

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Full Council Meeting, held at 6:00pm
on Tuesday 29th November 2022
at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

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

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Town Clerk & RFO, Stephen Humphrey – Assets and Facilities Manager, Sharon Parmley – Administration (minute taking), Inspector Wayne Daniels – Northumbria Police and Mr Neil Quinn – NCC Partnership Manager, Economic Growth Regeneration Team.

FC22/1065 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Mark Purvis.

FC22/1066 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Victor Bridges, Lawrence Henderson and John Tully

FC22/1067 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interests.

FC22/1068 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensations.

FC22/1069 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** questions from Mrs Irene Walker in relation to the proposed cinema in Ashington, sent out in advance of the meeting.

The Chair informed Mrs Walker that the questions addressed to Mr Neil Quinn would be answered in item seven on the agenda, Economic Growth and Regeneration in Ashington.

FC22/1070 REPORT FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING TEAM

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** a report from Inspector Wayne Daniels sent out in advance of the meeting.

Police Report – General Overview:**Data over the last 12 weeks:**

Over the last 12-week period there have been 2,263 incidents reported to police in the Ashington area. There have been 898 crimes recorded from these incidents, the majority being in relation to violent crime (without injury), so this is typically threats of violence. Theft makes up the second largest portion of crime followed by criminal damage.

Issues of note

Shoplifting – a high percentage of our theft crime is in relation to shoplifting. I know this issue has caused some debate so I will explain our stance in more detail. -

We have seen an increase in theft from motor vehicle offences and burglary type offences (this is made up of garages and sheds).

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Speeding is regularly reported as an issue – again, I will give a further update in relation to this, and I have a proposal to put forward for some assistance. I would like to run an operation in Ashington in our hotspot areas for speeding motorists. As part of the operation, I would like to drug test the drivers at the roadside. Unfortunately, we do not have many of these tests available but if there was any money available from councillors who would be interested in tackling the issue then I would be grateful for their assistance. Speeding isn't restricted to one ward in Ashington, it's across the whole area.

Other Items of Note & Good Work

I have been working with some of the councillors and other partners regarding the Hirst area. We're currently trying to work towards a plan for the area which will also affect the rest of Ashington in the long term.

The CCTV that was put in place to overlook the Community Woods had an immediate impact regarding the fires. We were able to identify some kids who were caught setting fires, they were spoken to in front of their parents and referred into the extinguish programme. The issues significantly reduced, and we've only had one recent report but again the camera footage was excellent.

We have recently made some excellent arrests in relation to some of our sector targets, who had committed burglaries, theft from motor vehicle and shoplifting offences between them. All of which are now serving prison sentences.

We have now moved into our Winter Initiative phase where we will be focusing on violent crime and anti-social behaviour in particular. We will be carrying out extra patrols in our hotspot areas in the early evenings and then concentrate on our night-time economy later on the evenings. This will be taking place every Friday and Saturday from this weekend until the 18th of December and also include the nights of the England football matches.

Inspector Daniels asked Councillors if they could relay the message to residents to go through the proper channels for reporting incidents and crime and not ask PC's or CSO's, as this can result in a delay in the issues being dealt with.

Inspector Daniels reiterated that Councillors could email him directly with any matters.

Cllr Louis Brown asked Inspector Daniels if he was aware of the motorbikes racing around North Seaton, Cllr Brown indicated that it could possibly be the same offenders, travelling at high speed and it could only be a matter of time before someone is injured.

Inspector Daniels suggested that if it is the same offenders, someone could possibly know who they are, and need to be encouraged to report them. Inspector Daniels suggested that the area could be one of the hot spots that they intend to target for speeding drivers.

Cllr Mark Purvis enquired about a speed camera that had been purchased, asking if it was being used and the locations. Inspector Daniels informed Cllr Purvis that staff were in need of training for that particular piece of equipment, however, other cameras were being used to address speeding issues in the town.

