

Listening, learning & shaping our future



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S EVIDENCE REPORT

AN EVIDENCE ADDENDUM TO THE COCKBURNSPATH COMMUNITY PLACE PLAN

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Foreword

Communities are strongest when everyone has the opportunity to shape their future, including children and young people.

Too often, younger residents are consulted after priorities have already been established by adults. This report demonstrates a different approach.

Through two participatory workshops, children and young people became active contributors to the Community Place Plan. They identified the places that matter most to them, explored challenges within their community, debated ideas, prioritised investment, mapped local opportunities and collectively shaped recommendations for the future of Cockburnspath.

Their contributions provide valuable insight into everyday life from a perspective that is often underrepresented within community planning. They remind us that successful places are not defined solely by buildings or infrastructure, but by relationships, opportunities, belonging and the confidence to move safely and independently through the community. This report forms part of the evidence base for the Cockburnspath Community Place Plan and demonstrates the value of genuine participation in shaping local decision making.



Introduction

WHY THIS REPORT MATTERS

Children and young people experience communities differently from adults. They use different places, build friendships in different spaces and often recognise community strengths and challenges that adults may overlook. Recognising this, Cockburnspath Community Place Plan sought not simply to consult younger residents but to involve them meaningfully in shaping the future of their community.

Twenty-six children and young people took part in two participatory workshops using Participatory Action Research (PAR). Rather than responding to predetermined questions alone, participants generated ideas, discussed priorities, challenged one another's views, voted on proposals and developed shared recommendations. The result is a robust piece of community planning evidence which complements the wider Community Place Plan and ensures the voices of younger residents are reflected throughout future decision making.

26 PARTICIPANTS ACROSS 2 WORKSHOPS

- ✓ Cockburnspath Primary School
- ✓ Village Hall Youth Group
- ✓ Participatory mapping
- ✓ Prioritisation exercises
- ✓ Community Benefit Fund voting
- ✓ Facilitated discussions
- ✓ Nature-based activities

THE STRONGEST MESSAGES

Children and young people consistently identified six priorities:

1. OPPORTUNITIES AFTER SCHOOL
2. SAFE PLACES TO PLAY
3. NATURE AND OUTDOOR SPACES
4. ROAD SAFETY
5. PLACES TO MEET FRIENDS
6. FEELING PART OF THEIR COMMUNITY

More Than Consultation

WHAT MADE THIS DIFFERENT?

This engagement was deliberately designed to move beyond traditional consultation. Rather than asking children and young people to respond to adult-designed proposals, participants became active partners in shaping the Community Place Plan.

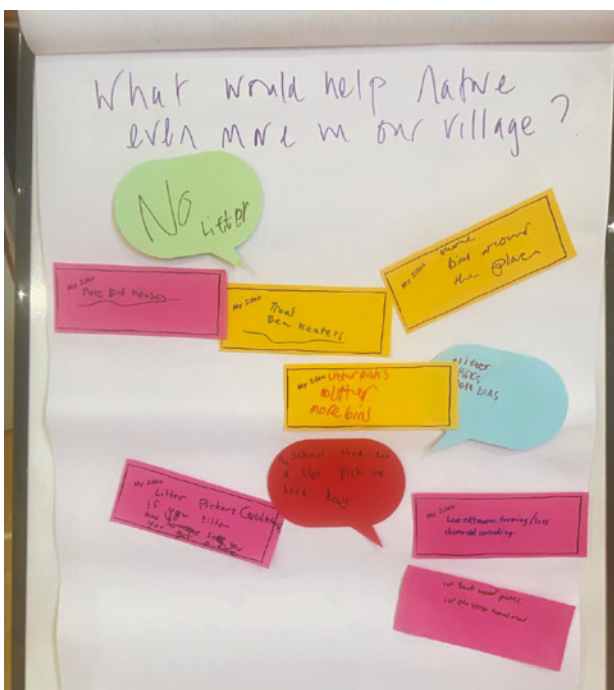
Using Participatory Action Research principles, the workshops (aligned to the survey themes and questions), encouraged our children and young people to identify the issues that mattered most to them, explore ideas together, challenge different viewpoints, negotiate priorities and build consensus before agreeing recommendations.

