



Cumbria Humanist Group

**Anne Pickles, Columnist and Associate Editor, Cumbrian Newspapers
talking about maintaining editorial balance on a local newspaper.**

**Meeting at Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road, Carlisle
on Wednesday, 21 May 2008 at 7.30 pm**

Anne Pickles, columnist and Associate Editor for Cumbrian Newspapers, spoke to the Cumbria Humanist Group at Morton Community Centre, Carlisle on Wednesday 21 May on the subject of maintaining editorial balance over controversial issues in a local newspaper. Anne pointed out that the least impartial newspapers tended to be the most highly regarded: although she did not name the paper, we suspected that it was the one read by most of the members, and it does include a wide range of news and analysis.

As secular Humanists, the Group are sometimes concerned about some of the extreme fundamentalist views voiced in the press by some church members, and in the past we have had the opportunity to express our opposition on The Cumberland News Letters Page. Anne seemed somewhat sceptical about the concept of Humanism, asking how it differs from the human values of the religions and it was pointed out that the basic tenet of Humanism is the absence of religious or other supernatural beliefs. Humanist convictions are based on reason and human experience, although they obviously share many values with the religious teachings.

Anne went on to describe how Cumbrian Newspapers responded to controversial issues such as the expansion of Carlisle Airport and the Carlisle Renaissance Project, both of which they now support, having consulted a wide range of interested parties and based their policy on the potential social and economic outcomes for Carlisle and district. At one stage in the airport debate, the Cumberland News website had received 40,000 hits in a few hours responding to a report in the paper, and editorial views would obviously respect this massive response from the readership.

A local newspaper has to be both Guardian and Sun in one title – and that can't be easy. Or perhaps it shouldn't be either, but focus on the facts about local people, activities and issues, and develop a 'stance' on particular issues in response to readership feedback and outcomes for the local community.

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information.

(351 words)

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Affiliated to the British Humanist Association