

## Resilient adaptation of churches: the Keld Resource centre, Yorkshire Dales National Park

### Context for Change

Keld is a small village situated in Swaledale in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Located at the junction of two major long-distance footpaths<sup>1</sup>, and with the highest concentration of waterfalls in England, it is a popular destination for walkers.

At the height of the C19th lead-mining boom, the then Congregational Minister erected a series of buildings including the Chapel School, the Congregational chapel Manse, the Literary Institute (all now grade II listed), and a Methodist Chapel. However, even at this time, the chapels were never used to their full capacity and subsequently congregations declined. By 1972 when the Congregational Church became the United Reformed Church (URC), it was clear that although the URC chapel was still the focal point of the village, the considerable church infrastructure that had built up over time could not be supported by a village of little more than 30 households and a few surrounding hill farmers.

### Key decisions

In the 1970s the URC set up the Keld Project and the buildings were used as 'bunk barns' to give children from urban Sunday Schools a chance to experience the countryside. However, this eventually started to become unsustainable. In 2008, the URC Northern Synod reviewed the situation and looked at two options. The first was to sell the buildings and invest the money in other projects. The second was to find a new use for these buildings which would provide them with a sustainable future, as well as provide a community benefit and bring economic activity into the area. Early on it was recognised that, while it was relatively straight forward to increase facilities for visitors to the area, the project also wanted to help local inhabitants.



Keld refurbished Manse and chapel  
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<sup>1</sup>The *Coast to Coast Path* and *Pennine Way*.

## Implementation

Keld Resource Centre is an independent organisation, a company limited by guarantee, and a charity which has close ties to the URC Northern Synod. It aims to restore the group of historic buildings and give them a range of community uses which will help to educate visitors in the rural heritage of Swaledale and benefit local residents by increasing economic activity.

The Centre's activities have been managed as separate projects. For each of these, there have been three objectives. The first is to obtain the capital necessary for refurbishments, the second is to set up the most effective method of running it – once refurbished – on a commercially viable basis, and the third is the requirement to secure funding to enable other forms of community outreach. The aim is to give these buildings a new life of 25 to 30 years. Funding has come from EU *Leader Funds*, the Big Lottery, some Trusts and a substantial amount from donations.

Already complete projects are:

- The **Manse** which was refurbished in 2009 and is now commercially let as holiday accommodation. It is also available as a venue for respite breaks for Ministers from different denominations.
- The **Well-being Garden** – a meditative garden which was previously a patch of unkempt land in the chapel churchyard.
- **The Countryside and Heritage Centre** which was opened in 2011 in what was a stable with adjoining carriage room, providing information about the countryside and the built and social history of Keld.



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**Future plans and outlook**

To date, the Manse has been on average 70% booked with a high level of repeat visits. The rental income supports other community development activity in Keld. The development has also brought new economic activity into the village as the Centre encourages visitors to stay longer. The Centre does not offer refreshments itself, but directs people to other local providers such as the coffee shop, Keld Hotel and B&Bs.

Future plans, involve the refurbishment of the School and the upper room of the Institute to provide residential and day-time accommodation for small-scale conferences, retreats, and workshops. Further down the line, the former Methodist chapel may be adapted to provide residential accommodation.

A project called *Group Work at Keld* is being developed to attract church and other groups to Keld to do their own activities or take part in organised activities. For this purpose, a bothy is being built on the side of the school building to provide a residential unit for a rural outreach worker. Under this model, the project is not trying to provide all of the accommodation as one of its objectives is to provide business for the local community.

**Weblinks:**

The Keld resource centre website

<http://www.tkrc.org.uk/>

The Manse website

<http://www.askrigg.com/cottages/19/the-manse>

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