

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Full Council Meeting, held at 6:00pm
on Tuesday 31 January 2023
at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Marjorie Chambers (Deputy Chair), Caroline Ball, Michelle Brannigan, Victor Bridges, Louis Brown, Vicky Brown, Glyn Davies, Jim Lang, Pauline Thompson, John Tully, and Bob Walkinshaw.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Town Clerk & RFO, Stephen Humphrey – Assets and Facilities Manager, Sharon Parmley – Administration (minute taking),

FC23/1080 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Marjorie Chambers.

FC23/1081 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Eileanor Armstrong, Matthew Cuthbert, Lynne Grimshaw, Lawrence Henderson, Liam Lavery, Mark Purvis, and Sophie Robinson.

FC23/1082 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllrs. Caroline Ball and Jim Lang declared an interest in agenda item, FC23/1088 PLANNING APPLICATION 18/00779/FUL as the application would be coming to the Northumberland Local Area Council, of which they were members.

Cllr. Victor Bridges declared an interest in agenda item, FC23/1092 ALLOTMENT LIAISON GROUP.

FC23/1083 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensations.

FC23/1084 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Two members of the public attended the meeting to speak on item PLANNING APPLICATION 18/00779/FUL.

Cllr Caroline Ball and Cllr Jim Lang left the meeting.

The following comments were made and received by the Council:

Residents Comments on Application 18/00779/FUL

1. Once again, the timing of this application has been very inconsiderate and very clever! Although the date on our letter stated December 12th, we did not receive the letter until December 22nd, I suspect this was due to the current Royal Mail strikes and the increase in mail over this already busy time of year. The number of bank holidays and more strikes by Royal Mail will have an impact on how and when the local community can raise any comments. The date given to comment on this proposal is Tuesday 2nd January which is a Bank Holiday so is the date given achievable and fair?
2. I have had a number of issues with Northumberland County Council's website trying to look at the amended application and the comments everyone has made. It is very frustrating and reduces the time available to make any personal comments. I have tried to contact the planning office via telephone however I have been unable to gain any help. I even tried to email and got a reply that was very confusing and did not answer my questions about the process. If I am having difficulty who else is?

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3. I have surveyed the site and spoke to a few residents of the surrounding area and a lot of them do not know anything about the proposed plans. It seems the recent letters sent out about the amended plans have only been sent to those who have raised concerns before - again is this fair to the wider community who will be greatly impacted by this planning application. No signage or information about the planning application has been displayed around the site - is this lawful and in the interest of the community?
4. Given who is applying for planning permission and the various bodies, some connected to the government, is this a true and fair application as all of the bodies are associated with the County Council who own Ascent Homes.
5. It has been suggested in the application that there are a number of amenities and a good number of facilities in the surrounding areas. It would be interesting to understand what is considered as over development and again whether the existing infrastructures, local education and health facilities can cope with the increase in population that these houses would bring. I personally feel it will put a strain on these facilities and even the current climate of backlog due to COVID this can only have an impact on the current community.
6. The national policy and guidance around planning applications is based on economic, social and environmental objectives. The social objective is based on a healthy community this does not go well with what has been raised in point 5. The noise, dust and emissions from these new dwellings will also go against the national objectives. A very busy road where a number of families cross at all times of the day will be impacted by the increase of road users from the new estate. As for the environmental objective there are a number of areas where this proposal fails in the guidance. It states that we should be protecting and enhancing the historic environment, the style of housing will not do this. The field is where a number of the local community has family that has worked on the mine that was once situated here - building houses on this land will destroy the history of this land. Due to the destruction of the woodland areas and how unsafe they have become the field has become a place where the community can meet, there are also a number of people who use it for exercise. This has been a key element through COVID and has helped mentally by encouraging people to get out and about in a safe environment. The building of these houses will have a big impact on the local community.
7. Portland Terrace, Ellington Terrace, Portland Estate, Bothal Terrace, the Pines, the funeral Directors and New Moor Close have all suffered from years of noise and dust pollution from the opencast that we had to endure. The building of these houses will again cause both noise and dust pollution. Due to the disturbance and the impact on the proposed ground treatment and the building work proposed I would recommend that you ensure structural surveys are completed on the properties in New Moor Close and Portland Terrace to ensure we can see if the building work has had any impact on our properties. I would also like reassurance and an agreement to be written with the residents of New Moor Close and Portland Terrace to ensure building and deliveries are not conducted outside of the proposed operational hours and do not fall into unsociable hours.
8. Consideration to TRA4 needs to be taken into account and the increased parking due to users and occupiers of the development on already a very busy road.
9. In the same traffic assessment surely the position of the suggested new junction will have a dangerous impact on this road and the main junction at the end of the A1068.
10. Although tests on the land in question have been deemed as suitable, a second opinion should be sought on whether it can be built on given the number of mine shafts in the field. I would also like to raise concern about the surrounding area if this land was built on. There have already been some issues in the Woodland behind the proposed dwellings as holes have appeared. The field in which the stables are adjoined has moved quite considerably

