative People and Places project with Everyone Here
- Recruit new staff to support our delivery for communities in West Cumbria
- Seek additional new resources for capital works for Village Halls and community buildings to make them fit for the future.
- Work with CVS and CYA to strengthen the support to, and role of, the third and community sector in Cumbria.
- Take advantage of the new Mayoral authority to promote a focus on rural issues



Voices from the rural survey

The nearly 200 respondents to our Rural Survey overwhelmingly saw local affordable housing and transport as key challenges for people living in our rural communities and want to express those challenges to people in power. Poverty was a more complex picture, with many respondents recognising the hidden nature of poverty and its links with expensive travel and housing. Here are some of the most powerful quotes:

'Youngsters have no chance of accessing the [housing] market'

'A lack of permanent residents threatens viability of local services such as primary schools'

'Less populated areas often have infrequent or non-existent public transport options, leading to isolation and reinforcing the dependence on private vehicles'

'As a local employer it's difficult to employ staff that live locally'

'It would be impossible to rely on public transport where I live'

'I am shocked how many in my area need to access the food bank. I think these are low paid workers rather than unemployed people'

'There are lots of stoic pensioners in our community struggling to keep warm'

'Holiday homes are necessary but need controlling and curtailment'

Village Halls Week spring 2025

- Village Halls Week is a annual, national, week-long celebration organised by ACRE and the ACRE Network
- It shines a spotlight on the contribution that England's 10,000+ (and Cumbria's 330+) village halls make to bringing communities together
- The 2025 theme was celebrating, encouraging & supporting volunteers. These volunteers are the backbone to community involvement
- A big collective 'thank you!' to all the volunteers who work tirelessly to keep community buildings and village halls open for the benefit of their local communities



celebrating, encouraging & supporting volunteers
Village Halls Week • 17-23 March 2025

A good result this year, from our careful husbandry of resources and new investment. We are using Flagstone – CAF Bank’s investment portal- to manage our reserves and produce surpluses to support our work with communities. Everyone Here continues to grow and spend, and should become independent next year – a significant change for them and ACT.

Due to the several multiyear projects and funding agreements we have, we changed our reserves policy this year, so that we hold more funds to enable longer term delivery. The security this offers us means we can ensure ongoing support to rural and wider community groups to be heard, to achieve their plans and to work with others and share their achievements. Careful long-term management allows us to do this.



Alan McViety, our treasurer

Financial report



Charity Income	2024/2025
DEFRA	49,415
DEFRA Rural Housing Enabling	56,450
National Lottery Community Fund core & social value	52,500
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	96,472
Community Places Partnership (National Lottery)	118,215
Westmorland and Furness Council	28,250
Electricity North West	25,000
Investment income	20,602
Other unrestricted	18,750
Arts Council England CPP EH	448,790
TOTAL	914,444

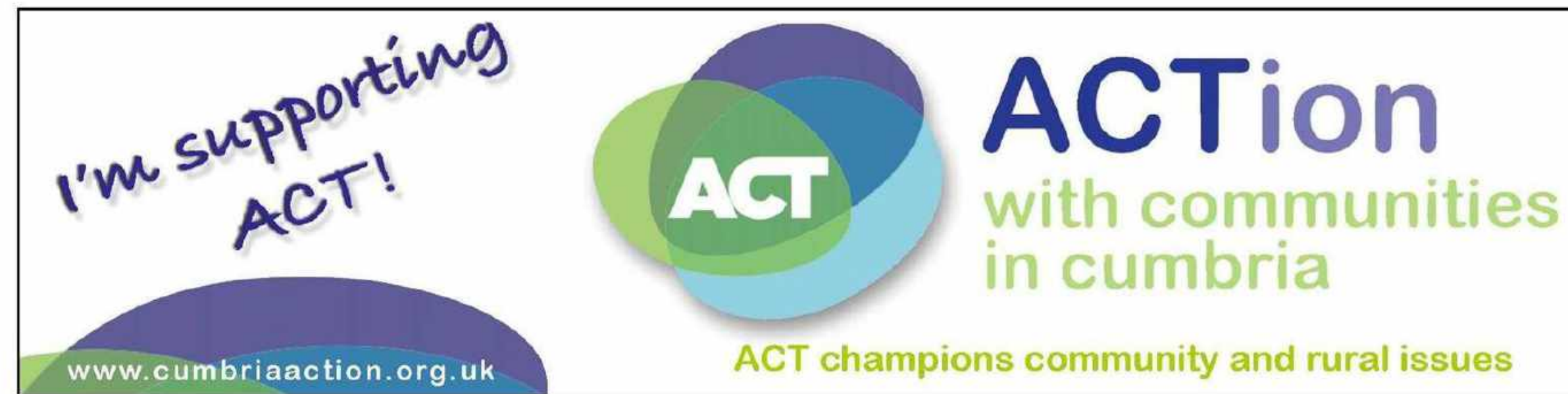
Charity Costs	2024/2025
Staff costs	287,067
Direct project delivery	390,994
Governance	14,117
Travel	2,343
Membership	36,101
Other charity costs	19,079
TOTAL	749,701

Our surplus this year is £164,743, of which £142,155 is restricted and £22,588 is unrestricted

Funders



Becoming a free supporter of ACT will enable us to keep you informed about our work and provide evidence to allow us to keep supporting Cumbrian communities for years to come!



Become an ACT Supporter

Remember if you support us
- we can better support you!

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria



**Thank you for watching
our Annual Review!**

Registered in England as:
Voluntary Action Cumbria
Charity No. 1080875
Company No. 3957858

Contact ACT via:
info@cumbriaaction.org.uk
or ring: 01768 425666

Address:
Room 11, Redhills House
Penrith, CA11 0DT

