

Penrith Action for Community Transition (PACT) AGM 2014 Summary of activities and progress for the year 2013-2014

Formed in 2008 as part of the Transition Network, PACT is a community organisation leading a local response to the challenges of peak oil and climate change in Cumbria's Eden Valley.

Once again PACT has had a very busy year, with fingers in an increasingly large number of pies both literal and metaphorical.

In particular PACT is now an important partner in the Sustain Eden project generously funded by the Big Lottery Fund, working with Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAfS).

Projects include collaborating with Freegle to deliver the Grow Your Own project, aiming to encourage communities and individuals to grow more produce locally, reducing food miles and increasing our resilience. Food is ever popular and great progress has been made, with now a very well used 'Give & Take' gardening category available on Freegle, exchanging everything from tools to surplus produce. PACT has also gone truly global this year, with asparagus kale seeds being mailed direct from Shap to keen growers as far afield as Canada and Australia.

The Grow Your Own project has also been responsible for a programme of Visiting Edible Gardens ('VEG') visits over the past 6 months - everything from community garden spaces in town centres, to growing successfully in the more challenging climate of the Pennines on Hartside.

Another strand to Sustain Eden is the Tree Whisperers project, inspired by Dawn Hurton leading on from the hugely successful Giants of Eden project in 2011. Earlier this year Emma Aylett was appointed to coordinate the project, working with a range of schools across Eden to deliver a creative and stimulating education programme, including visits to the county archives and woodland sessions. The aim is that this will culminate in a tree festival in June 2015.

PACT also continues its links to the Opt4 Switch & Save initiative, aiming to help tackle fuel poverty, gain commissions from providing a service to switch to lower energy tariffs, and then reinvest back into the community in the form of home insulation and other such measures.

Despite a challenging energy market where goalposts often seem to move at an alarming rate, considerable progress has been made to establish and promote Opt4 over the year. The company now employs 2 staff members at its call centre offices in Penrith, providing a switching service to Cumbrian communities in partnership with USwitch. These efforts have recently been recognised with the winning of a Community Action Award.

As well as delivering our own projects, increasingly PACT has also become a partner and hub to support other like-minded groups in our area. This includes meeting with SLACC from Kendal to discuss ideas such as a local Cumbrian pound, and providing support to Sustainable Carlisle for their Fair Food meals service.

PACT has also supported groups such as those developing community gardens in Penrith, Appleby Edibles which has now established a large polytunnel at Appleby railway station for community growing, plus help and advice provided to the group which attempted a community buy-out of the watermill at Little Salkeld. Particular thanks are due to Eden District Council for their grant support for the raised beds at the Salvation Army, and to other partner organisations and individuals who have made that project such as a success.

PACT members also take credit for the Greening of Penrith and St Andrews gardens projects; responsibility for these has been passed to Penrith Partnership in June 2014.

PACT now has increasingly strong links to and influence with Eden District Council, plus has met Cumbria County Council to discuss ways to collaborate on reducing waste, and how to increase rates of domestic recycling and composting.

Throughout the year PACT has hosted and participated in a number of diverse events. Our own events have ranged from a film evening to screen the inspiring movie 'In Transition 2.0', involvement with the second Stone Soup Day, to a very well attended storytelling ceilidh in Appleby complete with more homemade soup!

PACT has also put on stalls and displays at well-known local events such as Apple Day at Acorn Bank, a plant fair at Lowther Castle, and at Penrith on a Plate as part of the Eden Food & Farming Festival, as well as a presence at the CAfs AGM. These stalls have been mostly on a food-related theme, which unsurprisingly continues to be the group's main area of activity.

The PACT website is a veritable mine of information and continues to act as the hub for our various events and activities. The PACT publicity machine has also been in overdrive this year, with regular stories appearing in local and regional press and online, plus more short films produced to document our progress, all broadening our reach along with our continuing direct engagement with communities at events.

PACT is fortunate to be able to attract grant funding for various projects. During the year PACT has supported the development of EdenSave Credit Union Ltd, including depositing group funds there as an investor.

As a group PACT has gone through various constitutional changes, and is now formally registered as an Industrial & Provident Society ('IPS') for the Benefit of the Community. This stands us in good stead as a platform for future endeavours.

Particular credit is due to all board members for their unstinting hard work and enthusiasm to achieve all this progress. Board members should also be credited with contributing in so many ways to a wide range of other environmental initiatives not immediately within PACT, acting either as individuals or within their local communities. This continues to set a great example to others, showing what's possible with the right mindset and commitment.

Earlier this year PACT board members attended a short training course on lobbying for change, and there remains the opportunity for PACT to consider whether more active campaigning could further increase our effectiveness, and if so what extra resource and expertise might be needed to help make this happen.

Despite all the hard work and achievements of the past year, we should still be conscious that at our core PACT remains a very small group, with the same faces putting in long hours time and again to make all this happen. Attempts to draw in new energy to the board have so far proved unsuccessful, so inevitably we do have to question our own resilience and sustainability.

Therefore amongst our on-going challenges, we remain ever hopeful of attracting new members to bring fresh ideas and stimulus to PACT. We also continue to hone our approach to transition as we gain experience, aiming to broaden our general community engagement across Eden.

The challenge for us all is to convey as positive a message as possible, outlining an optimistic vision containing real world practical solutions, even despite the immense scale of the challenges ahead.

Nigel Jenkins
(Chairman)

3rd Sept 2014