

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 16 March 2022 at 4:00 pm** in County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF.

PRESENT

Councillor L Grimshaw (Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball
B Gallacher
K Nisbet
K Parry
W Ploszaj

M Purvis
M Richardson
E Simpson
A Wallace
A Watson

OFFICERS

R Greally

Assistant Democratic Services
Officer

S Hall

Senior Animal Welfare and
Enforcement Officer

R McCartney
N Snowdon

Infrastructure Manager
Principal Programme Officer
(Highways Improvement)

R Wealleans

Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager

01 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor E. Cartie and J. Reid.

02 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

Councillor Simpson disclosed an interest in item 4(b)(i) as she had signed the petition being presented.

Councillor Humphrey disclosed an interest in item 4(b)(ii) as he had also raised the issues in the petition and had worked with the lead petitioner.

03 PETITIONS

(a) Members were informed of a new petition titled; "Make Hirst Playing Fields a no dog area". It was opened on 21st January 2022 and closed on 21st February. It

had received 278 signatures and would therefore be brought to a future Local Area Council meeting.

(b)(i) DOGS SHOULD BE KEPT ON LEADS ON NEWBIGGIN-BY-THE-SEA PROMENADE

Members were read an extract from the lead petitioner which outlined their reasons for creating the petition. Her comments were as follows:-

With mental wellbeing at a low and with many individuals benefiting from fresh air and daily exercise, the promenade of Newbiggin by the sea is a popular place to use. Unfortunately, due to the amount of unleashed, out of control dogs this prevents this from happening and it is being avoided by some.

Having lived in Newbiggin by the sea all my life, a dog owner and someone who uses the promenade on a daily basis I have noticed an increase of out of control dogs. I have personally been verbally attacked on more than one occasion from owners whom I have asked politely to recall their dogs if they have viciously approached myself and my leashed dog. I not only feel intimidated when I am approached – the dog and said owner but nervous and uneasy of what outcome the situation may result in, i.e. an altercation, dog fight or vet bill. This can turn into a very stressful experience when in fact going for a walk on the promenade should be an enjoyable one.

I feel strongly that locals and visitors alike should feel comfortable and safe whilst using the promenade. It is the biggest attraction of the village and used all year round. Users should not feel anxious or be worried about being approached or in the vicinity of aggressive dogs.

Although I am a dog owner and appreciate they need exercise, a pedestrianised area is not the place. Dogs can and should be walked on a leash to make the area fully accessible for all users, that being other dog walkers, children, pushchairs, wheelchairs and those with poor mobility without fear of being approached by out of control dogs. These dogs are often causing nuisances, chasing balls the owners throw for them or running around in groups causing potential trip hazards. If the owners can be encouraged to do so elsewhere this would make the promenade a more user-friendly walkway. I have witnessed owners separated from their unleashed dogs, not knowing where they actually are and certainly not noticing them fouling, therefore unaware to pick their faeces up. This in itself is a very big problem. If all dogs were leashed whilst walking the promenade I feel confident this fouling problem would decrease, the average owner would surely feel compelled to pick it up rather than plead ignorance/innocent and walk on by.

I look forward to the findings from the Enforcement Officers who will be patrolling during 2022, I hope that they will be in regular attendance and attentive to the situation to provide full and frank reports.

I urge you to consider the wider community make a prudent decision to ask for dogs on leads to become mandatory to ensure a safe experience for all. This could be achieved by deploying Enforcement Officers and erecting signage and issue fines and using social media to inform users.

Chair's Initials.....

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S. Hall, Senior Animal Welfare and Enforcement Officer, attended to answer questions from members. The following comments were made:-

- Members believed that enforcement should not just be notices and there should be active enforcement with fines.
- Members were assured that enforcement officers were present in the area but it was highlighted that it was difficult to catch people in the act. Officers had visited sites in plain clothing but it was still a difficult task.
- Members were assured that there was a zero-tolerance policy to dog fouling. Members of the public would be issued with a fixed penalty notice if caught.
- Members suggested that data relating to fixed penalty notices should be published in newspapers to show that enforcement was happening.
- Officers confirmed that there was a condition in areas where dogs must be kept on a lead for the length of the lead. This was 1.5 metres.