Throughout the workshops, children and young people:

- ✓ generated their own ideas
- ✓ debated priorities
- ✓ respectfully challenged one another's thinking
- ✓ voted on investment priorities
- ✓ mapped places that mattered to them
- ✓ identified locations where they felt safe and unsafe in relation to traffic.
- ✓ reflected on their experiences
- ✓ collectively developed recommendations for the future.

This approach recognises children and young people as experts in their own lived experience. Rather than simply consulting them about decisions already being considered, the process enabled them to shape the evidence from which future decisions will be made.

Participation was not limited to answering questions. Young people actively discussed, negotiated and refined ideas before agreeing collective priorities.



What We Learned

One finding became increasingly apparent as the workshops progressed. Although children valued parks, woods and outdoor spaces, many of the strongest conversations were not about places at all.

They were about people.

Participants repeatedly described a community where they felt welcomed, recognised and supported by adults. This sense of belonging emerged naturally throughout both workshops and became a defining themes of the engagement.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

"Everyone is friendly, the adults are kind to us."

"The shop is the best, you can go on your own and the adults are nice to you and always ask how you are."

"If you needed help, you could ask the adults."

These comments demonstrate that community assets are not limited to buildings or facilities. Relationships, trust and informal support networks are equally important contributors to children's wellbeing and their sense of belonging.

The village shop emerged as a particularly significant community asset, not simply because it provides goods

and services, but because it represents independence, familiarity and positive relationships between generations. This illustrates the importance of investing not only in physical infrastructure but also in maintaining the social fabric that helps communities thrive.

Community assets are more than buildings. Children consistently described relationships, trust and belonging as some of the greatest strengths within and around Cockburnspath.

PLACES THAT MATTER



Shop



Beaches



Park



Fields



Woods



School

FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE

One of the most consistent themes running throughout the workshops was the value children placed on independence. Participants spoke positively about being able to walk to the shop, meet friends, play outdoors and explore the woods without constant adult supervision. These experiences were not described simply as leisure activities; they represented growing confidence, developing responsibility and feeling trusted within their community. This highlights the important relationship between safe, walkable places and children's wellbeing. In Cockburnspath, independence emerged not only as a practical benefit of village life but also as an important part of children's sense of identity, belonging and connection to place.

Community Benefit Priorities: Investing in Young People's Futures

Community Benefit Funding provides an opportunity to invest in projects that make a lasting difference to the community. Rather than asking children and young people to respond to a pre-determined list of projects, participants first explored what they valued most about their community before discussing where future investment could have the greatest impact.

Following group discussion, participants were invited to vote individually for the initiatives they believed should be prioritised. This approach encouraged participants to consider not only their own interests but also the wider needs of the community.

FIGURE 4.1: COMMUNITY BENEFIT PRIORITIES

RANK	PRIORITY	FREQUENCY	%
1	More clubs and organised activities	High	62%
2	Somewhere to meet friends	High	44%
3	Better facilities for older children <i>(NB: only inc. in 2nd session)</i>	High	76%
4	Nature & Outdoor Activities	High	Over 60%
5	Parks, Playgrounds and Places to Play	High	Over 55%
6	Arts, Music Drama and creative activities	High	Over 55%
7	Sports opportunities	Medium	Over 50%

FIGURE 4.2: WHAT WE WOULD DO IF WE HAD THE MONEY....

