



THE HEALTHCHECK REPORT

ALSTON MOOR MARKET TOWN / VITAL VILLAGES PROJECT

funded by the Countryside Agency, Cumbria Rural Development Programme and European Objective 2

FINAL REPORT – March 2003



ALSTON MOOR 2002 Healthcheck report

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Sonia Kempsey,
Project co-ordinator

PART I

Background

1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

1.1. THE FIRST APPRAISAL

The first appraisal of Alston Moor was carried out in 1980 following the closure of Alston Foundry, then the area's major employer, with the loss of 125 jobs. This struck a heavy blow to a community of 2,000 resulting in 25% of the working population being unemployed, so the Parish Council commissioned an appraisal to take stock of the situation. Inevitably the document uncovered a number of opportunities and so they commissioned an Action Plan to pursue opportunities identified in the appraisal. Some of the recommendations in that Action Plan took a long time to fulfil but several important developments came out of it: the Alston Town Scheme which provided funding for property owners to renovate buildings in the Conservation Area (which was subsequently followed by a Conservation Area Partnership Scheme which enabled further town enhancement to take place); the Skelgillside workshop units; and the Alston Moor & East Fellside Project from which developed the now well established East Cumbria Countryside Project.

1.2 ALSTON MOOR THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Fifteen years later the community had come to realise that there was never likely to be another single employer to replace the Alston Foundry Company and it had become apparent that we were entering a long term decline in our traditional forms of employment in agriculture and mining. It was against this background, recognising that the economy still remained fragile, that Alston Moor Business Association commissioned a new appraisal "Alston Moor through the Looking Glass" in 1995. It was intended that the appraisal would be followed by an Action Plan, but this proposal was overtaken by circumstances as Alston appeared to be a good candidate for Rural Challenge and energies were diverted to preparing a Rural Challenge bid. A lot of local volunteers put time and effort into the Rural Challenge bid which was successful at the County level but failed at the National Level. However some of the opportunities identified then are still there, waiting to be developed.

1.3 ALSTON MOOR 2002

In 2001 Alston Moor Business Association (AMBA) and Alston Moor Development Company¹ (AMDC) put forward a joint proposal for a new appraisal to be carried out. Although it was only just over 5 years since the previous one, circumstances were changing fast, the Cybermoor "wired up communities" project was about to happen, another round of European funding was on the horizon and it was recognised that if opportunities for Alston Moor were to be grasped, a new appraisal would be needed to inform a new set of proposals in a new Action Plan.

Following on from the publication of the Rural White paper in 2000, the Countryside Agency announced a new "Market Towns Initiative" in recognition of the importance of market towns as the focal point for commercial and social activity covering the wider rural area. The Market Towns Initiative sought to identify a certain number of market towns within each region which would receive this funding, and a wide range of towns were eligible to apply, from traditional agricultural market towns to seaside resorts and with populations ranging from around 2,000 to 20,000. The aim of the initiative is to revitalise these towns by enabling their future to be shaped by the people who live in and around them. A "tool-kit" has been developed for this purpose to carry out the appraisal or "Healthcheck" and develop the "Action Plan".

AMBA and AMDC therefore sought funding under the Market Towns Initiative as this was potentially an excellent opportunity to achieve a new appraisal and action plan. Their bid was unsuccessful but the Countryside Agency suggested that a similar exercise could be carried out using Vital Villages funding. The Vital Villages programme provides grants to Parish Councils to support rural communities to take stock of their village, identify what is needed to revitalise it and ensure that local people have a voice in their future.

¹ Although the Rural Challenge bid failed, the action partnership which had been formed to manage the bid was encouraged by the Rural Development Commission to take their "flag-ship" project forward. This involved extensive research and a large scale feasibility study was undertaken which included the possibility of opening up the Nent Force Level. The Alston Moor Development Company was formed to take the project forward. However, at that time (1997-98) European funding was running out, Heritage Lottery moved its goalposts and the proposed funding package fell apart but the company continued for some time afterwards.

The Parish Council agreed to apply for Vital Villages funding with a view to carrying out a Market Towns style “healthcheck” and action plan. This application was successful and a Steering Group was set up to oversee the project. The steering group consisted of four Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk, the local District Councillor, representatives of the Alston Moor Business Association, representatives of the farming community, the Cybermoor Project and Cumbria County Council’s Neighbourhood Services.

In the meantime Alston Moor had been identified as a target ward for European Objective 2 Priority 2 funding. This funding could only be accessed through development of a local Partnership to administer the funding and so the Alston Moor Partnership was formed. At the outset, the partnership resolved to serve a wider purpose than to just administer the European funding. It would exist to facilitate projects for the benefit of Alston Moor whether or not they were projects which could benefit from this particular pot of money.

Under the Market Towns Initiative, communities are prescribed to create a Partnership to oversee the project and its implementation. In the case of the Alston Moor 2002 healthcheck the project steering group developed in parallel although in fact it shares many of its members with the wider Alston Moor Partnership. The proposal is to disband the project steering group once this Healthcheck and the Recommendations for Action² have been approved and published and the Alston Moor Partnership will then fulfil the role of facilitating implementation of the proposals.

The Vital Villages funding for the Alston Moor 2002 project was matched with funding from the Rural Development Programme and Objective 2 Priority 2 funding.

2. PROJECT AIMS AND PURPOSE

The project sets out to:

- Appraise the services and facilities provided in Alston together with Nenthead and Garrigill
- Identify the main issues facing Alston Moor
- Draw up a vision for the area’s short, medium and long term future
- Set out a realistic plan of action to deliver improvements and assist with implementation of projects to enhance the quality of life for residents

The project has two key purposes:

- It will provide an opportunity for residents to influence the future of the town
- It will provide evidence on which to base bids for funding to deliver projects of importance to the community

² It was agreed at an early steering group meeting that the recommendations for action emerging from the health check would be given the title “Recommendations for Action” rather than “Action Plan”.

3. LOCATION AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

Alston's location is the key to what makes it a very special place:

By English standards Alston Moor is regarded as an isolated community, probably one of the most isolated communities in the country, being situated at least twenty miles from any larger towns offering a full range of facilities.

At the same time it is very centrally situated, approximately half-way between east and west coasts and approximately half way between Lands End and John O Groats. On the borders of the three counties of Cumbria, Durham and Northumberland it is at the hub of trans North Pennine routes.

Alston is also renowned as a place which gets cut off in winter, although with global warming this is an increasingly rare occurrence. By English standards however it is at a high altitude, with all the land in the Parish being over 800 feet above sea level and the town itself lying at an altitude of between 1,000 and 1,200 ft. The highest point in the Pennine Chain, Cross Fell lies just outside the Parish boundary and forms a dramatic landmark from many parts of the parish.

Alston is within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area rich in minerals which once provided lead for many of Europe's cathedrals. For many years, Alston's economy relied on agriculture and mining. During the first half of the 20th century, the mining industry began to decline and in the 1960's mining ceased altogether apart from a few privately owned coal-mines. In common with other upland areas, farm incomes have declined drastically over the past few years and, in common with most of rural Cumbria, local farmers and many other businesses were affected by Foot & Mouth Disease in 2001. For farmers and some other businesses the consequences are still being felt.

Alston Moor's location also makes it a land of contradictions and strong contrasts:

- Central yet isolated
- England's highest market town but no market
- Remote yet cosmopolitan (In the hey-day of lead-mining, workers were attracted from all over the country and from as far away as Belgium and Italy – Alston still has a pioneering quality and attracts those looking for an alternative life-style)
- Well serviced for size of population but deprived of facilities many communities take for granted
- Excellent quality of life but many struggle below the poverty-line
- A land of wild moorland and green valleys

The open landscape gives a sense of freedom. The town itself has a lot of historic charm. The high altitude and changeable weather patterns create a constantly changing landscape with a rich variety of colours and, although Alston's weather can be harsh, when the sun comes out and the wind drops, many who live here would agree that there are few places more beautiful.

4. CYBERMOOR

Alston Moor is one of 7 areas selected as a pilot for the UK Government's Wired up Communities initiative. The Wired up Communities initiative has invested £10 million of tax-payers' money to connect homes in disadvantaged communities to the internet. The object of the initiative is to assess how individual access to the internet can transform opportunities for people living in disadvantaged areas by eg, developing new ways of accessing training, jobs and public information services. Free computers were given out to over 600 households. This resulted in a massive increase in numbers attending local ICT training with 297 people receiving training in addition to the many who have taught themselves. As a result of attending training courses there has been substantially more social contact between residents, and people with IT skills voluntarily help the less able. The project has created jobs and many local people have been involved in the project as volunteers. The community website has become an important means of disseminating information and has brought

people together through the discussion pages. The project has become a focal point for the community. It has opened up opportunities to people who would never previously have dreamt of owning a computer. Attitudes to ICT are changing as people are becoming more familiar with computers, with special courses being laid on for farmers , Over 60's etc. They have discovered the ability to access information in the convenience of their own homes and above all the opening up of new and vast avenues for exploration and self-development.

Alston Moor is one of the first rural communities to access broadband so the project has the potential to assist in efforts to attract much needed inward investment. It will also enable people to access better paid jobs and promote teleworking opportunities for local people. 3 volunteers have already found jobs after helping out on the project and 35 jobs have been supported in the 25 local companies that have worked as contractors or subcontractors for the project.

The project has had a tremendous influence on the local community already and in the longer term will potentially develop as a driving force in the local economy attracting knowledge based higher quality employment to the area.

5. METHOD OF STUDY – THE HEALTHCHECK PROCESS

Both the Market Towns Initiative and the Vital Villages funding put a strong emphasis on the importance of providing an opportunity for local people to help shape their future. This is something which was very much welcomed and embraced by the project Steering Group. It was therefore decided that there should be community involvement right from the start. The following structure for the project was therefore followed (*see diagram in Appendix 1*)

5.1 RAISING AWARENESS OF THE PROJECT

Firstly a simple leaflet was produced to publicise the project locally, accompanied by press releases to local newspapers and the project was featured on the community web-site (Cybermoor). A logo was established to enable easy identification of material related to the project. Posters and press releases were produced for each public meeting and to draw attention to the community questionnaire. The Cybermoor web-site was used to provide updates as the project progressed and it is intended to continue to use the site to provide information as the project moves into the implementation stage.

5.2 FOCUS GROUPS

A series of consultations with focus groups was held to help to identify the issues. Groups were asked to identify strengths, weaknesses and needs/opportunities (likes, dislikes and wish-list). The following target groups were identified and where possible the project co-ordinator met with existing groups or used an existing event to facilitate participation:

- young families with pre-school children
- 11-17 year olds
- young adults
- young families
- elderly people
- disabled
- Alston residents
- Nenthead residents
- Garrigill residents
- The farming community

5.3 INITIAL PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at an early stage in the project to further identify the issues that are important to people living on Alston Moor. The meeting was conducted as a working session where participants were led through a series of exercises to reflect upon aspects of life on Alston Moor and to indicate the most important issues which they felt should be addressed. The first exercise was a brainstormer looking at pros cons and a wish-list. This was followed

by a SWOT analysis. The results of these two exercises were used to identify the main issues and participants were then asked to prioritise these. The meeting was also used as a vehicle to establish the headings of proposed working groups which would explore the issues in more detail and to recruit volunteers for these groups.

5.4 PHOTOGRAPHIC EXERCISE

Following the public meeting 20 disposable cameras were handed out and passed around a cross section of local residents, young and old, from all walks of life who were asked to photograph what they liked and disliked about life on Alston Moor. This visual exercise was very worthwhile: it introduced a fun element into the project, provided more freedom of expression and engaged people who had not been previously involved. It identified some problems not previously highlighted whilst reinforcing many of the strengths, weaknesses and issues already raised.

(A selection of the photographs were displayed at Gala Day and subsequently in the Town Hall foyer. They are also being used to illustrate the CD Rom version of the Recommendations for Action).

5.5 COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRES

The steering group had agreed that it was necessary to do a questionnaire survey in order to obtain the views of a wider cross-section of local people. However, members did not want to issue an excessively long questionnaire as they were aware that it was not that long since the last exercise and they did not want the community to suffer from "questionnaire fatigue". They felt anything too daunting would meet with a poor response and it was decided that it must fit onto an A3 folded to A4 sheet of paper. Part of the purpose of the earlier consultation exercises was therefore to establish which issues to concentrate on when framing the questionnaire to avoid asking too many questions which many people would find meaningless or of little interest, rather than giving space to all aspects of life on Alston Moor. Although this did give rise to one or two criticisms, this approach did seem to be generally welcomed and overall the questionnaire met with a favourable response. Two prizes were offered as an added incentive to return the form: a digital camera and a £50 cash prize. A freepost envelope was also included for the reply. The result was an approximately 30% response rate which was quite reasonable considering that Alston Moor is a frequently surveyed community. The questionnaire was designed so that all members of the household were to fill it in, thus getting to a greater number of people, so the 315 households who responded actually represented 565 individuals. The questionnaire itself was anonymous but in order to enter the prize draw respondents had to fill in their name and address on a slip of paper. This was used as an opportunity to recruit more participants for the working groups and to seek volunteers for potential youth projects. This produced a good response which will be useful in following up proposals at the implementation stage.

In order to gain the views of young people a separate questionnaire was developed. This was circulated in the local schools and copies were also sent to Haydon Bridge High School and William Howard School in Brampton. The covering letter with the main community questionnaire urged any families with young people being educated outside Alston Moor who had not received a copy to obtain one from the Information Centre in the Town Hall. Thanks to the co-operation of the local schools there was a very good response to this questionnaire (60%). Unfortunately due to the timing of the project and the fact that the questionnaire was circulated after GCSE examinations had been held, the response from the older age groups was poor as few of them were attending school at that time but 11 – 14 year olds were well represented.

5.6 WORKING GROUPS

Following on from the questionnaire exercise, the working groups were launched in July with a "workshop" which started with an ice-breaking exercise to ensure that all individuals felt at ease and ready to contribute their ideas, starting with all working group members working together. During the second part of the meeting people were asked to come up with ideas which they posted under each working group heading (which had been identified at the previous public meeting) as a means of determining group membership. The following groups were established:

- Economy
- Culture
- Transport and communications
- Community Safety

Each group was given an information-gathering task relating to their working group topic heading which they would go away and research ready for the next meeting. To start off with, all the groups met together as there was a high degree of overlap. At the second session, after going through the results of the previous week's research, the groups were asked to go through a brainstorming exercise to establish key points for each of their core issues and to suggest what action might be necessary to develop or resolve them. Each group presented their ideas to the other groups present. The co-ordinator realised that the role of the working groups was moving towards ideas for action rather than further information gathering so the third session developed ideas from the previous meeting and looked at what further information it was necessary to obtain. The Culture and Economy groups combined as there was a high degree of overlap, and probably the most significant result of this meeting was the decision to carry out two further surveys, a business survey and a visitor survey to inform identified needs for inward investment and tourism marketing. At this point the Community Safety and Transport groups felt they needed to know the results of the community questionnaire survey before they could progress further.

No further meetings were held for a while as time was needed to complete the healthcheck information-gathering exercise and to analyse the results of all the surveys which had been undertaken.

The working groups met again in October to review key healthcheck and survey results and to agree proposed actions. These formed the basis of the next public consultation stage.

5.7 CONSULTATION WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS

During the healthcheck information gathering stage a circular letter was sent to all known community groups describing the project and seeking ideas and proposals for projects which they would like to see included in the Recommendations for Action. Although only a small number of groups responded, the opportunity had been presented, and some of those that did so had not previously come forward but had a very positive contribution to make.

5.8 SECOND PUBLIC MEETING

A second public meeting was held in November 2002 the purpose of which was to:

- Examine the results of the survey and consultations carried out so far.
 - To look at ideas for action which people had put forward (individuals, community groups, working groups and other organisations)
 - To explore the priorities of participants
- This was done as a game which simulated project funding and prioritising by allocating money to activities, played in groups to encourage discussion, negotiation and forming partnerships.

A key factor identified was the need for a sustainable future for Alston Moor, the high degree of overlap between potential projects involving people, the economy and the environment suggesting a high level of sustainability. This provides the core for the community vision.

5.9 EXHIBITIONS

Gala Day:

Nearly half-way through the project an exhibition was mounted and shown at Gala Day which is attended by a large proportion of local residents. It was subsequently displayed in the Town Hall foyer for several weeks. The purpose of the exhibition was to:

- raise awareness of the project
- display the range of issues identified in the consultation process so far, including the photographic exercise
- encourage people to complete and return their community questionnaires
- describe some of the ideas for action which were already emerging, and
- solicit ideas for the action plan

Second Public Meeting:

A fuller exhibition was mounted to accompany the second public meeting. The priorities identified at the first public meeting were used as key headings for the display. These were as follows:

- Culture : People and Environment
- Economy
- Young People
- Transport & access
- Community Safety

Each of the key headings was presented on display panels outlining:

- Key topics: defined by the first public meeting, focus group and working group consultations
- Survey Results: Responses from the community questionnaires
- Context: Results from the health-check information gathering exercise
- The Challenge: meeting highlighted needs and turning them into action.

After the Public Meeting the display was shown in the Library window for two weeks accompanied by instructions on how to comment on the proposed actions. Comments sheets were made available inside the library. At the same time a press release was produced about the public meeting and exhibition. The project was given a headline news article on the Cybermoor website from which the full display could also be accessed (as a PDF file).

6. LIMITATIONS AND BENEFITS OF THE HEALTH-CHECK PROCESS

6.1 THE MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE PROJECT STRUCTURE

6.1.1 The Healthcheck:

Because funding for the project was not through the Market Towns Initiative(MTI), we had the benefit of not having to follow the format rigorously but to use it as a guide. Some of the core questions (ie those which must be answered under the MTI) were not relevant to our particular circumstances, whilst other areas were completely missing. It is surprising to find an initiative coming from the Countryside Agency with so little reference to sustainability and with no questions relating to some important issues like waste disposal and recycling. (In fact there were no questions relating directly to Local Agenda 21 issues). There were also very few questions relating to youth needs which in view of the common problem of lack of facilities in rural communities and small towns is surprising.

Some of the "core" questions were of far less significance than some of those which had been totally omitted.

Some questions also did not seem to be in a logical order whilst others seemed to almost duplicate each other and were better combined as one answer, and a few questions seemed to be in the wrong section.

With the benefit of not being tied to the MTI, the detailed healthcheck report whilst following the general structure has therefore deviated in some of the detail with the intention of an improved result.

6.1.2 The Snapshot:

In our "Snapshot" we set out a summary of what we see as the key healthcheck findings so that the Snapshot can be used as an executive summary. The Market Towns Initiative version of the snapshot is included in the appendices.

6.1.3 Working Groups:

Better use could have been made of the working groups if it had been decided at the outset that they would be a vehicle for creating a community vision and action planning rather than information gathering. However, because of the pressure of time to complete the information gathering process and the time lost with data analysis difficulties (see below – Survey Software) this aspect was not fully developed. In some communities there may be willing volunteers for the information-gathering process, but in our case although group members were all people very committed to our community, they are nearly all self employed, and being self-employed on Alston Moor means having little spare time. They were prepared to come to meetings but could not undertake to spend a lot of time researching information. However there does appear to be a continuing role for the groups which will hopefully develop to move projects forward and provide continuing local input at the implementation stage with additional input from outside agencies.

6.2 STATISTICAL DATA

Statistical data was limited by the following:

- the fact that the 2001 census material was not yet available at local level and in some cases 1991 data had to be used (although in other cases more up to date estimates exist)
- some data is no longer readily available at ward level
- In some cases the healthcheck questions asked for information about services in the town which was only available at County or District level

6.3 SURVEY SOFTWARE

Considerable time was spent researching suitable software. In some cases MTI initiatives have been able to use Local Authority resources to process questionnaires but our local authority does not possess these resources. We wanted to use software capable of analysing questionnaires which contained answers from a number of respondents. We thought we had acquired a programme which would work but when we started using it we came up against problems. We were fortunate in having data-base designers in our community and sought their assistance. In the end we used them to design the data bases for all the questionnaires but lost about six weeks of project time. It would be helpful in the future if the Market Towns Initiative provided its own software package for community surveys.

PART II

The Facts & the Issues

7. THE SNAPSHOT – a profile of Alston Moor

7.1 LOCATION

Alston Moor is a remote community by English standards, 20 miles from the nearest town, located just within Cumbria, bordering Northumberland and Durham. It is however, centrally located at the hub of trans-Pennine routes within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The C2C cycle route and the Pennine Way pass through Alston Moor.

The parish is overlooked by Cross Fell, the highest point in the Pennine chain. By English standards Alston Moor is situated at a high altitude, most of the parish being over 1,000 feet above sea level, with Alston reputedly England's highest market town although it is a long time since a regular market was held here.

The main communities in the parish are Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill, although Alston also acts as a service centre for Slaggyford in the adjoining parish of Knarsdale in Northumberland.

Alston Moor's unique location is key to the understanding of its many special characteristics, both its strengths and its weaknesses. A knowledge of its historic background is also helpful in understanding the Alston we know today.

7.2 HISTORIC CONTEXT

The North Pennine hills are rich in minerals and in the past were an internationally important source of lead. Mining has taken place here since Roman times, but the heyday of mining activity was in the first half of the nineteenth century when the population reached around 7,000. Now all that remains is one small private anthracite mine but mining and farming have historically been the mainstay of the local economy. Changes in these industries over the latter years of the 20th century have therefore had a severe impact on the area. The area was also badly affected by changes in the steel industry when the town's main employer closed in 1980 having a devastating effect on the local community as 25% of the workforce was plunged into unemployment. This saw the end of centuries of dependency on a single industry as first the mines and then the foundry had been the main source of employment.

7.3 POPULATION

The population of the parish was estimated as being 2,200 in 1998

Age range

The age range of the population on Alston Moor is broadly similar to that for Cumbria as a whole except for a slightly higher percentage of children and lower percentage of 15 –29 year olds - probably reflecting the lack of job and training opportunities locally.

Single parents

There appear to be a higher than average number of single parents living on Alston Moor. There were estimated to be 27 single parents in the parish in 1995, representing 11.4% of the population compared with 6.7% for Cumbria as a whole.

Population Density

Alston Moor has 0.14 persons per hectare and is categorised as "super-sparse" compared with 0.7 for Cumbria as a whole which is categorised as "sparse".

7.4 DEPRIVATION

The indices of multiple deprivation 2000 (with 1 being the most deprived ward in England) gave Alston Moor the rank of 2086 out of a total of 8414 English wards, placing it within the top 25% of most deprived wards.

7.5 CYBERMOOR

Alston Moor was one of 7 areas selected as a pilot for the UK Government's "Wired up Communities" initiative. This initiative has invested £10 million connecting homes in disadvantaged communities to the internet and providing public internet access points as a vehicle for education, employment and social inclusion.

7.6 EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

Local unemployment rates in July 2000 averaged 5.1%, just under half what they were in 1995. Unemployment has decreased further since then and now stands at around 3% compared with 2.7 for Cumbria as a whole and 1.1 in Eden. Although unemployment has reduced considerably it is still the highest rate in Eden and slightly above the Cumbrian average for males.

Self – employment

The proportion of self-employed is more than double the average for Cumbria for both males and females and approximately a third of self-employed people work for themselves with no employees. (*Business Survey*)

Place of work

62% of the workforce work on Alston Moor, 25% working at home, the rest working elsewhere on Alston Moor (*Community Questionnaire*).

The most popular destinations for commuting to work are Carlisle and Hexham but many travel much further afield, 23% travelling beyond Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland or Tyne & Wear (*Community Questionnaire*).

Scale of employment

There are 700 employee jobs on Alston Moor. There is no single large employer.

The largest business is Precision Products with 65 employees.

Education, health and social services together provide over 120 jobs although many of these are part time and the majority of them are female.

Wright Bros.(Coaches) are significant employers providing work for 20 people.

The North Pennines Heritage Trust is now also a significant employer, providing 17 permanent jobs and 6 seasonal jobs.

Business Activity

The results of the business survey indicated the following categories to be most predominant in the local economy:

accommodation &/or catering	25
farming, (+forestry, nursery / plants)	21
art, crafts, design / creative industries	19
retail	14
IT	11

The Effects of Foot & Mouth Disease

Not surprisingly in view of the high proportion of agriculture and tourism businesses, 79% of businesses in the survey had been adversely affected by FMD and 32% had experienced a decrease in turnover compared with year 2000 figures indicating that they had not fully recovered from the effects of FMD.

Barriers to Work

The community questionnaire identified lack of job opportunities as the main factor preventing people from obtaining work and lack of start-up finance as the main deterrent to becoming self-employed.

Lack of full-time child-care facilities for working parents is now also an important factor with the closure of the Kid's Club at the end of 2002.

7.7 INCOMES

Household income:

Over 16% of household incomes were below £5,000 and 57.4% of household incomes were below £15,000 in 1998 (gross annual figs.)

Income support:

In August 1998 there were 125 Income support claimants on Alston Moor. This represents 7 % of the resident population aged 16 or over compared with 4% for Eden. 89 dependent children were living in households claiming income support during this period.

Whereas in the past unemployment was the main issue, low wages and low incomes from self employment probably constitute the most serious issue facing Alston Moor today.

7.8 EDUCATION

There is one secondary school which is the smallest in the country. It lacks a 6th form and most pupils continue their education in Haydon Bridge or Brampton (each approx 18 miles away). There are primary schools in Alston and Nenthead.

Local schools have attained high levels of achievement with Key Stage 2 and GCSE results above the national average and average for Cumbria.

The schools are used for a variety of adult education and IT training courses.

7.9 HOUSING

Type

The most common housing type in the parish is terraced (35%) followed by semi-detached (30%) and detached (23%). (*Office for National Statistics*)

Tenure

36% of homes are owned outright, 30% mortgaged, 20 % rented social housing and 10% privately rented. (*Office for National Statistics*)

Affordability

Local house prices which had been relatively cheap have soared in the last 2- 3 years, catching up with comparable property elsewhere in Eden and neighbouring Tynedale. Local incomes however are still below average, creating a rising affordability gap with an estimated average house price around 10 times the average income.

7.10 CAR OWNERSHIP

The high level of car ownership (4.4% higher than the average for Cumbria), does not reflect an affluent society as household income figures make clear. Rather it is a necessity for many living in such a remote location.

