

**AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX**

**CLLRS PRESENT:**

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw (**Chair**), Cllr Mark Purvis, Karl Green, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Pauline Thompson, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Glyn Davies, John Allen, Scott Amery, Jim Lang, Bob Walkinshaw, John Allen, Steven Roberts

**ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE**

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer, Sharon Parmley – Engagement and Events Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration and Communications Officer

**FGS2526/038 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR**

Welcome by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

A moment of silence was held for the late Cllr Victor Bridges.

**FGS2526/039 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Paul Wright and Caroline Ball.

**FGS2526/040 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Cllr Louis Brown declared an interest in allotment discussions FGS2526/050 GRANT FUNDING 2025/26 – ANNUAL GRANTS.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw declared an interest in annual grant discussions FGS2526/050 GRANT FUNDING 2025/26 – ANNUAL GRANTS.

Cllr David Coyle declared an interest in FGS2526/050 GRANT FUNDING 2025/26 – ANNUAL GRANTS.

**FGS2526/041 DISPENSATIONS**

Cllr Louis Brown requested a dispensation on allotment discussions.

**FGS2526/042 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were 3 members of the public present.

A letter by a resident was submitted.

It read:

“Hello Sarah,

Please find below questions for tomorrow's meeting.

1. Given that NCC are starting work on their Local Development Plan what steps will the Town Council take to ensure the most meaningful public involvement in this, particularly by means of producing an Ashington Neighbourhood plan?

The Localism Act introduced ‘Neighbourhood Plans’, which can be prepared by Town and Parish Councils. Although there is not a statutory requirement for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans they can act as a catalyst to meaningful public participation in shaping what the community wants, not simply what they oppose. The scope of the plan is determined by the Town and Parish Council in consultation with their communities. Neighbourhood Plans

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must take account of national planning policy and be in general conformity with the Local Plan. Neighbourhood Plans are not Development Plan Documents. However, once made, or approved by referendum, they will form part of the Development Plan for the area.

2. Given the response from Advance Northumberland about the sale of the Green Lane Workshops to an out of area property company and their statement that "We acknowledge that communication during the disposal process could have been improved and we are committed to strengthening this aspect in future programmes. We value the Town Council's ongoing efforts to work collaboratively for the benefit of the community and look forward to maintaining a positive relationship as we continue to deliver regeneration projects in Ashington. "

Can the Town Council explain how they will work with local businesses to ensure that there is not a repeat of this sub-optimal outcome and investigate if there is an opportunity for some form of cooperative or social enterprise structure that could see the ownership and management of similar assets being based here in the community?

3. To follow a question about the Old Police station. (not received)"

Cllr Pauline Thompson raised a query regarding item 2, line 5, seeking clarification on the reference to "we value" and understanding that the information was sourced from McGregor. Sarah clarified that this was the response received from Advance Northumberland when enquiries were made about the disposal of Green Lane.

Cllr John Tully expressed strong concerns about the sale of public assets, emphasising that such assets are permanently lost once the disposal is finalised. He stated that what had been a valuable community asset for Ashington was now gone and criticised the County Council's lack of communication regarding this matter. He requested that any County Councillors present seek answers on this issue. Sarah noted that this disposal had occurred pre-election and indicated that enquiries would need to be directed to the previous county councillors.

Cllr Scott Amery voiced his criticism of the briefing provided by Northumberland County Council and confirmed that he had held a meeting with Advance Northumberland to express his disappointment regarding this matter. During that meeting, Advance Northumberland had explained that the disposal was a strategic decision based on maintenance considerations and that it was deemed appropriate timing to dispose of the asset.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw stated that the committee had received no prior notification of this disposal and emphasised that Advance Northumberland had not informed them of what she characterised as their asset stripping activities.

Cllr Louis Brown provided historical context, recalling that in 1980 Prince Charles had opened the workshops on Green Lane when it served as the old council depot. He noted that this facility had subsequently been taken over by Wansbeck Council and had helped facilitate the establishment of new businesses. Cllr Brown further criticised Advance Northumberland for what he described as asset stripping, citing their actions regarding part of North Seaton Colliery as well, and condemned the entire situation as absolutely atrocious.

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**FGS2526/043 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the last Finance and General Services Meeting held on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

**FGS2526/044 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES**

This report provides an update on key activities and developments since the last Finance and General Services meeting held in July 2025.

***Team Update***

All officers are completing time and task sheets to note the work carried out on a daily basis. I have asked for this to support your strategy and budget discussions throughout the autumn and to help me identify where there are gaps that would benefit from greater resource.

This has been a very busy summer for me. Dealing with things outside of the Council's usual remit has been a challenge and has thwarted the time that is usually available when meetings aren't scheduled to catch-up on housekeeping. I have managed to progress a payment card for the Council, but an investment account is still on the to do list, as is a more permanent solution to our small van. These things will be actioned but later than I'd have liked.

***Strategic Meetings***

As a reminder you have been invited to attend the following round table meetings to discuss the priorities of the Council:

23 <sup>rd</sup> September – 5:30pm – 7pm	Hirst Welfare Centre
21 <sup>st</sup> October – 5:30pm – 7pm	Hirst Welfare Centre (if the room works in September)
18 <sup>th</sup> November – 5:30pm – 7pm	(as above)

The CCE meeting has been changed to Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> November to accommodate the above.

