



Ravenglass Village Forum

November 1999

No 1

What's this Village Forum, then?

At a public meeting on 20 October last year Andy Lowe, the Lake District National Park's Building Conservation Officer, announced that money was available to improve our village. In the Parish Magazine shortly afterwards, Muncaster Parish Council invited residents to form a voluntary working group to help him spend it. We answered that invitation. We are: Ann Edwards (Chairman), Pam Conroy, Mike Harrington (Secretary), Kate Hunter (Treasurer), Norman Inglis, Brian Levitan and Peter van Zeller. We are not an exclusive group. If you want to join us, you can, but be prepared to work, make yourself available and take some responsibility, not just criticise.

What are you up to?

We meet about once a month to discuss ideas for improving the appearance and the social and economic life of the village and to monitor their progress. Many of these ideas were put forward by residents at the public meeting last October. To advise us on what's possible and to support us on an official level we have Andy Lowe, our main contact with the National Park, and Jonathan Walkingshaw, who represents Voluntary Action Cumbria.

Jonathan Fisher of the Ratty and Peter Frost-Pennington of Muncaster Castle have joined forces with us in order to promote the village as well as their own enterprises. They need our support, just as we welcome theirs.

How do we know what residents want? Our only qualification is that we live here. At this point we have to go public, present our ideas and seek your reactions. If we are doing it wrong or not doing enough, we want to know. **We will be showing the village the progress so far and what we hope to do at a Public Meeting in the Parish Hall on Thursday, 18 November at 7.30 p.m. We want your support and your ideas. Please be there.**

Why?

Ravenglass has a unique character but there are constantly changing threats to this tiny community:

- economic, because small, isolated businesses are vulnerable when trade goes elsewhere;
- social, because the village supplies fewer of our needs for jobs or entertainment;
- structural, because outside agencies either propose radical changes or just ignore us.

The Forum in Roman times was a meeting place, where ideas could be discussed before decisions were made. This Village Forum gives local people a chance to talk to outside agencies and seize the opportunities that arise. We can apply for funds to make improvements that will complement the restoration of property we see around us. The village hall, the old signal box and many private houses and gardens now look better than ever. However the Pennington Arms sadly reminds us that, without sufficient trade and sustained maintenance, property can go out of use to the loss of owners, users, workers and neighbours alike.

At the public meeting last year residents thought of a host of ways to improve our village which will also benefit the general public. Regular, satisfied visitors to our B&Bs, the Castle, the Mill, the Ratty, the pubs and shops will support local jobs and may encourage new businesses, which we need.

Traffic that sweeps into the village unthinking can be calmed, not by bone-jarring bumps but by paving road surfaces and restricting the highway to warn drivers that walkers have equal rights here.

To attack these problems we have to win your support for negotiations with outside bodies. Services need to go underground before the Main Street receives a major face-lift. To show what can be achieved, we want to restore the unloved piece of the Village Green behind the Old Reading Room first. This can be completed soon and it will set the standard for further improvements elsewhere.

Main Street

Looking along Main Street, what do you see? An open vista bordered by an attractive mixture of houses of various periods. Its shape, wide in the middle where the Cross used to be and narrow at both ends, testifies to its layout as a market. The narrow exits at both ends presumably gave a better chance of controlling any beasts that felt like leaving early.



What else? Ugly 'maypoles' festooned with telephone wires: British Telecom agrees that it is time they came down and they will, in the next six months or so. Unsightly above-ground mains electricity cables at first-floor level between Clifton Terrace and Pennington House and a Heath Robinson contraption that supplies The Ship: Norweb is talking about burying those supplies too. A few lamp-posts that are neither use nor ornament: the Copeland and Cumbria lighting engineers agree that our lighting must be brought up to standard.

So before work starts on any grand design for Main Street, the first visible sign of change will be people digging trenches for new underground services.