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over the years we have lived in our house. Would subsidence be an issue and has this been ruled out for the areas that surround the new dwellings and in particular the houses on New Moor Close.

11. Given the number of dwellings and the average number of vehicles homeowners have this goes against climate change proposals of the County Council due to the increase of emissions due to the number of vehicles and the given traffic congestion currently on the A1068.
12. The number of dwellings and the amount of electricity consumed by these homeowners will also have an impact on the amount of energy that is being used within the Ashington area, again against the promises made about reducing the areas carbon footprint.
13. Although there are speed limits on the A1068 road this does not reduce the speed of all vehicles coming along this road. It is extremely difficult for vehicles to exit the junction from New Moor Close and Ellington Terrace now, I feel the vehicles during the building of the dwellings and after with the homeowners will have a negative impact on the junction. The queues forming from the junction at the end of A1068 can be very long and slow on gaining entry to the Morpeth Road, this will again have a negative impact to New Moor Close, Ellington Terrace, Portland Terrace and the new dwellings.
14. Although the number of dwellings is unchanged the layout has changed to accommodate some of the issues that the last planning application raised however there are still some concerns on the actual number of properties within the given space and how close they are to some properties in New Moor Close. In particular the one that is at the corner near to the public path and across from my house which will encroach on our privacy (and the potential homeowner of the house if the planning application is accepted).
15. As a property owner we have invested a lot of money in our garden, and we have raised our space to enjoy the views and the wildlife in the given field. Due to the storm and the destruction of the neighbouring woodland (adjacent to the Pegswood Straight) the amount of wildlife has increased and can be seen in the field. It is amazing how much wildlife has survived the open cast and now the destruction of the woodland area. If the land was built on this would have another very negative impact on the wildlife in this area.
16. As there has been a huge loss in the trees to the west of the field in which the planning application has been made, there will be an increase in carbon dioxide etc as the trees have been reduced and this will have an impact on the environment and goes against the environment plans of the area.
17. The proposed architecture of the houses would not blend in with the current house styles in the surrounding areas as it states in the proposal which would have an impact of the landscape and I feel it would have an impact on how the environment looks, the new houses would stand out and look out of place. The woodland and green belt areas would be spoilt by this look.
18. The proposed street lighting given by the application will also have a negative impact and create light pollution to our area.
19. Although the Traffic Assessment has been completed, I feel there is still concerns around the flooding on A1068 road near to the entrance of the proposed new development. I feel this needs to be addressed as this has the potential to cause accidents and it already has an impact on this road now.
20. The location of the puffin crossing facility has a big impact on the exiting of New Moor Close and Ellington Terrace as most residents or business users of the local businesses have to rely on other road users to let vehicles exit when the crossing is being used or at busy times, this could be up to 10 minutes, another 150 vehicles from the proposed dwellings would have a huge impact.