In fact compared with DETR figures for rural settlements (defined as less than 3,000 population), Alston is worse off than average. There were 26.6% of households on Alston Moor without a car in 1996/8 compared with the average for rural settlements of 17%.

7.11 SERVICES & SHOPS

Alston Moor has an excellent range of services for the size of population:

Emergency services

There are local fire and ambulance services based in Alston and there is a local police station although this is frequently unmanned with enquiries being routed via Penrith. Police cover in Alston is actually as good if not better than in other communities of comparable size but its remote location leads to poor response times when responding from outside Alston Moor.

Health

There is a cottage hospital with doctors' and dentist's surgeries. There are also branch doctors' surgeries at Garrigill and Nenthead.

Library

There is a part time branch library in Alston.

Banks

There are 2 banks with cash-points.

Post Offices

There is a post office in Alston and post office/village shops in Nenthead and Garrigill.

Shops

Shops include a chemist, a newsagent, a variety of food shops including a small Co-op supermarket, craft shops, gift shops, a charity shop, a second-hand book shop and 1 antique shop.

Other services

Other services include a hairdressers', an architects' office and an estate agent. There is also a local vet and a pet-food supplier.

7.12 PUBS, CAFES AND ACCOMMODATION

It is estimated that there are approximately 600 bed-spaces within the parish in a variety of types of accommodation.

There are 6 hotels, a variety of bed and breakfast and self-catering accommodation, 3 bunk-houses and a youth hostel within the parish.

Three of the hotels are in Alston where there are also 2 cafes, 3 fast-food outlets (including a fish & chip shop) and five pubs, most of which serve food.

There are also pubs in Nenthead, Garrigill and Knarsdale (in adjoining parish), a restaurant in Nenthead and café attached to the heritage centre, and a tea-room in Garrigill.

Also within the parish are 2 outdoor education centres and 3 caravan parks (accommodating tents).

There is also a caravan park and a camp-site at Slaggyford – outside the parish boundary.

7.13 VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

South Tynedale Railway attracts the most visitors followed by Gossipgate Gallery. Other attractions at the station are the Model Railway Centre and The Hub (transport museum). Nenthead Mines is an important lead-mining heritage attraction, Hartside Nursery garden specialises in Alpine plants and there are a variety of craft attractions.

7.14 SOCIAL & LEISURE FACILITIES

Apart from the local schools the main community venues are the Town Hall, the Topp and the Masonic Hall in Alston, the village hall and the reading room in Nenthead and the village hall in Garrigill.

There is no swimming pool, sports hall, gym or cinema and it is a forty mile round trip to access these facilities.

There are children's play areas and informal football pitches in Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill, although the facilities in Alston are in need of upgrading.

There are three football pitches catering for formal sports for adults and children, and there is a 10 hole golf-course (the highest in England). The only tennis courts are at Nenthead and Samuel King's School.

There are plenty of footpaths and places to go cycling, horse-riding and fishing.

7.15 CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Churches Together on Alston Moor, as part of Churches Together in England, endeavour to meet the challenge of rural ministry as in similar areas of the UK. In its propagation of the Gospel at the start of the 21st century the Christian Church of different traditions works ecumenically where possible and not least through its individual members. The Churches also continue to adjust to ever-changing circumstances, seeking to be relevant and sensitive to the varied needs of the local community whilst also pointing to wider global issues.

7.16 YOUTH PROVISION

There is currently no youth club although a youth leader has recently been appointed and the pavilion is currently being improved for this purpose.

7.17 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The nearest connections to the national rail network are approximately 20 miles away. There is a local bus company based at Nenthead which provides regular services to Hexham, Newcastle and Carlisle but there are few services to Penrith.

7.18 CAR-PARKING

There are approximately 100 car-parking spaces located at the Station Yard and Market Square with a further 26 planned at Fairhill. The current provision is considered inadequate both by residents and visitors. Due to the steep nature of much of the terrain surrounding the town centre there is a problem in finding suitable sites.

7.19 TRAFFIC

Congestion is a problem in Alston Town centre largely caused by a combination of parked cars and heavy vehicles negotiating the narrow steep cobbled street.

Speeding motorbikes concern many local residents and the proportion of accidents involving motorbikes is far higher on the A686 over Hartside than within the rest of the parish. Speeding motorbikes are also a particular problem through Nenthead village.

7.20 CRIME

Between April 2001 and March 2002, 55.9 crimes per 1,000 population were reported on Alston Moor compared with 54.6 per 1,000 in Eden as a whole and 75.4 per 1,000 in Cumbria. Therefore even if some crime goes unreported, incidents are still not high in number and fear of crime appears to be greater than actual crime.

By far the highest incidence of reported crime involved criminal damage (40.3%)
(Source – Cumbria Constabulary)

7.21 ENVIRONMENT

The whole of the parish is within the North Pennines AONB

Moor House National Nature Reserve which is one of the largest in the country lies partly within the parish.

There are 7 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), most of these being designated on account of their geology, and some because of the importance of their flora.

The lower dales within the parish form part of the Pennine Dales Environmentally Sensitive Area(ESA).

Fell-land within Alston Moor (which constitutes a large part of the parish) will be affected by Right to Roam legislation.

Alston Town Centre and the village of Garrigill are designated Conservation Areas

There are several "brownfield" sites and areas of semi-dereliction in need of improvement, notably the entries to the town on the A686 and Wright's bus garage and adjoining District Council owned land at Nenthead.

The nearest civic amenity site is approximately 25 miles away and there are no local facilities for businesses to recycle waste.

8. THE ISSUES – results of community consultations

8.1 FOCUS GROUPS

A series of consultations with focus groups was held to help to identify the issues. Groups were asked to identify strengths, weaknesses and needs/opportunities (likes, dislikes or pros and cons and a wish-list). The following target groups were identified and where possible the project co-ordinator met with existing groups or used an existing event to facilitate participation:

- young families with pre-school children: parents were consulted at Pre-school Playgroup, Kid's Club, 2^{1/2} Club and Mothers & Toddlers Group sessions
- 11-17 year olds consulted via the local schools, (face to face and questionnaires)
- young adults – special meeting called plus interviews with individuals
- elderly people – Over 60's Club, Alston Day Care unit
- disabled – Alston Moor Special Needs Support Group
- Alston residents – at League of Friends Jubilee Fair at Samuel Kings School
- Nenthead residents – via Nenthead Gala Day
- Garrigill residents – using a Cybermoor event as an opportunity to meet local individuals
- The farming community – following meeting of Show Committee

Common themes throughout all the focus group consultations were:

Pros: the value of living in a small community with a strong community spirit, the quality of the countryside and its wildlife & flora, peace & quiet, fresh air, sense of freedom and quality of life, good local services, good place to bring up young children.

Cons: lack of things for young people to do as they get older; lack of police presence; vandalism; lack of public transport; lack of car-parking; maintenance of footpaths and public amenity space; speeding motorbikes.

In addition, young adults and young families were particularly concerned about lack of job opportunities, lack of childcare facilities and lack of affordable housing; Farmers felt they were not appreciated for the important role they play as custodians of the countryside.

Wish-List: swimming pool; cinema; more things for young people to do, police on the beat;, better jobs, child-care facilities for working parents, affordable housing, improved public transport, improved facilities at Fairhill.

For further details see Appendix 1.

8.2 INITIAL PUBLIC MEETING

The aim of the first public meeting was to further identify the issues that are important to people living on Alston Moor. The results of a brain-storming exercise and swot analysis were used to identify the main issues which participants were then asked to prioritise.

The results indicated that employment was the highest priority, followed by policing, sport & recreation and youth services.

The meeting was also used as a vehicle to establish the headings of proposed working groups which would explore the issues in more detail and to recruit volunteers for these groups. The groups proposed were:

- Economy
- Culture (to include sport & recreation)
- Young People
- Transport & Communications
- Community Safety

A report of the public meeting is included in Appendix 2.

8.3 PHOTOGRAPHIC EXERCISE

20 disposable cameras were handed out and passed around a cross section of local residents who were asked to take photographs of likes and dislikes around the Parish. This was very revealing as some issues, eg concerning areas of degraded environment, had not featured highly in the consultation sessions but were clearly of concern to many people. For example, quite a large number of photographs were taken of the areas around the two garages and scrap yard and other derelict and poorly maintained buildings. (It may be that people had not come forward verbally as these areas are mostly privately owned so people do not want to be identified as criticising the owners). The photographs also revealed people's appreciation of our environment with many attractive shots of the local landscape and picturesque corners of the town, our local services – the cottage hospital, schools, garages, and some of Alston's well-loved characters.

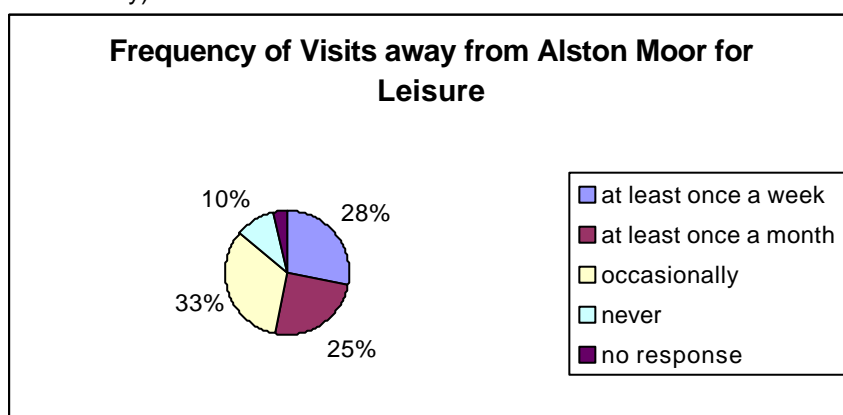
8.4 COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRES

8.4.1 HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONNAIRE

Key points identified in the community questionnaire are listed below. (The full results are given in Appendix 3)

Leisure

86% of respondents travel off the Moor for leisure and recreation (although 33% only do so occasionally).



Facilities people would use regularly if available on Alston Moor:

By far the highest scores for sports were as follows:

- Swimming Pool : 385 representing 68% of respondents
- Gym/fitness centre: 228 “ 40% “

and for arts were as follows:

- Cinema: 398 representing 70% of respondents
- Regular music: 240 “ 43% “

Shopping

45% of residents shop mainly outside Alston Moor, the main reasons being:

- better choice 61%
- cheaper 48%
- travel there anyway 33%

The main reasons given for shopping in Alston were to support local shops and because they need "last minute" items.

The most frequently cited goods not currently present which people would like to see available on Alston Moor were

- clothing (57 respondents) and
- DIY/building materials (67 respondents)
- Over 80% said they would support a regular local produce market, and
- 30% said they would make use of a local home delivery service if these were developed.

Public Transport

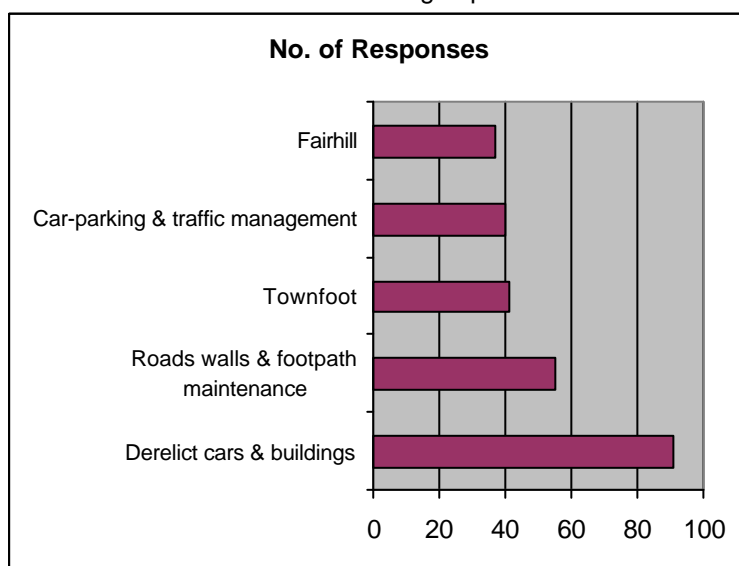
- Quite a large number of people (103) said they would like to see more services around Alston Moor.
- 65 people said they would like to see more services to destinations off the Moor. However, the choice of destinations were fairly evenly spread between Newcastle, Hexham and Penrith, although Penrith has the poorest service and was the route most complained about in face to face consultations.
- 140 people said they would like to see more services during the day.
- 110 people said they would like to see more services at night.

Environment

People's main concerns were as follows:

- 63% of respondents identified **car-parking** as being unsatisfactory.
- 47% felt **dog-fouling** was a problem and 43% thought there was a problem with **litter**.
- 34% felt **recycling facilities** were unsatisfactory, and
- 32% felt that **footpath maintenance** was inadequate.

The main areas identified as needing improvement were:



Community Safety

Dissatisfaction with police cover reflected the concerns raised in other consultations: 66% felt police coverage was poor and only 3% felt it was good.

The preferred measures for improvement were identified as:

- the police station being manned full-time (including use of civilian staff) – 69%, and

- a greater police presence in the town – 67% .

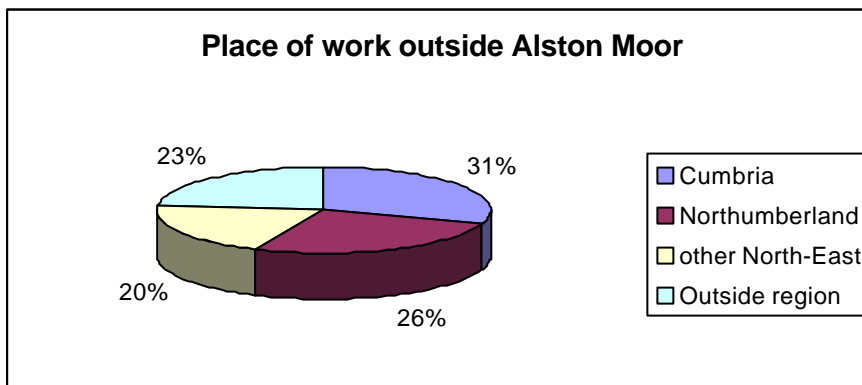
Main concerns about crime were identified as:

- vandalism & criminal damage 66%
- illegal use of drugs 45%
- drunkenness & anti-social behaviour 42%

Jobs

Place of work:

62% of respondents work on Alston Moor (25% at home and 37% elsewhere on Alston Moor) People who work away from Alston Moor travel a surprising distance, 23% travelling beyond Cumbria, Northumberland or elsewhere in the North-East:



Mode of travel:

75% of people travel to work by car and 19% walk. Only 1% travel by bus.

Type of work

"Double-jobbing" is recognised as a common practice in Eden where a lot of jobs are part-time and poorly paid. The questionnaire results indicate that on Alston Moor, as many as 40% of the workforce is employed in 2 or more jobs.

By far the largest number of jobs were in education, health or other public sector, indicating the important role these services play in the economy.

Most people looking for work were looking for professional or technical work

Barriers to work

The main barriers to work were identified as lack of job opportunities.

The main barrier to self-employment was lack of start-up finance.

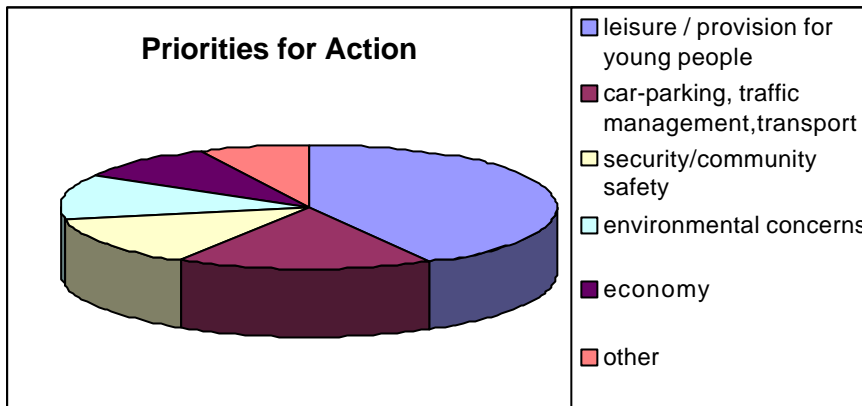
Since the survey was carried out the Kid's Club has closed leaving working families without childcare provision.

Voluntary work

Perhaps reflecting the strong community spirit, as many as 27% of respondents do some form of voluntary work.

Priorities for the future

Leisure facilities and provision for young people came top of the list of priorities:



What People Value Most about Life on Alston Moor

When people were asked what they valued most about life on Alston Moor three things stood out above all the rest:

- environment 54%
- community spirit 43%
- quality of life 35%

8.4.2 11 – 17 YEAR-OLD'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Many of the concerns expressed in the household survey were re-iterated in the young people's survey.

- 66% of young respondents are concerned about being bored or having nothing to do
- What they like best about living on Alston Moor is the friendly community and the countryside, fresh air and peace
- What they like least is the lack of facilities
- 87% would use a cinema regularly if available in Alston
- 83% would use a swimming pool regularly if available in Alston
- The most common mode of travel is a lift from parents(76%) followed by walking((58%) – but a significant number (38%) travel by bus
- The most popular destination for leisure activities is Carlisle (58%)
- The most popular activity is swimming, followed by shopping and meeting friends
- 39% travel away from Alston Moor at least once a week for leisure activities
- The main reason young people are not able to take part in activities they would like to do is that the activity is not available locally
- Apart from the 30% who do not know what they will do when they leave school, most young people(35%) expect that after leaving school they will move away from Alston Moor to get a job
- Only 18% think they will continue to Higher Education
- The main things which young people think would help to make Alston Moor better for them are organised trips away (62%) and better transport to larger towns (55%) followed by more jobs (47%) and more say for young people in community decisions (44%)

8.5 WORKING GROUPS

The following groups were established:

- Economy
- Culture
- Transport and communications
- Community Safety

A separate Young People's group which had been suggested was not established as there were no volunteers for this, but issues concerning young people were considered by all the groups.

These groups as well as contributing to the healthcheck information gathering exercise, examined the issues identified at the previous public meeting to look at how needs might develop into action.

The most significant points which developed from each group are as follows:

Culture

- The definition of culture for this group is used in its widest sense to embrace a whole range of activities which define how we live our lives, but particularly looking at sport, leisure and arts activities.
- Our culture is very much dependent on our environment. It has been shaped over the years by the relationship of the people who live and work here with their surroundings.
- The environment is inspiring and nurturing for creativity
- This group also defined the importance of the inter-relationship between people, the environment and the economy, the greater the overlap the more sustainable the development.
- They produced the following definition of "sustainable development" for the purposes of this study:
Meeting the needs of the present
whilst valuing the past,
without compromising the needs of future generations

Economy

This group identified the following needs:

- broaden the economic base to encourage inward investment and encourage young people to stay in Alston Moor
 - in order to do this we need to take stock of the economy so it was decided that a business survey should be undertaken
- the changing nature of farming and the need to encourage farm diversification, possibly marketing local meat and other local produce
- develop a regular local produce market
- tourism marketing – develop up-market attractions, special interest (eg art & craft) holidays, cycling routes, marketing to Northern Europe
 - in order to do this it was considered useful to have a profile of visitors and their perceptions of Alston Moor so a small-scale visitor survey was undertaken
- The need to improve the environment at the approaches to the town on the A686 in order to be more attractive to tourists and to inward investment
- The need for affordable housing

Transport & communications

This group recognised:

- Alston's key location at the hub of routes through the North Pennines and its potential to act as a transport interchange, particularly in the long term with the encouragement of sustainable transport links, cycling and walking.
- The potential to develop as a centre for cycling
- The need to support our local bus company and at the same time improve the environment at Nenthead by development of a new bus garage.
- The need for more car-parking in Alston (but the difficulty of achieving until large scale redevelopment of derelict sites takes place)
- The need for traffic management to control congestion on Front Street
- The need to work with the police to address the problem of speeding motorbikes
- The difficulty in improving public transport when the demand in terms of numbers is low and therefore services unviable – need to explore group use of community mini-bus, taxi- vouchers etc.
- The important role of Cybermoor in reducing isolation and disseminating local information and the importance for it to continue in the long-term

Community Safety

The group identified what they would like to see from the police:

- Measures to improve police cover:
 - (eg *Police station manned full-time by civilian clerk*)
 - Regular police presence on the streets late on Friday and Saturday nights*
 - reduce vandalism & anti-social behaviour
 - improve confidence in police
- improved response times
- continuity of individual officers
- more feedback from police
- more cross-border co-operation between police authorities (this already happens)

Issues for the police:

- small community, friendly & caring....but...a problem with a close knit community is fear of retribution
- lack of confidence in police
- encouraging Farm Watch
- Neighbourhood Watch – not a lot of enthusiasm

Community Disorder Issues:

- Impact on individuals
- Drugs misuse
- Youth & anti-social behaviour
- Special Operations
- Police targeting

Services For The Elderly

- Vulnerability – feeling of insecurity
- Fear of intimidation
- Fear of crime
- Channels of help through Age Concern & Social Services

Services For Young People

- Youth activities
- Drugs & alcohol

Community Support

- The working group should continue and develop as an Alston Moor Community Safety Group. The group would be run by local residents with the purpose of encouraging the community to work together to identify problems and implement proposals.
- Priorities were identified as follows:
 - reducing fear of crime
 - improving drugs & alcohol awareness
 - improving security
 - young people (activities, counselling)
 - old people (security, fear reduction)
- Cybermoor should be used as an additional tool for communication between police & community (in fact this has been happening regularly since suggestion was made)

9. THE HEALTHCHECK FINDINGS

The following sections broadly answer the Market Towns Initiative questions but the numbering and order has in some cases been changed, and some questions have been omitted whilst other issues have been introduced to meet the particular circumstances of Alston Moor.

ENVIRONMENT

EN1 CHARACTER & VITALITY OF THE TOWN

EN1.1 LANDMARKS

The main landmarks or distinctive buildings in the town are St Augustine's Church, Alston Town Hall and Alston Market Cross in the centre of the town.

Other prominent buildings include St Paul's Church and the police station at Townhead and the railway station and former goods shed on the edge of the town on the Hexham Road.

EN1.2 FOCAL POINTS

The main areas where people congregate are the Market Place, the Co-op, the library, other local shops and the Town Hall, depending on the occasion. The Tyne Willows playing fields provide another location for gathering for summer events such as Gala Day, the Duck Race, Sheepdog trials and Sheep & Goat Show.

EN1.3 HISTORIC CORE

The historic core of Alston includes many buildings dating from the 17th century and is a designated conservation area (see conservation area plan). There are 34 listed buildings within the conservation area but there are many more old buildings which are not listed. The majority of buildings date from pre 1775¹ (over 140 or approximately 65%) and the town centre is remarkable for the fact that there is so little 20th century development. There are 2 pre-second world war properties and 4 properties built post 1939¹ but three out of these four are outside the main central area – two in the Butts and one on Church Road. The only modern building in the Town Centre is the Co-op, built in the 1970's. Two other particular features of Alston are that:

- it is built on a steep hillside with the roads out at the top of the town (to Durham & Barnard Castle) being approximately 200 ft higher than the bridge over the South Tyne at the bottom, and
- the town centre still retains its cobbles and stone setts.

The whole of the town centre has strong historic associations, in particular the Market Place, The Butts, and the Mill race from Fairhill through Overburn to the bottom of the town.

The whole parish, Nenthead in particular, was an important centre for lead-mining from the 17th to 19th century (see also S6.6).

EN1.4 DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

Although the population of Alston equates with a large village, the centre has very much the quality and scale of a town, with buildings in the town centre being mostly 3 or more storeys high. Most are built of local sandstone, some of which are rendered. Traditional sandstone flag roofs characteristic of the North Pennines are the most common roofing material followed closely by Welsh slate with a few Westmorland slate roofs. This predominance of the local honey-coloured sandstone reinforced by the cobbled market place and road surface of stone setts creates a very strong identity and blends perfectly with the surrounding landscape.

Other distinctive characteristics include outside staircases to a number of older dwellings (22 have been identified¹) where originally animals were kept below, and

due to the sloping site, 44¹ buildings have basement accommodation only partly visible from the front.

To quote from the previous appraisal “The relationship between architecture and local factors - the harsh climate and availability of building materials - is unusually apparent”.

EN1.5 UNATTRACTIVE AREAS OR BUILDINGS / DERELICT LAND / REVITALISATION PROPOSALS

The A686 “scenic route” runs through the bottom (western side) of the town. This is the route carrying the most traffic but it only passes through Townfoot and does not pass through the attractive town centre. Unfortunately travellers along this route get a very poor impression of the town: one of dereliction and decay.

Coming from Penrith or Carlisle, as one crosses the bridge over the South Tyne into Alston is Henderson’s Garage with an informal car-park area containing scrap vehicles on the left and the repair garage with derelict buildings including the former Tyne Cafe on the right.

Entering from the Hexham direction is the former foundry site part of which is now a scrapyard and the vacant former gas-works site. There has been some recent improvement however with the dismantling of a huge vacant engineering shed which had also been part of the former foundry site subsequently occupied by Falmech, a steel fabrication firm, until it also closed.

The areas identified in the responses to the community questionnaires and in the community photographic survey as being most in need of improvement included

- scrap vehicles and derelict buildings
- the Townfoot area (Hendersons and the former foundry & gasworks sites.)
- roads and footpaths

Other areas identified included:

- Tyne Willows Pavilion
- Fairhill Recreation Ground
- The Butts: Behind High Mill/below the Crown and the undeveloped part of the former Keartons’ builder’s yard

The main culprits of poor design were:

- The Coop (only modern building in town centre)
- Use of upvc windows (There is now an Article 4 Direction in operation within the conservation area which should control any further inappropriate development as its effect is to prevent alterations from being carried out without first gaining consent from the Local Planning Authority).

Existing proposals for improvement:

- Hendersons carpark/Tyne café & repair garage – potential site of proposed swimming pool project & associated carparking (see S5.2)
- Tyne Willows Pavilion (part of Sports & Youth Project see S5.1)
- Fairhill Recreation Ground (see S5.1)
- The Butts, former builder’s yard (Private development - 2 buildings being converted and site for 2 new dwellings, planned as residential accommodation with studio facilities).

EN1.6 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES WHICH DEFINE THE LIMITS OF THE TOWN

The main area of the town is situated between the Rivers South Tyne & Nent which could be described as defining the limits of the town although the riversides are largely undeveloped apart from a former brewery building located close to the bridge over the South Tyne and former woollen mill on the scrapyard site referred to in EN1.5 above.