RANK	PRIORITY	%
1	Better facilities for older children	76% (of older group)
2	More clubs and organised activities	62%
3	Nature & Outdoor Activities	62%
4	Parks, Playground and Places to Play	60%
5	Art, Music, Drama and Creative Activities	57%
6	Sporting Opportunities*	52%
7	Somewhere to meet friends	52%

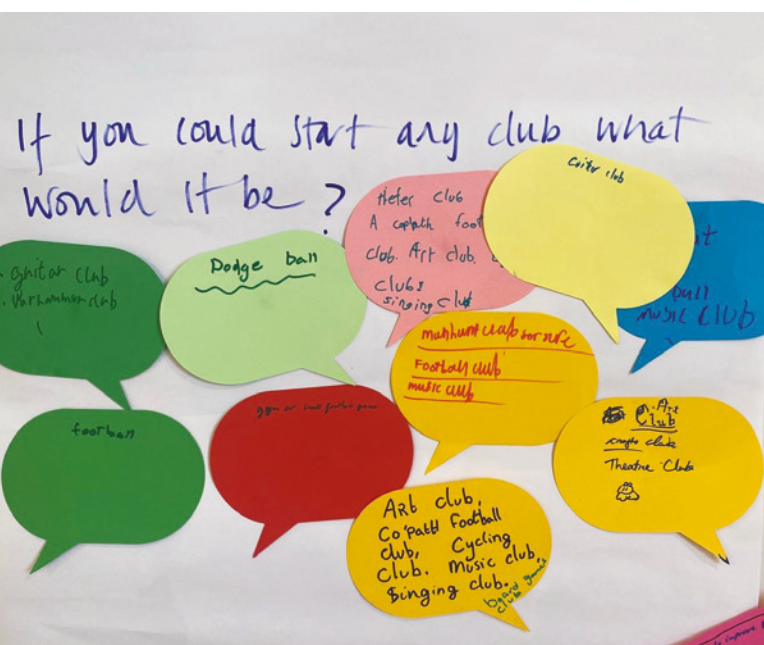
*(NB: Pump Track highlighted specifically as option by around 50% of the boys in both workshops)

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY IDEAS GENERATED BY PARTICIPANTS

THEME	SUGGESTIONS
OUTDOOR RECREATION	Pump track, bike skills area, climbing opportunities
NATURE	Wildlife projects, tree planting, wildflower areas, bird boxes
ARTS & CREATIVITY	Art club, music activities, drama
COMMUNITY	Youth café, events, volunteering
SPORT	Football, basketball, multi-use games area

WHAT THE RESULTS TELL US

Aside from the Pump Track (exclusively boys voting), rather than requesting expensive infrastructure or one-off attractions, children and young people consistently prioritised opportunities that would strengthen everyday community life. The highest-ranking projects focused on creating opportunities to meet friends, learn new skills, spend time outdoors and participate in activities close to home.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES: WHAT ARE THE THINGS YOU LOVE ABOUT LIVING IN THIS VILLAGE.....?

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

One of the strongest messages emerging from the workshops was that children and young people largely viewed Community Benefit Funding as an opportunity to improve the quality of everyday life rather than to fund isolated projects. Many of their suggestions reflected a desire for places where they could spend time together safely, develop friendships, enjoy nature and contribute positively to their community. These priorities align closely with wider Community Place Plan objectives relating to health and wellbeing, community cohesion, active lifestyles and environmental sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION

HOW WE VOTED

Road Safety - Safe Places to Move Around Our Village

For children and young people, moving around the village is part of everyday life. Walking to school, visiting friends, playing outdoors, going to the park or walking to the village shop all contribute to their independence and wellbeing. While participants spoke positively about the freedom they have within Cockburnspath, they also identified a number of locations where traffic made them feel vulnerable or unsafe.

Children and young people worked together using large-scale maps of the village to identify the places where they felt safe, the places they avoided and the locations where they had experienced near misses or frightening incidents. This enabled them to identify problems and build a shared understanding of the challenges affecting their community.

MORE THAN MAPPING

The participatory mapping exercise encouraged children and young people to compare experiences, discuss different viewpoints and collectively identify common areas of concern.

Rather than individual comments being recorded in isolation, participants built consensus about the locations where improvements would have the greatest impact.



