

## **Northumberland Charity Bringing Vision Impaired People Together With Newcastle Building Society Grant Support**

Dozens of people across Northumberland with visual impairments are enjoying more social time together thanks to the work of a county charity and new funding from Newcastle Building Society.

Vision Northumberland set up its Chatter Box community café 18 months ago as a way of giving vision impaired people from across the county a safe and welcoming place to go, after the restrictions of the pandemic had left many of them stuck inside for months at a time.

The café is located at the charity's Reiver House sensory hub on Staithes Lane in Morpeth and opens on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

It has around 30 customers visiting every week, with some being brought there by the charity's team of volunteer drivers from as far afield as Berwick and Hexham, as well as from closer local communities.

The charity is now using a £1,500 grant from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation to provide its customers with free hot meals, tea and coffee to ensure that the impact of the cost of living crisis doesn't prevent anyone who'd like to visit the café from visiting.

The grant is being provided through the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, which offers grants to charities and community groups located in or around the communities served by the Society's branch network.

Vision Northumberland, which was formerly the Northumberland County Blind Association, provides advice and support services to vision impaired people to enable them to gain the knowledge, confidence and skills necessary to increase independence and fulfil life potential.

The purpose-built Reiver House hub houses a wide range of low vision aids and equipment that are available to visitors, while the charity also has a number of other outreach centres around the county.

The charity's work is supported by a team of over 160 volunteers across the county.

There are estimated to be over 18,000 vision impaired people living throughout Northumberland.

Julie Boyack, chief officer at Vision Northumberland, says: "We know that many vision impaired people experience feelings of social isolation and exclusion at the best of times, which can impact on their general health and well-being.

"The pandemic really magnified the problem, leaving many of our service users unable to get out of the house for several months, and as the covid situation has eased, there's been an understandable nervousness for some of them about stepping back out into a much-changed world.

"We set up the Chatter Box café as a way of encouraging vision impaired people to get out into the community again, but we've been increasingly conscious of the impact of the cost of living crisis on our customers, especially as many of them are living on a very specific fixed income and don't have much spare money.

"Being able to take away the worry about paying for food and drink at the café has made an amazing difference to the work we're able to do - and what's really special is being able to hear the laughter and chatter coming from the café every time we're open.

"Newcastle Building Society's support is having a big positive impact of people living right across the county and we're really grateful for their help."

Suzanne Wood, head of compliance and conduct risk at Newcastle Building Society, who recently visited the charity, adds: "Vision Northumberland recognised an emerging local need and put together a terrific response which is making a real difference to the lives of many people across the county.

"I was blown away by the commitment of the volunteers at Vision Northumberland and the stories Julie shared about the work the charity carries out in the region.

“We’re really pleased to be helping them increase the community impact that the café can make and hope it continues to go from strength to strength.”

Since its launch in 2016, Newcastle Building Society’s Community Fund at the Community Foundation has also contributed over £2.3m in grants and partnerships to a wide variety of charities and projects across the region, including the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation and the Prince’s Trust.

The grants are so far estimated to have had a positive impact on more than 151,000 people.

- ends -

**For further information on Newcastle Building Society, please contact:**

Julian Christopher  
Footprint Public Relations  
07891 005034

### **About Newcastle Building Society**

Newcastle Building Society\* is the biggest building society in the North East, with a network of 31 branches and assets of more than £5.3bn. We’ve been here for our members for over 160 years.

As a leading local employer, we’re committed to growing our region’s talent and being a great place to work where people can realise their potential. We hold Platinum IIP and won the Excellence and Positive Impact Award at the 2022 CIPD North East of England HR&D Awards. We were named Company of the Year in the Northumberland and Tyneside category of the North East Business Awards 2022.

We help people to own their home, to save and to plan their finances through our range of products and services. We believe in the role of the high street at the heart of our communities and are proactive in making financial information and financial advice accessible across our region.

Our Financial Advice is provided through our Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited division\*\*.

We’re dedicated to helping our North East communities make positive changes; since 2016 the financial support through grants and donations from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation to benefit local causes has surpassed £2.3m

\*Newcastle Building Society Principal Office: 1 Cobalt Park Way, Cobalt Business Park, NE28 9EJ. Newcastle Building Society is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the

Prudential Regulation Authority. Newcastle Building Society is entered in the Financial Services Register under number 156058. You can check this on the Financial Services Register or by contacting the Financial Conduct Authority on 0800 111 6768. Call 0845 734 4345 or visit us online at <https://www.newcastle.co.uk/>

\*\* Newcastle Building Society introduces to Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited for advice on Investments, Pensions, Life and Protection Insurance and Inheritance Tax Planning. Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited is an appointed representative of The Openwork Partnership which is a trading style of Openwork Limited which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.