***Invite from Cllr Sanderson***

If you have not already responded, please advise Gary if you expect to attend the event with Cllr Glenn Sanderson on 2<sup>nd</sup> October in Cramlington – 6 – 7:30pm.

***LTP Programme 2026-2029***

I have emailed asking if Cllrs would like to attend the sessions on the Local Transport Plan programme. All County Cllrs are invited separately. I will attend and disseminate the information to all, but there is a further space if any else is keen to attend. There are two sessions nearby that may interest you, I am attending Bedlington.

- o SE – Thursday 18th September 18.00- 19.30 Bedlington Community Centre
- o Central – Thursday 25th September 17.00- 18.30 County Hall Morpeth

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***Neighbourhood Services***

***Memorial Garden***

Work carried out by Brambledown is complete. By the time of reading all of the refurbished seats will also be back in the garden, looking 100% better following some joinery by Mark and a much better quality matt black finish, they look very smart.

***Doves Corner***

This ward Cllr funded project should be complete at the time of reading. The scope of works changed several times and it is now planted with wholly sustainable planting, including a lavender border that was expected to be annual planting by NCC.

I am liaising with Ward Cllrs now to establish if they would now prefer this asset to be maintained in-house as opposed to being maintained by NCC. This would give ATC full control over the appearance, and rather than inspecting the works carried out by another, we would be fully responsible.

***Town Council Assets***

All Town Council assets are being listed via description, location, what3words, and a photograph. As well as being in accordance with proper practice in respect of our Assets Register, this will also allow me to build, with the help of Gary, a spreadsheet that records maintenance visits. Memorials, Gateways, Planters and Towers are being catalogued first. When each asset is visited whether that be for a routine visit, for weed spraying, or watering this will be recorded with before and after photographs.

Following the horticultural assets being listed, the same will apply to seats, litter bins and bus shelters.

If we do move to an asset management database in the future, having this information available in spreadsheet form will be a huge help.

Town Seats are the next priority and all Cllrs have been contacted to ask if there are any seats in your ward that you would prefer were replaced with the new style seating which is made with recycled materials and no maintenance, as well as being more accessible with arm rests. If you do identify any seats that you think are past their best and would be better replaced than refurbished, I would be asking those with ward funding to consider using this for that purpose. Alternatively, if there are several seats in your ward, we could approach County Councillors for use of their Members Local Improvement Scheme Funding (MLIS).

***Allotments***

Clearance work has continued across sites, with a skip recently used to address a long-neglected plot at NS Colliery. This area had become overgrown and used for fly tipping, making it difficult to let. The clearance will help bring the plot back into productive use. At Seaton Hirst, further recycling improvements have been introduced, with NCC providing bins for glass disposal. These are already being well used by plot holders. Looking ahead, dedicated recycling days are scheduled for North Seaton in November.

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Weekly Tuesday sessions at Woodhorn Road continue to make a positive impact. Recent work has included weed spraying of car parks, clearance of abandoned plots and entrances, and regular litter picks. The ongoing support and cooperation from plot holders is greatly appreciated.

At Hirst East End, the internal roadways have been strimmed, with plans to weed spray before weather conditions change. In addition, joint work with NCC is scheduled this week regarding the boundary at Green Lane Allotments.

Site inspections have commenced at Nursery Park and North Seaton Colliery. Where issues have been identified, improvement letters have been sent. Wherever possible, plot holders were contacted by telephone prior to letters being issued, ensuring a supportive and constructive approach.

A seasonal fire ban for garden waste has now been introduced at Wansbeck Road and Highmarket Allotment Sites. This will apply throughout the year, excluding March and November, balancing environmental considerations, and neighbouring complaints with the needs of tenants.

Finally, work continues to resolve water billing issues affecting Wansbeck Road, Highmarket, and Highmarket Small Holdings (Welbeck Estates). Further information is available if required.

### ***Play Areas***

#### ***North Seaton Colliery Play Area***

The consultation for the redevelopment of NS Colliery Play Area is underway. We have an in-person event at the Community Centre on Wednesday night. Following this Kompan will draw up plans that meet the needs of those who have engaged in the consultation. Additionally, tree works are planned, as well as further work to the entrance/exit to ensure accessibility requirements are met.

#### ***Bywell Road Play Area***

Bywell Road play area is maintained by NCC, it was not part of the long-term lease agreement as it is considered 'not fit for purpose' as a play area. Following input from County Cllr Sonia Simm and ward Cllrs there has been some engagement with NCC on the possibility of developing the space. I produced a survey that could be used to questions residents and Gary made this available via a QR code. We are awaiting an update as to whether the surveys have been posted out to residents by NCC.

It would be expected that following the survey, results would be compiled and a way forward could be considered. This is dependent upon funding available, and the Town Council's commitment to maintain any new space, if that was the result. I would not bring to the Council to take on the asset as it is now as it has no play value, however, with development this could be considered.

### ***Annual Governance and Audit 2024/25***

Everything was completed in accordance with proper practice and it is expected that the Council's Accounts will be placed on the September Full Council meeting.



