

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CRAMLINGTON, BEDLINGTON AND SEATON VALLEY LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Committee** held at Netherton Social Club, 1a Netherton Lane, Bedlington, NE22 6DP on Wednesday, 22 November 2023 at 5:00 pm.

PRESENT

M Swinburn (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

L Bowman
P Ezhilchelvan
B Flux
M Robinson
R Wilczek

E Chicken
D Ferguson
S Lee
C Taylor
G Sanderson

OTHER COUNCILLORS

G Sanderson

OFFICERS

H Bowers
T Gribbin
R Mason
R Strettle

P Mawer

Democratic Services Officer
Neighbourhood Services Manager
Highways Maintenance Senior Team Leader
Economic Growth and Regeneration
Manager
Senior Programme Officer, Economic
Growth and Regeneration

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

A Mowbray

Director of Projects, Advance
Northumberland

Around 21 members of the press and public were present.

41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daley and Dunbar.

42 MINUTES

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Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daley and Dunbar.

43 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Robinson requested declared an interest in agenda item 7 – Bedlington Place Plan and Town Centre Regeneration Update as he was a member of the Borderlands Working Group involved in the Place Plan.

44 PETITIONS

No petitions had been received; there were no reports or updates to consider.

45 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Susan Weedy, Bedlington resident – submitted a written question on behalf of residents living adjacent to the building development sites.

For 31/2 years, residents living adjacent to the building development sites, Miller homes and Taylor Wimpey (since January 2023) had been subject to numerous issues which had destroyed their enjoyment of life at home. For example, excessive dust, noise disturbing sleep, deliveries and work outside of permitted hours. At times this had made life at home totally intolerable and had a significant negative impact on residents' wellbeing. Numerous representations about the issues had been put forward to NCC officers and to date there had been little or no support provided to help resolve issues. Residents wanted to know why 31/2 years into the building development, conditions had not been enforced on the sites, particularly Longridge.

A written response had been received from the Planning Enforcement Officer:

There have been various cases over the last few years however this relates to current planning enforcement case 23/00536/BRCND which relates to the site not adhering to the Construction Method Statement which controls various aspects of the site such as working hours, mud etc.

This case is on hold pending the outcome of planning application 22/04292/DISCON.

Councillor Robinson concurred that the situation was unacceptable and contrary to the planning conditions.

Malcolm Wilson - submitted a written question relating to the development behind 21 Front Street East, Bedlington:

Since 2016, why has the Council failed to deal with significant breaches of planning control that has resulted in the development of 2 properties within a conservation area, built on contaminated land without planning permission?

Councillor Taylor stated that she had already written to Rob Murfin, Director of

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Housing and Planning requesting a meeting with Mr & Mrs Wilson but had received no response.

A response would be sought from the Director of Housing and Planning.

Joanne Hogg, 14 North Ridge, Bedlington - referred to speeding along the B1331 in Bedlington. There was no school patrol and stated that traffic calming measures were needed before a serious accident happened.

Councillor Robinson advised that a 20mph was due to be put in place very soon.

The Chair advised that a 20 mph road safety schemes is the first step in traffic calming and will be monitored after this has been put in place. Once this has been in for a period further speed tests can then be carried out to see if more traffic calming is required in the area.

Adam Hogg, Bedlington – referred to the lack of enforcement action with the Broad Oaks development, woodland and mud on Choppington Road from both the Longridge Farm development and the Willow Farm development both of which had made Choppington Road a complete mess.

West Bedlington Town Council had raised these issues but had received no response or update.

The Chair informed Mr Hogg that the Director of Housing and Planning was working with Parish and Town Council's to resolve any issues and suggested that Mr Hogg email him direct for a response.

Victoria Thompson, Avon Avenue, Bedlington – referred to the Education Plan and Section 106 monies. Hundreds of children were out of school as provision did not meet their needs and the academisation of schools within Bedlington, 20% of each cohort of primary and secondary did not meet their needs and asked what the Council was planning to do.

