



## Our Story

Bedlington Community Brass Band was created as part of a project by Music Partnership North (MPN) to 'flood' Bedlington with brass. The town is in the heart of the Northumberland coalfield and has a proud history of brass music – but that was in the past. MPN gained funding to introduce brass music to local school children through whole-class teaching. The keener children then joined mini-bands in their schools, and these bands came together for occasional projects. The Community Band was another part of the jigsaw, to provide the next step in their musical progression, to inspire them and to provide the link between this work with schoolchildren, and local people. The band is open access with no age or expertise requirements, so local children sit alongside a very varied crew of adults, conducted and supported by MPN staff.

The Bedlington Community Brass Band Trust was founded as the initial three-year MPN project came to an end, and no one knew for certain whether the funding would be available for the project to continue. The band members and their supporters wanted the band to continue: we had done some exciting things, yet it felt like we were only just getting going. So we set up the Trust to work with MPN, and to provide a structure for the band to continue even if the wider project folded. The Committee includes band members, parents and friends, and works closely and happily with MPN, because we all want the same thing: a lively, fun brass music scene in our town.

## Who are we?

There's no such thing as a 'typical' band member, so perhaps it's best to explain by introducing some of us.

One of us was really shy when she started. She came from her school mini-band, with a passion for music and lots of support from Mum, but not much confidence – though it turns out she's got bags of talent. She's grown in skill and confidence and now leads her section. And she's dragged her mum along, who is learning a new instrument to join in; at first to support her daughter, but now for herself!

One of us is all over the place. Can't concentrate for long, messes about, argues with the conductor – always with a smile! Every now and then he leaves the band for a bit, but so far he's always come back, and his concentration is improving, while he's playing, at least.

Two of us are parent and child. Daughter's enthusiasm for playing led Mum to get hers out of a cupboard where it had languished for over twenty years – and she now leads her section, and they form key members of the Committee, working hard for the band.

One of us is a seasoned musician – but a string player. Goaded by her brass playing husband, she picked up a trombone she'd never even thought of learning to play three days before coming to her first rehearsal. She loves playing with no fear – because mistakes in our band are good, they're how you learn. And learning a new instrument in your '50s turns out to be a whole lot of fun.

One of us comes from a brass playing family but hadn't picked up her horn for many years. She was so nervous when she began that she nearly left immediately – it took the rest of us a while to persuade her



that open access really did mean open access. But she's stuck at it, started having lessons and is now taking grades; the thrill of learning new things and performing them has really got to her.

## Our vision:

When we set up the band trust, it was as the 'emergency backup' in case the money for phase 2 of the MPN project didn't come through (it did). However, we relish working with MPN, they have a place on our committee and play an active role supporting us, whilst the band provide the next step for young aspiring brass players – it's a great partnership.

But we are starting to develop a vision for our beloved band, and we want to share it.

- To develop, we need more members, so we need to increase our visibility and make sure people know that we're here and that they can join – whoever they are. More members means we can play more music, and have more fun.
- We're developing our branding, with a fab logo, banners and new uniform, showing ourselves as fun, creative, colourful, varied...
- We've been invited to perform at various events in our town and beyond and we want to perform more in town, to share our music with our own community. This includes supporting local charities and community events.
- We'd like to work in areas where music really makes a difference – for example, perhaps partnering with a dementia charity. Music has a dramatic effect on people with dementia, and we could help unlock powerful memories and make important connections to the world.
- It's also known that inter-generational contact is beneficial to old and young alike. As an inter-generational band we'd like to extend and expand that. We'd like to partner with Local History experts and enthusiasts, to unearth the history of brass music in our town and help us all reconnect with the past and move into the future together.
- We've loved doing special projects, including our amazing time with Mnozil Brass and working with other local bands and composer Lucy Pankhurst. That broadens our horizons, give us new ideas about what we can do and how far we can go, and we want to join in with special events whenever we can.
- It's really important to us to provide a place for young and new players, especially the ones inspired by the MPN project, to develop and grow; a space where they can see adults enjoying their music, and gain a bit of ambition in a safe place where mistakes are always allowed and no one is not good enough.





