

## HEALTHCHECK REPORT

### KIRKBY STEPHEN AND THE UPPER EDEN & LUNE VALLEY VILLAGES

#### 1. Background and introduction to the report

This report presents details of the way in which the Kirkby Stephen Market Town/Vital Villages Healthcheck was undertaken, who was involved and in what way. It identifies the methods used, including the presentations, snapshot, surveys, workshops, working groups, exhibition and the communication strategies adopted. The report also presents the results of the snapshot, surveys and workshops, together with the key findings of investigations stemming from the healthcheck worksheets. These are followed in the report by an analysis and interpretation of the major findings. The report concludes by the setting out of a vision for the future of the area in terms of its facilities, services and provision.

Although Kirkby Stephen Town Council were unsuccessful in their bid to be part of the Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative they were given the option of using the full Healthcheck process within what was essentially the Vital Villages scheme. It was decided to follow the full Healthcheck path because:

- The Healthcheck process seemed rigorous and robust;
- The time seemed right following on from the difficulties experienced through the prolonged foot and mouth epidemic to put the area under close scrutiny using a tested process;
- The opportunity might not easily present itself again.

Funding for the process was provided by the Countryside Agency within the Vital Villages funding regime and assisted by grants from Cumbria Rural Development Programme and Barclays Rural Recovery Programme.

The report that follows is written to further the process of openness with which the healthcheck was carried out and to provide a measure of accountability to those who gave their ideas, time and effort to bringing this stage of the process to a conclusion.

## **2. Location, town and contributing villages**

### **2.1 Location**

Kirkby Stephen is a small market town in the North West of England which lies almost at the head of the Upper Eden Valley on the eastern edge of Cumbria within the Eden District. It was originally part of the old Westmorland County but was subsumed within the County of Cumbria in 1974 when government reorganisation took place.

### **2.2 Kirkby Stephen**

Kirkby Stephen is a traditional market town which was granted its charter for fairs and markets by Edward III in 1353. Although much has changed since the time when livestock was the central trading currency, it is still possible to detect links with this ancient past, notably, in the retention of the livestock and outdoor markets and the arrangement of properties around the market square and their relationship to the parish church. Many of the properties date from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and the construction and materials give the town centre an attractive appearance.

Kirkby Stephen is served by a good road network which contributes to its popularity as a stopping off point for those travelling between the north-east and north-west and vice versa. It would be fair to say that Kirkby Stephen is more travelled through than travelled to as far as tourists are concerned but tourists taking a break from their journeys often contribute to the local economy by patronising the local teashops and cafes.

Kirkby Stephen is also characterised by the number of antique shops, two more having opened in the past year and these in turn attract visitors to the area.

The town is positioned roughly half way on the Coast to Coast long distance footpath and because of this it attracts a sizeable number of walkers who stay overnight before proceeding to Keld in the Yorkshire Dales.

Kirkby Stephen has retained many facilities and services unlike the villages in the surrounding area which have lost theirs, notably, schools, post offices and shops. This has had the effect of strengthening Kirkby Stephen's role as a service centre for the Upper Eden and Upper Lune valleys and generally speaking the range of services is broad enough to cater for the everyday needs of local people.

The town is the focal point for surrounding villages with which it has strong links many of which are associated in more recent times with its role as a service centre but perhaps over longer have been forged through more traditional and cultural practices.

### **2.3 The surrounding villages**

There are many small villages and hamlets in the countryside surrounding Kirkby Stephen. Some of these retain a public house, a village hall or community facility, although with the exception of Brough, none have shops; Nateby has a garage. Only Brough and Ravenstonedale have retained their primary schools and several have churches of great distinction.

The spectacular remains of Brough Castle, owned by English Heritage, are sited in Church Brough. As with many of the villages, Brough can lay claim to a fascinating heritage. Of particular note was the Brough Fair, chartered in the 1326, and which continues in a much reduced and change form as the Brough Hill Fair. Brough's position on the old Roman road across the Stainmore accounts for its past as a major droving centre.

Brough is divided by the A66 so that Church Brough is separated from the Market Brough area. 6 shops, including a post office and grocers and several public houses, are all located within the Market Brough area.

Many of the villages can boast a unique history, buildings of distinction and unrivalled settings in the landscape. Several of the villages have strong community organisations, organise community events and share in the community events provided in Kirkby Stephen helping in the organisation and participating too.

Between the town of Kirkby Stephen and the neighbouring villages there is a cohesive grouping which presented few, if any, difficulties in relation to the healthcheck. In fact, the advantages of working through the process over the broader Upper Eden and Upper Lune Valleys were considerable, not least because of the support given by the residents of the villages in distributing, collecting and responding to the survey, signing up to working groups and generally taking an interest in the process and its results. Without doubt the healthcheck process has reinforced the bond between town and villages.

### **3. The Healthcheck Process**

#### **3.1 Timescale**

Work on the healthcheck began in February 2002 after the Kirkby Stephen Town Council succeeded in gaining a parish plans grant from the Countryside Agency and was scheduled to be completed to and including the Action Plan stage by October 2002.

#### **3.2 Co-ordinator, Administrator and Steering Group Personnel**

The process began with the appointment of the part-time project co-ordinator who, in consultation with members of the Town Council, appointed the part-time project administrator and drew up a list of people who might be available and be interested in joining the Partnership/Steering Group. In the case of the Kirkby Stephen healthcheck the Steering Group were envisaged as the core of the partnership. Other people were brought into the process as and when needed so in effect, although the Steering Group managed the process, there was a wider Partnership network encompassing a much broader range of people, often in an advisory capacity.

The single most important criterion was that the steering group should be truly representative of a broad cross-section of the town and surrounding villages. In the event, 22 people were approached in this initial phase, 4 declined the invitation for various reasons. The Steering Group thus started with 18 members representing various community groups, a broad range of interests, skills and experience and a wide age range, from both the town and surrounding villages. Another person volunteered to join the Steering Group after the first newsletter went out to the households in Kirkby Stephen and 3 others who were encountering difficulties in attending meetings, offered help where they could but resigned from the formal Steering Group so the group ultimately consisted of 16 people. From this group, Mr Arthur Littlefair was asked to take on the role of Chairman and although he chaired the majority of meetings there was some delegation of responsibility to Cllr Mrs Shiela Haughey when he was unavailable. The Steering Group met for the first time on 25 February and roughly every 3 weeks in the early stages and every 4 weeks from July.

**Co-ordinator, Administrator and Steering Group Personnel**

**Co-ordinator responsible for the Healthcheck:**

Dorothy Waterworth, Community & Council Centre, 15 Market Street, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, CA17 4QS. Tel/Fax: 017683 71325. E-mail: [d.waterworth@virgin.net](mailto:d.waterworth@virgin.net)

**Administrator to the Project:**

Edwina Brown, Community & Council Centre, 15 Market Street, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria CA17 4QS. Tel/Fax: 017683 71325.

### Steering Group

Name	Networks	Area of Interest
<b>Arthur Littlefair (chair)</b>	Rotary Club of Upper Eden, Chair KS Mountain Rescue Team, KS Forum, KS Grammar School governor, business owner, KS resident	Economy, education, Business support
<b>Shiela Haughey</b>	Chair KS Town Council, business owner, KS resident	Economy, business services, health, housing, crime prevention
<b>Joan Johnstone *</b>	Town Councillor, United Charities member, member Eden Housing Association, KS resident	Housing, community groups
<b>Colin Albon *</b>	Town Councillor, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Upper Eden History Society, KS resident	Environment, culture & heritage
<b>David Keetley</b>	Headteacher, KS Grammar School	Education, sport
<b>Mike Buckler</b>	Headteacher KS Primary School	Education, arts, technology
<b>John Edwards</b>	Secretary Upper Eden Plusbus Company, Chofhs Youth Group Secretary, Brough Sowerby resident,	Transport youth
<b>Alex Birtles *</b>	Chair KS Sports Association, local solicitor, KS resident	Law, sport, education
<b>John Begg</b>	Technical engineer, former chair of governors KS Primary School, KS resident	Education, countryside
<b>Howard Lund</b>	Community Policeman,	Crime prevention, social housing, youth
<b>Ann Anderton *</b>	Training consultant, secretary KS Walking Festival, Winton resident	Employment, training/education
<b>Jackie Fisher *</b>	Researcher/consultant, KS resident,	Education, access
<b>Elsie Harvey</b>	Long standing KS resident	Elderly services, community representative
<b>Andy Sayer *</b>	Health Centre Administrator, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme administrator, KS resident	Health services, youth services, housing
<b>Alex Chalmers *</b>	Volunteer Bureau Eden, Warcop resident	Voluntary organisations, childcare
<b>Lesley Bagot</b>	Former Nursery teacher, Assistant Administrator KS Community Office, Ravenstonedale resident	Sport, childcare, education

However, because of the large amount of data being generated and the need to review all of this it was decided in May to form a core group of 7 Steering Group members (\* above) who would meet more often and report back to the full Steering Group. This appears to have worked well and taken some of the burden off some of the members.

