

# Cornhill Community Action Limited

## Strategy Sessions Report

28th August, 4th & 9th September 2020

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## Introduction

The Cornhill Community Action Limited (CCAL) Strategy Workshop sessions was held by Zoom meetings on 28 August, 04 and 09 September 2020 and was attended by 6 members:

William Carrington  
Elizabeth Devon  
Martin Devon  
David Richmond  
Steve Wright  
Oliver Wright

The sessions were facilitated and reported by Iain Hedley.

The findings within are based purely on member contributions, and the purpose of the report is to document and evidence the future direction of the group.

## Background

The Company CCAL is a company without shareholders, limited by guarantee and described as a micro-entity. It was established for the principal purpose of developing the school building.

It is a non-profit making company run by a group of volunteers who are keen to see the sad, disused Cornhill First School building brought back to life for the benefit of the whole community and surrounding area. The building has been empty for eight years since the school closed. This is a cause of concern and distress to many residents.

Cornhill Parish Council were informed in early 2019 by NCC of the potential for a Community Asset Transfer of either the whole site or a portion of the school grounds that could form a new village green. A well-attended community consultation event was held and overwhelmingly endorsed the parish council's pursuit of the CAT. The meeting gave a strong indication that the community would like to see health and wellbeing as the focus for future use.

The proposal is that Cornhill Parish Council would acquire the asset and the CCAL would undertake the restoration, management and future maintenance of the facility.

## Strategic Priorities

The first part of the programme focused on what everyone saw as the strategic priorities of the group for the next three years.

Strategic Objectives are not a complex principle. They are most simply defined as:

A goal aiming at achieving long-term or overall interests and the means of achieving them.

In thinking about the strategic objectives for the organisation, the board might like to consider the following elements:

- What Social Impact do you want to achieve?
- What do you need to do to remain financially sustainable?
- Who are your clients and what do they need?
- What is your competition?
- What opportunities do you want to create for People?
- What resources do you have available to you now?
- How can you use existing resources efficiently?
- Do you want to be Innovators?
- What is your attitude to risk?

The participants took part in a group discussion to consider their Strategic priorities. Their findings were:

### Short Term

- Acquire the asset
- Funding
- Tenants
- Restoration

### Long Term

- A social hub - community
- Eco-friendly, e.g. electric car charging
- Internet provision
- Disabled parking

Social impact - social hub. Village moving up a gear in what it wants to achieve. The school site is a big chunk of the village. The decision to close a thriving school was made without consultation and the village is keen to ensure that such mistakes are not repeated. They then faced the prospect of housing development that the community didn't want. This is an opportunity for the community to take back control.

Financial - In theory, it will be sustainable if tenants can be attracted.

Clients - requirement to focus on health and wellbeing. A number of therapeutic practitioners have expressed interest in units.

Competition - There is none. It could even become a model.

Opportunities for people - To become a hub. A green community meeting space with entrepreneurial opportunities and social opportunities. Potentially, employment opportunities.

Current resources - lots of human resources in terms of experience and connections. Cornhill Community Action group has a small amount of funds and the parish council have ring fenced £2,000. Keen to ensure that Cornhill gets its fair share of funding in the future. Previous councillors have promised and given funding to other villages from their Member's Local Improvement Schemes allowance.

Attitude to risk - Cautious. Only way to mitigate risk is to plan properly.

## **Vision**

What will CCAL be doing in three years time, what will be the key drivers and what will your values be?

In the visioning session there was a group discussion about key drivers and values that represented their vision most accurately. They are listed below. It is a good idea to draft or review your mission statement in the light of these key drivers to ensure that you are clearly presenting to the world what you are about. Values form the underlying ethos of your organisation and should be familiar to all members of the board, staff and volunteers.

### **Group discussion**

In three years to have brought about the restoration of the building and to be fully occupied. Village Green being used.

If that is achieved then we will have delivered for the village. The village has become a dormitory settlement. This could start the reversal and the village could be recognised in its own right; on the map with its own identity.



## Governance Review

Existing Governance - The company is new and this strategy exercise will assist it to develop a way to run the board.