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***Events and Engagement***

***Hirst Working Group (July Meeting)***

Summary of action points from the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

- **Terms of Reference Review:** All members to share and update terms of reference by September 3<sup>rd</sup>
- **Communications Meeting:** Rachel to invite Lauren for discussion on innovative communication approaches
- **Environmental Focus Session:** Neil and Carla to organise dedicated meetings on environmental issues

***Ongoing Initiatives***

- **Cross-Promotion Activities:** All members to maintain calendar of activities for better co-ordination and promotion
- **Group Branding:** Develop project name for the group (ASTRA has been suggested)
- **Community Outreach:**
  - Carla exploring community newsletter options for awareness and communication
  - All members to distribute flyers and leaflets to Ashington
- **Resource Sharing:** Gemma to share new hive details when available

***Next Steps***

The working group will reconvene in September to review progress on these actions and continue their collaborative work on community development initiatives.

***Free Swim Sessions Summer Holidays Report***

The free swim initiative continued throughout the summer holidays as part of Ashington Town Council's commitment to providing accessible recreational opportunities for local residents. The programme was designed to encourage swimming participation and help develop the next generation of swimmers.

***Programme Details:***

**Duration:** 26<sup>th</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024

**Schedule:** Every Saturday and Wednesday, 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM

**Capacity:** 80 slots available per session

**Cost:** Free of charge

**Booking:** First come, first served basis

The programme demonstrated strong community engagement with consistent participation throughout the holiday period. The average attendance across all sessions was 35 participants, representing approximately 44% utilisation of available capacity.

This attendance level indicates healthy community interest while maintaining comfortable swimming conditions without overcrowding. The programme successfully balanced accessibility with quality of experience for participants.

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Date of session	No. of attendees
26 <sup>th</sup> July	15
30 <sup>th</sup> July	39
2 <sup>nd</sup> August	38
6 <sup>th</sup> August	51
9 <sup>th</sup> August	23
13 <sup>th</sup> August	43
16 <sup>th</sup> August	34
20 <sup>th</sup> August	55
23 <sup>rd</sup> August	29
30 <sup>th</sup> August	27

One session scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> August was cancelled due to essential maintenance work being carried out on the pool facilities. This necessary maintenance ensures continued safety and quality of the swimming environment for future users.

The cancellation was managed appropriately to minimise disruption to regular programme participants, and the cancellation was highlighted on our social media channels well in advance of the cancelled session.

The consistent attendance figures demonstrate the value of this council-funded initiative in meeting community recreational needs during the summer period.

**October Half Term dates TBC**

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October at 1pm

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November at 1pm

***NCC Animating Ashington Cultural Event Grant Fund***

Ashington Town Council has submitted two applications to the Animating Ashington Cultural Events Grant Scheme ahead of the September 9<sup>th</sup> deadline.

The first application seeks £13,780 for the Christmas Lights Switch On & Lantern Parade on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025, which will be a more extensive community celebration including over 20 community group activities, lantern-making workshops at the Masonic Hall, a themed parade with live band and stilt walkers, and performances by local groups including the Ashington & District Male Voice Choir, expecting approximately 1,500 attendees. The availability of funding adds to the Council's £5,000 budget and allows us to recreate some of the very expensive magic that was brought by Walk the Plank.

The second application requests £5,000 for an Ashington Christmas Market. Both events aim to support local businesses, strengthen community cohesion, and establish annual Christmas traditions for Ashington, with Sharon serving as the primary contact and project manager for the

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Christmas Light Switch on and Money Tree Crafters and Traders project managing the Christmas Market.

***Youth Coordination Collaboration Meeting***

The Youth Advisory Committee collaboration meeting held on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025, brought together representatives from multiple youth organisations, council services, and Ashington Town Council to explore strengthening youth provision in the community. A report is included as part of the agenda.

***Field of Remembrance update***

Work is now complete on the 3ft x 2ft poppy wreath and installation of the wreath will take place on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2025. Thanks to Mark for the frame and Ashington WI for the poppy display.

Details will be available soon for the public service which will be held on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November in the Field of Remembrance at Saltwell Park.

***Small Grant Filming***

Production of a promotional video featuring the small grant scheme recipients is progressing well, with filming sessions completed for Wansbeck Community Links, Wansbeck Wanderers Football Club, Seaton Vale Neighbourhood Watch, only Reiverdale Scouts to do.

The video format represents an enhanced approach to showcasing Ashington Town Council's small grant programme and the groups we fund, with Jimmy France from Luk Luk Productions handling the production.

The completed video should provide effective promotion of the scheme's impact and beneficiaries, as well as the groups themselves having access to some great PR. The next application window for the small grants programme opens on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

***Ashington Pride Family Picnic 2025 - Event Report***

The Ashington Pride Family Picnic took place on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September at Hirst Park from 12noon to 3pm, organised in partnership between Pride Action North and Ashington Town Council. The event successfully created a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQIA+ people, families, and allies to celebrate together in the community.

The joint collaboration between Pride Action North and Ashington Town Council proved highly effective in delivering the event. This partnership approach allowed for the pooling of resources, expertise, and community networks, resulting in a well-coordinated celebration that maximised both organisations' strengths. The collaborative model demonstrated how community organisations and local government can work together successfully to deliver inclusive events that serve diverse community needs.

