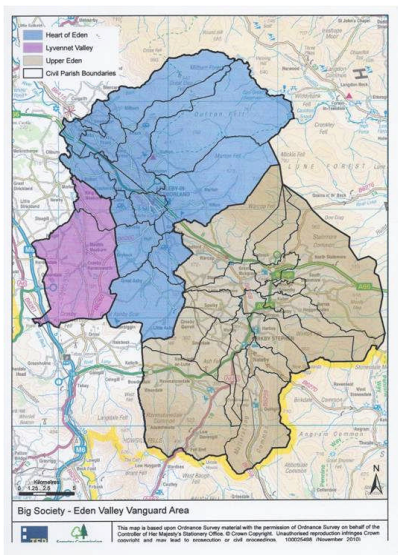


# Learning from the Big Society Vanguard Project Report

August 2011



of Eden



A Study by **ACTion with Communities in Cumbria** in collaboration with **Eden District Council**

supported by **North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership**

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## Preface

The **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project was developed by ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) in collaboration with Eden District Council. It was funded by the North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership.

The project was initiated by these partners because they recognised the opportunity presented by the establishment of a rural Big Society Vanguard initiative in the Eden Valley, a result of the advocacy of Rory Stewart MP. They particularly wished to record local experience and to disseminate practical lessons learned in order that other communities might benefit.

The project was developed and implemented to a very tight timescale, one which reflected that of the Big Society Vanguard initiative itself. In consequence this report, published only 12 months after the announcement of the Vanguard initiative, describes community activity which is very much work in progress. The work of the Vanguard communities will continue for many years to come.

It is important to emphasise the focus of this project. The **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project has not sought to deliver a comprehensive evaluation of the Big Society Vanguard in Cumbria. Instead it has focused on the development of case studies and guidance materials, based upon Vanguard experience, which other communities may use in developing and implementing their own projects. This report sets out the background to the projects on which those materials are based and also captures, in the words of some of the key participants, their experience of being involved in the Vanguard process.

Based upon that experience, the report captures some key principles that may be relevant to similar activity elsewhere.

*“this report sets out the background ... and captures, in the words of some of the key participants, their experience”*

The material presented in this report was gathered by staff of ACT assisted by Chris Kolek, initially on secondment from the Commission for Rural Communities, latterly in the capacity of consultant. Andy Lloyd of Cumbria Rural Housing Trust contributed to the case study and guidance materials relating to community land trusts and affordable housing. Contact details for the project team can be found in Appendix 6.

This team undertook:

- a review of relevant literature
- an assessment of existing guidance and toolkits
- structured interviews with key participants in the Vanguard programme, both from the participating communities and the various agencies, authorities and civil society organisations (charities) involved
- preparation of seven case studies and five new sets of guidance materials based upon selected projects progressed during the Vanguard initiative
- coordination of a conference at which key participants were able to share their experience and learning
- compilation and publication of this report

## Executive Summary

The Big Society Vanguard was announced by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010. Its purpose was to provide a test bed for Big Society, the Government's vision of a society where individuals and communities have more power and responsibility and use this to create better neighbourhoods and local services.

One of four localities selected, the Eden Valley in Cumbria was the only deep rural area to participate. Its Vanguard activity was also distinctive in being driven very much by the plans and aspirations of the local communities. It was also the only Vanguard officially led by Rory Stewart MP, rather than being promoted by the principal authorities of the area.

The Eden Valley Vanguard took place across three clusters of parishes, totalling 31 individual parish council areas (population circa 14,000), each with a pre-existing community led plan, an action plan and well developed proposals for the implementation of initial priorities. Just as importantly, each cluster of parishes was served by a committed group of community members, both parish councillors and volunteers, with extensive local knowledge and many of the skills and experience needed to plan, implement and manage ambitious local initiatives.

This combination of strategic thinking, ambition, commitment and parish council support meant that the Eden Valley was very fertile ground for effective action when the Big Society Vanguard initiative was announced.

With support from the District and County Councils, the Department for Communities and Local Government and a number of other public and civil society organisations, a majority of Vanguard activity focussed on eight principal projects. These covered the following themes:

- Community Renewable Energy
- Community Land Trusts and Housing
- Community Broadband
- Community Transport
- Community Owned Enterprises

The Vanguard initiative gave the participating communities access to a range of help:

- The support of a dedicated civil servant from the Department for Communities and Local Government to assist in "barrier busting"
- Support from government departments and agencies in addressing priority issues
- Specialist and technical advice
- Funding for feasibility and project development
- Support in negotiations

Activity on the ground involved a number of one-off events, regular visits to Cumbria by key participants and intensive work on individual projects.

The Vanguard initiative has enabled some community-led projects to make significant, in some cases exceptional, progress. It is clear too that work in some key areas, for example the delivery of local

broadband enhancement, is at an early stage but set to deliver exciting opportunities in the near future.

Highlights of the achievements include:

- An affordable housing scheme under construction by Lyvennet Community Trust
- The community buy-out of a pub completed
- Photovoltaic panels installed at a village hall and delivering financial benefit both to the hall and the wider community
- A Neighbourhood Plan in preparation
- Funding and other issues explored in relation to a community anaerobic digester
- Feasibility studies undertaken for a community hydro installation
- Communities actively engaged in the development of rural broadband pilot projects
- A transport study completed, local transport information published and a new community bus service introduced

Community participants say that the Vanguard has ... *helped break down barriers ... raised profile ... encouraged planners ... impressed Charity bank ... moved things on ... given confidence ... attracted attention ... helped with funding.*

For their part, participants from public and civil society organisations believe that it has ... *accelerated things ... given national profile ... sharpened focus ... brought new emphasis to communities ... been a catalyst for activity.*

### **Learning Points**

Intensive work on a wide range of community projects has generated valuable practical learning. This is presented in the Case Studies and Guidance materials that have been developed and published by Eden District Council ([www.eden.gov.uk](http://www.eden.gov.uk)) and ACT ([www.cumbriaaction.org.uk](http://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk))

Interviews with key participants have also identified important learning in relation to the Vanguard process and Big Society principles. In summary, the Eden Valley offered considerable strengths that underpinned its potential as a Vanguard area. It offered:

- Active and able communities with a history of community led action
- Strong local leaders able to effectively harness local knowledge, their personal skills and those of other community members to improve services and identify opportunities
- A history of active community development with local government and civil society organisations engaged with community groups and local elected representatives participating in projects and partnerships
- An established foundation of community led plans and action plans based upon widespread community engagement and led by proactive town and parish councils

In this context Vanguard status, the support of Rory Stewart MP and enthusiastic civil servants, coupled with the skills and energy of a large number of community members have:

- Accelerated work on existing projects and been a catalyst for new work
- raised the profile of what volunteers can do
- highlighted key rural issues

- seen communities grow in confidence, aspirations and expectations

As a result of the Vanguard some agencies are changing their behaviour including:

- making their processes easier for community groups to manage
- making their corporate structure more community oriented
- working more collaboratively with other agencies
- seizing opportunities to focus resources and test new ways of working.

Funding made available to the Vanguard communities has:

- enabled a community housing project to begin construction
- pump primed a number of other community projects
- enabled essential feasibility studies for embryonic projects
- encouraged communities to demonstrate their ability to add both social and financial value to modest amounts of external funding

Based upon the comments of participants, critical factors underpinning this success include:

- The presence of highly motivated and skilled local participants
- Access to small amounts of funding for start-up and/or feasibility activity and for project development
- Access to advice and support from a range of sources including government departments and agencies, infrastructure organisations and specialist advisers
- Adoption of new flexibilities and ways of working by departments, agencies and authorities
- “Barrier busting” support by civil servants in CLG and other departments

In highlighting the value of these critical success factors, interviewees have stressed the necessity that communities continue to enjoy the range of support that the Vanguard initiative has provided. From this we deduce that the following matters will need to be considered in further developing Big Society:

#### **Community Capacity & Potential**

1. How to enable all communities to pursue Big Society solutions, reflecting and recognising the significant variation in community capacity, volunteering and local leadership that exists.
2. The active sharing of learning and good practice between communities in order to demonstrate success and inspire action.

#### **Funding**

3. Access to funding and information for project development and feasibility work as a critical element in achieving locally relevant and cost-effective community solutions.
4. Alignment and flexibility of public and private funding streams with the needs and aspirations of communities; allowing for local input into how funds are spent, in order that projects with local support can be successfully progressed.

#### **Advice**

5. Sustaining and co-ordinating access to advice and support from Departments, Agencies, infrastructure organisations and specialists.

## **Policy & Practice**

6. How to enable communities to access and utilise existing infrastructure in order that community solutions, for example community broadband, may be successfully implemented.
7. Sustaining and extending “barrier busting” including simplification and transparency of the processes that community groups have to manage when dealing with public sector organisations.
8. Broadening understanding of the capacity of community groups to be able to deliver cost effective and sustainable solutions that benefit local people and their public sector partners.
9. Promoting the cultural change necessary to ensure that the resource allocation and service delivery decisions made by organisations are driven by community interests and needs.



## 1 Big Society and the Vanguard Initiative

1. The Big Society is the Government's vision of a society where individuals and communities have more power and responsibility, and use it to create better neighbourhoods and local services. Speaking in Liverpool on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, described the concept in the following terms:

*“The Big Society is about huge cultural change...*

*...where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace...*

*...don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face...*

*...but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities.”*

*“We need to create communities with oomph – neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them.”*

*“We must push power away from central government to local government – and we shouldn't stop there. We should drive it down even further...*

*...to communities, to neighbourhoods and individuals.”*

2. Having set this context the Prime Minister went on to announce a Big Society Vanguard initiative involving four different localities with widely varying ambitions. He said:

*“...vanguard communities will be the great training grounds for this change...*

*...the first territory on which real and ultra-local power is a reality – and the Big Society is built.”*

*“They have got different ideas, from devolving budgets to street-level, to developing local transport services, taking over local assets such as a pub, piloting open-source planning, delivering broadband to local communities, generating their own energy.*

*“But they've all got one thing in common: a firm commitment from this government to help them realise their dreams.”*

3. The four localities identified were the Eden Valley in Cumbria, Liverpool, London Borough of Sutton and Windsor and Maidenhead.

4. Of these four, the Eden Valley Vanguard is quite distinctive. It is a deep rural area and the Vanguard activity has been driven very much by the plans and aspirations of the local communities rather than the principal authorities of the area.



5. Rory Stewart MP has played an especially significant role in the Eden Valley Vanguard, sponsoring its inclusion in the process and taking a very active role, alongside community members, as the initiative has progressed. At the time the Vanguard was launched Rory Stewart had only recently been elected to represent Penrith & the Borders constituency but had gone to great lengths to familiarise himself with local grass roots activity.

6. The concept of the Vanguard initiative was that the trialling of a new relationship between Government, agencies, authorities and local communities would generate innovation which, in turn, could be speedily made available in other localities. It was indicated that each Vanguard area would receive targeted and tailored help from the Government around issues such as helping communities to overcome bureaucratic barriers and delivering greater responsibilities that would empower them to do things their own way. It was anticipated that each Vanguard area would generate proposals for innovative local projects which embrace Big Society principles.

***"the Eden Valley Vanguard is quite distinctive. It is a deep rural area and ... activity has been driven very much by the plans and aspirations of the local communities"***

7. The **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project is a study of only one Vanguard area, and the only rural Vanguard – Eden Valley in Cumbria. In consequence, this report is substantially the story of the community's experience.

8. In setting out its aspirations for the Big Society, Government has described four key principles that will be applied in achieving its vision (*Building the Big Society* – Cabinet Office, May 2010). These are:

1. Communities will be given more powers
2. People will feel encouraged to take an active role in their communities
3. Power will transfer from central to local government
4. Communities will be supported in taking over the running of public services

9. In seeking a community perspective on the changes experienced at the grass roots as a result of the Vanguard initiative, these principles were used to frame a segment of the interviews that took place with community informants. Their perspective on progress towards achieving these principles is reflected in Section 5 of this report which summarises their experience.

## 2 The Eden Valley Communities

10. For a considerable number of years communities in the Eden Valley of Cumbria have been engaged, like rural communities in many parts of England, in thinking about and planning for the future of their areas. Significantly, with the support of local authorities (Eden District Council and Cumbria County Council) and third sector partners (including ACT and Cumbria Rural Housing Trust), they have delivered a significant evolution of the Community Led Planning process being adopted elsewhere.

11. The combination of characteristics that make the work of the Eden communities distinctive are:

- Numbers of parishes collaborating, by mutual agreement, in the development of community led plans for their localities
- The close involvement of volunteers from local communities, alongside parish councillors, in the community led planning process
- The use of local taxation powers (the parish precept) by parish councils to raise funds to support the implementation of the priority actions identified in community led plans
- The incorporation or planned incorporation of community owned legal structures (e.g. Community Land Trust, Community Development Trust, Community Interest Company(s)) to provide a focus for the implementation of plans and manage the financial and other risks that would otherwise affect the community members involved

12. There existed three clusters of parishes, totalling 31 individual parish council areas, each with a community led plan, an action plan and well developed proposals for the implementation of initial priorities. Just as importantly, each cluster of parishes was served by a committed group of community members, both parish councillors and volunteers, with huge local knowledge and many of the skills and experience needed to plan, implement and manage ambitious local initiatives.

13. The cluster approach to working had helped to stimulate what can be argued to be a higher level of strategic thinking and ambition in the three community led plans than might be typically found.

14. This combination of strategic thinking, ambition, commitment and parish council support meant that the Eden Valley was very fertile ground for effective action when the Big Society Vanguard initiative was announced by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

15. The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the background for each of the three participating communities at the beginning of the Vanguard process.

***“This combination of strategic thinking, ambition, commitment and parish council support meant that the Eden Valley was very fertile ground for effective action when the Big Society Vanguard initiative was announced”***

### **Lyvennet Community Plan Group**

16. Comprising 2 Parishes, total population 524 - The Lyvennet Community Plan Group serves communities from Crosby Ravensworth, Kings Meaburn, Maulds Meaburn and Reagill. In 2009 the group completed and published a Community Plan which identified 41 actions that could be used to improve the local area. Significantly, affordable housing emerged as a high priority for action by the communities involved. Using evidence gathered from a Housing Needs Survey undertaken with the help of CRHT, those leading on the Community Led Plan set up a working group that led to the creation of the Lyvennet Community Trust. This new organisation is committed to undertaking new initiatives to deliver affordable housing in the area. Also as the result of the original Community Led Plan, communities in Lyvennet were also looking to buy their local pub and investigating the possibility of building an anaerobic digester to produce their own energy. Each of these latter ambitions is being driven by purpose designed and community owned incorporated bodies.