Because of its isolated rural location and the decline in the lead-mining industry, whilst other towns were expanding Alston’s population followed the trend of many remote rural areas which experienced depopulation as people migrated to urban areas during a large part of the 20th century. Thus unlike many larger towns which developed suburban sprawl during this period, from whichever direction Alston is approached there is a distinct edge to development.

¹ Source: A Survey of the Architectural Characteristics of Alston (published January 2001 by the “North Pennines Township Project”)

EN1.7 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS, STREETS AND FURNITURE IN THE TOWN CENTRE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Alston has benefited from being the subject of a Town Scheme (one of the proposals put forward in the first Action Plan following the 1980 appraisal) and more recently a CAP (Conservation Area Partnership) Scheme. These grant schemes enabled property-owners to restore and refurbish buildings which were derelict or in poor condition and the CAP scheme also enabled an enhancement programme to be implemented which included improvements to steps, cobbles and paved areas and improved street-lighting. There is however still room for improvement. Opportunities include:

- provision of tourist signs similar to those found in other conservation areas
- rationalisation of existing signs particularly at Townfoot and also in Garrigill conservation area
- better housing for gritbins
- more seating
- additional street-lighting
- improved laying of setts as many have been dislodged by heavy traffic. This problem is likely to be reduced with the closure of Weardale Cement Works. There is therefore now an opportunity to re-lay them again with an expectation that they may last longer than the last time. It is also important to make sure the job is done properly next time as although the problem was exacerbated by heavy traffic, the setts were laid too far apart last time and consequently rocked and became loose or dislodged with the constant movement of vehicles over them.
- Buildings in poor condition have largely been described in EN1.5 above, but mention should also be made of the former St Paul's Church which has had a considerable amount of refurbishment work done already to make it weather-tight but is in need of further attention. It is currently vacant but has recently been purchased privately and it is likely that permission will be sought for conversion to residential accommodation.
- Old town footpaths or lonnings are characterised by their dry-stone walls which in some cases have fallen into disrepair and need rebuilding (see EN1.9 below)
- The town centre could be made more colourful with flower baskets etc. - although some shops do this already it could be done more effectively if planned and co-ordinated. (However it should be noted that there has been a problem of vandalism in the town centre in the past, eg a replacement tree was vandalised and when the Flower Club organised hanging baskets on the Market Cross these were pulled down and damaged)
- Parish wide: old cast-iron signposts and milestones are a feature – but many cast-iron sign-posts are in poor condition

EN1.8 CONDITION OF 'MAIN GATEWAYS' TO THE TOWN CENTRE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The particular routes and locations in need of improvement are the approaches on the A686 which have already been identified in EN1.5 above. The route into the town centre along the Middleton Road is quite attractive but the Clitheroe entry on the Durham road is very open and devoid of trees. This approach could therefore benefit from some tree planting, eg at Skelgillside, and possibly by encouraging farmers to take up grants to plant trees there.

EN1.9 SAFETY & ATTRACTIVENESS OF MAIN PEDESTRIAN ROUTES

Most pedestrian routes within the town are reasonably attractive and well-used but could be improved by better maintenance including control of weeds and dog-fouling. Safety at night is a particular issue as many routes suffer from poor or inadequate lighting and in some cases street lighting is non-existent. The Loning from St Paul's Church to the Hospital was most frequently cited in consultations as being in need of attention both to provide lighting and to rebuild the stone walls on either side. Other areas in need of street lighting are the footpath below Bruntley Meadows, the lower end of the Butts and part of Church Road.

EN1.11 DIVERSITY OF TOWN CENTRE USES

There is a diverse mix of uses in the town centre, the majority of shops having living accommodation above.

EN1.13 IMPORTANT GROUPS OF TREES

Although the centre of Alston is devoid of trees they are important as a backdrop eg views down the street with churchyard trees behind, trees beside Hill House Lonning which can be seen from the Market Place.

EN1.14 CHARACTER & VITALITY OF VILLAGES

- **Nenthead**

The village of Nenthead developed around the lead-mining industry and during the 19th century the London Lead Company, the Quaker owners of the land and mines built a planned village. This included a school which was compulsory for children of the Company's workers – the earliest compulsory schooling in the country. The original school is now the village hall. The reading room which still exists today as a meeting room was built by the Company as the first free library in the country as all workers were encouraged to read and study.

The North Pennines Heritage Trust have restored many of the remaining mine-buildings as a visitor centre and have now also opened up a mine to the public.

The centre of the village is dominated by a large former mine building which is in a poor state of repair but is currently used by Wright Bros.(Coaches).

A land reclamation scheme carried out by Cumbria County Council about five years ago will improve the appearance of a large area of former spoil heaps beside the River Nent as trees planted there begin to grow and have an impact.

- **Garrigill**

Garrigill is a tranquil, picturesque village built around a village green. The whole village apart from a few outlying farms and groups of buildings is within a designated conservation area.

Garrigill also has a history of lead-mining although the evidence is less obvious than at Nenthead.

EN2. THE COUNTRYSIDE

EN2.1 THE LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE'S DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER

The landscape character of Alston Moor is typical of the North Pennines. It is a landscape of upland farms characterised by dry-stone walls. Bleak windswept plateaux and high fells covered with blanket bog and heather grouse moors contrast with the once glaciated valleys of the South Tyne and its main tributaries, the Nent and Black Burn. The valleys are characterised by strong field patterns with pasture and hay-meadows interspersed by small areas of woodland often situated around gills where there is more shelter for young trees to develop. Not surprisingly in this upland landscape there are a number of waterfalls, the most spectacular being Ashgill Force, approximately 100ft drop made more dramatic by the bridge over the top – it is possible to stand behind the waterfall and feel the water rushing past.

Cross Fell just outside the parish boundary is the highest point in the Pennines. At 893m and just short of 3,000ft (2930ft) it forms a dominant feature in the landscape from many parts of the parish.

EN2.2 LANDSCAPE QUALITY

The contrast between the wild moorland and the green fertile valleys create a landscape of considerable beauty which is particularly rich in wildlife and flora. The whole of the parish lies within the North Pennines Area of outstanding Natural beauty.

When asked what people value most about life on Alston Moor, the quality of the environment was top of the list for both residents and visitors.

EN2.3 QUALITY OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Farming is important to the local economy but the land is within a “Less Favoured Area” and is all grade 4 or 5.

EN2.4 AREAS IMPORTANT FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

Moor House National Nature Reserve is situated within Alston Moor and Upper Teesdale around the headwaters of the River Tees and is one of England's largest nature reserves. It incorporates almost the complete range of upland habitats in the North Pennines and is of particular significance on account of its Arctic-alpine flora which have survived since the last Ice Age. Ornithological interest is also high with strong populations of breeding waders including golden plover, and important populations of black grouse.

Moor House is also listed as a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and there are 6 other SSSI's important for both geology and flora within the parish of Alston Moor as follows:

- Alston Shingle Banks –important for species rich vegetation including presence of metalliferous plants
- Blagill Mine – the site is a world type locality and the main source of the rare double carbonate barytocalcite
- River Nent at Blagill – important for the information it provides on the development of river channels, together with documented evidence provides most detailed record of river change available for any site in Northern England
- River South Tyne & Tynebottom Mine – important for fluvial geomorphology, and unusual in Northern England for its sequence of well preserved river terraces. Tynebottom mine workings still accessible via a long adit, important as a locality for rare secondary minerals which have implications concerning the genesis of North Pennine ores.
- Smallcleugh Mine – the largest and most detailed example of limestone flat-type mineralisation and the only site in the country for the minerals melanterite and epsomite - includes spectacular development of mineralized cavities.
- Hags Bank – recently designated on account of its rich variety of flora including metalliferous types.

EN2.5 CONSERVATION AREAS, LISTED BUILDINGS AND SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS

- Conservation Areas
The centre of Alston & Garrigill are both conservation areas. The main features of Alston are described in EN1.3 & EN1.4. and Garrigill in EN1.14
- Listed Buildings
There are a total of 85 listed buildings/structures in the parish including fortified farms, a tollhouse and a large number of milestones, also boundary markers and a claiming stone, which can be broken down as follows:
 - 2 grade II* (Clarghyll Hall and the Market Cross)
 - 49 grade II buildings
 - 3 boundary stones
 - 1 boundary cross
 - 1 claim stone
 - 18 milestones
 - 11 other structures - walls, bridges, etc
- Scheduled ancient monuments
There are 10 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the parish which apart from the bronze age cairn are all important for industrial archaeology as follows:
 - Parkins Stones - bronze age cairn
 - Moated site at S. end of Hallhill Plantation
 - Nenthead Lead Mine complex

- Perry's dam, Nenthead, an important survival of the formerly extensive water management system at Nenthead
- Fletcheras rake lead-workings – good example of medieval mine workings(In the medieval period the mines of Alston Moor were of great importance nationally - the lead ore mined in the mid 12th century is thought to be particularly rich in silver and was used by the royal mint in Carlisle)
- Whitesyke & Bentyfield lead mines and ore-works (situated either side of Garrigill Burn and crossed by the B6277Alston – Middleton road)
- Lead rake workings on Flinty fell, 800m northwest of Flinty Quarry
- Rotherhopefell lead and fluorspar mines and ore works
- Hudgill leadmine bingsteads,200m north-east of Hudgill Farm
- Upper Slatesike lead-mine & ore works 750m north east of Black Dub – one of the best preserved examples of an 18th or early 19th century lead-mine known in Northern England

EN2.6 COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

Alston Moor lies within the Pennine Dales ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) which includes all those parts of the parish covering the in-by-land within the valleys. Farmers who enter into ESA schemes are paid to manage all their land within the ESA in an environmentally sensitive way. There has been approximately 80% take up of ESA schemes on Alston Moor and about 25% of agreement holders also have a Conservation Plan which entitles them to conservation grants for repairing barns, walls, etc.

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme operates outside ESA's and makes payments to farmers and other land-owners to enhance and conserve English landscapes, their wildlife and historic features and opportunities for public access. Farmers and land managers enter a ten-year agreement to manage their land in an environmentally beneficial way in return for annual payments, and grants are available for capital works such as planting, dry-stone walling etc. Farmers in the Alston area can use Countryside Stewardship schemes on the higher fell-lands which are excluded from the ESA, for instance for management of heather moorland. 5% of farms have Countryside Stewardship Schemes.

There has also been one Rural Enterprise Scheme and 3 holdings are in the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme.

All the above schemes come under the umbrella of the England Rural Development Programme which is the Government's programme for integrated funding measures for two main priority areas:

- schemes to conserve and improve the environment
- schemes to enable, farming, forestry and other rural businesses and communities to adapt to changing circumstances and develop.

East Cumbria Countryside Project(ECCP) implements a programme of guided walks and a range of self-guide leaflets. In the past these were part of a wider countryside management programme where ECCP acted on behalf of the County Council but the County Council has now retained responsibility for footpaths and bridleways on Alston Moor.

The forthcoming appointment of North Pennines countryside officers for each of the County areas within the North Pennines AONB may provide fresh impetus for countryside management issues within Alston Moor.

The effects of Right to Roam legislation will be significant for Alston Moor as almost all the fell-land within the parish will become accessible when the legislation comes into effect in 2005.

EN3 LINKS BETWEEN TOWN & COUNTRY

EN3.1 NATURAL OR MAN-MADE FEATURES THAT LINK THE TOWN AND COUNTRY

Wherever you are in Alston you are aware of the surrounding hills visible from almost all parts of the town. Therefore the visual link between town and country is very powerful.

A variety of footpaths lead from the town into the surrounding countryside, eg the footpath and bridleway to Gossipgate and Blagill from the Butts, Firs Walk from below the Firs housing estate, the footpath from St Paul's Church towards Annat Walls and Natrass Gill.

The South Tynedale Railway also provides an important link between town and country.

EN3.2 DISTINCTIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS FOUND IN BOTH THE TOWN AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE

Local vernacular architecture is typical of the wider North Pennines where availability of materials dictated the use of local sandstone not only for the walls but also for the roofs which are traditionally clad in sandstone flags. These local materials blend naturally into the landscape, sometimes contrasted with render and Welsh slate. Many cottages have "catslide roof" extensions where the roof continues over a single storey off-shoot. This is common throughout the North Pennines as are dwellings with outside staircases to the first floor, where traditionally animals were kept below.

EN3.3 MEMORABLE VIEWS

The most memorable view is arguably the best in England, from Hartside Pass overlooking the Eden Valley, Lakeland Fells, Solway Firth & Scottish Borders.

All the views as one enters the Parish are exciting as one enters a different landscape from each approach whether from Hartside having come over the top of the Pennine escarpment descending into Alston Moor, over the wilderness of Yad Moss from Teesdale, over Killhope from Weardale, over Whitfield Fell from Hexham, or along the picturesque South Tyne valley from the Brampton direction. The mass of Cross Fell provides an awe inspiring and dominant feature in the landscape from many viewpoints.

The view of Alston nestling in the South Tyne valley must have been a very welcoming site in bygone days after a long trek over wild moorland and today the dramatic approaches over the fells still provide a real sense of arriving somewhere special.

There are so many good views all around the parish as there are so many high points from which one can get a panoramic view and views of the surrounding fells from wherever you are – many people are fortunate in having a memorable view from their own window!

EN3.4 HISTORIC COMMERCIAL LINKS BETWEEN THE TOWN AND COUNTRY

The town grew up around a mill race which for hundreds of years provided power for a forge, a saw mill and two corn mills as well as functioning as the town's chief means of cleansing and sewerage. This runs underground below Overburn, the Market Square and through much of the Butts before joining the River Nent close to its confluence with the South Tyne.

Forge Cottage indicates the location of the former forge.

Precision Products occupy High Mill, the remaining corn mill, which still has a waterwheel intact. This was open to the public but had to be closed as it was unmanned and suffered from vandalism.

The Market Cross and Market Square were gathering places for the sale of local produce. The Square was originally divided by buildings into separate market places for different goods, eg for corn and potatoes.

Historic links with the farming & mining community are strong – agriculture and industry have been linked inextricably since the earliest mining activity in the area as families traditionally relied on both to provide a source of income.

As described previously there are still quite a few houses with outside staircases left in Alston from the days when people lived upstairs and kept their animals downstairs even within the town of Alston itself.

EN3.5 DISTINCTIVENESS OF COUNTRYSIDE AT TOWN EDGE

There is no “urban fringe” . The upland farm landscape meets the edge of the town. However, what was an attractive riverside along the banks of the Nent in Victorian times is now occupied by the former foundry site with a scrap yard on one side as described in EN1.5

EN3.7 LONG-DISTANCE FOOTPATHS AND CYCLE ROUTES

The Pennine Way passes through Alston Moor arriving at Garrigill after the most strenuous stretch of the route from Dufton over Cross Fell, it then follows the South Tyne to Alston and crosses the river at the Brewery Bridge to continue northwards on the west side of the river.

The C2C cycle route also passes through Alston Moor, the way-marked route leading through Garrigill and Nenthead, but many cyclists stop in Alston.

A new Pennine Cycle Way will also pass through Alston. Like the Pennine Way footpath it will start in Derbyshire and pass through the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The cycle way will pass through Appleby and Melmerby and over Hartside, through Alston, then via Randalholme, joining the South Tyne Trail to Haltwhistle. The route is due to be launched in June 2003.

Other routes being developed include

- a cycle tour of the North Pennines – a route which is planned to link all the valleys, and
- Source to Sea cycle routes which include a two-day cycle route from the Source of the South Tyne to Tynemouth and routes from the sources of the Tees and the Wear which also start close to Alston Moor.

EN4 OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

EN4.1 AIR QUALITY & POLLUTION

Alston Moor is in the best air quality category and this was reflected in the local consultation process where fresh air was frequently remarked upon as one of Alston’s strengths.

There are no major pollution problems but the legacy of mining activity means that there are some areas with elevated levels of lead. A contaminated land strategy is currently being developed to address this problem, first by identifying the sites and then by adopting measures to protect people and animals.

EN4.2 WASTE MANAGEMENT & RECYCLING

There are no current plans for a civic amenity site on Alston Moor but it is recognised by the County Council as a problem which needs to be addressed and a new waste management strategy being produced should investigate this issue.

At present the allocated site at Flusco the other side of Penrith is on average around a 50 mile round trip from the parish. This cannot be regarded as sustainable in terms of reducing traffic pollution quite apart from the consequent fly-tipping which takes place.

The loss of the bottle-bank is a particular issue for Alston businesses who were subsequently informed that the bottle bank was for domestic use only. There is now a “green box” scheme for domestic recycling which has been moderately successful

although it has frequently been the cause of complaint when it has failed to operate as intended. However, there is no recycling opportunity at all for local businesses, and local pubs and hotels in particular generate a large volume of bottles. They were disposing of them at the bottle bank but now have nowhere to take them. The only waste collection available for commercial waste in Eden is to land-fill sites and there are no commercial recycling facilities available locally. When local councils in England are finding it difficult to meet government targets for recycling of waste which are way behind many of our European neighbours, and businesses want to play their part by recycling but are unable to do so, this is clearly an issue which urgently needs to be addressed. The new Cumbria Waste Minimisation Project based at Voluntary Action Cumbria's offices near Penrith aims to assist businesses to develop waste minimisation and recycling projects. They clearly need to work with businesses on Alston Moor to rectify the situation.

ECONOMY

EC1 EMPLOYMENT

EC1.1 & 2 LOCAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Alston has come a long way towards recovery since Alston Foundry closed in 1980 when unemployment rose to 25%, with Alston then being described in the press as “dole town” and unemployment blackspot. By the time the last appraisal was carried out in 1995 unemployment had fallen to 10.5% but the comparative figure for Eden was then much less at 3.4%. Since then unemployment has continued to fall - local unemployment rates in July 2,000 averaged 5.1% just under half what they were in 1995. Unemployment has decreased further since then and now stands at around 3% compared with 2.7 for Cumbria as a whole and 1.1 in Eden. Although unemployment has reduced considerably it is still the highest rate in Eden and slightly above the Cumbrian average for males.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES 2000 - 2002						
Unemployed	Alston		Alston		Eden	Cumbria
	Jul 2000		Oct 2002		Oct 2002	Oct 2002
	no.	%	no.	%(approx)	%	%
Male	37	6.5	24	4.2	1.3	3.9
Female	12	3.0	6	1.5	0.8	1.5
Total	49	5.1	30	3	1.1	2.7

sources - ONS (July 2000) and Penrith Job Centre (Oct 2002)

EC1.3 LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

There are currently 9 long-term unemployed as follows.

Timescale	No of People
over 6 months	5
over 18mths	1
over 2 years	1
over 3 yrs	2
total:	9

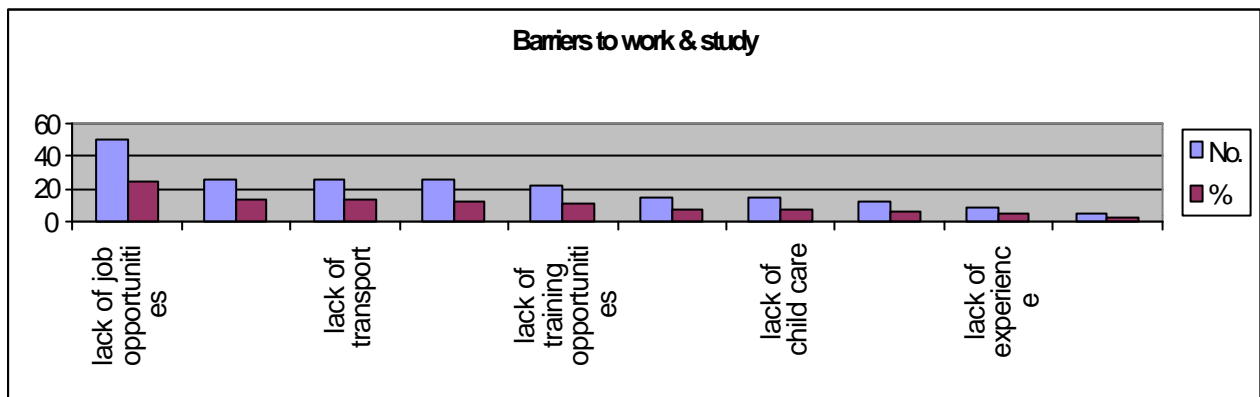
Penrith Job Centre (Oct 2002)

This represents 30% of the total unemployed with 13% having been unemployed for over a year.

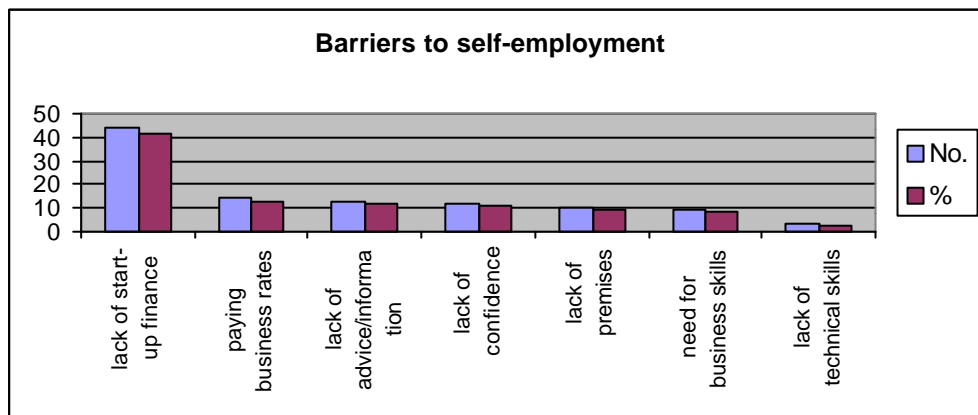
These figures are a considerable improvement upon the figures for July 1995 when 54% of those out of work had been unemployed for over 6 months and 40% for over a year.

EC1.4 BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The community questionnaire identified the following barriers to work and training:



Community Questionnaire



Community Questionnaire

EC1.5 AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD EARNINGS

Over 16% of household incomes were below £5,000 and 57.4% of household incomes were below £15,000 in 1998(gross annual figs.). For the same period, the average household income for rural Cumbria was £15,000 to £20,000. Cumbrian wage levels are below the regional average and wages tend to be lower in rural areas but incomes in Alston are below the rural average for the county.

Gross family income (1998)	
Income band (thousands)	%
0 – 5	16.3
5 – 10	20.6
10 – 15	20.5

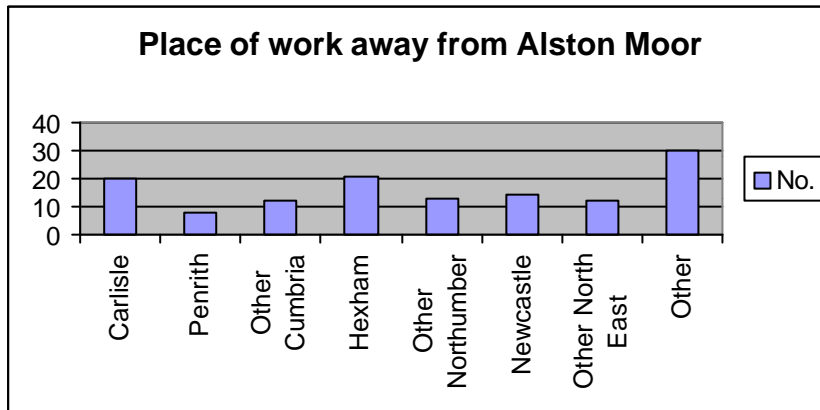
15 – 20	15.9
20 – 25	10.7
25 – 30	6.6
30 – 35	3.9
35 – 40	2.3
40 – 45	1.3
45 – 50	0.8
50 +	1.2
<i>(Acorn Data CACI limited)</i>	

Whereas in the past unemployment was the main issue, under-employment (relying on part-time jobs), low wages and low incomes from self employment probably constitute the most serious issues facing Alston Moor today.

EC1.6 PLACE OF WORK

The community questionnaire identified that 37% of workers commute elsewhere to work. Of 62% working on Alston Moor 25% work from home and 37% work elsewhere on Alston Moor.

The isolation of Alston Moor probably accounts for the relatively low number of commuters compared with other places of similar size. However over a third of the working population are prepared to travel considerable distances in order to find suitable employment:



Community Questionnaire

Alston is too isolated to be a “dormitory town”. Anyone commuting from Alston is likely to be travelling at the minimum a 40 mile round trip, most are travelling at least 50 miles a day, eg to Hexham, Carlisle and Newcastle.

Therefore local employment provision is significant with 700 employee jobs, and the proportion of self-employed is more than double the average for Cumbria for both males and females:

Self-employed	Alston Moor	Cumbria
male self-employed	40.1%	16.7%
female self-employed	18.7%	8.4%

Source 1991 census

EC1.7 DEPENDENCY OF LOCAL ECONOMY ON SPECIFIC INDUSTRY SECTORS

Local services

Health and education play an important role in the local economy with 27% employed in this sector(*Community Questionnaire*). This sector is therefore important on two counts: not only providing important local services but also providing an important source of employment.

Type of employment	No.	%
transport/garage	16	4

building/skilled trades	28	8
manufacturing	28	8
education/health/other public sector	98	27
IT	22	6
catering/holiday accommodation	28	8
visitor attraction	10	3
retail	46	13
design/creative industries	21	6
other professional	38	10
other	29	8
TOTAL	364	100

Business Survey Alston Moor 2002

Farming

Although numbers employed in agriculture have continued to decline, farming still plays a significant role in the local economy. The role of farming itself is changing in that its principal role is becoming increasingly one of countryside management with food production being an integral part of this, rather than production being the primary aim. Nationally, hill farm incomes in 2001 - 02 were only 30% of the level in 1994 -97. As farm income levels fall, farmers are increasingly reliant on a mixture of Government subsidies, diversification and/or one or more members of the family working away from the farm.

Effects of Foot & Mouth Disease(FMD):

Although there was only one outbreak of FMD on Alston Moor, many farmers were affected and had their animals culled as they over-winter their stock in the lower lying areas of the Eden Valley. Apart from loss of livestock was the loss of livelihood with no money coming in from sales as the marts were closed. This led to a lack of social life as the mart is the main meeting place for farmers, and the fact that people were only visiting farms when essential caused a further sense of isolation. Lack of sales meant they were not able to purchase breeding rams and replacement suckler cows. They have still been feeling the knock-on effects this year with continuing restrictions on livestock movement which affected the two annual events in the local farming calendar – the Alston Sheepdog trials in June which ran for one day instead of two and the cancellation of the Sheep & Goat Show in September which would have affected the ability of farmers to take stock to the autumn sales.

