

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held in Northumberland YMCA, North View, Ashington, NE63 9XQ on Wednesday, 16 May 2018 at 6:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor E Simpson

MEMBERS

E Cartie
G Davey
S Davey
J J Gobin
L Grimshaw

J Lang
K Nisbet
M Purvis
T S Wilson

OFFICERS

H Bowers
M Carle
D Lally

Democratic Services Officer
Highways Delivery Area Manager
Chief Executive

ALSO PRESENT

M Black, Head of Investments, Arch
M Cotton, North East Ambulance Service, NHS Foundation Trust
R Dodd, Business Chair
20 members of the public
1 press

01. CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair requested that the agenda items for Petitions and Public Question Time be moved towards the end of the agenda, which was agreed by members.

02. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED that the membership and terms of reference for the Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council agreed by Council on 2 May 2018 be noted.

Chair's initials

Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council - 16 May 2018

03. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Campbell, B Gallacher, K Parry, L J Rickerby and G Webb.

04. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 11 April 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

05. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

(i) Consultation on the refreshed functional hierarchy and resilient road network

The purpose of the report was to inform the Local Area Council about the consultation that was taking place with county councillors, town and parish councils and other key stakeholders on a periodic review of the Council's functional road hierarchy. (Report attached to the official minutes as Appendix B).

Following the the report, comments were raised as follows:-

- A member had received no response following a request for his ward. The Highways Delivery Area Manager advised that this would be forwarded to Dale Rumney, Principal Programme Officer;
- A member requested that the Cowpen Home Zone be added to the LTP Programme. This would be referred to the Principal Programme Officer;
- What was the position regarding signs at North Seaton Crossing? It was advised that this was still at the Design Section. The Highways Delivery Area Manager would chase up and provide a response;
- In response to a comment regarding the change of legislation for parking in disabled bays, it was advised that would be raised with Technical Services;
- A member conveyed his thanks to highways for the work carried out during the bad weather which was echoed by members;

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(ii) Verge Litter Picking Programme/Plans

Members had received a letter from the Head of Neighbourhood Services on scheduled verge litter picking programme/plans over Spring, which was in response to a letter received from Alnwick Friends of the Earth.

Members were informed that the Neighbourhood Services Manager was not in attendance but if members had any questions they would be forwarded to him.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

DISCUSSION ITEMS - CORPORATE

06. NORTHUMBERLAND EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE UPDATE

A presentation was provided from Mark Cotton of the North East Ambulance Service about ambulance performance standards (copy attached to the official minutes). Key details included:

- Details of the 14 ambulance stations in Northumberland
- The categorisation of response time standards up until 30 October 2018 (Red 1 - 2 and Green 1 - 4)
- The need to change the standards due to increased demand, time frames over-ruling patient care, the high volume of crews diverted between cases, and Rapid Response on the scene for longer periods for a conveying resource; a decade old system would be replaced to meet modern needs
- Ambulance call volumes 2005/06 to 2016/17
- Details of the new standards, Categories 1 - 4, and specialist responses
- Ambulance response objectives: a timely response to patients with life-threatening conditions; having the right clinical resources to meet the needs of patients; reducing multiple dispatches; reducing the diversion of resources; increasing hear and treat and increasing see and treat
- Details for the ambulance response benchmark with other areas for categories 1 - 4 as of April 2018.

Key details of ensuing discussion included:

- Members were advised that during the winter weather, the Fire Services and Northumbria Healthcare had put out calls to health staff and patients
- In response to a query regarding the parking of ambulances outside residential properties, Mr Cotton advised if evidence was provided, that could be followed up
- A member commented on the speedy response of paramedics and ambulance services in relation to a recent incident.

Mr Cotton was thanked for his attendance and it was:

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

07. OUTSIDE BODIES

Members were asked to make appointments to outside body organisations within the Local Area Council's remit. A list of outside bodies was attached to the agenda for consideration. (Attached as Appendix C to the official minutes).

It was agreed to reappoint the following:

- Blyth Valley Disabled Forum - K Nisbet
- Briardale Community & Training Centre. Com. Ass - D Campbell
- Buffalo Community Centre - K Nisbet
- Community and Voluntary Action Blyth Valley - G Davey
- Northumberland Community Voluntary Action - T Wilson

Members were required for BLISS Mediation Service and Industrial Communities Alliance. As not all members of the committee were in attendance an email would be circulated to the full committee for appointments to these organisations.

