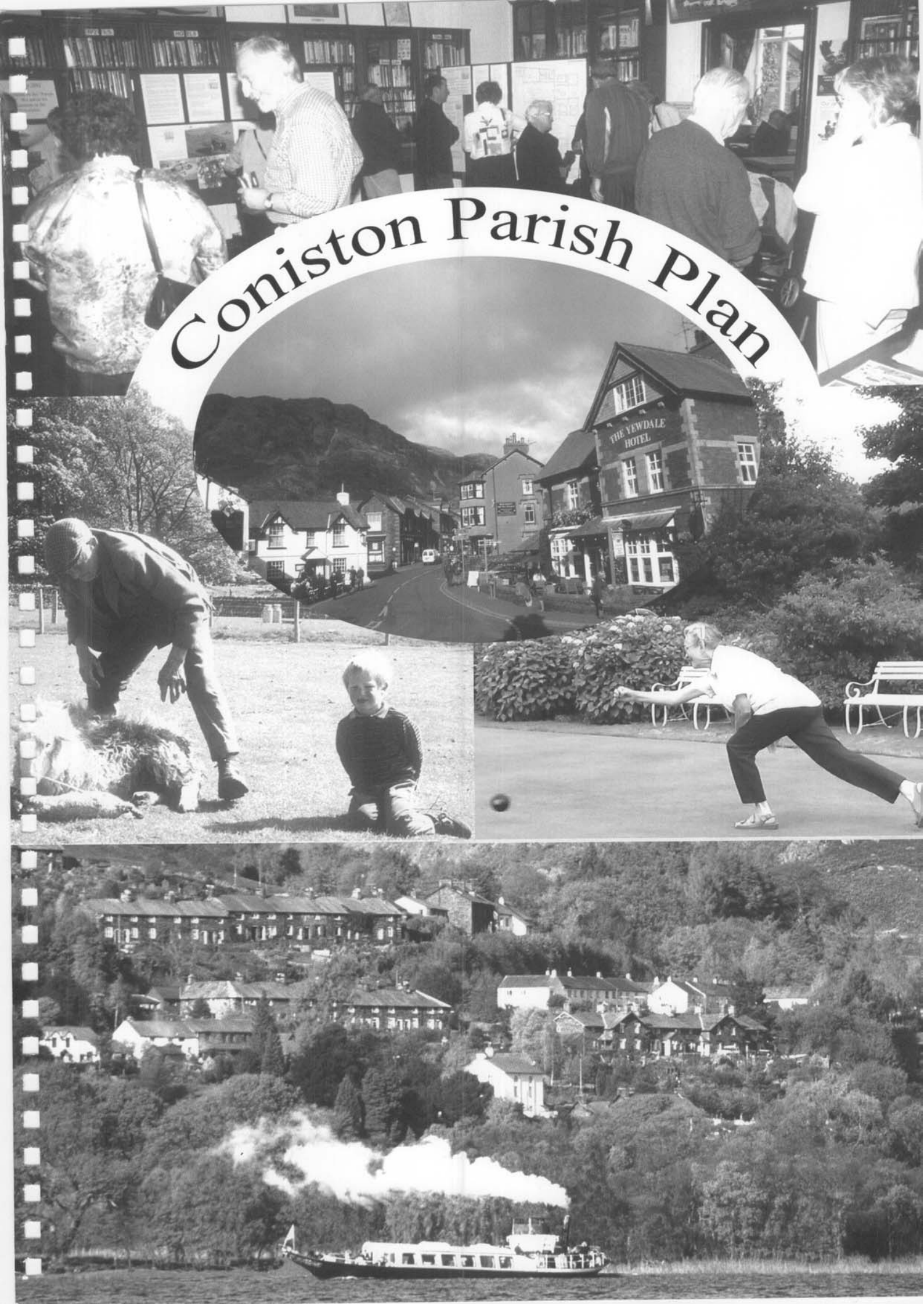
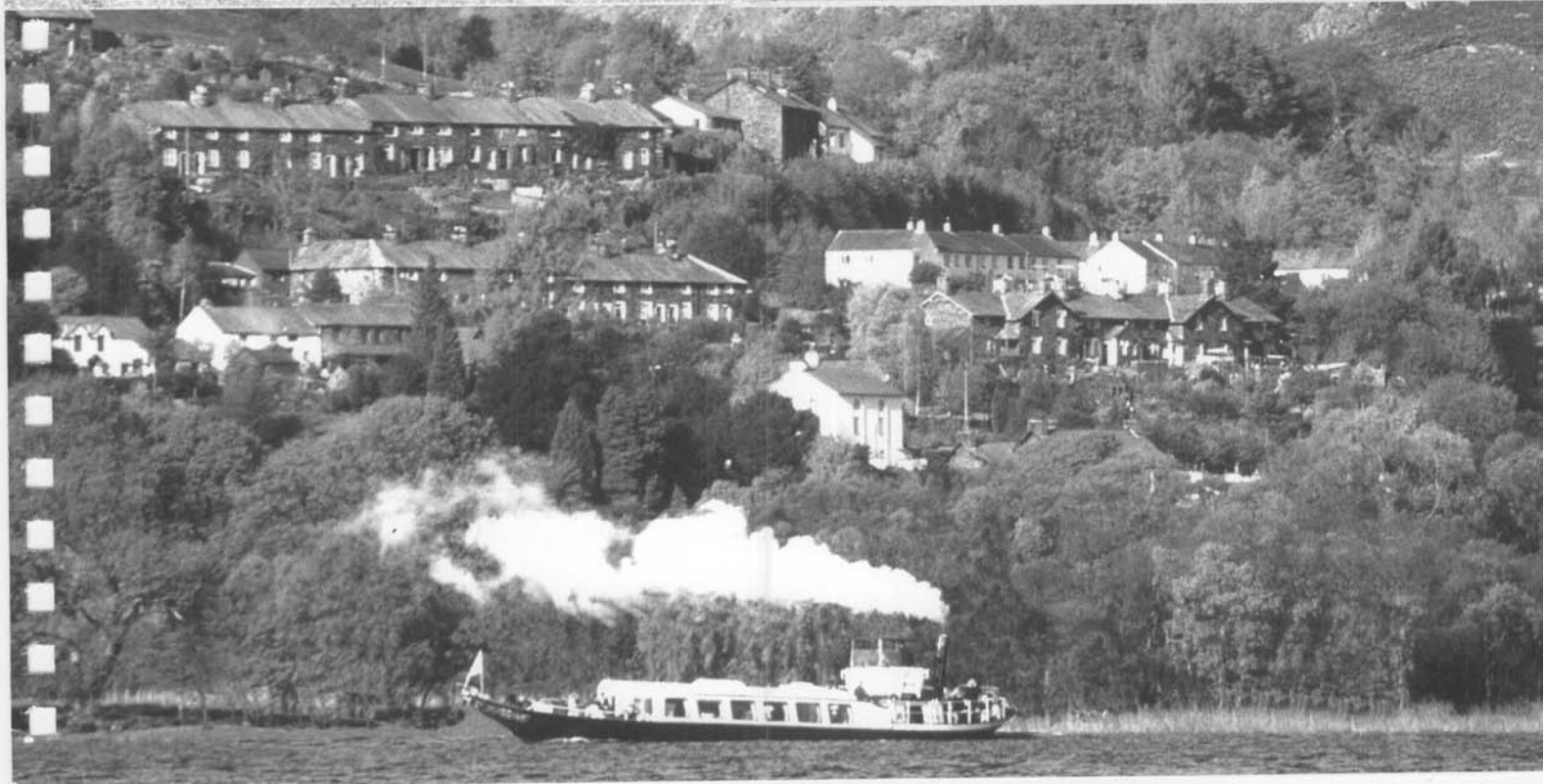




