

## **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 in Seaton Sluice Community Centre, Albert Road, Seaton Sluice, NE26 4QX on Wednesday 30 May 2024 at 6:00 pm.

#### **PRESENT**

M Swinburn (Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

L Bowman  
E Chicken  
W Daley  
C Dunbar  
D Ferguson

B Flux  
S Lee  
M Robinson  
C Taylor

#### **OFFICERS**

H Bowers  
J Cooper  
R Strettle

Democratic Services Officer  
Strategic Programmes Manager  
Interim Senior Regeneration Manager

#### **ALSO PRESENT**

A Mowbray

Director of Projects, Advance Northumberland

Public: 4

#### **01. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair reminded members of the pre-election period guidelines and restrictions on political publicity.

#### **02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wilczek.

### 03. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Cramlington, Bedlington & Seaton Valley Local Area Committee held on Tuesday, 19 March 2024 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and be signed by the Chair.

### 04. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A Hogg, West Bedlington Town Council asked for a response raised at the last meeting in relation to the 20 mph speeds signs on the B1331.

This would be followed up.

### 05. PETITION

#### **Call for Bedlington to receive similar levels of investment as neighbouring towns**

Adam Hogg was in attendance and spoke on behalf of Mr Fox who was unable to attend the meeting.

The key points referred to were as follows: -

- The fifth paragraph of the report in relation to NCC (Northumberland County Council) direct response - Since 2009 at the end of Wansbeck District Council, there had been repeated calls for direct interventions in the upgrade of Bedlington Town Centre from both Tesco and a petition calling for NCC to purchase the site after Tesco's closure which had been presented to the former South East Area Committee, 9 years ago by Adam Hogg.
- The new Northumberland Line including a station at Bedlington had been talked about for many years and yet Bedlington was last to see a station. There had been excuses that the station building was in the way, signalling issues, etc.
- Cycling, walking and wheeling improvements in the town had been done by Sustrans under Wansbeck District Council. NCC was mostly following the existing routes which were not in a poor state.
- Direct investment in the town was supported by a wider programme in the county featuring new schools. Residents had been told time and again that faith schools and academies were not NCC's responsibility and could not get involved, such as unsafe ways of entering schools, i.e. St Benet Biscop, so how was NCC responsible for upgrading those schools?
- Leisure facilities – NCC demolished Bedlington's last leisure facility in the form of the swimming baths at St Benet Biscop's without any discussion with the public, if there were any other leisure facilities apart from the country park, residents would be interested to know what they were.

- Most of Bedlington's population worked outside of the town due to NCC decisions, such as the closure of Bedlington Council offices which had been the biggest employer in the town, with no alternatives provided.
- All public toilets in Bedlington had been closed by NCC without discussion. Bedlington had always had free parking since the days of Bedlingtonshire Urban District Council and the library had been reduced to accommodate a chemist.
- Residents were fed up with NCC finding money for Ashington, Blyth, Ponteland, Hexham, Berwick, Morpeth, Cramlington and other areas while Bedlington only seemed to get housing estates for more people to do nothing in the town and told they were within distance of other town's provisions.
- Since 2016, NCC had gained £5,065,250 on land sales in Bedlington, yet the value of those land sales had not been reinvested in the town.
- He summarised that residents of Bedlington felt they were a forgotten town and had been for many years, which was demonstrated when Councillor Sanderson attended a meeting and faced emotional and angry residents due to the lack of investment.
- Residents were asking to be treated in the same way as other towns who seemed to ask for money and get it, it was not a matter of special treatment, but fairness.

Rob Strettle, Interim Senior Regeneration Manager and Andrew Mowbray, Director of Projects, Advance Northumberland were in attendance to respond.

Mr Strettle reported that the Petition had been considered and that the Council was investing in a range of services and improvements to the town including:

East and West Bedlington which included the new Northumberland Line, Northumberland Energy Park, Bedlington Town Centre and a number of other investments. Mr Strettle understood the frustration of the length of time taken for the line to be reopened but reiterated this is a huge and complex construction project which is well underway and will be opening with major benefits for the town.

