

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 12th November 2024
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr Sophie Robinson, Cllr Bob Walkinshaw, Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert and Cllr John Tully.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Office and Chief Financial Officer, Stephen Humphrey – Assets and Development Manager, and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant.

FGS24/062 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by the Chair, Councillor Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS24/063 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Graeme Wright, Cllr Glynn Davies and Cllr Mark Purvis.

FGS24/064 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS24/065 DISPENSATIONS

There were no dispensations requested.

FGS24/066 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public in attendance, other than representatives of Ashington & District Male Voice Choir.

FGS24/067 ASHINGTON & DISTRICT MALE VOICE CHOIR

The Chair asked that the meeting to agree to move the presentation from the choir as the next item. It was **AGREED**.

Kevin Lillie and George Blachflower from the Ashington & District Male Voice Choir (ADMVC) gave a presentation to the Council, outlining the major milestones of the group.

ADMVC presented their community project plans for 2025-2026. The choir seeks support for enhancing community events, purchasing promotional materials, developing musical skills, and creating a unique Heritage Music Creation Project. Their key objectives include hosting additional concerts, conducting musical training sessions, and they want to develop a new suite of heritage music celebrating Ashington's history, set to launch in 2026 during their 110th Anniversary year.

The proposed Heritage Music Project aims to create up to five songs documenting Ashington's journey from the Sheepwash era through the coal mining period to its future, with plans to engage local groups. Funding strategies involve applications to Northumberland County Council's Community Chest and Ashington Town Council, with the project encompassing direct music creation costs and in-kind contributions from choir members. The choir plans to promote the project through various media channels, including social media, their website, and potential recordings, ensuring transparent communication of their grant-funded activities and community contributions.

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Cllr Marjorie Chambers asked about the choir going to Ashington High School, of which the Choir responded that they are in the process of speaking to the school. Cllr Louis Brown commented on the acoustics of the building and that this would enhance the Choir's singing. Cllr Caroline Ball asked about playing at Woodhorn Museum, which the Choir responded they have spoken to Woodhorn Museum and are considering a new facility by the Woodhorn Museum railway for future concerts.

The Choir advised they would be seeking grant funding in the next financial year, which Cllr Lynne Grimshaw welcomed.

Assets and Development Manager Stephen Humphrey left the meeting at 18:24.

FGS24/068 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** and **SIGN** as a true record, the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 8th October 2024.

FGS24/069 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

The following update was given:

Budget Sessions

The next budget session is scheduled for Tuesday 19th November. During this session, the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) will have included non-discretionary spending for 2025/26 within the budget headings.

Now that the council tax base has been determined, it will be possible to provide members with an estimate of the available funding based on different precept figure scenarios. This analysis will assume that all revenue spending is attributed to the precept, and any remaining balances are used to top up the contingency budget and earmarked reserves.

If the required levels for the contingency budget and earmarked reserves cannot be achieved from the year-end balances, then the available non-discretionary funding will need to be adjusted accordingly.

This budget session represents an important opportunity to understand how we plan and allocate resources for the next financial year. The inclusion of non-discretionary spending projections, as well as the ability to model different precept scenarios, will help inform the council's budgetary decisions. Anyone not able to attend is very welcome to meet with the RFO at any other time.

Assistance in Family Military History Inquiry

A thank you goes to Stephen Humphrey, our Assets and Development Manager for his assistance in uncovering a piece of wartime history. Stewart Holmes, a Qathet resident in Canada, was searching for information on his great uncle Joseph Holmes, from Ashington, who was believed to have fallen at the Battle of the Somme in WWI. Stewart's mother, Edith, an Ashington resident, was advised to contact Stephen because of the Town Council's dedication to honouring the town's military heritage. Stephen, along with local historian Margaret Allison, who has previously assisted the Town Council on the War Memorial project, signposted Stewart to uncover correct details on Joseph.

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Edith visited the Town Hall on 11th November to personally thank Stephen for his assistance. Read more in the link below:

[gathet resident finds answer about great uncle's WW1 death - Powell River Peak](#)

ATC Neighbourhood Services

Ashington Mining Wheel

Neighbourhood Services Officer, Ryan Appleby led on improvement works to enhance the area around the mining wheel feature, which marks the 150th anniversary of Ashington. We featured this on the website and FB page.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-11-01-ashington-town-council-maintains-iconic-mining-wheel-entrance-feature>

Play Areas

Vandalism at Alexandra Road Play Area – works are expected w/c 11th November to repair the vandalism via our contractor Kompan Ltd.