Two thirds of farmers who responded to the business survey said that continuing restrictions on livestock movement would be one of the outside influences most likely to seriously limit their business.

FMD has also left a legacy of additional beaurocracy with licences required to move animals and, in addition to cattle passports and tagging, lambs now have to be tagged. However on the positive side, sheep are now in demand and lamb prices are good.

FMD also affected a large number of non-farming businesses in the Alston area, tourism businesses in particular. The following responses include all business types surveyed:

Was your business affected by FMD last year?			
no	slightly	badly	positively (eg.extra work for your business)
7	24	20	4
12%	42%	35%	7% no.

Business Survey Alston Moor 2002

Forestry

Plantations in the area are generally small and privately owned. Most of them are managed by Tilhill Economic Forestry apart from Mount Hooley which has recently changed hands and is now being managed directly by the owner for amenity and conservation purposes.

Mineral extraction

Mineral extraction was identified as still being important to the local economy in the last appraisal. It has declined significantly in terms of employment provision but is now probably fairly stable at this level. Ayle Colliery is the only remaining coal mine in operation, now employing 5 – 6 people, its main customers being local coal merchants. Hodgson Bros stone quarrying business continues to be important as a source for the attractive local sandstone and employs similar numbers to those quoted in the previous appraisal (6 full time one part-time). They report having a problem finding skilled labour for stone processing.

Tourism

Tourism continues to play an important role with over 50% of businesses (*business survey*) saying that their business income was significantly or very dependent on tourism. However tourism in the North Pennines is very seasonal (36% of jobs provided in the business survey – ie excluding public sector jobs – being seasonal)

IT

The advent of Cybermoor has coincided with a growing number of people working in IT based employment.

Creative Industries

The importance of arts based businesses was identified in the previous appraisal and numbers are increasing, including IT based design which fits well with the development of Cybermoor.

The Business Association reports that the arts and crafts section of their new directory has doubled in size since the last one was produced in 2000.

MAIN BUSINESS ACTIVITY

Business activity	No.	%
accommodation &/or catering	14	25
farming, (inc. forestry, nursery / plants)	12	21
art, crafts, design / creative industries	11	19
retail	8	14
IT	6	11
visitor attraction	4	7
manufacturing	4	7
transport/garage	3	5
building/skilled trades	3	5
other –		
specialist property	3	5
office services/admin	1	2
training	1	2

Business Survey 2002 (38.5% response to survey)

EC1.8 DEPENDENCE ON LARGE EMPLOYERS

There are no local employers who employ over 100 people. Since the closure of Alston Foundry the economy has been forced to diversify as the community gradually came to realise that no large employer was likely to come and take its place. Due to Alston's isolation - it is approximately 20 miles to the nearest trunk road or motorway and to the nearest rail connection - despite of its central location, it has not proved attractive to large organisations.

The largest single employer is Precision Products with 65 employees (47 male 16 female f/t plus 2 female p/time).

Education, health and social services together provide over 120 jobs although many of these are part time and the majority of them are female.

The employment figures for Precision Products and Total Postweigh have remained virtually unchanged since the previous appraisal but Mountain Range no longer

provides manufacturing jobs on Alston Moor.
 Wright Bros.(Coaches) are significant employers providing work for 20 people.
 The North Pennines Heritage Trust is now also a significant employer providing 17 permanent jobs and 6 seasonal jobs.

EC1.9 BUSINESS TRENDS

2 start-ups were identified as registering for VAT over the last 18 months but with a considerable number of single person businesses (33% of businesses in survey), and low levels of household income, many of these are likely to be operating below the VAT threshold and so this may not be an accurate picture.

The continuing pattern of shops opening and then closing after only one or two years in operation highlights the difficulty in sustaining sufficient trade from a small resident population and very seasonal tourist trade.

The Business Survey indicated a very marginal increase in numbers of jobs. (12% had taken on and 7% had laid off staff in the past 12months). Over 25% of businesses surveyed were planning to carry out one of the following actions to improve their business over the next 12 months:

- refurbishment
- investment
- expansion
- diversification

15 businesses were planning to expand and 17 were planning to diversify. However the numbers planning to take on new staff equated with the figure for those who were planning to lay off staff, so the benefits of proposals to expand or diversify may indicate strengthening of businesses but this is not translating into an overall gain in numbers of jobs.

Business performance does generally seem to be improving (*there were 6 no responses out of 57, so even if these were all poor performers it would not significantly affect the results*):

Compared with the same period, (January - June) in 2000 and 2001, please tick whether your business turnover during the first half of this year has						
	increased more than 10%	increased slightly	stayed the same	decreased slightly	decreased more than 10%	
2000	no. 14	10	9	5	11	
	% 29%	20%	18%	10%	22%	
2001	no. 19	11	8	5	8	
	% 37%	22%	16%	10%	16%	

Business Survey Alston Moor 2002

Businesses were asked whether they were more or less optimistic about the future of the local economy on Alston Moor than they were in the previous two years (both years were included in case FMD last year skewed the general trend). Very few were less optimistic compared with those who were more optimistic:

year	more		same		less	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
September 2000	15	26	29	51	3	5
		0				
September 2001	27	47	24	42	1	2

Business Survey Alston Moor 2002

EC2 RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE SERVICES

EC2.1 LOCATION OF LOCAL SHOPPING PROVISION/ SHOPPING HABITS

There is a post office and village store in Nenthead and in Garrigill but no provision in Slaggyford – all other local shopping provision is located within Alston.

There is no out of town or edge of town facility. There is only one small supermarket, the Co-op which has a limited range of goods and tends to be more expensive than other supermarkets including their own stores elsewhere as they appear to put a premium on their goods to cover transport costs to Alston. This means that local people tend to shop elsewhere:

SHOPPING HABITS

Shop mainly	No.	% (respondents to question)
in Alston	92	18
Outside Alston Moor	235	45
half & half	196	37
No. of responses to question	523	100

(community questionnaire)

REASONS FOR SHOPPING ELSEWHERE

Reason	No.	% (total respondents)
Cheaper elsewhere	271	48
Better choice	343	61
Travel there anyway	185	33

(community questionnaire)

REASONS FOR SHOPPING IN ALSTON

reason	No.	% (total respondents)
like to support local shops	293	52
need "last minute" items	260	46
saves time	169	30
saves transport costs	135	24
social contact	123	22
lack of transport to go elsewhere	43	8
local shops give good value	37	7

(community questionnaire)

Although availability of transport does not appear to be a big issue with respondents to the community questionnaire, 167 people (30% of respondents) said they would use a local home grocery delivery service and 47% of over 75's would use such a service.

EC2.2 TYPES OF SHOPS & SERVICES

A wide range of shops and services are available in Alston for the size of population: Shops and services located within Alston are as follows:

- 2 banks
- 1 post-office selling stationery in Alston
- 1 small supermarket (Co-op)
- 2 butchers
- 2 bakers (one a local co-operative)
- 1 wholefood shop (local co-operative)
- 1 greengrocer's
- 1 chemist
- 1 shoe-shop (closing down)

- 1 outdoor clothes shop
- 1 newsagent/general stores/hardware
- 1 charity shop
- 1 florist
- 3 gift shops
- 1 second hand book shop
- 1 antique shop
- 1 clock shop
- 3 craft shops including one specialist ceramics gallery
- 1 art & craft gallery
- 1 architects' office
- 1 estate agent
- 1 hair-dressers

Station Yard:
 Model Railway Centre
 Petfood supplies

also outside Alston with retail space:
 1 pottery (Pennine Pottery)
 1 blacksmiths' (attached to tea room) (Thortergill)

Although Alston is well endowed for size of population there are notable gaps in shopping provision which were identified in the questionnaire responses: the main ones being clothes shops (it's a 40 mile minimum round trip to buy a pair of knickers!) and DIY/ building materials, but there were a wide variety of comments relating to better choice and cheaper groceries being available locally.

Type of goods	No.
Clothing	57
DIY/hardware/building materials	67
Other	87

(community questionnaire)

Other included – electrical goods; wider variety/cheaper/economy size/better quality groceries; fresh fish daily; delicatessen; CDs, books & music; sports equipment/sportswear; sewing materials etc.

EC2.3 LOCAL PRODUCERS AND OUTLETS FOR LOCAL PRODUCE

Food

Cumberland Mustard available in some food shops, at Gossipgate Gallery and used in some local pubs.

Local butchers' Alston sausage

Moody Baker selling produce (bread, cakes etc) made on the premises and local preserves

Wholefood shop selling local farm baked cakes and local free range eggs.

Crafts

6 venues selling a variety of locally made crafts including candles, textiles, wrought iron work, turned wood and pottery and a clock shop which makes and repairs clocks.

Plants

Hartside Nursery Garden specialises in growing alpine plants.

There are three other local growers of plants. These are seasonally available at Gossipgate Gallery, Pinehaven and the Wholefood Shop.

Publications

The North Pennines Heritage Trust and local historian, Alistair Robertson publish books of local historical interest. These are available at Nenthead Mines, Alston Information Centre, Gossipgate Gallery and the local newsagent. The local estate agent publishes a specialist property marketing magazine, "In the Sticks".

EC2.4 MARKET

Alston is often described as England's highest market town. However, although Alston has a market charter and a market place complete with market cross, there is no regular market and there has not been one for many years.

A local produce market was held as a pre Christmas event with Morris Dancing in 2001 and was generally judged to be successful. A similar market with live entertainment was successfully held in December 2002 and Alston Moor Business Association would like to seek funding to create a regular programme of market-based events.

460 local people (over 80% of respondents to questionnaire) said that they would support a regular local produce market in Alston.

EC2.5 LOSS OF RETAIL FLOORSPACE/ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOWN CENTRE FOR RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

A previous locally made knitwear shop has reverted to its former residential use. Several premises have been recently renovated but as described in EC1.9 above, the continual changing hands of shops reflects the difficulty in achieving adequate turnover with a small resident population. The situation is probably fairly static: Alston appears to be an attractive place to set up shop but it is difficult to sustain, so there are nearly always some premises changing hands.

EC2.6 VACANT SHOPS

There are 6 vacant shops representing around 20% of total retail outlets and 3 of these have been vacant for over 2 years

EC2.7 NEW SHOPS & MAJOR REFITS

In the last three years the following new shops have opened:

New: Clock Shop (former building society office)
Lavender (craft shop in former model railway shop now relocated in Station Yard)
(another shop in former Doris' Café and adjoining vacant shop was opened but ceased trading within this timescale)
Harvest Home (reverted to former use as greengrocers' after being used as photographer's studio- photographer now has studio attached to his home)
Moody Baker

Major refits: Pinehaven and Wholefood shop

EC2.8 TENURE

The majority of shops are owner occupied.

EC2.9 RETAILER CONFIDENCE

When asked whether more or less confident about the local economy than the same time in 2000 and 2001 (both years were included in case FMD last year skewed the general trend) most retail businesses replied they were about the same although a few were more confident than in 2001.

EC3 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

EC3.1 LOCAL SCHOOLS

The aims of all three Alston Moor Schools is to co-operatively provide the environment for children to develop their maximum potential across the broadest base with access to a wide curriculum.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education is provided at **Samuel King's School (SKS)** in Alston up to GCSE level but pupils have to travel elsewhere for 6th form education.

The number of pupils on the school roll in 2001 – 2002 was 170.

This is the smallest secondary school in the country although it is not far behind Beacon School in Aspatria which has 12 more pupils.

The school attracts a large number of pupils from Weardale in addition to pupils from Alston Moor with 30 pupils from Weardale in 2001 and an additional 15 in 2002.

A variety of adult education classes are run from the school (see EC3.3 below).

There are 17 teaching staff, 6 full-time, the rest part-time, and 15 non-teaching staff employed at the school.

Samuel Kings School is part of a consortium of 9 small rural Cumbrian secondary schools which have put in a joint bid for virtual technology special status to become a Rural Academy Technology College. This would enable 2,500 pupils to be linked together by video conferencing.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

There are two primary schools on Alston Moor, one in Alston and one at Nenthead:

Alston Primary School

Numbers on the school role have been stable for the last few years around 172 – 179, currently 173 although numbers are likely to go down to around 160 in 2003 –04 as there are fewer pre-school children who will become of school age next September. The school is staffed by a mixture of full time and part time teachers (8.2 full-time equivalent).

Alston Primary School houses the Alston Moor Community Development Centre, run under the Cumbria Credits scheme which provides an adult education facility with computer room at the school.

Nenthead Primary School

There are currently 30 pupils on the school roll. Numbers have been fairly stable over the last few years ranging from between 22 to 36.

The head teacher is the only full-time member of staff, supported by 5 part time staff (1.5 full-time equivalent).

Nenthead is a very isolated community, the climate is very harsh and incomes are low. These factors have enabled access to funding for out of school activities with an after school club two nights a week. The school works hard to enable activities to help reduce the sense of isolation such as taking advantage of opportunities for residencies at the school and organising school trips.

The school has been the subject of several residencies, a very successful one last year being the RSPB's Working with Waders Project. This enabled the children to learn a lot about biology without even realising they were learning.

They are also now taking part in English Nature's Natural Links Project which involves textile artists working with local communities to raise awareness locally of Moor House National Nature Reserve.

The school's recent award of Beacon School status will help to raise the profile of the school and to access additional funding.

The school also acts as a local information centre funded by Eden District Council as an offshoot of its centre in Alston with a public internet access point, photocopying and FAX facilities, and provides a venue in Nenthead for classes under the Alston Adult Education Programme.

E-LEARNING FOUNDATION

A spin-off of Cybermoor is a joint project linking all Alston Moor Schools. This is one of seven schemes in the country of which only one other (in Suffolk) is located in a rural area.

The schools are being linked by wireless networking and are being provided with laptops giving them one of the highest pupil to computer ratios in the country, varying slightly between the schools but around 1 computer to every 2 pupils.

Samuel King's School has a ratio of 1:1.7 and hopes to achieve a 1:1 ratio within the next two years (September 2003 if they achieve technology college status).

EC3.2 LEVELS OF LOCAL EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

There were 10 successful University applicants from Alston Moor in 1997, all of whom were under 20.

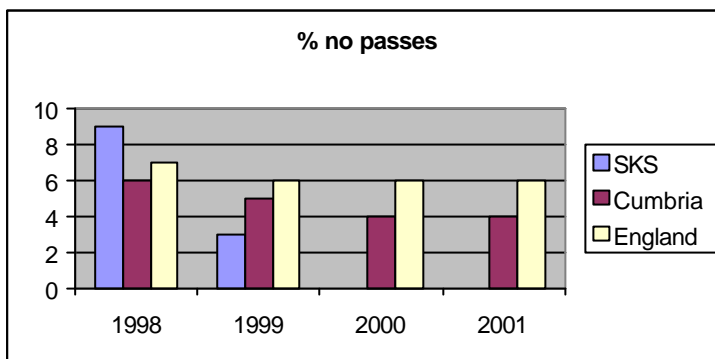
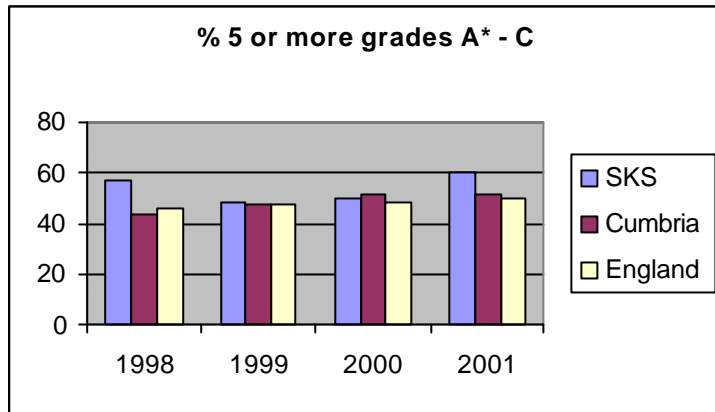
In 1998 there were again 10 successful applicants but only half of these were aged under 20

All the local schools have attained high levels of achievement:

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Samuel Kings School:

In 2001, 60% of pupils who took GCSEs achieved A-C results in 5 or more subjects, 96% achieved 5 or more passes. There were no failures. This compares favourably with both the local county averages and figures for England as a whole and the school has been awarded an Achievement Award from the DFES:



There is no 6th form, but of school-leavers in 2001, 20 went on to further education to join 6th forms at other schools or FE courses at colleges as follows:

- Haydon Bridge : 9
- William Howard : 1
- Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Penrith: 1
- Newman School, Carlisle: 1
- Carlisle College: 4
- Newton Rigg: 4

1 school leaver joined the Navy and 4 went directly into employment

PRIMARY EDUCATION

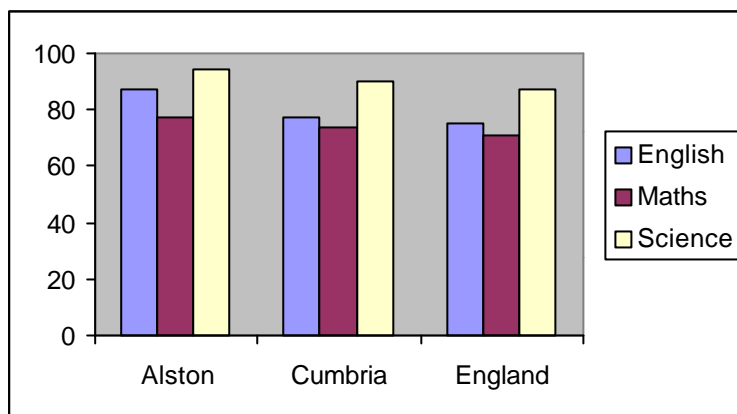
Alston Moor Primary School

Key Stage 2 test results 2001

number of pupils eligible for Key Stage 2 assessment	31
number of pupils eligible for Key Stage 2 assessment with SEN	4
percentage of pupils eligible for Key Stage 2 assessment with SEN	12.9%

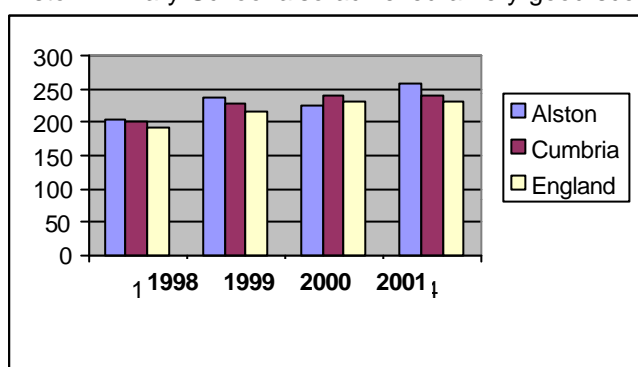
Alston pupils achieved above the National average and above the average for Cumbria in all key subjects in 2001:

PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING LEVEL 4 OR ABOVE IN 2001



IMPROVEMENT MEASURE

Alston Primary School also achieved a very good score for improvement in 2001:



The results of the national curriculum tests for 2002 show that the standards attained in 2002 by Year 6 pupils at Alston Primary were up on the previous year. They were above the national average in English (with 95% of pupils achieving Level 4 or above) and well above the national average in mathematics (91%) and science (100%) and the work of the pupils currently in Year 6 matches that expected for their age in all 3 subjects.

Despite these high levels of achievement, a recent Ofsted inspection which took place in October 2002 has made the school the subject of Special Measures and the governing body is responsible for drawing up an Action Plan showing how the school will tackle the improvements needed. The inspection team recognised that the school does a great number of things well: the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good and they are eager to learn and want to succeed in their work. The school also works effectively with other local schools to improve curricular provision; school visits and after school activities effectively promote the pupils' good social development. However the inspectors felt that the opportunities for pupils' personal achievement were under-developed, the quality and range of the school's curriculum was not sufficiently broad and balanced and that the quality of teaching and learning had deteriorated since the previous inspection in 1997 and therefore school improvement was unsatisfactory. The management of the school acknowledge the need for special measures and have already taken steps to address some areas of concerns. They look forward to working closely with the LEA on all of the report's findings to improve what they regard as a successful and caring school.

Nenthead Primary School

Because of its small size, figures are not available for Nenthead. However the school achieved Beacon status this year so this speaks for itself for the quality of education provided at this school. Pupils also won a Key Stage 2 trophy for art and poetry for the work they did during the Working with Waders project.

EC3.3 QUALIFICATIONS & SKILLS

ADULT POPULATION ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

The proportion of the working-age population who had attained NVQ level 3 or above in Eden was 34.1 per cent in March 2001 to February 2002. This compares with 39.5 per cent in the North West and 41.1 per cent in the UK.

The results of the community questionnaire would appear to be comparable with the figures for Eden for achieving NVQ3 or higher. Although the level of skills qualification was not generally identified, the proportion of questionnaire respondents with skills was similar (but slightly lower):

QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

Qualifications	No.	%
Graduates	42	
Professional	35	
Other	98	
TOTAL	175	31

(community questionnaire)

A large proportion of those respondents who had skills thought they were underpaid although this is not surprising in a low-wage economy. A smaller proportion thought that their skills were under-used.

Skills under-valued	No.	%
Skills under-used	56	
Skills under-paid	117	
TOTAL	173	31

(community questionnaire)

The main skills identified were in the following broad subject areas:

Skills	No.	%
Business skills	31	
Education	28	
Other professional	23	
Skilled Trades	21	
Arts	17	
Health	15	
Social & community	14	
Other skills	40	
TOTAL	189	33

(community questionnaire)

Not surprisingly Cybermoor has made a tremendous difference to computer literacy within the community : the results of the computer literacy questions in the community questionnaire were above average: In July 2002 it was estimated that nationally 43% of the adult population (*Office of National Statistics*) use the internet for individual purposes as opposed to 68% on Alston Moor.

COMPUTER SKILLS

Task	No.	%
Type a letter or CV	391	69
Play solitaire	325	58
Send an e-mail	375	66

Surf the internet	382	68
Incorporate a picture into a document	265	47
Install a programme	227	40

(community questionnaire)

EC3.4 LOCAL TRAINING PROVISION

EXISTING:

The Community Development Centre (CDC) based at Alston Primary School provides a number of courses including IT to NVQ Level 2. Alston Adult Education Centre based at Samuel Kings School runs a variety of evening courses in various locations. There are IT courses which include "Computing for the Over 60's" and CLAIT courses, as well as leisure courses in languages, dance, yoga and craft skills.

PROPOSED:

Samuel King's School is hoping to develop vocational courses in catering and electronics, the latter being particularly appropriate if the school's current bid for Technology College status is successful.

TRAINING NEEDS:

Several businesses have indicated a need for training in traditional building skills – eg stone-masonry. This could be both training for existing and for potential employees.

The Business Needs Survey carried out by Alston Moor Development Company in 2001 indicated that the greatest areas of need for training were:

finance/budgeting and business management(40%)

internet for marketing and e-commerce(40%)

marketing (25%) and

general/basic computer skills 20%

A small number of businesses also identified specific IT areas: ie graphics, spreadsheets, accounting software and data-base management.

Another area of training, related to business management where there is clearly a need, exists in respect of existing and potential community enterprises and other community groups who are looking for funding for projects but lack skills in business planning and developing funding applications.

EC3.5 PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION AND CHILD-CARE

PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUP

The playgroup is located within a purpose-built extension to the town hall which was developed three years ago.

It operates Monday to Friday during term-time from 9.00 -11.30am and 12.30 – 3.00pm.

It takes children in the pre-school year age group (ie aged 3 – 4 years).

Twice a week children are taken to the primary school where they have school dinner and stay for the first period after lunch.

Nursery education is now free. There were nursery vouchers but these have now been replaced by a nursery grant per child paid directly to the play-group.

In 2001 - 02 there were 33 children, but in September 2002, numbers dropped to 16 and in 2003 –04 numbers are expected to continue at a lower level when there are likely to be 18 children starting in September 2003.

2¹/₂ CLUB

This is a play-group facility for younger pre-school children aged 2¹/₂ - 3¹/₂ which operates for two hours three mornings a week at the Topp¹ during term-time. The number of sessions depends on the total number of children attending. Approximately

15 –16 children attend at present.

There are three staff and parents pay £3.25 per session. There need to be at least 12 children to cover costs and they depend on fund-raising for upkeep.

MOTHERS AND TODDLERS

The Mothers & Toddlers Group meets once a week on Tuesday afternoons at the Topp. This provides a chance for mothers to meet and for toddlers to learn to socialise.

SOFT PLAY

A further facility for young children is soft play held every Thursday afternoon in Alston Town Hall.

KIDS' CLUB

At the time of the last appraisal. the lack of child-care facilities or an after-school club was highlighted. There was a Mother and Toddlers' Group and a pre-school play-group but no facility caring for children whilst parents were at work. Up until now, the Kid's Club had helped to remedy this situation albeit only for school-age children (4 – 12 year-olds), providing a Breakfast Club from 7.30am – 9.00am and After School Club between 3.30 and 6.00pm. During the School Holidays they ran a Play Scheme from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday which ran in 2002 for 4 weeks.

However after December 2002 the Club will cease to exist. Some 10 – 15 families have been regularly relying on this service which has been privately run. Charges were £2.50 per hour or £3.50 for the full morning session and £6 for the After School session. Although there are personal reasons for the closure as the Kids' Club organiser is moving away, it is difficult to break even financially and therefore the likelihood of it being re-established will probably depend on securing additional funding.

OTHER CHILD-CARE ISSUES

The Kids' Club shares premises with the Pre-School Play-Group. This means that Pre-school overheads will increase if they are no longer sharing the rent with another organization. Overheads will have already gone up in relation to income as there are fewer children and therefore less grant to cover them this year than has been the case for the last few years. Potentially this puts the future of the pre-school play-group into question. Could it survive by combining with the 2¹/₂ Club?

The loss of the Kids' Club will mean that most parents will have to rely on informal arrangements for child-minding. This is likely to be difficult for those who do not have relatives living locally who are able to make a regular ongoing commitment.

Even if the Kid's Club is re-established, this still leaves a gap in provision for parents with pre-school children who want to work as there is no all-day provision apart from one registered child-minder. Therefore unless this problem is also addressed, people who want to continue working after they have had a baby will either have to make informal arrangements for child-care or move away unless they are prepared, or indeed are financially able, to give up their job in order to stay here.