### Existing board Make-up

4 Directors

William

Martin

Steve

Ollie

2 Members

Elizabeth

David

## General Guidance

1. Comply with your organisation's governing document and the law
  - It's about being:
    - familiar with your governing document
    - up to date with filing accounts, returns and any changes to your organisation's registration details
    - aware of other laws that apply to your organisation
  - It's not about being:
    - an expert - but you do need to take reasonable steps to find out
2. Act in your organisation's best interests
  - It's about:
    - making balanced, informed decisions
    - recognising & dealing with conflicts of interest
    - being prepared to question and challenge
    - accepting majority decisions

- It's not about:
  - preserving the organisation for its own sake
  - serving personal interests
- 3. Ensure your organisation is accountable
  - It's about:
    - managing risks, protecting assets (reputation) and people
    - getting the resources your organisation needs
    - having and following appropriate controls and procedures
    - dealing with land and buildings
    - responsibility for, and to, staff and volunteers
- 4. Manage your organisation's resources responsibly
  - It's about:
    - using your skills and experience
    - deciding when you need advice
    - preparing for meetings
    - getting the information you need (financial, management)
    - being prepared in case something does go wrong
- 5. Act with reasonable care and skill
  - It's about:
    - meeting legal accounting and reporting requirements
    - being able to show that your organisation complies with the law and is effective
    - being accountable to members and others with an interest in the organisation
    - ensuring that staff and volunteers are accountable to the board
    - welcoming accountability as an opportunity not a burden

## **Governing Document**

When you sign up to be a board member of an organisation you must be mindful of all of the above. You should also ask to see a copy of the organisation's Governing document and should understand what this means to you. The governing document could be one of several things:



- An unincorporated organisation will have a constitution
- An incorporated organisation will have a memorandum and charitable articles which are registered with Companies House
- A Community Interest Company will have a memorandum, articles of association and a Community Interest Statement and will be registered with Companies House and the CIC Regulator
- We can provide separate governance guidance for charities for a list of Charity models and their governing documents

The governing document will outline the objects or aims of the organisation. It will also explain who can be members and how they can become members. It will explain who can be a board member and how they become a board member and it will explain how decisions are made. Crucially it also explains what the organisation can and cannot do with its money and assets and what it must do if it wishes to close.

If you are ever in any doubt about the meaning of your governing document then you must consult with an advisor or the relevant regulatory body.

#### Attendance of meetings

Board members must be invited to all board meetings. The organisation may decide on a minimum number of board meetings that any board member must attend every year, it may also include a maximum term between attendance of meetings. The board may agree that if these rules are not adhered to, a board member may be asked to step down from the board in line with any rules in the governing document about how this must be done.

#### Skills Mix

The board may adopt a governance model which encourages board members to take on specific roles on the board. If so it must define these roles and how they interface with other board members, staff and / or volunteers. Levels of devolved responsibility must be clear and if in any doubt all decisions must be taken to the full board.

#### Induction

New board members should be given a formal induction where they are presented with a copy of the governing document and given access to all live policies and procedures. They should be helped to understand clearly the objects or aims of the organisation and the named roles and responsibilities of

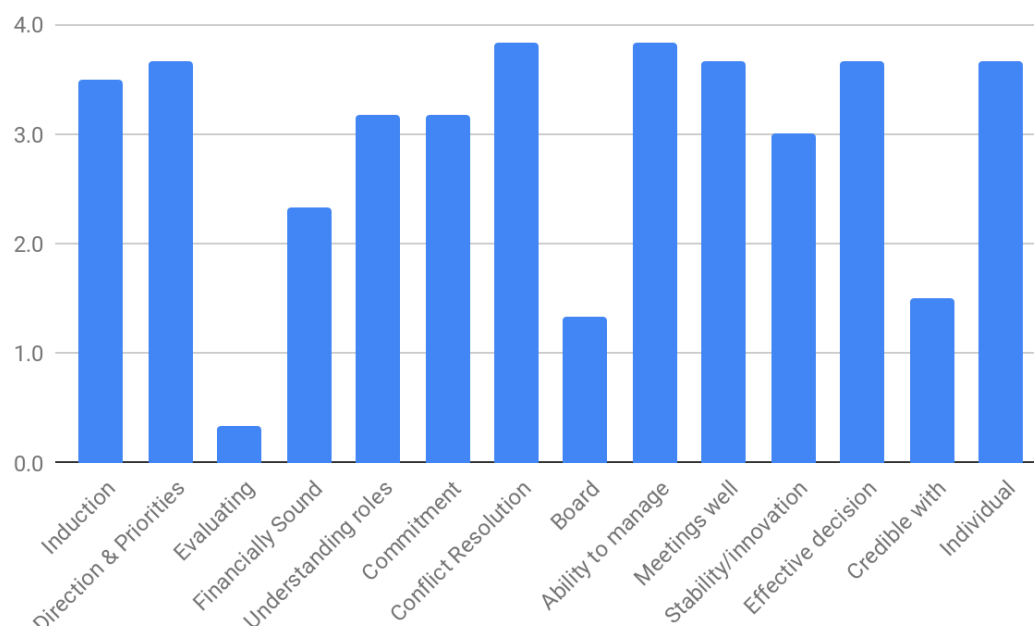
all other board members. They should also be given a copy of the organisation's latest accounts.