The Northumberland Energy Park would bring thousands of jobs to the area and the new Northumberland Line station at Bedlington Station would bring passenger services back to the town. £7m investment in the new cycling, walking and wheeling corridor would improve connectivity, which would get underway late 2024. £5.8m has been invested in educational facilities in the town and leisure amenity investment includes significant improvements to country parks.

A lot of investment was taking place in south-east Northumberland overall and the Council was working with local partners to develop future projects through the Borderlands Place Programme.

Members made the following comments: -

- The response to the petition did not answer the questions raised.
- Whilst there had been some investment from NCC, the majority had come from other companies, e.g. Northumberland Energy Park

- Disappointment at the response to the petition. Questions had been raised at full Council last year and the Leader had stated that over £48m would be invested in the town. Whilst there was going to be some investment it was not a question of what was wanted, but what was needed.
- There was no infrastructure in Bedlington, e.g. doctors, dentists, and leisure centres.
- The walking and cycling route had been reduced from £9m to £7m.
- The strategic issues with the land at Bedlington station should have been picked up at the surveying stage.

In response to members' comments, Mr Strettle stated that balanced information had been put forward as to how the Council could make Bedlington a better place using both council funding and attracting investment to the town from other public, private and community sources. The Strategic Transport Scheme was required to be carried out in stages. In terms of the Northumberland Line, the queries and questions would be taken back.

A clear business plan is required to develop further projects as part of the Borderlands Initiative, and some study work would take place this year with marketing, followed by a mapping process to identify potential further projects to improve the town centre.

New opportunities could also be created with the new Combined Authority and the £10m provided from the previous Combined Authority to support the Northumberland Line Economic Corridor is a good example. These opportunities will be developed in the next phase and subject to allocations from National Government.

**RESOLVED** that the petition be received, and the Council's reply be noted.

## **07. NEWCASTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Members were informed that this item had been deferred to a future meeting.

## **08. TRANSITION FROM ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL LANDLINES**

J Cooper - Strategic Programmes Manager was in attendance to provide a presentation on the transition from analogue to digital landlines. Presentation attached to the signed minutes, uploaded to the Council's website, and share with members of the committee.

Members were informed that the switchover would only impact users with a landline telephone and for the majority of those, the transition would be straightforward. Work was underway in the telecoms industry to try and mitigate the risks with power cuts by adding resilience within the network structure by adding backup generators at relay sites or mobile phone masts.

Northumberland County Council was not directly involved in the industry led programme but had taken the decision to raise awareness with Northumberland's residents, businesses and community groups and signpost those with concerns to the relevant organisation for support. The Council did not have access to switchover plans and timescales and did not know when individuals would be switched across but had raised awareness with activities including adding flyers to council tax bills, attending Local Area Committee and Parish Council meetings when requested, engaging with stakeholders with a role in community resilience and working with BT to support regional roadshow campaign.

In response to members' comments, Mr Cooper stated that no additional costs would be involved, and equipment would be free of charge to vulnerable or land line dependent users. Existing telephone numbers could be ported across, and numbers should be able to be retained.

Maps with wards which identified vulnerable people relating to the broadband coverage were requested by Councillor Robinson.

A supplier could install additional extension lines, but hybrid telephones were now being installed however, installation could be delayed if wanted.

Mr Cooper would provide a Comms link from the website via Democratic Services for members.

Members thanked Mr Cooper for the presentation and for attending.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

## 09. OUTSIDE BODIES

Members considered the list of appointments to outside bodies for 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** that the following list of appointments be confirmed but to query whether NCC representation was required for Cramlington Community Association and Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project.

Astley Park Management Committee	L Bowman
Beaconhill Community Association	B Flux
Cramlington Community Association	M Swinburn
Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project	B Flux W Daley
East Hartford (and District) Community Association	B Flux
New Hartley Community Association	D Ferguson

**10. WORK PROGRAMME:**

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

**11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 24 July 2024.

**CHAIR** .....

**DATE** .....