

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 16 November 2022 at 4:00 pm** in **Ashington JW Rugby Football Club Ltd, Ellington Terrace, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8TP.**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor L Grimshaw (Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

C Ball  
D Carr  
B Gallacher  
C Humphrey  
J Lang  
K Nisbet

K Parry  
M Richardson  
E Simpson  
A Wallace  
A Watson

#### **OFFICERS**

M Carle  
N Dawson  
  
J Driscoll  
  
R Greally  
  
A Peaden  
J Robertson  
  
R Thomas  
  
N Walsh  
R Wealleans

Lead Highways Manager  
Countryside and Green Spaces  
Manager  
North of Tyne Combined Authority  
Mayor  
Assistant Democratic Services  
Officer  
Library Service Manager  
Principal Environmental Enforcement  
Officer  
Director of Business Development  
(Northumberland National Park)  
Service Director  
Neighbourhood Services Area  
Manager

2 Members of the public were in attendance

## **01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors W Ploszaj and M Purvis

## **03 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council meeting held on Wednesday 16 November 2022, as circulated, be a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## **04 PETITIONS**

### **(b) (i) Petition regarding South Beach Library**

Mr Cessford was introduced to committee to introduce his petition:

Firstly, he thanked the committee for allowing him to explain why the return of the library service to the South Beach area of Blyth was vital for the wellbeing of the area.

The South Beach area had developed into one of the largest housing estates in Northumberland. As the demographic of the area changed the requirement of services and facilities must also evolve. At the time there were no facilities available in the area during daylight hours when both the older generation and the new younger generation (grandchildren) could meet. The reopening of the library would have allowed access to learning and pleasure for these groups. Blyth Central Library offered excellent services for Blyth who lived within walking distance or areas that were serviced with regular public transport, but parts of South Beach were not. If the library were reopened it would have allowed the new younger generation to access the wonderful world of literature and would have provided a safe and warm space where the older generation could have met to socialise and be involved in the services provided by libraries, thereby support would be provided to combat one of the older generation's major problems, that of loneliness.

The petition provided a snapshot of South Beach as only a small percentage of the area was canvassed. However the petition showed there was a wish for the library to reopen as well as a requirement of a facility for people to socialise.

Since handing in the petition Mr Cessford and friends had been in contact with various Councillors and portfolio holders. They had met N Walsh and A Peaden and through discussions it was felt that there was a willingness to open South Beach Library in some capacity but it needed further backing from the Authority. The petitioners realised in the difficult financial times it was the Council's responsibility to ensure taxes were being used in the best way. Reopening the library would have outweighed the costs as it would have helped the children in

their education and reduced isolation of the elderly, which possibly would have reduced the strain on other community services provided by both Council and NHS. The petitioner therefore asked that the committee support the request and direct the Council officers to progress with the opening of the facility.

Members asked if there was a mobile library service but it was highlighted that this would not give the full facilities that had been requested.

N Walsh, service director, gave an overview of the report. He thanked the hard work of all the library staff across the thirty libraries in the County especially during the Covid pandemic where they stood up to the challenges they faced. He thanked the petitioners for submitting the petition and bringing it to the attention of the Authority. It was hoped that the situation in South Beach was going to be a positive one. The petitioner had met with Council colleagues at the site and discussed the possibilities. Strategically there were five core libraries in the County and then there were further facilities around the County that enhanced these services.

Officers shared the same ambition as the petitioners and hoped to widen library services at South Beach. It was understood that the four hours a week was not sufficient. There was a hope a partnership could be brokered with local shareholders to increase the hours and services provided.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:

- South Beach was one of the most expanded estates in Blyth so there was a hope that facilities and services could be reinstated.
- Officers confirmed that the facility would not be fully ran by volunteers. There would be opportunities for volunteers to assist but the volunteers must be suitable. There was hope that volunteers would be able to use their own skills and knowledge to help increase the offer in the library for example story telling.
- Members suggested that if funding was required to contact them to see if they were able to help through small schemes.
- There was an ambition to get the service up and running as soon as possible however there was a lot of work needed including legal considerations which meant officers were unable to confirm a timeline for the service.