## Assessing your Governance

The group were then asked to complete a confidential governance review, assessing where the board feels that their governance skills are strongest and where they might need to develop. The categories assessed by the board were as follows:

1. Your organisation's induction of new board members adequately prepares them to fulfil their governance responsibilities.
2. Your board is actively involved in planning the direction and priorities for the organisation.
3. Your board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the manager.
4. Your organisation is financially sustainable.
5. Board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board, manager & staff.
6. Board members demonstrate commitment to the organisation's mission and values.
7. The board's capacity to govern effectively is not impaired by conflicts between members.
8. There is a productive relationship between board and the manager / staff.
9. I am confident that the board would effectively manage any organisational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated.
10. Board meetings are well managed.
11. The organisation has a good balance between stability and innovation.
12. Board decision making process is effective and decisions are implemented and followed through.
13. Your board has a high credibility with stakeholders (members, staff, volunteers, funders, community etc.)
14. Each member of your board has their own specific responsibilities to the organisation.

In graph form the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the board can be seen below:



Those attributes scoring over 3.5 on the graph could be assessed as real strengths of the board. Those below 2.5 should trigger some development activity. The results show a range of scores 3.0 or above and these attributes are not a cause for concern. The weak attributes (financial, evaluation, credibility and the Board) are only to be expected from a group in the early stages of development.

## Good Governance

At the start of the day, each member of the group was asked to complete a pen portrait, the results of which are included as an appendix to this report. Pen portraits can be usefully included in funding applications, tenders and on your website.

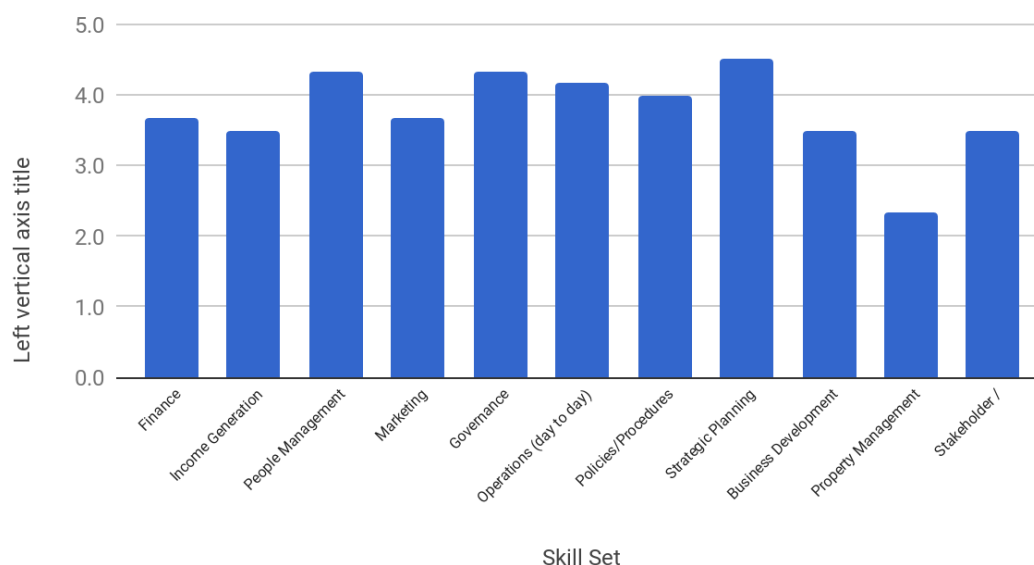
## Using your Skills

The group were then given a Personal Skills Audit which they were asked to complete to judge the level of skills base within the group.