Coniston Parish Plan



Coniston Parish Plan

January 2004

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Coniston's mountains and lake attract a large number of discerning visitors each year. One of the best ways for them to appreciate the surroundings is from the lake on board the Coniston launch or the Gondola. The launch runs for most of the year and provides a service linking up the lake jetties.

Tourism is becoming Coniston's dominant industry although much of the revenue from tourism does not benefit the village.

Coniston Parish Plan

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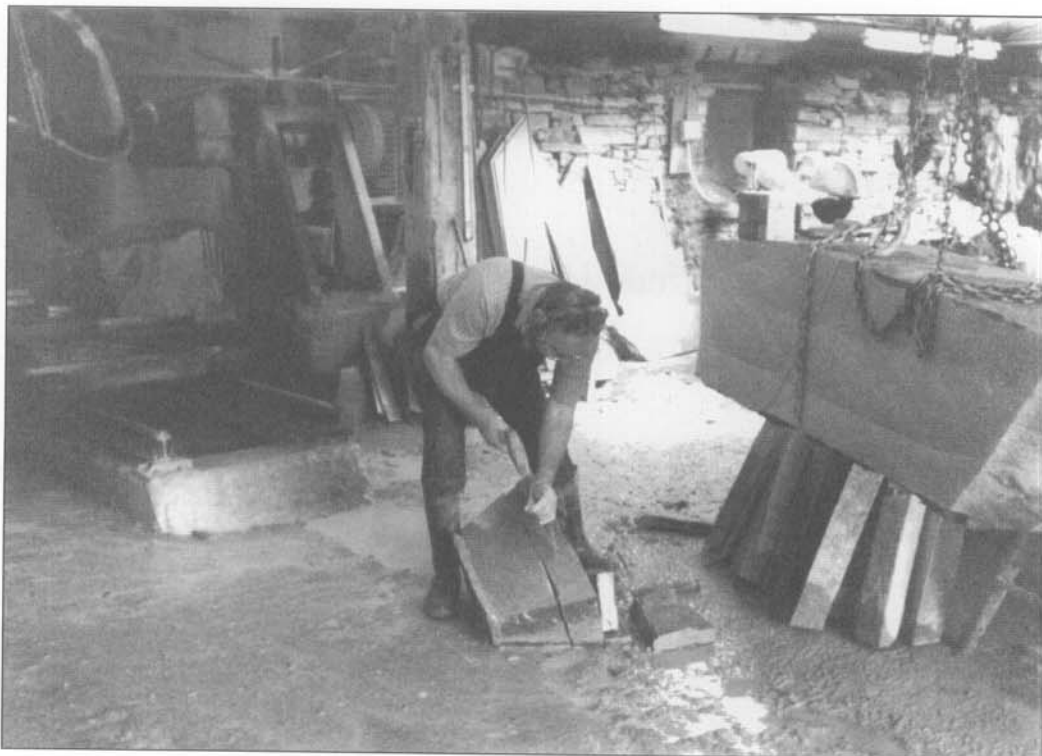
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Slate quarrying has been one of Coniston's core industries for many centuries and it is still important to the community today. Sixty years ago three large operators dominated the industry but today there is only one, plus a number of smaller concerns. These photographs show slate working at High Fell Quarry operated by Neville Walker and George Tarr.

There is some concern today over the future for the industry as fewer young people are willing to put up with the hardships of such work. The overheads associated with operating a slate quarry are also becoming prohibitive to those wanting to start up in a small way, especially third party liability insurance. Recently this has caused a potential new venture to be abandoned, despite efforts by the National Trust and local authorities (and many local people) who were enthusiastic for it to start.

However it is very unlikely that the industry will die completely. There will always be a huge demand for attractive products made from Coniston's slate.



INTRODUCTION

In the Government Rural White Paper "Our countryside, the future" published in 2000, it was stated that *'...parish plans are an important step in helping local rural communities to take charge of their own destinies and also an opportunity to strengthen the first, and most local form of government we have in this country.'*

Over the past few years several villages in England have embarked on projects to produce a 'parish-plan'. Many have now been completed but some have failed for a variety of reasons. In December 2002 a small group in Coniston felt that an official 'parish-plan' for the village would be an extremely beneficial document, and work started on the hard task of producing one.

Parish plans have no statutory powers but, as they reflect the opinion of a high proportion of villagers, they give a very strong mandate to influence future decisions and policy affecting the village. They have also been used at public enquiries to great effect. Government inspectors are very keen to take account of the opinions of those living in communities, as expressed in a parish plan. However the greatest benefit of producing a parish plan is that it will assist in providing funds for projects that the community feel are important for the future.

The official body who finance and oversee the production of parish plans is The Countryside Agency. Coniston was fortunate that it applied for and obtained generous funding to cover the cost of the project from the Agency and from other bodies. Much of the work of the Coniston Parish Plan Team involved obtaining the opinions of Coniston residents, businesses, clubs, societies and institutions and the young people of the village. From the 'returns' we believe we have obtained opinions and comments from approximately 73% of Coniston people, which is an extremely satisfying figure.

Results of the exercise have flagged up a number of big concerns that the community has. It is now the job of the Team, with the help of other authorities, to make sure that these concerns are addressed.





Lack of affordable housing is a huge problem to most rural communities. In Lakeland Villages, with so much property being lost to the second-home market, the problem is even more acute. Some attempts have been made by planning authorities to safeguard new development and protect it from becoming second homes. These attempts have not always been successful. These photographs show (from top left) Church Beck Close (no occupancy restrictions), St Martin's Court (Section 52 applied), Hellen's Court (Section 106 applied to part of the development), Barratts Croft (some property purchased under 'shared ownership').

During analysis of data for the Parish Plan the robustness of local occupancy clauses was found to be of great concern to many Coniston people.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Parish Plan team would like to thank the following official bodies for their help in preparing this Parish Plan:

The **COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY** for providing funding towards the cost of producing the Plan and also to Gail Knopfell of the Agency for her help and guidance.