### **Heart of Eden**

17. Comprising 12 parishes, total population 8,477 - The Heart of Eden area centres on the historic market town of Appleby-in-Westmorland. In 2007 ACT facilitated initial discussions with parish councils in the area about producing a community plan using a cluster approach. As a result, the Heart of Eden Community Planning Group was set up, 12 parish councils (Appleby, Asby, Bandleyside, Bolton, Crackenthorpe, Dufton, Kirkby Thore, Long Marton, Newbiggin, Milburn, Murton and Temple Sowerby) having agreed to participate. Extensive engagement with local residents and businesses using questionnaire and telephone surveys followed. Based on the survey results an Action Planning Day was held with residents and other stakeholders, including the County Council, NHS, Eden District Council and Cumbria Rural Housing Trust, where actions were ranked according to priority. The Community Plan was completed in 2009 with 51 action points planned to be undertaken over 3 years. The Heart of Eden Development Trust was then incorporated by the parish councils as a vehicle for achieving the targets of the Community Plan including promoting the use of local transport, economic development and renewable energy projects. With funding from the Rural Development Programme for England, the Development Trust has been able to employ professional support in implementing its action plan.

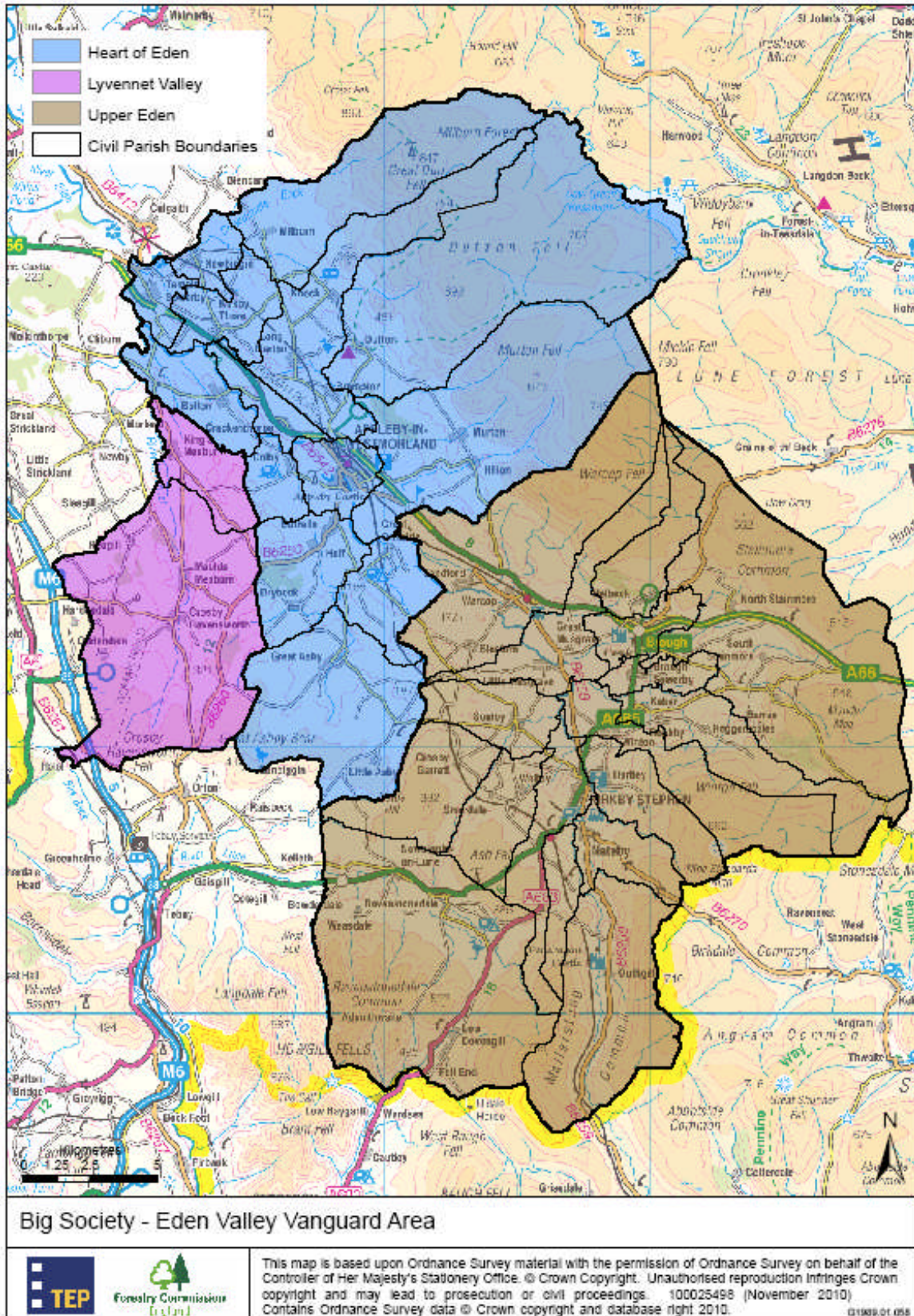
### **Upper Eden Community Plan (UECP)**

- 18. Comprising 17 parishes, total population 5,000 - The Upper Eden Community Plan is the result of collaborative working between seventeen Parishes in the Upper Eden area surrounding and including the key service centre of Kirkby Stephen. Work started in 2005 and the Community Plan was published in 2008. With 90 actions specified, a decision was made to employ a part-time co-ordinator to manage and monitor their delivery. Work has already started in earnest looking at the development of free advertising for local businesses, walking programmes to increase visitor numbers and support for the development of a community exchange. The Plan also highlighted what individuals could do to help achieve the visions in the plan. The Upper Eden Community Plan group continue to work with the Local Strategic Partnership and local council to raise awareness of the Plan's Action Points and influence local policy. For example the group has developed its own policies relating to housing allocation and affordable housing with



the aim of having them adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. This type of community led approach, already underway in Upper Eden, is exactly what the Big Society seeks to encourage through the Localism Bill. The Upper Eden Community Interest Company has recently been incorporated as a locally controlled company to take forward the implementation of the community plan.

The three parish clusters that made up the Eden Vanguard area are illustrated below:-



### 3 Eden Vanguard - The Process

19. The Prime Minister's launched the Vanguard initiative on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010. Eden Valley was one of four pilots, two of which were to be led by the Leader of the council, one by Phil Redmond, with Eden Valley being led by Rory Stewart MP. At a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> July, facilitated by Eden District Council and attended by community representatives and advisers, it was agreed that the three community planning clusters described previously would be the focus of activity.

20. At this same meeting a senior civil servant in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), presented further information about the nature of the Vanguard initiative, referring to the following elements:

- Communities to provide DCLG with summary statements of their leading priorities, and the barriers being experienced in progressing these
- The allocation to the Eden Vanguard of a lead contact in the form of a specified DCLG civil servant who would liaise with the communities and help to progress actions
- Support from DCLG and other government departments in addressing priority issues
- The potential availability of a small amount of funding (£50k - £100k) to be targeted on actions identified as community priorities
- Regular visits to Cumbria and meetings with the communities by the allocated civil servant.
- A need to understand what the key issues were within a very short time frame, i.e. by December 2010
- An aspiration to share information about the project as widely as possible, drawing upon experience from elsewhere and disseminating learning from the Eden experience

21. The three Vanguard communities, in liaison with Eden District Council and ACT, were asked to provide an initial summary of key priorities.

22. At this first meeting one community representative expressed some concerns, referring to possible tensions between the three groups of communities and also pressing the view that this process should be directed by the community groups, rather than the local authority partners involved.

23. This strong sense of community ownership was a feature of subsequent activity, leaving the local authority partners with a challenging task in terms of establishing their relationship with, and contribution to, the initiative.

24. A second meeting on 3rd August, chaired by Rory Stewart MP brought together wider representation of the three community groups with elected members and officers of Eden District Council, Cumbria County Council and ACT.

25. Rory described Big Society as *"an approach, a culture, an attitude of mind"* based upon collaboration. He went on to suggest that the Vanguard initiative was an opportunity to break barriers and to move forward founded upon a *"good hearted and generous"* approach to help.

***"This strong sense of community ownership ... left the local authority partners with a challenging task in terms of establishing their relationship with the initiative"***



26. Rory described his own role as that of “sponsor” for the Vanguard communities and committed a significant amount of his time to help the project to progress. He referenced the existing community led plans as the starting point and emphasised that it was the responsibility of the communities to lead the initiative and for the various authorities and agencies to provide support.

27. There followed a round-table discussion during which the community representatives, while welcoming the opportunity, also voiced initial concerns. These included the possible additional burden of monitoring and evaluation that the Vanguard might generate and a fear that they might be diverted from the community-driven work already under way.

28. In order to assuage these concerns it was emphasised that the purpose of the Vanguard was to offer additional help and support, not to create additional tasks.

29. Following these initial meetings and conversations, the Vanguard Initiative was progressed through regular visits to the communities by civil servants and other advisers. The lead civil servant for DCLG, usually supported by one or more colleagues during visits to Cumbria, quickly established a very positive and supportive relationship with the participating communities and made an absolutely critical contribution to the progress achieved.

30. Three key events for the Vanguard initiative in Eden took place during these visits. These were:

31<sup>st</sup> August/ 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 - Over two days, each of the three groups gave presentations about their critical priorities and challenges followed by discussion of ways in which DCLG, and other Departments, agencies and authorities might be able to speed progress. At the conclusion of the visit Rory Stewart MP chaired a round table discussion with all the groups at which common themes were identified.

5<sup>th</sup> November - A full day community workshop to which Rory Stewart MP and CLG had invited a wide range of people with expertise relevant to one or more of the communities’ priority projects. This very well attended event allowed key interests to be identified and some important partnerships to be forged (e.g. between Heart of Eden and the Community Transport Association). The event also triggered some early conversations about local planning issues and the possible new “neighbourhood plan” mechanism for addressing these.

The three Vanguard communities were further asked to identify priority funding issues, providing input that would help to frame subsequent financial support (see below for further details).

6<sup>th</sup> November - A key workshop took place for those in the Vanguard area and beyond who had an interest in addressing rural broadband issues. The event followed the announcement of the allocation of funds to rural Cumbria for a pilot project to be managed by Broadband Development UK. The level of interest was extraordinary with perhaps 12 community groups showing interest in developing local community-based solutions for broadband delivery in their respective areas. From this day a substantial programme of discussions and community engagement has developed and continues to progress. Two of the case studies relate to community broadband initiatives.

31. Subsequent activity was less high profile, involving approximately monthly visits to Cumbria by civil servants. During these visits, meetings and site visits took place with the smaller groups of individuals involved in progressing individual projects. These allowed progress to be reported, problems to be identified and, importantly, relationships to be established which gave community members confidence in using their new relationship with DCLG to the full.

***“The level of interest was extraordinary with perhaps 12 community groups showing interest in developing local community-based solutions for broadband delivery”***

32. Outside these face to face meetings and visits, a great deal of telephone and email traffic took place. Involving Rory Stewart MP, civil servants and others, this ready access to Whitehall, and the flexible and supportive nature of the engagement by CLG officials, was critical in enabling significant progress to be made by the communities.

### **Seedcorn Funding**

33. At the initial meeting about the Vanguard, on 27<sup>th</sup> July, reference had been made to the potential availability of some funds to help key projects to progress. The need for such funds was emphasised by the participating communities during their various contributions to the first of the visits to Cumbria on 21<sup>st</sup> August/1<sup>st</sup> September.

34. The particular issue highlighted by local people was not the hope and expectation of on-going funding but the need to access to funds that would enable initial project feasibility to be assessed and information to be gathered that communities required in order to fully develop and progress their ideas.

35. Underlining the desire of all three Vanguard communities to work without long term external support each emphasised at an early stage their desire to establish local and sustainable sources of income that would underpin the delivery and sustainability of community groups and services. In all three cases considerable effort had already been invested in examining the potential for community-owned renewable energy projects to be the vehicle for delivering such funding.

***“all three Vanguard communities ... emphasised ... their desire to establish local and sustainable sources of income”***

36. In November the Vanguard communities were asked to provide much more specific information about the key areas where small amounts of funding might make a critical difference. This in turn led to the establishment of a small fund to be managed locally by ACT on behalf of DCLG.

37. This fund, formally approved in December 2010 provided a total of £84,000 to be spent primarily on previously identified projects and activities. This was welcomed by the communities who were, however, concerned at the challenge involved in completing spend of the awarded funds no later than 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, a concern that was reflected in subsequent interviews.



38. In practice, all of the funds were committed and spend completed on time. 14 projects received support. These included many of those described in the case studies that follow and contributed to exploration of a range of themes including community engagement, local asset management and asset transfer, affordable housing, community renewables, local transport and opportunities for young people.

39. It is clear, from the case studies and key learning points which follow, that the issue of funding for project development, especially for new or small community groups, is an ever present challenge. The funding made available, as a one-off exercise, during the Vanguard was therefore particularly valued by the communities and was a significant factor in the progress that some projects were able to achieve.

## 4 Eden Vanguard – The Projects

40. At the very outset of the Eden Vanguard initiative the participating communities were asked to set down in summary their priority issues and activities and to define the barriers that they felt they faced in taking these forward. To undertake this task each community turned to its respective Community Led Plan and the principle priorities therein.

41. An extensive list of some 25 projects was prepared (see Appendix 1) but in practice eight became the primary focus of support through the Vanguard initiative.

42. As a part of the **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project, ACT and its partners, working with key community members, prepared case studies based upon eight of these principal projects. There follows a summary of the key points identified in these case studies, full copies of which can be downloaded from [www.eden.gov.uk](http://www.eden.gov.uk) or [www.communityaction.org.uk](http://www.communityaction.org.uk)

43. In addition to the case studies and drawing upon the work of the Vanguard communities, ACT has published a series of five new or revised guidance papers. These cover the following topics and may also be downloaded from [www.eden.gov.uk](http://www.eden.gov.uk) or [www.communityaction.org.uk](http://www.communityaction.org.uk)

44. Guidance topics:

- Community Renewable Energy
- Community Land Trusts and Housing
- Community Broadband
- Community Transport
- Community Owned Enterprises

45. The case studies and guidance sheets were presented to participants at the Big Society – Rural Action Conference held on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at which a great deal of interest was evident in sharing and learning from the experience that had been gathered. There follows a brief summary of each of the case studies captured through the **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project.