MOST FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIED LOCATIONS

-  **The Square – Hoprig Road**
-  **The Square – Calendar Place**
-  **Calendar Place (School Corner)**
-  **Garage Corner**
-  **Hoprig Road Steps**

WHY DID THESE PLACES FEEL UNSAFE?



Speeding traffic



Heavy agricultural vehicles



Large lorries



Poor visibility (largely as a result of careless parking)



Blind corners



Difficult crossing points (parking again cited as an impediment to some crossing points)



Steep gradients

Rather than isolated incidents, participants described these as regular experiences that influenced how they moved around the village.

Every older participant (10 out of 10) described experiencing a frightening incident involving traffic somewhere within the village.

This level of consistency is particularly significant. Rather than representing isolated concerns, the findings suggest a shared experience among young people and reinforce the need to consider road safety as a priority within the Community Place Plan.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

"We live in a village on a steep hill so cycle safety for most kids would be good. They would be more aware of other users. How do we make cars, lorries and other farm traffic learn too? We need more speed and safety signs."

One of the most striking aspects of this discussion was our young residents did not focus solely on other traffic. Instead, they spoke about cycle safety and shared responsibility of everyone using the roads.

Their comments demonstrated an understanding that creating safer streets requires both education and changes in driver behaviour.

BUILDING CONSENSUS

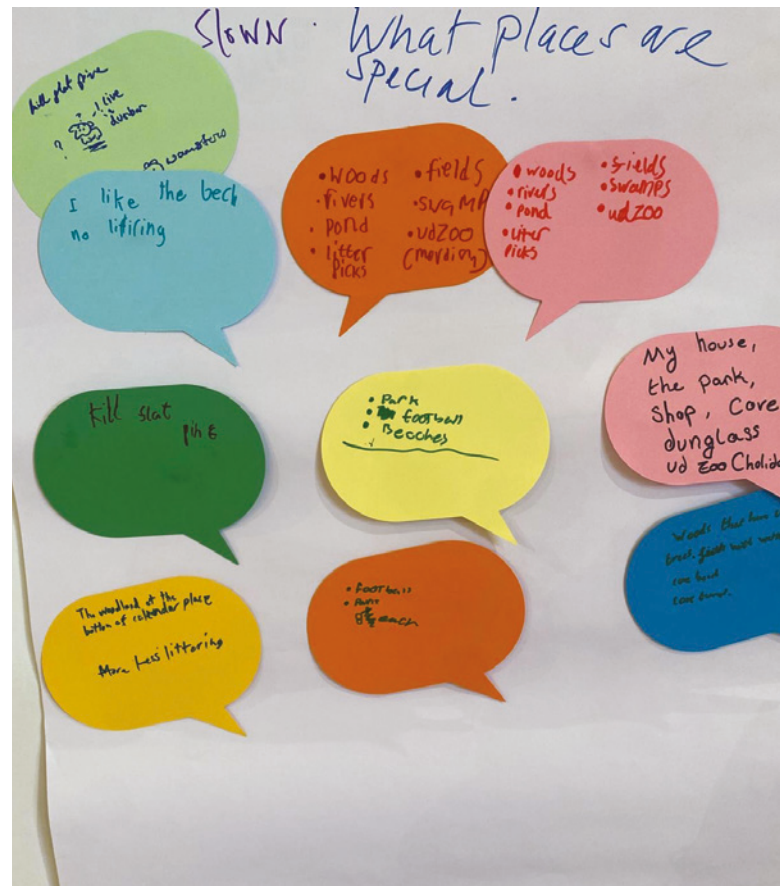
As participants placed red and green markers on the maps, they began sharing personal stories about travelling around the village. One participant's experience often prompted others to recall similar incidents, leading to discussion about shared concerns and experiences.

By the end of the exercise there was a strong consensus about the locations where improvements would have the greatest impact. The mapping exercise therefore became more than a way of collecting data. It created an opportunity for children and young people to reflect together, recognise common experiences and collectively shape recommendations for improving safety within their community.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES

The discussions identified several practical measures that participants believed would make the greatest difference.

