AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 11th March 2025

Neighbourhood Services

Public Seats

Mark and Ryan are doing some TLC on our public seats. Some have been taken away to repair and refurbish them indoors away from the elements. We'll revert to on-site work later in the season when the weather is better.

They will also be checking if the seats meet accessibility requirements, as some of our older seats are just too low (below 400mm) and may not meet accessibility guidelines.

Bus Shelters

Officers Mark and Ryan have successfully installed stand information at Ashington Bus Station on behalf of Northumberland County Council (NCC). Working closely with NCC's bus ambassador, Bill Lynch, we are developing a strategic approach to bus shelters across Ashington, with emphasis on accessibility, comfortable seating, and improved information through timetable cabinet upgrades.

A press release detailing this initiative has been written and is currently with NCC's communications team for approval. NCC has expressed interest in highlighting this partnership as an exemplary model to encourage similar collaborative efforts with other Town and Parish Councils. While our direct responsibility is limited to bus shelter provision, we continue to extend our support to enhance broader public transport infrastructure, maintaining our commitment to upgrade 2-4 locations annually. We have applied for funding for shelters in 2025/26, and we have sought user information to prioritise the busiest shelters for accessibility, and upgrade.

Defibs

All defibs have been cleaned and checked.

Allotment General

Successful UPVC recycling days were held at North Seaton Colliery and Seaton Hirst. Huge effort by plot holders at both sites, nearly 1.5 tonnes of plastic has been recycled. This has prevented this going to landfill or staying on site and being an eyesore. Next Monday we are rolling this out at Highmarket.

Two plot holders have been relocated due to asbestos after a fire at HEE.

Asbestos to be safely removed from Seaton Hirst and High Market, contractor to visit on 11th March to assess costs.

Alan met with Ryan and Mark to consider building a manure store at North Seaton Colliery. Existing manure to be moved and fence to be reinstated.

A meeting has taken place with Bernicia Group in relation to overgrown ivy and a tree on the boundary between the Seaton Hirst allotment site and Milton Grove. We await an update from Bernicia.

Invoices have been sent for Hirst East End and Nursery Park allotment sites 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026.

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Events and Engagement

February Half Term

34 people attended the first free swim session and 29 attended the second free swim session. The promotional video made by Luk Luk Productions has turned out exceptionally well and was fun to make. As part of the ongoing half term programmes agreed by the Youth Advisory Committee, two free swim sessions were booked for Wednesday 26th February and Saturday 1st March, both sessions 1pm to 2pm.

A further 4 free swim sessions are arranged for the Easter holidays.

Free gym sessions were booked at Sculpt Gym for 16-18 year olds for Tuesday 25th February and Thursday 27th February. No one attended the free gym sessions, which was disappointing. Feedback was sought from the gym about what could be the reason, other than holidays and more publicity we are not sure what else we could do, other than more lead in time.

Animating Ashington

Key points from the Positive Friends Group meeting on Tuesday 4th March 2025

Torch Lit Procession

- Around 300 people have signed up
- Nominations close March 12th
- Mr. Wilson's Second Liners will perform at the front
- Soup and rolls will be provided to participants and families
- Community groups can sign up directly without nomination

Seeding the Future Workshops

- James Brunt worked with over 1,000 young people creating artworks from natural objects
- From April 21st, James will create a 200m artwork in the park based on youth input
- The artwork is designed to naturally fade over six weeks

Artwork Updates

- Site secured for displaying artwork on the fencing of the proposed cinema site opposite Asda
- Three local artists employed
- Artworks will be installed by end of March
- Still seeking High Street shop owners willing to display artwork

Feast of Fire Event

- Confirmed performers include Northern Monkey Band, Ballooning Midnight, Dan Lee (fire performer)
- Features include illuminated reindeer, Northumberland College fire pit with free spicy popcorn
- Promotional materials coming March 10th

One Amazing Day

- Road closure from 6am to 7pm for High Street setup
- Various performances planned to include a golden birdcage show, acrobatic performances, and dance floor

- Animatronic animals will be featured
- Looking for local choirs and performers to participate

