

Ashington Town Council
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at
6:00pm on Tuesday 10 May 2022, in The Council Chamber, Town Hall

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Caroline Ball, Michelle Brannigan, Louis Brown, Vicky Brown, Marjorie Chambers, Matthew Cuthbert, Jim Lang, Mark Purvis, Pauline Thompson, Bob Walkinshaw.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah Eden – Clerk/RFO, Stephen Humphrey – ATC Assets and Facilities Manager, Sharon Parmley – ATC Administration Officer (minute taking)

FGS 22/182 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Eleanor Armstrong, Victor Bridges, Lawrence Henderson, Liam Lavery, Sophie Robinson and John Tully.

FGS 22/183 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw, Jim Lang, Mark Purvis and Caroline Ball declared an interest in item 13. ASHINGTON HOSPITAL LEVEL CROSSING SURVEY.

FGS 22/184 DISPENSATIONS.

Cllr Ball requested dispensation to answer any questions arising from item thirteen on the agenda.

FGS 22/185 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

The Clerk provided the Chair with two letters from members of the public, not present, but verified as Ashington residents, these were read by the Chair as follows:

Agenda Item 12 – Woodhorn Road Traffic Calming Measures

I wish to make a representation against the plans for the traffic cushions on Woodhorn Road.

I share the aim of those who have suggested these measures; for Ashington to have a safe and pleasant environment which allows everyone to get around safely, minimizes pollution, and promotes active travel (bike and walking) for its health benefits as well as cost savings.

However, I do not consider the proposal for Woodhorn Road devised by NCC and subject to public consultation to be the best way of achieving this.

There are problems with both specific design of the highways work and the consultation process.

My three areas of objection to this scheme are:

1. There should be no more piecemeal traffic or parking schemes introduced in Ashington until there has been a sensible wide-ranging study, with community involvement, of the traffic flow and parking across the whole town, not just as it presently is but as it is likely to be affected by future developments. This should also be looked at in conjunction with the walking and cycling strategy. The Grand Corner junction is due to be re-modelled and access to parking at the soon to be re-opened railway station as well as the new College campus will affect traffic, as will increased housing development near the hospital.

2. Woodhorn Road is a major route into the Town Centre and isn't like a cul de sac in a housing estate so introducing 10 sets of humps is not appropriate. It will cause damage to vehicles, more noise and pollution as vehicles will not be moving at a steady speed.

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3 .The vast majority of drivers drive sensibly according to the conditions and present regulations: The idiot minority will drive like idiots even when the humps are in place. The result will be many law-abiding motorists, taxi drives and buses will be inconvenienced while "accidents" will continue to occur.

Without examining the accident reports for the road, I cannot be certain of this, but I think a large proportion of the serious accidents in this location will involve drivers who have been far outside the normal rules of the road, speed, drink or drugs. I would urge ATC to seek this data from NCC.

I have seen speed enforcement camera vans on this road and think that they, or permanent cameras, will be a more effective, and cost-effective way of preventing excessive speed. More attention should also be given to driver, cyclist and pedestrian safety training.

Quality of life for all residents is important and should not be dominated by motor cars, particularly those driven by people ignoring the existing regulations. This needs however to be balanced by the advantages cars, and other transport systems bring. Inevitably some roads will have more traffic than others and will need to be managed appropriately.

There is always a need to balance the needs of the many with the rights of individuals. As elected representatives' councillors at Town and County level you have an important role in this.

While the present consultation may comply with the letter of regulations, I think it is flawed and urge the Town Council to consider and debate the wider issue before making any formal decision about supporting, seeking amendments to, or a rejection of the scheme in its present form.

The consultation letter was only sent to residents of houses on the part of Woodhorn Road where they are proposed and not the wider community who will be affected by them. I know this has been the custom; but that doesn't make it right!

I only became aware of these proposals because my attention had been drawn to them by a posting, on a social media site, which lead me to seek them out on the, helpful, Ashington Town Council Website.

The consultation letter refers to a request by the local County Councillor and a petition in 2020 signed by 80 people asking for unspecified traffic control measures in this location. It is important to point out that there are over 3,000 electors in Hirst ward so only a small percentage of them have expressed support for some changes. Many other residents, workers and visitors will be affected by the proposed "humps."

Like many other schemes there is a danger that the wants of a vocal minority are able to override the wider good.

It is the role of the council to perform this balancing function and communicate effectively to and from the local community and help to "co-produce" a solution that has majority support from residents and motorists. Simply rubber-stamping a highways department scheme won't change

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the behaviour of the people who cause the problems or solve the problems of traffic flow around Ashington.

I urge the Town Council to send a strong signal to NCC that they should not be introducing piecemeal schemes but need to have a thorough Town-wide plan before making changes.

Item 13 Ashington Level Crossing Survey

As a resident living locally, I would like to express not only my own feelings towards the current consultation regarding the hospital crossing and train line but also those that are shared amongst my neighbours who reside close to the location.

