

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
AGREED Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 14th November 2023
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Louis Brown, Victor Bridges, Graeme Wright, Eleanor Armstrong, Marjorie Chambers, John Tully, Glyn Davies, and Jim Lang.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer and Responsible Financial Officer, Stephen Humphrey – Assets and Facilities Officer, and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant

FGS23/090 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by the Chair Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS23/091 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Caroline Ball, Matthew Cuthbert, Sophie Robinson, Pauline Thompson, Vicky Brown, and Mark Purvis.

FGS23/092 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllr Graeme Wright disclosed an interest in **FGS23/100 ANNUAL GRANT AID FUNDING UPDATES** – Northumberland Citizens Advice. Cllr Jim Lang disclosed an interest in **FGS23/099 SMALL GRANT FUNDING – OCTOBER 2023** – AFC Newbiggin Juniors.

FGS23/093 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FGS23/094 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A member of the press and a member of the public were in attendance. The Chair of Ashington AFC addressed the meeting and presented the letter recorded below:

Dear Town Councillors,

I am writing on behalf of Ashington Football Club, a cornerstone organisation of Ashington since 1883.

In April of this year, we gained promotion to the Northern Premier League East from the Northern League. This is level eight of the English football pyramid and level four of the non-league system.

The club now sees itself representing Ashington in faraway towns such as Grantham, Carlton, Cleethorpes, and Sheffield. We reciprocate with people visiting Ashington, utilising our town's facilities and businesses. It is the first time in 55 years that Ashington has been at this level, and we have several challenges to overcome if we are to solidify our place at this level and ultimately thrive.

For the volunteer-led club, the challenges are as follows:

- 1. Pitch Enclosure: A fully enclosed fence around the pitch is a mandatory requirement at Step 4, the level at which we are currently competing. (approximately £36,000—imperative by March 2023)*
- 2. Rotating Turnstiles: To provide seamless and safe access for supporters, two rotating turnstiles are also a necessity for Step 4. (approximately £8,000 - imperative by March 2023)*

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3. *Away Game Travel: With our promotion, we face longer journeys for away games, representing Ashington in the process. We seek sponsorship or funding to assist in transport expenses for our remaining away matches. (Approximately £10,000 in remaining cost, ongoing)*
4. *Floodlight Upgrade: By upgrading our 15-year-old floodlights to LED, we will significantly decrease both our energy costs and carbon footprint. The current lights are outdated, prohibitive to maintain, and due for replacement. (approximately £80,000; a larger project aimed to be completed by 2025/26)*
5. *Grounds Equipment: Our volunteer groundsman works wonders with the resources at hand, but our equipment is desperately in need of an upgrade to facilitate his efforts. (approximately £20,000; we can use external agencies in short term but aim to have in place by 2024/25)*
6. *Utilities Costs: Like all organisations, we have seen an increase of 120% in our utilities, which is proving prohibitive to our operation, especially using floodlights for games and training.*

Our total expenditure projected over the immediate period is £74,000. We have created a crowd funder for the general public and businesses to contribute to, but we are unable to predict the response at this stage. We have just started a crowd funder but are unable to predict the outcome of that at this stage.

What do we do for our community?

The club has a vital role to play in the community of Ashington. As well as providing sporting enjoyment and enrichment, we also support and promote local food banks and encourage and host local charities. It champions the cause of the vulnerable in our community.

Beyond football, Ashington AFC stands as a communal sanctuary where individuals find a voice, combat loneliness, and come together to be united. Where else in Ashington is there a gathering of over 500 people every other week, bonded by a shared spirit?

As a club, we feel we are a vital part of the fabric of this town and have been for 140 years. To enable the club to survive and thrive, myself and the other directors and members would be delighted if you could support us in any way possible. I look forward to hearing from you.

*Best Regards,
 Chairman, Ashington AFC*

In response to questions, it was confirmed that several sources of funding had been applied for and some elements of the updates required could achieve match-funding. It was also confirmed that the club could stay in the Northern League and not face as many financial pressures, but the success of the team and the club and the move into the Northern Premier League was something that everyone was striving to achieve.