### Case Study Summaries

#### Anaerobic Digester – Lyvennet Renewable Energy Ltd

46. During work on the Lyvennet Community Plan local interest was identified in sustainability issues related to climate change and the generation of renewable energy. Having considered a variety of options a Sustainability Working Group decided to focus on anaerobic digestion (AD). The AD process produces methane from the digestion of feedstock. This methane is then used to drive a generator producing electricity to sell to the National Grid. The process also produces a mineral rich digestate which can be returned to participating farmers to be spread on the land, thus saving on the cost of artificial fertiliser. A third product is excess heat which can potentially be used to heat local buildings or businesses.

***“The idea that the (AD) project be taken forward in community ownership is unusual”***

47. The Group considered that the potential to use surplus manure, slurry and feedstock from the locality, and the supply of digestate, would benefit local farmers while the energy generated would provide a sustainable source of funding for community projects and services. This satisfied their philosophy that the community as a whole should benefit from any development.

48. The idea that the project be taken forward in community ownership is unusual, possibly unique in the UK.

49. Challenges with this project have included:

- Identifying and accessing relevant technical expertise
- Securing funding to enable feasibility and project development work to proceed
- Sustaining community support through a long development process
- Establishing equitable values for some of the inputs and outputs involved (feedstock, digestate, etc.) so that business planning can be undertaken
- Gaining a land lease agreement for the site of the 1MW AD plant is a further challenge

50. Despite this the group has made progress, incorporating as Lyvennet Renewable Energy Ltd ( a company limited by guarantee) in order to manage the project. A partnership was also forged with the Centre for Process Innovation, a source of technical expertise whose subsidiary, Anaerobic Energy Ltd, would be responsible for the building and running of the plant.

51. The Vanguard initiative has helped the project by providing:

- A grant of £2,500 to enable the exploration of possible funding sources
- Support from Department for Communities and Local Government staff to access help from the Country Land and Business Association on land management issues

### **Photovoltaics – Heart of Eden Development Trust/Bolton Village Hall**

52. During development of the Heart of Eden Community Plan, interest was identified in exploring a range of renewable energy projects. At the time the Vanguard was announced the Heart of Eden Development Trust had already begun to discuss the possible installation of photovoltaic panels on village halls. Their aspiration was to offset the running costs of these key community facilities while at the same time creating a sustainable income stream, from the Feed in Tariff, to fund community initiatives. It was also hoped that the installation of photovoltaic (PV) panels on public buildings would stimulate increased interest among private householders.

53. A first step in achieving this ambition has been realised with the installation of PV panels on the roof of Bolton Memorial Hall. This is intended to be a pilot project with a view to installing PV panels on other community buildings in the area. A proportion of the income generated from the Feed in Tariff will go to the Memorial Hall with the remainder going to the Heart of Eden Development Trust to develop area-wide initiatives.

54. Challenges with this project have included:

- Implementing this first installation in a very tight timescale that resulted from accessing funding which had to be spent by 31st March 2011
- The need to identify top-up funding at short notice because of changing project costs

- The unexpected need to apply for planning permission since usual permitted development rights do not apply to buildings such as the Memorial Hall
- Agreeing arrangements for the ownership and maintenance of the panels and the split of income from the Feed in Tariff, again at short notice. (It was agreed that the Memorial Hall trustees would own and have responsibility for maintaining and insuring the panels and would keep 64 per cent of the income, with the Development Trust receiving 36 per cent.)

55. These challenges notwithstanding, the project has achieved a first step towards the Development Trust's wider vision of a sustainable income to benefit community buildings and the wider community. A "Step by Step" guide is being prepared that will steer other community building volunteers through the process while within Bolton the project has raised awareness of the opportunities the Feed in Tariff presents and eight private householders have installed PV panels on their own homes in less than six months with others considering it.

***"the project has raised awareness of the opportunities the Feed in Tariff presents ... eight private householders have installed PV panels"***

56. The Vanguard initiative has helped the project by providing a significant proportion of the total cost and supporting subsequent dissemination of learning. While enabling the project to go ahead earlier than expected, the community volunteers managing this project found the tight timescales involved very challenging.

### **Affordable Housing - Lyvennet Community Trust**

57. During the preparation of the Lyvennet Valley Community Plan a housing needs survey was undertaken which identified twenty-three households with housing need. This led to the formation of an affordable housing group which investigated ways in which the community might address the unmet need. Members considered working with Housing Associations and explored community owned affordable housing solutions before deciding to adopt a Community Land Trust approach. They were supported in this by the Community Land Trust Project Officer employed by Cumbria Rural Housing Trust.

58. The members of the group then incorporated the Lyvennet Community Trust as a charitable company before being awarded a £30,000 preliminary scheme costs loan (which could be written off) from the Community Land Trust Fund and a similar loan from Eden District Council. This enabled the development of a business plan to develop twelve houses for rent and two for shared ownership; all to be retained by the Trust in perpetuity. A further eight self-build plots with local occupancy restrictions were included to subsidise the development. The whole scheme is intended to be affordable to a range of local incomes.

59. The group's work focussed on the purchase of a substantial brownfield site in the middle of Crosby Ravensworth, although some twenty-six other sites were also evaluated with assistance from Eden District's Head of Planning.

60. Challenges with this project have included:

- Establishing the credibility of the Trust as a new voluntary organisation. However, the site vendors' agents and other parties were reassured by the professional experience of key Trust members
- Securing the funding necessary to make a bid for the development site. This was enabled by a £300,000 development loan from Venturesome / Charities Aid Foundation (part of the Community Land trust Fund). Venturesome was the only organisation prepared to provide finance to the newly formed Trust within the timescale
- Overcoming the lengthy processes with the Homes and Communities Agency and Tenant Services Authority necessary to access Housing Grant. Lyvennet Community Trust is the first Community Land Trust to become a Registered Provider of social housing with the Tenant Services Authority
- Due to the emergency budget in June 2010 the Trust was subject to unusually tight deadlines to secure funding. They had from November 2010 until March 2011 to buy the site, obtain planning permission, tender and sign off build contracts, and secure development finance to match Housing Grant. The Trustees drove the scheme forward, with support from Eden District Council, the Homes and Communities Agency, and Eden Housing Association. Lyvennet Community Trust was awarded £660,000 Housing Grant and also secured a £1m development loan from Charity Bank
- Developing governing documents to meet the changing requirements of the Charity Commission and Tenants Service Authority was difficult, requiring the help of Community Land Trust specialists Cobbetts Solicitors
- Meeting the requirements of the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 (a requirement to qualify for Housing Grant) was difficult on a small rural site which does not have mains gas or a bus service but does have a low crime rate meaning that security glass or security lighting are not required (all of these characteristics reduced the site's scoring)

61. Despite these challenges, as a result of their tenacity and hard work, Lyvennet Community Trust will create twenty two new houses in Crosby Ravensworth to meet the needs of local people. The value of community ownership is demonstrated in that this is far more than would have been delivered if the site had been sold to a developer. The development is on site, the housing to rent will be completed by 2012 and the self-build housing by 2014.

62. The Vanguard initiative has significantly assisted this project. High level access to the DCLG has helped to resolve some issues while the added credibility gained by Lyvennet Community Trust contributed to securing support from other key agencies, in particular the allocation of significant funding by the Homes and Communities Agency. The Big Society Vanguard status of the project also undoubtedly contributed to the willingness of key partners to work to abnormally tight timescales and deliver the outcomes needed for the project to proceed.

***“LCT will create twenty two new houses ... to meet the needs of local people ... this is far more than would have been delivered if the site had been sold to a private developer”***

## Neighbourhood Planning – Upper Eden Community Plan Group

63. A key element of the Upper Eden Community Plan, published in 2009, was a request to the Local Planning Authority for a policy solution to a number of issues. Prompted by concerns about access to affordable homes by local people, it set out two suggested housing policies for the area which would help rural settlements remain sustainable. This innovative element of the plan was commended by the Royal Town Planning Institute in 2009 as making a valuable contribution to rural planning.

64. The policy approaches suggested related to rural housing allocations (proposing a development rate of one per cent per year) and rural self-build affordable housing. The community's wish was that these policies be incorporated in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Framework, and that they form part of an Area Action Plan containing non-statutory policies which would be adopted by Eden District Council, the local planning authority.

65. The Upper Eden Community Plan Rural Self-build Affordable Housing Policy would encourage self-build affordable housing in rural areas to meet an identified need for people with local connections and a Section 106 agreement would secure its affordability in perpetuity.

66. Challenges with this project have included:

- Inability of adopted district and regional policies to accommodate local variations
- Unwillingness by Eden District Council to develop an Area Action Plan

67. However, the concept of locally tailored planning policies chimes well with emerging thinking about Neighbourhood Plans and the Government has decided to support the Upper Eden Community Plan group in its development of new planning policies as part of a national trial of the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. Work has begun on developing a plan for the Upper Eden area which prioritises Community Sustainability and, subject to local support at referendum, will seek to influence planning policy relating to:

- Housing that is affordable and suitable for local people and communities in rural areas
- Flexibility on housing on farms and rural businesses
- More specialised housing for the elderly
- Housing densities suitable for the area
- Helping to deliver Fibre for Broadband Internet Access
- Proposing a general growth limit for rural communities of one per cent per year

***“This is the only  
Neighbourhood Planning  
project led by the community  
rather than a local authority ...  
its success in securing support  
is a consequence of the  
Vanguard”***

68. This is the only pilot Neighbourhood Planning project led by the community rather than a local authority. Its success in securing support is a consequence of the Vanguard initiative and the opportunity that this has created for the Upper Eden Community Plan Group to share its thinking with colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government.

## Community Broadband - Eden Valley Digital

69. Responding to current poor or non-existent broadband services in rural areas, a number of Eden Valley communities have been inspired to improve their broadband provision following events organised by Rory Stewart MP and the announcement, as a result of his advocacy, that the area would be one of four pilots for rural broadband improvements via Broadband Development UK (BDUK). Those in the area covered by the Leith-Lyvennet Church newsletter (Crosby Ravensworth, Morland, Bolton, Cliburn, Newby, Sleagill, Great Strickland and Little Strickland) have formed the Leith-Lyvennet Broadband Group (LLBG) to inform and advise their Parish Councils and residents on broadband issues and developments.

70. In November and December 2010 the LLBG held community meetings to present information on rural broadband. With a live referendum, using an electronic voting system, they gauged the level of interest in a high speed service.

71. They are committed to fulfilling the aims of the Eden Declaration on [broadbandcumbria.com](http://broadbandcumbria.com) (see Appendix 2) which sets out a number of aspirations around broadband and demands that rural communities are not disadvantaged by poor access to high speed broadband connections.

72. A community interest company, Eden Valley Digital, was incorporated by the group in May 2011. This is intended to be the vehicle for providing community run fast broadband for the Leith-Lyvennet area Parishes, seeking the best ways in which to improve broadband and mobile phone services for local communities and to get the best possible value for them. There are a range of possible technical solutions including: fibre optic cables, wireless, wimax (infrared) and satellite. In implementing any solutions Eden Valley Digital recognises the importance of maintaining an open (monopoly-free) broadband network that will be answerable to their communities. To this end Eden Valley Digital will return 65 per cent of net profits to Parish Councils in proportion to their levels of participation.

***“Eden Valley Digital  
recognises the  
importance of  
maintaining an open  
(monopoly-free)  
broadband network  
that will be answerable  
to their communities”***

73. Challenges with this project have included:

- the technicalities of delivering broadband to remote premises
- levels of demand for service
- ensuring the service is commercially viable
- the introduction of service to households new to IT

74. The Vanguard initiative, and the concurrent inclusion of the area as a BDUK rural broadband pilot, has helped to move this work along by providing a focus for the discussion of rural broadband and securing access to a range of technical and Government support, including funds to support community hub pilots.



## Community Broadband - Great Asby Broadband

75. The Great Asby Broadband project pre-dates both the Heart of Eden Community Plan (although it falls within the Plan's area) and the Big Society Vanguard.

76. Great Asby Broadband, a community interest company (CIC), delivers a broadband service to Great Asby village and surrounding farms, a community that has had no access to conventional broadband by cable or by ADSL over a copper wire phone network.

77. Initially local subscribers used a satellite system to connect to the internet which was installed in the village in 2005. However, in 2007 the village primary school became connected to the internet by fibre optic cable as part of the Cumbria and Lancashire Education On-line (CLEO) initiative. With the school's permission it was possible then for the village to piggy-back on that connection via an Ethernet cable, using a series of wireless devices to form a wi-fi network around the village. It was at that time that local people incorporated the CIC in order to underpin the service with a stable legal structure.

78. Over a five year period the company's subscribers have increased in number from 20 to 69. Income from these subscribers has enabled an incremental improvement in the broadband service available, taking advantage of increased backhaul speeds and improved technologies for local distribution. Most recently, in March 2011, Great Asby Broadband completed a project to upgrade the network and increase bandwidth and speed of connection.

79. Challenges with this project have included:

- Securing capital funding for significant investments in infrastructure. Support has included grants from the Rural Development Programme for England and Cumbria Community Foundation. However some funding is only paid retrospectively, creating cash-flow challenges
- Meeting demands for increased backhaul speed and capacity. CLEO having declined to increase the available bandwidth of the backhaul, the CIC is now looking for a new backhaul provider to improve their primary connection to the internet
- Resolving local technical problems such as the connection of remote households

80. Despite these challenges the group can demonstrate considerable success, having established a financially sustainable community-led broadband solution for Great Asby that provides local people with a reliable broadband service. The company continues to look for opportunities to improve their service and is part of East Cumbria Community Broadband Forum which covers forty parishes in the East of Cumbria.

***“the group can demonstrate considerable success, having established a financially sustainable community-led broadband solution for Great Asby”***

## Community Transport - Ravenstonedale Parish Council

81. In 1979 the villages of Ravenstonedale and Newbiggin on Lune in Eden District were bypassed. The new route of the A685 made no provision for pedestrian access between the two. In 1998 the

Ravenstonedale Millennium Committee persuaded Cumbria Highways to plan a scheme of 600m of combined footpath and cycleway which would allow children from Newbiggin to walk to school in Ravenstonedale and that would also be the final piece of a scenic ten mile cycle route from Pendragon Castle to Orton. The project was then costed at £40,000.