Future Planning

- Discussion about using Hirst Welfare Centre as a space
- Suggestion to develop a list of key stakeholders for creative conversations
- Discussion about sustaining momentum after Walk the Plank leaves
- Focus on career development opportunities for local residents

Other Notes

- The Animating Ashington webpage has been created to promote events
- Already engaged 10,000 people with positive feedback
- Ashington Town Council has added Animating Ashington to its Events page
- ECO Fair poster will be circulated with minutes

Dukes Primary School World of Work Day

Communications and Engagement Officer Sharon Parmley and Gary Holmes attended Duke's Secondary School, Tuesday 4th March 2025

Activities

The event was organised as an exhibition-style careers fair for students across multiple year groups.

Sharon and Gary distributed promotional materials including, flyers for free swimming sessions during Easter Holidays, information about the upcoming Eco Fair and details about the Easter Trail.

Student Engagement

Just over 100 youth surveys were completed by students during the event

Students from Years 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 attended in scheduled sessions throughout the day

Outcomes

The event provided an excellent opportunity to engage with young people

Promotional materials for council events were well received

The youth surveys collected will provide valuable feedback for future town council activities.

Youth Survey

Communications and Engagement Officer, Sharon Parmley, and Administration Assistant, Gary Holmes, participated in a workshop event at Northumberland College and Duke's Academy, where they conducted a Youth Survey to gather insights from local young people about their preferences, dislikes, and suggested changes for Ashington. A total of 124 young people completed the survey, both on paper and digitally via Google Forms. The responses provided valuable feedback, enabling us to compile a comprehensive report with meaningful ideas and suggestions from the youth regarding improvements for Ashington. The results will be shared with the Youth Advisory Committee initially.

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Hirst Working Group
Wednesday 5th March 2025

Sarah Harvey, Financial Inclusion Lead in the NCC Public Health team provided a short presentation. Citizens Advice also attended to provide information on what they are doing on financial inclusion.

Eco Fair Working Group Meeting - Monday 3rd March 2025 at 4pm
Following on from the Climate Change and Environment meeting with took place on Tuesday 18th February, it was agreed that an Eco Fair Working Group be established for the upcoming event on Friday 25th April 2025 at Ashington Hirst Welfare Centre.

Eco Fair Working Group Meeting Summary

Progress Update

- Funding application for £5,000 submitted to NCC's Climate Change Fund (decision expected by 14th March)
- Venue booked at Ashington Hirst Welfare
- Event notification submitted
- First Aid cover arranged with St John's Ambulance
- Invitation letter drafted and poster created
- Video arrangements confirmed

Confirmed Participants

- James Brunt (artist from Walk the Plank) - outdoor workshop
- Northumberland Wildlife Trust - nature activities
- Mortal Fools – hand puppet activity and Punch and Judy show
- Full Circle Food - seed swap
- Ashington WI - make do and mend workshop
- NCC's Dr. Wendy Fail - talk on recycling and waste management

Action Points

- Full Circle Food to be invited to offer cooking demonstrations with slow cookers and air fryers
- Northumberland Wildlife Trust to provide resources like recipe cards and hedgehog hotel building instructions
- Friends of Ashington Community Woods to host a gazebo with hedgehog hotel building activity
- Doug Mitchley to deliver a talk on saving energy
- Cathy Sharp to organise a children's activity (fox planter, bird feeders, or seed bombs)
- Explore using Doug's Punch and Judy theatre with Mortal Fools for potential sock puppet workshop
- Additional organisations to be invited:
- Newcastle United Foundation
- CAN
- Smoothie Bicycle
- Family Hub
- Scrap Store

- Whistle Art Stop
- Northumbrian Water
- NCC's Rewilding
- Cycle4everyone (sustainable transport and bike repair)
- Vicky Morgan (mini scrap store with craft activities)

Next Meeting

Thursday, 20th March 2025, 4pm

Location: Remscheid Room, Town Hall

Projects

Ashington Cricket Club

The Ashington memorial tree project is approximately 10 weeks away from its launch date on 18th May 2025. Progress includes:

- 63 trees from NCC have been delivered, with most planted.
- Remaining trees (1 standard and 15 smaller ones) will be planted on 15th March with Scout involvement, and County Cllrs who provided funding towards the project also invited.
- The project has reached its funding target, with contingency for any trees that may need to be replaced.
- Plaques manufactured by Falon Nameplates will be installed in alphabetical order around the cricket pitch to be completed by 25th April.

