



# ALSTON MOOR ...

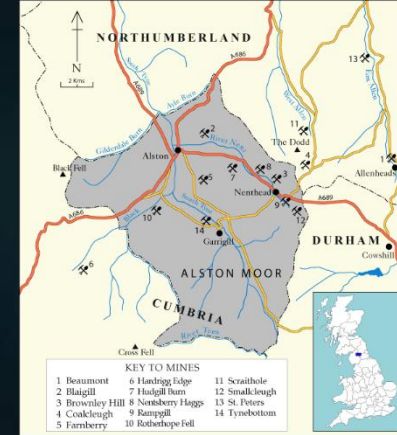
## The UK's First Social Enterprise Town



**Alston Moor**  
Social Enterprise Town

# About Alston Moor...

- Small rural parish in Cumbria (pop. 2,100)
- Alston (England's highest market town) and villages of Nenthead & Garrigill
- Predominantly sheep farming
- UK's lead mining capital (emp. 2,000+ in 1860)
- Nearest service town Penrith 20+ miles (40 mins)
- Limited public transport
- Often 'cut-off' for weeks during winter



# ALSTON MOOR ... The Social Enterprise Capital of the UK !



- 24 registered social enterprises
- 1 social enterprise / 50 households
- 50 jobs supported
- 200 volunteers involved in the sector
- £2.2m combined turnover



Alston Moor  
Social Enterprise Town



**Alston Moor**  
**Social Enterprise Town**

## What the Judges said ...

*“a model to be copied in other small areas”*

*“a perfect example of small is very powerful”*

*“great depth of engagement with its community”*

# Social Enterprise in Alston Moor



- Often born out of necessity
- Best described as 'community led enterprise'
- Delivering services that either no one else will provide or have been withdrawn
- Predominantly community owned businesses & workers' co-operatives
- Sector relies heavily on volunteers
- Preserving and sharing our local heritage and community



# ALSTON MOOR ... The UK's First Social Enterprise Town

## A Timeline of Social Enterprise Activity on Alston Moor



South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society  
1983



The HUB Transport and Heritage Museum



Alston Moor Partnership

2001



Alston Moor Community Transport



Alston Moor Fitness  
2003



Nenthead Community Shop  
2007



Nenthead Community Snowplough



Epiacum Heritage

2011



Cybermoor Networks  
2012



Alston Pre-School Group  
2014

1998



Alston Wholefoods

2006



Alston Healthcare



2009



Nenthead Community Toilets



Alston Moor Film

2013



Nenthead Chapel Project

2002



The Moody Baker



Cybermoor



Alston Moor  
Social Enterprise Town

## SPECIAL REPORT The power of social enterprise

'There is more to life than the financial bottom line'

## Community spirit pays a dividend

A Cumbrian town shows how co-operatively owned businesses can keep remote areas alive and thriving. Sarah Morrison reports

Alston, England's highest market town, sitting in north-east Cumbria, is so remote that it will take you 20 minutes to reach it from the nearest big town. Its parish is deemed so rural that big companies refuse to supply it with high-speed broadband.

But this community made up of 2,100 people will make up a landmark in British history this week. Alston Moor will be named Britain's first certified "Social Enterprise Town". The former mining hub, famous as a stop-off for cyclists on their tour of the Pennines, is being heralded as a "trailblazer" for a "new era of social innovation in Britain."

The parish - made up of Alston town and the villages of Garrigill and Nenthead - lost its lead mines in the 1950s. Thirty years later, the last employer in the area - a foundry employing more than 300 - closed its doors. It looked as though "high" socio-economic needs, made worse by the fact that the town is virtually cut off from the rest of the country during bad winters: even in summer, buses are few and far between.

But it has a trump card: its community. When BT refused to provide up-to-date internet, without government subsidies, Alston Moor set up its own community-owned co-operative, Cybemoor, to provide broadband. Residents bought shares in the company and local labour dug up the roads to install the fibre cables needed. In the next month, it is hoped 300 homes will have high-speed broadband.

## GET INVOLVED



The Independent on Sunday is delighted to be the main sponsor of the UK Social Enterprise Awards 2013. The awards, in their 15th year, celebrate the pioneering work of Britain's 65,000-strong social enterprise movement - businesses that are regenerating communities and changing lives. The awards also recognise five social enterprise champions - people who deserve recognition for their achievements.

Members of The IS is are brilliant at spotting such talent, as the annual Happy List proves. There will be more details next week but, meanwhile, if you know of an extraordinary individual in your community or workplace who is worthy of a social enterprise award, get ready to nominate them for an ambition status.