In the last appraisal whilst the lack of child-care facilities was identified as an issue, there were three registered child-minders – now, as indicated above, there is only one. One other child-minder was registered until the end of the 2001 –2002 year but stated that now that Ofsted have taken over the role of regulator, the new conditions being imposed are making the operational costs too expensive to be able to continue.

In an area of low incomes and low population it appears that the costs of child-care provision cannot be met by parents without additional funding being forthcoming.

EC3.6 PUBLIC INTERNET LEARNING AND ACCESS POINTS

Public internet access points are situated at Alston Information Centre at the TIC in the Town Hall, at the Post Office at Nenthead, several shops and pubs and the Day Centre, bringing the total by the end of December 2002 to six. These access points are particularly important for low income families who, even if they have a Cybermoor computer, may not be able to afford to be connected to the internet. The charge for using public access computers is £1 for half an hour. It may be appropriate to consider a voucher scheme for those on low incomes.

EC4 COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY NEEDS

EC4.1 AVAILABILITY OF COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL FLOOR-SPACE

In September 2002 there was a total of 717 sq. m. of workspace available in Alston (this compares with 793sq. m. in Kirkby Stephen) represented by 7 properties under 1,000sq ft and 2 premises between 1,000 and 5,000sq. ft.

THE STATION YARD

Since the last appraisal was carried out in 1995, workshop units have been created in Kearton's former builders' yard providing a range of units, smaller in size than those previously built at Skelgillside. They are occupied by a variety of businesses including pine furniture making, pet supplies and a model railway centre.

There are however still 3 vacant units available around 600 sq.ft in size (55 – 60 sq m) at a rent of around £35 – 40 per week.

The Station Yard also includes the former Goods Shed, a listed building with potential for a more tourist orientated use, the structure of which was restored when the new units were created. This building is now occupied by the Hub (see tourism below –EC5.1)

SKELGILLSIDE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

These industrial units, several of which have been vacant for a considerable time provide a variety of space ranging from around 750 - 1500 sq ft (69 – 148 sq m.)

Four units are currently available ranging in price from £46 – 85 per week.

There is also an undeveloped site of .45 Hectares available at Skelgillside.

Most of the Rampgill workshops described in the previous appraisal are actually being used by the Heritage Trust for its own purposes.

OFFICES

Office space is available at The Brewery House providing one unit of 1000sq ft (93 sq.m) and one of 400sq ft (37 sq m.) at £2.50 per sq ft. A variety of small office spaces are available in the former Keartons' offices located above the library in the centre of town.

EC4.2 RENT LEVELS

Rents for industrial and commercial property have remained fairly stable in recent years at between £2.50 and £3.50 per sq ft. These prices are similar to (and in some instances less than) those for comparable properties in small towns in Cumbria.

EC4.3 VACANCY LEVELS

Vacancy levels overall have remained fairly static in all areas of commercial property, ie shops, offices and industrial premises although a large unit at Skelgillside is about to be taken up by the local vet to provide much more spacious and accessible premises than their current location in Overburn. Another has been taken up by relocation of Total Postweigh who have moved their business base from Garrigill. There was also one new vacancy in Eden District Council's premises turnover report for the period September 2001 – 2002.

EC4.4 DEMAND

It is encouraging to note a rise in demand after a period of several years where demand was static:

From 1999 – 2001 Eden only received 2 enquiries per year for premises in Alston compared with 3-5 in Appleby. However, by the end of August 2002 they had received 7 enquiries. This compared with 5 in Appleby and 4 in Kirkby Stephen. 200 out of a total of 261 enquiries received by Eden in 2002 during the same period were for any location, so if it were possible to persuade even a very small percentage of these to locate in Alston it could make a big difference.

By 17th September there had been 10 enquiries:

7 of these were for properties under 1,000sq.ft. These included 3 enquiries for industrial use, one for office, one for retail use and 2 others. There were a further 2 enquiries for industrial workspace between 1,000 and 5,000 sq.ft. and one for over 20,000 sq. ft.

EC5 TOURISM AND VISITOR SERVICES

EC5.1 VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

The main visitor attractions are as follows:

SOUTH TYNEDALE RAILWAY

Narrow gauge railway running on part of former Alston-Haltwhistle line

ALSTON MODEL RAILWAY CENTRE

Model railway exhibition and shop

THE HUB (TRANSPORT MUSEUM)

Community museum displaying old vehicles, artifacts and images run by volunteers.

NENTHEAD MINES HERITAGE CENTRE (at Nenthead)

Museum and mine with "Power of Water" interactive interpretative centre and café

GOSSIPGATE GALLERY

Art and craft gallery with programme of exhibitions specialising in display of work from the Northern Region, also coffee shop and garden

STOKOE HOUSE CERAMICS STUDIO & GALLERY

A wide variety of ceramics made on the premises plus exhibitions of guest potters in the gallery

PENNINE POTTERY (approx. 2 miles out of Alston on Hexham Road)

Hand thrown pottery made on the premises

THORTERGILL FORCE (Garrigill)

Tea-room, blacksmiths' forge and waterfall walk

HARTSIDE NURSERY GARDEN(approx. 1 mile out of Alston on Penrith road)
Alpine plant specialists

KILLHOPE LEADMING CENTRE(OUTSIDE THE PARISH)
Museum with overshot wheel and mine

EC5.2 NATIONAL TRAILS

The Pennine Way runs through Alston Moor and although numbers walking the Pennine Way have declined recently it is still an important visitor resource.

The C2C cycle route also passes through Alston Moor and has made a significant impact on tourism in the area.

The Pennine Way Cycle Route is due to open in 2003, taking people from Appleby along the Pennine foothills and up over Hartside into Alston then on to Haltwhistle and the Scottish Borders. It is eventually planned to run from Derbyshire closely following the route of the Pennine Way. This will further increase Alston's potential as a centre for cycling. There is also a lot of scope for off-road cycling using Alston as a base. The former North Pennines Tourism Partnership produced a series of cycling leaflets for each of the main dales: ie one each for Allendale, Stanhope, Middleton in Teesdale and Alston Moor. The Alston leaflet is available from Alston Tourist Information Centre and describes four routes for experienced cyclists on and off-road. However it is not widely publicized.

The previous appraisal referred to a proposal for a Pennine Bridleway. In fact this route has since been developed but does not pass through Alston Moor. However the area provides

excellent trail-riding and pony-trekking opportunities although at present the potential for these are not being realised. In the longer term this may change as the North Pennines Partnership is looking into the possibility of developing pack-horse trails.

EC5.3 ACCOMMODATION

Total provision on Alston Moor including non- inspected property is as follows:

Type of Accommodation	No. of establishments	No.of bed-spaces	(approx.)
hotel	6	125	
bed and breakfast inc pubs.	5pubs+16B&Bs	252	
self catering	21 providers	150	
bunk-house	3	60	
TOTAL BEDSPACES(approx)		587	

Three of the hotels are located in Alston, one is just outside Garrigill and there are two country house hotels between Nenthead and Alston. These are the largest hotels on Alston Moor, Nenthall Country House Hotel with 17 bedrooms and Lovelady Shield with 12.

EC5.4 VISITOR PROFILE

EC5.4.1 VISITOR NUMBERS

It is estimated that at least 40,000 – 50,000 visitors per year visit Alston. South Tynedale Railway expect to get 24,000 visitors this year and Gossipgate Gallery expect 18,000 based on previous figures and visitor numbers so far this year.

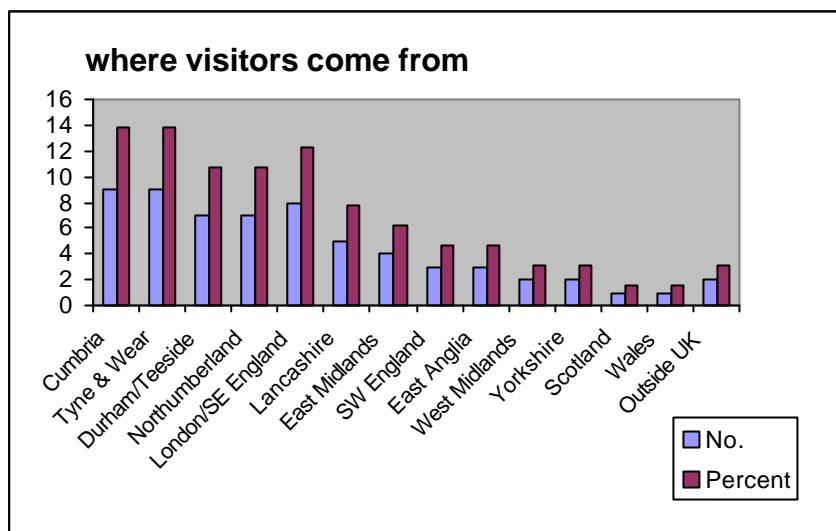
South Tynedale Railway carried out a visitor survey in 1997. One of the questions they asked was designed to find out how many visitors to the railway visit other businesses in the town and 27% of visitors to the Railway in this survey also visited Gossipgate Gallery &/or other craft shops. Therefore, assuming 27% of railway visitors were common to the railway and the gallery the two venues together attract 34,000 visitors to Alston. There were 11,735 visitors to the tourist information centre in the year September 2001 – 2002. Assuming around a third of these would either visit the railway or the gallery, this would leave a further third not accounted for in their figures. If this figure is added, the total comes to around 37,900. However this doesn't take account of visitors to the Hub or the Model Railway although one would expect a higher proportion of these to co-incide with the railway. Further attractions outside Alston include Nenthead Mines, Pennine Pottery, Thortergill and Hartside Nursery. Allowing for the fact that some of these may overlap with other attractions and assuming one third in each case do not visit any other (the railway survey found that just under a third of their visitors did not go anywhere else), and assuming visitor numbers of 5,000+ each

(nos. not available for all attractions), this would add a further 7,000 approx, giving a total of around 45,000. (This does not allow for visitors who do not visit any attractions at all, eg those coming specifically to go for a walk, so perhaps a figure of around 50,000 is a more realistic total).

EC5.4.2 WHERE VISITORS COME FROM

The Alston Moor 2002 survey indicated that most visitors to Alston come from either Cumbria or Tyne & Wear followed by Northumberland and County Durham/Teesside.

50% of visitors in the survey came from the this area(corresponding closely to two surveys carried out in 1997 by the South Tynedale Railway and Alston Moor Action Partnership which identified 51.9% and 49% respectively). The recent survey carried out by the North Pennines Partnership showed similar results, although as one would expect there were less visitors from Cumbria (and more from Co.Durham). Looking at the wider region there were less from Lancashire and more from Yorkshire in the overall North Pennines survey, again to be expected. The biggest number of visitors outside the Northern region came from London and the South East in the Alston Moor 2002 survey (12%). There were more from this region than from the North-West (8%). In the 1997 visitor surveys there were fairly equal numbers from these regions in the South Tynedale Railway Survey and 13% from London and S.E. and 11% from the North West in the Alston Moor Action Partnership Survey). The North Pennines Partnership survey found that Kent was the leading county outside the North again showing that the south-east generates more visitors than other areas outside the North.



EC5.4.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS

The North Pennines Partnership visitor survey was carried out between Easter and October 2002.

Visitors were asked their occupation and their response was coded into socio-economic status.

Over a third of visitors (34%) were classified as C1 while a further 27% were classified as B. Eighteen percent were classified C2 and twelve percent were classified as D. E's made up seven percent and A's less than one percent

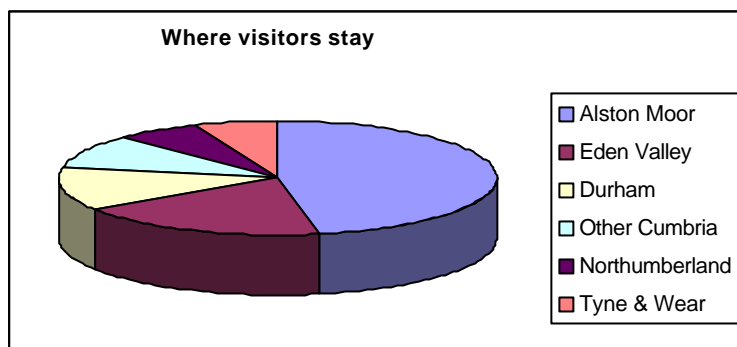
EC5.4.4 TYPE OF VISITOR & LENGTH OF STAY

All the surveys carried out indicate a roughly 50/50 split between day visitors and staying visitors. In the Alston Moor 2002 survey 55% were overnight visitors, 8% of which were staying with friends and relations. The average length of stay was 4.6 days. 25% were staying for 4 days and 19% were staying for 7 days which equates with the numbers staying in self-catering accommodation. The highest percentage in the North Pennines survey (20%) were staying for 7 days whilst 17% were staying for 2 days. 11 – 12% were staying for 3 days compared with 16% in the Alston Moor survey. It would therefore appear that the average overnight stay excluding self-catering accommodation is likely to be between 2 – 4 days. The overall average length of stay for the North Pennines survey was 4.7 nights for self-completed questionnaires which is comparable to the Alston survey.

A third of visitors in the North Pennines survey were first time visitors to the North Pennines AONB. There was an even spread amongst the other visitors who had visited anything between twice and more than eleven times.

EC5.4.6 WHERE PEOPLE STAY

47% of respondents to the local survey were staying on Alston Moor. A surprisingly large number (19%) of visitors on holiday were staying in the Eden Valley. This would indicate the effectiveness of Eden District Council's marketing activities and corresponding lack of marketing from the North Pennines Partnership, as previous surveys whilst the North Pennines Tourism Partnership was in existence have indicated a larger number staying within the North Pennines in Northumberland and Co. Durham.



EC5.4.7 TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION

Just over half (54%) of overnight visitors stayed in serviced accommodation (*Alston Moor 2002 survey*). This figure is significantly higher than the average for the North Pennines as a whole. The North Pennines survey identified between 31 –38%¹.

This is likely to be accounted for by the concentration of this sort of accommodation in Alston and other towns whereas the North Pennines survey included a large number of small villages.

A significant number stay in rented self-catering accommodation (20% in local survey, 11 – 20 in North Pennines survey).

In the local survey 9% were camping, 3% staying in caravans and 3% in second homes.

EC5.4.8 OCCUPANCY RATES

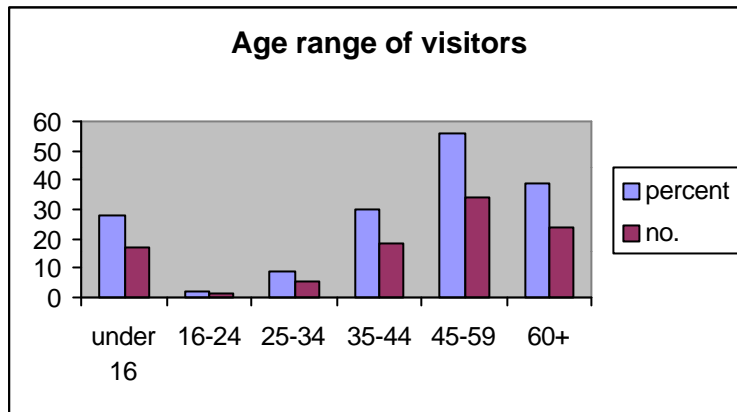
Provisional rates for 2002 provided by Cumbria Tourist Board indicate average bed-space occupancy rates of 41.6% in Eden compared with 46.1 for Cumbria as a whole and also correspondingly lower percentage of overseas guests in Eden compared with Cumbria as a whole, probably indicative of the higher profile of the Lake District abroad (7.8% of guests in Cumbria were overseas visitors compared with 3.7% in Eden). These were based on small sample sizes but the implication is nevertheless that occupancy rates in Eden District are lower than for Cumbria as a whole.

EC5.4.9 AVERAGE AGE OF VISITORS & SIZE OF GROUP

The majority of visitors are over 45 (58% in local survey and 59% in North Pennines survey) and there are very few young adults visiting (6% in local survey and 5% in North Pennines survey aged 16 – 34)

The most common group size was 2 people (51%) followed by 3 and 4 people (17% each) – (*Alston Moor 2002 survey*)

¹ North Pennines Partnership survey included two sets of results – one from face to face and one from self-completion questionnaires giving two different results in this case.



EC5.4.10 REASONS FOR VISITING

The main purposes for visiting were:

- Out for drive/sightseeing
- Passing through
- To visit specific attraction

These activities together account for nearly 75 % of reasons for visiting. (*Alston Moor 2002 survey*)

A small proportion were doing the Pennine Way and C2C cycle route.

As with the North Pennines survey, the reason for deciding to visit was largely because they had been before, although approximately a third of visitors (*North Pennines survey*) were visiting for the first time.

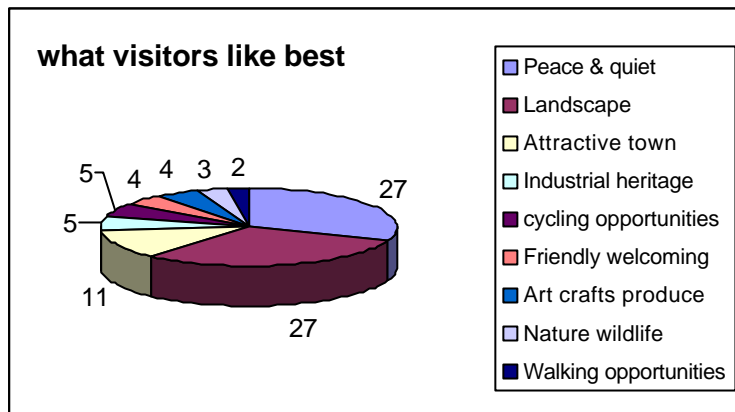
EC5.4.11 VISITOR INTERESTS

The survey carried out by Alston Moor Action Partnership in 1997 asked what visitors would like to see featured in a new attraction. The highest scores were for local history (97%), local countryside (91%) and wildlife & plants (88%).

EC5.4.12 VISITOR SATISFACTION

Satisfaction levels were high for all aspects of accommodation, catering and attractions, with the majority of visitors' ratings being either excellent or good. The highest levels of satisfaction for all sectors were with the friendly welcome, 40 – 53% giving an "excellent" score, although 6% gave attractions an average score and 8 % gave catering establishments an average score for their welcome. (*Alston Moor 2002 survey*)

What people like most about the Alston area, in common with the North Pennines as a whole, is peace and quiet and the quality of the landscape.



Alston Moor 2002 visitor survey

When visitors were asked what they liked least about Alston, by far the most common complaint was that they had difficulty parking. Although visitors were generally happy with Alston as it is, the three points which they liked least were:

- Difficult to park 31%
- Derelict buildings/scrap vehicles 12%
- Poor weather 8%

When asked whether they would recommend their friends to visit Alston a resounding 89% said that they would, even though only 17% replied “yes” when asked whether they would visit Alston again (but 80% said that they might possibly visit again – only one respondent answered “no” to this question and there were no negative responses to the question whether they would recommend to friends).

When asked whether they had any other comments, although there were a few criticisms, most people had a very positive opinion of the area. Two particularly praiseworthy examples were:

“Have visited Alston several times at different times of the year and experienced all weathers. We love it here.”

“This area is a little bit of heaven, a wonderful uplifting place to stay - very refreshing”.

EC5.5 TOURIST INFORMATION

In Alston the Tourist Information Centre(TIC) is combined with a local council Information Centre run by the District Council and this seems to be working very well. It enables the T.I.C to stay open for longer hours in the winter when previously the TIC had been closed.

In the year Sept 2001 – August 2002 the information centre received 7444 community and 11735 enquiries from visitors.

The North Pennines Visitor survey identified leaflets and brochures as the main means by which visitors find out about the area.

EC5.6 IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY

EC5.6.1 RELIANCE OF BUSINESSES ON TOURISM

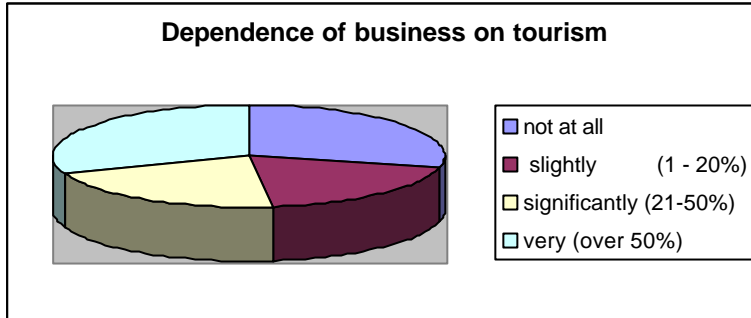
25% of businesses surveyed were providing accommodation and/or catering.
7% were visitor attractions.

19% were art & craft businesses. Many of these rely significantly on tourism for their income.

14% were retail businesses and many of these are also reliant on tourism

In the business survey we asked businesses how dependent their business turnover was on tourism.

Just over 50% of businesses rely significantly or very much on tourism for their income.

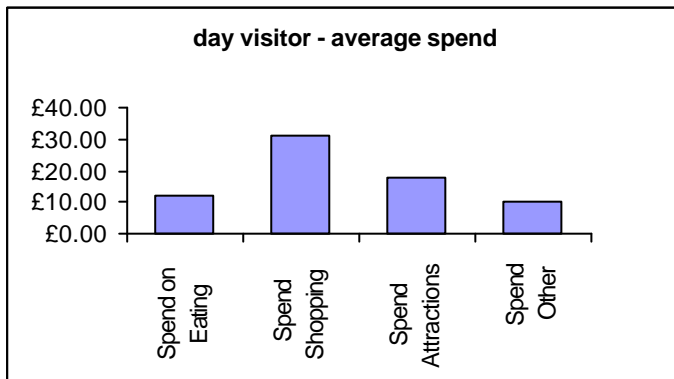


EC5.6.2 VISITOR SPEND

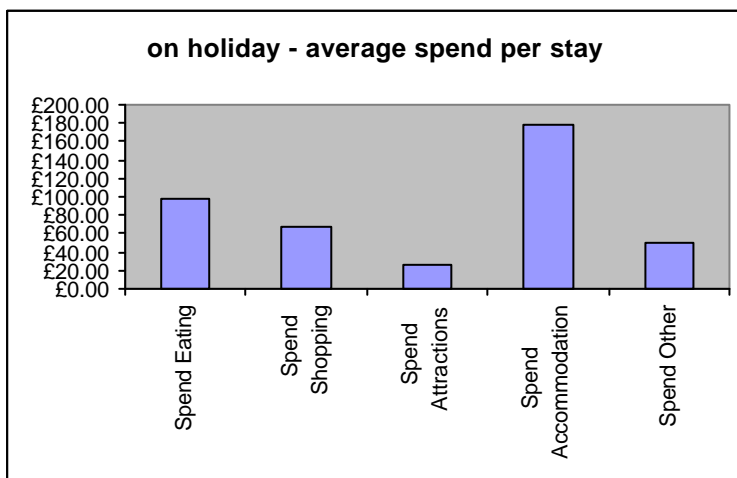
Visitors make an important contribution to the local economy.

The Alston Moor survey indicated an average visitor spend of £106.28 per visit.

A break-down of average spend is given below:



Alston Moor visitor Survey 2002²



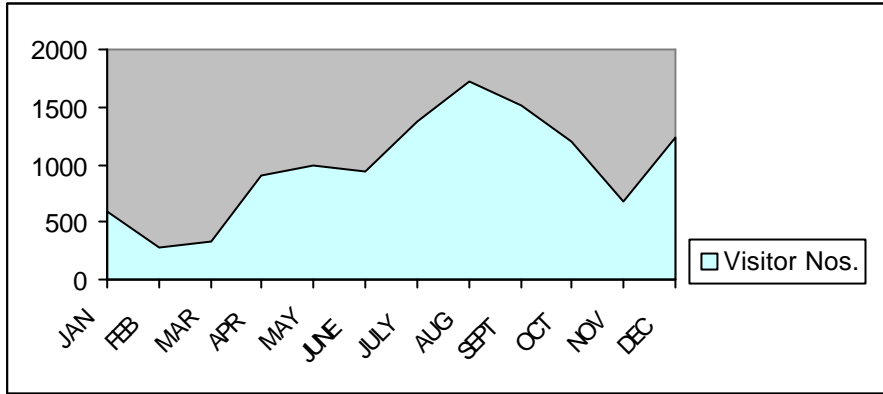
Alston Moor visitor Survey 2002

² Figs. per response – “per person” was not specified in the questionnaire and most figs. are likely to be per group.

(Please note: in “other” above – visitors on holiday - one visitor spent £700 but as this appeared to distort the figures, this is excluded from the averages above)

EC5.7 SEASONALITY

The seasonal nature of the tourist season in Alston is indicated by the visitor figures for the tourist information centre over the period of a year:



(Source: Alston TIC)

The North Pennines Visitor survey identified a much greater degree of seasonality with overnight visitors than with day-visitors. 35 % of summer day visitors said they were likely return over the winter months compared with 8% of summer overnight visitors. This is reflected in the fact that there is a much higher proportion of day-visitors in winter months, some tourism related businesses only opening at week-ends in the winter as this is when most day visitors come.

The seasonal nature of the tourist industry means that much of its labour requirements are seasonal and casual and unable to provide year-round employment or permanent jobs.

EC5.8 MARKETING

Alston Moor Business Association has produced various promotional leaflets in the past and more recently has obtained funding to produce a new promotional pack which is currently being produced for the 2003 tourist season. They also have what is generally recognised as a very attractive web-site promoting Alston Moor.

Alston is marketed by Eden District Council as one of its visitor destinations within the overall Eden area – (attractions and accommodation providers are featured in the Eden Attractions leaflet and Where to Stay in Eden brochure).

However there has been no co-ordinated marketing of the North Pennines area as a whole since the end of 1998 when the North Pennines Tourism Partnership was merged with the North Pennines AONB Steering Group to form the North Pennines Partnership. Much more needs to be done to raise awareness of the area. In the recent North Pennines survey they found that awareness of promotional material concerning the North Pennines was low.

Over 70% of visitors had neither seen nor used any formal promotional material about the North Pennines.

This is however hopefully about to change as the North Pennines Partnership has recently appointed a marketing and sustainable tourism officer which should help to raise the profile of the North Pennines in general.

