



ts across the North Pennines since the coronavirus pandemic

Churchwarden and local farmer Liz Walton generously loaned a refrigerated van – and with a small team of volunteers and funding from the parish council – the *Alston Essentials* van (as it is affectionately known) soon began delivering groceries, prescriptions and other goods to hundreds of households across the parish. They deliver four days a week, often driving more than 30 miles a day.

Vicar Mark Nash-Williams explains, “the idea came from a conversation pre-lockdown about how we could look after the elderly and vulnerable members of our congregations, and quickly developed into caring for the whole community – including people in isolated farms and hamlets across the 130 square miles of the North Pennines which make up our parish.”

“The *Alston Essentials* van is a real lifeline for people who live in more remote parts of the parish, or who are self-isolating.

“By reducing the number of individual visits to local shops, we’re helping to keep everyone safe.”

He highlights that the team of eight ‘van volunteers’ (working in pairs) complete more than 100 deliveries of groceries every week, with six other volunteers (using their own cars) delivering around 80 prescriptions a week. In total, they deliver to more than 130 different families every single week.

The initiative is also helping to support small local shops, which would otherwise be struggling, reveals Revd Mark.

“I’m really inspired by how well the churches and the local community are working together for the common good.”

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