82. By 2003 the scheme hadn't progressed and Ravenstonedale Parish Council followed up the project. One of the barriers was funding and the Parish Council agreed to add £1,000 to its annual budget to contribute to the cost. It was further suggested that the scheme could usefully be incorporated into the National Cycle Network which would add value to the project.

***“the Parish Council agreed to add £1,000 to its annual budget to contribute to the cost”***

83. Challenges with this project have included:

- Securing all of the funding necessary
- Cumbria County Council is currently contracted to Amey in relation to highways works and the terms of this contract mean that projects such as this cannot be let to other providers. In this instance Amey has quoted £106,000 to undertake the work, compared with a quotation of £80,000 by an alternative local contractor

84. However, some progress has been achieved in that Ravenstonedale Parish Council and the Upper Eden Community Plan Project Officer have worked with Cumbria County Council Highways Officers to improve communications and secure their support for the project. As a result, the community better understand the limitations of the current contract and have advocated greater flexibility in awarding contracts in the future. After the current County Council Highways contract ends in March 2012 it is hoped that some progress will be made.

85. The Cumbria County Council's legal team has also confirmed that, as an alternative approach, the community could build the cycleway themselves if they could raise sufficient funds to cover the project without a Council contribution.

86. The Vanguard status of the locality has assisted in achieving this progress, Communities and Local Government facilitating some of the dialogue between the community and Cumbria County Council.

### **Community Transport – The Heart of Eden Transport Study**

87. One of the priority projects set out in the Heart of Eden Community Plan concerned the improvement of local transport services. The Vanguard initiative enabled the Heart of Eden Development Trust to establish a relationship with the Community Transport Association and to fund the necessary study required. This explored public and community transport options for the area in the context of proposed cuts to existing public transport provision.

88. The Trust wished to identify practical steps that they could take to improve transport for residents and particularly to address the difficulties that young people in surrounding villages experienced in getting to Appleby in the evenings.

89. The study:

- Identified minibuses and other vehicles available for community use including those owned by youth groups and schools. It set out recommendations to encourage organisations who owned minibuses to share them through Community Transport Cumbria’s minibus sharing scheme
- Mapped existing transport provision so that services could be promoted in a leaflet which brought together all the transport options for the area. This has also helped identify gaps in provision which can now be addressed by the Trust

90. Challenges with this project have included:

- A tight timescale to complete the project because of the funding arrangements
- Sustaining a focus on very practical projects which the Development Trust could deliver

91. Given the limitations of the project’s scope and the time available a great deal of progress has been achieved. Responding to one of the findings of the study, that potential users weren’t always aware of the range of transport options available, guides have been produced for distribution in the following communities; Temple Sowerby, Long Marton, Kirkby Thore, Appleby, Bolton and Morland. These set out bus and train times and also list information about alternatives such as Rural Wheels (a demand response shared taxi scheme run by Cumbria County Council), Voluntary Car Scheme (through which volunteer drivers provide lifts for people without transport), and Patient Transport Services.

*“the study meant that ... the Trust was well placed to suggest a new fast route through part of the Heart of Eden area”*

92. The close working between the Development Trust and Cumbria County Council that was fostered by the study meant that when the volunteer-run Fellrunner bus service had an opportunity to introduce new routes, following the purchase of a new vehicle, the Trust was well-positioned to suggest a new fast route through part of the Heart of Eden area from Bolton to Penrith.

93. The study has also laid the foundation for further work including clarification of the participation guidelines for Rural Wheels, marketing of the minibus sharing scheme to organisations which own minibuses and ways to improve transport for young people during evenings and weekends.

94. The Vanguard initiative undoubtedly accelerated progress by Heart of Eden Development Trust on this project, providing some seed corn funding and useful contacts with advisers. It also contributed to further strengthening the good working relationship between the Trust and the County Council’s transport officers.

### **Community Owned Enterprise - The Butchers Arms, Lyvennet Community Trust**

95. The Butchers Arms, the only pub in Crosby Ravensworth, closed in September 2010. The Lyvennet Community Trust, which had already formed to develop affordable housing in the area, called an open meeting and established that there was interest in the community taking over the pub.

96. A project emerged with the aim of raising sufficient funding through a share issue to buy the Butchers Arms which is for sale. To implement this, a community co-operative was established, Lyvennet Community Pub Ltd (an industrial and provident society). Through this people were able to buy shares and thereby invest in the pub. Shares cost £1 each with a minimum individual investment of £250 and a maximum of £20,000.

97. At the time of writing (May 2011) the target for investment of £255,000 has been reached. This covers the purchase of the pub although shares are continuing to be sold in order to raise investment to £290,000, sufficient to cover the cost of repair and refurbishment.

***“Substantial progress has been made, the share issue generating sufficient investment for the purchase of the pub”***

98. The co-operative intends to lease the pub to a tenant at a price below market value ensuring that the tenant will get a profitable business and local people will get a pub. Consideration is being given to the use of the premises to provide other local services such as a small shop selling basic provisions, internet access, and perhaps a library facility.

99. Challenges with this project have included:

- The capacity of community leaders to progress the pub purchase at the same time as the affordable housing project described previously
- Accessing relevant expertise which was only possible once a grant of £21,000 was secured from Communitybuilders enabling the group to commission support from Martin Booth who had been involved in the community buy-out of a pub in Yorkshire; the George and Dragon at Hudswell. The grant also allowed the group to fund a feasibility study, information leaflets, a business and marketing plan, a prospectus which was required for the share issue and architects plans for possible refurbishment

100. Substantial progress has been made, the share issue generating sufficient investment for the purchase of the pub. Although most of the investors have been from the local area, shareholders have come from the Hebrides to Cornwall and also abroad including Alaska, Australia and Singapore. The investors will own the building; a tangible investment which could be re-sold if the business fails.

101. It is hoped that the pub will re-open during summer 2011 offering a variety of services and providing a focal point in the community.

102. The Vanguard initiative helped to create a very positive environment for the project, for example in increasing awareness of the share issue, while the success of the affordable housing project which has progressed in parallel has raised confidence in the community that ambitious projects of this type can be successfully implemented.

## 5 Community Experience

103. It is clear from the case studies explored that the Big Society Vanguard in the Eden Valley helped a significant number of projects, which had previously been defined by the participating communities, to make significant and, in some cases exceptional, progress. New relationships were forged and in some cases apparently insuperable barriers to progress were overcome while in others significant steps were made in a much shorter timescale than would otherwise have been possible.

104. As well as recording the progress made with respect to various projects, which is reflected in the case studies described previously, interviews with key informants sought to assess their perspective concerning the positive change that the Vanguard had brought, other changes that might have assisted and progress made towards the Government's four principles for delivering Big Society.

105. In the following sections we use the interviewees own words to comment on these different elements. It is clear from these comments that the Big Society Vanguard experience in Eden was broadly positive. However, both community participants and agency staff (see Section 6) identify continuing challenges.

### **What positive difference has being part of the Big Society Vanguard made?**

*"it (the Vanguard) has helped to break down barriers and seemed to help get quick planning decisions as the planners were under greater scrutiny than they would have been otherwise."*

*"There has been a sense of working together with the planners and that additional raised profile helped to meet the Homes and Communities Agency's deadline."*

*"The funding has helped with the cash flow"*

*"£13,000 of grants which were used for feasibility studies. This is essential. It's difficult to get feasibility studies funded."*

*"The Environment Agency has been very helpful but ... this may be due to the Vanguard."*

*"Don't think we'd have had the BDUK (rural broadband) pilot without it. Cumbria was chosen because one of the Vanguards was in the County."*

*"It (the Vanguard) has been very helpful, we wouldn't have met the people we have without it."*

*"It has encouraged planners at Eden and Homes and Communities Agency to work with the group."*

*"It impressed Charity Bank when the group was trying to line up funding from them."*

*"It's helped to increase the profile of the project and the builder sees it as an opportunity to promote their business."*

*“Once or twice the group has copied Rory Stewart into emails when we are trying to get a problem resolved (once with United Utilities) and although he didn’t do anything it was enough to move things on.”*

*“It will help in publicising the share issue. The housing project is getting positive publicity and that, in turn, is helping the pub.”*

*“Provision of funding has obviously been an asset and greatly appreciated”*

*“Raised our profile with Rory (Stewart) being a shareholder. Anton and Mary (from DCLG) have tried to help and direct us towards funding.”*

*“Don’t think that Cumbria would have got BDUK (rural broadband) pilot without the Vanguard.”*

*“This (Ravenstonedale Cycleway) is a small project but it has highlighted how things can be done on a larger scale. Sets a precedent. The Big Society has given it a higher profile and we have received information from DCLG on similar projects.”*

*“It has been helpful because Eden DC is interpreting national (planning) policy in a particular way.”*

*“It’s an intangible difference – it gives confidence and has raised the value of the community which is more important than money. When members of the community aren’t listened to it encourages them to stand firm (but they would anyway!). “*

*“The funding has paid for the Centre Manager to work more hours (to help develop the project).”*

*“The small grant was useful. “*

*“The civil servant helped when it was apparent that there might be a problem between the landowners and the tenant farmers whereby the tenancy agreements state that nothing should be taken from the farm which affects the richness of the land. He secured the help of the CLA and NFU.”*

*“It has attracted attention to what we are doing. Community Broadband day was in Great Asby and we were held up as a good example but this is nothing to do with the Big Society Vanguard.”*

*“The Big Society event at Great Asby in November 2011 brought us into contact with the Community Transport Association”*

*“Since the start of the Big Society Vanguard our position has been supported by central government.”*

***The Vanguard has  
...helped break down  
barriers ...raised profile  
...encouraged planners  
... impressed Charity  
Bank ...moved things on  
...given confidence  
...attracted attention  
...helped with funding ...***

*“Neighbourhood Planning has provided an opportunity to take forward a project that we wouldn’t have been able to otherwise, national policy has caught up with where UECP group was a few years ago.”*

**What would make/would have made it easier to deliver your project?**

*“Agencies need to be more responsive. There are bats on the site in one of the existing derelict buildings and an application needs to be made to Natural England who require a 30 day response time which seems excessive.”*

*“The project would have been faster if the group had involved the professionals earlier on i.e. quantity surveyors, contract administrators, architects etc.”*

*“Longer timescale (to use the grant funding) – even a couple of months would have made a difference.”*

*“Support from other agencies. “*

*“Have all the documentation Community Land Trusts need (company articles, policies, information about what others have done) available centrally so new CLTs can benefit from this. This would need to be updated when regulations change.”*

*“A timeline to take CLTs through a series of steps covering things that they may not have thought of; do you need an ecological survey on the site, do you need to consider asbestos etc.”*

*“More funding – enough to actually buy the pub. Only small grants are available.”*

*“It would have been helpful to have had project approval at a much earlier date along with a firm indication of actual levels of available funds. “*

*“Once it was known that the project needed full planning approval some help could have been given to expedite the process.”*

*“Not having to go through European Procurement Process. CCC will have to do this to appoint contractors, which leads to a time delay”*

*“BDUK have put information out which has been misunderstood by communities because they (BDUK) haven’t understood how to communicate with rural communities. They need to put faith in individuals that they know how their communities work.”*

*“Cumbria County Council not being locked into inflexible contracts, but is there any recognition of this? “*

*“Parish Councils don’t always know what they can do. There is a lack of qualified Clerks.”*

*“Local people being involved in the prioritisation of projects.”*

*“The opportunity to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. This would still need to fit with the planning authority’s priorities though.”*



*“Not to have to deal with the processes of local government, with three people coming to each meeting and too much micro management. If the ideas don’t fit with what they want to do, they won’t think outside the box and this clashes with the voluntary/community sector mentality”*

*“Small start-up grants are very useful; easily accessible money to get going.”*

*“Help to direct groups to larger sums of money if the project seems feasible. “*

*“Travel expenses (incurred by community volunteers) can be high in rural areas which is sometimes forgotten.”*

*“Public service networks could be made available to community broadband groups so that they can get an affordable connection to the internet.”*

*“Landowners could allow fibre to be buried on their land at minimal cost. CLA is looking at the issue and has produced guidance. “*

*“Having (localism) legislation in place will make it easier.”*

*“To have looser controls on funding. Use of money becomes a worry for community groups; the need to be seen to do things in the proper way which becomes cumbersome. Funding is a responsibility and sometimes it’s difficult for groups to be bold”*

106. Although comments by those interviewed were overwhelmingly positive, it is perhaps inevitable that occasional criticisms were voiced. These related to three areas:

- What were felt to be excessive timescales in providing decisions on funding applications
- Concern at the challenging timescales faced in progressing projects
- A view that the Vanguard distracted groups from their primary purpose, the implementation of their community plans

### **Progress towards the four Big Society policy commitments**

107. In Section 1 the report summarises four key commitments made by Government in delivering the Big Society. Interviewees were invited to offer their perspective on progress towards these commitments. In reading the comments made it is important to reflect that these were made at an early stage in the government’s programme.

