

New Website

This is a standing item on Clerk and Officer updates, but the website is shaping up very well, thanks to Sharon Parmley. The website will become a mix of what is required from a Governance point of view and items of local interest. We have now linked Facebook and Instagram and are working efficiently to ensure all press releases are adapted to suit both media. Sharon has reached out to Community Groups so we can actively share their good news stories and events. The more links the Town Council has, the more the information we put out is received.

Councillor Training

At the last meeting it was raised that budget allocated to Councillor Training is not being spent. It was discussed that Members should come forward with any training needs, allowing the Clerk to seek external training or design in-house solutions as a result.

A couple of suggestions have been put forward in regards Meeting Protocol, Climate Change/Carbon Literacy, Planning, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These are being explored as well as NALC circulars with available training being shared.

NCC Core Services/Partnership Agreement

Paul Jones has responded to our request for information with the suggestion of a presentation which will cover:

- how partnerships with T&PCs have evolved over time across the county (general overview and key principles)
- the evolution of the partnerships with Ashington
- what the core service standards and the enhanced standards are
- an overview of Neighbourhood Services operational arrangements in Ashington.
- how performance is monitored and reported
- member service requests and feedback arrangements
- key developments/proposed changes in the coming year
- an open Q&A session.

We are trying to sort a suitable date and feel it would be better held when the Council Chamber is open to larger numbers than presently.

The first Partnership Meeting, under the new reporting regime will be held on Tuesday 22nd March at 2:00pm. A report of the meeting will be brought to the April Finance and General Services Committee.

Environmental Proposal

Following the agreement of the Council to progress a design scheme for Station Road, which is sustainable, low maintenance and with year-round interest and colour, officers met with Sean Murray, a celebrated expert in this field.

It was discussed that if the Council wish to seek a new scheme that encompasses sustainability and year-round interest, that this could be achieved in September 2022. Station Road and the Entrance Features are the priority, with a move to include more sustainable and interesting planting in planters and towers moving forward (*baskets and troughs are part of a three-year contract*).

CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATE

AGENDA 7, Enc ii)

Further to the Council's agreement that Sean Murray designs the schemes, it is fantastic to learn that Sean can also deliver the schemes, using local labour. This is a positive development as it reduces any risks associated with not being able to source the stock or the labour. The Council can also support any labour with our own workforce, thus reducing overall cost. As previously agreed, the schemes will be maintained in-house once delivered.

In view that the transformation will take place in September 2022, the beds on Station Road will be tidied and supplied with fine mulch, to provide the nutrients needed. The Council should be clear that it will not plant seasonal plants that will be landfill in September, and that instead will nurture what is there. It is being discussed with the Climate Change Group that their school competition could be to design 'work in progress' signs that get this message across, and these could be placed in the beds.

In the move towards more sustainable towers and planters, the three new tower planters being installed in the Haydon Ward will be planted according to a design by Sean which will see plants trailing over the sides of the black planter. Depending on how well this works, and how it is received, the Council could consider developing this type of scheme in all 32 planters. Unfortunately, barrier planters and hanging baskets do not lend themselves to sustainable planting with year-round interest and colour as they do not have the depth required; this should be discussed in the future.

The Council will receive designs and costs for Station Road, four Entrance Features and three Tower Planters at the Finance and General Services Committee in May. Stephen Humphrey has worked hard to secure a partnership with Sean Murray, which is a tremendous triumph, especially in the current climate.

Northumberland County Council – Environmental Enforcement Officer

The Service Level Agreement for 2022/23 has been signed and includes the additional clause, as agreed:

12.3 For the purposes of clause 1, "hours at work" does not include any time where the EEO is absent from work (whether due to annual leave, flexitime, injury, illness or any other reason). If The Service as set out in this SLA cannot be delivered by NCC due to staff absence, or can only be partially delivered, other than in circumstances described in clause 12.2 above, invoices for payment will be adjusted accordingly pro rata and NCC shall advise the Town Council of that fact as soon as reasonably practicable.

Jack Charlton Statue

The Clerk accompanied working group members Cllr Liam Lavery, Cllr Jim Lang and Cllr Mark Purvis to see the statue in clay, in readiness for the bronzing process. This was a whistle-stop tour to the studio of sculptor Douglas Jennings near High Barnet, London.

Although any images of the statue are secret, we can report that the quality and attention to detail is outstanding. The folk of Ashington will be immensely proud and Cllr Lavery has liaised with Jack's family recently on the finer design choices.

The Clerk has a meeting with NCC Officers at Hirst Park on 8th March; once planning and legal matters in regards the statue are signed off, the Council will step-up press releases and the arrangements for an event to support the unveiling.

All external funders have been written to, to keep them informed of developments. It is expected that further funding will be sought.

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Capital Works at Allotment Sites

All works agreed at the last meeting were offered and accepted by the Council's chosen contractors.

Works at Nursery Allotment have started, and an update is included in the proposed private session. Stephen Humphrey is pressing for start dates for work at High Market, North Seaton and Woodhorn Allotments.