The **CONISTON PARISH COUNCIL** for their support and for handling the finances of the Parish Plan Team.

The **SOUTH LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL** for their support and, in particular, for enthusiastic encouragement from Sue Barton, Director of Strategy & Planning, David Sykes, Regeneration Officer and Mike Jones, Director of Customer Services.

CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL, in particular the Area Support Manager Stuart Pate and Councillor Oliver Pearson, for their encouragement and Dianne Whitehead of the Neighbourhood Forum Office.

The **NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**, and especially Paul Tiplady, the Chief Officer, Norman Atkins and also Rachel Bland for help and support in many areas.

Many other bodies and individuals have also helped during the project and we will be thanking them later in the report.

“.....Thank you for your letter regarding your Coniston Parish Plan project. I am delighted to see Coniston once again leading the way....”



For people living in rural areas shopping can present difficulties.

More and more the cost of transport and the cost of one's own time to go on shopping expeditions is becoming prohibitive. Shops such as David Watt's, that supply the community with a good range of household goods, are becoming much more sensible alternatives to the long journeys to towns such as Barrow or Kendal.

Coniston has a good selection of shops which support both the local community and visitors to the village. During work on the Parish Plan the team discovered that 65% of the village households did a significant proportion of their shopping in the village. More than 60% thought that Coniston shops were at least adequate for their needs, although many felt that there were too many outlets aimed purely at the tourist industry.



SETTING THE SCENE...

Coniston is the fifth largest community within the Lake District National Park. Despite this it is a relatively isolated community, with relatively poor road links with other neighbouring towns and villages. Over the centuries this degree of isolation has helped to create a keen community spirit and a very strong identity which is apparent to all who know the village today.

Coniston is an old mining village but the history of the Coniston community can be traced back much further than this. During the Neolithic times Bronze Age families inhabited the high commons, felling the woodland and cultivating the land. There has been little recorded history from the Roman Period and the Dark Ages and it is only after the Norman Conquest that we have any clear evidence of how life in the area was developing.

Since the 13th century Coniston's prosperity has been controlled by the le Flemings, the Lord of the Manor, who still has a significant effect on the village today. Coniston's wealth has developed since mediaeval times round the slate industry, farming and, more lately, the Coniston Mine, at one time one of the largest copper mines in Europe. The mine closed in the late 19th century but the quarrying of slate and farming are still vital industries for the community's economy.

Much more recently tourism has become the main source of income for the village. Coniston lies in a very attractive location beneath the steep back-drop of the mountains and close to the Lake Shore. Since the 18th century tourists have found their way to the village, despite its remoteness, attracted by the scenery and solitude. With the opening of the Coniston Branch of the Furness Railway in 1859 tourism expanded tremendously. The closure of the railway in 1959 had little effect on this industry because, by that time, road communication had improved and visitors from towns such as Blackburn, Preston and Blackpool could travel to Coniston for a day and return home the same evening.

Coniston has always welcomed visitors and one has to accept that many of the village facilities that feature in this Parish Plan would not be viable if it wasn't for the present day tourist industry. The main source of income has come from hotel, guest house and b&b accommodation. Camping and caravanning have also been popular for many years. More recently self catering accommodation has become much more popular. Clearly tourism is here to stay and many feel that the village community should work with the tourist industry to develop facilities that would benefit both. However we found that tourism does create some very real problems for the community, as can be seen from analyses later in the report.

Despite the influence of tourism, Coniston has remained a strong and very caring and welcoming community. This was reflected, in 1997, when Coniston was awarded the title Daily Telegraph 'UK Village of the Year'.

During the 1990's attempts were made in the village to produce a Parish Plan. However it was not until the end of 2002 that work finally got off the ground. Part of the reason for the renewed interest was the publication of *The Story of Coniston* (Cameron, Brown) in which many of the issues facing the village today were discussed.

In December 2002 an appeal was made in the Parish Newsletter for volunteers to form a group to develop a village plan for Coniston for the next five years. Following this a small team came together and funding was applied for. In the early weeks the team was guided by Gail Knopfel of the Countryside Agency and the team followed closely the guidelines laid down by the Agency for developing Parish Plans.

Data was obtained from the village community by a number of means. Clubs and societies were approached to explain the reason for the project and receive feedback, selected businesses were also approached using the 'glad', 'sad' and 'mad' criteria and village households were asked to complete questionnaires. The village was kept informed of progress through the Parish Newsletter, the Parish Plan web-site and a poster display in the Co-op window. Details of the information gathering process is given in the appendix 'How We Went About It'.

This report has been based entirely on information extracted from the data. The Team wish to point out that **none** of the results included in the Plan has been influenced by any members of the Team. They are all the opinions of Coniston people.

Because of the amount of data collected it has been decided to produce two reports. This particular report is a *summary report* giving an outline of the findings and future action to be taken. The main report has been distributed to a number of locations (e.g. the Library) where it is available for inspection. Alternatively you may contact the Parish Plan Co-ordinator, Elizabeth Brown, for details of how to download your own personal copy from the Parish Plan website..

From the huge amount of data collected and 'digested' a 'top-ten' list of issues that must be addressed has been produced. The next stage is to form an Action Plan giving guidelines on how to achieve the goals.

And finally, when we finish the project, we intend to deposit the vast amount of data that has been accumulated in the Village Archives to form an effective 'snap-shot' of village life and concerns at the start of the 21st Century.

DETAILS OF FINDINGS

We analysed the returns from the Household Questionnaires using data analysis software and by reviewing the additional written comments returned with the questionnaires. The final main report contains the results in full. Below is a brief summary of the findings.

Question 1 “Would you be happy to see some new housing in Coniston?”

There was a very significant response to this question with almost unanimous agreement amongst village people. Over 200 written comments were made and results are given in the summary below.

To summarise overall comments:

- The vast majority of people were prepared to accept some new building in the village, but only as affordable housing for permanent occupancy.
- Any permanent occupancy clause should be made very robust.
- Great care should be taken with any new building to make sure it blends well with the surroundings.

Question 2 “What type of housing would you be prepared to accept?”

Again there was almost universal agreement to this question with over 180 written comments received.

To summarise comments:

- There was an overwhelming preference for allowing only starter and family homes to be built.
- As with the previous question, any new building should be for permanent occupancy only.
- It was felt important that the style of any new building should be along traditional Lakeland village lines.

Question 3 “Do you think that all new houses should be for full-time occupancy only.”

As with the previous questions there was very high feeling in the village about this question with three points being strongly stressed.

To summarise comments to this question:

- All new housing should be for full time occupancy only. The number in favour of this was very high (88%).
- Present house owners should be encouraged to consider applying a permanent occupancy clause to their property.

- Again, the present robustness of permanent occupancy clauses in planning agreements was felt to be ineffective and should be reviewed.