Whilst we all welcome the Northumberland line and what it will bring to our town in terms of economic growth, job creation, infrastructure in connecting local towns and enhancing its overall reputation in the Northeast. However, we share similar views to NCC on the closure of the crossing. This crossing is a burden on local residents and the emergency services who often encounter anti-social behaviour, (stones being thrown, graffiti, fires on the embankments, children walking on the tracks), use of motorbikes which is on the increase as they can use the crossing as a cut through and means to evade police if needs be as well as being used by local criminals (local bank robber and burglars). The residents who live opposite, as well as Darnley Road, Oakland and Chillingham are all in favour of the line being closed as this will eliminate all, if not the majority, of these issues.

As stated in the consultation documents planning was put in by NCC with regards to an underpass, this angered many in the local community as it would impact many lives, as such NCC were met with a large number of objections including the local police who felt that this was deemed unsafe, coupled with recent assaults and crime rates at underpasses this therefore was not a viable option and will again be met with fierce opposition if this is brought back to the table. If the crossing is not closed and an alternative such as a bridge or underpass is looked at again the problems we are experiencing will continue in other ways. We would also like to add NCC themselves have deemed an underpass unsafe near Durrige Bay, and instead providing a crossing for people to cross the A1068 (which is a busy road). Therefore, the fact that 4 trains an hour is going to be passing on the line surely it makes sense to close the crossing to remove the potential for accidents or fatalities to occur, especially when people can cross safely meters away at either the station or Green Lane.

For those with mobility issues, they have never been able to use the current crossing due to the nature of a steep and angled exit on Chillingham side, causing them to cross at the bridge or Green Lane anyway, as you would struggle to get a wheelchair up there, therefore mobility is not a justifiable argument.

We would appreciate if our views can be shared at next week's town council meeting with our local councillors in the hope that they too support the closure of the existing crossing.

The Chair made a note of thanks to both members of the public for their comments, and they were noted.

FGS 22/186 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING.

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12th April 2022 as a true record.

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FGS 22/187 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES.

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the following reports, which were sent out in advance of the meeting.

Jack Charlton Statue/Charlton Brothers Commemorative Project

We have received an estimate of costs and full specification for the groundworks to install the statute from Brambledown. The mandatory process to establish whether planning permission is required will have been sent at the time of this meeting. Once a response has been received, the Council will be asked to approve the draft licence which we have from NCC Strategic Estates.

Most pledged funding has now been received for the Jack Charlton Project, including £10,000 received from Bruce Shepherd on 13th April 2022, via Cllr Liam Lavery. There is expected to be £4,133 remaining in the Jack Charlton Statue budget, following payment for groundworks. The Council can agree to divert their own funding to the Charlton Brothers Project, which at present has a promised £5,000 from Northumberland County Council.

Two concepts have been provided by interested parties that honour both Jack and Bobby, World Cup success, and celebrated footballers from Ashington. It is envisioned that there will be four storyboards set into a structure which will also be in Hirst Park, near to the statue of Jack. The next step is to get the working group, Barry Mead and NCC Officers together to look at the feasibility of bringing this project in line with the timescales of the Jack Charlton Statue project, which is scheduled for August. Additional funding is needed for this project.

Climate Change Schools Project – Work in Progress Signs for Station Road

Sharon Parmley has contacted Ashington Schools to seek their interest in being involved in the creation of 'Work in Progress' signs for Station Road. Schools were delighted to be consulted on how best they could be involved, and we look forward to a variety of designs coming from different groups and classes from the schools.

Station Road Preparation and Planting

Beds

WL Straughan, supported by Town Council staff, will be delivering, and placing a compost mulch into beds on 18th, 19th and 20th of May. This will nurture what is there and prepare the ground for planting in September.

The Clerk has responded to one letter of complaint regarding the Council's decision not to plant annuals on Station Road; the reasons have been given and plans explained.

We will receive an overview of Sean Murrays designs for Station Road on 30th May, these will be brought to the June FGS Committee for consideration and approval.

Hanging Baskets and Troughs

Hanging Baskets and troughs will be installed w/c 16th May 2022.

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Vacancy – Seaton Ward

The elections office has confirmed that an election has been requested. Further information will be announced when received.

Annual Grant Aid Funding

The closing date is Friday 13th May 2022.

Electric Vehicle

We are looking into replacing the Citroen Van with a suitable electric alternative. It is expected to bring a recommendation to sell the van privately, paying off what is owed on the Finance Agreement, and using the remaining funds to pay a deposit and install the charging point. We expect to recommend taking out an electric van on lease (due to the rapidly changing technologies), which would be like the vehicle repayments currently being made. Therefore, no additional budget cost. It is expected that this will be brought to the FGS Meeting in June.

Further verbal updates from the Clerk included.

Jack Charlton Project meeting scheduled for Friday 13th May, to discuss the Charlton Brothers project.

Climate Change School project, an agenda item for the next meeting will be to decide prize for those included.

The Clerk confirmed that the vacancy for the Seaton Ward would open for nominations from 1st June to Wednesday 10th June 2022, the election will take place on Thursday 7th July 2022.

Miners Picnic, a meeting is planned for Wednesday 11th May, to confirm the order of service with Fr. Michael Headley, who will be leading the service.