### **3.3 Geographical Catchment Area of the Healthcheck**

One of the first tasks of the Steering Group was to agree the geographical spread of the healthcheck.

14 villages in the surrounding countryside have been traditionally linked with Kirkby Stephen, they are: Hartley, Winton, Kaber, Nateby, Waitby, Wharton and Mallerstang which are all part of the Kirkby Stephen Ward, Brough Sowerby, Brough, Musgrave and Stainmore which comprise the Brough Ward and Ravenstonedale/Newbiggin, Soulby and Crosby Garrett which make up the Ravenstonedale Ward. These were drawn into the healthcheck process from the beginning.

In addition, because of ties relating to secondary education, a specific transport service, the shopping habits of some residents and expressed interest, it was felt that Warcop should also be included. Thus it was that a circle of six-mile radius from Kirkby Stephen could be drawn around the catchment area for the healthcheck, covering 15 parishes plus Kirkby Stephen within the CA17 postcode. Initially an invitation was extended to Orton and Tebay some 12 miles distant but they did not take up the invitation and were reluctantly excluded.

The map in Figure 1 below provides a detailed picture of the area covered in the healthcheck.

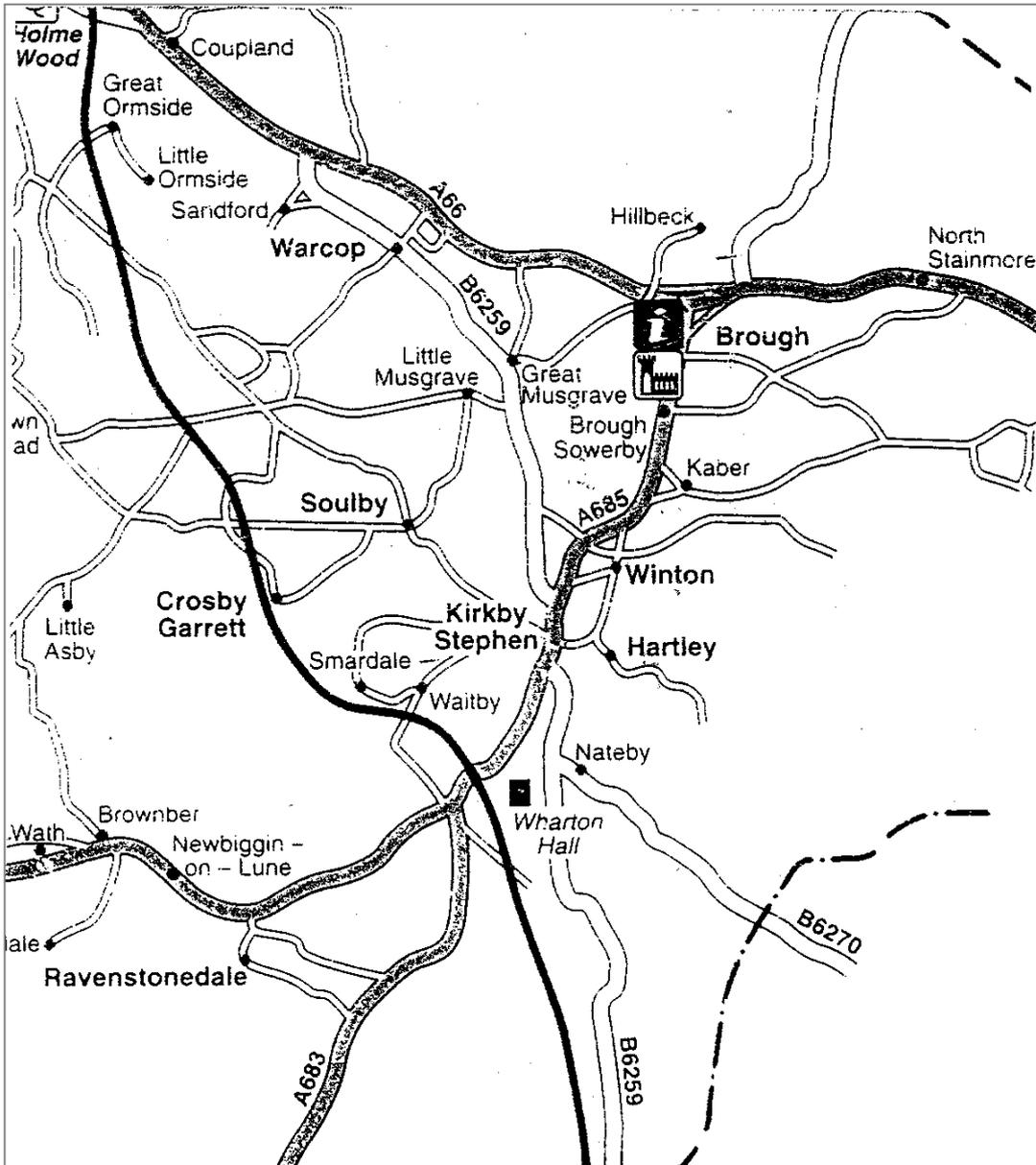
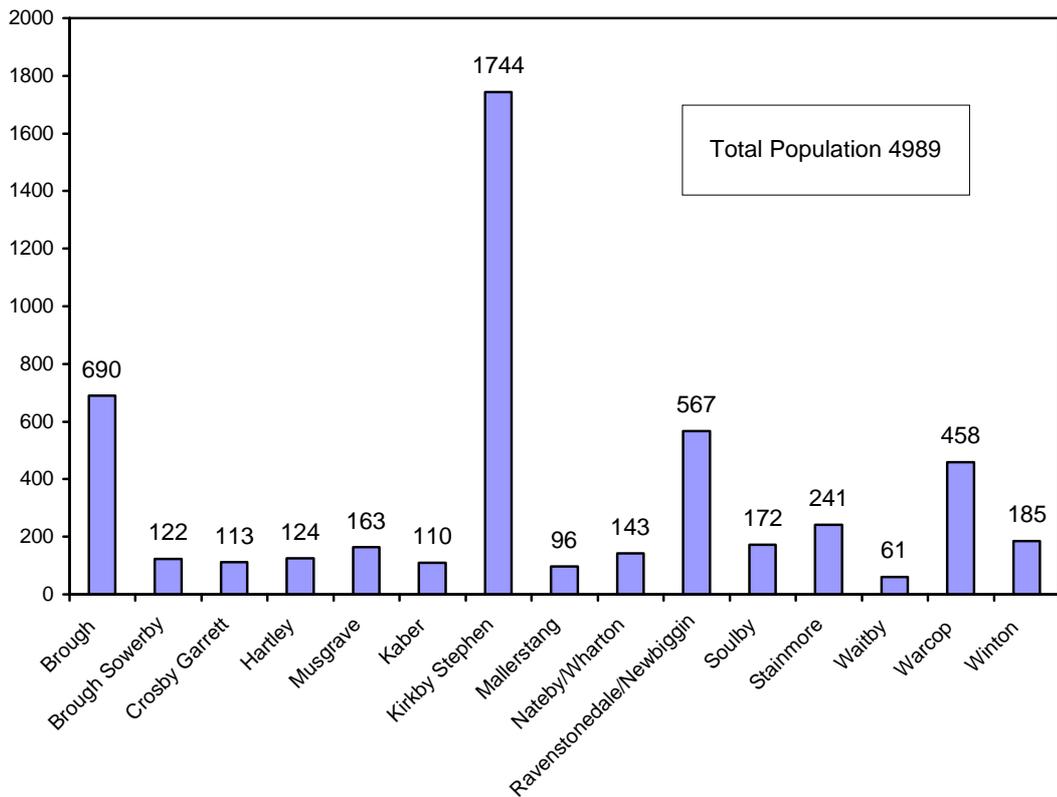


Figure 1 Map of the healthcheck catchment area

### 3.4 Population

Sixteen parishes of various sizes made up the catchment area, a total of 4989 residents in 1995. Until the 2001 Census figures are published there are no more up to date figures available at the parish level. Ward level figures in 1999 for the four wards, Kirkby Stephen, Brough, Ravenstonedale and Warcop, show that the population had reached 5058. Continuing this percentage growth it is possible to estimate that the figure in 2002 across the catchment area is in the region of 5100. Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of population by parish for the year 1995. (NB There are no separate figures available for Wharton parish as these are included with Nateby parish).

**Kirkby Stephen & The Upper Eden & Lune Valley Villages**



**Figure 2 Parish Populations 1995**

### **3.5 Involvement of surrounding parishes**

The initial period of the project was devoted to raising awareness about the project and gaining commitment to it and to this end a number of strategies were used - newsletters/fliers were delivered to all households in Kirkby Stephen and the same were posted on village notice boards and throughout the town, presentations were made to the larger community groups and displays were set up in the Community & Council Centre, press releases were issued.