**RESOLVED** members agreed the recommendations in the report.

#### **b(ii) Petition requesting a dog ban on the playing fields at Hirst Park, Ashington**

N. Dawson, Countryside and Green Spaces manager introduced the report which gave an update to members. The officer had sought fresh advice from public protection and legal services since the report brought to committee in May. It was confirmed that there was a public space protection order (PSPO) in place in the area. One of the considerations in the report for members to consider was whether to carry out a six-month evidence gathering survey to determine whether or not a new PSPO in the area was necessary and proportionate.

The report outlined data showing the extent of the dog fouling by recording weekly figures provided by the Ashington Town Football Club it showed on average there were 65 incidents of fouling a week. It also provided information on complaints received and fixed penalty notices issued between 2018-2022, it showed that no complaints or fixed penalty notices had been issued in 2021 or 2022.

The officer had confirmed they had looked options including closing the gates of Hirst Park but after seeking legal advice it was confirmed that this would be in contradiction to the covenant in the site's deed. It was also in contrary to the practice of the Council in other public spaces. Officers confirmed that there were bans in enclosed children's play area (where a dog ban already applied under the County's current PSPO) but this would not apply to the area containing the football pitches at Hirst Park.

Another option was to carry out the evidence gathering survey to determine whether an application of PSPO to ban dogs from the area enclosing the playing pitches at Hirst Park was evidenced as necessary. The officer confirmed that there would have to be a strong amount of supportive evidence for a PSPO to be put in place. The argument would have to be robust to withstand objections from dog charities.

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

- Members raised concerns that this was a County wide issue that should be addressed. Officers acknowledged that football pitches across the county faced a similar issue.
- It was confirmed that there had been no reports of dog fouling reported to public protection. Patrols had been carried out in the area and in the last two years no fixed penalty notices had been issued. Officers confirmed that if there had been fouling reported in the area more patrols would have been focused on Hirst Park. There was a hope that public would report fouling and include information regarding times and dates to create a pattern of behaviour.
- Although there had been no official reports of dog fouling to public protection it was obvious from the data collected that there was a large amount of dog fouling happening on the playing fields.
- Officers confirmed it could be a possibility for the Town Council to create a fresh by-law on the area however it was highlighted that by-laws still required enforcement officers to enforce it.
- Officers confirmed that fixed penalty notices could be increased but that decision would have to be agreed by Cabinet.
- Members questioned whether traffic enforcement officers were trained to give out fixed penalty notices for fouling. The officers could not confirm this but would raise it within the service.
- Officers confirmed that the Authority would not accept hoarding or fencing off the area in question.
- The members raised concerns that the other recommendations would skew the results of the evidence gathering survey. Therefore, it was

agreed that the proposed signage and events be postponed until after the survey has concluded.

**RESOLVED** members agreed to the recommendations under the condition that recommendations d) and e) do not take place whilst the six-month evidence gathering survey is taking place.

## **06 NORTH OF TYNE MAYOR**

J. Driscoll, North of Tyne Combined Authority Mayor, gave an update to committee. He outlined the work that the combined authority had undertaken. The role of the Mayor was not to duplicate the work of the County Council. The mayoral leadership allowed him to represent the area regionally and nationally.

There was a target to create 10,000 jobs in the region over the next 30 years. The job had to be fulltime for one year and a direct result of investment to count towards the target. To date the region had over 4,000 jobs created which was well above the target. The mayor was working to develop skilled workers in the region as this had been identified as one of the major barriers to social problems and businesses. He wanted to ensure that those most in need had access to the help.

The Mayor confirmed that transport was not part of the devolution plan however the Mayor had helped where possible with transport issues in the region namely the Northumberland Line. He highlighted the importance of continuing to develop the area and to ensure there was adequate infrastructure around the Northumberland Line including skilled jobs and quality housing. It was highlighted that the region was the number one area for inward investment in the country with 11 big digital companies set to invest in the area.

He highlighted the work in response to the cost-of-living crisis and assured members they were making good progress. There was a child poverty prevention programme across the schools. This included school uniform support and helping with after school activities. The Mayor highlighted the importance of preserving the dignity of those being helped.