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Cllr Pauline Thompson suggested the use of the data from ATC speed awareness signs to determine hot spots may be useful. It was discussed that Inspector Daniels would liaise with Stephen Humphrey to access and process the data.

Crimestoppers have requested to run a pilot zone in Ashington. The pilot will focus on community involvement and encourage public to report crime. The pilot has been extremely successful in other parts of the country. Inspector Daniels advised that the pilot required funding of approximately £700 to £1000 which the Town Council may wish to support.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers asked Inspector Daniels if anything was being done to address taxis doing U turns at the Grand Corner. Cllr Chambers also informed the Inspector that letters from members of the public to NCC regarding the issue were advised to contact the NCC planning department, who in turn referred them onto Advance Northumberland.

Mr Quinn informed the Council that the original highway regeneration scheme will likely be brought back as part of the plans to open up the Grand Corner and link the regeneration area with the high street.

Inspector Daniels left the meeting 6:00pm

FC22/1071 ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION IN ASHINGTON

The Chair invited the member of the public present to ask those questions relevant to regeneration.

The member of the public responded that as the report answered the original question, could alternative questions be asked, the Chair agreed.

The following questions were asked via the Chair and answered by NCC Officer Neil Quinn.

1) Why has the building of the Ashington cinema been delayed and what certainty is there that the project will be delivered within the next 2 years?

Mr Quinn responded by saying one of the main reasons for the delay was the price of materials going up, the original funding for the building is no longer enough to cover the total cost of the build.

Mr Quinn also confirmed that the original funds were still available for a cinema.

2) What are the risks, for example levelling up funding not approved or operator not secured, and what mitigations are in place to ensure project delivery?

Mr Quinn confirmed that they would know in the next couple of months if the bid is successful, in which case the funds will cover the additional costs of the build. However, if the bid is unsuccessful, they will have to consider how to progress with the cinema, at the moment the contract is still in place for Real Cinema, however, their model of cinema may not be achievable without the extra funding, therefore other cinema providers will have to be considered.

Mrs Walker left the meeting at 6:05pm.

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It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** an update report from Neil Quinn, sent out in advance of the meeting.

Ashington Investment Plan/Projects Progress Report

Report by: Neil Quinn, Economic Growth and Regeneration Team at Northumberland County Council

Background

Northumberland County Council held a range of stakeholder workshops in November 2020 and January 2021 on their aspirations for economic growth in Ashington. Following the workshops partners volunteered to become part of a new economic growth board called the Ashington Town Board. The board membership and Terms of Reference closely followed the guidance provided by central government for good governance in Town Deal boards. Board membership is drawn from the private, public and community and voluntary sector with a private sector chair. This approach was taken to put Ashington in a strong position of readiness when future government funding streams were announced.

Ashington Investment Plan/Spatial Plan

Ashington Town Board prioritised the development of an Investment Plan to serve as a regeneration framework for current and future economic investment in Ashington. Within the Ashington Town Board Terms of Reference there are clear guidelines on how the Ashington Investment Plan should be developed:

Development of the submission will involve:

- Collation of a draft town wide investment plan
- A series of workshops during 2021 with the Ashington Town Board members. Workshops to explore and challenge the contents of the draft investment plan, including a longlist of projects
- Board approval of the draft investment plan at a board meeting
- Selection of eligible and most appropriate projects/interventions for inclusion in the Ashington Investment Plan (externally moderated)
- Approval of the short list of projects for progression in the Ashington Investment Plan at an Ashington Town Board Meeting
- Board update on consultation and Ashington Investment Plan development at an Ashington Town Board meeting
- Board approval of the Ashington Investment Plan at an Ashington Town Board meeting

The final Ashington Investment Plan will be signed off by:

- The Chair of the Ashington Town Board
- The Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council
- The Leader of Northumberland County Council

The development of the Ashington Investment Plan (AIP) was supported by New Skills Consulting and Northumberland County Council. Public consultation on the AIP was carried out in the summer of 2021 and feedback was used to shape the draft AIP. The consultation exercise demonstrated public support for the vision and strategic objectives and provided important feedback on what residents would like to see in the town to support economic growth.