108. Given this context the fact that a significant proportion of participants perceive progress, in some cases significant progress, is testament to the Vanguard experience. The comments made by interviewees in relation to the Big Society commitments were:

<b>Big Society Commitments</b>	<b>Have you experienced any progress?</b>
<b>Communities will be given more powers</b>	<p><i>“We’re still learning how this will happen.”</i></p> <p><i>“To some extent. Decision making needs to be local.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, it’s happening, I have become a parish councillor as a result”</i></p> <p><i>“CLTs are giving communities more control over what happens to land/housing etc.”</i></p>

	<p><i>"Not applicable"</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes"</i></p> <p><i>"Not yet, it's coming with Neighbourhood Planning. "</i></p> <p><i>"Has started to happen with Broadband"</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"Not yet"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes"</i></p>
<p><b>People will be encouraged to take an active role in their communities</b></p>	<p><i>"People will believe they can do things if they see other communities doing so. Local residents and agencies know what Lyvennet Community Trust have done and believe it's possible for others to set-up similar projects"</i></p> <p><i>"Funds have made things happen and that's encouraged people to get involved"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes – for enthusiasts but not for other people"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, a group is now working on broadband because they've seen what LCT has achieved."</i></p> <p><i>"The HCA's solicitors have done some pro bono work for other projects because they were inspired by what LCT was doing."</i></p> <p><i>"They were an active community anyway. There has been more interest and more people coming forward due to the Big Society publicity"</i></p> <p><i>"No – in fact given the "hurdles" faced it is perhaps discouraging"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes"</i></p> <p><i>"People are starting to feel more empowered. Kaber PC is thinking of becoming a Parish Meeting to give all local residents a role. Parish Meetings punch above their weight."</i></p> <p><i>"Started our project before the Vanguard and we were already actively involved so it hadn't really made any difference"</i></p> <p><i>"(There is) no other way to get things done"</i></p> <p><i>"(This was) already happening in the Heart of Eden"</i></p> <p><i>"Unproven. It should do but this, so far, remains a professional led project"</i></p>
<p><b>Power will transfer from central to local government</b></p>	<p><i>"There is still a need to remove unnecessary barriers and to work in partnership."</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"The whole (Vanguard) process is evidence of that happening; talking to MPs and civil servants. Parish Councils are waking up to it."</i></p> <p><i>"What is meant by local? CCC may be seen as local from Whitehall but it's out of touch and too big. Eden DC is more in touch with community. Power needs to get down to parish level but at the same time we don't need a mini district council in each parish. LCT didn't want paid officers as the community interest would be lost."</i></p> <p><i>"Not relevant to this project"</i></p>

	<p><i>"Not at all"</i></p> <p><i>"Pub group hasn't experienced this."</i></p> <p><i>"Does this mean County or District? (This is) not far enough – needs to go to parish level. "</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"To local communities I hope, which is different to local government, a lot of which is still top down"</i></p> <p><i>"No, going to a different (more local) level"</i></p>
<p><b>Communities will be supported in taking over the running of public services</b></p>	<p><i>"That isn't really applicable to this project (affordable housing development)"</i></p> <p><i>"No – they don't want it! They want to be involved in making decisions but not in running services."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, this is what we're trying to do"</i></p> <p><i>"We are starting to look at other things we can do. Communities can make funding go further and do work more effectively."</i></p> <p><i>"Too early to say, we have had a discussion with CCC about using the pub for a small library instead of the library van visiting but it's early days."</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"Encouraged by Rory (Stewart) to do this"</i></p> <p><i>"Yet to see"</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"No change as yet"</i></p> <p><i>"A little progress with planning policy and services"</i></p>

## 6 Perspectives from Public and Civil Society Organisations

109. As well as interviewing key informants from the communities, ACT and its partners were able to interview officers of a number of the public and civil society organisations involved in one or more of the community projects.

110. From these interviews it is clear that the Vanguard initiative in Eden has stimulated some important reassessment of the relationship between communities and agencies, generating changes that have the potential to provide a more supportive context for community action. However, participants also described some challenges that will have to be overcome in developing the Big Society approach.

111. Key points made from this perspective, in the interviewees own words, are as follows.

### What has changed as a result of the Vanguard?

*“Vanguard status in Eden appears to have accelerated things, for example the fast-tracking of a funding application through the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA). The more hands-on approach of the HCA shows some behavioural change that has perhaps been influenced by Government Ministers and senior officials in the Department for Communities & Local Government. Similar patterns of behavioural change also appear to be happening in public bodies dealing with environmental schemes. Some of the progress has, however, been opportunistic rather than by design, taking advantage of communities overflowing with local initiatives.”*

*“It’s still early days to assess what changes are the result of Big Society but we are already witnessing the rolling back of government”*

*“Vanguard status has given national profile to the communities in Eden and the local authority has focused its support on key elements with technical advice/assistance, such as Community Land Trusts and affordable housing in Lyvennet, and renewables in the Heart of Eden. In a political climate of rolling back government and reduced funding, EDC is having to sharpen the focus for its resources, but in the Vanguard, communities should be feeling more empowered from being part of the Vanguard.”*

*“with the change of government and an even greater emphasis on localism, and the Big Society agenda, the HCA has undoubtedly sharpened its focus on how best to work with local communities. HCA are showing that they can be flexible and certainly want to be helpful to communities, but the Grant Agreement documentation remains complex and as it is advisable for communities to take legal advice on such matters it can come with additional costs. Efforts are currently underway to improve this and some simplifications have been made to the requirements of the agreements. HCA has had a Task & Finish Group that has*

***Vanguard status  
has ... accelerated  
things ...given  
national profile ...  
sharpened focus  
...provided a focal  
point ...***

*been exploring ways to engage with communities making best use of resources, including identifying lead contacts. Efforts to change processes include for example the simplification of procurement procedures.”*

*“The Big Society Vanguard initiative in Eden has undoubtedly provided a focal point for activity and support from the infrastructure of government bodies and civil society organisations such as ACTION with Communities in Cumbria and of course Locality (formerly Development Trust Association) who provide expertise and some modest resource to work with communities to build their capacity.”*

*“Locality (as DTA) worked with the Lyvennet communities to help them to attract the initial investment for a buy-out of the local pub, providing business planning support, training and feasibility work, and expert assistance with the shares issue. Without this initial support for the initiative it may have taken considerably longer, or may even have stalled and not progressed at all.”*

*“The Vanguard initiative was never going to change Natural England’s regulatory responsibilities, but it has sharpened the focus particularly on the priority for Natural England to re-organise and become a more customer-oriented organisation.”*

#### **What are the positive aspects of the Vanguard?**

*“The Vanguard can draw attention to the enabling role of local authorities, and the technical support provided by County and District councils.”*

*“Communities can expect to be given higher priority in the planning by all public bodies from here onwards.”*

*“The Vanguard initiative ... provides an opportunity to identify what can be improved to enable communities to do more for themselves. It also serves to highlight the important role of local authorities in enabling communities to address their needs”*

*“In these challenging times Cumbria Rural Housing Trust can provide evidence of the effectiveness of their enabling work, not least in the technical advice and support provided to the Lyvennet Community Land Trust - one of the most significant success stories in any Vanguard area.”*

*“There are likely to be opportunities and these have the potential to be exciting, with the provisions contained in the Localism Bill, reforms to planning and new powers for local decision making. The Right to Build offers communities a new means to achieve their objectives by identifying sites suitable for housing and Neighbourhood Planning, if it can overcome the much anticipated teething problems, offers new hope for delivering locally tailored solutions across many more communities.”*

*“the Environment Agency has been proactive in working with community interests, for instance working with the communities of specific places ... and with specific groups and interests such as Anglers. For some time now the priority for the EA has been to listen to communities and to be accessible to them. Other relationships that have developed include*

*communicating with locally elected representatives ... the dialogue with the local MP has developed in part as a consequence of the Big Society Vanguard in Eden and the Agency is becoming more aligned to local government rather than regional structures. Perhaps most significantly, EA are now working much more closely with other government bodies such as Natural England, Forestry Commission and so on. The closer collaboration within the “DEFRA family” of agencies – responding to a Ministerial steer – is demonstrated in the Vanguard area with EA working very closely with Natural England to provide advice to the community on the Bongate Weir Hydro scheme. Intending to simplify and streamline their interface with the communities themselves, EA are now “lead partner” liaising with the community on behalf of both agencies.*

*“The designation of the Eden communities as a Vanguard for the Big Society has undoubtedly provided some focus for the Agency’s resources. For instance, community interest in hydro schemes is growing rapidly so working closely with the communities in Eden is an opportunity to learn and to develop and improve practice, which in turn can then be shared more widely.”*

*“A sense that more is being achieved as the result of the Vanguard status ... (and that) learning will be of interest to other rural communities.”*

*“(There is an) expectation now that community engagement will continue to take on greater significance in the re-organisation of EDC. “*

*“the Vanguard has brought new emphasis to the role of communities in leading groups and local housing projects.”*

*“The Vanguard should highlight good practice in Eden such as the CLT expertise and enabling services provided by Cumbria Rural Housing Trust (CRHT). Without them the CLT project in the Lyvennet Valley may not have progressed at all as their Adviser proved “critical in ensuring that communities build momentum and can sense that they are making progress”.*

*“HCA supported the community through it enabling role, providing community group’s architect with expert advice on Quality Standards and is keen to provide an enhanced level of support to CLTs where resources allow for this. In this respect the Vanguard status certainly helped to legitimise the level of support provided to the Lyvennet community, and the learning from this experience is already being used to inform two emerging CLTs in other parts of the county.”*

*“The Vanguard has raised the profile of small communities and what they can achieve. It has “given credence” to their needs and aspirations. The HCA has learned more about the challenges facing small communities, with an insight into their perceptions of the barriers*

***The Vanguard has brought new emphasis to the role of communities ... community engagement will continue to take on greater significance... it has been a catalyst for the levels of activity taking place...***

*and some empathy with their frustration when dealing with the rules and requirements for a housing development.”*

*“Without the Vanguard it is debatable how much cooperation the communities in Eden would have received from public agencies and civil society organisations. It seems that the Vanguard has provided a catalyst for the levels of activity now taking place in the area.”*

*“Community development can be a long slow and sometimes painstaking process typically taking several years not months to achieve results. Indeed much of what is occurring in the Eden Vanguard area actually commenced well before the area achieved its Vanguard status, and similarly it will continue well after the initiative has gone. But what the Vanguard has done is to highlight many of the challenges and in some cases, for example the housing scheme at Crosby Ravensworth, the process appears to have accelerated as a direct result of the initiative delivering tangible benefits to the Lyvennet Valley communities.”*

*“The Government’s Review of Arms Length Bodies led to a clear Ministerial steer to DEFRA and its agencies to work together more effectively than before. Efforts are being made to map areas of joint interest and activity, for instance in the Eden Vanguard area NE and EA are already collaborating on the Bongate Weir Hydro proposal.”*

*“The experience of the Vanguard is encouraging NE to develop its engagement with communities”*

**But ...**

*“there’s generally a sense of being kept at the periphery of the initiative – some believe that things could have been done better. Elected representatives may feel “out of the loop.”*

*“local government and locally elected representatives ... don’t all appear to be actively engaged in the Vanguard initiative.”*

*“the timeframe for the Vanguard itself is extremely short for community-based activities which invariably require considerable time and patience to complete ... . So the Vanguard can only expect to provide a window on the on-going activities being led by Eden’s communities.”*

*“the Big Society Vanguard is not working as well as it could do. In particular the consultations and engagement with communities has not gone far enough”*

*“As local authority, Eden District Council did expect to have more of a role in the Vanguard initiative – particularly in coordinating community initiatives – but the impression given was that some communities did not want EDC too closely involved ... EDC has had to “rebalance” its role in supporting*

***“there’s generally a sense of being kept on the periphery ... the time frame is extremely short for community-based activities ... consultation and engagement with communities has not gone far enough ... there is some concern that the experience from the Vanguard in Eden will not be replicable...”***



*the Vanguard communities.”*

*“Communities are sceptical about the motivations behind the initiative, for instance over the reasons why the authority appears keen to transfer assets to communities.”*

*“There is some concern that the experience from the Vanguard in Eden will not be replicable in many other communities unless there is some resource made available to support them (because) the Big Society Vanguard has focused on the more active, more able communities in the Eden Valley and therefore must be expected to work and have some success.”*

### **What are the challenges ahead?**

*“It will be vital to draw out lessons and practice from the Vanguard communities that can be replicated elsewhere”*

*“There are challenges to existing or conventional governance arrangements, for instance parish councillors working collaboratively across local areas, going beyond their parish council duties. Willingness to do this varies considerably and heavily influenced by the attitudes of individuals”*

*“In the term “barrier busting” there is implicit criticism of local government and the way things have been done. This can create suspicion and even an unwillingness to play ball.”*

*“The Vanguard has raised expectations within and across communities. What will keep these things going – particularly as those organisations providing support and assistance to communities will be operating with fewer resources in future?”*

*“This Vanguard initiative is highlighting the challenges facing rural communities and although many of the needs will be the same as elsewhere the solutions can be much more challenging due to the numbers of people, the distances between communities, the ageing demographic and so on.”*

*“Communities often suggest introducing community transport operations but often fail to appreciate the resource requirements from within the community (necessary) to make a success of such an initiative. Ensuring lessons and experience are drawn from other communities where schemes have been established is a vital first step and CCC have facilitated this with communities in the Vanguard area and elsewhere.”*

*“Although the decentralisation and localism agenda is broadly welcomed, smaller civil society organisations, many of whom like CRHT are dependent to some degree on public funds, view their futures with some trepidation. There is currently a general sense of uncertainty, of being in a situation that most of us have not experienced before. Many existing sources of funding are of a temporary nature including funding through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). For CRHT, this poses particular challenges for planning ahead with the threatening prospect of several funds not being replaced at all.”*

*“Meeting the needs of communities disadvantaged in terms of their access to housing inevitably means working with “less able” or rather ‘less empowered communities’ whose requirements for support will be both significant and time-consuming. Attempting to*

*demonstrate greater efficiencies and achieving more with increasingly scarce resources is a massive challenge when dealing with communities requiring considerable input in order to deliver any measurable gain by way of outputs.”*

*“The challenge for Big Society as an approach is to recognise that “society” may need more assistance to work effectively in some communities, and actually Eden proved that some assistance was still needed even in the more active communities. For example, considerable time, technical advice and financial support was provided by CRHT, the local authority, the Homes & Communities Agency towards the Community Land Trust at Crosby Ravensworth. It provides an illustration of how the existence of strong local leaders and activists with a wide range of skills and knowledge may not, on their own, be enough. But can this level of support be replicable elsewhere?”*

*“There is room for improvement in dealing with potentially conflicting interests. For example, some river users express grave concerns about the impact of hydro schemes and it is important that local consultations within a community of place also consider the needs and concerns of all users, many of whom may come from further afield.”*

*“Local authorities often have to “pick up the pieces particularly when things go wrong” for instance when communities can’t solve the problems on their own. Local government must continue but community partnerships/groups may come and go.”*

*“There are challenges which relate to democracy and participation within communities. Local authorities (are) keen to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to engage in local decision-making but there can be small groups within communities that acquire undue power and influence – in itself difficult to challenge. For example, a Neighbourhood Plan could be agreed by the majority of the community but still leave significant minorities feeling disenfranchised or unable to change things – so there’s the challenge to overcome a sense of powerlessness at every level.”*

*“Applications to support schemes in rural counties such as Cumbria typically include relatively small housing schemes where a key challenge is to demonstrate its viability. Although the HCA will make efforts to be flexible there are some points where rules govern what HCA will support, for example on design standards which exist for good reasons but communities are not always aware of them. A challenge for HCA and the communities concerned is to ensure all the requirements are clearly understand – communities don’t always know what they don’t know.”*