One event of some importance in this early phase was the meeting on 6 March with the Chairs of 13 of the 15 Parish Councils /Parish Meetings from the surrounding villages, the object of which was to explain the Healthcheck Process, engage the members in discussion and generate commitment to the process. A presentation was made by the Co-ordinator and the whole meeting was facilitated by Cllr Mrs Haughey, Chair of Kirkby Stephen Town Council, on behalf of the Steering Group. From the outset the villages were assured of their place in the process and their support was in evidence throughout. It was acknowledged from the start that, although the major focus would be on the services and facilities available in Kirkby Stephen town, where possible attempts would be made to appraise provision in the villages and keep their interests in view throughout.

### **3.5 Healthcheck Process Framework**

From these early meetings a broad plan of action for completing the process was agreed as set out below and with minor modifications this became the blueprint for the process, Figure 3 below.

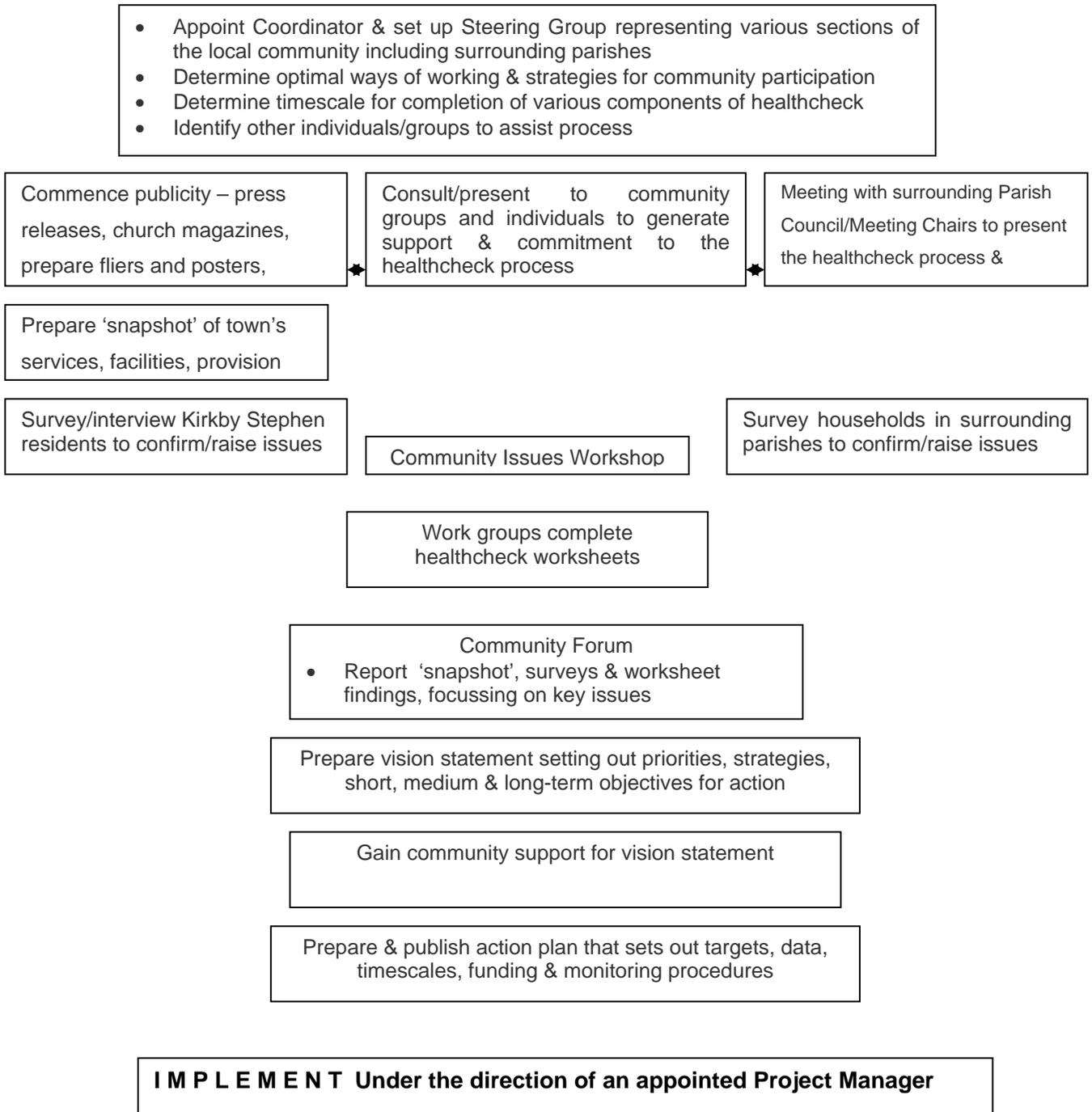


Figure 3 Healthcheck Process

### 3.7 Healthcheck Timetable

A timetable was drawn up as follows:

Key Milestones	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept
Establish chair/steering group/coordinator	XXX							
Publicity	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Consult/inform Kirkby Stephen community		XXX						
Consult/inform surrounding villages		XXX						
Prepare Snapshot of town's services		XXX						
Survey households in KS & surrounding parishes			XXX					
Issues Workshop			XXX					
Healthcheck worksheets completed				XXX	XXX			
Community Forum – report main snapshot and healthcheck worksheets findings						XXX		
Vision statement completed						XXX		
Feedback to community re vision & gain support							XXX	
Prepare & publish action plan								XXX

**Figure 4 Healthcheck Timetable**

There was in fact some slippage in what was a fairly ambitious programme for a large group of volunteers and two paid part-time workers so that the worksheets were not finalised until the end of June and this put the final stages of the programme back also. This was not perceived as a problem since the important thing was for the working groups to engage in the process and, also, sufficient time had been allotted at the outset with just this possibility in view.

### **3.8 Communications Plan**

Because of the need to keep members of the Upper Eden Valley Community informed and involved throughout the process the Steering Group agreed a communication plan and timetable at the outset. This was done in the first instance by a presentation to the chairs of surrounding village parish councils and meetings, delivery of fliers to all households in Kirkby Stephen, posters on all village notice boards and press releases in the Cumberland and Westmorland Herald, Westmorland Messenger and church magazines. It was followed by the survey forms with accompanying explanatory letter and promotion via Fresh AM local radio. This pattern of press coverage was continued throughout and the plan was followed much as it was laid down in the beginning with one main change. It was decided to present the healthcheck process results and the vision statement within one community event which would be an exhibition over ten days in late August which would be manned over the period by a succession of steering group members and would provide information to the broad Upper Eden Valley community whilst at the same time enlisting their support for the vision.

### **3.9 The Snapshot**

One of the first tasks for the Co-ordinator was to gather data in response to the Snapshot questions. This was completed by the end of March. Some difficulties were experienced in collecting this data and, similarly, occurred again in relation to the worksheets. In the main the major frustration was in not being able to locate parish or ward statistics. Although NOMIS and National Statistics databases were used extensively, along with a range of other sources, there were several occasions when the search was abortive simple because the database did not focus down or data was not available at the small area level. For example, although it was possible to find average wages for Eden District it was not possible to locate them for Kirkby Stephen ward or parish and yet these are significant in any interpretation of the economic characteristics of the area. On other occasions it was difficult to use the data in a conclusive way because it was grossly out of date, this was notably the case in relation to the condition of housing stock last reported upon in the 1991 Census. Fortunately, the local housing association were able to

update the picture and the impression of a significant amount of run down housing was changed for the better.

Despite the frustrations, the Snapshot proved to be a useful exercise and produced much of value in building a picture of the area which was further explored through the worksheets.

### **3.10 Surveys of Kirkby Stephen Town, Six Villages and Kirkby Stephen Grammar School Students**

During April a survey was carried out of all households in Kirkby Stephen town and in the villages of Brough, Brough Sowerby, Hartley, Winton, Crosby Garrett and Ravenstonedale, i.e. two villages from the Brough Ward, two from the Kirkby Stephen Ward and two from Ravenstonedale Ward, a total of 1561 households. It was a difficult decision not to cover all 14 villages and it was determined by the sheer volume of deliveries and collection, some over enormous distances, the prohibitive cost of a postal delivery and the processing of an anticipated large response. (see Appendix 1 for copies of survey forms and accompanying letters of explanation for the town, Appendix 2 for copies of the village survey form and letter and Appendix 3 for the letter and form used with students of Kirkby Stephen Grammar School).

In the past 4 years Kirkby Stephen residents had been involved in three complex surveys in connection with local projects. In addition, other surveys from the County and District Councils and National bodies had been delivered to local households and it was felt that something simple might produce a good response from a community that had been somewhat overburdened by questionnaires. Since it was hoped to draw some comparisons between the responses of town dwellers and village residents, with the exception of one question, the survey was the same for the surrounding villages.