The Chair responded that over the past few years, there had been a significant increase of children requiring educational needs. A Task & Finish Group had been set up by Family & Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee to understand why numbers had increased so much.

The new free special school would meet the increase in support for special educational and ASD needs

Whilst education throughout the country was based on average EHCPs, ratings in Northumberland was ahead of the north-east and top 10 in the country.

The Chair further explained that Academies were not funded or led by NCC but gave as much support as they could.

If there was any specific information or examples, then the authority would investigate this, and asked if the resident had any details of cases could they please provide them.

Alistair McFie, Windsor Court, Bedlington - referred to flooding to the

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footpath from the river Blyth which had been raised 4/5 years ago. He had been told £80,000 had been put aside but no work had been carried out.

Councillor Taylor stated that she had raised this with Paul Jones, Director of Environment & Transport and no work had been undertaken yet.

An email would be sent to the Director of Environment & Transport for a response.

Helen Nelson, Bedlington – referred to the proposed construction of a hotel in Bedlington and requested details. Ms Nelson was informed that this would be covered under the presentation for the Bedlington Place Plan and Town Centre Regeneration presentation.

Ms Nelson also referred to the amount of housing in Bedlington and the lack of infrastructure.

The Chair queried whether there was a Neighbourhood Plan for Bedlington and stated that some housing applications could be legacy applications.

The Chair was informed that the Local Neighbourhood Plan had not yet been adopted.

A Health & Wellbeing report on the access to doctors and dentists could be brought to the LAC.

Beverly March, North Ridge – queried when the residents of Bedlington would benefit from Council Tax receipts.

Councillor Taylor stated that she had asked this question at Full Council and still awaited a response from Councillor Wearmouth.

This would be followed up.

Marie Howett, Featherstone Grove – was unhappy at the lack of investment in the town. The £48 million invested in the cycle route would not be going through the centre of Bedlington. She asked what was being done to get people to come to the town.

John Hall, Bedlington – Bedlington used to have 2 swimming pools and 6 public toilets. The town had had nothing for the past 30/40 years.

Gareth Fernandez, Beech Grove, Bedlington – asked why Bedlington was not classed as rural whilst Ashington and Morpeth were, when accessing funding. Small businesses should be encouraged to grow.

Rob Strettle, Interim Senior Regeneration Manager stated that national programmes sometimes had different criteria. He added that he would be happy to have further discussion at the end of the meeting.

Tony Gribbin, Neighbourhood Services Manager provided the following updates:

Grass Cutting:

- Grass cutting had ended for the year and teams had moved to winter works tasks.
- The season finished on 10 cuts in Bedlington, 15.5 in Seaton Valley and 9 in estates and 10 on arterial roadsides in Cramlington. The wet weather at the end of the season had prevented completion of routes in those areas.
- This year had been particularly challenging for grass cutting teams, with unusual weather patterns with lots of wet weather, followed by warm weather.
- Grass grew at a faster rate for longer periods of the year, making arisings visible in some areas long after the summer period started.
- Storm Babet brought the premature cessation to the grass cutting season due to the amount of rain experienced, this left the ground saturated and unable to accept the weight of a ride on mower or other large cutting equipment (without causing significant surface damage).
- Weather would be assessed early next year to determine if the grass cutting could be commenced earlier.

Weeds:

- Winter works season had commenced, and the effectiveness of this years weed control programme was being reviewed.
- It had been a challenging year for weed control, placing more pressure on teams with unusual patterns of growth.
- It was hoped that the weather would be better next year.

Street Sweeping:

- Sweepers were active prior to and immediately after storm Babet, supporting with colleagues in Highways keeping the road network moving.
- Leaf hotspot areas were being worked on to prevent localised flooding.
- Members were requested to bring any areas in need of sweeping to the Team's attention.

Winter Works

- The winter works programme had started and the target programme was shared with all councillors on 19 October.
- Walkabouts could be arranged to identify any pressure areas.
- Core works would be carried out first then the prioritised list of requests. As with all other aspects to service provision, this was subject to weather conditions which may have an impact on the programme.