*“The Eden Vanguard has shown that even the more active, more able communities still require support and assistance specifically in relation to specialist expertise, some initial funding and in most cases some facilitation of group discussions, planning workshops and so*

***“The challenge for Big Society as an approach is to recognise that “society” may need more assistance to work effectively in some communities, and actually Eden proved that some assistance was still needed even in the more active communities.”***

*on. So what about the less active, less able communities whose needs may be greater than those in Eden?”*

*“The experience in Eden challenges some aspects of policies to “roll back government”. It suggests that cuts in support to communities should be carefully measured, well-judged decisions that have taken into account the longer term consequences and costs of the change. Getting the investment strategy right can actually help communities to become less dependent on support from the state in the future by creating wealth generating initiatives within communities and learning how to keep it there.”*

*“Further challenges include holding communities to account, for example with service delivery.”*

*“There is also the challenge to democracy itself, with several elected representatives already voicing some concerns over the legitimacy of people “representing” their communities. The Vanguard communities continue to develop the levels of participation in their communities and local “leaders” have emerged and hold influence over their communities.”*

*“For NE specifically there is clearly a challenge to improve the ways to communicate its messages to all communities. How NE’s regulatory duties are presented and conveyed to others determines how the organisation is perceived.”*

*“As with all public bodies, NE must manage significant cuts to their funding and staff resources and must re-think how it delivers on its statutory remit, to do at least the same as before but with less. The intention is to improve their on-going engagement with communities.”*

## 7 Lessons Learnt

112. As the review in Section 2 of this report makes clear, the Eden Valley offered considerable strengths that underpinned its potential as a Vanguard area. It offered:

- Active and able communities with a history of community led action
- Strong local leaders able to effectively harness local knowledge, their personal skills and those of other community members to improve services and identify opportunities
- A history of active community development with local government and civil society organisations engaged with community groups and local elected representatives participating in projects and partnerships
- An established foundation of community led plans and action plans based upon widespread community engagement and led by proactive town and parish councils

113. The case studies briefly reviewed in Section 4 provide a picture of the diversity and ambition of the projects that have been fostered through the Vanguard process, and point to some of the significant benefits that have resulted. In this section of the report we draw together some of the practical lessons that have been highlighted by community participants with the key lessons identified by those interviewees from public and civil society organisations.

### Practical Learning from the Case Studies

114. In contributing to case studies, community informants were invited to reflect particularly on the lessons learnt. The following is a summary of their observations.

#### Community Capacity & Potential

Communities can secure outcomes that serve local people better.

The successful implementation of community projects and services is dependent upon volunteers. In many communities the pool of people that is available is limited and, unless the people concerned are able to manage family and work commitments alongside their volunteering, they may be reluctant to become involved.

Working with the Lyvennet Community Trust has enabled the Homes and Communities Agency to learn more about both the challenges faced by, and the potential of, small community groups.

In rural areas the small number of potential customers for services such as broadband means that these are unlikely to be provided by commercial operators. Community groups, with public support such as access to publicly owned infrastructure, can step in where there is market failure.

Public infrastructure should be made easily available to community broadband groups to enable them to have an affordable connection to the internet.

Communities and their elected representatives (e.g. Parish Councils) are prepared to contribute to the cost of local projects that are regarded as a priority. For example Ravenstonedale Parish Council has ring-fenced a contribution of £8,000 to date towards the Ravenstonedale – Newbiggin cycleway.

Local knowledge of public services can be surprisingly limited. Community initiatives can contribute to raising awareness e.g. locally tailored information about transport services.

Strong community commitment to the development of a particular project can make this worth pursuing even if the opportunities at the time appear to be limited. In the case of Upper Eden's aspirations concerning housing issues, government policy has caught up with the ambitions of the community and they are now moving closer to making the adoption of specific planning policies for their area a reality.

### **Funding**

Realising the potential of community action, and the good value outcomes that it delivers, requires continuing access to small and easy to access grants for start-up, feasibility and project development work.

Access to funding is critical for projects which require significant initial capital investment in order to generate long-term income for the community. This may need to be "specialist" in nature, e.g. the risk free loan provided by Venturesome to LCT to enable affordable housing scheme development to a stage where external funders step in.

Government incentives are needed to encourage more support for shared ownership mortgages.

Devolving funding and responsibility for local schemes from the principal authorities to local communities has the potential to enable those schemes to be delivered at lower cost.

Modest initial funding can stimulate community activity which delivers a series of positive outcomes e.g. funding for the transport study by the Heart of Eden development Trust has triggered a series of projects which should make access to services easier for Heart of Eden residents.

### **Advice**

Communities need support from enabling/infrastructure organisations that can provide advice and support with business planning, incorporation and other aspects of their development (e.g. consultant Martin Booth's contribution to the development of the Lyvennet Community Pub project; assistance provided by the Community Land Trust Project Officer at Cumbria Rural Housing Trust; advice on incorporation provided by ACT).

Effective community engagement and good publicity are crucial in generating support as, for example, was achieved in relation to the share issue by Lyvennet Community Pub Ltd. The group's status as an Industrial and Provident Society enabled them to access support with their publicity from the Co-operative Group.

### **Policy and Practice**

There is a need for clear and consistent guidance on the requirement for consent (planning, building regulations, listed building consent) for PV installation and to agree policies for determining whether roof structures are suitable.

Partly as a result of the Big Society Vanguard the Homes and Communities Agency is reviewing the way it works with local communities and Community Land Trusts and may simplify some of its procedures.

Broadband connections could be improved if landowners would allow fibre optic cables to be buried on their land at minimal or no cost through wayleave agreements.

Greater flexibility around awarding contracts can save public bodies, such as Cumbria County Council, money and help them to be more responsive to the needs of communities.

### **Lessons from Public and Civil Society Organisations**

115. The interviews with officers of public and civil society organisations provide a different but complementary perspective on the Vanguard experience and the learning that it offers.

116. Through the Vanguard, the leadership and support of a proactive local MP and enthusiastic civil servants have:

- been a catalyst for new work
- raised the profile of what volunteers can do
- highlighted key rural issues
- seen communities grow in confidence, aspirations and expectations

117. Some agencies are changing their behaviour including:

- adopting processes that are easier for community groups to manage
- making their corporate structure more community oriented
- working more collaboratively with other agencies
- seizing opportunities to focus resources and test new ways of working

118. Funding made available to communities through the Vanguard has:

- pump primed a number of community projects
- enabled essential feasibility studies for embryonic projects
- encouraged communities to demonstrate their ability to add both social and financial value to modest amounts of external funding

119. In commenting on the challenges ahead, interviewees highlight significant issues which include:

#### **Community Capacity & Potential**

Achieving a Big Society approach where community capacity and local leadership may not be as well developed as in the Eden Valley, may require investment in capacity building.

Matching the hopes and aspirations of the Big Society approach with the finite capacity of local volunteers, who have to achieve a balance between family, work and volunteering.

Recognising that community engagement requires a long-term commitment and will prove difficult to measure.

#### **Funding**

Sustaining access to seed corn and start-up funding to enable new groups to emerge and new projects to be effectively developed at a time of spending constraints.

Finding realistic means by which community and voluntary organisations may reduce their dependence on public funding.



**Advice**

Ensuring that communities can access the advice and support that they need as they work through often complex processes.

**Policy & Practice**

Ensuring that community groups are representative and have clear accountability (in the Eden Vanguard area each group had prepared a Community Led Plan based on extensive consultation).

Ensuring that any devolution of power is appropriate to the local context.

Strengthening the understanding that public bodies have of the needs, priorities and potential of communities.

Making necessary bureaucratic processes more responsive and accessible to communities.

Having a regulatory framework that is flexible enough to allow communities the freedom to innovate, find locally relevant solutions and realise their aspirations.

Understanding that no project is without risk and that community projects can fail.

Maintaining continuing levels of commitment and support from public sector officers beyond the Vanguard initiative.

## 8 Conclusions

120. This study has sought to capture and report the experiences of the communities involved in the rural Eden Big Society Vanguard. It, together with the accompanying case studies and guidance sheets, is intended to capture learning from the process that may be of value to other communities and might also help to inform the further development of the Big Society concept.

121. It is clear that the Vanguard initiative has enabled a number of community-led projects in Eden to make significant, and in some cases exceptional, progress. It is clear too that work in some key areas, for example the delivery of local broadband enhancement, is at an early stage but set to deliver exciting opportunities in the near future.

122. Based upon the comments of participants some of the critical factors underpinning this success include:

- The presence of highly motivated and skilled local participants
- Access to small amounts of funding for start-up and/or feasibility activity and for project development
- Access to advice and support from a range of sources including Government Departments and Agencies, infrastructure organisations and specialist advisers
- Adoption of new flexibilities and ways of working by Departments, Agencies and Authorities
- “Barrier busting” support by civil servants in CLG and other Departments

123. In highlighting the value of these critical success factors, interviewees have stressed the necessity that communities continue to enjoy the range of support that the Vanguard initiative has provided. From this we deduce that the following matters will need to be considered in further developing Big Society:

### **Community Capacity & Potential**

1. How to enable all communities to pursue Big Society solutions, reflecting and recognising the significant variation in community capacity, volunteering and local leadership that exists.
2. The active sharing of learning and good practice between communities in order to demonstrate success and inspire action.

### **Funding**

3. Access to funding and information for project development and feasibility work as a critical element in achieving locally relevant and cost-effective community solutions.
4. Alignment and flexibility of public and private funding streams with the needs and aspirations of communities; allowing for local input into how funds are spent, in order that projects with local support can be successfully progressed.

### **Advice**

5. Sustaining and co-ordinating access to advice and support from Departments, Agencies, infrastructure organisations and specialists.

## **Policy & Practice**

6. How to enable communities to access and utilise existing infrastructure in order that community solutions, for example community broadband, may be successfully implemented.
7. Sustaining and extending “barrier busting” including simplification and transparency of the processes that community groups have to manage when dealing with public sector organisations.
8. Broadening understanding of the capacity of community groups to be able to deliver cost effective and sustainable solutions that benefit local people and their public sector partners.
9. Promoting the cultural change necessary to ensure that the resource allocation and service delivery decisions made by organisations are driven by community interests and needs.

## Appendix 1 – Projects of the Vanguard Communities

At the very outset of the Eden vanguard initiative, the participating communities were asked to set down in summary their priority issues and activities and to define the barriers that they felt they faced in taking these forward. To undertake this task each community turned to its respective Community Led Plan and the principle priorities therein.

The following table represents the information that was provided by them.

Name of Project	Description of Project	Statement of current progress of Project	Barriers to Progress
<b>Heart of Eden Development Trust</b>			
Tourism Promotion (ET3 <sup>1</sup> )	Effective and locally appropriate promotion of the area as a sustainable tourism destination. Outcome – Increased business opportunities, increased local incomes	The tourism potential of the Heart of Eden area is unrealised and the economic potential of the sector therefore untapped.	Failure of Cumbria Tourism, Eden DC and Cumbria CC to coordinate promotion of the peripheral areas of Cumbria, promotion focussing excessively on the National Parks. Failure of agencies to realise the tourism/economic potential of heritage assets such as roman features and the Settle – Carlisle Railway.
Delivering workspace (ET5)	Improving access to existing workspace and increasing local workspace supply. Outcome - New business start-ups. Employment opportunities for young people. Diversified economy. Increased average household incomes.	Evidence from local business surveys of the existence of demand/need for additional workspaces for micro and small business. Some units already provided in the area have not been occupied because of barriers of ownership and cost and failures in marketing/ promotion.	Lack of effective promotion. Ownership by agencies/organisations trying to apply rental regimes that are inappropriate to the locality in which they are working. Planning policy constraints on the use of redundant buildings for business use and which militate against aspirations for employment opportunities and work space to be dispersed within smaller as well as larger communities. VAT on refurbishment and energy efficiency measures increasing the costs of conversion or modernisation.
Rural broadband (ET9)	Delivering improved broadband services to all. Outcome - Homes and businesses throughout the area having next generation access. Business potential increased.	Local services are very patchy in terms of connection speed. The scattered and isolated nature of the local population makes	A market-based approach will not deliver services to rural communities because of the lengths of line necessary to service small numbers of businesses and households.