The event attracted 308 attendees in total, with 258 people actively engaging in the various activities provided. Notably, 71 young people participated in the festivities, demonstrating strong youth engagement with the event.



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These attendance figures were achieved despite a car accident that blocked the park entrance for approximately one hour during the event, which could have significantly impacted visitor numbers.

The picnic featured a diverse range of activities including creative workshops, live music, dance and movement sessions, sports activities, and entertainment from drag artists. Face painting and hairdressing services were popular attractions, alongside community safety demonstrations. Refreshments were provided, with attendees encouraged to bring their own picnic or purchase treats on-site. Picnic blankets were available for borrowing from the Pavilion. Representatives from Woodhorn Museum, Specsavers, and Full Circle Food Project attended the event to provide helpful advice and resources to attendees, enhancing the community support aspect of the celebration.

The event was well-received by both active participants and casual park visitors, with positive engagement observed from people who happened to be walking through the park during the festivities. This organic community interaction suggests the event successfully created an inclusive and approachable atmosphere that welcomed spontaneous participation.

Pride Action North received funding for the event from Ashington Town Council and the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with the North East Combined Authority serving as the Lead Authority, demonstrating institutional support for LGBTQIA+ community events in the region.

The event's success in attracting diverse participation and creating positive community engagement, despite logistical challenges, indicates strong community appetite for inclusive celebrations in Ashington.

***Hirst Working Group – September Meeting***

Summary of action points from the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

**Community Facilities & Programmes:**

- Futsal sessions being organised (Jake & Keir to share details)
- PlayZone building programme of use including free access, private bookings, and structured activities
- Family hub has 5 new staff members and usual activities resuming after successful summer programme
- Photography group and IT sessions for local residents run by NCVA
- Various upcoming events at welfare centre: Halloween disco, community lunch, Christmas disco, Children in Need fundraising

**Community Engagement & Development:**

- Resident forum working alongside Hirst master plan and NCVA
- NCVA seeking local voices for vox pop project related to Cambois data centre development
- Funding fair on 22nd September

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- Master plan document being rewritten for better community accessibility
- Community researchers programme available
- Street games coming to Northumberland

***Community Tensions and Safety***

**Current Status:**

- Community tensions assessment at "moderate low" level, indicating rising concerns
- Police advising events to continue as usual with enhanced risk assessments where needed
- Low reporting levels across the board

**Actions Being Taken:**

- Meeting planned between councillors and community organisations to discuss damage and risks
- Training on challenging inappropriate behaviours (Wayne coordinating)
- "Ashington Stands Together" initiative being developed with logo creation
- Bernicia housing taking strong action against tenants involved in racial incidents

**Action Items**

Notable responsibilities assigned to various team members including sharing event details, organising meetings, creating promotional materials, and coordinating various community initiatives.

The meeting was noted as informative with productive discussion and clear action points identified.

***ATC Slot on Koast Radio Show***

From Monday 6<sup>th</sup> October we will have a slot on the breakfast show from 9am to 10am, the first Monday of every month.

We will be promoting ATC events and activities as well as sharing meeting dates and council information and initiatives.

We also hope to have Cllr interviews and music requests from Cllrs for each show and invite Cllrs to let us know if they wish to be involved.

***Website and Social Media PR***

***Website***

The following items appeared on our website news page since the previous officer's report. Members are reminded that we maintain active Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages to promote Council activities and engage with our community. You can read them in full by visiting the website.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/>

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<a href="#"><u>Ashington Community Litter Project Receives Essential Equipment from SUEZ</u></a>	8th September 2025
<a href="#"><u>UPDATE: Information from Northumberland County Council regarding Former Quay Furniture Building on Ashington High Street</u></a>	5th September 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Town Council - Casual Vacancy – Hirst Ward</u></a>	3rd September 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Youth Groups Unite for Stronger Community Impact</u></a>	2nd September 2025
<a href="#"><u>New era for skills: North East colleges form transformational alliance to power regional growth</u></a>	1st September 2025
<a href="#"><u>Finance &amp; General Services Committee Meeting on 09/09/25.</u></a>	1st September 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Sees Strong Results from Fly Tipping Crackdown</u></a>	29 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Help Us Build Something Amazing - New Play Area Coming to North Seaton Colliery</u></a>	20 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Celebrates a Spectacular Annual Garden Vegetable Show</u></a>	19 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Marks the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day with Moving Ceremony</u></a>	18 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>No Plans to Sell Ashington Allotments</u></a>	13 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Town Council Awards First Round of Small Grants to Local Community Groups</u></a>	6 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>In Memory of Councillor Victor Bridges</u></a>	5 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Cambois Rowing Club Celebrates Outstanding Performance at British Championships</u></a>	5 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>What an Amazing Day! Get Active Family Fun Day &amp; Walking Football Festival Success!</u></a>	4 <sup>th</sup> August 2025

