

Key Highlights (Summary)

- Vandalism repairs completed at local play areas. New memorial bench installed at Nursery Park.
- Winter planting installed in town planters and towers. Sadly some plant theft occurred which was reported. Replenishing underway.
- Bulb planting scheduled for various locations around town.
- Children in Need community event on 17th November planned with schools, groups, and radio station. Town Council supporting.
- Christmas Lights Switch-On event on 30th November with activities, games, Christmas trail launch.
- St George's Day March requested through town on 20th April 2024 to celebrate Fusiliers' anniversary.
- Play area transfers progressing slowly with developers. Chasing responses.
- Jack Charlton statue cleaned and rewaxed. Annual maintenance now.
- Allotment administration underway for agreements, invoices, etc.
- Works continuing on allotment water system upgrades. Fencing to be installed by Network Rail.
- North Seaton roundabout planting idea objected by NCC Highways. Alternative locations suggested.
- Social housing decarbonisation responses received. To be reviewed by Climate Change Committee.
- Positive inter-Council meeting held to share ideas and common aims. Future meetings welcomed.

ATC Neighbourhood Services

Following vandalism at Peoples Park and Alexandra Road Play Areas work to address issues has been completed.

A new memorial seat, at the entrance to Nursery Park, was installed in October, taking the number of new seats installed in the town this year to four.

NSO's will support the installation of the towns Christmas tree on the 20 November and install the decorative safety fence around the tree.

Planting and Enhancements

Works to install winter planting to towers and planters around the town and troughs on Station Road was completed in October. Sadly, a significant theft of plants has taken place on towers in the Laburnum Terrace area which has been reported to Police and the towers replenished.

A tidy of the Ashington Memorial Garden has taken place in preparation of the Remembrance Day Service on Sunday 12 November.

Works to install new bulb planting in Station Road beds and entrance features will be carried out by NSOs in early November. A mix of miniature tulips, narcissus and hyacinths have been selected.

Work to plant bulbs at nine locations across the town, as agreed at the CC&E committee in September, will take place this month by our contractors WL Straughan. The sites chosen are as follows: A197 - Pegswood entrance, grassed area close to Holy Sepulchre Church, grassed area on Station Road, Featherwood Drive, Woodhorn Road / close to Wansbeck General Hospital, North Season Industrial Estate, Black Close Bank and Briardene. Additionally, wildflower planting schemes will take place in the spring at River Wansbeck, Paddock Wood, and Peoples Park.

Events and Engagement

Children in Need Event – Friday 17th November 2023

Asda's Community Champion, Amanda Sheldon has arranged the event. The stage will be set up for 9.00am by the YMCA. The backdrop is being designed by Collingwood Foundation School and Koast Radio will be attending from the start of the event.

There is a planned Dance-a-thon, with several schools signed up to take part, as well as community groups with stalls all raising money for Children in Need.

Ashington Town Council have a three-hour slot from 12.00noon to 3:00pm, we have 'Guess how many sweets are in the jar', 'Guess the teddy's name' and at the time of writing thinking caps are on for the third.

Christmas Lights Switch-On – Thursday 30th November 2023

There will be 24 community groups and organisations attending to provide Christmas activities and games within the YMCA. A full list of activities is available on our website at; [Ashington Town Council - Events](#).

The Christmas Trail will be launched at the event on 30th November, with selection boxes given out at Ashington Library on Saturday 16th December. Twenty businesses have signed up this year for the trail.

St George's Day March – Saturday 20th April 2024

NCC have received a request from the Northumberland Fusiliers to march through Ashington on 20th April next year to celebrate St Georges Day but also the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the Fusiliers. Plans are in early stages and Sharon will be attending any meetings held to keep the Council up to date on progress.

Play Areas

Epsom Drive (Taylor Wimpey)

Progressing with solicitor, draft transfer received and approved.

Aintree Close (Esh Housing, previously Dunelm)

Esh Housing solicitor details confirmed so this should progress.

Seaton Vale (Persimmon Homes)

Draft transfer with our solicitor.

Warren Court (Harron Homes)

No continuing response. Email advising that play area should be included in their own insurance liabilities, outlining urgency of situation and response.

Shire Farm Close (Bellway)

No response at all. Email advising that play area should be included in their own insurance liabilities, outlining urgency of situation and response.

Alexandra Road, North Seaton Colliery, Paddock Wood, and People's Park

NCC Strategic Estates confirmed in December 2022 that a draft agreement could be drawn up for the Council's consideration, and again in May 2023. I have confirmed the wording that needs to be included from an insurance perspective. This is still outstanding and has been requested again. An email response was received on 1st November advising a response from Strategic Estates in five working days.

Jack Charlton Statue

Jack was professionally cleaned, and rewaxed on Tuesday 24th October and looks as good as when he was first installed. This will be an annual maintenance requirement as the copper in the statue oxidises quickly due to being near the coast. It is hoped that the current works will last until spring 2025, and then works can be scheduled annually after that. However, this is something that we will need to keep under review, as we cannot control the science.