Cllr John Tully recommended that the club apply for a small grant in the next round of 2023/24 in, and a larger annual grant in 2024/25, which would be launched in February 2024.

The Council was united in thanking the Chair of Ashington AFC for bringing the information forward and in wishing the club success with fundraising and funding applications. The member of the press and member of the public left the meeting.

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FGS23/095 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Following two amendments, it was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** and **SIGN** as a true record, the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 10th October 2023.

FGS23/096 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

The following update was **RECEIVED** which had been sent out in advance of the meeting.

Key Highlights (Summary)

- Vandalism repairs completed at local play areas. New memorial bench installed at Nursery Park.
- Winter planting installed in town planters and towers. Sadly, some plant theft occurred which was reported. Replenishing underway.
- Bulb planting scheduled for various locations around town.
- Children in Need community event on 17th November planned with schools, groups, and radio station. Town Council supporting.
- Christmas Lights Switch-On event on 30th November with activities, games, Christmas trail launch.
- St George's Day March requested through town on 20th April 2024 to celebrate Fusiliers' anniversary.
- Play area transfers progressing slowly with developers. Chasing responses.
- Jack Charlton statue cleaned and rewaxed. Annual maintenance now.
- Allotment administration underway for agreements, invoices, etc.
- Works continue on allotment water system upgrades. Fencing to be installed by Network Rail.
- North Seaton roundabout planting idea objected by NCC Highways. Alternative locations suggested.
- Social housing decarbonisation responses received. To be reviewed by Climate Change Committee.
- Positive inter-Council meeting held to share ideas and common aims. Future meetings welcomed.

ATC Neighbourhood Services

Following vandalism at People's Park and Alexandra Road Play Areas work to address issues has been completed.

A new memorial seat, at the entrance to Nursery Park, was installed in October, taking the number of new seats installed in the town this year to four.

NSO's will support the installation of the towns Christmas tree on the 20th November and install the decorative safety fence around the tree.

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Planting and Enhancements

Works to install winter planting to towers and planters around the town, and troughs on Station Road was completed in October. Sadly, a significant theft of plants has taken place on towers in the Laburnum Terrace area which has been reported to Police and the towers replenished.

A tidy of the Ashington Memorial Garden has taken place in preparation of the Remembrance Day Service on Sunday 12th November.

Works to install new bulb planting in Station Road beds and entrance features will be carried out by NSOs in early November. A mix of miniature tulips, narcissus and hyacinths have been selected.

Work to plant bulbs at nine locations across the town, as agreed at the CC&E committee in September, will take place this month by our contractors WL Straughan. The sites chosen are as follows: A197 - Pegswood entrance, grassed area close to Holy Sepulchre Church, grassed area on Station Road, Featherwood Drive, Woodhorn Road / close to Wansbeck General Hospital, North Season Industrial Estate, Black Close Bank and Briardene. Additionally, wildflower planting schemes will take place in the spring at River Wansbeck, Paddock Wood, and Peoples Park.

Events and Engagement

Children in Need Event – Friday 17th November 2023

Asda's Community Champion, Amanda Sheldon has arranged the event. The stage will be set up for 9.00am by the YMCA. The backdrop is being designed by Collingwood Foundation School and Koast Radio will be attending from the start of the event.

There is a planned Dance-a-thon, with several schools signed up to take part, as well as community groups with stalls all raising money for Children in Need.

Ashington Town Council have a three-hour slot from 12.00noon to 3:00pm, we have 'Guess how many sweets are in the jar', 'Guess the teddy's name' and at the time of writing thinking caps are on for the third.

Christmas Lights Switch-On – Thursday 30th November 2023

There will be 24 community groups and organisations attending to provide Christmas activities and games within the YMCA. A full list of activities is available on our website at; [Ashington Town Council - Events](#).

The Christmas Trail will be launched at the event on 30th November, with selection boxes given out at Ashington Library on Saturday 16th December. Twenty businesses have signed up this year for the trail.