RESOLVED members supported the recommendations in the report.

(b)(ii) SPEED CALMING MEASURES ALONG SOUTH NEWSHAM ROAD (B1523)

The lead petitioner, Stuart Ferguson, addressed the committee and spoke around the reasons for starting the petition. His comments included:-

- The road is a death trap and there had been several serious accidents over the years. Concerns were originally raised back in 2011 and nothing had been implemented.
- Officers, Police and Ian Levvy MP had visited the area and were shocked at the speed and volume of traffic. After the visit there were positive ideas from Officers however nothing had been done since the visit.
- The road cannot cope with the volume of traffic at the time and further developments within the area were only going to add to the traffic problem.
- There was a playpark next to the road and there was safety concerns with Children walking to school alongside the road. There had recently been a serious incident involving a 16-year-old child which resulted in the child being hospitalised.
- It was asked when the road survey would take place, whether the police had been requested again and what proposals were there for traffic calming measures in the area.

N. Snowdon, Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement), introduced the report to committee and welcomed questions from members. The following response was given to member's questions:-

- Members wanted to highlight the environment of the road and how that exacerbated the situation. There was a pathway directly on the road, there were no crossings along the stretch of road. There is a small roundabout that was supposed to be a traffic calming measure however due to the size it was ineffective.

- Members asked if there were statistics from the Police visit as there had been 3 recorded incidents recently and a number of speed enforcement fines were handed out during a recent visit.
- Proposals for the road were being finalised and were expected to be ready in the near future. Possible proposals included signage, lines and temporary speed cushions.
- Officers were still waiting for details from the police regarding the recent incident. Once information was shared they would take action if it was deemed necessary.
- Officers had contacted the Neighbourhood Police but the speed camera van had not been to the area yet. Members expressed their support of working closely with the Police and felt it was imperative to Officers work.
- The speed survey had not been carried out yet as there were traffic lights along the road which would have skewed the data. Once the temporary traffic lights were removed the survey would be carried out. It was acknowledged that a lot may have changed since the last survey that was carried out 3 years ago. Officers highlighted the importance of the speed survey to help prioritise the scheme through the Local Transport Plan.
- Members hoped that the Blyth Relief Road would also alleviate the situation.
- It was suggested that maps may have been beneficial in the report.
- A date could not be confirmed on when the work would commence on the road. The Local Plan was in the final stages of completion but it was suggested that there may be work undertaken through the Urban Road Safety Allocation.
- It was confirmed that there was a speed monitoring sign in situ at the time however it was not confirmed if it had the software to download the speed data. Members confirmed that new speed surveillance equipment had been ordered for the area and a lot of new equipment had the capability to capture the speed data. It was confirmed that Parish and Town Councils do send Officers speed data from other areas.

RESOLVED members supported the recommendations in the report.

04 LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

R. Welleans, Neighbourhood Services Area Manager, gave an overview of recent work carried out:

Ashington and Blyth Neighbourhood Services Operational Update: NEAT

Winter works continue at a rate we expect.

Since the last Local Area Council, we have experienced a mild winter period.

This has helped our teams recover some ground we lost to storm Arwen.

- Continued to work a 28-hour week during the winter period this ended on the 25th of March when all Grounds staff revert to a 43.75-hour week to take advantage of the lighter evenings from the 28th of March.

Chair's Initials.....

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- Progress through scheduled work had been a challenge but successful.
- We were continuing work to complete scheduled winter works tasks.
- Please alert me at your earliest convenience if you believe any requested work had not been completed.

We have finalised preparations for the upcoming grass cutting season. All grass cutting equipment has either been serviced or is scheduled to be serviced.

- Grass cutting was started in most areas and will continue depending on ground conditions
- The Routes had been reviewed and agreed with Teams in all areas.
- Seasonal grounds maintenance positions for this year were in the process of been filled with all seasonal staff in place within Stakeford Depot and recruitment ongoing for Blyth NEAT (Neighbourhood Environment Action Teams) with 2 vacancies to fill, there was a low application rate this year and we were finding it difficult to engage seasonal workers in some positions but were going to use the Councils Staff bank to fill any vacant positions to ensure all staff were in place to start the season well.