This week, Neighbourhood Services Officers (NSO's) Mark Air and Ryan Appleby are focussing on repairs and improvements to play areas. This includes gates at Paddock Wood, wet pour damage across all plays areas, and play equipment repairs at People's Park. This work follows a busy summer period and time dedicated to getting everything all repairs done and the play areas looking their best. Members are reminded that NCC carry out play inspections, and we receive weekly lists of any actions required.

Christmas Lighting

Ashington's Christmas tree and associated decorative fencing will be installed w/c 18th November in preparation of the Christmas Lights Switch-On event on the 28th November. As is the annual routine, NSO's Mark and Ryan will be making sure the fencing is in tip top condition.

Bulb Planting & Wildflower Schemes

Bulb Planting is complete for this season, including the following areas that were put forward by Cllrs and agreed with NCC:

- ❖ Holy Sepulchre Church – grassed area adjacent to church
- ❖ Green Lane – grassed area adjacent to Kenilworth Road
- ❖ North Seaton Road – grassed area next to new tree planting, close to workshops
- ❖ Nursery Park entrance – grassed area next to cemetery
- ❖ College Road – grassed area next to College Shops
- ❖ B1334 / College Road & Wansbeck Manor roundabout area
- ❖ Ridgeway – grassed area next to Northern Social Club

Litter Bins

All but two annual litter bin updates have been completed according to those identified by NCC operatives as failing. NSO's, Mark and Ryan completed installations last week and have sensibly kept three aside for when work is completed on the new cycle path on North Seaton Road as it is likely the area would benefit from new bins, following the work. Mark has a very

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conscientious approach to our litter bin updates. His commitment to sustainability is evident in how he carefully considers whether removed bins can be refurbished and reused, reducing waste and maximising resources.

Bus Shelter Cleansing

Most of the town's bus shelters have been cleaned over the last couple of weeks. We are aware that this is often a job that gets put in when time permits and we want to address this with better scheduling.

Town Twinning Update

Ashington and Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council's welcomed our German guests from our twin town of Remscheid on the 25th October. The visit marked the 40th anniversary of support during the from the Remscheid community during the 1984/85 Miners' Strike as well as celebrating over 70 years of the town twinning partnership.

The visiting delegation was led by Stadt Director Sven Wiertz and including Regional MP Sven Wolf, was welcomed by Ian Lavery, MP for Ashington and Blyth, and Cllrs. Caroline Ball (Civic Head of Ashington and Fiona Rowley (Mayor of Newbiggin by the Sea).

The delegation then toured the Newbiggin Maritime Centre, where a well-attended public exhibition celebrated the longstanding international friendship between the communities. A highlight of the celebration was a moving performance by the Ashington & District Male Voice Choir, including their rendition of "Requiem" from "Fell 'Em Doon," paying tribute to the region's mining heritage. The exhibition showcased photographs and memorabilia spanning seven decades of cultural exchange and friendship between the communities.

We appreciated the support of the Ashington & Newbiggin by the Sea Town Twinning Association and Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council in the organisation of the civic events.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-11-01-ashington-and-newbiggin-by-the-sea-welcome-german-visitors>

Remembrance Day Service – Sunday 10th November

Work took place in the memorial garden in the run-up to Remembrance, this included work to shrubs and beds, hedges and seats. Our NSO's Mark and Ryan worked in partnership with NCC Neighbourhood Services Operatives in some of this work, and on set-up and take down on the day of the service.

The well-attended ceremony was organised by the Royal British Legion's Ashington Branch and supported by Ashington Town Council. The Service was led by Revd Chris Grocock and Revd Lorna Beadle and was supported by the Ashington Colliery Band with communal singing supported by the Ashington Music Society.

Various organisations and community groups laid wreaths at the memorial, including representatives from the Armed Forces, emergency services, youth organisations, and local schools. It was particularly encouraging to see local Scouts and Guides attending the Service in good numbers.

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Organisation running up to the event was supported by Stephen and Sharon. Thanks also to Graeme Wright for the PA system, which we will look at additional speakers for next year.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw wanted it noted that she thanks the officers on behalf of the Council for their hard work on setting up and running the Remembrance Day event, and that the event went smoothly, and the result was beautiful.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers thanks the officers on behalf of the Royal British Legion for their work on setting up and running the Remembrance Day event and noted on how beautifully it looked.

Allotments Officer Alan Bunker left the meeting at 18:35.