Question 4 “How do you feel about the number of second homes in Coniston?”

We were 'bowled over' by the response to this question, with 95% of Coniston residents having great concern about the level of second homes.

To summarise comments:

- The number of second / holiday homes should not be allowed to rise further. Ways of doing this should be investigated as a priority.
- There is extremely strong feeling in Coniston over this question.
- The Council Tax situation, with regard to second homes, should be reviewed as a matter of urgency by the local authority.
- There should be a requirement to apply for a 'change of use' when a permanent residence becomes a holiday home.

Question 5 “Are there any areas on which you wouldn't want houses built?”

There were a great many responses to this question and well over fifty locations were listed by Coniston people on which no housing development should take place in the future. This list will be held on file and will be available to act as evidence of village feeling during any future planning disputes.

To summarise comments:

- Village people have 'flagged up' many areas of the village on which they do not want to see any house building.
- The most acceptable development appears to be in-filling.

Question 6 “Are there any locations in the Village which may be suitable for new housing?”

Over thirty locations were suggested where Coniston residents thought new housing would be acceptable. As with Question 5 this has allowed a list to be produced for future consideration.

To summarise comments:

- Some suggestions were made of where new housing might be located.
- Several of these suggestions clashed with areas identified in Question 5 which listed open spaces “where no new housing should be located”.
- Again, in-filling seemed to be the most acceptable option to all.

Question 7 “Should the style and character of buildings in Coniston be preserved in any new development?”

Eighty nine percent of those who responded were in favour of this suggestion.

To summarise comments:

- There was strong feeling that the character and style of buildings should be reflected in future development.
- Facing in local stone should be a requirement of any new development.

Question 8 “Do you feel that any recent development in the village is out of character?”

Only 34% of Coniston households were concerned about any new development. Many pointed out that Coniston already consists of a variety of styles of dwelling.

To summarise comments:

- There was not, in general, strong adverse concern about any recent development in the village.
- However the St Martin's Court development created a number of adverse comments.

Question 9 “Do you think local materials should always be used for new buildings?”

To summarise comments:

- Slightly over half (56%) of those who responded thought that local materials should be used for new building construction
- The effect this would have on cost was thought to be significant.

Question 10 “Are there any buildings in the village that merit special attention?”

We had over 300 responses to this question with suggestions made of buildings that did warrant special attention.

To summarise comments:

- There was a very strong feeling that the Institute merited special attention. Any re-development of the Institute must take into account the wishes of Coniston people.
- Future plans should be made for developing the Church Rooms, again only after full consultation with local people.

Question 11 “How would you like community facilities in the village to be improved?”

This question was asked to gain an un-prompted insight into the opinions of villagers on the facilities available. Later on in the questionnaire we asked about specific facilities (the Institute, village shops etc) which are, in effect, 'leading questions'. With this question, however, we wanted to find out which were their main concerns, without any inducement or prompting.

To summarise the comments:

- Requirements of young people must form a major part of future village plans.
- Health issues, in particular the establishing of a health centre, is a top priority.
- A re-vamped Institute and completed sports pavilion are also essential priorities. The latter is felt to be important for providing a much needed additional recreational facility for the community.

Question 12 “Are Crime Levels too high and what should be done to reduce them.”

Fifty four percent of those who responded were not worried about crime levels and did not think them too high. However 40% were worried and gave a range of issues and proposals to reduce them.

To summarise the comments:

- We should discuss with the police authority the possibility of re-establishing a resident village policeman.
- A greater and more frequent presence is required of foot-patrol officers.

Question 13 “Have you any comments about the Primary School?”

Sixty three written comments were made about the Primary School. Overall there was praise and support for the school, staff, educational standards and atmosphere.

To summarise specific comments:

- Coniston Primary School is held in healthy esteem by a majority of people who responded. Positive comments well outweigh negative ones.
- Overall educational standards are felt to be very good.
- There is concern about the number of pupils attending in the future, leading to the fear that the school might no longer be viable.
- Provision for care of children before and after school would attract parents from other areas and thus boost the number of children.

- Capital improvements over the last 6 years - including extensions, the Community Development Centre and the work that has been done in the grounds received a very good response.

Question 14 “Have you any comments about the John Ruskin School?”

We received fifty three written comments about the John Ruskin School containing very conflicting views.

To summarise specific points:

- There should be much greater focus by the educational authorities on the School, especially on its weak and strong points.
- The School should be encouraged to integrate more with the village and provide more information to its 'customers' and to the community in general about the school and the future plans.
- Village people and societies should be encouraged to make more use of the School and facilities. Costs of using the facilities should be reviewed.
- An improved indoor sports hall would greatly benefit both the School and village.
- (from elsewhere in the report) Improvements to the open air pool would also be of great benefit to the community, and provide valuable funds for the School.

Question 15 “Have you any comments about pre-school facilities in the village?”

We received 30 written comments on this topic and there appeared to be some confusion about the facilities available in Coniston.

To summarise comments:

- A comprehensive survey should be carried out of requirements for nursery care / childminding in the village and surrounding area.
- Full time nursery care was likely to be a major requirement for the village and would probably attract custom from other villages.
- Local people should be encouraged to register and train as childminders.

Question 16 “Are you happy with the Health Facilities in the village?”

Over 200 Coniston households responded to this question.

To summarise the comments made:

- Overall the Coniston health facilities were praised.
- Access to the present surgery was considered a problem.

- There was considerable praise for the Coniston Carer scheme.
- Improved chemist facilities were required in the village.
- There was anxiety over possible delay in the access to the on-call doctor and the time it may take, at the present, to receive qualified emergency medical assistance.
- The proposed 'first-responders' system should be strongly encouraged.

Question 17 "Would you like to see a Health Centre established in Coniston?"

Over 200 people responded to this question with 50 additional written comments made. Several people did not appreciate that the concept of a Health Centre was supported by the Coniston Practice.

To summarise comments:

- There was very significant support for establishing a Health Centre in Coniston. Only 16% of respondents were against the proposals.
- There are many advantages to the community of Coniston, and also the Practice in establishing a Health Centre
- The proposals have received full backing from the current GP and Practice team at Wraysdale House.

Question 19 "Are you concerned about the future of the Far End Saw Mill?" (The County Council depot)

A number of residents have been concerned for some time about the future use of the buildings and therefore it was decided to include this question to gauge reaction from Coniston households.

To summarise the comments made:

- Present moves to secure the future use of the Saw Mill for the community should be actively supported and progressed.
- The possibility of re-locating some of the workshops at the Station Site to the Saw Mill should be investigated.

Question 20 "Are you concerned about the empty workshops on the Station Site?"

A total of eighty people made written comment on the Station Site workshops.

To summarise the comments made:

- There was concern in the village that the workshops were standing empty.
- Many respondents felt that high rents were the reason for this.