Cumbria Tourist Board have a new marketing campaign, “Undiscovered Cumbria” to

promote areas outside the Lake District. £10,000 has been allocated for promoting Carlisle and Eden.

This again should help to raise awareness of Alston Moor and the North Pennines and what the area has to offer.

EC6 BUSINESS SUPPORT

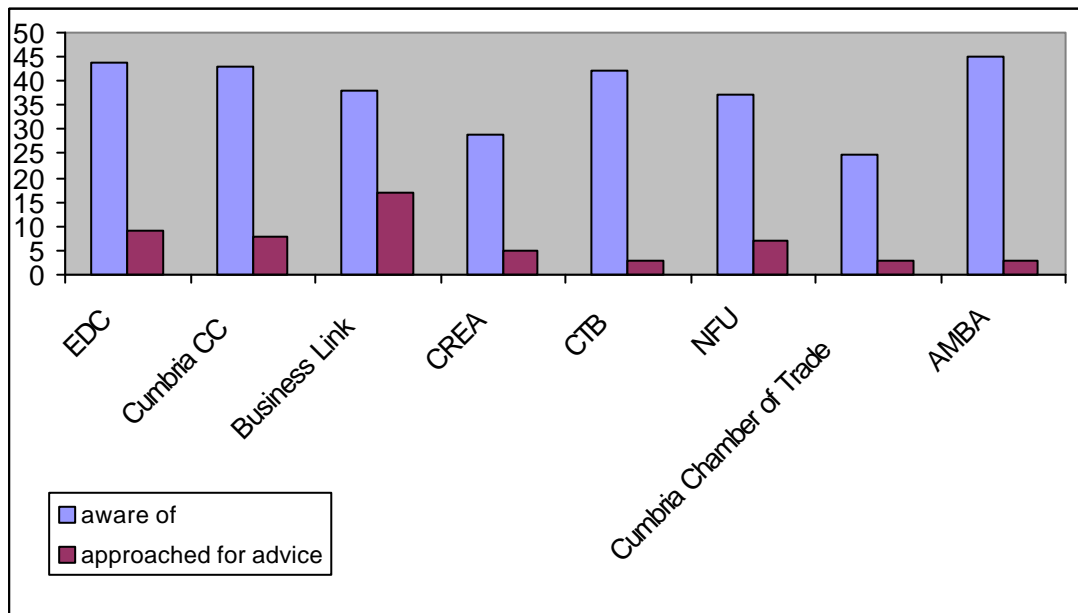
EC6.1 BANKS

There are two banks in Alston, HSBC and Barclays, which both offer a full range of business services although in most cases appointments are needed with visiting bank staff from main branches to access advice and support.

EC6.2 BUSINESS ADVICE SERVICES

The main source of business advice is Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency - CREA - previously Business Link (Rural Cumbria Eden) based 20 miles away at Redhills, Penrith. However it is not necessary to visit their offices as officers will come to Alston to advise. CREA also provides the Farm Business Advisory Service, Cumbria Farm Link.

AWARENESS & USE OF BUSINESS ADVISORY SERVICES



Alston Moor 2002 Business Survey

The relatively high level of enquiries to Business Link reflects the much higher than usual number of enquiries which they received last year during the Foot & Mouth outbreak and also the fact that they were giving recovery grants.

A number of other advisory services are based at the CREA offices including the Small Business Service and the North West Farm Tourism Initiative.

Activ 8 - Business Link in Carlisle also provides services throughout Cumbria.

A range of other support groups exist including:

The Rural Women's Network which is an innovative new service providing

women in Cumbria with the skills and support to set up their own business, to develop existing enterprises or to seek employment.

Rural Futures: a new pilot project set up to help the farming community in Cumbria respond to the need for change. Local co-ordinators from the farming community have been appointed to help find ways of meeting local needs, to improve awareness of opportunities and to establish new local farm development groups and help develop new projects. There is a local co-ordinator and it is hoped to form a new local group.

Enterprising Communities which helps to develop and support a variety of social enterprise projects such as co-operatives and development trusts.

The local authorities also provide support through their economic development departments and as part of their support for recovery after Foot & Mouth, Cumbria County Council has introduced regeneration grants.

EC6.3 NEED TO DEVELOP/FUND BUSINESS EVENTS

Alston Moor Business Association(AMBA) hosts an annual barbecue and holds other occasional events during the year, eg talks and training workshops(depending on funding).

AMBA recognises the need to provide a more comprehensive and regular programme of events in order to inform its members and others of the rapidly developing range of initiatives of which they may be able to take advantage, to improve business skills, and also to raise awareness of local business needs and aspirations to outside agencies.

The North Pennines Showcase was a trade event which was developed when there was a North Pennines business adviser and continued for several years at different locations around the North Pennines. If Alston is to promote itself as a rural centre for arts, media and IT development, to help consolidate and build upon these strong attributes, possibly some event to promote these would be helpful as part of an inward investment programme.

EC6.4 BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Alston Moor Business Association produce a Business Directory and (as described in EC5.8 above) they have an effective web-site.

Three quarters of businesses in the new business directory being produced for 2003 have an e-mail address and most of these also have a web-site.

In the business survey 25% of respondents said that access to broadband in Alston would be one of the main factors affecting their business success (*at the time of the survey broadband was in the pipe-line but not yet available*).

As a result of the Cybermoor project, Alston Moor is one of the first rural areas in England to get a broadband connection. The broadband connection is provided by radio technology which has been installed very recently and there have been some initial problems with the equipment. In order to help prevent the loss of signal in the future Cybermoor is currently looking at the possibility of some form of back-up but in the longer term a fibre optic cable is likely to provide a more reliable solution.

SOCIAL & COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

S1 POPULATION

S1.1 TOTAL POPULATION

2001 census figures are not yet available but the population was estimated as being 2,200 in 1998(*Oxford University population estimate*).

S1.2 POPULATION TRENDS

During the middle of the nineteenth century Alston Moor's population was at its height at between 6000 and 7000 but then declined dramatically to just over 3,000 in 1901. After a slight rise in population in 1921 the population continued to decline until 1971 when it reached an all-time low of 1,902. The population has gradually risen since then to 2065 (*1991 Census*) and an estimated 2,200 in 1998. In the previous appraisal in 1995 it was estimated that a further 250 people in the Ayle/Slaggyford area of Northumberland outside the parish depend on Alston for services and there is no reason for this to have changed.

S1.3 POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

The proportion of households split between the three wards in the Parish is as follows:

Alston	64.3%
Nenthead	21.4%
Garrigill	14.3%

(*Electoral Role statistics*)

S1.4 POPULATION DENSITY¹

The population density for Alston Moor is 0.14 persons per hectare compared with 0.7 for Cumbria as a whole. This puts Alston Moor in the "super-sparse" category. (There are 3 sparsity groupings defined as :

- urban – more than 4 persons per hectare
- sparse – 0.5 - 4 persons per hectare
- super-sparse – under 0.5 persons per hectare)

S1.5 AGE STRUCTURE¹

The previous appraisal noted that the age range of the population on Alston Moor was broadly similar to that for Cumbria as a whole except for a slightly higher percentage of children and lower percentage of 15 –29 year olds. (*1991 census figs*) This still appears to be the case:

- 22.7% of the population were estimated as aged 60 or over in 1995. This is very similar to the Cumbrian average of 22.9%.
- There are slightly fewer in the young adult age group, probably reflecting the lack of job and training opportunities locally: 18.4% on Alston Moor compared with 20.5% for Cumbria as a whole.
- 19.3 children aged 0-14 compared with 18.1 for Cumbria as a whole.

S1.6 SINGLE PARENTS¹

There appear to be a higher than average number of single parents living on Alston Moor. There were estimated to be 27 single parents in the parish in 1995, representing 11.4% of the population compared with 6.7% for Cumbria as a whole. However the figure is probably higher than this according to figures from the benefits agency: In August 1998, 34 lone parents were claiming income support.

S1.7 CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS CLAIMING INCOME SUPPORT

89 dependent children were living in households claiming income support in August 1998.

The age profile was as follows (*Benefits Agency*):

Age	Nos.	%
0 – 4	24	19.0
5 – 8	16	12.7
9 – 10	17	13.5
11 – 13	17	13.5
14 – 15	9	7.1
16 or over	6	4.8

¹ Office for National Statistics - estimates for 1995 except where otherwise stated

S1.8 ELDERLY LIVING ALONE

In 1991 the percentage of households on Alston Moor with elderly people living alone was 14% (*Office for National Statistics*)

S1.9 INDICES OF DEPRIVATION

Alston is ranked 2086 out of a total of 8414 wards in England which puts it within the top 25% of most deprived wards in England on the index of multiple deprivation. Looking at the individual headings of income, employment, health, education, and housing Alston fared much better in education where it is ranked 4649 and fared worst in employment at 1721 followed by income 2089. (*Office of National Statistics yr 2000 figs.*)

S2 HOUSING

S2.1 HOUSING NEED

No housing needs survey has been done since Eden Housing Association took over Eden's Council housing stock five years ago so no up to date information available. However there does seem to be an unsatisfied need for affordable housing both to rent but most particularly to buy.

The main demand for rented accommodation is for 3 and 4 bedroomed houses (there is only one 4 bedroomed house in the stock of social housing). 34 three-bedroomed houses (and one 4-bedroomed house) have been lost from the social housing stock through the right to buy since 1995 out of a previous total of 75 (a dozen smaller houses and flats have also been sold through the right to buy). A housing needs survey is about to be carried out in Alston Moor which may identify the lack of affordable housing, but at present there are no plans to build any more social housing in the area. There is no apparent homeless problem but, again the housing needs survey might discover hidden problems such as people "camping out" in friend's homes.

The community questionnaire identified 12 households (3.8 of respondents) with people in need of alternative accommodation out of a 30% response, all of whom were having difficulty finding affordable accommodation. 8 of the respondents were looking for rented accommodation, 3 to buy and one unspecified. If this is a representative sample it would mean that there are around 40 households where people are looking for alternative affordable accommodation, 10 of which are looking for affordable housing to buy.

Two Castles Housing Association own housing at Jollybeard Gate. When these were originally built it was intended to offer 8 as shared equity homes with the option to purchase the remaining 50%. At that time they weren't able to sell all of them on a shared equity basis, possibly as they were still unaffordable for local people in need, so three went into the rented accommodation stock leaving 5 shared equity homes. However, only one "affordable" home is now left at Jollybeard Gate and there are 13 rented properties.

To avoid the continuing decline in numbers of available affordable housing, any future social housing development which is sold should have conditions attached to ensure that it stays within the "affordable" sector. (eg. some Housing Associations have a buy back clause so that if the occupant wants to sell their property it must be sold back to the Housing Association who then offer it for sale again at below market value as an "affordable" home).

S2.2 HOUSING AVAILABILITY

Rented accommodation:

As described above, a total of 47 dwellings have been sold through "Right to Buy", thus reducing the level of social housing stock since the previous appraisal was carried out when it was described as being in good supply. The only un-let property at present is a single one-bedroom flat on Church Road. There are currently 15 people on the Eden Housing Association waiting list for Alston Moor and 8 people on Two Castles' social housing waiting list. Rent levels of social housing are now comparable

with privately rented housing in Alston but although the volume of privately rented accommodation appears to be increasing slightly it is still not meeting demand according to the local estate agents (demand for privately rented accommodation ranges from 2 bedroom flats to full houses).

Owner-occupied accommodation:

There is a continuing market for properties to renovate but an un-met demand for bungalows and new houses.

S2.3 HOUSE PRICES

Property prices were well below average at the time of the last appraisal in 1995 when it was noted that a lot of property was going for under £40,000. However prices have risen sharply over the last couple of years –eg a terraced house which might have fetched around £45,000 three years ago would probably go for £60,000 –70,000 now and most property is selling for £80,000 upwards representing around a 50% increase over the last three years and 100% increase since 1995. The cheapest properties tend to be former Council houses (around £55,000 average). The idea of selling a house for £100,000 was unheard of here a few years ago. It would have had to be something quite exceptional to fetch that, but now it is commonplace with larger houses going for around £150,000 and even over £200,000. Prices are now comparable with neighbouring areas – eg Eden Valley and Tynedale, but household incomes are still well below average (see EC1.6)

Properties are being bought by wealthier incomers (the Rural Housing Trust estimate that 100,000 people are moving to the country each year). They bring money and work into the area but the down-side of this is that property prices are pushed upwards as they are prepared to pay more than local people can afford.

Eden District has been recognised as one of the most expensive areas for housing in the North West region compared with average local wages in a recent study undertaken by Barclays Private Clients, the wealth management arm of Barclays. The problem on Alston Moor is further exacerbated by lower than average wages in a district which is already characterised by overall low wage levels.

S2.4 NEW HOUSING

There is currently plenty of housing land available. Most of the recent permissions are for detached dwellings (for which there is an apparent shortage). A total of 85 units are yet to be built in Alston, 9 in Nenthead and 10 in Garrigill. Most of the allocation for Alston is in the Raise: 11 at Raise Park and 62 on Field OS No. 1714. The developments at Lowbyer Park and Bruntley Meadows (now on Phase 3) are nearing completion with 3 left to build at Lowbyer and 5 at Bruntley Meadows. However with changes in government policy to encourage more brownfield development, Eden District Council is reconsidering its housing allocations and it is likely that many unimplemented permissions on greenfield sites in rural areas will not be renewed in future.

S2.5 HOUSING CONDITION

Eden Housing Association have been carrying out a systematic programme of improvements and repairs to their properties throughout the district to be completed during 2003.

On Alston Moor, some properties were improved between April 2001 –March 2002 and improvements to the rest are due to be completed by the end of March 2003.

There have been no recent surveys carried out by the local authority so there is no recent housing condition data available for the parish as a whole which would indicate problems with damp, structural problems and levels of disrepair. In the 1991 census 77.7% of dwellings had central heating compared with 74% for Cumbria as a whole and there were slightly fewer dwellings with no inside W.C probably reflecting the harsh climate. Percentages for sharing or lacking a bath or WC and overcrowding were slightly higher than for Cumbria as a whole although actual numbers involved are small.

S2.6 HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY

Two Castles development of 6 two-bedroomed houses at Nenthead (Nent Court) which have priority for elderly are in fact currently in mixed age tenancy due to lack of demand from elderly to fill all the units. Although some are occupied by elderly persons, this development is 2 storey and not suitable for some elderly people.

Grisedale Croft contains 6 sheltered bed-sits although a further 6 sheltered units have now been leased to Cumbria County Council Social Services dept. as residential units as there is greater demand for residential care units(see S3.3 below).

S2.7 SECOND HOMES

The level of second home ownership on Alston Moor is higher than the average for Eden as a whole. On Alston Moor, 10.3 % of homes are not the main place of residence compared with 7.3 % in Eden, but few are now being bought as second homes. Approximately 2% of house sales in the last 2 years were bought as second homes (*Pennine Ways Estate Agents*) so the overall proportion within the housing stock is probably actually decreasing after taking account of the number of new dwellings being constructed (33 between April 2000 & March 2001). However affordability is still a problem (and a growing one) as more people are moving into the parish from more affluent areas (as described in S2.3).

S3 HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

S3.1 EMERGENCY SERVICES

AMBULANCE :

The Moredun Garage operates the ambulance service on a franchise arrangement with 10 personnel trained to attend. There is no-one with paramedic training but the local G.Ps attend emergencies when requested. As there is an ambulance based in Alston, response times are generally good, meeting the 8 minute target for life-threatening calls 75% of the time and the 19 minute target for non life-threatening 999 calls 95% of the time. However, ambulance cover for the county as a whole is thinly spread, some much larger settlements than Alston like Penrith and Keswick only have one ambulance. The consequence of this is that the local ambulance can be called to cover other areas leaving Alston Moor without cover.

FIRE :

There is a retained fire service which currently has a team of 12 firefighters. Performance is very good for a retained service : In 18 out of 19 property fires in the past year they met the target response time of 20 minutes and were only 1 minute over for the one property which was outside the target time.

POLICE :

Whilst fire and ambulance services are perceived locally as being very good, the same cannot be said for police cover.

SATISFACTION WITH POLICE COVER

Police coverage	No.	%
good	15	3
adequate	150	27
poor	374	66

(Alston Moor 2002 Community Questionnaire)

There are 3 constables including a community police officer allocated to Alston Moor which is not sufficient to provide continuous cover. They normally operate separate shifts so there is only one officer on duty at any one time. Although this maximises the amount of time when cover is available it means that the police station is often unmanned. Also problems of public dis-order may be more difficult for a single officer to deal with (however when a task force was brought in to deal with anticipated week-end trouble, nothing happened !). Problems of disorder & criminal damage are caused by a small number of offenders and the police have strategies in place for these. However, in order to investigate crime police need the cooperation of local residents, but one of the problems in a small community like Alston Moor is fear of reprisal and consequently people are reluctant to give evidence.

Police cover in Alston is actually as good if not better than other communities of comparable size which often do not have a nominated presence, but its remote

location leads to poor response times when responding from outside Alston Moor, even though police from Northumberland and Durham sometimes respond if this will result in a quicker response time than waiting for police from Penrith. Although intelligence between neighbouring police forces is shared, Alston's location at the cross-roads between the Penrith-Hexham & Brampton-Durham roads contributes to the probability of criminals travelling into the area from outside.

Incidence of Crime

REPORTED INCIDENTS 1.04.01 TO 31.3.02

type of crime	no. of incidents	% of crimes reported
criminal damage	48	40.3
theft	19	16
offences against person	17	14.3
burglary(dwelling)	14	11.8
burglary (other)	9	7.6
Other (car theft /fraud /drugs /robbery)	12	10
TOTAL	119	100

(Source – Cumbria Constabulary)

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime appears to be greater than actual crime:

55.9 crimes per 1,000 population were reported on Alston Moor compared with 54.6 per 1,000 in Eden as a whole and 75.4 per 1,000 in Cumbria. Therefore even if some crime is not reported, incidents are still not high in number.

CONCERNS ABOUT CRIME

Crime	No.	%
vandalism/criminal damage	375	66
illegal use of drugs	252	45
drunkenness/anti-social behaviour	240	42
burglary/theft	180	32
theft of/from a car	66	12
violent crime/domestic violence	60	11
other	13	2

(Alston Moor 2002 Community Questionnaire)

It is interesting to note that although the highest percentage of recorded crime was for criminal damage which relates to peoples' fear of crime, their concern about use of illegal drugs is far greater than the reported incidence. There was only one drugs case whilst there were 48 cases of criminal damage between April 2001 and March 2002.

ELDERLY PEOPLE - (75+) MAIN CONCERNS ABOUT CRIME

Crime	No.	% in age-group
Vandalism & Criminal Damage	22	65
Burglary	17	50
Drunkenness & anti-social behaviour	15	44
Illegal use of drugs	13	38

It is probably not surprising in view of their vulnerability to find that elderly people were relatively more concerned about burglary. This does however illustrate the need to ensure that old people are taking all the precautions they can to protect themselves from this crime both to reduce fear and the actual incidence of burglary (see below).

Crime prevention & reducing fear of crime

A community police officer is based in Alston to work with local residents to improve crime prevention and reduce fear of crime (eg. by visiting elderly people at risk to ensure that they are taking the necessary precautions to protect themselves). Farm and Neighbourhood Watch schemes are being encouraged (although Neighbourhood Watch got the lowest response when local residents were asked what crime prevention measures they would like to see in place in Alston).

PREFERRED MEASURES TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY SAFETY

Measure	No.	%
Police stn manned full-time (may include civilian staff)	391	69
Greater police presence in Alston	378	67
more drug/drink education/prevention	175	31
community safety group(s)	143	25
CCTV	128	23
Neighbourhood Watch	108	19

(Alston Moor 2002 Community Questionnaire)

The overwhelming majority of responses were for a fully manned police station and greater police presence in Alston.

Local residents' concerns about vandalism and anti-social behaviour should be seen in relation to young peoples' concerns: The young peoples' questionnaire indicated that their greatest concern was about being bored and having nothing to do. Providing more for them to do would reduce the incidence of young people creating a nuisance of themselves out of boredom (see S7.7). However young people in general sometimes get blamed unfairly for vandalism and anti-social behaviour when it is only a small minority of residents who are causing offence and they are not necessarily young people.

Young people were asked if there are any times or places where they feel unsafe. 6 answered that they felt safe, the other answers are as follows:

Alone in the dark	25
Front St/Market Cross	13
Dark alleys/back streets	11
Cemetery/Firs Wood	5
Back of Coop/Crown	4

The fear of being in the dark or in poorly lit areas underlines the need to improve street lighting which would both reduce the fear of crime and aid crime prevention. Areas which have been identified during the consultation stages (*focus groups and photographic exercise*) as areas which feel unsafe and/or neglected are as follows:
 Vandalism: Pavilion; seat in front of Coop broken – no longer there;
 Litter: Market Square after Fri/Sat night;
 Dog-fouling: various, eg –Gossipgate Walk, Tyne Willows footpath below Hendersons;
 Grafitti: under back of Crown, The Firs (garage area)
 Lack of street lights: St Paul's Lonning, part Bruntley Meadows footpath, part Church road, and part of The Butts. The lights on the Church Gates also belong to the street-lighting system but are not currently working.

S3.2 HEALTH SERVICES

Alston Cottage Hospital

The cottage hospital provides the focus for health care on Alston Moor. It has 13 beds including one maternity bed. The last appraisal reported that there were about 10 deliveries per year. Since new regulations came into force which means that they are only allowed to keep maternity patients in for 6 hours, they have only had one live birth (which was an emergency and the patient was later transferred elsewhere). It is a great pity that the usefulness and convenience of this facility has been greatly reduced by new regulations and there is now the possibility that the maternity bed could be lost at some stage through lack of use.

Nursing care and terminal care is provided at the hospital and the medical practice provides 24 hour medical and casualty cover. The hospital also provides X-Ray, chiropody, physiotherapy and dental services. At the time of the previous appraisal a small prefabricated building in the hospital grounds was used as a centre for those

with Alzheimer's disease or other cases of confusion. It is now used by the health visitor and for smoking cessation sessions. There is also an integrated day unit within the hospital run jointly by Eden Valley Primary Care Trust, Age Concern and Social Services. This joint service which is unique to Alston operates 5 days a week, providing both hospital aftercare and social activities for the elderly (eg. games, quizzes, craft activities and speakers). The hospital is also an important source of employment, employing one full-time nurse, 16 part-time nurses and 13 (part time) health care assistants as well as 11 non medical staff.

Alston Medical Practice

The Alston Medical Practice is attached to Alston Cottage Hospital. It is run by two G.Ps and there are also branch surgeries at Nenthead twice a week (plus emergencies only on Saturdays) and Garrigill on Friday afternoons. There is an appointment system at Alston but appointments are not required for Nenthead or Garrigill. The practice area extends from Slaggyford to Tynehead and from Nenthead to Hartside with approximately 2,300 patients on the list. This means that Alston Moor has a better than average doctor :patient ratio at .91 per 1,000 population compared with the national average of .55 per 1,000 and so it is usually possible to see a doctor without having to wait longer than a day or two at the most. The practice provides the following regular clinics : Well person, Ante-natal, Well-baby, Elderly, Minor Surgery and Diabetic. Also attached to the medical practice are 2 part time and 2 full-time district nurses, a health visitor, a community mid-wife, a social worker, occupational therapist, dietician and community psychiatric nurse. Both doctors provide child health surveillance, childhood immunisation, minor surgery, contraceptive services and cervical smears and one of them provides cryotherapy, hypnotherapy and N.L.P for selected patients. The Alston Medical Practice is investigating the possibility of joining the Cuedoc out of hours Co-operative although the local GPs are continuing to attend out of hours visits at present. Alston's isolation and consequent distance from other doctors on call is a cause for concern locally as to how this would work in the long run. This is of particular concern during bad weather in winter months when Eden Valley doctors could have difficulty in getting to Alston.

Local Mortality Rates

The SMR² for Alston for all causes has varied over the last 10 years between 82 and 125 but generally balances out at around the national average and average for Eden (which is close to the national average). The largest proportion of deaths on Alston Moor and in Eden as a whole were caused by diseases of the circulatory system (around 43%) and malignant neoplasms or cancer (around 30%). However the SMRs for these diseases were slightly below the national average.

S3.3 SOCIAL SERVICES

Residential/nursing care

Grisedale Croft Residential Care Home in Alston is run by Cumbria Care, a non-profit making company contracting to Cumbria County Council. Since the 1995 appraisal, the home has been expanded from 11 to 19 residential care beds with 6 units of sheltered accommodation (previously 7). Originally built with 12 sheltered units, as observed in the previous appraisal, the demand for sheltered accommodation has declined since the introduction of Care-line into people's homes. This is a push-button/ cord-pull call system linked to the emergency services with a named neighbour or relative who is called to assist in the event of an emergency. The nearest nursing home is Milton Hall near Brampton, followed by homes at Penrith and Hexham, so local residents needing nursing care have to move away from Alston which can create difficulties for elderly people having to go a 40 mile round trip or more to visit their friends. With infrequent bus services if they are unable to drive visiting becomes very difficult and consequently the elderly from Alston in these homes may feel isolated.

² Standardised mortality rates (SMRs) are used in place of crude mortality rates to allow comparison between populations with different age & sex structures. The national average is 100, an SMR greater than 100 indicates a higher than average death rate whilst an SMR of less than 100 indicates a lower than average death rate.

Other services for the elderly

Age Concern have a development officer for Alston & East Fellside who was based in Alston 5 days a week but cover in Alston has now been reduced to two days. The local officer reports that it would be preferable to have a permanent presence.

However they do have a shop in Alston but would have a better presence in terms of serving the elderly if the office was more apparent. Age Concern organise a fortnightly coffee-morning at the Masonic Hall. They tried to set up a lunch club after Samuel Kings School (where it was formerly held) was unable to host it any longer, but had difficulty in finding an alternative arrangement that was affordable. (Lunches at Samuel Kings School had cost around £1.75 compared with £3.50 at a local commercial venue). There is therefore no lunch club currently in operation in Alston. They have also tried to set up a befriending scheme and handyman scheme but have found that with the low pay they are able to offer it is difficult to recruit people with the right abilities. All these ventures would be very valuable but have failed through insufficient funds.