Projects

Ashington Cricket Club Commemorative Tree Project to Mark the 80th Anniversary of the ending of WWII

The funding package for the project is now complete with £20,000 secured from County Councillors and local trusts and foundations. A Working Group meeting will take place on the 14th November to plan for work commencing in the coming weeks.

Initial work includes the removal of a number of dead trees, and crown lifting others to enable the wildflower planting. In the new year 48 trees will be planted by the Reiverdale Scout Group with an unveiling ceremony of the plaques planned for May to coincide with the 80th Anniversary of the ending of WWII.

Ashington Memorial Garden

Further to the comprehensive update last month, we are awaiting details of the procurement for the works agreed. Due to the scale of the works and the timescales involved, NCC is leading on the project and tender documents for the work but we will be fully informed and across the project as it develops.

Further to the previous update, work requested will include:

- Install new, robust paving and complete associated works to connect the newly developed public realm area with the Memorial Garden. This will extend from the existing memorial (recognising post-1945 conflicts) and the area around the existing War Memorial, to the current entrance on Kenilworth Road, creating a smooth, durable pathway.
- Resurface the existing resin-bonded gravel path around the garden to improve accessibility and visual appeal, enhancing the visitor experience while preserving the garden's natural charm.
- Trim and reduce the height of the north and south border hedges to approximately 1.5 meters, and the east border hedge (adjacent to Wansbeck Square) to 1 meter.
- Add new plantings around the memorial commemorating post-1945 conflicts as part of the overall connection with the new public realm.
- Introduce fresh plantings in the two borders near the east border, along with refreshed greenery around the post-1945 conflicts memorial. This will enhance the area's aesthetic,

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soften the garden's transition to surrounding spaces, and complement the existing tree canopy.

- Update and improve the two borders along Kenilworth Road. Enhanced plantings in these borders will create a more inviting entrance, boosting the garden's visual appeal from Kenilworth Road and making the memorial more engaging for those passing by.

Events and Engagement

Sharon has been busy attending several engagement events in the town since the last meeting. More detailed reports are available for all, but an overview is detailed below. The engagement gives an overview of activities across the town. With Sharon's in-depth knowledge of the people and places in Ashington she is able to sign-post enquiries received from members of the public, and groups themselves.

Community Engagement Workshop

Sharon attended this event on Thursday 17th October at Ashington Family Hub facilitated by Neil Quinn, NCC.

The workshop consisted of presentations around the benefits of Creative Health Engagement, Hirst Engagement and Involving Children and Young People in Research and Public Participation.

Copies of the presentation are available.

Hate Crime Awareness Week Event

Sharon attended the Hate Crime Awareness Week Event on Thursday 17th October at the Hirst Welfare.

This was a well-attended event with several organisations present including the Community Policing Team giving out free soup, cake, and sweets.

It also featured a selection of clothing and toys available for anyone attending to take free of charge.

Full Circle AGM & 10 Year Celebration

A well-attended event which you can read about here:

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-10-25-full-circle-food-project-marks-decade-of-growth-with-special-anniversary-celebration>

Hirst Working Group

The Hirst Working Group met on 6th November; the meeting covered:

Fly Tipping Awareness and Engagement

- Worst affected areas are Blyth, Cowpen, and Ashington, Hirst
- Actions include looking at the cost of fly tipping, developing community conversations (with the first held at ASDA)
- Many people confuse litter and fly tipping
- 90% know how to report fly tipping, but many have no ideas on how to tackle it
- Most fly tipping is bulky waste like furniture and white goods
- Bernicia to hold an action day in March 2025 with skips in the Hirst area to tackle fly-tipping.

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Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Week

- Police and partners holding proactive initiatives across the county.
- Themed days include Partnership Roadshows, Victims Day support, "Let's Talk ASB" Day, Community Heroes celebration, Young People's Day, and a Health Day

Heritage Lottery Fund, update on application from NCC

Bid to create green gyms working with Northumberland Wildlife Trust, and Groundworks NE.

Hirst Masterplan Update

- Advance renovating a property to serve as a workspace for the Masterplan team, they will also use "Heart of the Hirst" on Second Avenue.
- Coulson Park development - public consultation in January 2025, with new housing to be used for relocating (or temporarily rehousing) residents from the Hirst area.

Cllr Louis Brown commented on the work at Coulson Park and is very happy with the current stated and progress made.

Operation Impact update from the Police

PlayZone in Hirst Park

- new start date of 2nd December 2024

Free Swim Sessions

Another great result for the swim sessions held on Saturday 26th October and Saturday 2nd November, seeing 34 attend the first session and 39 attended the second session. Funding is committed for Christmas; we need to find a suitable date.

