

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
AHINGTON BLYTH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Ashington Blyth Local Area Committee** held at The Ashington Rugby Club, Ellington Terrace, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8TP on Wednesday, 22 January 2025 at 4.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor L Grimshaw
(Chair), in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball
E Cartie
K Parry

J Reid
A Wallace
A Watson

OFFICERS

N Snowdon
L Dixon

Principal Programme Officer
(Highways Improvement)
Assistant Democratic Services
Officer

ALSO PRESENT

K Gardner
R Wearmouth

Lead Petitioner
Deputy Leader

About 3 Members of the Public were present.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Gallacher, Nisbet, Purvis, Richardson and Simpson.

Ch.'s Initials.....

33. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Committee, held on 20 November 2024, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

34. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

35. PETITIONS

This item was to:

- **Receive any new petitions:**

None were received.

- **Consider reports on petitions previously received:**

A petition had been previously received for a request for a safe crossing on A197 between Jet Garage and KFC in Ashington.

Kelly Gardner, the lead petitioner, was invited to the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council meeting to discuss with the Committee and provided a speech.

Key information to take from Kelly’s speech was:

- The crossing in place now does not leave a lot of room for error, especially for the elder who can stand for over 15 minutes to wait for a safe time to cross.
- The petition started when a young girl was knocked over along the road in October 2024.
- The route is identified as a major route to schools and into Ashington Town Centre.
- Safety precautions were requested to be put up to create a safe crossing for pedestrians.
- The crossing was made even more dangerous with cars trying to quickly exit the Jet Garage station.

Neil Snowdon, Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) then ran members through the report which was provided in the agenda.

The e-petition had received 181 signatories as a request to make the A197 between the Jet Garage and KFC crossing safer. A scheme to improve the existing refuge was already in the current 2024-2025 Local Transport Plan Programme. The scheme had been issued to the area officer for

implementation, and works were programmed to start at the end of March 2025.

There had only been one recorded accident that had taken place along the A197 in the last 5 years. Following the incident, a PV2 survey was carried out. The data obtained highlighted that the location met the necessary criteria for a controlled crossing. To avoid any further delay, the Council had decided to proceed with the planned refuge improvements. The impact of the refuge was to be monitored and if deemed unsafe, a controlled crossing would be considered for inclusion in a future Local Transport Plan Programme alongside all other projects, subject to funding available.

Improvements had been made to the A197 puffin crossing. A raised toucan crossing had been introduced after the Council received funding from Sustrans to upgrade a nearby section of the National Cycling Network and improve walking and cycling infrastructure to encourage more active travel.

The 2024/25 Local Transport Plan was also funding improvements to the existing pedestrian refuge along the A197 such as:

- Wider and longer refuge to be provided in the centre of the A197.
- Width of dropped kerbs on either side to be doubled and associated works to both paths.
- Tactile paving to be provided to improve accessibility for visually impaired pedestrians
- Pedestrian crossing warning signs to be provided on both directions of traffic.
- New SLOW Road markings to be provided on both directions of traffic.
- Existing pedestrian guardrail on the South side of the road to be amended to provide improved accessibility for all pedestrians and wheelchair users.

Members were then invited to ask questions and discuss the petition. Key information to take was:

- The crossing is dangerous and well used at most times of the day. It would be beneficial to look at something more substantial to create a safe area for pedestrians to cross.
- It was suggested that a Toucan crossing be implemented with the use of 106 money provided by the Council's planning infrastructure to improve local infrastructure.
- The crossings are heavily used by school children therefore need to be made safe to avoid any more accidents.
- There was no crossing guard implemented. Work done in March should be adaptable for future improvements.
- Speeding cushions/bumps to be installed was suggested to slow people down or, the installation of a speed monitor on the road.

A motion was put forward by Councillor E Cartie to source 106 money from planning to install a Toucan crossing on the A197 between the Jet Garage and KFC. The motion was seconded by Councillor C Ball.

Neil Snowdon agreed to contact the planning department to request 106 money for the scheme.

AGREED that the report be noted and the motion set by Councillor E Cartie be carried.

- **To consider updates on petitions previously considered:**

None were received.