In the case of Kirkby Stephen town the surveys were delivered by hand and 4 collection points were provided at various convenient locations around the town with the Post Office collection box proving the most popular and the Co-op collection box a fairly close second. In the case of Brough, the survey forms were made available in the Post Office and One Stop Shop who, in addition, circulated them with their newspaper deliveries and provided collecting boxes. They were also delivered to and collected from households with children at the primary school via the school pupils themselves.

Surveys were delivered and collected by hand by a team of 16 volunteers to all the other five villages. In the event the response rate was 30% for the town, 34% for Brough and 50-60% for the other villages, a total of 729 returns. Several villagers added comments to the effect that they were pleased to be included and the delivery and collection team reported discussions with several villagers indicating a very positive interest in the process and where it might lead. There was only one negative comment on one returned form to the effect that the money would have been better spent on new sports facilities for the town!

The analysis of the returns was completed by early May (see Appendix 4 for results) and this has provided much needed information on what local people feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the town's services and facilities as well as an indication of the use of local facilities and services. In the case of the villages the additional question about the means of travel to Kirkby Stephen yielded some useful information, not least in relation to numbers using the Upper Eden Plusbus and those using the car.

An additional survey of the students at Kirkby Stephen Grammar School was also carried out and the results were analysed separately (see Appendix 5 for results). There was a 55% response rate, i.e. 220 returns out of a possible 400. Unfortunately, delay in distributing the survey meant that it was not possible to get the views of Years 11, 12 and 13 who had effectively been given leave from school at this point. Fortunately, one member of the Steering Group undertook to survey some of the young people on the streets of Kirkby Stephen during the evening, a total of 10, this involved the older students and this information has also been taken into account. It is worth pointing out that the catchment area for the school extends beyond the catchment area for this healthcheck to include Orton and Tebay and the responses of students from these villages are included in the results.

### **3.11 Issues Workshop**

The survey was followed on 2 May by an Issues Workshop in which 72 local people took part. These were 5 members of the Kirkby Stephen Town Council, representatives of the 14 surrounding parishes, representatives of 25 community groups and residents from Kirkby Stephen town who had indicated on the survey forms that they wished to participate. (For details of the Workshop format, objectives, facilitator, group leaders and participants see Appendix 6).

The Workshop was planned to assist local people to prioritise the issues facing the area. (see Appendix 7 for the Report on the Workshop itemising the key issues and priorities). It was

anticipated that this detail, along with the factual information obtained for the snapshot and healthcheck worksheets plus the survey results would provide a comprehensive picture of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the area plus some identification of future opportunities and threats as seen from the perspective of a very broad cross-section of the town and village population. In effect the Workshop provided an opportunity to cross-check against the results of the surveys and superimposed on this information was the factual data obtained for the snapshot and worksheets.

The final part of the Workshop enabled 24 local people to sign up to assist with the Healthcheck Worksheets and, following a debrief session on the Issues Workshop, these were swiftly assigned to the 18 Working Groups for completion of the worksheets by 30 June. (see Appendix 8 for Worksheet Guidance Notes).

**3.12 Worksheet Working Groups – Leaders and Helpers**

Ref No	Title	Working Group Leader	Working Group Helpers
EN1	Character & Vitality of Town	Joan Johnstone	Judith Doig Margaret Gowling
EN2	The Countryside	Colin Albon	David Ellis Dorothy Waterworth
EN3	Links between town & country	Andy Sayer	Malcolm Hutchinson Avril Goddard
EC1	Employment	Ann Anderton	Arnold Nelson Colin Albon Anita Proctor Graham McWilliam
EC2	Retail & town centre services	Shiela Haughey	Philip Jones Dorothy Waterworth
EC3	Training and education	Ann Anderton	Christina Collis Christine Remmer Mike Buckler David Keetley
EC4	Commercial and industrial property needs	Alex Birtles	Barry Stacey Graham McWilliam Anita Proctor
EC5	Tourism & visitor services	Dorothy Waterworth	Barry Stacey John Heron Steve McWhirter
EC6	Business Support	Arthur Littlefair	Barbara Dowson Mike Buckler Graham Simpson
S1	Population	Shiela Haughey	Dorothy Waterworth
S2	Housing	Joan Johnstone	Andy Sayer John Heron
S3	Health & public safety	Howard Lund	Thomas Robinson Dave Watt Andy Sayer
S4	Local Government & community organisations	Alex Chalmers	Julie Lindridge Christine Remmer
S5	Sport, leisure & open space	Lesley Bagot	Alex Birtles George Stores Trevor Waterworth
S6	Culture & heritage	Mike Buckler	Margaret Gowling Carl Hallam
T1	Ease of travel outside the local area	Jackie Fisher	Mike Buckler
T2	Ease of access to services	John Edwards	George Stores Avril Goddard
T3	Ease of movement around the town	John Begg	Elsie Harvey

### 3.13 The Primary School Workshop

Immediately following the Issues Workshop arrangements were made for the co-ordinator to hold a small workshop with the local primary school's School Council. From their perspective there were four main priorities, namely, improved swimming provision, creation of a drop-in centre where children could play pool and table tennis, provision of a junk food outlet where they could buy hamburgers and pizza and access to more books and a larger space to read them in - no doubt a comment on the smallness of the local library.

### 3.14 The Wider Partnership

The co-ordinator, steering group and working groups shouldered the major parts of the process, individual residents helped further by giving various facts, notably, in relation to retailing and business, however, other important contributions were made by individuals, representing organisations outside Kirkby Stephen area, who were drawn into the process and provided valuable assistance at different points in time, thus it was that a larger partnership was created as the need arose.

In some cases the contact with those outside the Steering Group took the form of requests for information and, with one exception, these were received positively. In a number of other cases the focus of the contact revolved around discussion and interpretation of the factual data. As the process developed minds were drawn towards resolving the issues illuminated by the healthcheck. For this the Steering Group required expert advice and consultations were arranged with a number of key personnel from the District Council, voluntary organisations and funding agencies.

#### Wider Consultation Group

Name	Organisation	Help given
Karen Spriggs	Countryside Agency	Process mentor
Roger Roberts	Eden District Council	Tourism information, discussions re healthcheck process, advice re tourism, town centre & business associated issues; workshop group leader
Sally Lansbury	Eden District Council	Tourism information

Graham McWilliam	Eden District Council	Economic information, workshop group leader, consultation & advice re commercial & industrial workspace provision, marketing, visitor centre project and general economic issues affecting KS
Anita Proctor	Eden District Council	Economic information, workshop group leader, consultation & advice re commercial & industrial workspace provision, marketing, visitor centre project and general economic issues affecting KS
	Cumbria Ambulance Service	Service response data
Hughie McNaughton	Cumbria Fire Service	Service response data & discussions re fire service provision in KS
Pat Allison	Cumbria RDP	Discussions re possible projects, feasibility study for visitor centre project, funding programmes & advice; workshop group leader
Elizabeth Murphy	Eden District Council	Listed buildings information
Francis Meynell	Eden Housing Association	Housing data & interpretation
Geoff Brown	Leader+	Consultation re possible visitor centre project and funding advice
Adrian Bamford	Leader+	Consultation re possible visitor centre project – assigned as our link to Leader+
Quentin Merritt	VAC	Workshop facilitator
Lorraine Smyth	VAC	General discussions and advice re process
Karen Bowen	Council for Voluntary Service	Workshop group leader
Louise Norman	EDC Housing Officer	Discussions re social housing provision & play area on estate
	Impact Housing	Social housing policy & data
	Two Castles Housing	Social housing policy & data
Sue Bennett	Eden Community Outdoors	Discussion re youth provision
Laura Robson	Age Concern	Discussions re care provision
Sarah Faill	Eden Family Support	Discussions re family provision
Sue Thackray	Eden Carers	Discussions re carer support & agenda of action to improve support
Sally Orrell	Eden Area Neighbourhood Forum, Cumbria County Co.	Discussions re healthcheck process, CCC involvement & funding advice
Kate Simpson	LA21	Discussion re possible visitor centre project & funding advice
Kirstine Riding	Cumbria Rural Housing Trust	Discussions re possible housing needs survey
	Eden Arts	Discussions re inclusion on arts touring programmes,

John Nicholas	Upper Eden Plusbus Company	Discussion re healthcheck process and implications for Plusbus continuation
Douglas Chalmers	Country Land & Business Association	Discussions re business support and stimulating broadband demand
Mark Lynn	Business Link Cumbria	Discussions re provision of Business Support

### **3.15 Healthcheck Worksheets**

All 18 worksheets were completed by 30 June by the various Working Groups with one small exception, notably, the counting of car park spaces, which was done during the early part of July as this was felt to be a more appropriate time for assessing peak demand. (see Appendix 9 for completed worksheets). Together with the Co-ordinator, the Core Steering Group checked and summarised on a cover sheet the main features and issues of the individual worksheets. Nevertheless, there was still a considerable amount of information to be brought within a manageable framework.