St George's Day March – Saturday 20th April 2024

NCC have received a request from the Northumberland Fusiliers to march through Ashington on 20th April next year to celebrate St Georges Day but also the 350th anniversary of the

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establishment of the Fusiliers. Plans are in early stages and Sharon will be attending any meetings held to keep the Council up to date on progress.

Play Areas

Epsom Drive (Taylor Wimpey)

Progressing with solicitor, draft transfer received and approved.

Aintree Close (Esh Housing, previously Dunelm)

Esh Housing solicitor details confirmed so this should progress.

Seaton Vale (Persimmon Homes)

Draft transfer with our solicitor.

Warren Court (Harron Homes)

No continuing response. Email advising that play area should be included in their own insurance liabilities, outlining urgency of situation and response.

Shire Farm Close (Bellway)

No response at all. Email advising that play area should be included in their own insurance liabilities, outlining urgency of situation and response.

Alexandra Road, North Seaton Colliery, Paddock Wood, and People's Park

NCC Strategic Estates confirmed in December 2022 that a draft agreement could be drawn up for the Council's consideration, and again in May 2023. I have confirmed the wording that needs to be included from an insurance perspective. This is still outstanding and has been requested again. An email response was received on 1st November advising a response from Strategic Estates in five working days.

Jack Charlton Statue

Jack was professionally cleaned, and rewaxed on Tuesday 24th October and looks as good as when he was first installed. This will be an annual maintenance requirement as the copper in the statue oxidises quickly due to being near the coast. It is hoped that the current works will last until spring 2025, and then works can be scheduled annually after that. However, this is something that we will need to keep under review, as we cannot control the science.

CCTV

Permissions are being sought, and details worked through for the new system for Station Road, etc. Stephen is making good inroads to tracing building owners. The aim is to have a commencement date confirmed in the new year. Following further discussions, we have secured the provision of drone images of three allotment sites at no cost, and a reduction on the CCTV provision in People's Park to the value of £1,040.

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Allotments

Letters, tenancy agreements and rules and conditions have been issued to North Seaton Colliery tenants and those with alternative agreements to an allotment tenancy, from 1st November 2023.

NS Colliery Allotment Association will pay to the Council a sum towards rent collected for November and December. The Council will pay water rates from 1st November 2023. Once signed agreements have been received by the Council, we will issue invoices for the payment of rent from January 2024.

The same will take place in respect of Hirst East End Allotments from January 2024, and for Woodhorn Road from April 2024.

The dates have been dictated by the usual collection of rent, and the preference of volunteers at the allotment sites.

All plot holders at Nursery Park have been issued with new tenancy agreements. Invoices for rent will be issued on receipt of the signed agreement.

Allotments (Capital Works)

Work is underway on the installation of the new water system at Woodhorn Road Allotment Site with works expected to be complete in December. Approximately 1,900ms of polyethylene piping will be installed to complement the new standpipes that were installed in 2022.

Following railway works, in the development of the new passenger rail line to the town, close to the boundary of the Green Lane Allotment Site, some shrubbery has been removed. This has allowed easier access to the site and unfortunately some anti-social behaviour has occurred. Contact has been made with NCC's Rail Project Liaison staff to highlight the issue and works have now been agreed to install 150m of palisade fencing on the allotment site boundary adjacent to the rail line. Work is expected to commence in November.

Tree Planting on North Seaton Roundabout

As agreed, a joint letter was sent from Ashington TC and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea TC with reference to NCC Highways objection to the suggested planting scheme on the roundabout. The Highways Improvement Team Senior Officer has supported the objection as it is considered an accident hot spot, and they would not want to introduce anything that would affect visibility. The response has been shared with Newbiggin-by-the-Sea TC along with the suggestion that there are alternative locations where tree planting might be more appropriate in Newbiggin, i.e. Central Parkway which could also prevent vehicles from driving over the grass.

Social Housing Decarbonisation and Retrofitting Properties

We have received a response from Bernicia Housing which will be brought to the next meeting of the Climate Change Committee. The response is fulsome in respect of their general policies and work so far, but not specific in respect of Ashington. They are not able to drill down the data at this time as budget work takes priority, but we could ask again after the busy budget period.