Armed Forces Day & Falklands 40th Anniversary Memorial Service. Taking place on Sunday 12th June, in Ashington Memorial Garden at 12:00noon.

FGS 22/188 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2021/22.

a) Updated Budget Report

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the updated Budget Report for 2022/23, sent out in advance of the meeting.

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the schedule of accounts and to endorse those accounts paid via delegated authority, and approve those accounts to be paid, since 12th April 2022.

c) Surplus Cashflow

It was AGREED to DEFER discussions relating to surplus cashflow until a full report had been received on the cost of water works to be carried out by Northumbrian Water on all allotment sites.

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FGS 22/189 QUEEN'S JUBILEE FUNDING APPLICATIONS.

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a summary of the Queen's Jubilee funding applications sent out in advance of the meeting.

It was further AGREED to award all community groups and organisations who had applied the sum of £250 to support the costs of their Jubilee events.

The following organisations and community groups revied £250.

Ashington Community Craft Group
 Ashington Cricket Club
 Ashington Sea Cadets
 Ashington Veterans & Elders Institute
 Beamish Court Residents Group
 Girlguiding Ashington Division
 Heart of the Hirst Tenants and Residents Group
 Koast Radio
 Parkhead & Wansbeck Powersports
 Real Deal Plus
 Seaton Vale Neighbourhood Watch

FGS 22/190 HIRST PARK – MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL AND ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL.

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Hirst Park, including the Clerk's added note on costs, sent out in advance of the meeting.

It was further AGREED that a fixed price of £23,680 per year be set as the contribution of the Town Council towards the maintenance of Hirst Park.

It was further AGREED that the Clerk signs the document on behalf of the Council, once amended.

It was further AGREED to set-up quarterly meetings with officers and members to ensure the Council's continued involvement in Hirst Park (ward Cllrs would be consulted on appropriate meeting times).

FGS 22/191 ALEXANDRA ROAD PLAY AREA.

a) Play Area

It was AGREED to receive a verbal update on the progress of the works to develop the play area.

The Assets and Facilities Manager reported that the consultation held at Ashington Children's Centre had been a huge success and options for play equipment selected by parents, staff and children had contributed to the final design of the park and the equipment that is to be installed.

Stephen Humphrey also informed the Council that Ashington Leisure Partnership had awarded the sum of £18,000 towards the play area project, following a successful funding application bid by Ashington Town Council.

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The perimeter fence of the play area is to be painted as part of the project and quotes are being sort for this work.

b) Standing Order 105 E (viii)

It was AGREED to suspend standing order 105 E (viii) to allow consideration of a single contract price, in view that the specification is identical to a contract already being delivered to a high standard in Paddock Wood and Peoples Park.

c) Security and Safety

It was AGREED to receive a proposal from the Council's current provider of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), in Paddock and Peoples Park.

It was further AGREED to enter a three-year contract for Asset Watch to supply, install and monitor CCTV at Alexandra Road Play Area, at a cost of £62/week.

FGS 22/192 WOODHORN ROAD – PROPOSED TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES.

Following a debate and a vote, it was AGREED at six votes in favour/4 votes against, to respond to the Woodhorn Road, traffic calming measures proposal as follows:

Whilst Ashington Town Council agree there are road safety concerns on Woodhorn Road, which include vehicles driving at excessive speeds, and that traffic calming measures are required, the Council does not agree with the measures under consideration that propose fourteen x 75mm high, three abreast, speed cushions.

The Council appreciate the views of residents are paramount and that these are being sourced, and would be interested in the findings, as well as any further consultation, and technical detail to support future plans.

FGS 22/193 ASHINGTON HOSPITAL LEVEL CROSSING SURVEY.

a) Drop-in Session

It was AGREED to RECEIVE formal notice of a drop-in session being held on Tuesday 17 May 2022 at YMCA Northumberland, North View, NE63 9XQ, between 2pm and 7:30pm.

b) Consultation

It was AGREED to receive formal notice of the online public consultation and agree to add that a Town Council response be agreed at the Full Council meeting on 17th May 2022.

FGS 22/194 ADDITIONAL TIERED PLANTERS (3).

It was AGREED to delegate that the Assets and Facilities Manager organise locations for the three additional flower towers and obtain the relevant permissions from NCC Highways and Neighbourhood Services.

FGS 22/195 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

Tuesday 14th June 2022, 6.00pm Council Chamber.

FGS 22/196 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Town Council AGREED to pass the following resolution:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, permitted under Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended

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by the Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Exempt Information) (England) Order 2006) Act as the matter is confidential.

FGS 22/197 NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES OFFICER APPOINTMENT.

It was AGREED to offer the post of Neighbourhood Services Officer to Ryan Appleby as recommended by the interviewing members of the Personnel Committee.

FGS 22/198 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS – PREFERRED SUPPLIER.

Following a procurement exercise whereby three suppliers tendered for the opportunity to be the Council's preferred supplier, **it was AGREED** to select Gala Lights as the preferred supplier for the delivery of the town's Christmas Lights displays.

The meeting ended 8:40pm.

DRAFT