Because there were several different parts to the process – surveys, workshop, snapshot and worksheet – and because together they provide a means of triangulation for the process of defining the key issues, and, because all of these would have a bearing on the vision and ultimate action plan, a format was devised for setting out the different parts within one larger framework for each of the four major areas of enquiry – environment, economy, social/community, transport and accessibility.

In Section 4 which follows, the composite frameworks for each separate area of enquiry are set out in the order indicated above and each one is followed by the appropriate analysis and interpretation.

## **4. Analysis and Interpretation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In broad terms the healthcheck has helped to identify many positive features of Kirkby Stephen and the surrounding villages and the picture is fairly encouraging across a number of services and facilities. It has brought many of the specific environmental, social, economic and transport/accessibility features of the area under scrutiny where they could be assessed anew and given more force by the factual detail accumulated. This is certainly the case in relation to the area's outstanding natural environment.

However, the healthcheck has also revealed a number of shortfalls in provision which might otherwise have remained hidden and which detract from the overall quality of life for those who live and work in the area. The strengths and weaknesses of the area are well documented now in the answers to the worksheet questions, the survey responses and from the Issues Workshop and these are appraised below in a little more detail along with some of the opportunities and threats that the area faces.

### **4.2 Environment**

Within the town of Kirkby Stephen itself much has been done by shop owners to maintain a good appearance on shop fronts and HERS scheme grants have aided this process in many cases. This scheme is now much reduced in relation to the percentage of financial aid so that any future upgrading will need to be funded largely by the shop owners themselves unless a new scheme is introduced. As several people pointed out in the surveys, two buildings at the heart of the town detract from the overall smart appearance, one in particular presenting a very run down image with broken windows and peeling paint. This building is privately owned and to a large extent its future restoration is outside the control of the people who reside in Kirkby Stephen.

At present one of the historic buildings of Kirkby Stephen, namely The Cloisters, remains unfinished whilst money is sought to complete the final stage of its restoration – bid for funding has been made. Its distinctive architecture, its position at the entrance to the church yard and its historical roots have established it as a defining feature in the town spoiled only by the litter that collects within and around it, something which many residents abhor along with the dog fouling of pavements and alleys in the town and which they wish to be addressed through this project.

Just off the market square and seen from many different approaches to the town is the parish church, an outstanding sandstone building of the early medieval period, with possibly earlier Anglo-Saxon origins, with a delightful green in front. Other buildings in the centre of the town of sandstone and brockram, many dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and 52 of them listed, and the yards and wiends off the main street, together with the independent shops, give Kirkby Stephen town centre much of its distinctive character and account for its status as a conservation area.

Approaches to the town from all directions pass through beautiful countryside with green fields, dry stone walls and hedgerows gradually giving way to more buildings until the main streets of the town are entered. On the southern edge to the town this idyllic picture is disturbed by some of the business activity at the old east station yard which by its very nature is untidy. Yet it provides a service and perhaps helps contain that untidiness in one quarter rather than it spreading in pockets throughout the area. Improved screening might help or relocation within the site but the problem is not easy to solve by virtue of the fact that the road is considerably higher than the yard.

The countryside around Kirkby Stephen, much of which can be seen from different points in the town itself, is outstanding. The area is rich in Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. It has two National Nature Reserves on its doorstep and the River Eden itself, which has been proposed as a SSSI because of its quality and stock, all together presenting exceptional assets which, judging by the surveys and workshops, are appreciated by many who live in the area.

The fact that these areas are protected is of some consolation since it might be anticipated that there could be changes resulting from the foot and mouth outbreak that might, in undesignated areas, affect the landscape quality. Thus the threat posed by the foot and mouth outbreak to the environmental assets of the area is offset by the protection afforded by their designated status. Unfortunately, there is no such protection in terms of the economic problems enforced by the disease, particularly for those farms that did not contract the disease and were unable to sell stock and, more especially, in relation to tourism as the industry struggles to recoup the financial losses of 2001 and regain its place as a tourism destination, which, judging by TIC figures for May and June of 2002, are falling far short of pre-FMD numbers.

That the landscape is attractive to local people is not in doubt but its potential as a magnet for visitors is probably under-exploited. The Coast to Coast long-distance footpath which passes through the town brings in visitors who would otherwise not be aware of the existence of this rural area of Cumbria but, after many years, numbers are declining, even with the pent up demand created by closure in 2001. Thus the time has arrived when the area's natural assets might be more widely marketed to assist the local economy, albeit with the necessary checks and balances needed to maintain the quality of the natural environment.

Of equal importance to the overall character of the area, are the delightful villages which comprise the Upper Eden and Lune Valleys. They too have their distinctive historic buildings, not least the many fine churches, halls and manor houses. They also are surrounded by countryside of a peerless quality and the overall effect is one of traditional villages in harmony with each other and their surroundings.

The area is well-served by good roads which link the town and villages and the Plusbus service cements this link by uniting the town and most of the surrounding villages 4 times daily, although there are threats to the continuation of this service as will be discussed later.

The District Council's Amenity Site in Kirkby Stephen has no doubt played a part in helping to keep the area free of unsightly rubbish and, according to the survey, is used by 83.3% of town respondents and 80.3% of village respondents but should be extended to include plastics recycling as mentioned in the Issues Workshop. This is apparently on the agenda for installation in late Summer 2002.

So apart from one or two smaller issues of concern, the area's environment ranks very highly indeed and probably comprises its richest asset alongside the less tangible community spirit.

### 4.3 Economy

Unlike the environment, the economy seems far more problematic. Although the area can boast only 1.1% unemployment it is characterised by seasonal variations, low added value jobs with consequently low skills and low pay. Only 35% of the population have full time positions with 27% part-time. 74% of household incomes are below the UK average and wages, assuming Eden figures in this instance, are 73.4% of the national average.

In such an economy there are few opportunities for managerial and professional jobs and a greater likelihood that those with the highest qualifications and skills will go to work outside the town. But the threats may be even more insidious because it may force the highest skilled and qualified to leave the area altogether and it does seem to be the case that many of the young people who go on to higher education do not return to the area when qualified. This may reduce the pool of expertise for all sorts of town and village initiatives and could undermine the community capital of the area. To some extent this is redressed by the numbers of people who relocate to the area in their later years and who have a background of higher education and a lot of experience to go with it. Many of them give their time freely to the clubs and societies in the area.

That 74% of household incomes are below the UK average and, significantly below, judging by the average wage and the high proportion (30%) of single residences, is of great concern in several respects. House prices are very nearly in line with the UK figures, 95% of detached house prices, 106% of the UK average for semis and 75% of the average terraced house price, which bodes ill for local people on local incomes trying to buy property in the area. But there are even more ramifications for an isolated rural community where access to most cultural, arts and entertainment events entails travelling some distance, where most training provision is in the major towns at a minimum of 25 and 47 miles distant, where hospital treatment is equally distant and where sports team fixtures involve much travelling, all with financial implications. Income levels may, therefore, affect the lives of residents in many less obvious ways – their choices in relation to housing, health, training, culture/arts and sport.

As 21.3% of the residents of Kirkby Stephen Ward do not possess a car and rely on public transport there are further consequences, not least the additional financial burden imposed by the cost of public transport travel but also the extra inconvenience when those services are fragmented and limited. Although the numbers without a car are not so great in the other Wards covered by this healthcheck (16.6% Brough; 10.2% Ravenstonedale and 10.4% Warcop) for

some residents the extra cost of getting to Kirkby Stephen to access the wider public transport network must act as a further deterrent. In total, the potential effect of low incomes is diverse and pervasive affecting the quality of life of rural residents in many ways.

There are 1100 jobs in the area for 2200 economically active people so the implication is that 50% of the economically active commute elsewhere to work. If it is the case that they spend their income in the area where they work then the town is deprived of a source of revenue which is needed to keep the shops and businesses buoyant. The implementation of a 'shop local' scheme with the appropriate explanation of how this benefits the local economy might be a useful strategy for overcoming some of the leaching of local income to the bigger towns and cities.

It is fair to say that Kirkby Stephen seems to be going through a period of economic uncertainty brought about by problems in both the farming and tourism industries which form a significant part of the area's economic base. Exacerbated by a strong pound and reduction in tourists from abroad, the decline in farm incomes and aftermath of the foot and mouth disease, retailer confidence is variable, ranging from the totally optimistic to the entirely pessimistic.

Six new retail businesses have opened in the town in the past six months and two enquiries have been received about commercial premises. In contrast, the livestock market has not yet returned to its full sales programme, the outdoor market seems vulnerable and four shops remain unsold over an extended period.

The balance between shops for local needs and shops to attract tourists is probably just about right at the present although several residents fear the increase in the number of tourist shops will deprive them of the provisions they need on a day-to-day basis. In summary, the picture is mixed although the generally good appearance of the town might suggest otherwise.

Provision for adult education in the town is limited in a number of ways. In the first instance, there is little provision for any kind of job training beyond general ICT. For some of the participants in ICT courses attendance is an attempt to keep up with children and grandchildren, for others it is seen as a means of personal development, rather than motivated by a specific vocational need (Learning Audit, 2001). However, whilst at the outset the motivation might be of a general or personal fulfilment nature there are several local cases where the motivation has oriented towards a career as the courses have progressed.