Halloween Trick or Treat Trail

24 shops took part in the first Trick or Treat Trail in the town centre. It is estimated that 150 children enjoyed the trail, many who attended the Halloween craft activities at the Market on Tuesday 29th October. Administration Officer Gary Holmes has worked extremely hard to engage more businesses, the positive results can be seen in the numbers taking part. Gary is currently working on the Christmas trail, which he will lead on.

October Half Term Activities

Tuesday 29th October – Sharon worked her magic to facilitate the delivery of activities by Pride Action North, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Central Northumberland Family Hub, Full Circle Food Project, and Mortal Fools.

The activities were well received with approximately 100 adults and children taking part in making Halloween crafts such as decorated bats, spooky friendship bracelets and picking up a free pumpkin.

[Ashington Town Council](#) you can also see a picture on our Facebook page of a free pumpkin carved by a young boy who collected his pumpkin with his mam on the day.

Allotments (General)

Allotment Officer Alan Bunker has completed the required PA1 and PA6 pesticide application training and certifications to allow more hands-on practical work in this role.

Scheduled allotment site inspections have been postponed and will be rescheduled. We are also exploring alternative inspection methods.

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The plots that suffered following the fire at Hirst East-End allotment site are unlikely to be re-let, and further advice is being sought. Contact has been made with the contractor as well as the Environment Agency to ensure we are meeting all legal obligations in this matter.

As usual at the end of the growing season, some plot holders have given notice on their tenancies. We recognise that the condition of some of these plots maybe less than ideal - they may not be readily "ready to cultivate." This presents accessibility challenges and is known to often lead to new plot holders becoming discouraged and giving up after investing significant time and money to get the plot into usable shape.

To address this, we will be suggesting investment in our own workforce and equipment to allow us to improve the condition of these plots in-house prior to re-letting them. This will require budget commitments by the Council, but it will be more cost-effective than paying hefty clearance bills or leaving plots unlet.

By improving the plots before re-letting, we aim to make them more attractive and increase the likelihood of successful cultivation by new tenants. We will assess the waiting list, communicate with those on it, and work to re-let the available plots as soon as possible, working on the basis of letting those in the best condition first. Moving forward we would like to make efforts to improve their condition first.

Allotment (Capital)

Last month, it was reported that some capital projects identified during budget planning were not moved forward in 2024/25 as the budget was not made available. Those outstanding projects remain to be addressed.

The most pressing of these outstanding projects is the water system upgrade at Nursery Park. The updated cost estimate for this project has been received, and it is 10% higher than the quote from November 2023.

In addition to the Nursery Park water system, there are also outstanding capital projects for:

- Roadway upgrades at Woodhorn, Seaton Hirst, and High Market
- Boundary fencing at High Market

Furthermore, new capital projects may be identified that will require consideration as part of the budget process

FGS24/070 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2024/25

a) Updated Budget Report

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED**, and no comments were made.

Cllr Bob Walkinshaw, and Cllr Marjorie Chambers left the meeting at 18:45.

b) Underspend/Balances

The treatment of any underspend or uncommitted budget from the current financial year was considered with emphasis on those areas of underspending highlighted by the RFO.

Cllr Caroline Ball proposed the balance in Youth Funding be committed/safeguarded for spending, be carried forward into 2025/26 if necessary. **It was AGREED.**

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Cllr Marjorie Chambers rejoined the meeting.

It was also **AGREED** that presently uncommitted funding in Environmental Improvements, which is ward Cllr developed projects should be safeguarded as some wards have plans underway or may wish to use the money remaining in 25/26.

c) 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 21st September 2024.

FGS24/071 GOVERNANCE

It was **AGREED** to appoint Cllr Graeme Wright as the Cllr responsible for undertaking routine checks, to ensure accounts are being kept properly, and in accordance with regulations.

FGS24/072 CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV)

a) Meeting held 25th September 2024

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**, and no questions were raised.

b) CCTV Policy

The draft policy was **RECEIVED**, and it was **AGREED** to adopt without any amendments.

FGS24/073 PUBLIC ACCESS DEFIBRILLATOR

It was **AGREED** to purchase a further public access defibrillator, with funding from Central Ward Cllrs, to be installed on the Police building at the entrance to Ashington Community Woods, and the guardian being Ashington and Hirst Running Club.

FGS24/074 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 10th December 2024, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

Meeting ended 19:03pm