- Several made the suggestion that the vacant industrial units should be re-located to the Far End Saw Mill site, freeing the Station Site for affordable housing for local people.
- The car service unit (Mike Myers) was considered to be a real asset to Coniston and should be helped to expand, as required, on the Station Site.

Question 21 "Are you Concerned about Preserving Historic Features in the Village?"

We asked this question to try and gauge the depth of feeling amongst Conistonians about 'heritage' features in the parish. Needless to say we got a very mixed response!

To summarise the comments made:

- Preserving and promoting heritage features was **not** considered a high priority by a large proportion of Coniston households.
- Nevertheless a significant number of respondents gave examples of features they were concerned about and felt should be preserved.
- There is a feeling amongst a number of Coniston people and Coniston businesses connected to the tourist industry that Coniston's history and heritage should be promoted as a 'quality' tourist attraction.
- The Ruskin Museum was felt to be doing a good job at explaining Coniston's history but should have its name changed to The Coniston Museum.

Question 22 "Do you know of anyone wanting to return to Coniston?"

In 2001 a housing-needs survey was carried out in Coniston. There have been many such surveys carried out in the country and, often, they tend to underestimate the actual housing requirements as they fail to include future likely needs and also details of those who have moved away but would dearly love to return.

To summarise the findings:

- There are a significant number of Conistonians now living away who would like to return if they could afford the cost of accommodation.
- When housing needs of the community are being measured, they should include those who would like to return
- Authorities should look more favourably on those who wish to build a home for permanent occupancy on family-owned land.
- Sufficient affordable housing is clearly the biggest requirement of the village.

Question 23 and 24 “Comments on the use of village shops” and “Are there any improvements you would like to see to village shops or additional shops?”

Nearly 200 written comments were received in answer to this question.

The main comments are summarised as follows:

- Over 65% of village households did a significant proportion of their shopping in the village.
- Over 60% of households thought the village shops were at least adequate and over half of them felt they served their needs well.
- There is a great need for the goods a chemist's shop provides.
- Local shops are more expensive and have less choice.
- The quality of fruit and vegetables could be improved.
- There are too many shops devoted to tourists' requirements.
- The tradesman services in the village were praised.

Question 25 “What other amenities would you like to see in the village?”

The local authorities provide a number of amenities for the benefit of villagers. Of the authorities, the South Lakes District Council, in particular, came in for significant criticism.

The main comments are:

- The facilities provided by the District Council were felt to be wholly inadequate as far as waste disposal and recycling in the village goes.
- A high proportion of Coniston households wanted skips returned to the Lake Road site.
- Some thought should be given to additional paper and bottle banks at the village car park and the Old Hall camp site.
- There must be no future threat of closure of the toilets in the village.

Question 26 Sports, Recreation and Social Activities

We asked a number of questions on this subject and also invited comments. Twenty five percent of villagers confirmed they often took part in village activities whereas 45% occasionally did. Just over 20% thought the number of clubs and societies was excellent and 50% considered them 'adequate'.

A summary of the main comments made are:

- Coniston has a large range of clubs & societies for a village of its size.
- More publicity should be encouraged by the individual societies / groups to promote their activities.
- There is some concern that the numbers of societies will drop as the average age of the population increases.

Question 27 "What improvements would you like to see in public transport serving the village?"

Ninety eight written comments were received in response to this question.

A summary is as follows:

- The present public transport services should be reviewed in an attempt to provide a better service for local people.
- Costs of using the present service should also be reviewed.

Question 28 "Do you think the Institute should be re-vamped?"

The Institute has been the centre of village social life for several generations. It is not surprising, therefore, that any future plans regarding it are of real concern to village people and we transcribed over four pages of comments relating to possible future development.

A summary of the main points is as follows:

- Some refurbishment is necessary although opinion was split equally between minor improvements and a major re-build.
- The Institute should be retained primarily as a facility for the local community.
- The Institute should cater for as wide a range of activities and pastimes as possible.
- Village people have strong opinions on future design and should have a major say in any plan for re-development.
- The external appearance should be in keeping with the 'village style'.

NOTE: Proposed plans for re-vamping have been presented to the community and have received a very favourable response.

Question 29 "Are you concerned about traffic and parking problems in the village?"

We received comments which were sufficient to fill six A4 sides of paper on this topic! In all 160 separate points were made. Clearly parking and traffic issues were of extreme concern to many Coniston residents.

A summary of the main points is as follows:

- There is a need for one more village car park of moderate size.
- The JRS should be used to a much greater extent at weekend and holiday times and should be well signed on all approaches to the village. Parking in the area round the sports pavilion could also be considered.
- Sufficient residents-only parking should be established in the village centre, based on a permit system. This should be for all residents, not just disabled drivers.

- Car parking charges were too high and should be reduced. Revenue from car parking should remain in the village.
- No more parking restrictions should be applied in the village except for two areas where parking is considered dangerous.
- Improved pedestrian walkways are required in at least three areas.
- Traffic issues were of great concern, in particular on certain stretches of roads around the village.
- Heavy goods vehicles, tour buses and caravans using roads leading to the village caused great inconvenience at times to local drivers.
- In general, Coniston residents do not wish for a 20 mph speed limit on village roads.
- The lack of visible policing was also felt to be a problem.

Question 30 “Are there any open spaces which you feel are at risk and should be safeguarded?”

A number of areas have been highlighted as being of concern by the village community.

A summary is as follows:

- The playing fields belonging to the two schools must remain.
- Green areas for relaxation in the village should also be kept free for the benefit of villagers and visitors.
- A quiet area is needed near to the village centre.
- There should be somewhere safe where young people can practise their games skills i.e. skateboarding, basketball and volleyball.

Question 31 “Do you think there are good care arrangements in the village?”

A summary of the comments made is as follows:

- The Coniston Carers service is held in the highest regard by the village community.
- There is some concern that the service may not continue to function in the future when the present carers retire.
- A significant number of village households considered a community nursing home an important facility.
- There is some professional concern about the feasibility of setting up a community nursing home.

Question 32 “How can we assist local businesses in Coniston?”

This question relates to the opinions of Coniston households as to how local businesses can be promoted. Elsewhere in the plan the comments by businesses themselves are analysed. However for this question, ninety

two people made written comments and a number of message came through loud and clear.

To summarise:

- The best way to assist businesses in Coniston is to use them.
- Rates and Rents should be lowered for businesses, particularly new ventures.
- Establishing Broadband internet facilities was felt to be very important and should be encouraged.
- Parking for business use was felt to be inadequate and too expensive.
- A Chamber of Trade was suggested.
- Planned events to draw visitors should be considered, and advertised well. Promotion of events and businesses within the village should be encouraged.
- Better business advice is required.

Question 33 “How could banking and other financial facilities within the village be promoted?”

A total of one hundred and fourteen households commented on Banking in Coniston, and it was also mentioned several times in other relevant parts of the questionnaire. Though the question asked how financial facilities in the village could be promoted, most comments related to the customer's own needs.