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Advance Northumberland has responded to advise that their homes are classed as privately rented, not social or affordable. They are therefore subject to Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for Private Rented (MEE). They have provided the details of their adherence to these which will be reported to the next Climate Change and Environment Committee.

Meeting with Neighbouring Town and Parish Councils

As you know Cllr Tully asked that we seek interest from neighbouring Councils to a meeting of Clerks and Chairs; a get together to share ideas and common aims. The meeting was held on Wednesday 25th October and would be considered a success as everyone who attended would like to meet again, with an agenda set by the group. There isn't a report of the meeting as such, but the summary below shares the positive discussion:

Topics Discussed

- CCTV.
- Wildflower and bulb planting.
- Standards of ground maintenance.
- Changes being made to core service delivered by NCC (new standards).
- Variations in core service delivered by NCC.
- Differences between partnership agreements, SLAs, and enhancements.
- Reductions in services delivered by county council, i.e. youth service, number of litter bins.
- Transfer of assets -v- transfer of responsibility; insurance implications.
- The management of allotments.
- Relationship and communication with police.
- Response times from some NCC departments.
- Clear distinction of who is responsible for what, between County, and Town/Parish.

Consensus

There appears to be a consensus that future meetings would be useful to share good practice, look at developing purchasing power, and the potential for joined up thinking. A major benefit voiced is that by linking up, our Councils can share information and overcome the perception that there are irregularities in services and messages from County Council.

It was agreed Ashington was a good venue, that having a consistent Chair was appropriate, and that future meetings should have an agenda, with input from all.

Those present were reminded that the NALC County Committee provided a forum for the above for Cllrs, and Councils were encouraged to engage. The usefulness of Cllrs and Clerks being at the same meeting appeared to be attractive to most in attendance. It was discussed that although this was a forum for discussion, the group could not represent a collaborative approach from all Councils involved, as it was the responsibility of respective Councils to agree any stance, or action, on all matters.

It was offered that those attending may want to respond discreetly as to what they would like to get out meetings in the future, or not as the case may be. Any potentially conflicting comments

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about the format/style/content can be passed on privately, without fear of being singled out, or castigated.

FGS23/097 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2023/24

a) Updated Budget Report

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** updated budget report.

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid (including Bank Reconciliation)

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** a schedule of accounts paid and to be paid; to endorse those accounts paid, and agree those to be paid, since 29th September 2023.

FGS23/098 PRE-BUDGET LIAISON

It was **AGREED** to hold an informal pre-budget liaison and presentation by the RFO in advance of the FGS Meeting in December, to commence at 5:15pm.

FGS23/099 SMALL GRANT FUNDING – OCTOBER 2023

a) Parkhead and Wansbeck Powersports

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** an application from Parkhead and Wansbeck Powersports (received in October, but omitted from the report received), and to award £500.

b) Blossoming Communities

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** additional information from Blossoming Communities and to award £500.

c) Suspension of Standing Order 7 Previous Resolutions

It was **AGREED** to suspend Standing Order 7, to allow the reconsideration of the Small Grant Funding Application from AFC Newbiggin Juniors.

d) AFC Newbiggin Juniors

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** additional information from AFC Newbiggin Juniors and reconsider the small grant application. It was **AGREED** to award £500.

FGS23/100 ANNUAL GRANT AID FUNDING UPDATES

a) Northumberland Citizens Advice

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** an update on work this year to date, and it was **AGREED** to release the 2nd and 3rd instalment of annual funding.

b) YMCA Northumberland

It was **AGREED** to defer to December and receipt of update.

FGS23/101 ENHANCED NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETING

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** a report of the meeting held on 19th September 2023.

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Cllr Marjorie Chambers commented that Partnership officers had previously worn uniform that was distinctive to Ashington Town Council, and questioned why this would not be the case now.

The Executive Officer confirmed that the teams were employed by NCC, and it was expected that they would want their own branding, as well as the legal implications and those cited in regards being part of the same team.