CCTV

Permissions are being sought, and details worked through for the new system for Station Road, etc. Stephen is making good inroads to tracing building owners. The aim is to have a commencement date confirmed in the new year. Following further discussions with, we have secured the provision of drone images of three allotment sites at no cost, and a reduction on the CCTV provision in People's Park to the value of £1,040.

Allotments

Letters, tenancy agreements and rules and conditions have been issued to North Seaton Colliery tenants and those with alternative agreements to an allotment tenancy, from 1st November 2023.

NS Colliery Allotment Association will pay to the Council a sum towards rent collected for November and December. The Council will pay water rates from 1st November 2023.

Once signed agreements have been received by the Council, we will issue invoices for the payment of rent from January 2024.

The same will take place in respect of Hirst East End Allotments from January 2024, and for Woodhorn Road from April 2024.

The dates have been dictated by the usual collection of rent, and the preference of volunteers at the allotment sites.

All plot holders at Nursery Park have been issued with new tenancy agreements. Invoices for rent will be issued on receipt of the signed agreement.

Allotments (Capital Works)

Work is underway on the installation of the new water system at Woodhorn Road Allotment Site with works expected to be complete in December. Approximately 1,900ms of polyethylene piping will be installed to complement the new standpipes that were installed in 2022.

Following railway works, in the development of the new passenger rail line to the town, close to the boundary of the Green Lane Allotment Site, some shrubbery has been removed. This has allowed easier access to the site and unfortunately some anti-social behaviour has occurred. Contact has been made with NCC's Rail Project Liaison staff to highlight the issue and works have now been agreed to install 150m of palisade fencing on the allotment site boundary adjacent to the rail line. Work is expected to commence in November.

Tree Planting on North Seaton Roundabout

As agreed, a joint letter was sent from Ashington TC and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea TC with reference to NCC Highways objection to the suggested planting scheme on the roundabout.

The Highways Improvement Team Senior Officer has supported the objection as it is considered an accident hot spot, and they would not want to introduce anything that would affect visibility.

The response has been shared with Newbiggin-by-the-Sea TC along with the suggestion that there are alternative locations where tree planting might be more appropriate in Newbiggin, i.e. Central Parkway which could also prevent vehicles from driving over the grass.

Social Housing Decarbonisation and Retrofitting Properties

We have received a response from Bernicia Housing which will be brought to the next meeting of the Climate Change Committee. The response is fulsome in respect of their general policies and work so far, but not specific in respect of Ashington. They are not able to break down the data at this time as budget work takes priority, but we could ask again after the busy budget period.

Advance Northumberland have responded to advise that their homes are classed as privately rented, not social or affordable. They are therefore subject to Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for Private Rented (MEE). They have provided the details of their adherence to these which will be reported to the next Climate Change and Environment Committee.

Meeting with Neighbouring Town and Parish Councils

As you know Cllr Tully asked that we seek interest from neighbouring Councils to a meeting of Clerks and Chairs; a get together to share ideas and common aims.

The meeting was held on Wednesday 25th October and would be considered a success as everyone who attended would like to meet again, with an agenda set by the group. There isn't a report of the meeting as such, but the summary below shares the positive discussion:

Topics Discussed

1. CCTV.
2. Wildflower and bulb planting.
3. Standards of ground maintenance.
4. Changes being made to core service delivered by NCC (new standards).
5. Variations in core service delivered by NCC.
6. Differences between partnership agreements, SLAs, and enhancements.
7. Reductions in services delivered by county council, i.e. youth service, number of litter bins.
8. Transfer of assets -v- transfer of responsibility; insurance implications.
9. The management of allotments.
10. Relationship and communication with police.
11. Response times from some NCC departments.
12. Clear distinction of who is responsible for what, between County, and Town/Parish.

Consensus

There appears to be a consensus that future meetings would be useful to share good practice, look at developing purchasing power, and the potential for joined up thinking. A major benefit voiced is that by linking up, our Councils can share information and overcome the perception that there are irregularities in services and messages from County Council.

It was agreed Ashington was a good venue, that having a consistent Chair was appropriate, and that future meetings should have an agenda, with input from all.

Those present were reminded that the NALC County Committee provided a forum for the above for Cllrs, and Councils were encouraged to engage. The usefulness of Cllrs and Clerks being at the same meeting appeared to be attractive to most in attendance. It was discussed that although this was a forum for discussion, the group could not represent a collaborative approach from all Councils

involved, as it was the responsibility of respective Councils to agree any stance, or action, on all matters.

It was offered that those attending may want to respond discreetly as to what they would like to get out meetings in the future, or not as the case may be. Any potentially conflicting comments about the format/style/content can be passed on privately, without fear of being singled out, or castigated.