To summarise comments:

- The facilities provided by the Post Office are greatly appreciated and should be promoted.
- Banking is a major concern to villagers.
- Barclays, Coniston, must return to five-day opening.
- A Cash Machine outside the Bank is an urgent requirement.
- 'Shared banking' appears to have worked well in Coniston and should also be promoted.
- Several ways of providing financial advice through the Barclays branch at Coniston were suggested.

Question 34 “Will you use the new sports pavilion when it is completed?”

To summarise comments to this question:

- There is a lot of ignorance as to what the Pavilion will provide.
- Several villagers hope it will become a social centre, serving drinks at realistic prices.
- Frequent up-dates in the Newsletter etc on progress to finish the project have been recommended.

CONISTON'S BUSINESSES - TOURISM AND OTHERS

Despite its industrial past, Coniston has been in the forefront of the Lakeland tourist industry from the start. Intrepid travellers were finding their way to the village at the start of the 18th Century and writing at length about what they found. The village has always welcomed tourists and, in return, visitors have returned many times because they appreciate the professional way they have been looked after and the kindness of those who do so. Many have commented that the major attraction of Coniston is that it is still a 'living' village and not a 'sterile' one devoted entirely to tourism.

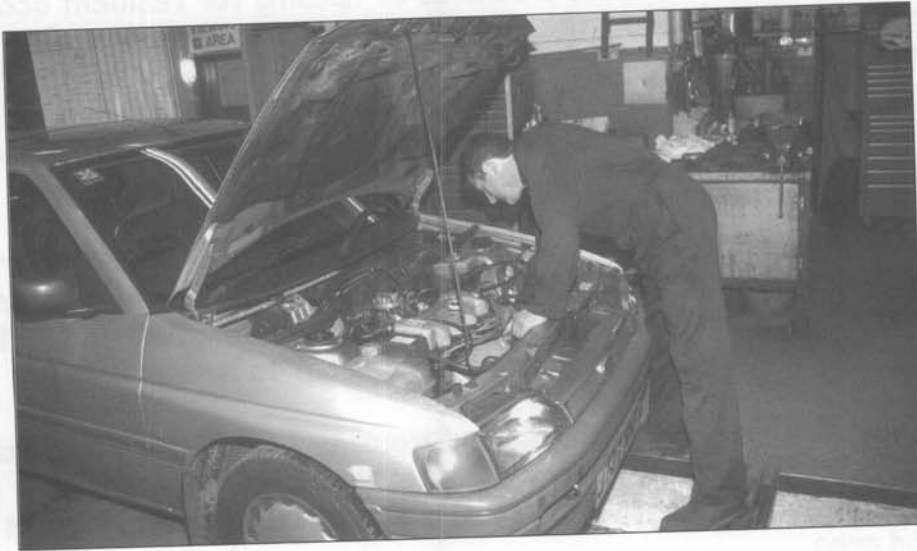
Coniston supports a significant number of businesses both connected and not directly connected with the tourist industry. As part of the survey for the Plan we interviewed a number of them. We asked each of them what they considered were the good and the bad points about operating a business in Coniston. We also discussed the merits of the village with a number of visitors during the summer of 2003.

We were pleasantly surprised at the responses to our questioning. It seems that the majority of businesses find Coniston a good place to operate, although they had a number of MAJOR concerns in common.

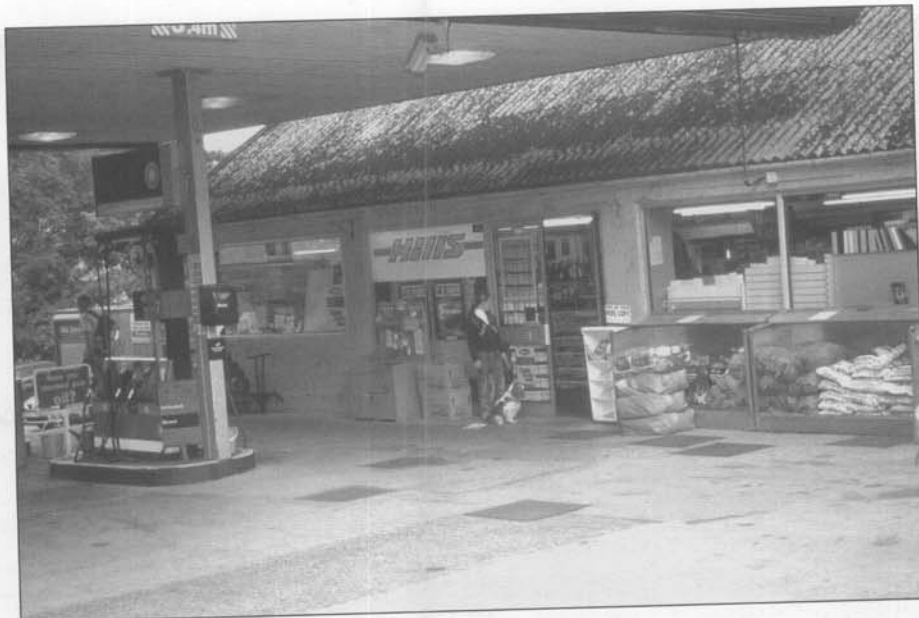
A summary of our surveys is as follows:

- In general it was felt that Coniston was a good place to start up a business.
- Recruiting staff is a major problem for Coniston businesses.
- The tourist industry is Coniston's dominant industry and the style is for quality tourist attractions.
- There is a significant number of non-tourist related businesses in the village which contribute to the local economy.
- Visitors prefer Coniston to other locations because of the close proximity to the mountains and Lake and because Coniston is a 'living' village, unlike many others in the area.
- The future viability of smaller slate quarrying enterprises is of concern because of the high cost of third party liability insurance.
- Many businesses are still recovering from the Foot & Mouth restrictions of 2001.
- There is a potential for improved 'quality' marketing, especially if it is of the village as a whole rather than of individual attractions.
- Lack of car-parking spaces is felt to be a major problem. The greater use of the JRS and the area adjacent to the football field could be the answer and would allow revenue from car-parking to benefit the village rather than to go to outside bodies.
- If Bluebird returns to Coniston many felt that the village would become very crowded with a much greater numbers of visitors.

- Broadband internet access is considered very important for village businesses.
- A forum such as a chamber of commerce may be a useful facility for village businesses. Such a forum must cover all businesses, not just the tourist related businesses.



Two businesses on which the village relies to a great extent are Crake Valley Motors (Mike Myers) and Hills petrol station.



LOCAL ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SPECIAL BENEFIT TO CONISTON

Two local organisations provide significant housing and employment opportunities for the local community. They are The National Trust and the Holywath Estates.

The National Trust maintains a balance of housing for resident occupation and holiday lets. When the Trust select new tenants for vacant properties they will consider the benefit to the community of (for example) young families who will make use of village schools. The Holywath Estate has for many years provided housing at affordable rents for local people on a long-term tenancy.