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21. It needs to be raised again that "Expectational circumstances" for building Green Belt land to ensure that the building application is needed for another 99 houses in Ashington? Or is it inappropriate development of Green Belt land. Due to all the building projects in and around Ashington area, I would argue that there are no housing shortages within our town?
22. There are a number of trees around the field and most of them had Tree Preservation Orders on them which prevented us from taking down various trees however we are led to believe that the Tree Preservation Orders have been lifted, is this due to the increase in housing applications. Given the destruction and lost of trees by recent storms should the Environment Policy and Climate Control issues we have - should we be keeping Tree Preservation Orders on trees to help the environment and not building more houses which will have an impact onto the environment.
23. As stated in my previous objections the archaeological survey was witnessed and understand that nothing was found however the survey was only carried out in small sections of the land so whether it was thorough survey could be questioned?
24. I understand that the plans have tried to leave the public walkways, an additional one to the last application to encourage more pedestrians' walkways through the woodlands at the back of the proposed application however, I again raise the risks of the woodland, has a survey of this land been incorporated? It holds a number of wildlife, some rare owls, buzzards and there is also a heronry that is protected, and they have nested there every year for the past 16 years. Building and the encouragement of people walking in this area will be detrimental to the existing wildlife in this area. The land is very dangerous in this woodland area and a number of mine shafts are located in this area. I feel it is very irresponsible to encourage people to walk through these woods when no local knowledge or tests have been conducted.
25. There continues to be problems with some of New Moor Close and Ellington Terrace households and the connection with the sewers, and I would argue that the sewers are inadequate for the building of 99 houses on the plot of land.
26. Finally, a few more points in which I base my objection, I hope these will also be taken into consideration:
 - Cannot emphasise this enough that the road system is inadequate.
 - Prejudice highway safety on Ellington Road and Morpeth Road.
 - Loss of open spaces in this area.
 - Adverse effect on rural economy, especially for the stables next to the proposed site.
 - Adverse effect on economy or businesses, is there enough provision?
 - Creating imbalance between jobs and homes.
 - Better alternative sites available within Ashington (not on Green Belt land) and if there is an actual need for the proposed houses?

The Resident asked the Council to support the Objection for the above reasons.

The Chair thanked the Residents for their comments.

Cllr Caroline Ball and Cllr Jim Lang re-joined the meeting.

FC23/1085 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** and **SIGN** the minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 29th November 2022 as a true record.

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FC23/1086 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 that unfortunately he had been unable to attend the Ashington & District Male Voice Choir Christmas Concert and Trinity Church's Carols and Mince Pies due to illness.

However, he had attended the Royal British Legion Christmas Function on Saturday 7th January 2023. It was a fantastic night with good music and a fish and chip supper.

The Civic Head informed the Council that he was looking forward to any future engagements.

FC23/1087 REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a tabled report from the Leader of the Council, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, who was unable to attend the meeting due to ill health.

Leader's Report – Full Council: 31/01/2023

I would like to give the Council an update on my activities as leader since my last report and to make a note of some of the events and developments that have taken place since then.

On the evening of Monday 23rd of January I attended the Town & Parish Councils Conference at County Hall in Morpeth along with the Town Clerk. One of the key aspects of this Conference was the unveiling of the revised Northumberland Town, Parish & Community Council Charter. In 2009 following Local Government reorganisation in Northumberland, when the former County Council and the six District Councils were abolished, the new unitary Northumberland County Council (NCC) adopted a Local Council Charter. The purpose of the Charter was to define the relationship between NCC and Town, Parish & Community Councils (TPCCs). It was designed to enable effective partnership working between the two tiers of local government. Reviews of the principles within the Charter were undertaken in 2011, 2014 and 2019.

The revised Charter of 2023 includes only minor amendments to the 2019 edition and has been prepared following consultation with Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC). It defines joint principles to enable NCC and TPCCs to work effectively together to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Northumberland.

The implementation of the Charter, and its effectiveness, will continue to be monitored by regular joint meetings of the TPCCs Liaison Working Group and, as a minimum, the document will be updated after every County Council election. The annual TPCC Conference will also address issues relating to the implementation of the Charter.