Members raised the following:

- The small mobile sweeper was required at Hartford West and Church Lane.
- Double Row and Wheatfield's paths were difficult to walk on due to mud.
- Members to be emailed with updates of any changes to work done at the end of each month.

Russell Mason, Highways Delivery Area Manager provided the following updates:

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- Highways Inspectors and response were continuing to inspect and fix carriageway/footway defects, with all planned routine inspections currently up to date.
- Gully emptier was fully deployed dealing with reactive and cyclic maintenance.
- There was a current back log of reactive reports to deal with following the recent severe weather conditions across all areas of the southeast.

Larger Tarmac Patching has been carried out in the following locations:

- Highburn, Cramlington (flags to flex)
- Chesterhill, Cramlington (flags to flex)
- Westmorland Cycleway, Cramlington (Small Cycle Way Repair)
- Burnside Close, Seghill (flags to flex)
- Cranshaw Place, Cramlington (garage area)
- Seven Oaks Park, Cramlington (footway)
- St Johns Crescent, Bedlington (footway)
- Millway, S. Sluice (Co-op Entrance)
- Glenfield Avenue, Cramlington (road Junction)
- Annfield Road, Cramlington (Carriageway)

Drainage Improvements:

- Deneside, Seghill (New pots Repair line)
- St Michaels Avenue, New Hartley (new Pot & repair line)
- Jubilee Terrace, Bedlington (New pots & Repair Line)
- A192 Plessey Checks (Aco Drain)
- Arcot Lane, Cramlington (In progress - Complete Next Week)
- The new improved pumps at Westmoreland Way have been well tested during the recent weather and the have been a coping well.

Upcoming Drainage

- Lodsworth Drive, Cramlington (Early December)
- Dudley Lane, Cramlington underpass (Early December)
- Yewtree Drive, Bedlington (Mid December)

LTP - Carriageway Resurfacing

LTP Carriageway Resurfacing schemes have been carried out in the following locations;

- Bristol Street, New Hartley – Completed in September
- Shields Road, Hartford Bridge – Complete Wed 15th– small section of remedial work to be completed on Thursday 24th November
- A1068 Hartford Bank – will be completed Friday 25th November

Upcoming LTP Resurfacing works

- St Ronan's Drive, Seaton Sluice (Feb)
- Eastfield Grange, Cramlington (March)

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Other Ongoing/Completed Work

- A190 Avenue Road, Seaton Delaval S278 Works (Site Access)

Other Upcoming work.

- A1068 Fisher Lane signage improvements – Programmed for February 2024.

Winter Maintenance

The Winter Services Preparedness Programme Resilience Report had been included within the agenda for members' attention.

Members raised the following:

- Compacted grit.
- Updates requested on Arcot Lane and Fisher Lane.
- 40 Deneside View, Seghill
- The large gullies at Plessey Checks.

47 BEDLINGTON PLACE PLAN AND TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

Councillor Glen Sanderson was in attendance and received a number of questions about the perceived lack of investment in Bedlington town Centre.

Councillor Sanderson suggested a more informal meeting with Bedlington County Councillors, Bedlington Parish and Town Councillors and some members of the public to meet at a venue at Bedlington or, County Hall.

Several members of the public requested that questions should be answered on the night, but the Leader pledged to meet with residents at a later date to discuss their concerns.

Residents requested that the meeting should be a formal minuted meeting where residents could raise questions.

A further meeting would be arranged, hopefully before Christmas.

Rob Strettle, Interim Senior Regeneration Manager, Andrew Mowbray, Director of Projects, Advance and Peter Mawer, Senior Programme Officer, Economic Growth and Regeneration were in attendance to provide an update on the development of the place plan for Bedlington, including Bedlington town centre and Bedlington Station.

The Interim Senior Regeneration Manager explained the background of the town regeneration in the wider area and Borderlands:

- The Borderlands Partnership represented five local authorities along the English to Scottish border working together to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth.
- The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal was made up of a series of interlinked investment programmes and projects.