The Chair also stated that a member was required for the Community Chest Panel. It was agreed that Councillor Purvis be appointed to the Community Chest Panel.

RESOLVED that the list of appointments be agreed, subject to the changes highlighted.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES

08. Timed 20mph speed limits near schools

A report was presented, for information, about the introduction of timed temporary 20mph zones near schools, indicated by flashing amber lights. (Report attached to the official minutes as Appendix D.)

It was requested that a schedule of costs be circulated to members in respect of the LED dual message school signs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

09. LOCAL AREA WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings (attached to the official minutes as Appendix E).

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

10. PETITIONS

- (a) **Receive any new petitions:** a petition had been received regarding additional parking and road surface improvements in Moorland Villas, Bedlington and neighbouring areas and a report would be submitted to the July meeting;

- (b) **Consider reports on petitions previously received: Ashington Town Centre Regeneration** (report and presentation attached to the official minutes as Appendix A).

The Lead petitioner was not in attendance.

Michael Black, Head of Investments, Arch provided a presentation and explained the background, historical context and current status of the site at Portland Park.

The consultation process aimed to gather opinions on the form of development people wanted on the site. The online consultation took place over two weeks following a drop in session.

Following the consultation, further focus group events were held at Northumberland College, Ashington Academy and Northumberland Church of England Academy.

The consultation had been well received with a good cross section of responses. The most popular response was for a cinema/theatre, followed closely by additional retail units, bars/restaurants, ten pin bowling and a music venue.

With the outcome of the consultation indicating the preference for a cinema/theatre, a feasibility study was commissioned by Arch to establish cinema operator demand for Ashington.

As a result this concluded with the Ashington Cinema Study report which identified there was an opportunity to develop a multi-screen cinema as part of retail and leisure which would help invigorate growth and increase visitor numbers into Ashington. A high quality cinema would provide improved trading opportunities and local traders would benefit from increased footfall. The cinema development would generate direct and indirect employment opportunities and create a more diverse range of employment opportunities for the local population.

The study concluded that with a carefully considered business plan, Arch should be able to engage with operators to provide a sustainable, high quality cinema operation.

Whilst the findings of the study were extremely positive, Mr Black gave a note of caution stating that if a national cinema operator was unable to be attracted to the town, the development of a cinema led scheme on the site would not be commercially viable.

The next steps therefore were crucial in gaining access to this highly specialised market.

To ensure Ashington was promoted at the highest level and attract operator

interest, a prospectus was being prepared to market Portland Park as an investable location for a cinema.

This would be completed during May 2018. Once approved and completed, a programme of engagement with selected cinema operators would be undertaken with the aim to establish formative interest by the end of June 2018.

Following the presentation, the following questions and comments were raised:-

- The cinema development would not work in Ashington. Could the former Gala bingo site not be used as a cinema and the Portland Park site be used for retail? Mr Black advised that the total cinema box office in the UK and Ireland exceeded £1.3 billion in 2017, the highest grossing year ever which suggested an economic formula that worked. Cinema operators making an investment would typically sign a lease for a term of 15 to 20 years and it was for them to determine if a cinema could work in Ashington.

With regard to the Gala bingo building, Mr Black said that this could probably have accommodated one screen cinema. Portland Park could accommodate five or six screens and create multiple activity across all screens. Contemporary cinema operators demanded a high level of design and infrastructure and to be located within an appropriate setting. Given the scale of the opportunity on Portland Park this would also include new restaurants and retail.

- Who would subsidise the development if it failed? Mr Black advised that high performing cinema operators would not seek to enter into a lease for a period of 15 years if they anticipated failure and to a large extent, like retailers and hoteliers, their expertise in assessing markets and business planning considered risk in great detail.
- A member was very disappointed that County Hall was not coming to Ashington which would have brought business to the town. Ashington Town Council were in the process of sending out resident surveys and requested that the surveys be taken into consideration. It was further asked what the cost implications would be to get out of lease and would there be cost implications to Arch/NCC? Mr Black confirmed that interest was being gauged from the corporate cinema market and surrendering a lease would be costly for the tenant. If a scheme was brought forward, they were not compelled to use a certain operator, this was part of the marketing process.
- Would the residents be consulted further? It was confirmed that they would be.
- In response to a comment regarding request of information via FOI, Mr

Black confirmed that Arch were keen to have the community involved.