But local adult education is limited in other ways too, not least by the funding structure which sets a minimum of 12 adults per course. Although some leeway is allowed, with a heavily subscribed course subsidising a course with fewer participants, a number of courses do not run because in small rural communities recruiting 12 participants across courses is not realistic. A solution would be to abandon the “one size fits all” approach and offer more flexibility and support to the smaller, more remote rural communities. Of course this will have cost implications but a major consequence of a lack of flexibility is an unfulfilled and unskilled people, which in a modern economy should not be tolerated and which in Cumbria is noticeably the case.

A further restriction on the adult education programme is the difficulty of finding tutors. The local community cannot provide a full complement of tutors and those from outside the area are often unwilling to travel for an hourly rate which, spread over the travelling time, is frankly unattractive. There simply is not the scope within small institutions to subsidise tutor pay and raising course fees would be inadvisable in a low pay economy.

The alternative at present is for local residents to travel outside the local area in order to attend training courses. This is costly since the journeys are lengthy and at times, for those without a car, impossible because the local transport services are inconvenient or unavailable. Add to this the low wage economy of the area and the difficulties are compounded.

The only solution is more responsive central funding and there is the possibility that the relatively new Learning and Skills Council will act strategically and positively in respect of such isolated rural communities.

Schools in the area are well regarded by local people and the standard of achievement up to GCSE level is above the Cumbrian average although the standards at A/AS level fall short of the Cumbrian and national averages. The smallness of the grammar school gives rise to some doubts about its capacity to retain post-16 pupils and as was shown in the worksheet, 30% move elsewhere to complete their education beyond 16 years. The number of pupils leaving education altogether at 16 years of age is above the national average. Whilst this might have been understandable in the past when many young people left to take up jobs in the family farming business it is unlikely to suffice in the post-FMD reorganisation of farming. From this situation there may be the impetus to change a long-term tradition but this will set further challenges for the post-16 school curriculum and further and continuing education establishments.

In relation to commercial and industrial property needs, Kirkby Stephen has limited spare capacity for either business expansion or new businesses and it might be assumed, from the worksheet data that supply and demand are pretty much in equilibrium. However, it is possible to detect a stirring in demand that has not been obvious before and this is of concern in view of the limited opportunities currently available within the town.

The District Council are addressing this problem in terms of the Local Plan allocations and enquiries in relation to redundant land and buildings. It is also agreed that more focussed marketing of the area as a business base is also needed. This might have greater impact if the area could offer broadband access but as yet a precise timetable has not been agreed and there is some fear that the area will remain uncompetitive as it waits in the queue behind others whose business case has been firmly assembled and argued.

Kirkby Stephen's business case is as yet unformed and some of this must be due in part to the lack of a dedicated business association. Thus there is no collective voice or driving force for business events, business training and business support in general and, whilst this remains the case, there is the consequence that business opportunities will be missed at both the individual and collective levels.

For an isolated rural area the advent of the Internet would seem to be a major opportunity to build markets and competitiveness and yet there is little obvious activity in this area. That said, it is only fair to say that this is a general impression rather than a substantiated fact. Of course it would be understandable since so many of the businesses are micro businesses with one or two employees and little spare capacity to leave the work whilst familiarisation training is undertaken. A business support worker employed in the town and proactive in relation to the business community might be a way forward.

Kirkby Stephen still looks fairly prosperous due to the refurbishments. The standard of service is highly regarded by local people and visitors. The mix of shops at present is able to meet the day-to-day demands of residents and still attract tourists, notably, because of the range of antique shops.

The town has an excellent Tourist Information Centre which fulfils a valuable role in the economic prosperity of the area. However, seasonal variations, visitor stays of less than 2 nights, little focussed marketing, little on offer for visitors during wet weather or to attract visitors other than walkers and antique hunters, little information at the station gateway and too few bus connections

to and from the town plus reduced winter opening hours detract from its overall effectiveness. A properly constructed website, directed marketing, alternative opportunities for visitors, improved information and bus connections at the station and an increase in the TIC opening hours during winter months could prove effective in drawing new visitors into the area for a greater span of time with consequent increases in visitor spend in the local economy.

Amongst possible alternative attractions for visitors is the project initiated by a group of railway enthusiasts who have for some time been developing the redundant east station buildings and track and who have begun the process of creating a railway heritage centre within the old ticket office area. This project has the potential to bring in extra visitors to the area. Unfortunately the station yard is currently used for other business enterprises which, although important because of the type of business, tend to detract from the overall appeal of the site and could be offputting to visitors. Some reorganisation of the various enterprises could improve the appearance and make it more attractive to visitors.

At the workshop held in August 2001 at the height of the foot and mouth outbreak, a specific agenda for action was agreed by the 55 businesses represented. Top of the list was the need for a wet weather visitor attraction and this was further supported in the priorities identified at the Issues Workshop in May 2002. From the worksheets also it would seem that there is a strong case for developing ideas in this respect in an effort to boost the local economy. Some preliminary investigations have been started in relation to a visitor centre that capitalises on the area's distinctive natural assets.

In summary, the area's economy is characterised by low added value enterprises, low pay and low skill levels. Business expansion or the capacity to attract new business is constrained in part by lack of available premises, lack of focussed marketing, absence of broadband technology. Upskilling is restricted by lack of training opportunities within the area, or tutor supply coupled with centrally imposed funding regulations or the added cost of accessing them at centres outside the area. The tourism market is too narrowly defined in terms of just walkers.

Redressing these deficits will not be easy for such a small community but with help from the wider partnership of support agencies and organisations some progress could be made. The opportunities in terms of funding are probably as bright as they will ever be and the best strategy would seem to be to harness the support, commitment and expertise of influential decision-makers.

#### **4.4 Social and Community**

Kirkby Stephen Ward's growth of 12.3% since 1991 could have significant consequences for the area's facilities and services. It is not equalled in either the Brough or Ravenstonedale Wards, however, in Warcop Ward an 11.8% growth in population is also significant. The significance lies in the fact that this growth appears to be largely uncoordinated and many infrastructure improvements occur behind the growth of population rather than ahead of it. For example, in Kirkby Stephen catering for the number of elderly residents, 27% of the population compared with 18.1% nationally, is putting some strains on the health services, particularly in terms of care support. Recent relocations into the area of people needing significant amounts of support seems to have been done without thought for the extra demands these would place on an already stretched service.

The high Standard Mortality Rates in the area across deaths from cancer, ischaemic heart disease and stroke is worrying and without apparent explanation.

In recent months changes in the ambulance service standby routine such that the Brough Ambulance Station no longer has an ambulance on standby throughout the 24 hour period but relocates its ambulance to Tebay for night time duties means that emergency ambulances must travel extra distances in response to calls during this period. This seems somewhat odd in view of the growth in population and the large number of elderly residents who, it can be argued, are most likely to need those services. Also, although achievements in relation to target times seem not unreasonable (67% of a 75% target) the fact that there is an 8% deficit and 25% are not even within the target means that unusually high attendance time figures like the two most recent cases can be smoothed over.

For many respondents to the survey, a major weakness of the area was the lack of police presence, although it was noticeable also that "lack of crime" was cited as a strength of the area in the survey and again at the Issues Workshop. This apparent contradiction is not easy to explain. In part it may be governed by the fact that the survey probably contained more people whose perception was more influenced by media claims of rising crime. By comparison, the Issues Workshop may have contained more people whose views were constructed on the basis of local evidence. It may simply be that there is no accountability when filling in the survey form in the privacy of one's home and much greater accountability for one's views when working in a group in public.

The survey occurred just as a new community policing scheme was coming into force so the strategy is as yet not thoroughly tested in relation to any changes in public perception. Actual crime figures are low numerically and unremarkable with the exception of the one for growth in criminal damage crimes, which, as the worksheet indicates, is a national feature. This offers little consolation to the community and a strategy is needed to deal with this, unfortunately, the Police Authority's bid for funding for a Community Warden failed so another means must be sought.

Property prices in Kirkby Stephen are generally not very different on average from UK averages and in this respect the 74% of households with incomes below national averages and those individuals working for an Eden wage of just 73.4% of the national average wage, and there is some evidence that it could be even lower, could be at a disadvantage in terms of affordable housing and movement up the property ownership ladder.

The amount of rented accommodation in Kirkby Stephen has been increased over the past 5 years, mostly on the Westgarth Estate and some of it, especially the social housing, in the face of some opposition. There is a limited priority for local people of 1 point awarded for each of up to 5 years and there is a proposal in the pipeline to introduce a shared ownership scheme for 1 pair of semis for which planning approval is now being sought. Rents are not yet in line with government regulations and will be reduced gradually over the next ten years. Unfortunately, this is seen as too distant for those seeking affordable housing in line with local wages and it is probably fair to say that until the change is completed local people will continue to experience difficulties. In view of the economic circumstances in the locality there would seem to be a case for fast tracking this kind of intervention.