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- Borderlands – Improving Places Theme was made up of two elements.
 - Destination Borderlands
 - Place Programme
- Towns had the opportunity to bid with matched funding from NCC.
- The Bedlington Place Plan had now been finalised following community and business engagement with drop in events fed into the partnership group which included County Councillors and Parish and Town Councillors.

Andrew Mowbray, Director of Projects, Advance shared information of existing project delivery:

- Phase 2 construction started in April 2022
- Tolent Construction entered administration in February 2023 and work had been suspended.
- The project was restarted in April 2023 with Advance acting as principal contractor and handing over to Greggs in accordance with their lease.
- Greggs unit opened in September 2023 which saw the completion of Stage 2a.
- Stage 2b had been retendered in August to secure a new contractor.
- This stage saw 3 further retail units and 6 apartments to rent.
- Surgo construction started work on 20 November.
- Advance would continue to market the 3 remaining units in the terrace and 3 development plots.

Mr Strettle continued outlining a summary of existing project delivery which the Place Plan took account of:-

- The Council had already secured Government Levelling Up Funds (LUF) to provide new and upgraded active travel infrastructure in Bedlington which would enhance the east to west link across the town.
- The dual use pedestrian and cycle route scheme would connect the western extent of Bedlington, key residential and employment areas with the proposed Northumberland line.
- Additional benefits to this route included a connection towards schools across the town to facilitate active travel at an estimated cost of over £7 million
- There were also several capital investment schemes in development within the Council's Parks Enhancement Programme.
- Good progress was being made on the station restoration project, with Network Rail offering a long-term lease for the North station.

Mr Strettle then summarised the 'project pipeline' in the Place Plan – a range of project concepts and proposals that could contribute to the Place Plans Objectives in the longer term, some of which may be eligible for Borderlands funding subject to further development work.

- Town centre strategic sites - The use of NCC buildings and development sites in the town centre to meet user and market demand, improving the Public Realm and connectivity in the town centre. Proposed uses of the assets included a heritage centre, doctors' surgery, and retail. This would be explored further through a site study in 2024 to test a range of potential

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uses.

- Bedlington Station was a gateway into the whole of Bedlington with the station providing access to the wider area – there was a proposal to capitalise on this through a project to improve the Public Realm on Station Road to provide an inviting Gateway to and from the town for rail users.
- Another project was the Library Hotel with restaurant and bar to serve the new rail passengers and the growing workforce on the Energy Park. A feasibility study had been completed on the land/building which concluded that the market was unlikely to deliver a project of this type in the near term. The council may undertake further market testing later subject to development plans for Northumberland Energy Park which would likely increase confidence in the market invest in this type of project.
- A Heritage and Innovation Centre to celebrate Bedlington's industrial heritage.
- Physio centre and hydrotherapy pool and a multipurpose sports facility.
- Upgrading the pathways in Bedlington Country Park to improve accessibility and connectivity throughout the park.
- Activate Bedlington - a programme of initiatives to encourage residents of all ages to participate in physical activity.
- Extending the existing train service onto Bedlington, linking Bedlington Station to key sites, and creating better access.
- Bedlington Enriched Environment – would add value to service to the town centre.
- A small community centre, sports facility, and café in West Lea.
- Next Steps
 - Place Partnership Group – Place Plan endorsed locally September 2023.
 - Project Development stage begins – Winter 2023 onwards, NCC to take forward commissioning of studies, development work committed to and stay connected with other sponsors on next steps and progress.
 - Place Plan LAC update Nov 2023
 - Borderlands Place Partnership Board – Borderlands endorsement of Place Plan (Dec 2023)
 - Place Partnership Group next meeting – early 2024 TBC – update on progress and more detail on Borderlands BTIP process
 - BTIP Process - TBC in 2024 subject to project development and commissioning of BTIP support

Following the presentation, the following questions/comments were made and responses given:

- The main development and railway line would be complete before the main car park.

Good progress was being made and specific timescales could be requested for 2024 and onwards.

- People should be attracted to visit Bedlington.

The Borderlands process had taken into account people's ideas and part of the challenge for Borderlands were well developed projects – this included the idea of attractions at the station and enhanced public realm to

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encourage visitors.