ATC's significant contributions following Stephen's support with funding applications prior to him leaving include Mark and Ryan helping with tree planting despite adverse weather conditions in February. They will also take responsibility for installing all the plaques using cement mix to secure them into the ground and will assist with installing the information board posts with NCC Highways Department's help.

An information board is being developed with historical photos and will be installed at the field's main entrance. Launch day arrangements for 18th May include speeches, a military honour guard, refreshments, and media coverage. The project aims to memorialise 177 individuals from Ashington who died during World War II.

The next meeting will be arranged for late April.

Doves Corner

Progress has been made on the area enhancement project across multiple phases:

- NCC have now removed the rockery and flags as planned. I have sought confirmation regarding the optimal timing for seeding, specifically whether it would be more beneficial to complete this at the end of the entire project rather than prior to the landscaping phase.
- Mark and Ryan are prepared to proceed with their phase, including the removal of existing seats and installation of the new litter bin. The replacement seats have been ordered. However, ATC's work will be scheduled once we receive confirmation from Brambledown regarding the timeline for their phase of the project, which has been requested and is currently pending.

The full project scope remains as follows:

Phase 1 (Northumberland County Council)

- Remove four Rockery's and infill with soil and grass seed (two large near seats and two smaller rockery's to edge of area).
- Remove redundant old paving in front of seating area and infill with soil and grass seed.

Phase 2 (Brambledown Landscape Services)

- Remove small section of shrubbery that encroaches onto path near the rail crossing (magnet for litter and leaves).
- Install quality paving where existing seats are situated.
- Enhance bed and existing shrubbery behind seating area and plant approximately 4 appropriate shrubs.
- Install two small, low maintenance, colourful shrub beds for insects – Buddleia, Hebe etc. The beds will play off the existing floral beds in this area in front of the seating.

Phase 3 (Ashington Town Council)

- Install two quality recycled seats with arm supports (for people with disabilities), Streetmaster Colwyn Seat (seat previously agreed by the Town Council).
- Replace existing aging litter bin with new litter bin. Recycle existing bin if possible.

Ashington Memorial Garden

The first stage of completed tenders have been evaluated.

Event Gate at People's Park

Following agreement last month, the gate has now been fabricated locally and will be installed when this can be scheduled.

IT and Communications Changes

A transition from Dropbox to Google Drive was implemented within the office to reduce annual subscription costs significantly. This change provides Neighbourhood Services Officers, Mark Air and Ryan Appleby, with real-time access to our drive and files while working in the field. This shift enhances team connectivity, creating a more professional and collaborative environment, as all team members are now linked to the same files, calendar, and email systems. Additionally, Mark and Ryan are equipped with work phones that allow them to access Google Drive anytime, anywhere. This mobility enables them to efficiently manage projects by providing instant access to files and communications, allowing for seamless editing, updating, and reviewing of documents while on the go.

Website and Social Media PR

A Guide to Sustainable and Eco Friendly Weddings

77 Diamonds has launched a guide to promote sustainable wedding practices, aiming to reduce the environmental impact of ceremonies and celebrations. The initiative highlights the significant waste generated by weddings, particularly from decorations, plastic use, and uneaten wedding favours. By raising awareness and offering practical solutions, the

guide encourages couples to adopt more eco-friendly choices on their special day, aligning love for one another with care for the planet.

We were asked last year to include the guide on our website, but we spoke to 77 Diamonds and agreed it would be better to include the guide on Valentines day, so the post was released on Valentines day.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-14-a-guide-to-sustainable-and-eco-friendly-weddings

Ashington Town Council Welcomes Transformative Net Sero Ashington Campus Development

We are celebrating the start of construction on Northumberland College's £52 million Ashington Campus, a transformative project that aligns with the Council's vision for a thriving and sustainable town.

The state-of-the-art campus will drive economic growth, attract talent, and provide diverse educational pathways, including technical courses, apprenticeships, and health-focused programs. With a strong commitment to sustainability and net zero principles, the campus will serve as a model for environmentally responsible development.