The Conference also saw Councillors and Officers from TPCCs engage in short roundtable discussions with NCC Officers from Neighbourhood Services, Highways, Northumberland Communities Together and iNorthumberland. Note-takers were on hand to record the discussions and points raised on all of the tables with a view to collating this information and disseminating it back to TPCCs.

The conference was concluded by comments from, and questions to, the Leader of NCC - Councillor Glen Sanderson. Councillor Sanderson stated that he had been able to visit several TPCCs recently and was open to invites from all Councils that wanted to engage with him.

Finally, I would like to put on record my disappointment at Ashington's unsuccessful bid in the

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second round of levelling-up funding. I would like to thank all those who worked so hard on the bid. Northumberland County Council have assured us that they are committed to working in partnership to support economic growth in Ashington. Funding from North of Tyne Combined Authority – High Street Innovation Programme was successfully obtained in 2022, and work will pick up pace in the coming months. Work on the Hirst Masterplan has begun and Ashington will benefit from the opening of the Northumberland Railway line and the new Northumberland College campus.

Cllr Pauline Thompson enters the meeting at 6:15pm.

Cllr Tully informed the Council that Cllr Matthew Cuthbert had resigned from the position of Leader of the Council and would like to thank him for doing the role to the best of his ability.

Cllr Tully informed that he would be facilitating the role until the next meeting when a new leader would be elected.

FC23/1088 PLANNING APPLICATION 18/00779/FUL

Cllr Caroline Ball and Cllr Jim Lang left the meeting.

The Council formally received the planning application via an online link, sent out in advance of the meeting, for the development of 99 dwellings incorporating new site access and internal access road, provision of SUDS, open space and landscaping, on land Southwest of Portland Terrace, Ellington Road, Ashington, Northumberland
[18/00779/FUL](#)

Cllr Brannigan asked the Council to object in the strongest terms possible to the planning application. Cllr Brannigan stated that natural habitats would be destroyed, and that Ashington has already reached its target for house building, as set out in the Local Plan. Cllr Brannigan stated that Ashington does not need any more houses and the 10% of affordable homes does not justify the build, that infrastructure in the town cannot cope with the additional homes, and that school age children are already having to travel to Blyth as there is not enough school places here.

Cllr Glyn Davies commented that the planning process was weighted in favour of developers.

Cllr Bob Walkinshaw echoed the environmental concerns already noted.

Cllr John Tully PROPOSED that the matter be delegated to the Clerk to respond with an objection to the application, in consultation with ward Cllrs. **This was seconded** by Cllr Pauline Thompson.

Cllr Michelle Brannigan commented that it was within the Council's power to agree to object to the application at this meeting of the Full Council, rather than this being deferred and delegated to an officer. The motion was put but not seconded.

The original motion was supported and passed.

Members of the Public left the meeting 6:25pm.

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Cllr Caroline Ball and Cllr Jim Lang re-joined the meeting.

FC23/1089 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **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 (1) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960) as the matter is confidential and relates to employment matters.

FC23/1090 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM – RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

a) Employment Budget

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the recommendations from the Personnel Committee meeting, held on 29th November 2022 that employment costs for 2023/24 include provision for additional administrative support to allow the current Senior Administrative Officer to take on the role of Communications and Engagement Officer. Additionally, to include possible provision for support with Allotments, to be assessed in September 2023.

b) Training Budget

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the recommendations from the Personnel Committee meeting, held on 29th November 2022 in respect of training budget for Members, which includes an increase to allow Carbon Literacy Training, additional external training, and members to complete a Certificate in Local Council Administration, should they wish.

c) Policies

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the recommendations from the Personnel Committee meeting, held on 29th November, for an Officer Code of Conduct.

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the recommendations from the Personnel Committee meeting, held on 29th November, for Homeworking Policy. It was **AGREED** to defer the motion to the next meeting of the Council.

The Clerk advised that the summons and agenda for the next meeting was already out, therefore if the item was to be deferred to that meeting, standing orders would need to be suspended.

The motion to defer the Homeworking Policy was **SECONDED and AGREED**.

