

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 11 January 2023 at 5:00 pm** in **Coquet Suite, Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, NE64**

PRESENT

Councillor L Grimshaw (Chair)

MEMBERS

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

K Parry
W Ploszaj
M Purvis
M Richardson
E Simpson
A Wallace
A Watson

OFFICERS

N Best
M Carle
R Greally

R Wealleans

Assistant County Archaeologist
Lead Highways Manager
Assistant Democratic Services
Officer
Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager

OTHER COUNCILLORS

R Wearmouth

Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder
for Corporate Services

1 Member of the press was in attendance

01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Jeff Reid

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 LOCAL SERVICE ISSUES

M Carle, lead highways manager, gave an update to committee members regarding the work carried out by the highways team:-

All Highways Inspectors and maintenance crews continued to work inspecting, fixing carriageway defects, making repairs and making safe category one defects across the Southeast area.

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

Larger Tarmac Patching

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

- Stanton Avenue, Blyth
- Thorp Close, Blyth
- Druridge Drive, Blyth
- Mermaid Carpark, Blyth
- Ariel Street, Ashington
- Jubilee Estate, Ashington
- Stanley Street, Blyth
- Percy Street, Blyth
- Beal Close, Blyth
- Bywell Road, Ashington

Drainage Improvements:

Drainage Improvements have been carried out in the following areas:

- Furnace Road, Blyth
- Carlton Avenue, Blyth

LTP - Carriageway Resurfacing

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

- Station Road, Ashington (Parking Bays)

Regeneration Scheme

- Bowes Street, Blyth – Started Monday 10/01/22 (48 Weeks). Phase 2 Completed, works were progressing on Phase 3.

Winter Maintenance

Since the cold snap during the early to midpart of December winter had quietened down. There was still have half of the Winter season ahead. These were often the harshest few months. They were currently working with suppliers to carry out a mid-season salt restock of 10,000 Tonnes. This restock with the existing 6000 Tonne strategic store at Powburn should give the service more than sufficient levels to see it out till the end of the winter season.

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

- Members thanked the service for all their hard work during the recent adverse weather.
- Members were advised that there was a winter services policy which was a robust policy and outlined what the service role and responsibility was in winter weather.
- It was confirmed that communications on social were being looked into. Members requested that communications be put out to residents to advise on how to use grit bins responsibly.
- It was acknowledged that due to the cold weather there was an increased chance of freeze thaw action taking place on roads which could create more potholes. Members were advised that potholes should be reported through the reporting system so they can be logged.
- Members were reminded that category 1 potholes that were reported had to be fixed within 24 hours. This could be temporary and the Council would return to permanently fix them at a later date.
- Snow wardens were still being recruited if applicants had not heard from the Council they were advised to contact Nicola Wardle.

R. Welleans, Neighbourhood Service Area Manager, gave an update to committee regarding the work carried out by neighbourhood services:-

Waste Service

- Refuse collection service worked well over Christmas period.
 - Very few complaints received from residents.

- Councillors may have been aware that we had an issue with incorrect collection dates being published in the Northumberland News publication.
- Staff worked with communications and staff from other parts of the organisation to leaflet drop those households which were affected.
- Targeted social media was also used to provide the correct information to those affected.
- Around a 95% presentation on all days (suggesting the comms campaign was successful).
- Dedicated refuse staff collected around 750 tonnes of residual waste over Christmas/New Year period. 90 Tonne on average more than two previous residual weeks collections

Grounds Maintenance

- The service were currently working through the winter works programme and were confident all outstanding works would be completed.
- Progress through the programme had been impacted by:
 - Deployment to winter gritting services in support of Highways colleagues (2 week)
 - Deployment to the leaflet drop informing residents of correct waste collection days over the festive period (up to a week)
- Last chance to schedule any work requests you might have.
 - i.e. Hedges and shrubs.
- Leaf clearance was close to being completed - if Councillors had any areas of concern, they were to inform the service.
- The service were starting the process of recruiting seasonal staff for the coming summer period in the near future.

Street Cleansing

- Business as usual.

Glass trial update:

- The trial continued as per the last update in November.
- This allowed the service to establish if this level of service met the needs of residents while delivering savings expected.
- The effectiveness of this change will be closely monitored.
- There was the option to revert to a 4 – week collection frequency if necessary.
- The extended frequency of collections was a key part of the trial as when the service was planning for the future they needed to be able to design a service that provided good value for money.

Food trial update:

- Trial started w/c 21st November
- 10 - month trial
- Weekly collection
- Approx 4,800 properties in the trial areas
- Trial operated from one depot only - Morpeth (*due to cost of dedicated vehicle and staffing*)
- Areas are:

- Morpeth (Loansdean),
- Bedlington,
- Pegswood
- Lancaster Park in Morpeth, Hebron, Longhirst and Ulgham
- During the trial, set out rates and average weights will be monitored
- Current set out rates vary between areas (Highest was 57% - Lowest was 40%)
- A report on the findings of the trial will be provided for members at the end of the 10 - month period.