We expressed enthusiasm for the project, recognising its potential to equip local learners with skills for future industries while strengthening partnerships between education and local employers. Although the college's relocation marks a change for some residents, the Council remains committed to ensuring continued progress across Ashington.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-19-ashington-town-council-welcomes-transformative-net-sero-ashington-campus-development

Ashington Town Council Awards Final Round of Small Grants for 2024-25

We have awarded £3,665 in small grants to eight community organisations for the 2024-25 financial year. These grants support projects focused on sports, wellbeing, mental health, and social engagement.

Recipients include Ashington Community Woodlands parkrun, Blossoming Communities, Bomarsund Welfare Cricket Club, Butokokan Judo Club, Evergreens Over 60's Club, Wansbeck Gymnastics and Trampolining Club, AFC Newbiggin Juniors Football Club, and Talking Marras.

The grants will fund initiatives such as physical activity programs, facility improvements, digital coaching tools, social activities for older residents, and mental health support.

The Council encourages community groups to apply for the next round of funding in the new financial year.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-21-ashington-town-council-awards-final-round-of-small-grants-for-2024-25

Ashington Town Council Climate Change & Environment Committee Welcomes Community Partners

Our Climate Change and Environment Committee has taken a big step forward by welcoming local community groups as new committee members. In our inaugural meeting chaired by Councillor Paul Wright, we established a collaborative approach with groups

like the Ashington Community Litter Project and Friends of Ashington Community Woods, setting up clear protocols for future environmental initiatives.

We're also excited to announce Ashington's first ECO Fair on 25th April 2025 at the Hirst Welfare Centre, which will raise awareness about sustainability and showcase local green initiatives. Additionally, we're enhancing our participation in the Great British Spring Clean (21st March–6th April 2025) by exploring waste sorting and analysis while keeping safety a top priority.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-21-ashington-town-council-climate-change-environment-committee-welcomes-community-partners

Ashington Civic Head Presents Grant to Local Gymnastics Club

We are proud to announce that Civic Head Councillor Caroline Ball recently visited Wansbeck Gymnastics and Trampolining Club to present a grant cheque for essential new training equipment. The club, now housed at its new facility in Ashwood Business Park, will use the funds to purchase a specialised polished training bar that reduces friction and enhances safety for gymnasts. During her visit, Councillor Ball met with coaches and members, praising the club's commitment to inclusive excellence and its impressive new facility.

Wansbeck Gymnastics and Trampolining Club serves 463 members—from beginners to national competitors—and is renowned for its positive impact on health, wellbeing, and personal development. Beyond sports, the club offers leadership training, coaching qualifications, and apprenticeship programs, reinforcing its role as a fully inclusive organisation in the community.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-21-ashington-civic-head-presents-grant-to-local-gymnastics-club

Local Elections Coming to Northumberland This May

Local elections will be held across Northumberland on 1st May 2025, offering residents an important opportunity to engage in local democracy either by voting or standing as candidates. Key deadlines for voters include registering by 11th April, applying for a postal vote by 14th April, and submitting proxy vote applications and Voter Authority Certificates by 23rd April. On election day, polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm, and voters must bring acceptable photo ID or secure a Voter Authority Certificate in advance.

For those interested in candidacy, nomination forms will be available from 3rd March 2025, with the official Notice of Election published on 20th March. Nominations can be submitted in person between 21st March and 2nd April at designated centres in Alnwick, Berwick, Hexham, and Morpeth, with early submission encouraged to allow time for corrections. This election is vital as it gives residents a direct say in local services such as housing, transport, parks, and waste collection.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-24-local-elections-coming-to-northumberland-this-may

Local Scout Group Transforms Community with Successful Clean-Up Initiative

On 27th February 2025, the 1st Hirst Scout Group held an ambitious litter collection event with around 20 participants from the Beavers, Cubs, and Scouts divisions, along with

parents and leaders. The team collected 15 bags of waste—including discarded bicycle and scooter components—showcasing strong community spirit.