Weed control activities will be undertaken in-house again this year.

- The blue dye would be used this year as it was well received pre-pandemic.

Street Cleansing

- Business as usual.
- We anticipated that the increase in footfall experienced last year (due to the pandemic – staycation) will reduce this year, this should ease pressure on our cleansing teams.
- **Newbiggin:** Cleansing routes ongoing within the area and in addition the Town Council have agreed to renew the partnership this year for 2 additional Seasonal operatives to carry out a variety of duties determined by the Town Council. The work on Newbiggin Beach to install a deterrent for windblown sand has been completed and we will be scheduling a clean-up of the sand within the Promenade area.
- **Cambois and Sleekburn areas:** cleansing routes were being followed; The Mechanical Sweeper was scheduled for the area week commencing the 21st of March.
- A litter-pick and cleanse will be scheduled for Brock Lane, I will speak with SUEZ about vehicles leaving without securing there sheeting systems to prevent litter coming off the wagons when leaving the transfer station.
- **Ashington:** We have agreed new Zones with ATC with all areas now cleansed on a set day, we will be monitoring progress and monitor all areas with our Total Mobile LEQ inspections.
- Maple and Chestnut bin compounds, we continue to monitor the compounds as we have issues with fly tipping daily, the Rapid Response team are there twice daily at times to keep them to an acceptable standard, the other issues around the bulk bins are contamination of the recycling bins, we are having to service these most of the time as general waste on their weekly collections.
- Enquiries had been made about installing CCTV within Maple and Chestnut to deter fly tipping and will update councillors when further information is available.
- **Blyth:** All cleansing teams are active within the area and continue to work well with BTC.
- Inspections carried out by Blyth Town Councils officers in association with NCC (Northumberland County Council) officers.

- Overnight Cleansing of the A189 spine road is scheduled to start on the 2nd of April for 5 consecutive weekends.

WASTE

Residual and recycling

- Business as usual for waste collection services. We are still seeing elevated tonnages due to covid – we put this down to many people now working from home and generating waste there, rather than at their workplace.
- Due to the rate of housing growth in recent years the waste service will see additional investment this year, we will receive 2 additional RCV's and crew.
- Work is underway to evaluate existing demands on the service and plan routes to ensure they are deployed in the most efficient way possible.

Garden waste collections have started

- Increasing housing/customer numbers have meant additional tweaking of rounds has been required to accommodate the increase with 12 collection days over the 2 weeks now taken place.
- Initial take up for the service is high, the scheme remains as popular as ever.

Additional info

Glass trial – has been extended by 12 months, presentation rates and yields remain encouraging in most areas.

A food waste collection trial is currently being planned. A special collection vehicle is required which we must hire in for the duration of the trial. Members will be provided with more information on the trial when plans are finalised.

The following comments were made in response to Member's questions:

- Members welcomed the weed programme and thanked Officers for the standard of grass cutting. Officers confirmed that a new type of blade on the grass cutters left a better finish as it mulched the grass.
- It was acknowledged that there were some issues in the Blyth area with grass cutting and tree debris from recent storms. The Tree Officer had been informed and was due to send an update soon. Members asked if the Tree Officer could also look at potential hazardous trees near school sites and give information regarding tree stumps left behind.
- Members asked if there could be a more enforcement around fly-tipping, littering and dog fouling and to be seen publicly addressing the issue.
- Officers confirmed the communal bins had made a positive change and the streets were much improved.
- Officers confirmed that information shared regarding the cleaning programme that was shared with Town Councils could also be shared with County Councillors to ensure they were aware of what was happening in their divisions.
- Officers assured Members that if there were any vehicle breakdowns (gullycleaners etc) that the Senior Team Leader would inform Members.
- Members asked if a maintenance programme for Paths and Cycleways can be stepped up as some of the cycleways were in poor condition. The Officers confirmed they would look into this.
- Members enquired whether a road sweeper could have been deployed at St John's Church to help tidy up the debris. Officers confirmed they would look into this.

