

## Anonymised Emails Received

**29/09** I will be representing a number of Ashington charities and voluntary organisations in response to the recent protests concerning asylum seekers and refugees. I have contacted all the organisations who have reached out to me and encouraged them to attend this meeting directly. Where they cannot, I have their permission to speak on their behalf and share their experiences.

As a collective voice from the voluntary sector, we stand firmly for tolerance, inclusion, and cohesion. At this meeting, we wish to highlight the direct impact recent events have had on our organisations and beneficiaries, and to explore how we can work together to protect community safety and unity.

These protests have already caused real harm in our town:

- Beneficiaries have been assaulted, with some forced to leave Ashington after being targeted.
- Staff and volunteers have faced intimidation and abuse.
- Organisations have felt pressured to withdraw or censor publicity for groups supporting asylum seekers and refugees.
- Staff are feeling anxious in their workplaces, where flags are displayed outside, and some sessions have had to be cancelled due to the risk of incitement.
- Both staff and beneficiaries are requesting to use back entrances to avoid being targeted.
- Young people have been exposed to conversations filled with intolerance and hostility towards marginalised groups, negatively affecting teaching and learning environments.

This is not the Ashington community we know. As community leaders, we should stand together to challenge division, reduce hostility, and restore the sense of safety and unity our town is known for.

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**29/09** Thank you for your prompt response to the concerns raised in my email.

I don't feel comfortable attending the council meeting for several reasons, one of them being fear. The potential repercussions of voicing my concerns in public.

It is my understanding that the following law applies: "it is illegal to attach a flag to a lamppost in the UK without the permission of the local authority, as this is prohibited by the Highways Act 1980".

I would appreciate an answer to one question, which is: Has the Northumberland County Council given its permission for the flags to be put on all of the lamp posts under its jurisdiction? Can this be tabled at the meeting?

I thank you for your help in this matter and look forward to an update after the meeting tomorrow night.

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**25/09** Dear Ashington Council,

The flags that have been put up all over Ashington are controversial and are creating tension in the community. They are not helpful.

Are there any plans to have them removed? If not, they should be.

Yours faithfully, a concerned resident.

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**23/09** To whom it may concern, I am a new resident in [REDACTED], I just moved into a house in [REDACTED] at the end of August, and today I had occasion to visit Ashington as I wanted to take some items to the household recycling centre.

As soon as I left the roundabout I saw the first of the flags, and I was quite shocked on the journey between the main road and the tip, and then continuing on the road to Asda - they're on almost every single lamp post. There must be nearly 100 of them.

I have to tell you how ashamed and heartbroken I was, trying to put myself in the shoes of the minorities that must live in Ashington, how upset and unwelcome and intimidated they must feel, knowing the reasons for those flags being put up. I felt so uncomfortable and intimidated myself. Is Ashington so unwelcoming? I know there are some that would argue that their display is patriotism and national pride - I don't want to hear this. It's thinly veiled racism peddled by bigots and uninformed citizens who want to blame asylum seekers for their troubles/

While the flag itself is, of course, a national symbol that many people are proud of, you must concede that in this case the display was organised as part of the recent anti-immigration protests and it makes me feel heartbroken and angry.

This context has left me – and I know many others in the North East – feeling upset and ashamed. Our country and region is built on diversity and inclusion, and using the flag in this way does not reflect who we are as a region. Rather than celebrating national pride, it sends a divisive and hostile message.

I would like to know:

- Whether the council gave permission for these flags to be displayed,
- If not, what action will be taken to remove them,
- And how the council intends to ensure public spaces remain welcoming and inclusive for all residents.

I urge you to consider the impact such displays have on community cohesion, and to take appropriate steps to address this situation.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your response.

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**19/09** Morning I'm just emailing in as I've seen other councils removing flags, I hope this isn't the case with Ashington council. Me personally I think they look great as you drive down the roads. The Union Jack flying high, make me feel proud. Personally instead of removing the flags, the money it would cost to take them down could be spent much more wisely in the area. Much appreciated

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**17/09** Good afternoon,  
Is it possible for the union flags to be removed from the main areas of the town and the associated roads? These are both unsightly and not becoming of our area. Thank you

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**15/09** I'm a local resident in Ashington on [REDACTED] and when I drove along Station Rd today I noticed many Union Flags on the lampposts along the road. While Bedlington's high street is covered in St George's Cross flags, the Union Jack used here in Ashington is surely there with the same sentiment.

As these flags are attached to public property, which, according to my research is not legal unless it's done by the council, I was wondering whether these will be removed?

They're not the 'patriotic' symbol they're made out to be and instead are a sign of racism in the current context and used to intimidate the many people who have come to live in our town from other countries. My partner and I included, but also the many refugees who have found a home in Ashington and who like living here.

Our town doesn't have the best image anyway, I think we'd do well to not add 'racists' to the list of things Ashington has to deal with and I'd greatly appreciate a response as to what action the council will take to remove these flags and not give a platform to racists in our community.

With the kindest regards and best wishes,

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**14/09** I am writing to express my disappointment in the proliferation of Union Jack flags in Ashington, and the lack of action in removing these. It is deeply saddening that Ashington is reflecting the misinformed views of a minority of people. Is this the message we want to send to people visiting the town?

I would not be allowed to put up flags of any other causes, so why are symbols that reflect racist views being allowed to litter Ashington on public property?

Please would you be able to let me know when you intend to remove these flags and graffiti. Kind regards,

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**10/09** I am sure that you have been alerted by now to the proliferation of union flags on every lamp post between the North Seaton Roundabout and the Elephant pub and which are now appearing to be erected along Milburn Road, presumably by a group of cowards who erect them overnight. Anyone got access to CCTV?

I am greatly concerned that we are seeing the rise of a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the National Front stirred up by Farage who feel they can cordon off (ghettoise) an area that is 'Britain First' with no room for asylum seekers or foreigners. It wouldn't be so bad but they are probably, one and all, descended from immigrants whether Angles, Saxons, Danes, Romans or Normans

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who came here not for asylum but to dominate just as Britain did to other countries from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And the flags were undoubtedly made in China!

I have asked Ashington Town Council whether they can take them down and await their reply. I have also contacted Northumbria Police and they have informed me that they cannot act as no law has been broken; there is no equivalent to someone spraying graffiti on property not theirs unless it obscures a direction sign or equivalent even if the Met are removing a Banksy which offends their sensibilities, or rather that of the legal profession.

I have no problem with someone erecting a flag within their own property line; that is their prerogative even if done for the most stupid of reasons (believing social media crap rather than searching for actual facts). But I do object to a group forcing their nonsensical views on the general public and I shall be grateful if you will ask Shabana Mhamood to consider a change to the law which makes it an offence to erect something deemed controversial on any public edifice.

I realise this is a sensitive issue but something needs to be done to end this oppression of the majority by a minority of bigoted, ignoramuses.

I am copying this email to Glen Sanderson as the area being delineated seems to correspond to the College with North Seaton ward and he might like to speak to Councillor Roberts to ask him to defuse the situation. Indeed, it may need to have those foolish enough to believe they are changing the world that in a democracy revolution is not an option and policies need to have substance as their base. I am also copying it to Ashington Town Council's representative Sarah Eden.