The UK Social Enterprise Awards 2013 are open for entries and nominations until 6 August. Visit [socialenterprise.org.uk](http://socialenterprise.org.uk) for information. Roy & Bank of Scotland Group, BP and FWC also support the awards.



When Nenthead's shop closed down - making it difficult to get a pint of milk as late as last business at 2.30pm - the community rallied round to raise funds to set up its own store, which has been running for five years. There are just two of almost 20 social enterprises in the parish - from a bakery and gymnasium to a community shop and a hair salon at the railway station, all run largely by volunteers.

All the organisations, but the rule is they must benefit the community and fund their profits back into it. More than 50 jobs are supported by the sector; hundreds of

volunteers are involved, and a £1.3m turnover is generated each year. People in the area as far as China have visited the parish to attend what has been dubbed "social enterprise salaris". "There's such self-help mentality here that we joke there's something in the soil. This could have been the place that people forgot, but the community wants it to be as vibrant as possible," said Sue Gilbertson, 51, a local resident and Cybemoor employee. "We realised IT was never going to give us fibre-optic broadband and we were sick of fibre providers, so we took control ourselves. There's

no point meaning. We've just got to get it done."

It is this sort of pragmatism that led judges of the Social Enterprise Awards UK to describe Alston Moor as "a model to be copied in other small areas". Gareth Thomas, Labour's spokesperson on civil society affairs, will officially declare the town the first of its kind this Thursday. Alston Moor could be the trailblazer for a new era of social innovation in Britain - getting the public sector to work more closely with social enterprises, charities and co-operatives to create jobs, keep



KEEP IT LOCAL: Joy Hutton at Alston Wholefoods, main picture; Nenthead's Angela Green, above; Alston resident Emry Angier, far left; Meryl Baker at Moody's Bakery, near left; Rosemary Sawyer at Alston Wholefoods; below: GABRIEL CLARKE/GETTY IMAGES



money in communities and tackle inequality," noted The Independent on Sunday. "We now need banks to respond, to be more willing to lend to social enterprises in communities they wouldn't otherwise invest in."

While Alston Moor has been supported by Cumbria County Council and other initiatives, its success derives largely from the commitment of residents. When cuts meant the public toilets were going to be closed down, volunteers stepped in to run them. When the county council wants to clear the low-priority roads of snow, it uses a second-hand tractor that villagers converted into the community shop's property.

Meryl Baker, 66, founder of the workers' co-operative Moody's Bakery, has come out of retirement twice to keep her store open. "I do this because I love doing it - not for the money," she says, before admitting that she often works 10-hour days. "It's important to be part of Alston, being part of the community is like

a service." She often employs local young people, and shifts can be passed from sibling to sibling. Tim Angier, 16, has worked there every Saturday for the past two months. He said: "It's a really good atmosphere. Your decision is counted, and if you've got an idea, they take it into account."

Ms Baker's partner, Pip, is more pragmatic about the bakery: "It's the only way to run a business here - you've just got to keep going." The local wholefood shop is also co-operatively owned, with seven members working one day

a week. Member Joy Hutton is an accountant as well as a shopkeeper, while another, Rosemary Sawyer, 72, is retired. "We're often cut off from transport links, but the idea is to try to provide customers who live here with what they want," Ms Sawyer said.

Angela Green, 65, lives in Nenthead and spends most mornings running the community-owned shop and its post office. She set up the store five years ago after the former owners closed its doors. The community raised £10,000 for its launch by selling

100 shares locally. "This town is so isolated, and we know if we don't do it, no one else will," she said. "But it does not come from a sense of neglect; it's always been within the people. If we want something, we get up and do it."

Emry Angier, 15, spends much of her free time at the town hall, doing karate. While she is hoping to study law at university, she said she hopes to return when she is older to Alston. "There's loads of things to do here. It's safe and it has a good atmosphere," she said. "It's good it's being recognised."

# New SE businesses 'in the pipeline'

*As a community we are continually looking at ways of retaining and expanding our services:*

- High Mill – Visitor Centre & Heritage/Cultural Hub
- Community owned Hydro scheme
- Library & Tourist Information Centre
- Community Hospital
- Residential Care Home
- Street lights
- Alternative transport schemes



# What makes our community different?

- Long history of *self-help, can do* attitude and community activists and social entrepreneurs.
- Our remoteness and environmental isolation.

# What makes our community UNIQUE?

- **THE PEOPLE** – both individually and collectively.





**Alston Moor**  
**Social Enterprise Town**

## Contact Details:

Sue Gilbertson

[sue.gilbertson@cybermoor.org.uk](mailto:sue.gilbertson@cybermoor.org.uk)

Cybermoor Services Ltd

[www.cybermoor.org](http://www.cybermoor.org)