This work produced clear Priorities for Action and Investment to support each of the 6

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Investment Themes identified by the Board (Skills, education and aspiration; Business Growth and jobs; Town centre improvements; Transport and connectivity; Housing and quality of place; Enhanced culture, leisure and retail offer). This information was then included in the Ashington Investment Plan Call for Projects Prospectus circulated in Summer 2021 to generate project development ideas.

The call out process generated 30 project ideas submitted via proforma. Northumberland County Council (NCC) officers then assessed each of the projects against the set criteria, based on learning and intelligence from the previous national funding calls, and this information was fed back to the town board in November 2021. Town Board agreed that the Task and Finish Group Chairs and NCC Officers should now consider the projects for opportunities for joint collaborative proposals where project ideas demonstrated similar objectives and also to identify gaps. Following this work project applicants were asked to meet with similar projects and come back to the board with refined project proposals. This process resulted in a range of reworked projects and supported a more collaborative approach to the project development proposals. The identified projects have now provided a suite of potential projects to support the seeking of suitable funding streams.

The Ashington Town Board has also produced a Spatial Plan of the town to use as a working document when discussing potential future developments/projects in Ashington.

The Ashington Investment Plan is still in draft form and is due for completion by winter of 2022.

Levelling Up Fund (LUF)

The Levelling Up Fund, administered by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, is designed to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. The fund will support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport plans, and cultural and heritage assets.

In Ashington, two town centre projects were submitted as a package bid to the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 on 2 August 2022. The outcome of this bid is anticipated in the next few months.

The two projects included in the LUF bid are the Wansbeck Square Creative Community Hub and the Portland Park Cinema. Funding is sought from the Levelling Up Fund to contribute to the overall costs of these projects of approximately £24.4m.

Both projects have been subject to public consultation exercises and there is demonstrable support for both.

High Street Innovation Programme (HSIP) 22/23 and 23/24

NCC submitted a successful bid for Ashington to the North of Tyne Combined Authority for £1.9m to the Town and High Street Innovation Fund.

The HSIP fund has three strands:

1) Accelerate Ashington - business support: Targeted support will include pre-start, digital sales and promotion, advice and marketing aimed at creating a resilient and adaptable business base. Information on business support can be found at <https://accelerateashington.com/>. This strand will also include co-ordination of workshops with town centre businesses similar to those

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offered by the national High Street Task Force. These workshops will be designed to fully explore the fast-changing consumer base and understand how the high street will evolve, establishing the framework for future interventions.

2) Public Realm and Connectivity (Grand Corner and Station Road West): Project will improve pedestrian movements in the town centre by removing physical barriers and creating attractive, green public gateways and routes to key destinations as the first stage of large-scale investments in the town centre.

3) Animating Ashington: Programme will be designed to deliver new cultural events and activities that engage local people, attract visitors, and support the wider economic growth plans for the town. It will create animation and drive footfall, as well as raising the perception of the town and draw together cultural organisations to raise confidence and increase delivery capacity

The process undertaken to develop the HSIP bid utilised and built upon relevant projects submitted as part of the Ashington Investment Plan Call Out Process, particularly in relation to improved town centre connectivity and town centre creative activity and also helped fill a gap in the call out process in relation to direct business support, which was not reflected in any of the project proposals to the call out.

Forward Plan:

Following submission of the High Street Innovation Programme and Levelling Up Fund bids the Ashington Town Board has highlighted several areas which require further work and/or investment as mentioned below:

1) Hirst Masterplan: - A request to see a plan developed for the Hirst was submitted through the Callout Process in 2021. A masterplan is being commissioned by Advance Northumberland, Bernicia, and Northumberland County Council. The Masterplan Report should be completed by spring 2023.

2) Finalise Ashington Investment Plan: - Due for completion by winter 2022/23.