Each group member was asked a series of questions in which they were to indicate their skills level on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), an average was then taken across the board.

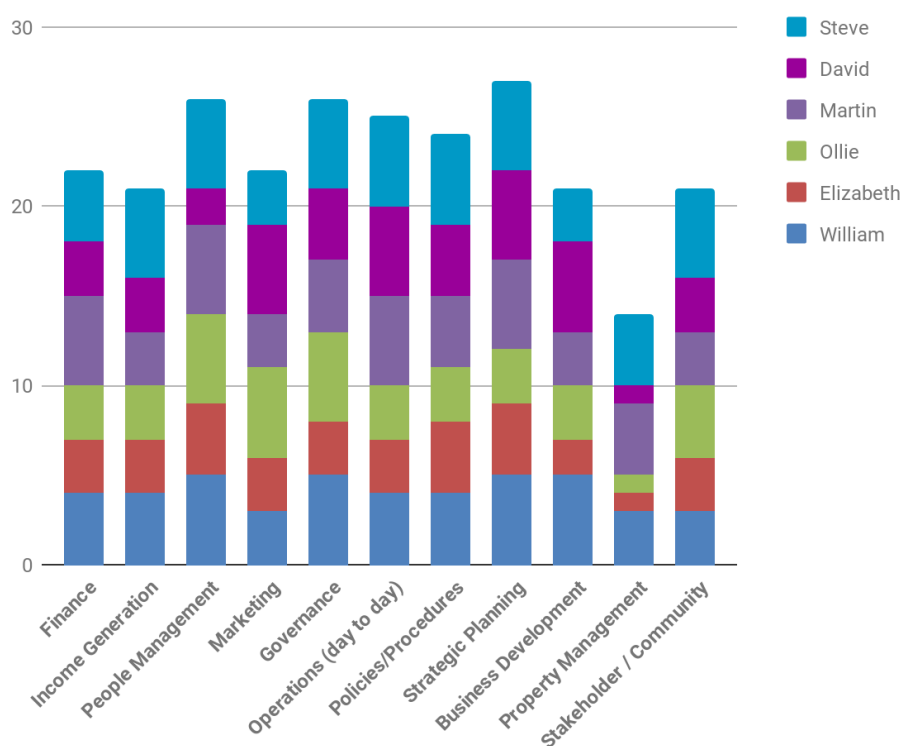
Core skills on the board can be seen below:

### Average Skill Levels across the Board



It's useful to think about strengthening those skills which fall below about 2.5 on the graph. Those above 3.5 could be deemed significant assets of the board. The individual skill levels of the board members are shown below:

### Personal Skills Audit Results



Bear in mind that although the average skill level of the board in a particular area might be low; there might be key individuals who are strong in an area which might be sufficient for healthy board dynamics. This is evident from Property Management where three participants were weak in this area but three were strong, with extensive skills and experience.

Iain then discussed the core board skills in more detail and advised that it would be beneficial to the organisation if Trustees could support by taking responsibility in key areas. Remaining mindful that these roles should be strategic rather than operational and that decision making is the responsibility of the full board.

Role on the board	Key Areas of Responsibility
Finance	Budget setting Cash flow monitoring Reconciliation Liaison with accountant / book-keeper
Income Generation	Identification of funding streams Acquisition of funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants</li> <li>• Procurement</li> <li>• Trading / Sales</li> </ul> Significant links with marketing
People Management	Line management for key staff Recruitment Disciplinary Appraisal / review / staff / volunteer training Reviewing Job descriptions Undertaking job evaluation Volunteer Recruitment / Management
PR/ Marketing	Development of marketing strategy Monitoring of marketing strategy Social Media strategy
Governance	Ensuring that the board adopts a strong governance model and adheres to an agreed governance calendar. Interface with appropriate legal bodies
Operations	Day to day decision making or support of frontline staff / volunteers
Policies and Procedures	Ensure key policies in place Regular Review programme for update and monitoring of procedures by the board

	NB Policy guidance paper available from SEN
Strategic and Business Planning	Driver for planning process, providing framework for Annual Strategic Review Strategic Plan Business Plans
Property	If you own or manage land or property, then it's useful to have someone on the board who can take a lead on this.
Stakeholder Engagement	Ensure organisation is fulfilling needs of stakeholders and stays 'real and effective'

The group was asked by Iain to recommend those that best suited the above roles. They were advised to identify a lead member on the board in each of the areas who could drive activity forward outside of the board meetings, and who could report progress into board meetings.