The Mayor wanted to highlight to members the crowd funding scheme that was running. It allowed communities to bring projects forward and if they received sufficient support from the community then the North of Tyne Mayor scheme would help give financial support. It was hoped that members would spread the word throughout their communities to raise awareness of the scheme.

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

- Members raised concerns around Towns having to bid against each other for funding and sought for a fairer system.
- Apprenticeships were meant to lead to skilled workers in skilled jobs. It was important to ensure the scheme maintained its purpose. The Mayor confirmed he had lobbied with employers to ensure they pay the real living

wage to apprentices. It was acknowledged that a kick starter programme had been introduced but there was a low uptake. Market conditions have changed over the years and it was important that employers adapted to this.

- The Mayor confirmed that he had spoken to ministers in regard to all children receiving free school meals and agreed that by giving them to all it would reduce administration costs and preserve dignity to those who needed them.
- The objective of the North of Tyne Mayor was to eradicate poverty in the region. More devolution was needed as skills programs could be tailored to suit the industry of the area. This would help with wealth generation in the area. He highlighted a program that the Combined Authority ran which was gave help to foodbanks by providing food. He stressed the point that it was important to be aware of volunteer burnout in these sectors as the workload had dramatically increased.

**RESOLVED** members thanked the Mayor for his update and noted the information.

## **06 NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK**

R. Thomas, Director of Business Development for Northumberland National Park, gave an overview to committee. Northumberland National Park was formed in 1949 as part of the post war legislation. It became a designated area for everybody to enjoy. There was 400 square miles of the park and it was the least populated park in the country. Northumberland National Park had the cleanest rivers and the darkest skies in the country too.

After a successful consultation with shareholders and members of the public the new management plan was signed off. The plan had several main objectives; nature recovery, climate change, cultural heritage, thriving and a welcoming park for all. The park had a farming team who worked with farmers to ensure they access funding. There was a Hadrian's Wall recovering nature project which looked at the enhancement of nature first in the landscape.

The Sill was the new visitor attraction which opened in 2017. The target for visitors was 100,000 a year. Since 2017 there had been 418,000 visitors, the highest percentage of visitors were from Northumberland. The centre had 50,000 public engagements where people visited to learn about the park. There were 34,000 educational experiences where schools signed up to visits these were currently oversubscribed.

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

- There was a Nature First project taking place in Hepple which was a rewilding project. Unfortunately, Northumberland National Park do not own enough of the land within the park to lead a rewilding project.
- It was confirmed that there was enough tourism in Northumberland and although there was a concern about over tourism members were assured

that there was room to grow within the area. It was important to put things in place to spread the load of tourism and highlight new areas of interests.

- Northumberland National Park had dedicated woodland officers who were providing advice and mapping opportunities. It was important that the right type tree was placed in the right area. The park was aware of the Ash dieback problems.
- It was acknowledged that transport to The Sill could be an issue for certain people. There was a bus route AD122 which went from Hexham to Haltwhistle and stopped at The Sill. There were also travel grants available that could help schools.

**RESOLVED** the members noted the information provided.

## **05 LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES**

R. Wealleans, Neighbourhood Service Area manager, gave the following overview:-

### **Grass Cutting:**

- Grass cutting has now ended for the year, the teams have moved to winter works tasks
- Finished the season on 15/16 cuts in the Blyth area and 11/12 in the Stakeford area
- The core cuts target of 10~12 cuts were achieved despite a short suspension due to very dry conditions.

### **Weeds:**

We are now in the winter works season so we will take the opportunity to review the effectiveness of this years weed control programme.

- The Hirst area was initially sprayed in March with a solution of No-Mix this acted as a barrier which subdued the growth for a period of time, we then carried out our normal 2 sprays over the summer.
- We have also trialled an acidic based weed killer with good results primarily within parks and Playground areas this is something to look at for the coming season.
- Weed ripping has taken place in some areas throughout the Blyth and Stakeford depots areas
- With the mild weather we are still seeing some weed growth carrying on within all areas and will take action when required and resources permit

### **Street Sweeping:**

- We are currently working on leaf hotspot areas to prevent localised flooding.
- Please bring any areas in need of sweeping to our attention.

