

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

TYNEDALE LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Tynedale Local Area Council** held at Hexham House, Gilesgate, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3NH on Tuesday, 12 September 2023 at 4.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor SH Fairless-Aitken
(Vice-Chair (Planning), in the Chair)

MEMBERS

A Dale
I Hutchinson
N Morphet

N Oliver
A Sharp
G Stewart

OFFICERS

D Hunt

A Olive
M Robbins
N Turnbull

Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager
Highways Delivery Area Manager
Strategic Estates Manager
Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

9 members of the public.

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cessford, Horncastle, Riddle, Scott and Waddell.

20. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meeting of the Tynedale Local Area Council, held on 11 July 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

LOCAL AREA COUNCIL BUSINESS

21. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Ch.'s Initials.....

Wendy Breach, Hexham Civic Society, asked if the County Council had designs for how the refurbished Shambles would be protected from poor drivers.

Mike Robbins, Strategic Estates Manager, reported that a project to safeguard the historic Shambles Market structure in Hexham Town Centre was currently in development following allocation of funding by the County Council.

The project brief identified safety measures to protect the grade II listed building from potential vehicle impact so it could continue to be a prominent feature in the town and could be used for markets and events with parking provision in the vicinity.

An application for Listed Building Consent would be submitted in the coming months and the Civic Society, alongside any other stakeholders, would have an opportunity to make comment upon the proposed scheme. At that stage the Council would be in a position to confirm more detailed timescales for the project's delivery.

As a follow-up question, Wendy Breach asked why priority was been given to highways and not heritage.

The Strategic Estates Officer commented that the planning process welcomed all views. The proposed scheme was not likely to replicate exactly what was in place now. They hoped to find a balance between protecting the building whilst providing some car parking spaces.

22. PETITIONS

This item was to:

a) Receive any new petitions:

There were none.

b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:

i) The Falcon Centre Wylam

The Local Area Committee were requested to acknowledge the petition and receive an update on progress made in addressing the issues raised regarding the Falcon Centre being used as a community hub and requested sympathetic consideration of a future application for a community asset transfer. (A copy of the report enclosed with the signed minutes).

Steve Grinter, Chairman of the Falcon Centre Action Group (FCAG), was in attendance with other members and supporters of the FCAG. He explained that the group had been working for three years to secure the Falcon Centre as a Community Hub with a vision for the development of activities and initiatives to complement existing community services and address new social concerns and interests. A survey had been distributed to 960

households in Wylam. 170 completed forms had been returned with strong support for the suggested priorities previously identified as well as a wide range of additional ideas and offers of help and support. Identified priorities included:

- To maintain and develop library services in cooperation with NCC library services. Discussions had been held with the Head of Library Services and the local librarian. They planned to develop a team of volunteers to supplement and enhance the current library offer by offering increased opening hours and services beyond the current 12 hours per week, such as book groups and continuing education classes.
- In partnership with Wylam Parish Council to further develop the Railway Museum, engage with local historians to provide space for local archives to be stored and accessed. To develop partnerships with organisations including the National Trust with a view to linking with Stephenson's Cottage.
- To provide a focus for Health and Well-Being. Services Provision and initiatives would include cooperation and partnership with new NHS Integrated Care Services and County Wide developments relating to Social Prescribing and community-based health and well-being services. The Action Group was aware of the County Council's aim to be a Marmot Authority and how activities and initiatives of the Falcon Centre could support the County Council's ambition.
- The Falcon Centre's vision embraced cooperating with organisations and agencies addressing employment and work interests and concerns. This would support Community Wealth Building, an interest of the County Council and its partnership with the North East Regional Authorities.
- A local meeting place and information point to provide a community café to serve users of the centre. To provide a focus for refreshment and information for tourists especially those using nearby popular walking routes. To provide a facility for cyclists including cycle repairs and cycle proficiency training.

The above demonstrated that the FCAG was ambitious. They appreciated that not all of the activities could be implemented in the short term and a phased approach would be required. They planned to conduct a feasibility study, linked to the development of a business plan, to help decide the order activities and programmes should be implemented.

They strongly believed that the plans fitted well with the priorities identified by the County Council, NHS and Health and Well-Being services. Their plans were supported by Wylam Parish Council. Time and funds were needed to develop their application for a Community Asset Transfer. Progress had been held back for over 2 years with lack of funding. They had raised over £2,000 of the £26,278 required to undertake necessary surveys and other work to complete the feasibility study and business plan.

They hoped the committee would support the group to secure the future of the Falcon Centre including provision of financial support for the feasibility study and business plan. He stated that they had not received any funding from the Council.

Mike Robbins, Strategic Estates Officer, confirmed that a number of the Council departments, including strategic estates, libraries and regeneration, had been working with the FCAG since 2020. The building was not in a good condition, was deteriorating and was not well used. It was now only occupied by the library and museum, as toddler groups had gone elsewhere.