Second or support for each area might be provided by another board member, a subcommittee from the board or by a combination of board, staff, members or volunteers. Using a second also works well for succession planning.

### Roles of the board

	Lead	Second
1. Finance	William	Shared
2. Income Generation	Steve	Shared
3. People Management	Elizabeth	Shared
4. Marketing / PR	Ollie	Shared
5. Legal/Technical	Elizabeth	Steve
6. Operational	Shared	Shared
7. Policies/Procedures	William	Elizabeth
8. Strategic and Business Planning	David	Shared
9. Property	Martin	Shared
10. Stakeholder Engagement	William	Shared

## SWOT Analysis

Iain then asked the group to explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project, bearing in mind that strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, and that opportunities and threats are external factors.

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
Individual's skills - no overlap Diversity on the board Good communicators Youth on the board Common agenda Committed to the community	Sooner rather than later
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
No proven track record Need for a hook Not at the front of the queue Funders will challenge viability No working capital Size of the community	CAT doesn't happen Site becomes a forgotten property again Relies on external funding Council sells to a developer New councillor/council is not supportive

At its most effective, a SWOT should be approached honestly and should be viewed as an internal document.

The two most important sections of a SWOT are the weaknesses and the opportunities. However each section gives valuable information to your organisation on which you should act:

- Strengths could be used as the basis of your marketing plan.
- Weaknesses should be viewed as action points that need to be resolved.
- You should consider how best to seize the opportunities available to you.
- Threats should be guarded against and viewed as risks which you should include in your risk management strategy.

## Wordle

As a part of your pen portrait, you all gave us three words that you felt best describe your organisation. This is a pictorial representation of those words. The larger the font, the more times they appeared on your lists of words. What do they tell you about CCAL?



## Key Actions from the Day

There really is only one key action from the session:

- Work with the parish council to submit the CAT application at the earliest opportunity



## Our Recommendations

As a result our discussions in your strategy day, I would like to recommend that in addition to the items you may wish to progress yourselves, you consider the following action points:

Action Point	Next Steps
Key Actions	Start with these!
Vision	Retain focus about working towards this
Key Words	Draft a mission statement for your organisation / review your mission statement in the light of these
Sustainability	Ensure that you have clear budgets and are targeting your income generation around remaining sustainable
Roles and responsibilities of the board	Confirm roles and responsibilities for board members at your next board meeting
	Write board member job descriptions
	Recruit new members to fill skills gaps on the board
Governance	Review the perceived weaker areas of board activity and strengthen procedures
	Ensure that you have a process of continuous policy review in place
	Adopt a clear set of policies (see SEN guidance document)
	Keep reviewing against the governance calendar. Chair's job to ensure this happens.
	Use the list of key skills as your basic board agenda. Keep meetings short and efficient.
	Review / draft your strategic plan in the light of today's discussion.
	Review / draft business plans to support the key strands of your strategic plan. Set clear budgets for income generation targets to support your plans

SWOT	Use your strengths as a key part of drafting your marketing strategy
	Find ways to reduce your weaknesses
	Find ways to seize the opportunities that fit your vision
	Write a risk management strategy to guard against your identified threats

## Contact Us

The Northumberland County Council Community Regeneration Team is here to support the development of your Community Enterprise in the future. We are here to support you with:

- Strategy Days in future years
- Strategic Planning
- Business Planning
- Governance Review
- Cash Flow development
- Legal Structures
- Funding Advice
- Signposting to other key professionals
- Advice

Please contact us when you need us.