FC23/1091 BUDGET AND ANNUAL PRECEPT 2023/24

a) Proposed Budget 2023/24

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** a skeleton budget for 2023/24, sent out in advance of budget discussions. The following budget was **AGREED**:

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MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT	BUDGET
Staff Salaries	£199,744
NI Contributions	£20,475
Pension Contributions	£36,154
Staff Expenses (Phone, Mileage, Clothing)	£3,000
Staff Training	£3,500
Office Rental	£6,500
Meeting Hire	£1,000
ATC Vehicle Costs	£6,402
Storage Unit (Green Lane)	£6,702
Tools & Equipment	£6,000
Office, Stationery & Sundries	£4,500
Telecoms & IT	£6,000
Professional Expenses	£2,000
Publicity & Comms	£2,300
Audit Fee	£2,750
Insurance	£6,750
Subscriptions	£5,300
Civic Head Expenses	£500
Member Training	£4,500
Sub Total	£324,078
RECREATION & LEISURE SERVICES	BUDGET
Events, Community & Engagement	£63,000
Play Areas (General)	£7,000
Hirst Park (MOU)	£23,680
Christmas Lights Displays	£27,500
Allotments (Capital)	£77,000
Allotments (General)	£10,000
Sub Total	£208,180
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	BUDGET
ATC Neighbourhood Partnership Agreement	£236,700

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Environmental Enforcement Officer (SLA)	£0
Environmental Enhancements	£57,727
Climate Change Projects & Initiatives	£31,000
Bus Shelters (Capital)	£28,000
Bus Shelters (General)	£6,000
Seats	£1,500
Litter Bins	£8,000
Memorials	£1,000
Subtotal	£369,927
GRANTS & SUBSIDIES	BUDGET
Community Support	£100,000
Youth Support	£20,000
Subtotal	£120,000
OTHER SERVICES	BUDGET
Election Expenses (Casual Vacancies)	£8,400
CCTV Provision (Town Centre)	£10,000
CCTV Provision (Play/Other)	£10,000
Interactive Cameras	£2,500
Subtotal	£30,900
Grand Total	£1,053,085

b) Earmarked Reserves

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** the Asset Management Budget.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** that the provision to earmarked reserves in 2023/24 to accumulate funds towards longer term asset management and replacement be set at **£97,000**.

c) General Reserves and Contingency

It was **AGREED** that the provision towards 'General Reserves and Contingency' for 2023/24 be reduced to **£175,000** which allows greater spending in the budget, as given.

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d) 2023/24 Precept Demand

It was **AGREED** to make a Precept Demand to Northumberland County Council of **£836,861**.

Based on the current financial position and tax base provided by NCC, this represents an annual cost of **£106.94** to the average band D householder, the same as in 2023/23, therefore no increase in the precept.

FC23/1092 ALLOTMENT LIAISON GROUP

a) New Allotment Liaison Group

It was **AGREED** to form an Allotment Liaison Group to provide a forum to enable a mutual exchange of information, and to enhance the provision and management of allotments. The provisions of the group were received and **AGREED**.

b) Membership

It was **FURTHER AGREED** to nominate Cllrs. Sophie Robinson, Pauline Thompson, Bob Walkinshaw, and Marjorie Chambers, who will be part of the Allotment Liaison Group, along with ATC Officers.

FC23/1093 EVENTS GROUP

It was **AGREED** to enable a meeting of members and officers to support the formation of an Events Working Group or Sub-Committee.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** that Cllrs. Sophie Robinson, Caroline Ball and John Tully be members of the Group and look to schedule their first meeting to propose 'Terms of Reference'.

FC23/1094 ENHANCED SERVICES – PARTNERSHIP NEGOTIATION GROUP

It was **AGREED** to form a specific negotiating group to facilitate a focused, informed, productive discussion about enhanced service delivery in the town and how that could look in the future.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** that Cllrs. John Tully, Pauline Thompson, and Mark Purvis be members of the group, which would continue after May's annual meeting with the same membership to ensure continuity.

FC22/1095 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 28 March 2023, 6pm, Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The meeting ended 6:50pm.