Although the Westgarth development has continued for some time and involved various housing associations little thought appears to have been given to play provision for the area and, as a result, there are tensions on the estate brought about by the clash of needs, those of the children and young people for play facilities and those of the more mature population for a less boisterous and quieter life. Resolving this tension is no easy task since no land is obviously available in the appropriate place.

The Upper Eden and Lune Valleys can pride themselves on the number of voluntary community organisations who provide a varied programme for their members. Community involvement is generally fairly extensive in the area and it is a fact that for many people one of the major strengths of the area is its community spirit. However, the worksheet on community organisations has thrown up an interesting fact that some people on low incomes are finding it

difficult to support their children's involvement in youth organisations simply because they cannot afford regular fees or associated costs, such as uniforms. As well they are avoiding getting their children into groups for fear that the children will be encouraged to join further groups and the whole problem of costs will escalate. This is an entirely new perspective and issue and one which the community groups with their very good record on community relations should attempt to resolve if the groups are to be fully inclusive.

It is true to say that the Upper Eden Valley has extensive outdoor provision for sport for such a sparsely populated area and there is considerable local talent which is being nurtured through the system, particularly in hockey and tennis. Membership is high for most sporting organisations although it is not absolutely clear that these are totally inclusive, again because of the need to charge either match fees or for travel costs. Indoor sports facilities are limited to a small gymnasium and hall at the school, however, the cost of hiring these facilities has led to the demise of the badminton club. This is of some concern when the only indoor facility of any size in the town is so expensive that no-one can afford to use it.

The largest unmet demand relates to swimming as evidenced by the surveys of residents and students, the views of the Primary School Council, the Issues Workshop and worksheet data. On the Kirkby Stephen Grammar School site there is a heated, outdoor swimming pool provided by the community some years ago but now owned and managed by the school. It is relatively small compared with modern facilities and there are maintenance problems such that a considerable sum, estimated at £40,000, will need to be spent in the near future to carry out improvements. The pool is open to the public from May to August and supervision is provided by the Swimming Club volunteers who charge an entrance fee to cover costs. Much of this revenue is used to pay for a lifeguard or handed over to the school for maintenance provision leaving little spare to support large-scale improvements. The Club faces yet another difficulty in providing the regulation level of supervision at swimming sessions since there are few volunteers coming through to ease the load on the dedicated nucleus of Club officials.

There are several high quality open spaces in the area, notably, Stenkrith Park, and the upgrading of Jubilee Park should add to this overall impression, although the problem of safe access from the town will need to be addressed if Jubilee Park is to become a community facility. The play area at the primary school gives cause for concern not only because much of the equipment has been removed because it was broken but also because of the general state of the environment close to the play area where litter and broken bottles deface what would be an otherwise beautiful site. The fact that this area is acting as a meeting place for some of the youth

of the town is offputting to the younger children, according to the Primary School Council, and, unfortunately, it does seem to be the case that the litter problems are caused by this group of youngsters.

However, since the youth of the town is underprovided for outside of sport it is perhaps not unexpected that they have commandeered this area. This kind of tension between the needs of the different groups is neither new nor surprising. One of Kirkby Stephen's problem lies in the fact that, whilst it experiences many of the problems of other larger towns, the scale is smaller and the case has less force to lever in grants to solve the problem making it hard to see an effective way forward.

Library services are much appreciated by the local community of townspeople and villagers, although for some the stock is too limited. There are no visiting professional theatre or arts events and distances to cinemas, theatres, museums and art galleries must militate against some residents availing themselves of the opportunities in the larger towns. There are several halls in Kirkby Stephen - Methodist, Old School hall, Masonic, schools - however, the fact that there is no dedicated community venue in Kirkby Stephen is seen as a shortfall affecting many different sectors of the population, for example, children, youths and elderly residents.

The Primary School Council were eager to point out that younger pupils would like a place to play pool and table tennis, some elderly people indicated that they would like a centre where they could drop-in for coffee and a dedicated facility could be used for a number of arts and cultural events. The major obstacles to this are initial funding and sustainability in the longer term. For a small community with limited manpower and financial resources maintaining a building at regulation standards is a huge undertaking.

In summary, whilst local people are appreciative of the high standards of the health centre, value the safe environment, enjoy outdoor sports facilities, voluntary community groups and events and other public services like the library, TIC and Community and Council Centre and whilst the friendly people and community spirit are held in high regard, there are a number of issues of concern. Notable amongst these are the strains on the health services, ambulance response times, cost of housing, a safe play area for young children, youth provision, indoor sports provision, quality of provision for swimming and paucity of locally-based arts, culture and entertainment programmes. A not insignificant list on either the positive side or negatively out of which an agenda for some improvements can be constructed.

#### **4.5 Transport and Accessibility**

Kirkby Stephen's position, although ostensibly rather remote, is in fact at the confluence of a very good road network giving easy access to other towns and cities via car. The recently installed heavy goods vehicle ban has made for even better connections to the main arterial road, the A66, and the M6 and it has made a huge improvement to the quality of life of the town's residents although there are still some concerns about the level of enforcement by the police.

The station, although 1.5 miles out of the town, is very highly regarded since it opens up even more opportunities than can be facilitated by bus services alone. The Plusbus service, managed locally by a group of volunteers, has made an increased number of connections with the train services and is set to link into the network on a once daily basis the villages of Ravenstonedale, Newbiggin and Sandford.

Free parking in the town is much valued by local people, especially from the surrounding villages, judging by the survey responses, although it is parking on the approaches to the town centre and in the town itself that was the subject of much adverse comment in the survey. One part of the parking problem revolves around access down South Road where home-owners cars are parked and which narrows the street to a single lane at times. There is no easy solution in this case as many of the houses do not have a garage or driveway having been constructed at a time when the number of motor vehicles presently on our roads would not have been envisaged. Neither is there an opportunity to create an adjacent parking area for the houses as vacant land close to the houses does not exist.

Whilst some residents point up this parking problem there are others who are concerned about traffic speed through the town and yet one advantage of the cars parked on South Road is that they have the effect of slowing down the traffic. What is clear is that there is no win-win situation as far as these subjects are concerned.

Another aspect of the parking problem concerns parking in the town itself and use of the long-term car park at Christian Head but there is no agreement here either. Many people recorded their appreciation of the free parking and accessibility of parking in the town itself whilst others felt that there was insufficient parking in the town. It is a fact that on Tuesday 3 July at 11.00 am there were 66 vacant places out of 77 in the Christian Head car park and 28 free places along the main street out of a total of 173. That Kirkby Stephen has 254 car parking spaces within the town centre or within 250 metres of the town centre is a considerable asset judging by comparison with

other similar sized towns. The need to create a dedicated disabled car parking space outside the post office is an urgent requirement.

Reference was made in the survey to the signing of the Christian Head car park and it would be useful to address the whole problem of signing whether it be to the Christian Head car park, the toilets which are not signed at the Fletcher Hill end of Market Street, and signage at and to the station.

Parking on the pavement in Rowgate was also considered by some to be a weakness of the town according to the survey and this too should be included in any specific survey of the parking problems which the County Council might undertake on the town's behalf.

One thing about which many respondents made adverse comments both in the survey and at the Issues Workshop was the mini roundabouts and about which there were no counter comments. These were generally referred to as dangerous, although it is interesting to note that there have been no documented traffic accidents in Kirkby Stephen in the past year. A number of alternative suggestions were made for improvements, namely, to impose a left turn only out of Hartley Road to safeguard traffic leaving the road, to provide alternative means of traffic control and to put stop signs at all minor road junctions. Whatever the outcome, the people who live with these on a daily basis are convinced that the mini roundabouts create a hazard and are not a solution.

Public transport services whilst being seen as a strength by some respondents to the survey were the subject of criticism by rather more. It is a fact that over the past few years there has been a steady increase in the number of bus and train services to and from Kirkby Stephen. There is now a late night bus service operating from Penrith to Kirkby Stephen from Monday to Saturday, more bus services now connect with the train services, the Plusbus service serves 12 villages and the town on a four-times-a-day schedule from Monday to Saturday and further increases are likely as the service connects with Newbiggin, Ravenstonedale and Sandford from August 2002.

The criticisms centre around inconvenient bus connections to and from the trains (just 12 out of a possible 28 connections are made Monday to Friday and 10 out of 26 on Saturday), lack of a Sunday and Bank Holiday bus service, lack of evening bus services to Kendal and lack of late night train services to and from Leeds and Carlisle. As was noted earlier, there are no cinemas, museums or theatres in the local area so anyone wishing to access these entertainments would need to travel by car and a car would need to be used to access evening training courses or hospital visiting during the evening. 21.3% of the population of Kirkby Stephen Ward do not

possess a car so for these people public transport is not a luxury it is a necessity in the same way that the car is a not a luxury for rural dwellers where there are inadequate public transport services, this is especially the case for residents of Ravenstonedale and Newbiggin and a little less so for residents of Crosby Garrett and Soulby who at least have the advantage of the four daily scheduled Plusbus services.

