

Glendale Gateway Trust Case Study

A rural community

Glendale, a valley in North Northumberland, runs from the Cheviot Hills onto the Millfield Plain and covers 250 square miles. The rural community has a population of around 6,000 with a third living in the market town of Wooler, 14 miles from the nearest traffic light and with only one direct bus per week to Newcastle.

Once a thriving agricultural area, population numbers have decreased significantly. Around 30% of the community is now at pensionable age, a mixture of an aging population and people moving into the area in their later years. For younger members of the community, it has become increasingly difficult to get on the property ladder, and many must move across Northumbria to find affordable housing. Due to several factors, such as the decline in the agricultural economy, many buildings have fallen into dereliction.

The Glendale Gateway Trust

The Glendale Gateway Trust (GGT) was formed in 1996 as a partnership organisation in the first instance, with representatives from the local councils, local retailers and local residents.

One of the key drivers was to address the demographic imbalances and create the right conditions to encourage younger members of the community to stay in the area. The goal was to secure and preserve local assets for the benefit of the community. The central value for the project was to enable people to do things for themselves, rather than the GGT delivering all aspects. They wanted to create the right conditions for local people to thrive.



Transforming Glendale

A village appraisal informed the action plan for the partnership, with the first priority to secure a community resource centre.

In 2000, the Local Authority (LA) transferred an asset to the group for them to create the Cheviot Centre, a one-stop-shop facility in the centre of Wooler. The ethos of linking services and facilities and clustering a range of support options suited the rural community.

Buoyed by the success of the community hub and having developed good relationships with funders, the Trust used their skills and experience to address other concerns in the community.

In 2005, with support from the regional development agency and Locality, the group set out an ambitious programme to buy an unwanted property on the high street, to create 14 affordable houses and commercial spaces alongside one another.

“The project meant more people were living in the town centre, more people were using the shops and more people wanted to develop their own businesses there.”

Tom (founding member of the Glendale Gateway Trust)

The project was a springboard for further initiatives. In 2006, the Trust purchased the Wooler Youth Hostel from the YHA (Youth Hostel Association) with funding from Northern Rock Foundation and ONE (Market Town Renewal).

Becoming a Registered Provider unlocked additional resources. The GGT secured significant funding from a local landowner which enabled them to leverage further investment. A zero-interest community bond scheme that raised £120k, gave the Trust the confidence to take on an interest free loan and demonstrated strong community buy-in to the lender, Unity Trust.



In 2012, having relocated the community library to the Cheviot Centre, the former library building was converted into two further affordable homes, with support from the Homes and Community Agency, private donations,

and funds from the GGT reserves. By 2015 they had created a further 9 housing units from empty buildings in Wooler and expanded office space at the Cheviot Centre, with capital and revenue funding from the Rural Growth Network and Villages SOS (National Lottery).

Creating conditions for success

The Trust now manages property worth over £2.5m. These have transformed the built environment and wider community, regenerating key parts of the community including the town centre.



“You can see the impact of our work clearly. Wooler is visibly different in comparison to other Northumberland high streets.”

Tom (founding member of the Glendale Gateway Trust)

The successes of the GGT have provided a range of opportunities to the close-knit community. There are currently 20 affordable houses rented to local people; the local lettings policy is managed by the GGT with support from the LA; all residential and commercial tenancies are managed by local people within the community; and all maintenance is managed by local contractors.

The Trust factored in 5% voids but occupancy has never fallen below 97%. When a tenant had problems meeting her rent, she did some decorating to pay off her arrears. It's a flexible, resilient model in which all profits get reinvested back into the community.



Looking ahead

The focus so far has been on revitalising old buildings and in testament to their success, there aren't many 'problem' buildings remaining locally. There's a new-build development on the outskirts of Wooler and the Trust are open to working with and supporting the project to work for the community. Whatever the opportunity, the Trust have developed good reserves which puts them in a strong and competitive position when they arise.

“We didn't start with it all planned out, it just evolved on an opportunistic basis. It's an excellent approach for communities to be managing and delivering their own housing. The time is good, there's funding there. It's a great model for sustaining communities.”

Tom (founding member of the Glendale Gateway Trust)



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