A bank of blankets is held at the Age Concern shop for emergencies (eg if heating is cut off). They supply gas and electric heaters, gas cylinders and electricity payments as part of the 'Winter Warmth' scheme for old people. They also have a home day care scheme where volunteer hosts invite up to 4 older people into their homes for the day, providing cooked meals and social activities. They offer a wide range of services including one-to-one friendly advice and support, home visits and fact-sheets, their strong links with the local community enabling them to respond to a wide range of enquiries.

Cumbria County Council Social Services provide home-care, meals on wheels, day-care (through the day-care unit at the hospital – see S3.2 above), dietary support and organise respite stays (in Grisedale Croft or elsewhere if preferred). They aim to provide a service integrated with health care and to tailor the options available to meet individual needs.

Care for the elderly is generally considered good and there was a high level of satisfaction amongst the elderly consulted at the focus group consultation stage. However, as identified in the previous appraisal, there is a need for better transport provision, but now that there is a community mini-bus this problem should be able to be resolved. Ways of providing additional funding to implement the proposals to set up a lunch club, befriending service and handyman service should also be investigated.

Advisory services

Penrith and Eden District Citizens Advice Bureau continue to operate a weekly outreach service at the Town Hall in Alston and they are planning to extend this to provide a home visiting service for disabled house-bound people.

Cumbria Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service (CADAS) is employing a new worker funded by the Communities Against Drugs Initiative to cover South Carlisle and Eden. They are also providing training for a peer counsellor to advise young people and are hoping to organise a Drug & Alcohol Introductory course in Alston soon which will be aimed at providing factual information for all ages.

New services introduced towards the end of 2002 include a jobs surgery operated jointly by Connexions Cumbria, Penrith Job Centre and Carlisle Benefits Agency office, and a pensions surgery both of which are planned to be held on a monthly basis in the Town Hall.

S4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

S4.1 COUNCIL INFORMATION POINTS - ACCESS TO COUNCIL SERVICES

The local council's integration of tourist information and community information has proved to be a resounding success. Although it took a while for local residents to get used to the fact that they can access local information of all kinds including district and county council services at the Council Information Centre (which is also the Tourist Information Centre) it is now proving to be very well used with 7,444 community enquiries being recorded between September 2001 and August 2002. (There were 11,735 tourist enquiries within the same period). The use of the centre as a focal point for information delivery and collection by the Cybermoor project has probably been instrumental in encouraging local use and it has been used for this

purpose for this Market Towns/Vital Villages project. The centre provides public access internet with video-conferencing and e-mail facilities.

The parish clerk's office is located within the town hall and the presence of the County Council's Neighbourhood Services office also within the same building provides further access to County Council services.

There is also a Nenthead outpost at the primary school offering videoconferencing, internet and e-mail facilities and providing the opportunity to videoconference with staff at the Alston Information Centre to access local information and services not held at Nenthead.

There is therefore good access to all levels of Council services within Alston Moor.

S4.2 COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

A large number of people are involved in a very wide range of clubs and associations for the size of the population covering a variety of age groups (there are approximately 80 clubs and societies within the parish ranging from Historical Society to Bowling Club, Flower Club to Pantomime Society, amateur and professional craft groups, music groups, etc.)

S4.3 COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

There have been a variety of economic development initiatives over the years either linked to the parish council or local business association. In 1997 Alston Moor Action Partnership was set up to develop a rural challenge bid and although unsuccessful nationally, Alston Moor was the winning entry for Cumbria. More recently a feasibility study for a swimming pool/leisure centre was led by a group known as AMPLE (Alston Moor Project for Leisure and the Environment).

The most successful community based initiative to date has probably been the refurbishment of Alston Town Hall and recently the acquisition of a community minibus by the community minibus group.

The local business association has carried out a range of promotional projects over the years, the most successful in terms of its impact outside the area probably being the Oliver Twist Trail which built upon the filming of LWT's production of Oliver Twist filmed in 1999.

S5 SPORT, LEISURE AND OPEN SPACE

S5.1 LOCAL SPORTS & LEISURE FACILITIES

Formal Sports provision:

Formal sports provision is provided on Tyne Willows Playing Fields which are well maintained as they are managed by Samuel Kings' School. These playing fields in their attractive riverside location form an important amenity area which is also used for local events such as the Sheep-dog trials and Gala Day. At present there are 3 football pitches: an under10's, under 12's and full-size pitch. There is no local rugby or cricket team. There are public tennis courts attached to Nenthead village hall. The only tennis courts in Alston are at Samuel Kings School.

Informal recreation:

- The Fairhill recreation ground provides an informal recreation / play area. It has recently developed a sportswall and has plans for a wide range of further improvements to include improved toddler's play area, cycle track and levelling the football pitch.
- Garrigill has an attractive village green and there are children's recreational facilities in a pleasant play area behind the village hall.
- Nenthead has a good children's play area but a rather uneven playing field located on reclaimed land.
- There is high quality fishing available on local rivers with licences being offered at very reasonable prices.
- Grouse shooting is also important to some sections of the local economy and to the preservation of heather moorland.
- The area offers excellent countryside for walking and many local people make use of the extensive public footpath network.

occasionally	187	33
never	54	10

Most people travel to Hexham, Penrith or Carlisle but some travel to Newcastle and a few go even further afield.

S5.4 WHY PEOPLE DO NOT TAKE PART IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Reason	No
not available in Alston	183
not enough spare time	130
too far to travel	100
facilities substandard in Alston	82
not interested	61
not available at suitable time	55
too expensive	53
no transport	31

S6 CULTURE AND HERITAGE

S6.1 CULTURAL FACILITIES

There is a privately run art gallery, a craft gallery, a community museum and a public library (open 4 days a week) in Alston.

However the nearest cinema is 20 miles away.

The North Pennines rural touring programme brings performing arts to the local town hall, otherwise the nearest theatre is 28 miles away, and the nearest arts centre 24m away.

There are also fairly frequent musical events (but rarely classical music)

The biggest needs identified in the community questionnaire were for a cinema and more musical events:

FACILITIES/EVENTS PEOPLE WOULD ATTEND REGULARLY IF AVAILABLE IN ALSTON:

arts:

cinema	398
regular music:	240
any kind of music	31
folk	16
jazz	10
rock	20
classical	39
other	56
other events:	
theatre/drama	12
other(including dance)	17

S6.2 REGULAR EVENTS

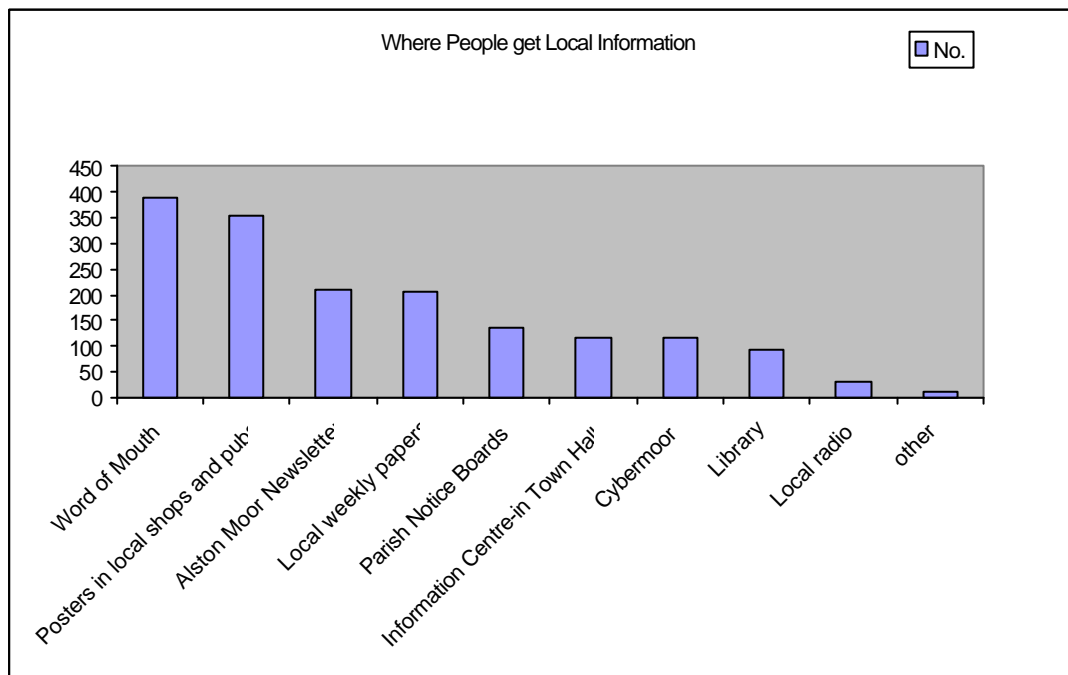
- Alston, Nenthead and Garrigill each have their own gala day and the local schools association runs an annual duck race as an end of term fund-raising event in July.
- There are annual sheepdog trials in June and a sheep & goat show in September.
- Alston Fire Show on the nearest Saturday to bonfire night needs to find a new site if it is to continue –it was cancelled in 2001 and 2002 (insurance requirements mean the existing site is no longer suitable). It was undoubtedly the most spectacular community event on Alston Moor and it attracted people from miles around. There was a lantern procession accompanied by local musicians at the start of the event and each year the bonfire was built with a different theme so that it became a piece of creative

work in itself. The standard of fireworks was also excellent and many local residents would like to see the event re-instated.

- There is a well established annual Christmas Craft Fair run by the Alston Moor Craftworkers' Co-operative.
- In 2001 and 2002 a Christmas Market was held in the Butts and it is hoped that this will become a regular feature.
- For several years now there has also been an annual pantomime to brighten up the winter months.

S6.3 MECHANISMS FOR REPORTING AND COMMENTING ON LOCAL EVENTS AND ISSUES

- Alston Moor Newsletter is a well established quarterly local newsletter in A5 format.
- The main local weekly newspaper is the Cumberland and Westmorland Herald based in Penrith but the Hexham Courant and the countywide Cumberland News also cover the Alston area.
- Media coverage is provided by Radio Cumbria based in Carlisle and BBC regional television based in Newcastle. The area is less well served by commercial channels as technically Alston is within Border TV area so it is difficult to get Tyne Tees to cover the Alston area but in terms of local television reception in most parts of the parish people get Tyne Tees rather than Border.
- The Cybermoor community website is providing an excellent medium for communicating local news and for people to communicate and voice opinions on local issues via the discussion groups, although at the time of the community survey it was not high on the list of how people find out about events. However, it is relatively new and also the web-site has been re-designed since then to make it more user friendly and able to respond much more immediately to local events and issues. There is quite a noticeable difference in response between the younger age groups and over 60's: 23% of 18 – 59 year olds use Cybermoor compared with 12% of over-60's.



S6.4 COMMUNITY VENUES

Alston Moor is well served by community halls:

Alston:

Since the last parish appraisal in 1995, Alston Town Hall has been completely transformed from a vacant building with serious structural problems into a multi-purpose venue at the heart of community life.

It contains two multi use spaces: a main hall upstairs with a stage, adjoining kitchen facilities and toilets, which is used for larger events and a smaller meeting room downstairs which has a bar area with facilities for tea and coffee-making. These

spaces are well used for a wide variety of meetings, evening classes, live performances, soft play, Church coffee mornings, jumble sales and now also for the new monthly jobs and pensions surgeries. The town hall is also the venue for the annual craft fair.

Also housed within the town hall is the Council Information / Tourist Information Centre, an office shared by the Town Hall Trustees, Parish Council and Citizens Advice Bureau, further offices occupied by Cybermoor and the County Council Neighbourhood Services, and until recently the local film company had its editing suite here.

A rear extension on the ground floor provides space for the pre-school play-group and until the end of December 2002 has also been used by the Kids Club (see EC3.5).

A foyer area at the rear entrance is currently used to house Alston Moor Historical Society's archive material.

The Topp situated at the top of the town was originally built as a school and is leased from Capita on behalf of the County Council who own the building. It is run by a users committee, the Topp Community Project, which is in the final stages of registration as a charity. The building houses an office currently occupied by Cybermoor and a multi-use space (plus kitchen facilities) and is used regularly by the Mothers & Toddlers, 2¹/₂ Club, Rainbows, Brownies and Guides, Ladies' Keep Fit, Line dancing and Akaido. It can also be hired for meetings etc. and currently has spare capacity for further uses.

The Masonic Hall provides a further venue in Alston and is used regularly by a variety of groups, eg Women's Institute, Over 60's Club.

Nenthead:

Nenthead village hall which was the original school is a much valued venue for local functions and the original reading room provides a further small meeting room. (These buildings were both part of the legacy of the former Quaker owned London Lead Company who encouraged education of their workers and their families – see S6.6)

Garrigill:

Garrigill village hall which was opened in 1993 is the result of concerted local fund-raising which enabled the former church institute to be refurbished and extended. The building also includes kitchen facilities and changing rooms and Eden District Council built new public conveniences as an extension.

S6.5 CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

There are historic and cultural links with Victorian engineers: John Smeaton of Eddystone lighthouse fame who was also responsible for the Nentforce Level and McAdam of tarmac fame who designed the road over Hartside pass. The area also has strong connections with the poet W H Auden and an exhibition held at Nenthead Mines has helped to publicise this.

S6.6 HISTORIC ASSOCIATIONS

The area's historic importance as a lead mining centre which provided lead for some of the great cathedrals of Europe makes it distinctive. The main era of mining activity was from the 17th to 19th centuries when the Quaker owned London Lead Company were responsible for most of the mining activity in the area, but before that the Romans mined silver here. For years the attraction of the riches underground brought people from all over the country and from abroad with influxes of Belgian and Italian miners in the 19th and early 20th centuries, so the area has quite a cosmopolitan history. Remnants of the Roman occupation are a fortification known as Whitley Castle close to the Pennine Way and the Maiden Way roman road part of which runs behind the Raise to join the Hartside Road.

There are also some fortified farmhouses and bastle houses in the area. Randalholme and Clarghyll Hall are reminders of the days of the border reivers.

S6.7 HERITAGE-BASED COMMUNITY GROUPS

Several heritage groups exist on Alston Moor indicating the importance of our local heritage:

- North Pennines Heritage Trust (based at Nenthead, the location of what was once the biggest mining complex in the area)
- Alston Moor Historical Society
- Alston Goods Shed Trust

- Walton Memorial Restoration Group
- South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society
- North Pennines Archeology & Wildlife Trust

S6.8 ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY GROUPS

Several Arts groups exist on Alston Moor both professional and amateur indicating the importance of the arts to the local community:

- Alston Moor Craft Workers' Cooperative
- Alston Moor Arts & Crafts Workshop
- Alston Digital Arts group
- Alston Theatre Group
- Alston Amateur Dramatic Society
- Alston Moor Pantomime Society
- Alston Angeli (Women's Choir)
- Pennine Parnassus Music Club

There are also a large number of individuals involved in creative activity who are not necessarily members of any organised group including professional and amateur artists, writers, and musicians (classical music including early music as well as folk, rock and jazz are all represented at a professional level)

S6.9 CHURCHES

Although historically there was a strong Quaker presence on Alston Moor as they owned the London Lead Company, a stronger religious influence seems to have been the preaching of John Wesley in the North Pennines, and consequently the predominant denomination throughout the area is Methodism.

Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodists and Quakers are all represented in Alston and there are parish churches at Nenthead, Garrigill, and Kirkhaugh.

All the churches struggle to attract larger congregations and to maintain buildings.

The Methodists, Roman Catholics and Anglican churches all have representatives at county level on the organisation "Churches Together in England" which seeks to address problems ecumenically. Locally the churches are working together, the Methodists and Catholics even sharing premises– (much to the surprise of some Irish visitors!).

Churches Together on Alston Moor, as part of Churches Together in England, endeavour to meet the challenge of rural ministry as in similar areas of the UK. In its propagation of the Gospel at the start of the 21st century the Christian Church of different traditions works ecumenically where possible and not least through its individual members. The Churches also continue to adjust to ever-changing circumstances, seeking to be relevant and sensitive to the varied needs of the local community whilst also pointing to wider global issues.

S7 FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

S7.1 YOUTH CLUB

For several years there has been no youth club on Alston Moor.

The Alston Moor Sports & Youth Project (referred to in S5.1) is a project to improve the Tyne Willows pavilion to provide space there for a youth club and to employ a youth worker. Although they still need more funding, they have obtained sufficient funds to make a start:

A youth worker has now been appointed to work 6 hours a week for six months and improvements are about to commence on the pavilion. The parish council has promised funding to allow the project to continue for a further six months and the Sports and Youth Project are seeking additional funding to provide a second worker. Until essential work on the pavilion is completed there is however no youth club venue but in the meantime two very successful discos have been held in the town hall.

S7.2 OTHER ORGANISED ACTIVITIES

Guides, scouts etc:

There are Guides, Brownies and Rainbows but no Cubs or Scouts at present. However it very much depends on available volunteers. For instance, the Rainbow group may have to close in the near future unless another volunteer can be found as the Guider for the Rainbows is moving away.

Alston Gym Club:

Alston Gym Club organises trips eg to the climbing walls in Penrith and Keswick, they have taken a group to see an Ice Show in Newcastle, and in the summer they regularly take children to a holiday camp at Derwentwater with the help of funding from the Cumbria Youth Alliance.

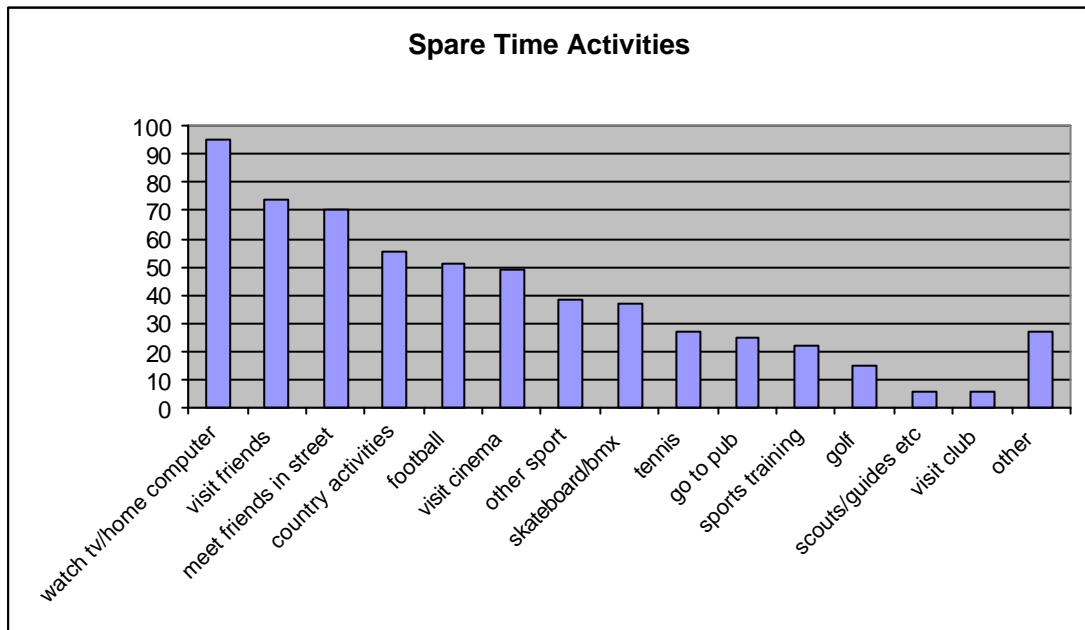
Alston Moor Sports Club:

Alston Moor Sports Club was formed from the amalgamation of Alston Moor juniors and the adults' football teams. This year the under 13's are joining with Allendale to make up a team which should help to bridge the gap between the under 12's and adults.

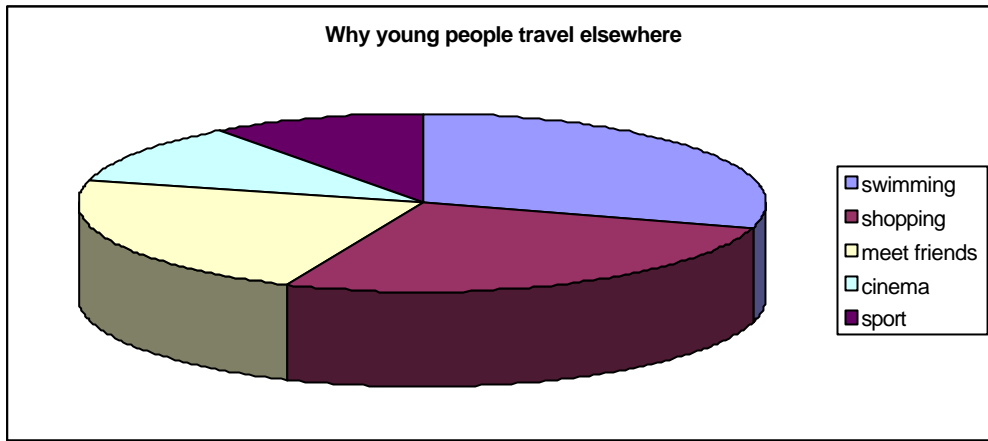
The club is planning to put on a pilot 6 week professional coaching course in the spring to coach the younger players as well as the managers and other enthusiastic volunteers. If this is successful they would try to get funding for a longer term project in future.

S7.3 SPARE TIME ACTIVITIES

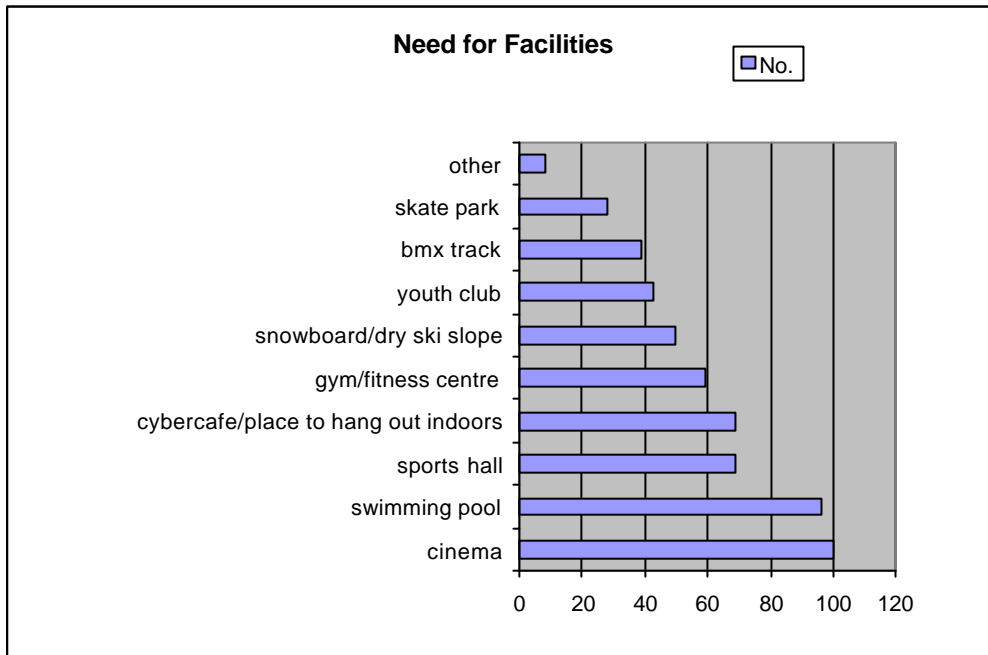
The consultation exercise has identified how although Alston is a good place to bring up young children, as they get older there is little for them to do. The following results from the Young People's Questionnaire which was aimed at the 11 – 17 age group illustrates how young people spend their time, what improvements they would like to see and what concerns they have:



S7.4 Main REASONS FOR TRAVELLING OUTSIDE ALSTON MOOR FOR LEISURE



S7.5 FACILITIES YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD USE IF AVAILABLE IN ALSTON



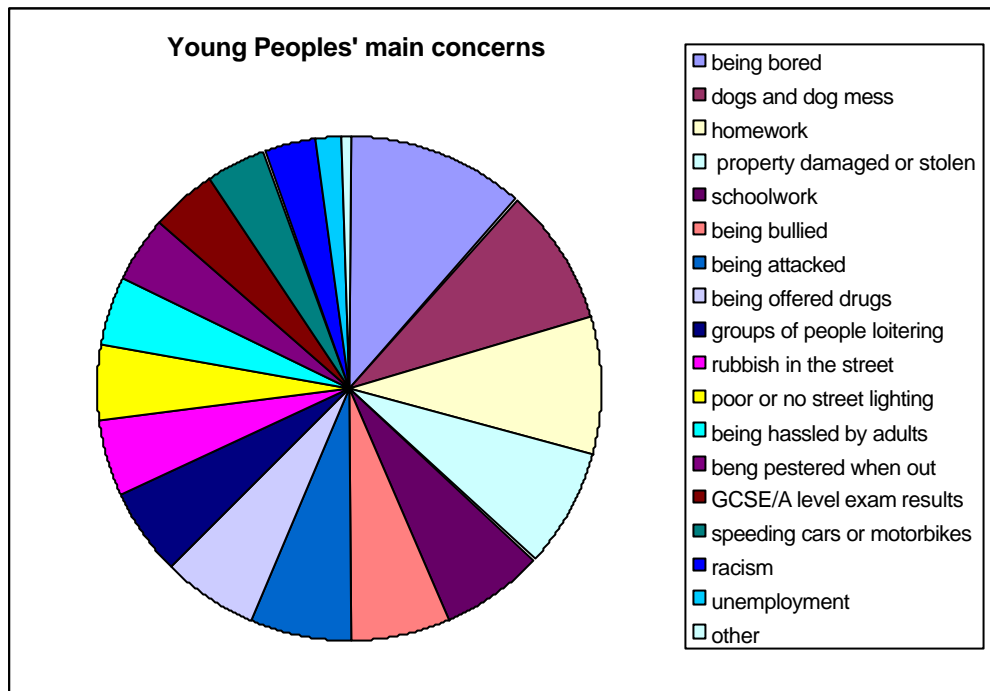
S7.6 OTHER THINGS WHICH WOULD MAKE ALSTON MOOR BETTER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

More organised trips away and better transport to towns were the highest priorities followed by more jobs and more say in community decisions

more organised trips away	71
better transport to larger towns	63
more jobs	54
more say for young people in community decisions	51
more organised sports/coaching	47
more after school activities	44
more affordable housing for young people	39
more work experience/training opportunities	24
more confidential advice/information	15

S7.7 THINGS WHICH CONCERN YOUNG PEOPLE

Being bored or having nothing to do came top of the list of young people' concerns:



S7.8 WHAT THEY HOPE TO DO WHEN THEY LEAVE SCHOOL

Only 18% expected to carry on to Higher Education, whilst 50% would look for a job. 53% expected to move away either to get a job or to study.

move away to get a job	35%
move away to study	14%
live on Alston Moor and work elsewhere	9%
try to get a job on Alston Moor	7%
live on Alston Moor and study elsewhere	4%
don't know	30%

7.9 THREE THINGS YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE MOST ABOUT ALSTON MOOR

friendly community	38
countryside/fresh air/peace	30
small-easy to get around/safe	19

7.10 THREE THINGS YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE LEAST ABOUT ALSTON MOOR

lack of facilities	50
boring	39
poor environment (rubbish, vandalism,dog-fouling)	17

7.11 OTHER NEW INITIATIVES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE

Peer Counsellor:

Cumbria Alcohol & Drugs Advisory Service are training a young adult to become a peer counsellor for young people on Alston Moor (see S3.3). This should help to address young peoples' concerns about being offered drugs and help to re-assure parents that their children are being properly advised.