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<a href="#"><u>Major Improvements Planned for NPC Lintonville GP Practice in Ashington</u></a>	4 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington's Christmas Lights: A Fond Farewell and a Bright New Future</u></a>	4 <sup>th</sup> August 2025
<a href="#"><u>Town Centre Developments</u></a>	28 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Union Flag in Memorial Garden</u></a>	28 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Get Active Family Fun Day and Walking Football Festival Coming to Ashington</u></a>	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Woodhorn Narrow Gauge Railway Seeks Community Support to Complete Vital Project Phase</u></a>	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Riverside Open Day Celebrates Community Spirit with Packed Programme of Activities</u></a>	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
Full Council Meeting - 29/07/2025	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Dive Into Summer: Ashington Town Council Launches Summer Free Swimming Programme for All Ages</u></a>	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>The Finance and General Services Committee Reports Great Successes During Month of June</u></a>	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Make a Splash This Summer!</u></a>	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Town Council's CCTV Investment Shows Positive Impact in Creating a Safer Community</u></a>	11 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Town Council Unanimously Backs Urgent Action to Save Historic Co-op Building</u></a>	9 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Civic Head Attends "Watch This Space" Performance from Mortal Fools</u></a>	9 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<a href="#"><u>Ashington Town Council Celebrates Staff Milestones and Role Changes</u></a>	9 <sup>th</sup> July 2025

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<a href="#">Applications Now Open for Ashington Town Council's 2025–26 Grant Funding</a>	9 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
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**Facebook**

Since the last F&G Meeting, our Facebook page has continued to perform well, with steady increases in interactions, followers, and overall engagement.

Building on our previous milestone of reaching 3,000 followers, we've now grown to 3,300 followers, showing that our audience continues to expand at a healthy pace.

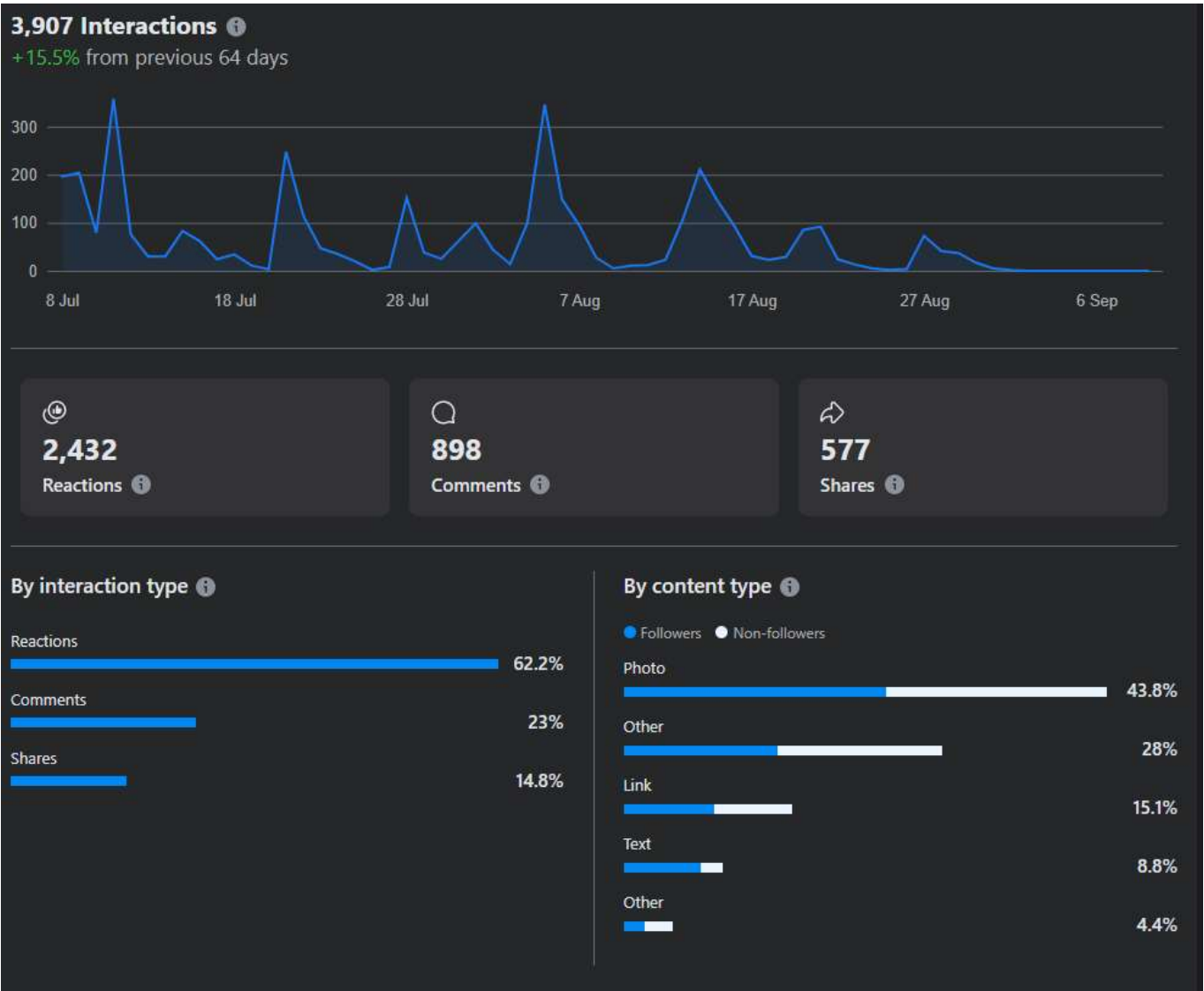
The content that resonates most with our community falls into several key areas: heartwarming community stories like our Community Fair Day coverage, important local causes such as the campaign supporting Woodhorn Narrow Gauge Railway, and updates on council projects like the Co-Op building work. Once again, Walk the Plank delivered exceptional results during Animating Ashington, and we're grateful for their outstanding work and continued partnership with our events.

