

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held in the former Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Blyth, NE24 2BX on Wednesday, 16 January 2019 at 5:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor G Webb
(Chair, in the Chair, for items 61-62 and 66-73)

Councillor B Gallacher
(Planning Vice-Chair, in the Chair, for items 63-65)

MEMBERS

D Campbell
E Cartie
G Davey
S Davey
J J Gobin

L Grimshaw
J A Lang
K Nisbett
J Reid
L J Rickerby

OFFICERS

M Carle
P Jones
D Lally
N Masson
J Murphy
K Norris
R Soulsby
A Ward
R Wealleans

Highways Delivery Area Manager
Service Director - Local Services
Chief Executive
Principal Solicitor
Principal Planning Officer
Democratic Services Officer
Planning Officer
Communications Lead
Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr P Jackson, Leader of the Council
Cllr N Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Cllr V Jones, Cabinet Member for Adult, Wellbeing and Health

Press: 1
Public: 12

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Parry, M Purvis, E Simpson, T Wilson.

62. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 12 December 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

Councillor Webb then vacated the Chair, for Planning Vice-Chair Councillor Gallacher to chair the development control section of the agenda, as was the arrangement for all Local Area Councils.

63. DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The report requested members to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications. The procedure at planning committees was appended for information.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

64. 18/03049/FUL - Modification and redistribution of existing earth mound, Blyth Town Football Club, South Newsham Pavilion, Sandringham Drive, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 3PS

Ryan Soulsby, Planning Officer, introduced the above application and updated members as follows:

Four further objections had been received against the application following the submission of the officer report. These objections were submitted by two members of the public who had originally objected to the application during the consultation period. A number of non material planning considerations were put forward which could not be given weight in the assessment of the application. Concerns were again raised regarding the impact upon the trees at the site which had been appropriately addressed within sections 7.16-7.18 of the report.

A slide presentation was then provided by the Planning Officer to summarise details contained within the report.

Councillor L Rickerby spoke against the application and her comments included the following points:

- Whilst the application before members may appear to be of a positive nature, she was dismayed that the committee was being asked to grant permission.
- The organisation did not, and appeared to be incapable of, adhering to any rules and regulations.
- Councillor Reid and herself had, for many years, supported the good work done by Blyth Town Football Club (BTFC) for young people but abhorred their practice of doing their own thing when it came to planning matters.
- This was a modification to the original application and she would challenge that it should be put back to BTFC to deliver what had been agreed and remove the mound which, it was stated in the report, had only appeared as a result of building spoil, building waste and debris.
- This had always been a flat public open space, there was no mound when she first became Councillor for the area in 1993.
- BTFC were told by the Planning Inspectorate to remove the mound in March 2017 which obviously had not happened and they should honour that judgement.
- In her opinion the application should not be granted planning permission but progress should be made in having the mound removed once and for all.
- How long was the Council going to wait before action was taken to rectify the situation?

Sandra Orr, the applicant, then spoke in support of the application and her comments included the following:

- She had specifically asked to speak on behalf of the BTFC in order to clarify their stance in respect of the stalled development of the site.
- As a club they had undoubtedly made some bad decisions over the past several years, more specifically, they had entrusted what they were led to believe was an honorable individual experienced in building and development to take control of matters. This was done in good faith and they had believed that development works could be achieved with the grant monies the club had secured 'at cost'.
- They had to go to court to rid the club of that individual then back to court to pursue the costs. Several club officers had put personal funds into the club to help it through that very difficult period.
- They were currently in a position whereby they had discharged all planning conditions which were either ignored or parked, with the exception of the mound.
- The mound consisted of material which formed a mound created in 2007 when the clubhouse was originally extended and was originally located on what was now a car park extension.
- Removal was not part of the initial agreement, it was requested retrospectively by the Council. Had the materials been removed from site in 2007 they would not be in the current position. There were two other mounds created in that initial development which remained on site at South Newsham and South Beach.
- Their proposal was to tidy up the area removing some of the material and landscaping the remaining, creating a pathway and an area for the youngest players to play/train.
- They hoped that members would approve the application upon which the

completion of their site pivoted. They were not a cash rich organisation, their main income being from subscriptions and the legal battle against the original contractor/development had had a financial, as well as emotional impact, on the club.

- The proposal was affordable.
- The current size car park was a luxury, very few clubs, including those in Blyth and surrounding areas, had such a large car park.
- They were not interested in politics, they just wanted what was best for their club and its members.
- They were all volunteers doing a good job, this matter had inhibited that and they just wanted to get on and run this much needed facility for the children and youth of the town. This type of club was never more needed in this day and age of computers and tablets.