### **Winter Works**

- Our winter works programme has started, please come forward with any requests at your earliest convenience (in some areas Cllr walkabouts and

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meetings have taken place and if requested I can arrange to meet councillors to check their areas of concern. – we will work through lists agreed with Cllrs during recent walkabouts).

- As always, we will carry out core works first then move onto our prioritised list of requests and make every attempt to see what we can get through.

## **Waste Services**

- Other than a few minor vehicle breakdowns, staffing shortages, Residual, Recycling and Garden waste collection services are all operating well.
- Garden Waste collections will come to an end soon - ends November/December.
- Income from garden waste exceeded target but demand for the service is slowing.
- Income from commercial waste and bulk collections are exceeding targets to date.
- Teams will continue to review existing collection rounds in order to cope with ongoing housing growth as well as continued growth in take up of the garden waste service.

## **Other information to make the LAC aware of**

- The kerbside glass recycling scheme trial continues and is allowing us to gather more data on volumes collected, servicing efficiency and participation rates etc.
- A food waste trial is due to start later this month.
- This will operate from the Morpeth Depot and will be a weekly kerbside collection [servicing a small caddy rather than a wheelie bin]
- A specialist vehicle is being brought in for the trial
- The trial is similar to the glass trial – it will be used to gather important information of public engagement, participation and yields
- A compact trial was deliberately designed to keep costs as low as possible while still including the required demographic groups for essential data gathering
- Our NEAT teams attended all the usual war memorial locations to bring them up to the highest standard possible for the remembrance services.

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

- Officers confirmed that the food waste trial was following the glass trial area. Officers would come back to members with feedback from residents.
- It was confirmed that urgent road signs were being produced within 3-4 days.
- Members thanked the team for their work on Remembrance Sunday and hoped the Christmas light switch on would be as much of a success.
- Officers confirmed that if there were raised ironworks on the street then the street was most likely not adopted by the Authority yet. They confirmed they would look into streets that had been identified by members.
- Members asked if there was a possibility to get manpower to help clear leaves as well as the machines. It was also asked that the service map the



areas where there was excess leaf clearing so that it could be tackled proactively.

- Officers confirmed that residents could share bins with mutual agreement.

M. Carle, Highways Delivery 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 Southeast area.

Gully emptier is fully deployed dealing with reported issues and cyclic maintenance.

### **Larger Tarmac Patching**

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

- Third Avenue, Blyth
- Belsay Court, Blyth
- Axwell Drive, Blyth
- Keilder Close, Blyth
- Fifth Avenue, Ashington (NCC1)

### **Drainage Improvements:**

Drainage Improvements have been carried out in the following areas:

- Additional Gully Tanker carrying out routine and reactive drain clearing.
- Havelock Street, Blyth

### **LTP - Carriageway Resurfacing**

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

- 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Ashington
- Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin
- Alexandra Road, Ashington
- Renwick Road, Blyth

### **Regeneration Scheme**

- Bowes Street, Blyth – Started Monday 10/01/22 (48 Weeks). Phase 2 Complete, works progressing on Phase 3.
- Station Road, Ashington was completed (Road Marking) 12<sup>th</sup> November 22, It has been received well received.

A winter briefing note (attached with minutes) was circulated to members and any questions were to be raised with officers.

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

- Officers assured members that if they wanted a walk around their area to identify areas of concern this could be accommodated.
- Members raised concerns over communications regarding areas that were being resurfaced. Officers confirmed that leaflet drops would have been carried out in the area as well as informing the Town Council clerk.
- It was confirmed that the pothole machine was running in the South East area and the productivity was increasing. There were some minor issues to begin with however it was now running smoothly. A second driver was being trained on the machine.
- Officers confirmed that grit bins were scored throughout the area and those that need replaced would be. It was confirmed that no grit bin would be removed without a new one replacing it. Officers confirmed that members could be informed of where replacements were taking place.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **07 LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME**

Members asked that a representative from the Authority come to committee to speak on tourism in the area and how it is being promoted.

There was also a request that someone from the administration attend the next meeting to provide an update on the budget and explain the financial situation.

There was a request that if there was no planning items for the next planning meeting that members receive planning training to understand the planning process.

**RESOLVED** Members noted the requests and the plan.

## **08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at 4.00 p.m. (planning only).

**Chair** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_