The main challenge we've identified is that repeated content, such as our ongoing Free Swim promotions, tends to lose impact over time as people naturally seek out fresh content. While we couldn't avoid this repetition recently, we expect to resolve this issue once our advertising campaigns are properly established, giving us better ways to promote regular services without overwhelming our main feed.

A goal was set last month to increase our following by 66 and was hit within two weeks reaching 114 making the goal overreach by 173%.

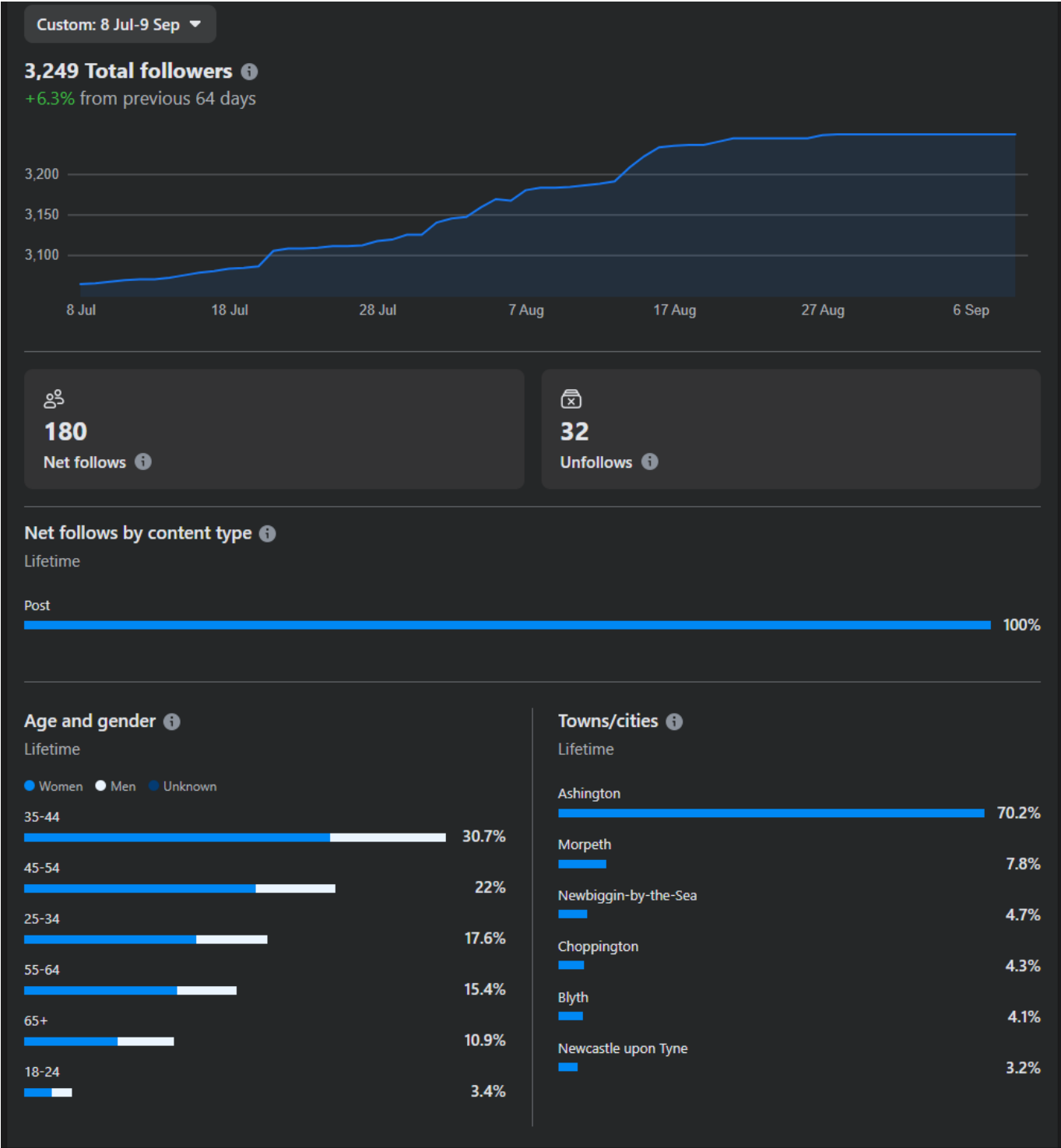
The following metrics are from the last FGS meeting - 8<sup>th</sup> July 2025 to the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2025.

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Top 10 Facebook Posts.

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Cllr John Tully congratulated those involved with Dove's Corner project, praising it as a great completion and noting that it looks beautiful. Councillor Louis Brown and Councillor Coyle expressed their agreement with these sentiments.