- No building work was being carried out on the Greggs unit.

Work had started on site with the stripping out of asbestos before the demolition, the new building would commence in January 2024.

- The lack of leisure facilities.

Work needed to be carried out with the project sponsor and applicant to build a business case for the potential physio / hydrotherapy pool. However, the site proposed could not be held exclusively at this stage and needed to be marketed to develop the town.

- Members of the public had asked for leisure facilities which they had not got. They did not want something they didn't want.

It was trying to find a balance between market demand, priorities of local people and stakeholders, evidence of need and opportunities to fund delivery – the place plan was intended to take account of those factors. including a focus on potential projects that would benefit the town.

- The site had been marketed for the past 5/6 years, is there a stop date. There was no Plan B to help small businesses?

There were small units on the Retail Terrace for smaller businesses.

- The residential units above limited the use of the units below and the units were still too big for small businesses with no incentives.

It was explained that the uses had been amended to make the project deliverable in a changing market, town centre living also being a good part of the mix in the area. Any feedback on availability of different units would be taken back to the Investment Team at Advance and queries followed up.

- Why was so much money spent on the cycle way and why not a leisure centre, which had been asked for?

There was a need and opportunity to develop cycling connectivity opportunity through the LUF for which over £7 million had been secured for Bedlington. This funding stream would not of supported the development of leisure.

- Everything in Bedlington gets ignored.

The job of the Regeneration Team was to take into account what the community needed alongside the other factors mentioned above.

- What opportunities would be brought into the town? East Bedlington had a distinctive plan because of the train station but the town centre would be forgotten.

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Interconnectivity was important with sequential development. Advance would bring forward a mixed-use development in the town centre but there were opportunities to explore other projects in the town centre – as mentioned earlier. The place plan included schemes in both parts of Bedlington.

- How would it become one large community?

This would be achieved through cycling, walking and parking infrastructure which will help connect the strengths and assets of Bedlington overall.

- Cycling, walking and parking would be no good for the infirm or elderly and the use of shuttle buses was suggested.

This could be looked into, linked to the new train services it will be important to consider interconnections with local bus services. Will feedback to public transport team.

- Appropriate funding streams, the cycle route was already there. People want connectivity and deliverability, eg the old train station, micro pub and live music. What could be done to fit criteria of every funding bid? Want to access leisure to build healthy communities.

Millions of pounds were being invested, including the delivery of the train station and new regeneration. Connectivity was important to improve the town. The Place Plan would bring opportunities from funders. Funding could not be put into something that was not deliverable.

- It was suggested that the old WDC council offices would be best put to use as a centre to doctors, dentists and pharmacy.

This would be fully tested as a strategic site as mentioned earlier.

- The building used for Greggs did not fit in to the conservation area.

The building fitted in with the plan and design codes in accordance with Conservation Guidance.

- Concern about the re-purposing of the town centre and young people.

The town centre vibrancy was a key concern and a challenge for town centres.

More detail would be brought on the cycle route to future events and the route had been subject to recent engagement and consultation.

- A resident found it difficult and stressful using public transport to access leisure facilities with her children who had disabilities.

Any positive ideas would be evaluated as part of the strategic work. Community responses could be developed.

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- How could residents influence the plan?

It was explained that the discussion tonight had been partly about project in development which were funded eg, Bedlington’s new town centre units – these schemes had already been consulted upon and planning permission for buildings which included residential above, if there was interest or big demand for these units, it would be difficult to change. This would be taken up separately. The second are of discussion had been about new projects that may be developed in the future - on this front there will be opportunities to input to the development of schemes as they are developed – for instance in commenting on design work through drop in events.

- NCC owned the building and land at the former WDC site. The public should be listened to and NCC should only sell that site for that purpose.

The town centre use could not be constrained and a strategic site study would be carried out which will help to determine how the site could be used effectively.

- It was echoed that residents did not want mixed use sites.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

48 **LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

49 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting to take place on Wednesday 24 January 2024.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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