Clearly both these are of huge benefit to Coniston. Although there is no reason at the present time why the situation with either should change, it will be important for the Parish Plan team to maintain dialogue with them in the future to ensure that this resource is not to be lost.

We should also mention The Lakeland Housing Trust. This organisation is dedicated to providing properties at affordable rent for local people throughout the Lake District and has a small number of properties in the Coniston area.



CONISTON'S YOUNG PEOPLE

Coniston's youth is Coniston's future. Frequently parish plans ignore facilities for the young people of a community and the Coniston team were determined that would not be the case with our Plan. We realised from the start the importance of considering the requirements of young people and we have obtained data from a variety of sources to make sure we cover all age groups. These included:

- By questionnaire of parents of pre-school youngsters.
- With the assistance of the Coniston Primary School for youngsters of primary school age.
- With the assistance of the Crusaders who carried out a 'Coniston Peer Research Project' in the Spring of 2003 of secondary school pupils.
- By a questionnaire targeted at the 16 to 25 year age group.

A summary of results is as follows:

- Facilities for full-time nursery care should be set up allowing parents to travel to locations such as Kendal or Barrow to start work at 9am.
- The work carried out by the Coniston Crusaders is clearly of benefit and should continue to be encouraged.
- Major requirements of young people is a youth club (in a dedicated facility), a skateboard park and improvements to the Lake Road playground.
- When reviews of public transport in the village are carried out the requirements of young people must form a major part.
- A high proportion of young adults wish to stay living in the village in the future. There is a critical requirement for affordable housing to allow them to do so.



Coniston Primary School is well regarded by the community as is the Community Development Centre housed at the school.

CONISTON CLUBS, SOCIETIES AND ORGANISATIONS

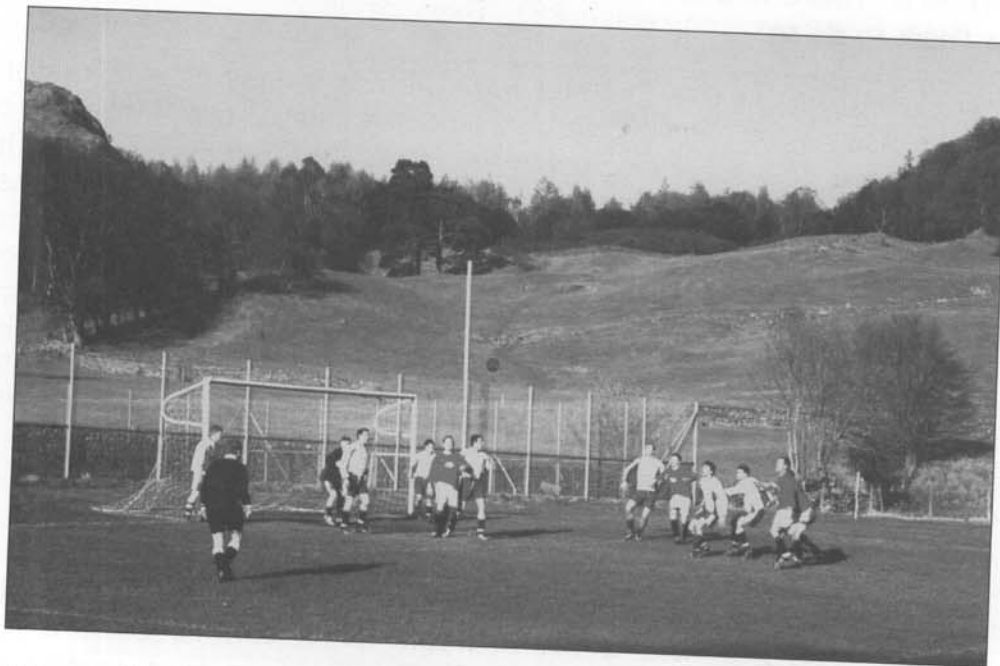
A major part of drafting the Parish Plan was to interview the various clubs and societies in the village. We were keen to learn what were the good points and what were the points of concern amongst the 50 or so local societies and organisations.

A large amount of data was collected which is available in the main Coniston Parish Plan report.

A number of societies have problems and issues which are specific to their operation. Although these were noted we were more interested in comments relating to the village as a whole.

To summarise our findings:

- Coniston supports a large number of clubs, societies and organisations for a village of its size.
- The main problem mentioned by several societies and organisations was the problem of attracting members, in particular from the younger age groups.
- A directory, frequently updated, of current clubs and societies (with contact names etc) would be a useful document.
- There is concern that the number of village societies will fall as the average age of the population increases.



Coniston has always been a sporting village and for many years the Coniston Football teams have been one of the areas outstanding success stories. At the time of drafting this Plan the team is top of the Westmoreland League, as it has been many times before. On the day this photograph was taken, in February 2004, Coniston was playing Appleby at home, and won 5 - 3.

CONISTON AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

We have mentioned earlier in this report the recent Government Rural White Paper 'Our Countryside the Future'. In the White Paper it was stressed that the essence of the Parish Plan is to help local rural communities to take charge of their own destinies.

Much of the control of policy in rural villages such as Coniston is in the hands of the District and County Councils with a certain amount of consultation on specific issues taking place with the parish councils and some with villagers themselves. At Coniston we also have an additional authority in the form of the National Park Authority.

As an exercise we decided to review recent issues that have cropped up relating to our own village and involving South Lakeland District Council, Cumbria County Council and also the National Park Authority. We also asked the question *how prepared are the authorities to allow Coniston to make up its own mind over decisions affecting the village?* Unfortunately at the time of drafting this report both the SLDC and CCC have received serious criticism from national audit bodies about the effectiveness of their operation. This is clearly a worrying situation for Lakeland communities at a time when farsighted, effective policies are required to help them retain their viability.

Several Parish Plan groups in England have adopted a rather singular way of 'rating' the performance of their local authorities by applying an arbitrary 'score out of 10' of their performance as it affects their village. The Coniston Parish Plan Team decided to adopt the same policy.

The South Lakeland District Council are responsible for many services include housing, waste management and council tax. A number of issues have come to light during our work to produce the Parish Plan. The most frequently made comments are concerned with the threatened closure of the public toilets opposite Bridge House, the high level of rates paid by Coniston residents and the removal of the refuse skips from the site at Lake Road. Clearly there are several points on which the District Council should be congratulated but, overall, there is some dissatisfaction with their operation amongst Coniston residents. We also feel that there are some classic examples of the Council not allowing the community of Coniston to make its own mind up over issues and because of this a 'score' of 6 out of 10 would be appropriate.