Cllr Louis Brown informed the committee that he would be attending Glen Sanderson's meeting on October 2nd at Cramlington, which is being held by Northumberland County Council regarding Budget and Corporate Priorities.

Cllr Scott Amery requested clarity regarding reference to 'engagement with Cllrs' referred to in the report of the Hirst Working Group meeting in September, which to his knowledge had not happened. Also noting that there had been no representation from police at the public meeting

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held. The Executive Office responded that this related to an update from Inspector Daniels which Cllr Amery could seek directly.

Cllr Mark Purvis asked for clarification about which public meeting Cllr Amery was referring to, Cllr Amery specified that it was the meeting held at North Seaton Community Centre on Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2025.

Cllr Pauline Thompson raised concerns regarding Officers attending meetings in the Hirst Ward without Councillors being informed or invited. The Executive Officer clarified that some meetings are arranged by external organisations, which Officers, including the Events and Engagement Officer, are invited to attend, and that reports from such meetings are subsequently presented to Council, as was the case at this meeting.

Cllr Thompson expressed the view that this could lead to Councillors losing public confidence. Cllr Mark Purvis disagreed, noting that Officers appropriately attend meetings in the course of their duties and that outcomes are reported to Council.

Cllr Thompson reiterated her concern that Officers' attendance at such meetings may undermine Councillors. Cllr Lynne Grimshaw stated that she did not consider this to be the case and commented that criticism of Officers was not justified.

Cllr Purvis added that the outcomes of meetings attended by Officers are routinely included in the Officer's Reports presented to Council.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers enquired about what was meant by the "Residents Meeting." It was explained that this referred to the public meeting held on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> of August at the North Seaton Community Centre.

**Sharon Parmley left the meeting at 18:32.**

Cllr Brown reported that the Pride Picnic had been a very positive and lovely event, with all the children enjoying the experience.

**FGS2526/045 CASUAL VACANCY – HIRST WARD**

To formally declare a casual vacancy in the office of Councillor was formally **DECLARED**.

Members **NOTED** that the formal Notice of Vacancy was published on 3rd September 2025.

**FGS2526/046 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2025/26**

***a) Updated Budget Report***

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED** and there were **NO** questions to the RFO.

***b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid***

The schedule of accounts paid was **RECEIVED** and those accounts paid since the last meeting was **ENDORSED** and there were **NO** questions to the RFO.

***c) Bank Reconciliation***

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The bank reconciliation dated 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 was **RECEIVED** and there were **NO** questions to the RFO.

**FGS2526/047 CCTV MEETING, 9<sup>th</sup> JULY 2025**

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**

Cllr Scott Amery raised a query regarding the camera at the side of Bubbles Bar and asked about options for reinstating CCTV coverage in that area. The Executive Officer explained that the intended streetlight could not be used to power a camera. However, local businesses could be approached to explore the possibility of using their power supply as had been done previously.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw noted that a previous camera in that location, installed by Northumberland County Council and powered by a local business, had not proved effective and had eventually become unusable.

Cllr Brown asked whether a new column could be installed in partnership with Northumberland County Council. The Executive Officer confirmed that this was an option, but it would be a more costly option than a business.

**FGS2526/048 YOUTH COORDINATION GROUP MEETING, 18th AUGUST 2025**

The note of the meeting was **RECEIVED**.

**FGS2526/049 ALLOTMENT FIRES – HIGH MARKET AND WANSBECK ROAD ALLOTMENT SITES**

The report of officers on the management of allotment fires at High Market and Wansbeck Road Allotment Sites was **RECEIVED**.

Cllr John Tully expressed concerns regarding consultation with allotment holders and questioned whether proper consultation had taken place. He stated that if allotment holders had not been consulted, the matter should be referred back to the Allotment Liaison Committee before any agreement was reached. Alan confirmed that both committees had been spoken to, but not the individual allotment holders directly. Cllr Tully requested that the matter be moved to the Allotment Liaison Committee to discuss the possibility of implementing a ban across all allotment sites. Sarah noted that notices had been displayed for three weeks without any feedback from allotment holders, and also that action had already been taken in consultation with Allotment Association, and the Council was being asked to endorse that action. The Allotment Officer confirmed that no issue had been raised with him directly over the past weeks.

Cllr Scott Amery highlighted the impact on local residents who were being forced to close their windows due to issues around allotment sites, particularly concerning the smell of burning plastic. He confirmed that he had emailed both Sarah and Alan requesting a meeting about this matter, as residents had been sending images and videos documenting the fires to him. Officers had acted and met with Associations, unfortunately he had not been able to attend, but he was pleased the matter had been actioned.

Cllr Pauline Thompson seconded the motion proposed by Councillor Tully, expressing concern that similar issues might begin occurring elsewhere if not addressed properly.

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Cllr Marjorie Chambers pointed out that the association was self-managing and questioned why the committee was debating the matter if the association had already consulted with their own allotment holders, stating that it had nothing to do with the council.