<sup>1</sup> References refer to the Heart of Eden Community Action Plan

	<p>People able to access the health, educational and other services on line that they are otherwise unable to access.</p> <p>Isolated and otherwise disadvantaged local residents enjoying improved quality of life and increased life chances.</p>	<p>broadband services a critical tool for overcoming physical barriers to accessing business, health, education and social opportunities</p>	<p>Public sector and community intervention is therefore essential.</p> <p>Publicly-owned fibre networks are not being made available to support private business and domestic needs, despite the availability of significant spare capacity</p>
Local Transport services (T1)	<p>Promoting, adapting and innovating in transport provision to improve services for local people.</p> <p>Outcome - Improved transport provision, using both public and community services, that better meets the needs of local people.</p>	<p>The public and community transport services currently available do not, in general terms, meet the present and future needs of local residents. This is especially so for those who live in the smaller and more remote communities in the area where there may be no formal provision at all.</p>	<p>Poor integration and promotion of existing services.</p> <p>Funding formulae to support public transport that are not rural proof and fail to enable suitable provision.</p> <p>Failure in systems of cross-subsidy between profitable and unprofitable routes.</p>
Localising health service provision (HW1/3/4/6)	<p>Wherever possible to deliver both health preventative and treatment services more locally, thereby improving access for isolated residents.</p> <p>Outcome - Rural residents, especially isolated individuals and sectors (the elderly) enjoying better health through easier access to preventative programmes, health advice and treatment</p>	<p>Communities are working to secure more local delivery e.g. of flu inoculations at village halls (under the Community Exchange project). However, this is proving difficult to achieve because GPs are either constrained by contracts or unwilling to deliver services in more flexible ways.</p>	<p>NHS contracts with GPs do not require GPs to be flexible in their delivery arrangements which is resulting in GPs refusing to become involved in local service delivery arrangements</p>
Improving life chances for young people (CY1/2/3)	<p>To both retain and strengthen voluntary and statutory youth provision in the area.</p> <p>Outcome - Greater integration between generations.</p> <p>Improved social and education opportunities for young people.</p>	<p>Community engagement clearly identifies provision for children and young people to be a critical priority in underpinning community sustainability. Local experience is that it is increasingly difficult to sustain that provision and that national policy issues are likely to result in the loss of services, especially for young people in smaller communities.</p>	<p>Regulations are making voluntary youth provision increasingly difficult (H&amp;S, Safeguarding % Barring, etc.)</p> <p>In the case of statutory provision (e.g. primary) this is being made less viable by changes in national funding regimes to a per capita system that disadvantages smaller schools and places an increasing financial burden on individual schools and their governors.</p>
Community renewables (E3)	<p>To support the development of practicable community energy projects with an initial target to complete feasibility evaluations of three projects.</p> <p>Outcome - Renewable energy generated.</p> <p>Community projects completed.</p>	<p>A number of community groups are interested in developing renewable energy projects. In the Heart of Eden area this relates particularly to aspirations to develop community-owned hydro</p>	<p>Planning, environmental and nature protection agencies require the development of multiple feasibility studies, environmental impact assessments, etc. This creates excessively large up front costs in project development</p>

	Communities receiving income from sustainable sources to use in supporting other local services (shop, hall, housing, workspace, etc.)	schemes	for which community groups are unable to access funding. Many projects fail to proceed because of this barrier and the complex technical issues to be explored. In addition, the inflexible application by agencies of generic protection policies, for example in relation to bio-diversity, create artificial barriers to project implementation.
Effective recycling (E1/7)	To make it easier for both businesses and households to participate in recycling schemes. Outcome - An integrated approach to recycling for households and businesses that maximise recycling opportunities.	Confusing and inconsistent recycling arrangements with not all householders able to participate and with businesses in particular precluded from using domestic recycling schemes, adding costs to business operations and reducing the volume of materials recycled.	Recycling schemes for households are inconsistent and are not universally available. In addition, policies that anticipated the emergence of a market-based solution to business recycling have not emerged with the result that recycling by business remains much lower than would otherwise be the case.
Affordable housing (H1/6)	A planning and housing provision regime that better meets the needs of communities Outcome - Effective local use of the community infrastructure levy. Affordable homes provided. Young people remaining in the area. Housing schemes tailored in scale and content to the needs of the local community.	Housing needs surveys are being undertaken to generate up to date evidence of the local need for affordable housing. Insufficient data is available concerning the degree to which housing provision is taken out of the market through their use as second or holiday homes.	Planning and Homes and Communities Agency policies that create unnecessary barriers to affordable housing provision. Agencies failing to support community-based initiatives. Tax regimes that fail to effectively discriminate against holiday and second homes. Lettings regimes for social housing that militate against uptake by local people.
Young people's participation	Creating an increased number of part-time work and personal development opportunities for young people. Outcome - Parish Councils, Eden Time Bank and other public, private and voluntary organisations providing personal development and part-time work opportunities for young people. Increased life chances for young people. Local young people living and enjoying life locally.	There is potential to create opportunities for young people to access part-time work opportunities and to participate in volunteering. 80% of secondary school pupils have expressed a desire to have part-time work.	An overly complex range of regulatory requirements (H&S, etc) makes it difficult for parish councils and other local groups to employ young people on a part time basis.
<b>Lyvennet Valley Community Plan Group</b>			
Crosby Ravensworth Anaerobic Digester	To build an AD plant in the Parish with equity stake from the community so	Currently completing second stage of the Rural	Finding finance for community equity stake.



Project: Lyvennet Renewable Energy	that all residents will benefit from dividend. Outcome - A 'Sustainable community'. Farmers with greater economic stability. Green electricity and heat produced by AD plant, community benefiting from equity stake dividend.	Carbon Challenge. Currently firming partnership with Centre for Process Information.	Initially, finding out about AD process and systems, Planning Permission.
Lyvennet Community Trust – Affordable Housing	To buy brownfield site, acquire planning permission for range of 6 rented, 4 shared equity homes cross financed by sale of 8 self-build plots all with local occupancy restrictions in perpetuity. Outcome - Affordable homes for local first timers, families wishing to return to support parents, tenant farmers wishing to retire. Retain balance of a mixed age community = support viability of other services.	In final stages of purchase dependent on receipt of promised funding, Eden District Council ready to issue planning permission.	High price of land from owners-Marshalls Stone. Finding funding, HCA forms, achieving charity registration, potential house buyers getting mortgages.
Provision for youth (11-18)	To start a youth club with a professional youth leader(s) initially, supported by adult volunteers. Investigate transport possibilities to larger centres. Outcome - Social provision for our youth leading to opportunities to channel their energies into volunteering and taking charge of their own provision.	Nil. Awaiting completion of Maulds Meaburn Village Hall as meeting place. No response from CCC re. support/advice.	Lack of statutory youth service: advice/support for volunteers willing to help but not take charge. Child protection issues.
Completing/Updating village halls in Kings Meaburn, Maulds Meaburn, Crosby Ravensworth and Reagill	KM & CR further modernisation planned and in-hand. R. modernisation almost complete, MM significant problems remain in rebuild/refurbishment. Long history of litigation. Outcome - An attractive, fully equipped meeting place for each community, each equipped for different specialisms – hold the community together.	KM & CR – active committees continuous fund raising and volunteer labour. R – needs promotion to increase use. MM awaiting engineer's report.	Funding, some volunteers getting tired and older, possible funding shortfall
Crosby Ravensworth First Responders	A trained team of volunteers with equipment in each village ready to support casualties while awaiting ambulance response to 999 (30 minutes from A&E on a good day) Outcome - Emergency assistance able to reach every home in area within 5 minutes = life saving	CR and MM teams trained and equipped. Need volunteers and equipment for Reagill and Kings Meaburn.	New rules may deter further volunteers, funding equipment (£2,500 per defibrillator)
Lyvennet Lunch Group/Exchange	Weekly community lunch club + gentle exercise/walking group, social activities and health provision (chiropractic, physio, optician) Outcome - Local social and health provision increasing lifespan and for growing elderly population = reducing number needing to leave	Not off the drawing board. Willing group of volunteers await completion of MM village hall.	Slow progress on village hall with most volunteers. Persuading PCT to fund health care part.

	villages/social and family support to live in Penrith.		
St Lawrence Church, Renewal and Renovation	Re-instate power and electrics, reorder internally with new heating system Outcome - Warm, more flexible building without compromising Grade I listing	Facilities granted from Diocese July 2010, future on-site meetings now planned.	Negotiation, funding
Butchers Arms Community Pub/Hub	Aim to open CR pub under community ownership/management with possible addition of village shop/ post office at later stage. Outcome - Restoration of pub with more frequent opening hours. Community hub making village more attractive to potential homebuyers from LCT	Other community pubs visited, 105 individual pledges of £1,500 for pub purchase. Pub valued at £260,000 and requires some £50,000 upgrade. Pub is temporarily open under current owners for part of the week until October 2010.	Fund raising
Lyvennet Nursery Expansion	Private nursery currently co-located with CR C.E. Primary School. Part time provision. No room for expansion to full time/extended day provision in these premises. Outcome - Full time – 8am until 6pm nursery. Supports full time employment for parents/reduces current mileage spent transporting to distant nurseries. Creates additional employment opportunities.	NFA possible until new location identified. Ideal would be new space alongside new homes on LCT development – near to school, village centre and new families.	Investment of funding
Lyvennet Out of School Childcare	To provide out of school club to support parents in employment both during term time after school and during school holidays. Outcome - Active club keeping children happy and safe. Parents able to plan easier access to employment. Reduction in travel to distant current provision.	Friends of CR Primary School willing to support proposal if site and finance available	Investment and funding
<b>Upper Eden Community Plan Group</b>			
Kirkby Stephen Community & Council Centre	UECP action point 9.16 Protect and develop KS Community & Council Centre and other multi – service facilities in other communities Outcome - Community & Council Centre (local links & children’s centre) retained.	Lease is about to expire on current building. Work to begin on the new building shortly. Community not in support of the new location due to lack of available space, development has been driven by external factors.	Lack of consultation and reluctance to take on board community opinions. Independent Admin/legal support needed to enable community to take over running of the new centre.
Broadband	UECP action point 11.1 Ensure 100% broadband connections in the area Outcome - USC broadband delivery to all who wish to have the service. Enabling business, education and	Key & Local service centres have adequate service. Outlying areas have very limited or in some cases no service.	Lack of access to current infrastructure e.g. CLEO, M6 & Network rail fibre. Issues relating to digging fibre across common land.

	reducing social isolation. Higher wage economy, lower carbon emissions.		
Footpaths & cycle ways	Construction of footpaths and cycle ways across upper Eden, in line with UECP aim 13. Outcome - Safer transport networks, healthier living, increased business and job opportunities. Better intergraded transport.	Feasibility studies prepared and local money raised to match fund some projects.	Costs – very high project costs due to service contract commitments within statutory authorities
Planning	UECP Action point 8.2 Prepare planning policy for self build affordable housing Outcome - Housing needs of small rural communities are met	Policy prepared	Policy not adopted by the district planning authority
Recycling	UECP action point 10.13 Expand curb side recycling Outcome - Increased awareness of local concerns at district council and understanding of local issues	Private enterprise providing an extensive service in the town.	Private enterprise is competing against statutory authority.

## Appendix 2 – The Eden Declaration

### Summary

We the parishes of rural Cumbria hereby declare that isolation is the greatest threat to the sustainability of rural communities; and that better communication is vital to our society, to government services and to our economy.

We are, therefore, determined to overcome the barriers of distance by installing the best superfast broadband in Europe.

- We want [100Mbps](#) fixed connections for the majority of people in rural Cumbria and universal mobile broadband coverage by 2012
- We aim to make at least 30 of our parishes into [hyper-connected](#) communities by 2012
- We will ensure that no one is left behind. While not everybody will share 100Mbps connections, every last dwelling in rural Cumbria will have access to 2 Mbps by 2012 and 30 Mbps by 2015

We recognise that we, the parishes of rural cumbria, must play a leading role in this process:

- Each parish will appoint a [broadband champion](#) responsible for driving our campaign
- We will aim to bring everyone in our parish online
- We will, where necessary, contribute our own labour and time, from digging trenches to negotiating concessions on [wayleaves](#), to deliver superfast broadband more quickly and cheaply
- We will work with suppliers to reduce their costs
- We will build our own networks where necessary

### Articles

1. Social and political life is based on communication. Isolation and lack of communication undermine the lives of communities and the efficiency of government
2. Communication increasingly depends on excellent data transport and access to the public Internet and all other interconnected networks. This we call 'connectivity'
3. The basis of connectivity is data, whose [throughput](#) and quality must be sufficient to allow all critical applications to work reliably and predictably
4. Connectivity is a limited, shared resource. The use of connectivity has no limits, except those that guarantee that other members of our community enjoy equal access

5. Connectivity exists for the general good. Citizens cannot fully explore their potential if they are isolated from one another, or isolated from information, education, and communication services. Everyone must have access to adequate connectivity

7. Geographical conditions may prevent an individual from enjoying the same level of service as is available elsewhere, but everyone in rural Cumbria should be able to achieve sufficient connectivity

**We, the communities of rural Cumbria, define sufficient connectivity as**

8. The connectivity speeds given in the European Commission's [Digital Agenda 2020](#): an expectation of 100Mbps and a minimum of 30Mbps at the edge of the network

9. A mobile broadband service capable of supporting home working applications and life support applications in the most rural areas

10. As the peak hour resources available to each user across the entire network, not a mere theoretical 'up-to speed' in the access component of the network

11. Capable of supporting real-time video telephony in the busy period

12. A TV terrestrial Broadcast network that delivers all channels to all customers

**We, the communities of rural Cumbria, expect**

13. Mobile operators to build and operate one network, sharing resources and radio spectrum between them to offer complete coverage

14. Fixed operators to run fibre networks deep ([backhaul](#)) and wide ([access](#)) to replace existing infrastructure wherever possible and remove all legacy network costs

15. All operators to make available the full potential of universal connectivity and not seek to create scarcity from a plentiful resource

**We, the communities of rural Cumbria, expect**

16. The [VOA](#) to zero rate all communication installations until these installations achieve the same volume as achieved in urban areas

17. [Ofcom](#) to fulfil its duties under the Communication Act 2003 to ensure that communications services are made available to rural users and to ensure that efficient use is made of the radio spectrum for all users, not just those living in densely populated areas

18. Central government to invest in communications infrastructure in rural areas in order to transform public service delivery in areas such as health care, social care, education, community capacity building, and economic development

19. Local authorities to facilitate construction upgrades including roadside digs and to assist central government in its efforts to transform public service delivery in areas such as health care, social care, education, community capacity building, and economic development

**In return, we, the communities of rural Cumbria, will**

20. Work with our neighbours to stimulate and aggregate demand, including mass migration of all customers to the new connectivity platforms, allowing old platforms and costs to be retired
21. Provide access to land and power sources for communications equipment
22. Negotiate concessions on [wayleaves](#)
23. Provide resources for the construction of civil infrastructure in accordance with best practice

**In return, we, the communities of rural Cumbria, will**

24. Work with suppliers to reduce their cost of connection by using our own resources to complete access networks
25. Build our own networks where the demand and wherewithal exists
26. Continue to refine requirements, particularly the convergence of fixed and mobile resources
27. Partake in publicity events to promote the benefits of a fully connected community
28. Work with central and local government to transform public service delivery in areas such as health care, social care, education, community capacity building, and economic development
29. Become the first rural communities in Britain and Europe to move entire parishes to [next generation access](#).

Author: the communities of Cumbria



## Appendix 3 – List of Interviewees

The following people kindly gave their time to contribute to the interviews on which much of this report is based.

From the communities:

Cameron Smith – Lyvennet Community Trust  
Carl Bendelow – Heart of Eden Development Trust  
Charles Paxton – Eden Valley Digital  
Chris Elphick – Ravenstonedale Parish Council  
David Graham – Lyvennet Community Trust  
Derick Cotton – Heart of Eden Development Trust  
Kitty Smith – Lyvennet Community Trust  
Libby Bateman – Upper Eden Community Plan Group  
Maureen Newrick – Lyvennet Renewable Energy Ltd  
Miles Mandelson – Great Asby Community Broadband  
Peter Smith – Heart of Eden Development Trust  
Tom Woof – Upper Eden Community Plan Group

From the agencies:

Andy Lloyd – Cumbria Rural Housing Trust  
Cheryl Cowperthwaite – Cumbria County Council  
Jackie McQueen – Locality  
Jacqui Walsh – Homes and Communities Agency  
Jeremy Westgarth – Environment Agency  
Judith Derbyshire – Cumbria Rural Housing Trust  
Lorraine Smyth – Cumbria County Council  
Ruth Atkinson – Eden District Council  
Simon Humphries – Natural England

## Appendix 4 – Eden Big Society Vanguard SWOT Analysis

The following analysis was collated by the project team drawing upon all the materials that they collated during the course of the study.