- ✓ **Additional traffic calming measures**
- ✓ **Reduced vehicle speeds**
- ✓ **Vehicle Activated Signs**
- ✓ **"Children Playing" signage**
- ✓ **Improved driver awareness**
- ✓ **Safer walking and cycling routes**
- ✓ **Sorting out potholes!**



Rather than requesting major infrastructure projects, participants focused on practical improvements that would help them feel safer and more confident moving independently around the village.

Road safety and Traffic and Transport turned out to be about less about roads and more about children and young people's independence. That's why they cared so much about traffic. It was quite the revelation to watch them engage with the mapping exercise and talk so passionately about this particular community planning priority.

The adults appear to have looked at traffic and transport as an engineering and infrastructure issue whereas the young people viewed it entirely based on whether they could safely walk to the shops or park, ride their bikes and just enjoy going about the village.

It again fitted with the whole theme of belonging and trust that was prevalent in other planning themes.



Caring for Nature and the Environment

Children's environmental ideas in order of priority were

- ✓ **Litter** – organising litter picks and 100% of young people asking for more bins *“you have to walk for ages to get a bin which is annoying”*
- ✓ **Growing Food:** more resources for children at the allotments *“not enough spades for digging” “can we have other activities too when we are there? Sometimes some people have nothing to do” “can we have other outdoor activities like parachute games?”* (Primary School Children)
- ✓ **More Trees** including fruit trees and a nature-based trim track at the allotments (children in the primary school)
- ✓ **Wildlife:** the second biggest priority in the Community Benefit Funding Ideas was nature and environmental clubs and activities across both groups.
- ✓ **Pollinators:** *“more plants for birds, butterflies and bees”*
- ✓ **Bird Boxes** around the village particularly in the woods at the edge of the field

Recommendations for the Community Place Plan

RECOMMENDATION 1: CONTINUE TO INVOLVE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

Children and young people demonstrated that they can contribute thoughtfully and constructively to community planning when meaningful opportunities are provided.

RECOMMENDATION 2: PRIORITISE SAFE AND INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT AROUND THE VILLAGE

The participatory mapping exercise identified consistent concerns regarding road safety that directly affect children's independence and participation in community life.

THE COMMUNITY PLACE PLAN SHOULD COMMIT TO:

- ✓ involving children and young people in future community planning and Community Benefit Fund decision-making;
- ✓ establishing regular opportunities for young residents to shape local priorities;
- ✓ recognising young people as active partners in community development rather than consultees.

THE COMMUNITY PLACE PLAN SHOULD PRIORITISE:

- ✓ traffic calming measures;
- ✓ improved crossing points;
- ✓ better parking management around key routes;
- ✓ Vehicle Activated Signs where appropriate;
- ✓ improved cycling opportunities;
- ✓ road safety education involving both young people and drivers.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
INVEST IN OPPORTUNITIES RATHER
THAN BUILDINGS ALONE

The workshops demonstrated that children valued opportunities to spend time together, learn new skills and enjoy their community more highly than expensive infrastructure.

**FUTURE COMMUNITY BENEFIT
FUNDING SHOULD PRIORITISE:**

- ✓ youth clubs;
- ✓ outdoor learning;
- ✓ creative activities;
- ✓ sports opportunities;
- ✓ informal meeting spaces.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
PROTECT AND ENHANCE NATURE

Children consistently identified nature as one of Cockburnspath's greatest assets and expressed a strong desire to care for the local environment.

**THE COMMUNITY PLACE PLAN
SHOULD SUPPORT:**

- ✓ litter reduction initiatives;
- ✓ additional litter bins;
- ✓ wildlife habitats;
- ✓ tree planting;
- ✓ pollinator-friendly planting;
- ✓ growing spaces;
- ✓ opportunities for environmental volunteering.