Ashington Town Council supported the initiative by providing essential equipment, and Northumberland County Council managed the removal and proper disposal of the waste. Group Lead Volunteer Susan Black praised the participants' dedication, highlighting the event as a valuable hands-on learning experience in environmental stewardship and community service.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-27-local-scout-group-transforms-community-with-successful-clean-up-initiative

Join Ashington Town Council for the Great British Spring Clean 2025

We are joining the 2025 Great British Spring Clean, a nationwide campaign aimed at reducing litter and enhancing our shared spaces. We're taking this initiative seriously, as clean streets and public areas boost community pride, wellbeing, and protect our local wildlife and environment.

To make a real impact, we've organised several community clean-up events across Ashington on 27th, 28th, and 29th March at key local spots, with all necessary equipment provided and safety measures in place. In addition to these events, residents can pledge to clean up independently during the campaign period from 21 March to 6 April. This effort not only improves the look and feel of our town but also reinforces our commitment to environmental stewardship and community collaboration.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-28-join-ashington-town-council-for-the-great-british-spring-clean-2025

ASHINGTON'S FIRST EVER ECO FAIR SET TO INSPIRE SUSTAINABLE LIVING

We are launching the town's first ECO Fair on Friday, 25th April from 10am to 3pm at the Hirst Welfare Centre. The event aims to raise awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainable solutions by inspiring residents, local schools, and community groups to showcase their green initiatives and adopt more sustainable lifestyles.

Attendees will enjoy a diverse lineup of activities, including a climate project showcase, guest talks on recycling and waste management, an interactive art workshop, and practical sustainability workshops. Additional attractions include a local produce market, children's nature crafts, information stalls from environmental organisations, and opportunities to join a climate change hackathon and take-home wildflower seed bags. Councillor Paul Wright said the fair is a significant step toward inspiring lasting change by showing how small actions can collectively make a big difference.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-03-05-ashingtons-first-ever-eco-fair-set-to-inspire-sustainable-living

Free Swimming Sessions Brought Community Together at Ashington Leisure Centre

During February Half Term, Ashington Town Council, in partnership with Places Leisure, hosted a free swimming session on Saturday 1st March 2025 from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM. The event offered 80 first-come, first-served slots, aiming to make swimming accessible to everyone and support new swimmers. Fully funded by the Town Council's Youth Advisory Committee, the initiative welcomed participants of all skill levels, promoting healthy family activities.

Sharon Parmley, our Communications and Engagement Officer, also highlighted the fantastic promotional video produced by LukLuk Productions, which captured the event's vibrant community spirit and the strong collaboration with Places Leisure.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-03-05-free-swimming-sessions-brought-community-together-at-ashington-leisure-centre

https://youtu.be/25__Pt5dK5Q

Casual Vacancy - College Ward

We announced that Gemma Hemsley has resigned from her position as a councillor, leaving a vacancy on the Council. As this resignation occurred within six months of the May 2025 elections (noted from 4th November 2024), the vacancy will be declared and can be filled through co-option at the Council's discretion rather than triggering a new election. The notice is dated Thursday, 6th March 2025.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-03-06-casual-vacancy-college-ward

Ashington Youth Advisory Committee Joins Forces with Established Riverside Groups to Expand Access to Water Activities

Ashington Town Council's Youth Advisory Committee is launching a collaborative initiative to support local water sports organisations at Wansbeck Riverside. Building on the successful programs of Ashington Sea Cadets, Cambois Rowing Club, and Wansbeck Paddle Sports Club, the initiative will bring these groups together to boost community participation in both on-water and shoreside activities. A key element of the plan is a coordinated summer open day that will showcase the diverse opportunities available, along with enhanced promotion of individual open days and taster sessions.

The initiative aims to expand the reach of these longstanding organisations, helping them connect with new audiences and overcome participation barriers. Leaders from the involved clubs and the Council expressed enthusiasm about the project, highlighting the benefits of a united approach to community outreach. By building on established programs and leveraging collective expertise, the initiative seeks to celebrate Wansbeck Riverside as a vibrant hub of activity and provide more opportunities for families and young people in Ashington.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-03-06-ashington-youth-advisory-committee-joins-forces-with-established-riverside-groups-to-expand-access-to-water-activities