36. BUDGET 2025-26 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Councillor Wearmouth, Deputy Leader of Council, was in attendance to provide a power point presentation on the budget for 2025-26.

Members were reminded that the presentation was not a full representation of the final budget which would go to Cabinet.

The presentation outlined achievements in 2024/25 under the following headings:

- Delivering Value for Money Services with an Outstanding Children's Services Ofsted inspection, no cuts in front line services, parking in towns and investment in leisure services such as Concordia, Morpeth and Ashington Leisure Centre, libraries and amenities across the County.
- Investing in Growth and Jobs – passenger figures for the new Northumberland Line were encouraging with discussions continuing for the £10 billion data centre in Blyth with ring fenced jobs.
- Tackling Inequalities - £28 million had been set aside to support those who struggled to pay their Council Tax. A new County Partnership had been established with external bodies to work together to tackle issues regarding and health and housing.
- Dealing with potholes, weeds and placing crime markers around fly-tipping hotspots.
- Record number of schools were outstanding, including colleges such as Ashington. Continued investment went on into Northumberland schools.
- The Northumberland Line had been opened and was operational from Ashington to Newcastle.
- A £10+ billion investment has been secured at NEP3
- The Council Tax Support scheme continued
- Warmzones had been provided in co-operation with partners
- Investment and support in communities and public health continued
- Dementia-friendly housing had been built

- A county partnership had been established on health and housing
- Woodlands, parks, and greenspaces had been transformed to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II
- A historic clean up of Lynemouth Beach had commenced
- Tree planting had increased due to the 'Free Trees' project set up by the Council
- The council had invested in solar panels and affordable heating to sustain their commitment to tackling climate change.

The Financial Context for the 2025/26 Budget Continued delivery of Priorities in 2025/26:

- Value for Money Services
- Growth & Jobs
- Tackling Inequalities

The next steps in the budget process and Financial Context included:

- New responsibilities from Government such as Children's Social Care Prevention, NI increase, and Extender Producer Responsibility, which totalled almost £9.5 million.
- An anticipated pay award of £5.5 million was to be received.
- Growth and pressure on home to school transport
- Inflationary pressures on external contracts
- The Council had not received any Recovery Grant from Government, and the Rural Service Delivery Grant of £3.2 million had been abolished.
- A Policy Conference was to be held on 23 January 2025 with all County Councillors being encouraged to attend (in person or virtually).
- Consultation continued in the form of an online questionnaire on the Council's website
- Jan Willis was to brief individual groups during January and February
- Engagement with Business Representatives was planned for 6th February 2025.

Members were then invited to asked questions. Key information to take from responses was:

- Unused money from Children's Services was to be reinvested where possible. Housing for children was a key priority within Northumberland.
- The Council were trying to figure out ways to safely remove any weeds around the County. This included commencing research on what machinery and chemicals can be used with little to no harm.
- Businesses such as Home Bargains in Ashington were content to offer free parking for a certain time in order to have the element of control for how long people can park outside their business.
- The investment in Cambois was welcomed, however, Investment in Bedlington was sought after.

- Security was important to QTS for the new data centre investment in Cambois. The company would ensure its own safety against any cyber-terrorism or data attacks.
- Regular meetings would take place for security, and QTS would follow protocol for security the same way as other data centres in the UK.
- The data centre would create thousands of skilled jobs for residents in Northumberland.
- Council tax was to increase by 2.99%.
- A presentation had been given at the Climate Change Working Group on 16th January 2025 by EGGER, promoting the Northumberland Forests. An update was also given on the Free Trees project. EGGER had offered an invitation to any member to tour their factory.
- Cambois was a good location for the data centre due to a lot of electricity, land and potential.
- The most efficient way to save money in children’s services was to build children’s homes in County.
- There were no changed plans to the parking at beaches, meaning, parking would remain free.

Councillor Wearmouth was thanked for his time and the report/presentation was **AGREED** to be noted by the Committee.

37. 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.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

38. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Ashington Blyth Local Area Committee would be held on Wednesday 12 February 2025 at the earlier time of 4.00 pm as per the revised winter timetable.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____