Chair's Initials.....

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R. McCartney, Infrastructure Manager, gave the following overview:-

All Highways Inspectors and maintenance crews continue to work Inspecting, fixing carriageway defects, making repairs and making safe category one defects across the South East area.

Gully emptier is fully deployed dealing with reported issues and cyclic maintenance. An additional gully emptier is also working in the Ashington/Blyth area on cyclic maintenance.

Larger Tarmac Patching

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

- Links Road, Blyth
- Wensleydale Terrace, Blyth
- Garden City Villas, Ashington
- A189 Woodhorn R/A
- Woodlea, Newbiggin
- St Andrews Terrace, Ashington
- Coronation Street, Blyth
- Station Road Junc Institute Road, Ashington
- Station Road, Ashington (Bus Layby)
- Willow Crescent, Blyth
- Ford Drive, Blyth
- Tynedale Drive, Blyth

Drainage Improvements:

Drainage Improvements have been carried out in the following areas:

- Black Close Bank, Ashington
- A189 Spine Road

LTP - Carriageway Resurfacing

Footway and Carriageway LTP Resurfacing have been carried out the following areas:

- Newsham Road, Blyth (Finished Surface NCC1)
- Norham Road, Ashington (Finished Surface NCC1)

Regeneration Scheme

- Bowes Street, Blyth – Started Monday 10/01/22 (48 Weeks)
- Waterloo Road, Blyth

Winter Maintenance

Winter Services continue.

We continue to have an average winter so far in both snow and precautionary gritting.
Chair's Initials.....

A small restock of salt across the county has been completed. This will ensure we have sufficient resilience levels for the remainder of the winter period.

This includes a 5000 Tonne strategic store located in Powburn.

The following comments were made in response to Members questions:-

- Members asked for an update on a report being carried out to identify problematic Gullies.
- Members raised concerns regarding gullies in John Street. The problem had been reported numerous times, but it was thought that it may have needed more than just gully cleaners to sort the problem. Officers noted this.
- It was noted that grit bins had been topped up, as mentioned in the report, however in some cases the grit had been placed on top of old, unusable grit. Members asked that in future the grit bins are emptied before topping them up.
- Members asked if a survey could take place on the drainage opposite the White Elephant beside the Post Office as it often flooded.
- Officers noted that Members would like clarification on what determines a pothole and the criteria for when a pothole needs repairing. Members asked if the Service could be more proactive rather than reactive but also acknowledged the little funding they had been provided with.
- Officers confirmed the scheme of work regarding line painting was like most other programmes and relied on updating the areas that were most in need.

05 MEMBERS LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

RESOLVED Members noted the information.

06 LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED Members noted the plan.

07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 13th April 2022 at 4.00 p.m.

08 URGENT BUSINESS

With agreement from the Chair, Cllr Nisbet raised a concern regarding the Blyth Beach Huts. The following was read out:-

We recently wrote collectively to you about the Blyth Beach huts. We found your response disappointing. The Beach Huts in Blyth are being made inaccessible to local people because of the changes being made. Will you actively lobby Active Northumberland to look again at keeping these community assets accessible to local people for one off bookings? Not everyone can afford to block book the huts and while we welcome tourism into Blyth it mustn't be at the expense of local people.

Response

Active Northumberland had not made a firm decision on the availability of the Beach Huts for daily rental due to considerations regarding the national Covid-19 situation. I can now confirm that the Beach Huts will be available for daily rental, this Summer, on the same basis as pre pandemic. The Officers liaised with Active Northumberland and they have confirmed that the Beach Huts have only every been available for hire during June, July and August.

Members felt it was still a concern as it's stated that they were only used during June, July and August however it was believed that they used to be hired out daily all year round. They were hired out by different groups all year round and they had been an asset to Blyth Town Council for many years.

The huts were built for the people of Blyth but there were now only 6 allocated to a daily rental and others were allocated to yearly rentals which made it difficult for people to book them. It was felt that they should be allowed to be booked all year round. It was hoped that Officers would look into it more and respond.

Chair _____

Date _____