What is the grand design? Nothing is settled yet, but early thoughts have concentrated on gentle traffic control. We know the problem: visitors in cars come to the Neb and are not sure where to go. Some turn into Main Street, ignoring the directions to the car park. They may try to park in front of people's houses. If they want to get to the beach ... oh dear, the tide's up, so they do 13-point turns at the top of the ramp or reverse perilously into the wider bit of the street.

Suppose instead that drivers find good signs to the car park at the Neb and a cobbled strip across the entrance to Main Street to indicate that it is not the main road. If they go down Main Street, paving between the Pennington Arms and the Post Office will slow down those in a hurry and suggest that vehicles go further on sufferance.

In Main Street itself the tarmac ends in a turning area near the site of the Old Cross. A stone plaque, flush with the road surface, marks where the Cross was. From there to the ramp the highway is paved or cobbled. So are the parking areas in front of the houses, to provide an attractive and hard-wearing surface for residents' cars to stand. The boundary between private forecourts and the highway is marked with a distinctive flush edge of natural stone. There are no kerbs or other actual obstructions, but there are strong visual hints that cars do not rule here any more.



That's the vision. It could happen, if the residents of Main Street approve. This is the first thing we need to know. If your property would be affected (for the better, we hope), please make your views known at the Public Meeting on 18 November or by letter to the Editor. The second thing we need to know is who owns which property. The Forum is trying to make a property ownership map in order to show which houses are privately owned or rented from Muncaster and which are permanently occupied or

holiday homes. This will help those who need to ask permission for work on private forecourts. We will be collecting this information at the public meeting on 18 November.

Story: Mike Harrington. Pictures © Ann Edwards.

Maypoles will go

The 'maypoles' festooned with telephone wires will disappear from the Main Street in about six months, BT engineering surveyor Richard Trotter told Andy Lowe. BT has committed itself to re-laying the phone lines underground and has drawn up a schedule for obtaining wayleaves for buried cables and maintaining services during alterations. When the work is done, there will be much less visible wiring on the fronts of houses. The cost of the work will be about £15,000. The National Park offered a contribution, but BT is happy to bear the whole cost.

Norweb is willing to lay underground supplies to replace the ancient and ugly electricity supply cables at first floor level that serve the Ship Inn and several properties on the landward side of Main Street. This work will have to tie in with the new lighting and should become a reality in 2000.

New lights

Andy Lowe has made a survey of Ravenglass's street lighting with Mike Nicholson and Louise Riley, the lighting engineers of Cumbria County Council and Copeland BC respectively. The lamps on the 'new' estate belong to the county, those in Main Street are Copeland's and one or two are debatable. The engineers agreed that the present lighting in Main Street and elsewhere in the village is inadequate. A scheme is being designed to bring our lighting up to the required standard.

The scheme will require about twelve new lamps at a cost of £18.6K + VAT. This includes Norweb's charge, normally almost £500 a lamp, for providing a mains connection. Mr Lowe hopes that Norweb may be persuaded to reduce its charge as a contribution to the village improvement scheme. To make the budget more manageable, the re-lighting of main Street may be the first stage of a two-stage project.

The new lamp standards will have to be of a robust and attractive design that will fit in with the scale of the surroundings. It may even be possible to customise them with a design that belongs to Ravenglass and nowhere else.

Thank you

- to the Ravenglass Charter Fair for a grant of £100 towards the Forum's expenses;
- to the Lake District National Park Authority for printing this Newsletter;
- to Muncaster Parish Council for meeting the cost of its distribution to each household in the parish.

Designs wanted

We are looking for ideas for the design of motifs on seats, litter bins and other 'street furniture' that will be unique to Ravenglass and accentuate the village's own character.

There are plenty of ideas to draw on: Ravenglass's connections with the sea, the Ratty, the Romans, the Vikings, medieval times or perhaps a pun on the village's name.

Sketches from children will be especially welcome. It will be their village in twenty years' time. What a pleasant thought that they may then be able to show their own children something in the village that they designed. Waberthwaite School is already encouraging its pupils from Ravenglass to start designing. Older children and adults, this is your invitation.