Although the value of the station is recognised, its position outside the town poses some problems not least the synchronisation of rail and bus services, as noted earlier, but also the lack of a surfaced footpath connecting town and station. There is a connecting fieldpath but unfortunately it is fairly wet in the hollows and is generally avoided by those who walk between the two. Car parking at the station is good although access from the south platform by wheelchair users is impossible.

Almost 25% of respondents to the survey from the town and the surrounding villages said they used the Plusbus service which has specially adapted wheelchair access and, as has been noted, there are to be some extensions to the service from August 2002. A relatively large number of village residents do not own a car so the Plusbus service performs a very important function for these residents, giving access to a whole range of services and facilities which do not exist within the villages. It is worth pointing up, that many retailers in the town depend on the extra trade generated by village residents and it is their patronage that makes many of the shops and services viable. In this respect the Plusbus serves the local economy as well as the personal needs of users.

Unfortunately, the Plusbus service faces two threats. In the immediate future there is a need to secure four replacement volunteers to manage the service and if the service is to continue beyond October 2003 there is a need to secure funding.

80% of local buildings have wheelchair access, unfortunately, several of the most heavily used services do not, namely, at both banks, cash machines, the post office and the community and council centre. It would seem relatively easy to make adjustments at the banks and cash machines but impossible in terms of the community and council centre. Whether or not adaptations could be made at the new post office is uncertain but there are a significant number of local people using mobility scooters and wheelchairs and their access to services and facilities is significantly less than ambulant users.

## **5. A Vision for the Future**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The frameworks for each area of enquiry submitted in this report contain a vision for the future in relation to the environment, economy, social/community and transport/accessibility dimensions of the healthcheck.

By including the visions in the frameworks it is possible to see from where they arise and what it is they seek to protect or improve. Thus there is an identification of the present source or origin along with a focus for the future and in this way there is a measure of accountability for the view posited.

The visions are being repeated below, again in relation to each area of enquiry separately, and they contain not only the broad, more generalised statement about the shape of the future but a number of strategic objectives which help to sharpen the focus and which should make it easier to identify what needs to be done to achieve the vision.

### **5.2 Environment – the vision**

A resident population aware of and knowledgeable about the distinctive and valuable character of the Upper Eden Valley countryside & built environment. A resident population committed to protecting the landscape and buildings for future generations whilst capitalising on them to promote the economic prosperity of the area. Widespread countryside access for the benefit of local people and tourists. Broad provision for recycling of waste materials.

### **5.3 Environment - strategic objectives**

- Implement a programme of awareness raising in relation to the special character and attributes of the countryside and built environment.
- Develop visitor attractions and employ strategic marketing to capitalise on the area's natural and built assets.
- Promote access to the local countryside through a programme of countryside-related events and attractions.
- Support the implementation of broad provision for recycling of waste materials.

#### **5.4 Economy – the vision**

A vibrant economy and dynamic business community which has the capacity to attract new business. High levels of employment transformed in part by higher added value employment. A local workforce that has access to a broad range of training opportunities and is committed to take advantage of those opportunities for personal and career fulfilment. A strategically marketed Upper Eden Valley image which capitalises on the distinctive natural assets of the area and helps promote sustainable tourism.

#### **5.5 Economy - strategic objectives**

- Develop a small range of commercial and industrial property sites capable of attracting new business, relocations and expansions working, in partnership with the District Council.
- Promote the area as an attractive base for business, including relocation and business expansion, in collaboration with external agencies.
- Increase understanding of the advantages of broadband technology and generate a business case for broadband supply, using available expertise.
- Work in partnership with L&SC, learning providers and training agencies to establish a rural perspective on funding in relation to training opportunities for rural residents.
- Promote locally based training initiatives with training providers.
- Exploit the area's natural assets through strategic marketing, such as, website, tourism publications and local events.

#### **5.6 Social and Community – the vision**

A good quality of life for all residents in which most of the day-to-day needs for services and facilities can be met within the town and surrounding villages. Health services which meet the increasing needs of local residents whilst addressing shortages within the service which place undue burdens upon practitioners. High quality emergency services and community policing. Enhanced provision for the young people of the town and their voice in town affairs. Affordable housing and specialist housing for local people. Opportunities for people to enjoy the arts, cinema and entertainment both locally and outside the area. Preservation of a strong community spirit.

### **5.7 Social and Community – strategic objectives**

- Safeguard and develop the range of services and facilities available to town and village residents to meet their daily needs.
- Build a network of support with statutory providers to enhance health care provision, particularly, addressing shortages.
- Maintain high levels of emergency service cover for the area whilst generating commitment to improvements from service providers.
- Provide improved facilities for sport and recreation for young people in the area and promote young people's involvement in town affairs and events.
- Initiate a focussed survey of housing needs in the area.
- Promote the formation of a culture and arts association for the area to facilitate visits by touring arts groups and a programme of cultural visits outside the area.
- Promote community events, access to community groups and associations, community networks and community information.

### **5.8 Transport and Accessibility – the vision**

A range of co-ordinated public transport services that meet the varied day-to-day needs of all town and village residents. Public transport services, parking facilities and information that meet the demands of visitors to the area. A better environment within the town through improved traffic management. A network of well-maintained, signed and publicised footpaths and cycle ways.

### **5.9 Transport and Accessibility – strategic objectives**

- Present a substantiated case to the appropriate authorities for improvements in the co-ordination of transport services, traffic management, parking and information dissemination taking into account the resident and visitor perspectives.
- Publicise walks and cycle routes within the area through website, tourist publications and event marketing.
- Engender support from the responsible bodies for improvements in the maintenance and signing of footpaths and cycle ways through continued dialogue.

## **6. Conclusion**

On the whole the services and facilities to be found in Kirkby Stephen serve well the needs of residents of the town and villages with a few exceptions. The Healthcheck process has allowed much of the provision in the area to be put under scrutiny and apart from some specific economic, social, environmental and transport dimensions, there is much of value, which in the main is recognised by residents.

The process has been productive in that it has allowed time and consideration to be given to the major topics and issues facing many rural communities, for example, housing, transport, health services, employment, youth provision and the environment. These topics and the issues embedded in them are ones that local people are concerned about and the Healthcheck has provided the incentive to place them right in the spotlight.

The process has allowed the investigation of opinion alongside the collection of factual data so that in some cases people's views are supported by the facts, but in others the data have revealed facts that in effect run counter to opinion. This is especially the case in relation to the criticism of insufficient parking spaces in the town referred to earlier.

The quality of the local environment is just one of the assets of the area but there are many more, notably, the delivery of high quality health care through the local health centre, the 100% target achievements of the fire brigade, the low level of crime, the achievements of the schools, local outdoor sports and leisure facilities, the range of community groups, community programmes and the community spirit in evidence, shopping provision and quality of service, appearance of the town brought about by upgraded buildings, the range of accommodation for visitors, the range and quality of local services provided through the banks, post office, library, TIC and Community and Council Centre, the improvements in bus and train services, the Plusbus service connecting to the villages, free car parking, childcare provision. A partial list but one which casts its net over a wide spectrum of services and facilities which make life in this corner of Cumbria run all the more smoothly.

Against these positive features must be set the negative ones which undermine the quality of life for residents of the area, namely, limited employment and training opportunities, low incomes, shortage of affordable housing, shortage of care places and care workers, high Standard Mortality Rates, range and quality of provision for the young people of the town, paucity of indoor sports provision, the mini roundabouts, lack of late night train services, no Sunday and Bank

Holiday bus services, access to a range of arts and cultural events, limited number of bus connections between town and station, ambulance response times, litter and dog fouling. Not an exhaustive list but one which comprises a range of agenda items and one which the forthcoming action plan will be concerned to address, albeit that some of these issues are the responsibility of statutory providers and it is their co-operation which must be sought.

The vision for the future acknowledges the many assets of the area and the need to protect them whilst at the same time recognising some of the weaknesses and tensions that exist and which will be addressed in the future either through awareness raising in relation to local service providers or through the delivery of new projects for which funding must be secured.

The healthcheck process is in effect completed and will now proceed into the action planning stage. A separate document will be produced setting out the objectives, strategies, actions, timescale and monitoring procedure for delivery so that local people will be able to judge how the issues illuminated by the healthcheck process are to be tackled. The action plan should be available for public approval by the end of September 2002.

The healthcheck has involved an immense number of local people who have given their ideas, time and efforts freely, it has been facilitated by others outside of the immediate area who have provided expertise and knowledge for the benefit of the local community, the report is thus an account of this collaborative effort. But that is not all. The report attempts to set out the evidence on which decisions about the future of the area might be made, it is in effect advocating change in some instances and protection of the status quo in others. Its value can only be judged against the quality of life experiences of residents in the future.