RECOMMENDATION 5: RECOGNISE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AS COMMUNITY ASSETS

Perhaps the strongest finding from the workshops was the importance children placed on relationships, trust and belonging.

FUTURE PLANNING SHOULD RECOGNISE THAT COMMUNITY ASSETS INCLUDE:

- ✓ welcoming public spaces;
- ✓ trusted local businesses;
- ✓ opportunities for intergenerational interaction;
- ✓ activities that strengthen community relationships.

RECOMMENDATION 6: SUPPORT CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENCE

The workshops highlighted that independence is an important contributor to wellbeing.

FUTURE PLANNING SHOULD SEEK TO CREATE A VILLAGE WHERE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAN SAFELY:

- ✓ walk;
- ✓ cycle;
- ✓ meet friends;
- ✓ participate in community activities;
- ✓ access local facilities independently.



Final Reflection

This report set out to understand what matters most to children and young people living in Cockburnspath. In doing so, it became something more.

The workshops demonstrated that, when given time, trust, meaningful opportunities to participate as well as pizza and refreshments children and young people do far more than answer questions. They analyse, debate, challenge assumptions, build consensus and produce thoughtful recommendations grounded in their everyday experiences.

Throughout the engagement, participants spoke with pride about their village. They celebrated its people, its natural environment and the freedom it offers while also identifying practical ways in which it could become an even better place to grow up.

Perhaps the strongest message was not about parks, roads or activities. It was about belonging.

Children described a community where adults know them, neighbours look out for one another and independence is valued and encouraged. They reminded us that successful places are built not only through investment in infrastructure, but through relationships, trust and opportunities to participate in community life. This report has therefore contributed more than evidence for the Community Place Plan. It has demonstrated the value of meaningful participation and shown what can be achieved when children and young people are recognised as active citizens with important contributions to make.

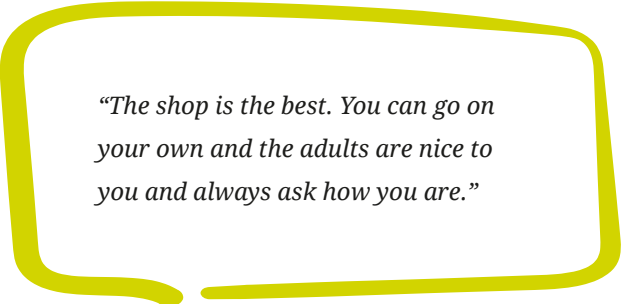
The challenge now is not simply to acknowledge their voices, but to ensure that the decisions taken through the Community Place Plan reflect the insight, creativity and aspirations they have shared.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go to **Rachel Foy**, Headteacher of Cockburnspath Primary School, together with the teaching staff, for recognising the value of this work and creating space within an already busy end-of-term curriculum for children to participate. Their encouragement, enthusiasm and practical support throughout the workshops helped create an environment in which children felt confident to share their ideas, challenge one another's thinking and contribute meaningfully to the Community Place Plan.

We would also like to thank the staff and volunteers at the **Cockburnspath Village Shop**. While their role may be to serve customers, the children and young people reminded us that they provide something much more valuable. Throughout the workshops, participants repeatedly described the shop as a place where they feel welcome, known and trusted—a place where adults ask how they are, where independence is encouraged and where informal conversations help strengthen community connections.

As one young person simply put it:



"The shop is the best. You can go on your own and the adults are nice to you and always ask how you are."

Their words are a reminder that community is built through everyday acts of kindness as much as through formal services or programmes.

An African proverb tells us that "It takes a village to raise a child." Throughout this engagement we saw many examples of that philosophy quietly lived out in Cockburnspath. The relationships between children, families, neighbours, volunteers, local businesses and community organisations create a sense of belonging that is one of the village's greatest strengths.

Finally, and most importantly, our thanks go to the children and young people of Cockburnspath. This report is built on their curiosity, liveliness, honesty, creativity and willingness to share their experiences. They did far more than participate in a consultation—they helped shape the evidence that will inform the future of their community.

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