Members' Questions

In response to questions, the following information was provided:

- With regard to paragraph 2.3 of the report, it was confirmed that the existing mound was formed from materials that were left at the site following the extension to the existing clubhouse.
- The Council owned the land and no objections had been received from Strategic Estates although they did request the removal of debris.
- For financial reasons the site could not be cleared so officers had worked with the applicant and agent to find an acceptable solution in planning terms.
- Approximately 75% of what was there would be removed.
- Condition 4 stated that the reduced mound area would be fully stone and debris picked along with the removal of any building materials/waste, to remove any protruding items and to allow for adequate grass growth. All removed stone and debris would be immediately disposed of off-site.

Councillor Campbell moved that the application be approved in line with officer recommendation which was seconded by Councillor G Davey who added that the landscaping plan should be available on the Council's website.

Some sympathy was expressed for the club but it was also felt that the situation had been brought about by poor decisions. It was acknowledged, however, that it was a much needed facility run by volunteers doing excellent work and it would be devastating if it was to close.

A member pointed out that the application was not about the good work done by the volunteers, which nobody disputed, it was about a 2m high mound put on ground for which they did not have a leasehold. Planning permission was previously refused, the club had lost its appeal and due, to a change in Administration, enforcement was not pursued. He said he could not support this application but could see no other way but to accept the recommendation with conditions.

Further comments included praise for the applicant and planning officers in their plans for moving forward with an acceptable scheme.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried FOR: 10, AGAINST: 0 with 1

abstention.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the application be granted permission subject to conditions, with reasons, 1, 2 and 3 as set out in the report.
- (2) the rewording of condition 4 as follows:
 - (4) Upon commencement and throughout the duration of the redistribution works, the reduced mound area shall be fully stone and debris picked along with the removal of any building materials/waste, to remove any protruding items and to allow for adequate grass growth. All removed stone and debris shall be immediately disposed of off-site.

Reason: To ensure a safe and functional open space for members of the public in accordance with policy C2 of the Blyth Valley Core Strategy.

- (3) Conditions 5, 6, 7 and 8 as follows:

- (5) Prior to the commencement of any works hereby granted planning permission, a method statement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The method statement shall specify the following and the works shall be carried out in accordance with this schedule for the duration thereafter:
 - Removal vehicles access and parking at the application site.
 - Schedule including timetable of work
 - Method of removal for all unrequired material specified in condition no. 4 from the application site.

Reason: To ensure that the works are carried out in a safe and concise manner thus not disrupting the use of public open space to members of the public, in accordance with policy C2 of the Blyth Valley Core Strategy.

- (6) Upon discharge of condition 5, the approved method statement shall be adhered to for the duration of the works on site

Reason: To ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the approved document.

- (7) Prior to the commencement of development a detailed landscaping scheme, showing landscaping proposals as noted within the approved documents, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. This shall include written details and a plan outlining the seeding of relevant areas to allow grass growth and any further planting or landscaping works required in the formation of the raised training area.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and the satisfactory appearance of the development upon completion, and in accordance with the provisions of policy DC27 of the Blyth Valley Development Control Policies Document and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- (8) Upon discharge of condition 7, the approved landscaping plan shall be adhered to and maintained for a period up to 5 years from the completion of the development. This shall include watering, weeding and the replacement of areas of seeding or turf comprised in the approved landscaping plans, which fail.

Reason: To ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the approved document.

65. PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE

Members received information on the progress of planning appeals.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

On the conclusion of the development control business, the meeting adjourned as the remainder of the agenda consisted of other Local Area Council business scheduled to begin at 6pm.

OTHER LOCAL AREA COUNCIL BUSINESS

66. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Colin Durward, Blyth Battery, expressed his thanks to all those who had campaigned to prevent parking charges being introduced at the Blyth links, particularly Councillors Cartie, Nisbett and Rickerby.

Adrian Cartie, Mayor of Blyth Town Council, added his thanks to Councillor Cartie and Blyth Town Council for the work they had done in that regard.

Sandra Stranger, Blyth Town Council, queried when it had become Council policy to issue Council decisions through the press rather than the usual channels.

Peter Henderson, NE24 4AD, referred to the Council receiving extra funding for road repairs and said the quality of road repairs in Blyth was not satisfactory. In response Michael Carle, Area Manager Highways Delivery, said there were two types of response for road repairs and the one Mr Henderson referred to was the standard approach.

Mr Henderson also referred to money invested in Council parks and pointed out that, in addition to Ridley Park, Blyth had another park in New Delaval. The tennis court was full of leaves and covered in moss, he queried if anything would be done to clean it up. In response Raymond Wealleans, Area Manager Neighbourhood Services, asked Mr Henderson to provide him with his contact details and he would follow this up.

67. PETITIONS

Members were advised that Councillor G Davey had intended to hand in additional signatures against the the proposed introduction of parking charges at Blyth Beach, but since it had been announced that the proposal had been withdrawn there was no need to do so.