He stated that there had been little progress in the last three years. He had not been given the information regarding the costs for the feasibility study and business plan although Mr. Grinter confirmed during the discussion at the meeting that he would provide this data. Officers were happy to accept the petition and would continue to work with the FCAG but needed to consider all options for the building.

In answer to questions from members, it was confirmed that:

- Library services would continue to be provided in Wylam but this might be from another building.
- Whilst the current building had character, the building was not fit for purpose and required substantial investment.
- All options would be considered including possible demolition and rebuilding.
- The perception of officers was that there had been little progress in the previous 3-year period.
- The effect of the FCAG's proposals on other buildings and services within the village and future sustainability would need to be considered.

A member asked if a further report could be considered by the Local Area Committee before a report was considered by Cabinet or a decision taken on the future of the building.

Mr Grinter reported that a number of applications had been made for funding of the feasibility study and decisions were awaited. A previous application for Council funding for the feasibility study had been declined as it had not been met the grant criteria.

RESOLVED that:

1. The petition requesting support for the efforts of the Falcon Centre Action Group (FCAG) to secure the future of the Falcon Centre as a community hub, be received.
2. The potential of FCAG to take on the Falcon Centre as a building to develop as a community hub, be noted.
3. The issues raised in the petition by Wylam residents, their wish to see FCAG supported in their work to take on and develop the Falcon Centre as a community hub, be noted.
4. The ongoing work of NCC staff to support the FCAG, be noted.
5. The commitment that a library offer will be maintained within Wylam, be noted.

6. Given the time that the FCAG have already had to develop a proposal, in the best interests of the service and the building, other options for the future use of the building, in parallel with any proposal FCAG put forward, should be explored.

c) To consider updates on petitions previously considered:

Traffic safety at Woodlands Hexham – an update was to be presented to the meeting of the Tynedale Local Area Committee in November 2023.

Request to impose a speed limit on a section of the C234 between Warden Bridge and Fourstones petition – a member enquired whether an update was available. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to check.

23. LOCAL SERVICES UPDATE

Members received the following updates from the Area Managers from Neighbourhood Services and Technical Services:

Technical Services:

- Highways inspections were up to date and being carried out in accordance with the Council's statutory duty with actionable defects being repaired.
- The 3-month pothole trial of repairing category 2 defects was coming to an end. The purpose of the trial was to improve the condition and quality of the road surface. In the Tynedale area, work under the trial had been carried out on 17 different carriageways. In total nearly 1,700 metres² of permanent patching had been undertaken.
- Following heavy rain at the weekend, a number of properties had flooded due to the volume of water. Teams were assisting with clean up and looking at the drainage in those areas.
- The gulley wagon would be diverted to locations which had flooded for the next 7-10 days. The wagon had recently been working in the North Tyne valley to carry out cleansing in the villages within 30mph zones. In the previous 2 weeks, it had mainly been undertaking reactive cleansing as well as cleansing within LTP Schemes. Traffic management would be needed when it focused on B classified roads.
- The cost of works for all LTP schemes had been calculated with a number of projects having been completed. An additional £3.8 million of funding from government had enabled a number of additional projects to be carried out including several schemes in the Tynedale area. Footway improvements and road safety schemes were also being carried out with a summary given projects scheduled, underway or completed.
- Preparation for winter services work had commenced with salt bins being replenished within the next few weeks.

In answer to questions from members, it was confirmed that:

- Adoption of highways in Woodlands Rise would be followed up.

- Footway work in Hexham Town Centre was progressing with the one-way system working well. Work on the opposite footway was scheduled to commence in January.
- The source of blocked drains in Oakland car park in Prudhoe was being investigated.
- A JCB and team had concentrated on ditches in areas of high ground in the Tynedale area for the previous 2 years. Councillors concerned about specific locations were requested to email these to the Highways Area Manager so they could be programmed into the schedule to optimise use of the resource.

Councillors Sharp, Dale and Oliver expressed their appreciation for work undertaken in their wards.

Neighbourhood Services:

- There had been some challenging periods of wet weather during the summer which had meant that grass cutting had been suspended in some areas due to concerns regarding the possibility of damage given ground conditions. This had led to long grass and more arisings. It was expected that the minimum required number of cuts (10-13) was still expected to be achieved with 8 cuts having been carried out so far. Staffing issues had also caused difficulties with 4 members of staff on temporary contracts leaving for permanent employment elsewhere.
- A delay on verge grass cutting had arisen due to a contractor withdrawing at short notice and until a replacement had been appointed. Areas which had been left long to encourage wildflowers and a more diverse range of flora as part of an environmental project would be cut later in the season with a machine and flail to collect arisings.
- Wet and windy weather had hindered the team's ability to treat weeds. Any areas of concern should be reported as soon as possible as further treatment could only be undertaken within the next 6-8 week period.
- Annual winter maintenance schedules were due to commence at the end of October. Members were requested to send an email with details of any areas requiring attention.
- The normal schedule for street sweeping would continue for approximately the next month until it was required to focus on leaf hotspots. Any areas of concern should be brought to the area manager's attention. Teams were currently undertaking reactive work in the areas which had been flooded at the weekend.
- Over 1,000 issues had been reported via Fix My Street which had been launched in May 2023.
- Residual, Recycling and Garden waste collection services were all operating well with a few minor vehicle breakdowns or staffing shortages. These were notified to affected ward councillors. Income from garden waste had exceeded the target for the year. Whilst no further significant changes to collection rounds were expected, they were kept under review to ensure the service was as efficient and effective as possible to cope with ongoing housing growth and the increasing demand for garden waste collection services in some areas. Additional resource was being made available for the collection of bulky waste. The collection of domestic

waste tonnages also remained higher than normal with various operational adjustments made to cope with the demand.