<b>Strengths</b>	
<b>Learning Headlines</b>	<b>Sources of Evidence</b>
High levels voluntary activity exist already in many places	Stats confirm comparatively high levels of voluntary organisations per capita.
Community-led planning is common practice for many	ACT map of parishes engaged in community-led planning confirms widespread coverage
Communities can be effective at making things happen	ACT case studies and DCLG reports evidence multiple initiatives underway across Eden.
Communities that build strong links with their elected reps	Interviews with CCC and EDC officers described benefits of elected representative involvement.
Vanguard initiative has been a catalyst for activity	Interviews with public and civil society organisations described positive affect of Vanguard status.
Strong local personalities or champions – local leadership	Interviews with local authority managers and community group members emphasised leadership.
Proactive town & parish councils prepared to collaborate	Interviews with community group members highlighted benefits of parishes working together.
Government agencies consider their joint working is strong in Eden	Interview with government agency managers and examples of EA, NE and FC "Defra family"
Local MP has been inspirational and provided leadership to the Vanguard	Interview with local authority and government agency managers
Vanguard has given national profile to challenges being addressed by rural communities	Interviews with local authority managers
Big Society places pressure on public bodies to justify why regulations exist	Interviews with government agency managers
Raised profile of small communities & what they can achieve. "given credence" to needs	Interviews with government agency managers
Much of the success in Eden existed before the Vanguard and will continue well beyond	Interview with civil society organisations
Vanguard provided a focus for civil society organisations and taking advantage of community activities	Interview with civil society organisations
A number of agencies are trying to make their processes easier for community groups	Interviews with community groups
Having a "community group friendly" contact in LAs and other agencies smooths problems	Interviews with community groups
Small grants through Big Society grant fund have been useful. Communities need start-up and feasibility grants	Interviews with community groups
Being part of vanguard has increased our confidence and raised value of community action	Interviews with community groups
Highly skilled local people prepared to invest time and expertise	Interviews with community groups
Local knowledge can be harnessed to improve services and identify gaps or opportunities	Interviews with community groups

<b>Weaknesses</b>	
<b>Learning Headlines</b>	<b>Sources of Evidence</b>
Levels of voluntary activity not uniform and low in places	Interviews with local authority and civil society organisation representatives described inequalities.
Community groups not representative of whole community	Interviews with local authority and civil society organisation representatives described limited participation.
Community aspirations not always realistic or advisable	Interviews with local authority managers
Public bodies not always meeting the needs of communities	Interviews with local authority managers
Communities that fail to work with their elected reps & Councils	Interviews with local authority managers
Vanguard initiative is too short a timeframe for learning	Interview with government agency managers
A mutually acceptable solution cannot be a guaranteed outcome.	Interview with government agency managers and examples by EA and NE
Consultations and engagement within communities has not gone far enough.	Interview with government agency managers and examples by EA and NE
Vanguard highlighting existing practice and not adding much value yet	Interviews with local authority managers
Vanguard coincided with cuts in public spending. Communities sceptical about motives.	Interviews with local authority managers
Community initiative less formal less regulated but can also be less accountable	Interviews with local authority managers and civil society organisation reps
Challenge to overcome a sense of powerlessness at every level.	Interviews with local authority managers
Achievements through participation in communities take time and not easy to measure	Interviews with local authority managers
Many regulations (perceived "barriers") exist for a purpose and some barriers will remain	Interviews with government agency managers
Not much has changed yet - Vanguard reliant on existing good practice	Interviews with government agency managers
Community access to funding remains a challenge (e.g. when legal advice required)	Interviews with government agency managers
Many projects are complex and technological which makes them challenging to tackle	Interviews with communities - energy, housing
Vanguard has focused on the more able communities making lessons less replicable	Interview with civil society organisations
Complexity of charity and company law re fundraising and trading is an issue for many communities	Interview with civil society organisations
Not all communities created equal - resources needed to support even the most able communities	Interview with civil society organisations
Community development can be a long and painstaking process often taking several years	Interview with civil society organisations
Communities not preparing or even considering a Plan B or contingency for failure	Interview with civil society organisations
Some communities feel that they don't have sufficient skills to tackle complex projects	Interviews with communities
Appropriate devolution of power - Whitehall to Carlisle not necessarily local	Interviews with communities
Vanguard has been a distraction	Interviews with communities

Agencies are inclined to think of a solution and consult rather than starting with a blank sheet	Interviews with communities
Big Society Grant Fund timescales were too short; not enough time to consider or implement projects	Interviews with communities
<b>Opportunities</b>	
<b>Learning Headlines</b>	<b>Sources of Evidence</b>
Extend community action through widening of participation	Interviews with local authority managers
Community aspirations are high and expectations rising	Interviews with local authority managers
Reformed, community-oriented allocation of public funding	Interviews with local authority managers
Building capacity of communities with greatest needs	Interviews with local authority managers
Highlighting support & enabling services that work well	Interviews with local authority managers
Sharing the lessons and learning from others/ networking	Interviews with local authority managers
Vanguard is changing behaviour of authorities/public bodies	Interviews with local authority managers
Vanguard highlighting increasingly proactive work of public bodies with communities	Interview with government agency managers and examples by EA, NE and HCA
Government bodies working more closely with elected representatives MP and Cllrs	Interview with government agency managers and examples by EA and HCA
Vanguard an opportunity for govt bodies to focus resources and test new working	Interview with government agency managers and examples by EA and HCA
Govt bodies can be enabling "can do" organisations rather than "controlling" bodies	Interview with government agency managers
Considerable scope for the communities in Eden to learn from practice elsewhere	Interview with government agency managers e.g in engaging with wider interest groups
Vanguard has provided opportunity to help communities feel sense of empowerment	Interviews with local authority managers
Eden Vanguard offers valuable lessons for other rural areas.	Interviews with local authority managers
Expectation community engagement will become even more important in local govt	Interviews with local authority managers
Opportunity of Vanguard taken by public agencies to map areas of possible collaboration	Interviews with government agency managers
Attitudes of public agencies towards communities now "yes, if.." rather than "no!"	Interviews with government agency managers
Efforts by some public bodies to be more proactive in community engagement	Interviews with government agency managers
Public bodies have new enthusiasm to cut the levels of bureaucracy e.g. T&F Groups	Interviews with government agency managers
Government programmes becoming more inclusive of community initiative e.g. CLTs	Interviews with government agency managers
Getting investment strategy right can help communities become less dependent on the state	Interview with civil society organisations
Availability of small funds in Vanguard highlights value achieved by communities with modest funding	Interview with civil society organisations
It is essential that any paths smoothed, barriers busted or practice changed are accessible to all communities	Interview with civil society organisations
Seeing other communities achieve their aims is inspiring	Interviews with community groups
Community groups can be guided by organisations that perform an enabling role	Interviews with community groups
People will invest their own money in community projects if they are inspiring and viable	Interviews with community groups
People can be empowered to take on other projects/roles i.e become councillors	Interviews with community groups
Greater flexibility around contracts could meet needs more	Interviews with community groups

effectively and harness local energy	
<b>Threats</b>	
<b>Learning Headlines</b>	<b>Sources of Evidence</b>
Absence of funds and expertise at crucial stages may suppress community action	Interviews with local authority managers
Cuts to enabling and technical support for communities	Interviews with local authority managers
Unrealistic high expectations means failure becomes inevitable	Interviews with local authority managers
Criticism of public sector = throw baby out with bathwater	Interviews with local authority managers
Social and economic divisions might emerge ("twin track")	Interviews with local authority managers
Impatience through not understanding timescale required to deliver	Interviews with local authority managers
Communities can be frustrated by time required to address environment regulations	Interview with government agency managers
Role of local authorities particularly leadership can be marginalised	Interviews with local authority managers
Concern that local authorities must "pick up the pieces" when community projects fail.	Interviews with local authority managers and civil society organisation reps
Communities risk being elitist with only a few holding power and influence locally	Interviews with local authority managers and civil society organisation reps
Central govt initiatives deal direct with communities by-passing local govt	Interviews with local authority managers
Significant demands on people who volunteer but also have day job.	Interview with government agency managers
Community enterprise can fail for many of the reasons any other enterprise might fail	Interview with civil society organisations
Still a job to do to build community confidence in the motives for Big Society when cutting funding	Interview with civil society organisations
Consequential costs of removing support for communities may not be adequately assessed	Interview with civil society organisations
Officers have responded to communities because the "Big Soc spotlight" is on them may not transfer to other areas	Interviews with community groups
Levels of bureaucracy from some organisations make it impossible to deliver small community-led projects	Interviews with community groups
Lack of clarity around planning and building control requirements for PV projects	Interviews with community groups
Difficult to bridge gap between officers who think and act strategically and community groups	Interviews with community groups
How do you replicate in less able communities who don't have a history of community activity	Interviews with community groups

## Appendix 5 – Big Society – Rural Action, Conference Report

The **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project culminated in a major conference which took place on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Held at Rheged, near Penrith, the purpose of this event was to:

- share the initial findings of the study
- provide an opportunity for community participants to celebrate and share their various achievements
- initiate the dissemination of learning from the Eden Vanguard experience.

To this end a programme was created that included contributions from the Eden Vanguard sponsor, Rory Stewart MP and key community participants who gave presentations and also led workshops. Several additional speakers contributed to describing the broader policy context in which the Vanguard had taken place. In excess of 100 delegates attended comprising representatives of the Eden Vanguard communities and key local authorities and agencies together with many community members from elsewhere in Cumbria and further afield, all keen to share and learn from the Vanguard experience.

All those attending were provided with draft versions of the case studies and guidance materials produced during the Learning from the Big Society Vanguard project.

### Setting the Context

Chaired by Ruth Willis, Chief Executive of ACTION with Communities in Cumbria, the conference opened with a series of presentations to provide strategic context for the event. Speakers in this segment included Rory Stewart MP; Anton Draper (DCLG); Sylvia Brown (Chief Executive, Action with Communities in Rural England) and Gordon Nicholson (Eden District Council).

Speaking of the Vanguard Rory Stewart said that this was *“not the story of politicians, it is the story of communities, of individuals, personalities, of luck...”* He stressed the importance of the local knowledge that communities possess commenting that *“there is an incredibly important role for government ... but communities know much more about their local areas than Carlisle, London, or Brussels, they care more and they can do more”*.

Anton Draper talked of the move towards a state that is an enabling body, highlighting the Vanguard as providing the space to try new approaches and helping to shape the new rights that will appear in legislation.

In offering a community perspective, Sylvia Brown spoke of the shift from public sector engagement with communities to communities empowering themselves to take action, a process in which she suggested that it is necessary to allow communities to find the limits of their power. She also pointed to the critical contribution that a community being in control makes, the essential stimulus that it provides for local involvement and volunteering.

Offering an important perspective, Gordon Nicholson observed that the interests of rural communities had been marginalised by government for many years. However, the Vanguard had

presented an opportunity to change this, provided that the actions being taken by groups had a clear mandate from local people.

### **The Community Experience**

Three speakers spoke on behalf of the Vanguard communities. Peter Smith of the Heart of Eden Development Trust described work involved in developing the community led plan for the locality before speaking of the way in which the Vanguard had helped to accelerate progress on some of their key priority projects (see Section 4). He also talked of future plans, which are to revisit priorities in their action plan, especially those relating to affordable housing and the use of commercial buildings.

Annie Kindleysides, representing the Lyvennet Community Plan Group, described their initial scepticism about participating in the Vanguard, fearing that it might divert from their key priorities. However, it had turned out to be a positive experience that had contributed to the progress they had been able to make. She also described the very high levels of community involvement and support that the projects had received and highlighted key messages for the public sector. These included the need to tie funding in to community priorities as set out in community led plans and in particular to provide accessible seed corn funding.

Finally Tom Woof of Upper Eden Community Interest Company spoke of the lengthy background to community planning in the Upper Eden valley, which had included activity under the Vital Villages and Market Town initiatives of 10 years ago. He described the character of the area, which is one of the most sparsely populated in England, and explained the way in which current policies relating to housing development were threatening to undermine the social and economic sustainability of the area's smaller communities. This set a context for more detailed discussion of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan pilot during the later workshop sessions.

The morning of the conference concluded with a presentation by Julia Wilson and Chris Kolek of the key learning points and recommendations emerging from the **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project.

### **Workshop Sessions**

The afternoon of the conference provided delegates with the opportunity to attend two of five workshops. These were presented by community members who were as keen to share their experience as the delegates were to learn from that experience.

Focusing on the practical aspects of the projects undertaken, rather than the theory of Big Society, these workshops explored:

- Affordable Housing and Community Land Trusts – David Graham (LCT) and Andy Lloyd (CRHT)
- Transport – Peter Smith (HoEDT)
- Renewable Energies – Peter Smith (Photovoltaics), Peter Emry & Carl Bendelow (Hydro), Maureen Newrick (Anaerobic digestion), Kevin Draper (Wind)
- Neighbourhood Planning – Tom Woof (UECIC)
- Community Assets – David Graham (LCT)



The popularity of these workshops is evidenced by the large number of delegates who stayed to the end of this Saturday conference!

### **Conference Evaluation**

As is their normal practice, ACT invited delegates to provide feedback on the Conference. The following table reflects the feedback received:

<b>Question</b>	<b>% of delegates scoring good or very good</b>
How well did the event meet your expectations?	100
How do you rate overall content?	93
How do you rate the speakers?	97
How do you rate the venue?	91
How do you rate the catering?	84
How do you rate the administration?	90

It is clear from these that the event was well received. In written comments delegates appreciated the balance between strategic context and practical experience with the input provided by the Vanguard communities in their presentations and workshops being particularly welcomed.

## Appendix 6 – Project Team

The following people contributed to the development, implementation and reporting of the **Learning from the Big Society Vanguard** project.

### **ACTion with Communities in Cumbria**

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### **Eden District Council**

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