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

- Members were assured that the country walk planning work was continuing.
- Officers would look into the progress of signage regarding the communal bins.
- Members questioned whether staff from within the Council could be utilised for the seasonal staff positions.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

06 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AT SOUTH NEWSHAM FARM

Nick Best, Assistant County Archaeologist, gave a presentation to committee (attached with minutes).

It was explained that the Council archaeologists advise colleagues in the Planning Service to ensure that planning decisions are informed by an understanding of any archaeology that may be on site. Planning applications were screened by the service and advice was given to planning officers where needed.

Where appropriate, planning conditions can be used to ensure that the results of archaeological work undertaken as part of the planning process are accessible to the general public and local communities. This process also serves as a 'de-risking exercise' to ensure that development is not delayed by 'unexpected' discoveries and that archaeological work, if required, can be accommodated as part of a development programme.

At Newsham (and along the line as a whole), early engagement between NCC Archaeology and the NL consultant team was undertaken from 2020. An assessment programme was agreed with NCC Archaeology and managed on site by the NL Team's heritage consultants. This consisted of desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and trial trenching.

The car park and platform were proposed on the site of a cropmark feature previously recorded via aerial photography. This was believed to be the site of a prehistoric enclosure but had not been subject to archaeological investigation. Trial trenching confirmed that this was a substantial ditched enclosure, almost certainly an enclosed settlement or farmstead of Iron Age or Romano-British date.

The main phase of archaeological excavation focussed on the prehistoric settlement site but also recorded evidence of medieval and later agriculture and activity in the modern period, including two timber-lined pits. Initially, the first pit was identified as being of modern date due to the obviously sawn and tarred timber used in its construction. A second identified pit was initially not so obviously modern in character. Further investigation to a greater depth (where the timbers were better preserved) showed that this structure was also formed of swan timbers. A provisional analysis suggested the timbers were of pine, potentially originating from the Baltic regions and therefore likely to have been imported in the post-medieval or modern period. The pits may have been associated with mining prospection or perhaps constructed as a temporary water source. Therefore, these features were not prehistoric but still of local interest.

An interim report was available now with a full report due in April 2023.

In partnership with the NL Team, the service contributed to a number of site open days. These included engagement with Members and members of the local community and publicity through BBC Look North. A community event held in October 2022 at Newsham attracted over one hundred local children and adults.

NCC Archaeology are currently in discussions with the NL Team and their archaeological consultants regarding the scope of future community events.

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

- Members thanked Nick for the informative presentation and found it of great interest.
- Members were assured that most developers were accommodating if any finds were discovered.
- Typically, less than 1% of planning applications require archaeological work.
- Archaeological assessment (at planning application stage) is undertaken to identify sites which may retain archaeological remains which might prejudice their development. In practice, it is very very rare for archaeology to 'prevent' development. Rather, development proposals can be amended to accommodate sensitive archaeology or programmed to allow archeological work to be undertaken in advance of construction.
- The archaeologists were under the planning service and it was not in their remit to curate heritage sites however members were assured that the request for a heritage site at Bedlington Station would be forwarded on.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

06 BUDGET 2023-24 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Councillor R Wearmouth, Deputy Leader, gave a presentation (attached with minutes). It gave an overview of 2022 and the events that had taking place. The

presentation highlighted the three top priorities of the Authority: tackling inequality, value for money services and delivering growth and jobs.

Investments were planned to help tackle inequality with £1m Public Health funding planned to be invested into a poverty and hardship plan. The Authority's Capital Programme outlined over £806 million investment for 2022-26. The Borderlands Partnership was receiving £452 million of fresh investment to the Borderlands area. The Council were investing in a number of schools and partnerships as well as further education campuses to improve education and skills facilities in the County.

The presentation welcomed the provisional financial settlement that had been received from Central Government. The Government would also be given the Authority more powers to address issues faced by the County such as vacant and second homes. The budget would focus on the three priorities whilst continuing to look after residents in most need. It would deliver the things that were most important to residents such as free car parks in town centres. The budget would deliver efficiencies which included a new management structure. Investments would be made in future growth, jobs and prosperity across the County. The presentation also highlighted the impact of inflationary pressures on the setting of the budget.

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

- Members were reminded they would be invited to the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC meeting to scrutinize the budget.
- Members were assured that to achieve the new management structure wanted some roles would become no longer needed. It was hoped that the management structure would be achieved through voluntary redundancies.
- Council Tax setting would take place in the budget and members were assured that the administration was aware of the financial pressures on households.
- Members noted that there was maintenance needed on Council properties which was reflected in the rent increase. It was also noted that a significant proportion of tenants received support through the benefit system.
- Members noted that there had been an increase in special educational need children which added pressure to schools. The County had a large rural geography. Work was being undertaken to ensure the school transport service was being delivered effectively. It was acknowledged that communities grow at different rates and members were assured that children would always be able to receive a school place.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

07 LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

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Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council, 11 January 2023

RESOLVED Members noted the plan.

08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 15th February at 4.00 p.m.

Chair _____

Date _____