Cllr Louis Brown gestured that a resident in the public gallery may have information on this issue. Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, as Chair, pointed out that the public participation was held at the beginning of the meeting, not during debate. However, with the permission of the Chair, the resident was permitted to speak and suggested there was dissent as allotment holders had not been properly informed. She clarified that this consultation failure was by the association rather than Ashington Town Council and confirmed that High Market allotments had agreed to the proposal.

The Executive Officer clarified again that the action had been taken and the new policy on fires had been implemented weeks ago with no dissent received. However, should the Council wish to rewind this decision, their votes 'not in favour' of endorsing would do that, and officers would return to the situation of simply recording complaints about allotment fires and taking no action, which is what had been done for the previous 3 years. Residents who were complainants felt very let down by the Council's inaction of this time.

Following much unrest in the Council Chamber the Chair called for order, and implored Cllrs to agree the action that officers had brought forward, questioning why Cllrs would undermine what had been carried out.

The Executive Officer advised that it would be in order for the endorsement to be voted upon. Cllr Scott Amery requested a named vote:

**In favour of endorsement:** Cllrs Mark Purvis, Marjorie Chambers, Kerry Davison, Karl Green, David Coyle, Scott Amery, Steven Roberts, Lynne Grimshaw (8 votes)

**Against endorsement:** Cllrs Jim Lang, Pauline Thompson, Bob Walkinshaw, Glyn Davies, Louis Brown, John Tully (6 votes)

**Abstentions:** Cllr John Allen (1 vote)

The motion to endorse the proposal was carried by 8 votes to 6.

**FGS2526/050 GRANT FUNDING 2025/26 – ANNUAL GRANTS**

Following discussion of funding caps, the use of Youth Funding budget for Annual Grants, and an element of dissent from the previously agreed Annual Grant Policy, the following was agreed:

It was **AGREED** to award the following organisations Annual Grants (under the Annual Grants Policy) with funding from the Youth Initiatives and Support budget:

- **Ability 2 Play - NCC:** £1,177
- **Ashington JW Rugby Football Club:** £5,000
- **Ashington Town FC:** £5,000
- **First 4 Darts:** £2,000
- **Mortal Fools:** £5,000

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- **Wansbeck Paddle Club:** £2,400
- **YMCA Northumberland:** £5,000

Cllr John Tully expressed concerns about the priorities of the budget, stating that they had not been properly identified and emphasising that it was imperative to establish clear priorities. He highlighted that two organisations in particular – Wansbeck Valley Food Bank and Citizens Advice Northumberland - provide support to the most vulnerable members of the community and argued that their funding should not be reduced. Councillor Tully disagreed with the funding cap, stating that it undermined the council's priorities.

The Executive Officer confirmed that the priorities of the Grant Funding Policy had been agreed by the Council and were presented in the Grant Funding Guidelines to organisations applying. The Executive Officer further confirmed that those organisations named by Cllr Tully had scored 100% on the funding criteria and as a result were awarded the maximum available, which was £5,000.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw read responses from both organisations who appreciated the pressure on the Council's budget and the need to cap the level of funding.

It was **AGREED** to make Annual Grant awards to the following organisations:

- **Ashington & District Male Voice Choir:** £2,380
- **Ashington Association FC:** £1,000
- **Ashington Cricket Club:** £5,000
- **Ashington Hirst Running Club:** £2,394
- **Ashington Joint Welfare Scheme:** £5,000
- **Cambois Rowing Club:** £5,000
- **Citizens Advice Northumberland:** £5,000
- **Escape Family Support:** £5,000
- **Full Circle Food Project:** £5,000
- **Narrow Gauge Railway:** £3,800
- **NCOS:** £2,370
- **NSC Community Centre:** £5,000
- **Repurposeful CIC:** £5,000
- **Wansbeck Valley Food Bank:** £5,000

Cllr Mark Purvis, Cllr John Tully and Alan Bunker, left the meeting at 19:15.

**FGS2526/051 CENTRAL ARCADE (known as Co-op Building) Placed on the agenda by Cllr Caroline Ball**

The response from Northumberland County Council regarding Ashington Town Council's motion on the former Co-op (Central Arcade) building was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**.

**FGS2526/052 NORTHUMBERLAND LOCAL PLAN 'CALL FOR SITES' CONSULTATION**

Formal consultation from NCC was **RECEIVED**.

The Executive Officer clarified that landowners were invited to put sites forward for what could be included in the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA).



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**FGS2526/053 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Members AGREED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, permitted under Section 1 (2) LGA 1960, due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted.

**FGS2526/054 UNIT AT GREEN LANE**

A response from Northumberland Estates regarding their sale of units at Green Lane was **RECEIVED**.

**It was AGREED** to consider a new rent for the unit at Green Lane following 'without prejudice' discussions with the new Landlord, Northmount Property, and agree any further action

Cllr Scott Amery expressed that it was unfortunate that Advance Northumberland had sold the property, noting that the rent had been low during the period when start-up businesses were utilising the area. He reported that he had spoken with the owner of another space and that the proposed rent was 'reasonable' in the current market.

Cllr David Coyle agreed that this represented a reasonable rent level.

It was **AGREED** 'in principle' to proceed with the lease at the new rental amount for a term of 3 years, subject to the lease being received and in keeping with the current lease.

**FGS2526/055 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Full Council Meeting – Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 19:32