3) North of Ashington: - ATB have expressed a view that making better use of the land to the north of the town and improving connectivity between the town centre and the existing and new assets is important. This may require the development of a masterplan/study for the North of Ashington.

4) Work with Project Sponsors/Partners to provide support with projects that complement the priorities in the Ashington Investment Plan Contact officer: Neil Quinn, Partnership Manager, Northumberland County Council

Neil Quinn added to the report and informed members that he had been working closely with the Town Board to get Ashington ready for whatever funding streams come along.

The bid submitted to the Levelling up fund will be decided mid-January and if successful will include work on the cinema and the gateway to Ashington, which will be a multipurpose building comprising of office and retail space as well as a performance area and space for the YMCA.

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The gateway will be constructed at the newly appointed train station, consultants have looked at the space and have agreed full scale demolition of Wansbeck Square is the only option.

Cllr Grimshaw thanked Neil for all the work that has been done for project so far and agrees it will definitely benefit Ashington once completed.

Cllr Ball asked Neil what would happen to the digital funding if it was not used?
Mr Quinn responded by informing Cllr Ball that an audit will be carried out and if the digital presence is already high, they will concentrate on small business building.

Cllr Ball asked what type of jobs were expected to be created?

Mr Quinn has forecasts in place but did not have the figures with him. However, it is expected that all jobs would not be retail, there will be other job opportunities such as youth work.

Mr Quinn leaves the meeting at 6:25pm

FC22/1072 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and SIGN the minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 27th September 2022 as a true record.

FC22/1073 REPORT FROM THE CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON CLLR BOB WALKINSHAW

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a verbal report from the Civic Head, Cllr Bob Walkinshaw.

The Civic Head reported the following engagements.

Wednesday 19th October – Poppy Appeal Launch photo shoot.

Thursday 20th October – Photography Exhibition by Ashington Camera Club, the Civic Head commented that it was a brilliant exhibition, showcasing a high standard of photography, many of which were young members of the club.

Saturday 12th November – Photo opportunity at the newly refurbished play area on Alexandra Road, with funders who contributed, Ashington Leisure Partnership.

Sunday 13th November – Remembrance Sunday, Parade and laying the poppy wreath on behalf of Ashington.

Saturday 14th November – Cheque presentation to Ashington Litter Pickers Group. The group were successful in securing £500 funding from Ashington Town Council's small grants fund.

Saturday 10th December – the Civic Head is delighted to have received an invitation to the Ashington and District Male Voice Choir's Christmas Concert.

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FC22/1074 REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** a verbal report from the Leader of the Council, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert.

Cllr Cuthbert attended an in-person NALC meeting on the 19th September to discuss the effects of Storm Arwen and what work can be done to prepare for the future.

Cllr Cuthbert had also attended online courses, 'Preparing for Audit and Finance for Councils'.

More training will be available in the new year and some of the courses will be run by Rob Murfin.

FC22/1075 CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

It was **AGREED to NOTE** the draft minutes of the Climate Change and Environment Committee sent out in advance of the meeting.

FC22/1076 SELECTIVE LICENSING OF PRIVATE LANDLORDS

It was **AGREED** to note the letters/questions sent to Northumberland County Council in March.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** to receive the response from Northumberland County Council. No further action was agreed.

FC22/1077 LONG-TERM EMPTY HOMES

It was **AGREED** to note the letters/questions sent to Northumberland County Council in March.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** to receive the response from Northumberland County Council. No further action was agreed.

FC22/1078 NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION – PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) FOR THE CONTROL OF DOGS, ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, CRIME AND POLICING ACT 201, Part 4

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the Public Spaces Protection Order.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** that the Clerk respond to Northumberland County Council on behalf of the Council to request that sports/playing fields be added to the Public Spaces Protection Order as dog fouling is a major issue in these areas across the County.

FC22/1079 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 31st January 2022, 6pm, Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The meeting ended at 6.45pm