Iain Hedley	<a href="mailto:iain.hedley@northumberland.gov.uk">iain.hedley@northumberland.gov.uk</a>	07747473687
Peter Mawer	<a href="mailto:peter.mawer@northumberland.gov.uk">peter.mawer@northumberland.gov.uk</a>	07976794068
Tony Kirsop	<a href="mailto:tony.kirsop@northumberland.gov.uk">tony.kirsop@northumberland.gov.uk</a>	07917266864

## Appendices – Pen Portraits

Name	<b>Steve Wright</b>
Role within the Organisation	To look at different funding opportunities and lead with applications
Length of Involvement	1 month as a Director
Current Occupation	Manager of a local charity for young people
Previous Relevant Occupations	Professional Yacht Skipper Operations Manager, Greece for a sail training /charter company
Other Social or Community organisation involvement	I spent 5 years as Chairman of Coldstream Football Club and recently re-joined the committee after a wee break. I am the current Chairman of Cornhill Village Hall
What I bring	Expertise in funding applications/the funding landscape  Knowledge of the challenges of living in a rural environment and how it impacts on families/young people  Expertise and experience with managing a committee and being an effective committee member/Director
What I would like to gain	I want the best for our community and I want a positive outcome for the Old School Project

Name	<b>David Hillier Richmond</b>
Role within the Organisation	Member – Safety Officer
Length of Involvement	Since inception , first quarter 2020, as Member
Current Occupation	Retired
Previous Relevant Occupations	Banking Operations Manager
Other Social or Community	Parochial Church Council

organisation involvement	
What I bring	Business and managerial skills.
What I would like to gain	Make a significant contribution to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the community.

Name	<b>William George Carrington</b>
Role within the Organisation	
Length of Involvement	3 months.
Current Occupation	Assorted: Chairman, company director, various consultancies
Previous Relevant Occupations	Past chairman and committee member of Cornhill Parish Council. Founded the Trevor Jones Trust (now called Regain Sports Charity <a href="https://regainsportscharity.com/">https://regainsportscharity.com/</a> ) in 1989 to assist spinally injured amateur sportsmen and women
Other Social or Community organisation involvement	I am and have been President of B.A.R.K. (Berwick Animal Rescue Kennels) for the last 5 years. Immediate past chairman of the Hirsell Golf Club
What I bring	Leadership, impartiality, decisiveness, experience.
What I would like to gain	To help the local community achieve its aim of protecting the fabric of the community by giving it the control of its assets and putting in place effective governance.

Name	<b>Elizabeth Devon</b>
Role within the Organisation	Chair Secretary
Length of Involvement	Member since March 2020
Current Occupation	Earth Science Educator (semi-retired lecturer)
Previous Relevant Occupations	Teacher, Lecturer, CPD facilitator

Other Social or Community organisation involvement	Cornhill Community Action group Cornhill Social History project St. Helen's Churchyard group U3A Duns and Wooler - Geology group leader Member of Earthlearningidea Team (global resource for Earth Science teachers) Member of Oxford Sparks Teachers' Panel
What I bring	Management, organisational, secretarial, skills  Enthusiasm
What I would like to gain	Satisfaction of seeing a thriving centre (both the building and the Village Green) for the benefit of the whole community.

Name	<b>Oliver Wright</b>
Role within the Organisation	Director
Length of Involvement	Director, since August 2020.
Current Occupation	Student and freelance journalist
Previous Relevant Occupations	N/a
Other Social or Community organisation involvement	Social Convenor – Glasgow Caledonian University Men's Hockey Club
What I bring	PR and communications knowledge, contacts within local press and social media expertise.
What I would like to gain	The space needs to work for everyone, and I hope that my age will provide a different perspective. I'd find it incredibly rewarding to be involved and would love to see the neglected school I attended turn into something that we can be proud of again.

Name	<b>Martin Devon</b>
Role within the Organisation	Director

Length of Involvement	Director, (specifically for the purpose of developing the school building) since formation in March 2020.
Current Occupation	Consultant structural engineer (retired)
Previous Relevant Occupations	Principal of own practice as consultant structural engineer since 1968.
Other Social or Community organisation involvement	Member of Cornhill Parochial Church Council Server manager for earthlearningidea.com and three Cornhill websites
What I bring	Expertise in structural work, project management and some legal knowledge.
What I would like to gain	The village needs an input of new vitality and purpose. Towards this It must develop the major resource of the school and field. It would be good to achieve that.