There were no reports to consider on petitions previously received and no updates on reports previously considered.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

68. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

Members received a verbal update from the Area Managers of Technical Services and Neighbourhood Services who were in attendance to discuss recent, ongoing and/or future planned Local Services work for the attention of members of the Local Area Council.

Neighbourhood Services update:

Raymond Wealleans, Area Manager, stated that the winter programme was on-going. Edging work in Ashington would be complete by the end of February, complete in Blyth by mid February with work in Newbiggin due to commence the following week.

With regard to waste, there had been 29,000 changes in the Blyth and Ashington area and everything was going well.

The Planning Vice Chair said he had requested a meeting in November about the route for emptying bins in Ashington in order to keep the town tidy but that had still not taken place. Mr Wealleans confirmed that the meeting would be arranged.

In response to further requests Mr Wealleans agreed to follow up the following issues:

- Ashington Town Council be provided with an update regarding use of the small road sweeper in Ashington for which they were paying extra.
- An update about concerns reported by the public in regards to Newsham park;
- An update to Councillor Nisbet on Blyth Market Place;
- An update to Councillor Campbell about the installation of a speed camera on Laverick Hall Road.

Technical Services update:

Michael Carle, Area Manager Highways Delivery, said Winter services were continuing. There was nothing to report at present but that could change due to predicted low temperatures over the next few weeks.

It was reported that two new 68 plate gritters had been purchased for South East Northumberland and work on the salt barn at Cowley Road Depot, Blyth had commenced in early January.

Plans were being made for additional funding received from Central Government and £970,000 in total would be spent on the following schemes:

A189 East Sleekburn;
B1328 Waterloo Road; Blyth
C415 Brock Lane, West Sleekburn;
U6075 Remscheid Way, Ashington;
U6557 West Sleekburn Industrial Estate.

In response to comments about potholes, it was stated that potholes were assessed on a risk based approach. A 40 ml lip on a road was considered to be a trip hazard and was classed as a pothole, whereas on a footpath a trip hazard was considered to be a 20 ml lip. Water was a big issue for road deterioration and £2.2 million would be spent on surface dressing prevention.

The Highways Delivery Manager agreed to follow up the following issues:

- Belisha Beacon on Newsham Road, the left light was out and this happened on a regular basis so it could be more than a simple fault - a report would be sent to the street lighting section;
- An answer be sought from Kris Westerby regarding prices for an SLA for the maintenance of Station Road, Ashington - information to Councillor Gallacher;
- Ellington Road End Crossings, move to 30 mph, see if a TRO was in place and enquire if painting of the fence opposite Kentucky Fried Chicken in Ashington had been scheduled - information to Councillor Grimshaw.

69. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-22 and Budget 2019-20

Councillor P Jackson, Leader of the Council and Councillor N Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services were in attendance to give a presentation outlining the Council's strategy to its Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget 2019/20. The presentation provided details of the approach to setting the budget for the next financial year and the broad impact this would have on the delivery of services. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the signed minutes.)

Councillor Oliver said the Council was facing difficult financial times but the administration was confident that over the next 2 ½ years it would be able to deliver the services needed to protect front line services and improve prospects for the residents of the county. A lot of work had been done over the last year and he asked that this thanks to officers be placed on record.

The presentation covered the following areas:-

- The context of the plan in relation to savings, reduction of debt, the capital programme and increasing demand for services.
- An analysis of funding over the years 2014 to 2022.
- Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

- Proposal to increase Council Tax by 2.99%, which was not an easy decision but necessary.
- Additional funding available in Northumberland from extra Rural Services Delivery Grant, Rate Retention Levy Surplus and Social Care Funding.
- Savings by Directorate 2019-22.
- Summary of savings and movement of debt (total borrowing from March 2013 to December 2018).
- Capital Programme 2019-2022 - the most ambitious the county had ever seen, covering the themes of the Corporate Plan; Living, Enjoying, Connecting, Learning and Thriving.
- Investment in the Port of Blyth, Ridley Park and the Mermaid Play facility; proposed improvements to Bowe Street, Blyth and the major programme in Hirst Park, Ashington.
- The importance of connectivity - further pressure would be put on the Government to open up the rail line from Ashington to Newcastle central station. There would be major investment in roads with the possibility of a relief road for Blyth to address the problems on Cowpen Road.
- Everything possible was being done to improve the standard of education in the county. In Ashington and Blyth investment had been made in special educational needs and work was being carried out with Northumberland College, and its partners, to improve their offer as well as Newcastle University. Over the next year, investment would also be made in a training academy in the Port of Blyth.
- In terms of regeneration of town centres, an announcement regarding plans for Ashington would be made very soon.
- The success of the North of Tyne Combined Authority would see £600 million being invested in the region over the next 30 years. This could make a difference to people's lives and the Borderlands Growth Deal could act as a catalyst for further investment.
- In Ashington the Council had bought Ashwood Business Park which would bring jobs to the area.
- The budget position was challenging but it was hoped to maintain local services and inspire confidence to residents that they lived in one of the best counties in the country.
- The next steps were:-
 - invite views from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Local Area Councils
 - Final version to be considered by Council in February 2019 alongside the Medium Term Finance Plan 2019-22.