Cumbria County Council is responsible for a large range of services including roads and road maintenance, public transport, schools, fire services and the police and social services. Comments received from the village, while the plan was being drafted, were critical of the poor maintenance of roads within the parish and the fact that traffic and parking restrictions were likely to be imposed without considering the wishes of local people. Clearly there are big improvements that can be

made to their operation and a 'score' of 5 out of 10 would also seem appropriate.

The Lake District National Park Authority has come under significant criticism over the years, mainly concerning planning disputes. More recent issues have included the 'climb-down' over the planning application for the Black Beck development on the East Side of Coniston Lake and issues relating to replacement windows in village properties. However, while drafting the plan we also became aware of a much more serious issue regarding 'Local Plans'. Local Plans are being drafted for all rural communities in England and Wales. They are required by Government legislation and are normally the responsibility of the District Councils, in close consultation with Parish Councils. In National Parks the National Park Authority take on the responsibility. Local Plans form a blueprint for the community's future and included in them are a wide range of subjects such as estimates for housing needs, a review of employment prospects and public transport requirements for each rural community.

The LDNPA has produced a Local Plan which was adopted in 1998 but this appears to be concerned mainly with preserving the beauty of the Lake District landscape and reviewing tourist-related issues such as the number of footpaths repaired etc. There is no reference within this document to assessing the housing, employment or other requirements for specific local communities such as Coniston. We have taken this issue up with National Government at Westminster.

Recently there are signs that the LDNPA may be becoming more supportive to local communities but it will be some time before we can tell whether this is genuine change of policy. In the past we consider that the National Park Authority have fallen down seriously in supporting local communities such as Coniston and we feel that a 'score' of 4 out of 10 is appropriate for their past performance.

To summarise the performance of our local authorities:

South Lakes District Council	6 out of 10
Cumbria County Council	5 out of 10
Lake District National Park Authority	4 out of 10

There are definite areas for improvement which can be made in their dealings with Coniston and we expect all three authorities to perform much better in the future.

We should point out that these 'scores' are arbitrary and have been given purely to emphasis that all three authorities are accountable at all times to the communities that they serve.

THE 'TOP-TEN' ISSUES

We have selected what are clearly the ten issues of greatest concern to the community of Coniston. This selection is based on an analysis of the number of times the points were raised by Coniston people during the gathering of the information by the Parish Plan team.

The list is as follows:

- Affordable housing.
- Loss of village homes to the second home market.
- Youth facilities.
- The Institute.
- Provision of a Health Centre.
- Parking and Traffic issues.
- Full-time nursery care.
- Supporting the Coniston Carers.
- Gaining Broadband internet facilities.
- Supporting the First Responders scheme.

Affordable Housing

This point was of enormous concern to the village. It probably created more comment than all the other points put together. Many young people and young couples do not want to move away and villagers realise that it is essential to retain them in the village, to support and maintain a viable community, inject new blood into village societies and organisations, keep the primary school viable, provide a labour pool for local businesses and retain Coniston's image as a working village. Some affordable housing already exists and more is planned. However much more will be needed as further village property is lost to the second or holiday home market.

Loss of village homes to the second home market

The rate of loss appears to be accelerating and this is worrying a high proportion of village people. There are a number of action points that could be taken to halt this and these need to be investigated. If this trend could be halted there would be less need for new affordable housing. The 'robustness' of permanent occupancy clauses as part of new planning applications was also a concern. A lot of work is required here.

Youth facilities

The plan has flagged up the high concern within the village of lack of facilities for the younger age groups. One proposal put forward is for a dedicated youth centre. A number of village people and also village groups such as the Crusaders have already spent many years helping to develop facilities for younger residents. Their work will be encouraged.

The Institute

Village people are always unhappy about changes being made within the community which they have not had a chance to comment on or be involved in. As far as the Institute is concerned two surveys were carried within

the past three years. There was initially very high concern that the proposed modifications to the Institute would not be to their liking. As part of the Parish Plan development, an exhibition on the proposed modifications was set up by the Team to which several hundred local people came and which alleviated many peoples' concerns.

Provision of a Health Centre

Single-handed practices, such as the Coniston Practice, are not viewed favourably by the NHS (Primary Care Trusts). In many parts of Britain such practices are being closed down as a matter of routine. Developing a Health Centre in Coniston would safeguard the practice. One possible location is on land adjacent to the Institute. About 85% of those villagers who responded were very much in favour of a Health Centre being set up, as is Dr Wood and the Practice Team at the present surgery.

Parking and Traffic Issues

There was huge concern in the village about the problems of parking and traffic and equal annoyance at the proposals by Capita (on behalf of CCC) for changes to parking and traffic management such as 20mph speed limits in the village.

Full-time nursery care

Many people felt that it was essential that full time care was available to allow working partners to carry out full time employment in locations such as Kendal or Barrow.

Supporting the Coniston Carer Scheme

This scheme has received very high praise and has meant that many elderly people can stay in their own homes in Coniston for much longer than would be possible otherwise.

Gaining Broadband Internet access

This facility is required more and more by business. Many of the local businesses we interviewed felt that lack of Broadband could affect their operation in the future.

Support for the First Responder's Scheme

Rapid qualified medical attention is not always at hand and it can take an ambulance over twenty minutes to arrive from Ambleside. A sad incident in the village during the summer of 2003 brought this home to many Coniston people. The proposed First Responder's Scheme is felt by many in the village to be exactly what is required and will be supported.

There are other equally deserving causes such as improving the fortunes of the John Ruskin School, supporting the completion of the Sports Pavilion and the development of the Far End Saw Mill (County Council depot) for the benefit of the village community. We decided to target the top ten issues as a priority before concentrating on other points but will maintain a close watch on these other issues as well.

THE NEXT STEP

Having selected the issues on which village people feel most strongly, the Parish Plan Team will put together an Action Plan which will outline the action that must be taken to carry out the work. In some cases the response will consist of lobbying the relevant bodies to make sure that the correct action is taken. In other cases sourcing and raising funds will be the requirement. There is a lot of help available for this from agencies such as the Countryside Agency and Voluntary Action Cumbria.

Action on some of the major issues that the community highlighted during work on the Parish Plan are already well underway.

The team will work closely with many bodies including the Lake District National Park Authority, local councils and also National Government. We are certain that these bodies will be very enthusiastic about helping to achieve the aspirations of a local community.



A possible site for a Health Centre on Yewdale Road would have convenient access for most of the village.

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Royal British Legion
Women's Institute
Cameo Club
Day Centre
Mothers' Union
Coniston Sailing Club
Coniston Playgroup
Twinning Committee
Coniston and Torver District
Angling Association
Low Bank Ground Outdoor Centre
Coniston Mountain Rescue Team
Coniston 14 Association
Cricket Club
Football Club
Bowling Club
Tennis Clubs
Coniston in Bloom
Coniston and Torver Gardening Club
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The Coniston Newsletter

All who took time to fill in the questionnaires – anyone we have omitted inadvertently – in fact the whole of Coniston Village!