## How do we make this vision a reality?

Our key focus is to increase the visibility of the band within Bedlington and through that we can attract new members. We would like to reach a larger portion of the local community so that they know what we do, where we are, who we are and how to join us. So, how do we do this?

- we develop our branding through a new uniform to help cement our identity. Our uniform will say something about the type of band we are i.e. I expect it will be sweatshirts and polo shirts not dress jackets like most seasoned brass bands – we are different with an emphasis on participation and fun;
- we want to perform more in Bedlington to share our music and increase the opportunities to engage with our community. We are planning to play outside local shops within Bedlington where there is high footfall and where we can interact with a wider cross section of the local public;
- we have taster sessions every couple of months - a ‘come and play’ morning where people can turn up have a coffee, a chat and try a range of instruments;
- we partner with a local charity e.g. a local dementia charity – a vehicle to give something back to the community whilst raising our profile and accessing another section of the community. We may link this into a ‘play-a-thon’ e.g. we have the band playing constantly for 12 hours, joined by anyone who either can or wants to play a brass instrument, and we publicize this with local press and radio;
- we initiate a project focused on the inter-generational (old and young) links through events to unearth the history of brass music in our town and capitalise on a rich seam of banding heritage;
- we team up with Local History experts to reconnect with the past through historic events that are significant in Bedlington’s history. We would like to develop some themed performances that coincide with the anniversary of a historic event of local interest. Through are younger band members we may be able to link this into a one-off school curriculum event;
- we are also thinking of commissioning some new music that would tie in with an historic local event to raise our profile and reach a wider local public;
- we continue to look for more opportunities for one off special projects by teaming up with other local bands, music groups and choirs;
- we already have some parents with their children that play in the band, we could build on this with a recruitment drive to target parents of the school children engaged in the Bedlington Brass project;
- we improve upon our social media presence;
- we build on the article that has already appeared in ‘British Bandsman’ to advertise for new members;
- in future we may consider a ‘friends of the band’ organisation which would have a remit to raise the profile of the band and fund raise.

This is quite an exhaustive list and this won’t all happen straight away. However, this is the basis of the plan to raise our profile within the local community and in doing so recruit new members, young and old alike. It demonstrates our commitment and passion to the band and to build upon our success.



## Our *USP* – what makes us us?

- We're open to everyone, no auditions, no requirements
- You don't even need an instrument, we can lend them
- We're all sorts of people, all ages, lots of walks of life – and we're fun and friendly.
- We play all kinds of music, from traditional brass hymns to Queen, movie music and even new compositions – and the band can put in their ideas via our suggestions box
- We are linked to a major youth music project in our local schools, which provides mutual support and benefits

## What else might you want to know?

Through MPN the band is supported by Bristol Street Motors - Ford (Morpeth) who have sponsored the MPN Bedlington Brass project from the start and in doing so pays for our conductor and rehearsal space. You can see our recent visit to the showroom on YouTube (search for *bedlington brass bristol street*). Unlike the other brass bands in the region we don't enter brass band competitions – but we do occasionally link up with them for one off rehearsals and a performance. It improves us and provides the opportunity for some of our younger members to progress to these bands (but they still stay loyal to us as well). Through MPN the younger members have the opportunity to study for the Arts Award – a nationally recognised qualification to develop their arts and leadership talents in a creative and accessible way. We also partner with the Children's University – a national charity that works with schools to encourage participation in extra-curricular activities.

## Where do we perform?

We perform in our local community centres each school term with other MPN music groups and are now regulars at the Bedlington 'civic' carol concert in the local church where we partner with the community choir. Last year we played for a scout group in nearby Choppington and a primary school in Pegswood where the entire town came out on a cold December evening to sing carols with the children in the school yard. We regularly play at the Miners picnic at Woodhorn and at the Bedlington Picnic – a day of outdoor fun that celebrates all things local. We have performed at the Sage as part of a mass brass band alongside Mnozil Brass – an international renowned brass septet. We even played in Hexham abbey with the same massed brass band where we narrowly missed out in the annual Journal Culture Awards to the Blyth Tall Ships event. We sometimes get paid, often play for free – we just enjoy performing and sharing our music.

**In summary we are a community brass band, made up in equal measures of young and old and we have fun making music together.**