Voices in Cumbria:

Voices in Cumbria is a project which has been set up by Cumbria Youth Alliance to create a forum for young people to have a say about things that concern them and a new Alston Voices group has recently been developed as part of North Voices representing Carlisle and Eden.

This should help to address young peoples' concerns about having more say in community decisions.

7.12 VOLUNTEERS FOR YOUTH PROJECTS

In the community questionnaire an encouraging number of people said they were willing to help with youth activities as follows:

Youth trips	24
Youth Club	23
Youth Arts	18
Youth Sports	17
Scouts & Guides	13

TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATIONS & ACCESSIBILITY

T1 - EASE OF TRAVEL TO AND FROM THE LOCAL AREA

Ease of travel can be divided into two main categories, namely accessibility by car and accessibility by public transport.

T1.1 DISTANCE TO A NATIONAL NETWORK OF DUAL CARRIAGEWAY ROADS

Alston is 20 miles from The M6 motorway. It is 24 miles from the A69 Carlisle – Newcastle trunk road (which is partly dual carriageway) when travelling in an eastbound direction going towards Newcastle, and 18 miles when travelling westbound towards Carlisle. Nenthead and Garrigill are each about 4 miles from Alston so for travel in most directions this means they are slightly further.

T1.2 DISTANCE AND AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME BY CAR TO NEAREST LARGE TOWN

The market towns of Penrith and Hexham are approximately 20 miles and a 40 minute drive away. The city of Carlisle is just under an hour away and Newcastle upon Tyne is just over an hour way (distances from Alston: Penrith 20, Hexham 24, Carlisle 30, Newcastle 45miles)

T1.3 DISTANCE FROM MAIN BUS STOPS TO TOWN CENTRE

The bus stops are within a 5 minute walk of the town centre

T1.4 TRAVEL TIME TO THE NEAREST LARGE TOWN BY BUS

The quickest bus service is the 888 service which takes 40 minutes to Penrith and 45 minutes to Hexham but it only runs to Penrith in the summer.

T1.5 TRANSPORT LINKS

There are regular services throughout the year to Carlisle, Hexham, Newcastle and Haltwhistle but in winter there is only a service to Penrith on Saturdays.

There are also services to Haydon Bridge on schooldays and on Tuesdays & Fridays in school holidays.

There are no bus links to Teesdale and only one Summer Saturday bus from Weardale. This is a return bus service from Durham to Kendal via Alston and Penrith. However quite a few people in upper Weardale come to Alston rather than to Stanhope for local shops and services but these are visitors coming by car.

TRANSPORT LINKS:

Destination	Road No.	Train Link	Coach Link	Airport	Journey Time		Bus Route	Frequency
					by Car	by Bus		
Langwathby	A686	Settle-Carlisle			25mins	35mins	887	2 Sat only
Penrith	A686	West-Coast line	M6 routes		35mins	50mins	887	2 Sat only
						40mins	888	1/daysummer
Hexham	A686	Carlisle-Newcastle			40mins	45mins	888	3/day
Newcastle	A686/A69	East Coast line	M1/A1 routes	International airport	70mins	100mins	888	3/day
Carlisle	A689/A69	West Coast Line	M6 routes		50mins	70mins	680	3/day
Brampton	A689/A69	Carlisle-Newcastle			35mins	45mins	postbus	1/day
Haltwhistle	A686/A69	Carlisle-Newcastle			30mins	40mins	681	3/day
Barnard Castle	B6277				50mins			
Scotch Corner	B6277/A66		M1/A1 routes		60mins			
Stanhope	A689				30mins	50mins	X85	1 Sat summer
Bishop Auckland	A689				45mins	80mins	X85	1 Sat summer
Durham	A689/A690	East Coast line	M1/A1 routes		60mins	105mins	X85	1 Sat summer

Based on table compiled by Paul Huish, member of Transport & Communications Working Group

T1.6 PROVISION ON BUSES FOR WHEELCHAIRS, BABY BUGGIES AND CYCLES

Local bus services provide for wheelchairs and buggies which are taken in the luggage compartment. Bikes are taken but they also have to go in the luggage compartment as there are no purpose-made racks.

T1.7 PLANS FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT PROVISION

No changes to public transport provision are currently proposed.

Most bus contracts have several years to run except the Carlisle College service which is run on an annual subsidy. However, as long as the college continues to subsidise the term-time bus it looks set to continue as it is a relatively well used service and the County Council subsidise the holiday period.

T1.8 ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

There are several scheduled capital schemes for re-surfacing due to take place before the end of March 2003 (depending on winter weather conditions) as follows:

- A686 Clargill to the County Boundary
Hartside Café to Plantation Corner
Two Top Bridge
- A689 Killhope Cross to Nenthall

When re-surfacing roads the County Council recognise the opportunity to incorporate improved road markings and other options such as cats eyes:

In Nenthead there are very real concerns about speeding motorbikes travelling through the centre of the village and local consultations suggested several slow signs as one descends into the village from the Killhope direction and a 30mph sign painted on the road on red tarmac as one enters the speed limit.

The cross roads at the centre of the village is also close to the children's play-ground and there are particular concerns about road safety for children here. A pedestrian crossing has been proposed by local residents and although this cannot be incorporated into the re-surfacing scheme it is likely to go forward as a scheme in the near future.

All the high roads into Alston often tend to be foggy and include hazardous bends. In these conditions cat's eyes are a tremendous help in guiding drivers but in some cases there aren't any at present. It is hoped that the County Council will address this issue in any new re-surfacing schemes on these roads and in view of the many bends on the Hartside road, a great improvement would be to have cat's eyes all the way down whereas at present they only exist on part of the route.

There is a voluntary one way lorry scheme through Alston, using the B6294 Blagill Road as an alternative route. This scheme was originally started because of severe problems of congestion in the main street in Alston due to heavy lorries travelling in both directions when the street is not wide enough. There are proposals in the Local Transport Plan (LTP) to improve the Blagill Road for heavy traffic and £500,000 has been allocated for this purpose. Since this was first proposed, the Blue Circle cement works in Weardale which generated a lot of traffic through Alston has closed. It is important however for the lorry ban to continue to reduce congestion caused by other heavy traffic and that the Blagill improvements are still carried out. The last revision to the LTP was after the closure was announced and the proposal is still included in the plan at present. It is a "priority 2" scheme which means that it will be a couple of years before it comes forward into the "preparation pool" when the proposal will be looked at in more detail. Whether or not it is still needed will then be assessed.

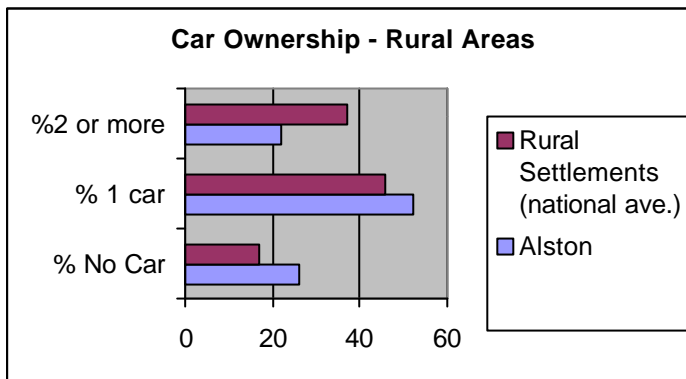
Other proposed improvements include a Winter Hazard Warning Scheme for High Places which will incorporate police proposals to improve signing arrangements.

T2 EASE OF ACCESS TO SERVICES

T2.1 CAR OWNERSHIP

The high level of car ownership 26.6% of households without a car compared with the corresponding County figure of 31% in 1998 ¹ does not reflect an affluent society as household income figures make clear. Rather it is a necessity for many living in such a remote location.

Also if compared with DETR figures for rural settlements (defined as less than 3,000 population), then Alston is worse off than average. In 1996/8, the average for rural settlements was 17% of households without a car:



Sources DETR & Office for National Statistics

High levels of car ownership makes it difficult to provide acceptable levels of public transport when there are only small numbers of people using it. Those without a car thus become doubly disadvantaged by

- a) not having a car, and
- b) lack of adequate public transport.

It should be borne in mind that the majority of car-owning households only have one car, 52.1% (compared with 21.3% with two or more cars)¹ and if one member of the household uses it to go to work the remaining member(s) of the household have to rely on public transport. The community questionnaire indicated that around a quarter of cars on Alston Moor are over 10 years old.

T2.2 CONVENIENCE OF BUS-TIMES FOR TRAVEL TO WORK

Nenthead is relatively very well provided for in view of its size and remoteness, largely due to the location of Wright Bros' bus garage there. It is possible to travel from Nenthead, as well as from Alston by bus to work in Hexham and Carlisle (or even Newcastle if you finish work early enough to catch a bus at 16.15).

However there is no journey to work transport to Penrith at present although this was tried a few years ago by Newton Rigg to transport students (like the Carlisle College bus) but it was not continued presumably because there weren't enough people using it at that time. However the local bus company report that there are quite a number of people travelling to and from work on the Carlisle College bus.

The Saturday winter bus to Penrith goes via Garrigill but the only other service to Garrigill apart from school buses is a Friday return bus to Alston.

T2.3 GAPS IN TRANSPORT PROVISION & DEMAND FOR SERVICES

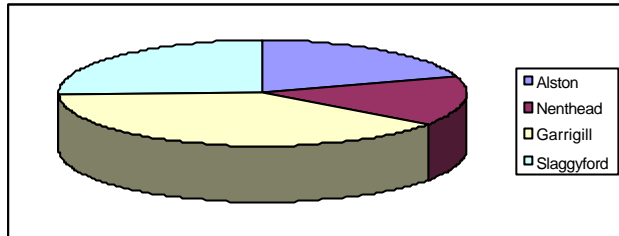
The community questionnaire and focus group consultations identified the need for more bus services around Alston Moor including the following:

- Week-end evening bus in and late bus out of Alston connecting with Nenthead, Garrigill etc.
- Need for around the Moor house to house service for the elderly to enable them to shop in Alston.
- A midday service from Nenthead (possibly re-timing of existing service?) to enable residents of Nenthead to attend afternoon activities in Alston. At present there are plenty of services in the morning and late afternoon but nothing during the middle of the day. It was pointed out at the mother & toddlers group that there are no buses to get

you into Alston for around 2pm as there is nothing between 11.am and 3.15pm (or 2.33pm on Saturdays) If this gap could be remedied and some form of evening transport provided for week-ends the Nenthead service would be very good.

- 103 people said they would like more services around Alston Moor. The percentage of respondents from Garrigill, the most poorly served community was not surprisingly the highest:

% RESPONDENTS FROM EACH VILLAGE/TOWN:



A need was also identified for more buses to Penrith and for a late night Saturday service for leisure activities, eg to Carlisle or Newcastle.

¹ (Source *Regional Trends – Office for National Statistics, Policy & Research Unit 2000*)

T2.4 LAST BUS TIMES ON FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS

There is an apparent need for evening services in and out of Alston which is borne out by the community questionnaire where 103 respondents would use public transport more if there were more services around Alston Moor and 110 would use it more if there were services at night from Alston for evening leisure activities.

The last bus from Alston to Nenthead and Garrigill is the return bus from Penrith stopping in Alston at 16.28 on Saturdays until Easter 2003.

This replaces the Newcastle - Alston - Penrith - Keswick bus which runs in the summer. The summer service does not operate via Nenthead and Garrigill. There are regular services Monday – Saturday between Nenthead and Alston: approximately half a dozen each way (depending on the day of the week and time of year). The last bus Monday-Friday is 18.05, and on Saturdays is 16.28 (or 16.18 when the Penrith winter service not operating).

Evening transport is in fact better to most of the equivalent North Pennine settlements than it is to Alston. The best service is to Allendale and Allenheads where there is a late night Friday and Saturday service to Allenheads leaving Hexham at 22.28pm. arriving in Allendale at 22.55 and Allenheads at 23.15pm. Last buses to Stanhope arrive at 20.45 and in Middleton in Teesdale at 21.53 compared with 18.05 in Alston.

However, compared with some rural areas where public transport is virtually non-existent, largely thanks to the presence of Wright Bros (Coaches) Ltd a relatively good service exists particularly for those services into Northumberland which are subsidised by Northumberland County Council.

T2.5 ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR THE MOBILITY IMPAIRED

Low floor buses which are easier for wheelchair users are not practical in the hilly North Pennines terrain. Wrights test drove such a bus and found that the undercarriage is too low for ground clearance in some places. Also this type of bus has a rear engine and is automatic. An automatic gear system is hazardous in icy conditions (The bus skidded on the test drive!)

T2.6 COMMUNITY MINIBUS

Although local buses cannot easily accommodate wheel-chair users, the community minibus is available to meet special needs as it has a rear ramp and the Community Minibus Group have a brokerage arrangement with ADAPT in Hexham.

It is available for hire by any local organised groups which have a constitution or agreed aims and objectives.

The minibus is relatively new and a need was in fact identified in the previous appraisal. It has already become an indispensable asset to the community but there is scope to use it more. It costs 45p per kilometer or 70p per mile to hire. There is a pool of volunteer drivers

but the minibus group would like to encourage more. There are two drivers who are qualified to train more volunteers to help.

T2.7 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Bus timetables are situated at bus stops and are available from the Local Information Centre.

The Across the Roof of England map based leaflet of timetables throughout the North Pennines produced by Durham County Council with support from Cumbria & Northumberland County Councils (which originated as a North Pennines Tourism Partnership initiative some years ago) is an excellent way of publicising services available.

This year as a Foot and Mouth recovery measure to encourage use of the 888 Newcastle – Alston – Keswick service along the A686 “scenic route”, Cumbria County Council produced an attractive publicity leaflet with easy to read timetable for this route.

Public transport information is also available on Cybermoor.

T2.8 CAR-SHARING

The community questionnaire identified quite a few people who said they would be willing to car-share:

consider as a driver	72
consider as a passenger	54
consider for leisure	83
consider for work	46

(the response includes a few people doing this already)

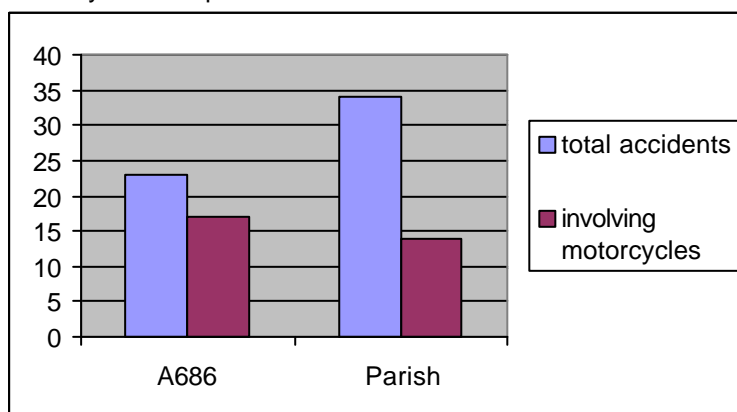
T3 TRAFFIC & CAR-PARKING

T3.1 TRAFFIC CONGESTION

There is frequent conflict between pedestrians and cars or heavy vehicles in the Town Centre (Front St/ Market Square) particularly when parked cars cause traffic to mount the pavement in order to continue up or down the street.

T3.2 ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

Speeding vehicles and most particularly motor-bikes are a particular cause of concern locally, particularly on the Hartside Road(A686) and also through Nenthead village. Over the last three years 1999 – 2001, 74% of accidents on the Hartside Road involved motor-cycles compared with 41% in the rest of the Parish.



T3.3 CAR-PARKING PROVISION

There are approximately 60 car-parking spaces at the South Tynedale Railway and around 40 in the Crown car-park and Market Square, with a further 8 in front of the Town Hall, four of which are allocated as disabled spaces. There is also a small amount of on-street parking and 26 new spaces are proposed at Fairhill Recreation Ground at the top of the town. All the parking available is free.

The existing provision is not considered adequate:

- 63% of respondents to the community questionnaire said that car-parking was unsatisfactory, topping the list of unsatisfactory services on Alston Moor.
- 17% said car-parking/ traffic management & transport should be a priority in the recommendations for action
- Top of visitors' dislikes about Alston was difficulty parking (31%)
(next was scrap vehicles – 12%)

Existing provision is certainly inadequate at busy times like week-ends and school holidays

The South Tynedale Railway car-park is not big enough to cater for special events at the station like "Thomas the Tank-Engine" week-ends. On these occasions cars park all the way along the main road past the Lowbyer Manor Hotel on the edge of the town.

T3.4 DISABLED ACCESS & PARKING

Alston is a very difficult town for people with impaired mobility. The town is built on a steep slope with over 200ft difference in altitude between the highest and lowest parts of town. Therefore although there is a Shopmobility scheme in operation in Alston, for Health & Safety reasons only experienced people are able to use the Shopmobility machines. Consequently there are 2 or 3 regular local users in Alston but very few visitors use them. Shopmobility machines are available from the Information Centre in the Town Hall but access is not ideal. The Special Needs Support Group indicated that it would be better if parking spaces allocated for the disabled outside the town hall were placed at the opposite end near the post-box where the slope is gentler as it is impossible for many to use the spaces currently allocated due to the slope. The same problem applies to the space in the town centre car-park. There are 5 disabled spaces altogether and although these are all within the town centre the steepness of the street presents a difficulty even for a short distance. Therefore finding a suitable location for disabled parking spaces presents a problem. The current positions are closest for access to the Co-op and the Town Hall but it may be easier for wheelchair users to park slightly further away if the space is on flatter terrain.

T3.5 TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

There are double yellow lines to control on-street parking along the most constricted parts of the main street and the junction at Townhead. A give way system operates to give priority to traffic driving up the street through the narrows between Townhead and the market square, and there is a voluntary arrangement of one-way traffic for lorries through the town centre. However, congestion in the town centre is still a problem, a mixture of heavy traffic and parking on double yellow lines being the main causes. Even in the area where on-street parking is permitted the street is too narrow for two way traffic for any vehicles larger than a car, so driving on the pavement is a regular occurrence presenting a continuing hazard for pedestrians.

T3.6 PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY

The sandstone setts reduce speed but perhaps ways of giving pedestrians greater priority should be investigated, particularly as vehicles are frequently forced to mount the pavement as described above to enable two way passage of vehicles in the area where on-street parking is permitted. Perhaps a very low speed limit like 10 or 15 miles per hour through the centre could be looked at.

T3.7 EASE OF MOVEMENT AROUND TOWN

Town Footpath Links

Footpaths link the two former Council housing estates and the new Bruntley Meadows development with the town centre but residents of Lowbyer Park and the Raise have to use the footways along main road routes to access the town centre.

Sign-Posting

Alston is a small compact settlement with most of the amenities of a town but with a village sized population, so it is generally fairly easy to find one's way about. However there is still scope for better signage for visitors and perhaps to incorporate this with some interpretative material of historic interest by providing signs for the different areas of the town eg The Butts

–site of medieval town where archers used to practice in the days of the border reivers. The different areas of the market square could also be defined: eg potato market, corn market etc, and Kates Lane and Overburn would warrant similar treatment.

There is also a need to rationalize clutter from signs and other street furniture, particularly at the junction at the foot of the town and in the centre of Garrigill.

PART III

Conclusions

9. HOW FAR WE HAVE COME AND WHERE WE ARE GOING

CHANGES OVER THE 20TH CENTURY

Historically the local economy depended on the land and what lay beneath the ground, as most families on Alston Moor would have derived a living from a combination of agriculture and mining. Today to a large extent the economy still depends on the land and what lies beneath it, but now the quality of the landscape to attract visitors is becoming increasingly important at the expense of the original primary purpose of food production, and the history of mining is interpreted for visitors with the opportunity to experience going underground into a mine at Nenthead.

Over the course of the 20th century, jobs in agriculture and mining declined. During the Second World War, Alston's isolated location made it an ideal location for a munitions factory and so a foundry was set up to make shell-cases. The foundry continued to exist after the war and replaced the mines as a mainstay of the local economy until its closure in 1980. Although the closure of the foundry created a crisis as a large proportion of the workforce lost their jobs creating around 25% unemployment, it was actually a turning point for Alston Moor – a chance to break away from dependency on a large single employer, although at that time, a variety of small scale manufacturing was probably what most people expected to replace it and this has not really materialised. Instead, a large number of people have become self-employed.

When the foundry closed the tourist industry was very low key, there were a handful of hotels, pubs and B&Bs but no tourist attractions other than the alpine nursery. The 1980 appraisal identified that there was scope for development whilst recognising that due to the seasonal nature of tourism it would be unwise to consider tourism as the answer to Alston's economic problems. The community survey carried out as part of the appraisal process came up with several suggestions which have since taken place:

- wet weather facilities – eg art gallery
- opening up of mines / mining museum
- re-instatement of South Tynedale Railway
- development of winter sports (on a small scale -Yad Moss ski-tow)
- a general face-lift (Alston Town Scheme & Conservation Area Partnership scheme improvements)
- car & bus park - The Station Yard car park did not exist at that time although parking still remains a problem to be resolved.

Another suggestion which was made at that time and has since been pursued but has yet to materialise was the opening up of the Nentforce Level. If developed, this could make a tremendous difference to Alston's ability to attract visitors as it is relatively unique. There are only 4 existing underground water attractions in the UK, one in Northern Ireland, one in Wales and two in England (in the Peak District and West Midlands). The Nentforce Level would therefore be the only one in the North.

CHANGES SINCE 1980

By the time the second Alston Moor appraisal was carried out, unemployment although still high had gone down to 10.5%. Self-employment was much higher than the Cumbrian and National averages indicating that many had realised that if they wanted to stay here the only way to earn a living was to become self-employed.

The South Tynedale Railway, Gossipgate Gallery, The Pennine Pottery and Thortergill had become established, Nenthead Mines was about to be developed and the C2C cycle route had recently opened. Tourism was thus becoming established as an important part of the local economy.

Skelgillside workshops had been developed and there were proposals to develop workshops in the Station Yard.

A number of micro-businesses were beginning to develop and the appraisal identified the fact that Alston Moor was gaining a reputation for its role as a centre for arts and crafts suggesting that this sector has much potential to grow and increase its profitability. Although the number of arts practitioners has undoubtedly continued to grow since 1995, there has been no co-ordinated initiative to improve business performance, for instance by providing networking and training combined with marketing and development opportunities.

TRENDS SINCE 1995

At the time of the 1995 appraisal, the Nentforce Level was still identified as a potential opportunity whilst recognising that it would initially need to be decided whether it would be preferable to retain the former foundry site as industrial land. However, the slow take up of existing industrial units since then has indicated the lack of demand for industrial use. A feasibility study was carried out and proposals put forward in 1998-9 for the opening up of the Nentforce Level but a proposed funding package was unsuccessful and the proposal was abandoned.

The opportunity for a teleworking initiative was identified in the 1995 appraisal and although this has not yet materialised, an increasing number of people are using teleworking as a means of working at home linked to employment or customers based elsewhere.

The local economy and the community is continuing to evolve:

Some problems identified previously remain, two examples are the lack of sufficient car-parking and lack of adequate child-care facilities. There is also the problem of areas of dereliction. However, there have been successes since 1995:

The Town Hall has been refurbished to become the focus of community life and the Conservation Area has undergone a programme of environmental enhancement. Nenthead Mines has continued to develop, two further attractions have developed at the Station Yard: a model railway centre and the Hub community transport museum, (both very appropriate complementary uses to the South Tynedale Railway) and Stokoe House Ceramics Gallery has developed in a corner of the Market Square reinforcing the strong art and crafts presence in the town.

FUTURE TRENDS

The continuing decline in agriculture has been well documented and farmers are being forced to consider diversification. Diversification of farm activity may not be the appropriate answer for all farms and many will continue to survive with members of the family bringing in income from work outside the farm. Flexible local job opportunities are needed to enable farming families to manage the farm whilst working in another job. As farmers become more computer literate teleworking from home would be one way of achieving this. Teleworking could also be an answer for parents of young children who find lack of childcare a problem.

More self-employed micro-businesses continue to be attracted by the quality of life on Alston Moor and many of these are reliant on teleworking. Over the past year the development of the Cybermoor wired up communities project has had a major impact on local life. It has the potential to help open up new horizons for employment as well as disseminating community information and broadening social contact.

This project will make Alston one of the first rural communities to have broadband internet access which will be essential if we are to continue to attract skilled micro-businesses. Alston Moor needs inward investment to provide better quality, higher paid jobs but the only way to achieve this may be to attract a wide range of micro-businesses (ie employing less than five people) who don't have to consider the needs of

a large workforce but could be attracted by the potential labour pool of IT literate workers and the presence of broadband, but above all who come to experience a better quality of life.

Together with the fundamental changes currently occurring in agriculture, Cybermoor has the potential to drive forward a pathway for broadening the economic base. It could assist with inward investment marketing, local networking and “business “cluster” development, act as a marketing tool for local businesses, provide a focus for a teleworking initiative and for developing the strong local creative industries sector .

10. THE VISION

A key factor identified at the second public meeting was the need for a sustainable future for Alston Moor, the higher the degree of overlap between potential projects involving people, the economy and the environment, the higher the level of sustainability. Prior to the public meeting the Culture Working Group had come up with a definition of sustainable development as follows:

Meeting the needs of the present
whilst valuing the past,
without compromising the needs of future generations

This provides the core for the community vision –

A sustainable future for Alston Moor