- Was there any indication how many jobs would be created? It was advised that jobs would be created through the development process, the cinema, suppliers and restaurants. There would also be other parts of the town that would benefit from retailers based in the town.
- The cinema would not bring jobs. People were using food banks and the cinema development would not be viable. People wanted regeneration and jobs.
- Ashington needed employment. Two hundred jobs would be lost from Wansbeck Square and in total, 1100 jobs had been lost. Mr Black reported that, not only had a large element of investment been carried out in Portland Park, but also also in all the industrial estates and business parks around and within Ashington. There was a strong commercial base with Dutch, American and Japanese companies having invested in the town alongside many local businesses. Ashwood Business Park had also just been acquired, funded by Northumberland County Council. It accommodated the world's largest paint processing plant, and with the recent award of Enterprise Zone status, a programme of investment was planned to upgrade and improve the offer and attract new industries into Ashington. South East Northumberland and Ashington had a significant amount of public and private funding already invested in commercial and industrial property and the town centre needed to reflect this by, promoting a quality retail and leisure offer within an attractive environment.
- In response to a query regarding the future of Arch, members were advised that the on going work around projects in Amble, Prudhoe, Ashington, Bedlington and Blyth were a strong positive element and had the skills to attract business to bring forward regeneration.
- The Business Chair advised members that a report would be presented to Cabinet regarding the future of Arch.
- Discussion took place about the merits of the reporting process and the next steps of the report to be considered by Cabinet.
- Members were informed that Arch worked with a range of stakeholders to promote business growth and other businesses and landowners.

11. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

To reply to any questions received from members of the public, which could be received in writing in advance of the meeting or asked at the meeting. Questions could be asked about issues for which the Council has a responsibility.

Following on from the presentation regarding Ashington town centre regeneration, the following questions/comments were raised:-

Local Resident asked what would happen if the cinema development did not get the go ahead?

The aim was to promote the scheme and engage with the community. If the scheme was not successful, other aspects would have to be examined. A public building would be required to kick start the development and it was hoped to match the investment of the leisure centre. It was hoped that the focus of the scheme element would not be lost. A fundamental approach had been the constructive and informed consultation to make sure people had their say.

G Wright, Resident stated that approximately 2% of the population had responded to the consultation. Following the exhibition consultation, young people had been asked their opinion and he was concerned that the consultation should have been bigger and more digital instead of paper based.

A strong economic focus needed to be provided on the town centre. There was a view that the site should remain as employment. Job creation in the town centre was extremely difficult.

The study showed that a town centre cinema would provide access to many people within the local area who would not otherwise have access to a cinemas within a 30 minute drivetime. Station Road needed an uplift in infrastructure and more investment and the consultation had gone out to as many people as it could.

He was aware that there were a number of other opportunities and Arch were working very closely with operators.

Susan Lonsdale queried transport links and it was explained that this had been raised through the consultation. Currently, the bus services did not promote or support the economy and work would have to be carried out with Arriva. Work was ongoing and there was already some level of engagement.

Councillor Cuthbertson, Ashington Town Council referred to public transport and the night time economy and stated that people wanted to feel safe. At present, there was no bus station.

In order to make the development work, there needed to be an area where people could sit and have access to public toilets and bus routes. It was hoped that the private sector would bring forward additional value to the scheme.

G Wright, resident queried when the public would be informed, if the scheme did not proceed. Mr Black stated that engaging with every member of the public was difficult but hoped to administer information as early as possible, although operators/investors could not be identified due commercial confidentiality. The usual process was that, once exchange of contracts had taken place, names of the operators could be released.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Democratic Services follow up these queries after the meeting with the Cabinet member for Local Services.

12. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 13 June 2018 at Briardale Community Centre, Blyth.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

CHAIR.....

DATE.....