In answer to questions from and issues raised by members, it was confirmed that:

- The flail machinery could only be used in large flat areas and where there was a nearby area which could be used to tip arisings. It was requested that enquiries for the use of the equipment be emailed after the meeting.
- A similar level of resource had been in place to deal with weeds for the previous 5 years. They could not be treated during wet or windy weather. Conditions had been particularly wet since the end of June which had prevented treatment. Unfortunately, the Council did not have sufficient resources to deploy staff for manual extraction.
- There was 1 HGV road sweeper and 1 5 tonne sweeper for use across the Tynedale area. An arrangement with Hexham Town Council saw use of an additional pavement sweeper in the town. The vehicles followed a programme which attempted to sweep streets 4 times each year. This programme was suspended in the autumn for leaf clearance, during severe winter weather and when any reactive work was required.

The Chair thanked all staff who had been out working in the recent bad weather. Training and a more detailed update on the Fix My Street system was expected in the next couple of months.

The Chair and members thanked the Neighbourhood Services Area Manager for his update and work undertaken in their wards. The Chair reminded members to contact officers by email if they needed to report any issues of concern.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

24. THE TANGA CLUB

Katherine Miller, Chair of Trustees, and Rachael Sanderson, Project Manager, were in attendance to give an overview and raise awareness of the work of the charity. (A copy of the presentation was enclosed with the signed minutes).

Katherine Miller explained that the charity had been started in November 2019 by herself and 5 other parents as a place where their children could mix regardless of whether they had special educational needs, disabilities or other vulnerabilities. She had wanted somewhere to take her son who had autism and ADHD acquired from a brain injury. It was a safe place where children with additional needs and their families and friends could meet. Within a few weeks more than 50 children and their families had started attending sessions. Participants ranged from babies and young children up to the age of 25.

Children were now referred to them by the NHS, social care, schools and by word of mouth. The charity now had more than 400 members with some

participants travelling for an hour to attend sessions. An official diagnosis was not required to participate although they did what they could to help ensure children were put on the correct pathway helping parents access Education, Care and Health Plans.

They provided recreational activities and activities to develop skills and support to parents and careers with information, advice and guidance.

The charity had now had 8 trustees from a diverse range of backgrounds including marketing, engineering and finance. Funding for 3 years had been received from the National Lottery which would end in April 2024. A nominal fee was charged to contribute to the costs of activities which were often heavily subsidised.

Activities during the Covid Pandemic had moved online with provision of activity bags and self-care packages.

They ran a range of activities including:

- A youth club at the Torch Centre
- Activity sessions
- Crazy creatures
- Quiet Tanga
- Day trips with transport including seasonal events such as Halloween and Christmas.
- Forest School
- Holiday for 160 people at Centre Parcs
- Parent carer support group with retreat days to allow parents a break from caring responsibilities.
- A lending library for toys and equipment which enabled parents to try high value items before deciding to buy them.

Their vision for the future included:

- Meeting the ever growing need
- Career support
- A respite retreat

They hoped to formalise arrangements within the charity and eventually employ paid members of staff; currently most activities took place with the assistance of volunteers. It would also be beneficial to have their office and activities at the same location.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that:

- They had received funding from the council for half term activities such as forest school which was a free session held once per week and included a hot meal. They had also benefitted from Community Chest funding for equipment for the office and the lending library.

- They assisted parents and carers directly rather than working with schools and SEND officers.
- They had a 100% success rate with overturning decisions for PIP and DLA appeals.
- The need for the service was rising with the numbers of children receiving various diagnoses in mainstream schools increasing.

Members of the committee expressed their admiration for the work of the charity, and several had suggestions for funding opportunities. Given that most of the work was undertaken by the parents and volunteers, it was essential that they had the right support in place for the long-term future of the charity to help families in need. It was agreed that contact details and the presentation would be circulated electronically after the meeting.

RESOLVED that information be received.

25. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

A list of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings was circulated. (A copy is enclosed with the minutes.)

Members were invited to email any requests to the Chair and / or Democratic Services Officer between meetings.

Suggestions for inclusion in the work programme:

- Go North East re bus services in the Tynedale area.
- The recent County Council report ‘Annual Portfolio Report – Improving Our Roads and Highways’.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

26. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting (planning only) would be held on Tuesday 10 October 2023.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____