Please send sketches, clearly labelled with your name and address, to the Editor, who will keep them until they are needed and see that you get full credit if your design is chosen.

When the money becomes available for various projects, we want to employ **local craftspeople and contractors**. If that interests you, please send your contact details and a brief list of recent work to the Editor.

Village Green: disabled access

Muncaster Parish Council is now seeking tenders for construction of a ramp to provide disabled access to the Village Green. With a severely limited budget it could only consider concrete construction as used for the steps, which do their job but are not pretty.

The National Park has offered to fund the difference between concrete construction and a ramp built from natural materials.

Where to go, what to do?

'There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool, that's noted for fresh air and fun.' Its attractions are well known, but how would Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom fare in Ravenglass today? Like many visitors, they might get off the Ratty train or out of their car and wonder whether there is a village at all.

The National Park owns the village car park and the scruffy seating area the other side of Croftlands Drive, behind the Pennington Arms. Vital pedestrian links cross this area between the Ratty, the Ratty Arms and the village, but at present those links are invisible to visitors. Nothing draws them on into the village.

Chris Greenwood, the National Park's landscape architect, is drawing up an improvement scheme that will provide:

- a welcoming area where the seats now are, with better seats and safe playing space, to encourage visitors and residents to use it for meeting and relaxation;
- grassed and planted areas and hedges that will remain attractive with low maintenance;
- signs to direct visitors onwards to the Main Street, the shops, Holly House and the beach;
- a map that you can read without having to stand in the road.

Jonathan Fisher, the Group General Manager of the Ratty's owning company, has offered help to the National Park with maintenance of the paths and hedges either side of the footbridge over the main line and directions to the Roman Bath House. The Ratty's timetable leaflet for the year 2000 will provide much more information about Ravenglass, its immediate surroundings and attractions up the valley. Mr Fisher told the Forum that he wants to make much more of the attractions of the whole area, not just the railway, and persuade visitors who make day trips to the Ratty that Ravenglass is a holiday destination in its own right.

Peter Frost-Pennington is discussing the provision of waymarked walks over Muncaster land with Malcolm Guyatt, the responsible National Park Ranger.

Meanwhile every house in the Main Street has its own history which is part of the village's heritage. Barbara Newton's book *Ravenglass Through the Ages* contains much information, but the book cannot just be given away.

Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom need more information. The Ratty will make a start with next year's timetable leaflet. The National Park will provide a better map and signposting from the new welcoming area by the car park. Ravenglass needs its own leaflet, freely available in the village and in tourist information offices, which will tell visitors enough about the village's history and attractions to tempt them to walk round, have plenty of fun, then buy Barbara's book to take home. Kate Hunter has agreed to undertake research for such a leaflet.

Behind the Old Reading Room

Chris Greenwood, the Lake District National Park's Landscape Architect, is preparing a plan for the improvement of the area of the Village Green behind the Old Reading Room. This area belongs to Muncaster Parish Council, who will be asked to approve the plan before work starts. The money will come from the National Park and from the Friends of the Lake District, who have been interested in improving this area for some time.

Stone flags along the lonnen between the Reading Room and Heywood House and a cobbled mosaic in the corner visible from the Main Street will provide an attractive entrance to the area. A notice will invite people in, just in case it is not too obvious that this is a public space.

Inside there will be plenty of interest. Appropriate natural materials (stone flags, cobbles, timber) and a flagpole will emphasise Ravenglass's maritime spirit. Small beds of plants that will withstand salt spray will break up the space interestingly. A low fence, possibly of posts and rope, will mark off the concrete apron that belongs to the Old Reading Room from the public area. This will be an area for looking over the wall at the estuary or sitting and relaxing.

We need design ideas that will express Ravenglass's unique qualities, especially from the children of the village, for the seats and the cobbled mosaic. We also want local craftsmen to carry out the work when plans are approved. If you would like to see work of yours become a permanent part of Ravenglass, look back at page 3 for the headline 'Designs Wanted.'

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