Cllr Chambers recounted issues with the cutting back of hedges in the Haydon ward and recalled being asked previously for priorities. Chair, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw commented that additional winter works are requested via County Cllrs, and that these are not part of the Enhanced Services paid for by Ashington Town Council, but that she had been asked and would consult ward Cllrs.

FGS23/102 HIRST PARK LIAISON MEETING

a) Report of Meeting

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** a report of the meeting held on 9th October 2023.

b) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Hirst Park

It was **AGREED** that discussions should progress to consider a revised MOU for Hirst Park, with draft to come back to Council for approval and budget recommendation.

In view that ward Cllrs may not be able to attend, Cllrs Louis Brown and Marjorie Chambers **AGREED to attend** at 2:00pm on 22nd November, and **it was further AGREED** that any other Cllrs interested would be welcome.

FGS23/103 PADDOCK WOOD PLAY AREA

a) Essential Works

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the quotation for replacement play bark at Paddock Wood Play Area, at a cost of £3,745 from Scotbark, and **it was AGREED** to place an order for the work to be carried out.

Members discussed whether it would be more cost effective to install wetpour as opposed to bark, which is a more accessible. Stephen Humphrey explained that bark was chosen due to the woodland nature of the surroundings, and that it had been replenished previously at a lower cost, but that everything has increased in price. The alternative of buying in play bark and handballing is difficult from a labour and access perspective so this is the only option.

Cllr Glyn Davies commented that some residents feel that the play area is poorly placed, and this should be considered prior to any major investment.

It was concluded that in the short term the replacement play bark was essential to provide the safety surface necessary.

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b) Gift of trees

It was AGREED to RECEIVE notice of a gift of x20 chestnut whips, and to seek NCC approval and support to plant within the copse of trees near Paddock Wood Play Area. **It was AGREED** to purchase the stakes and guards required at an approximate cost of £60.

FGS23/104 ROADWAYS AT WOODHORN ALLOTMENTS

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the quotation to repair roadways at Woodhorn Road Allotment site, at a cost of £8,870 from DA Johnstone Plant Hire, Morpeth.

Stephen Humphrey explained that the works would repair the worst parts of the roads which accounted for approximately 30%. The contractor is the only one in the area with this specialist machinery that will lift and rip the top surface off the road, then grade and compact it with a roller. The system reduces the need for excessive road planings and covers a greater area.

The RFO reminded members that although £10k was included in the budget for these works at the beginning of the financial year, money had been spent on the additional water works at Green Lane Allotments, leaving a balance of £5,337 in this budget heading. To proceed, the Council would need to agree to move the money from Contingency or another budget heading.

It was AGREED to move the required £3,443 from Contingency, and **it was AGREED** to place the order.

FGS23/105 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY ACROSS THE FORMER OPEN CAST SITE AT POTLAND PARK

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and APPROVE the draft letter proposed to be sent jointly from Longhirst Parish Council, and Ashington Town Council.

FGS23/106 NOTICE OF CONSULTATION: Proposal to extend the duration of a Public Spaces Protection Order for the consumption of alcohol Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Part 4

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and ENDORSE the positive response agreeing to support the extension of the PSPO, following email communication with members.

FGS23/107 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

In accordance with section 1 (2) LGA 1960, **it was AGREED** to exclude the press and public due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted.

Gary Holmes and Stephen Humphrey left the meeting at 19:27.

FGS23/108 PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the report and recommendations of the Personnel Committee in relation to employment matters.

It was AGREED to APPROVE the commencement of recruitment for an Allotment Officer in accordance with the terms and conditions, and employment and recruitment information presented.

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It was **AGREED** to **ENDORSE** those contractual salary increments noted and budgeted for 2024/25.

It was **AGREED** to **APPROVE** that the Job Description, and role of the Assets and Facilities Manager is retitled and modified to that presented 'Asset and Development Manager', following the recruitment of an Allotment Officer.

FGS23/109 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 12th December 2023, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

Meeting ended 19:40.

AGREED