Questions and comments included the following:

- It was queried if heritage events and residents' festivals would be reintroduced. In response it was stated that last year 'Great Northumberland' had brought together some events across the county and the 'Discover our Land' campaign had been launched to promote Northumberland so it was a possibility that these could be linked to heritage events.
- Councillor Oliver said the decisions to increase Council Tax and cut Council Tax support were not made lightly but savings had to be made. He added

that these cuts were also built into the former administration's plans but this was disputed by some opposition members.

- Members thanked those who had been involved in the campaign to stop parking charges being introduced at Blyth Beach. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services stated that the introduction of parking charges at Blyth Beach had been subject to a genuine consultation. The Council had listened to residents, considered petitions received and decided not to introduce the charges. In response to comments about the decision being issued through the press before it was announced to members, it was pointed out that it was not a change in policy. Officers had been asked to identify areas for savings and one of those identified was car parking charges. A consultation had been carried out, a decision was made not to change the policy and the press was informed of that.
- Discussion took place about rent for market stalls in Blyth and how incentives, similar to those received in Hexham, would be beneficial. Members asked for help to be offered to market traders as a good market would attract shoppers to the town. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services said he would look into this but pointed out that the internet was affecting retail sales on the high street and, in some places, there were now too many shops. There would need to be a strategic alteration to high streets throughout the county with more town centre living.
- Members hoped that the Ashington to Newcastle rail link would be forthcoming and pointed out that developments had begun under the previous administration. The Leader acknowledged the work carried out by the previous administration and stated that the name had been changed to the Northumberland Line in order to give it more weight with the new Combined Authority. A programme of investment was in place and they were determined it would be delivered.
- In response to concerns about the cost of collecting 8% Council Tax from the most vulnerable in society it was stated that this had already been implemented in Sunderland and Newcastle and there was benchmarking evidence regarding the collection rate of 83%.
- In terms of what would happen if there was a 'no deal' Brexit, it was stated that the Devolution Working Group had been renamed the Brexit and Devolution Working Group and its membership would remain the same.
- The Leader agreed with comments that the lack of basic skills in maths and english was preventing less fortunate people from obtaining meaningful employment and said help should be available to young people from a preschool age, all the way through secondary education. In response to comments that some people were in that predicament now, it was stated that the Council was working with Northumberland College to improve their offer of education for those with special needs. Discussion also took place about the need for apprenticeships for those with practical skills and for more vocational routes to be available in schools.
- A member queried if leisure services could be offered for a week in the summer holidays, free of charge, to deprived children as had happened in the past. In response the Leader stated that the Council did not provide leisure services, although it worked closely with Active Northumberland who offered a number of incentives;
- Concerns were also raised about:
 - The budget for maintaining roads in South East Northumberland;

- Cut to front line services and services being transferred to Parish/Town Councils;
- A new policy about floral decorations around towns (this should be county wide);
- The need for additional budgets for expanding town centres;
- No reference in the slide presentation as to what cuts would be made in order to achieve savings;
- The Rural Services Grant - £400,000 per year was not enough. Other Councils had put pressure on the Government for more funding then offset the money to invest in deprived areas;
- The lack of information about what was happening with the Combined Authority;
- Leisure services in Blyth - it had been announced that there would be new centres in Berwick and Morpeth yet Blyth Leisure Centre had just been patched up and that should be a priority in the future;
- Some terminology used at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received and comments noted.

70. URGENT BUSINESS

With the agreement of the Chair this item was brought forward on the agenda.

Derelict and Vacant Properties in Blyth

Councillor Nisbet raised concerns about derelict and vacant properties in Blyth, related health and safety issues and persistent problems with a particular landlord in the Cowpen Quay area. She referred to a scheme in South Tyneside whereby private landlords were made to bring their properties to a decent homes standard or otherwise the property must be sold and suggested that could be a way forward. The Leader advised Councillor Nisbet to contact the Housing Department in that regard.

RESOLVED that Councillor Nisbet contact the Housing Department about her concerns and the South Tyneside scheme as outlined above.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

71. MEMBERS' LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES 2018/19

Members received a progress report. (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D.)

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

72. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings (any suggestions for new agenda items would require confirmation by the Business Chair after the meeting) (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E)

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

73. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council would take place on Wednesday, 13 February 2019 at Ashington YMCA - time to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 7:55 pm

Chair _____

Date _____