

Neighbourhood Services

Memorial Garden

Mark has done a great job on the refurbishment of the seats, respecting the wishes of Ashington Branch of RBL to retain as long as possible. Works by Brambledown on paving and planting to east is complete. The beds on the entrance side need significant work so this has been put off until after Remembrance.

Doves Corner

Whilst this remains an asset of NCC, I have emailed ward Cllrs Ward Cllrs 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. **I await a response from all Cllrs.**

Town Council Assets

I would like to take the opportunity to repeat the information shared on ATC Assets. Work is ongoing to list everything in advance of potential movement to an asset management database.

Town Seats are identified as the next priority and all Cllrs have been contacted to ask if there are any seats in their wards that they 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. Thoughts being that if seats are identified for replacement rather than refurbishment we could seek funding via MLIS or Windfarm. **A reminder to Ward Cllrs to get in touch.**

Horticulture

Station Road beds have been cut right back and shaped with a good quality mulch added. Following the spring arrivals which pop up Ryan will identify gaps and we expect some new planting.

Work has started on the Woodhorn Road/Woodhorn Villas entrance feature which has always been more difficult to maintain. Mark and Ryan are building up the border in brickwork to match the gateway structure and this will be planted with plants that will thrive.

All planters and towers have been emptied and replanted with winter pansies and hyacinths. Following our move to managing this in-house costs were sourced for the plants needed and we saved substantially on previous years. Plants were purchased from Heighley Gate Garden Centre, where we now have an account.

Allotments

An Allotment Liaison meeting is scheduled for Thursday 23rd October with the opportunity for site representatives to bring forward capital projects across all allotment sites. This includes those managed by ATC and those that are self-managed.

An assessment framework has been developed to provide a transparent, fair way to evaluate capital work's needs. All capital projects put forward by sites will be assessed using the framework to prioritise schemes in order of need. Officers assess, and then Full Council will decide the total capital budget available for capital allotment works.

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025

The assessment will reveal and order of priority - highest scores represent the most urgent needs. Whether the top 2, top 3, or more schemes can be funded depends entirely on the budget allocation decided by Full Council.

This framework ensures that the recommendations presented to Full Council can be clearly explained and justified, recognising that all sites have genuine needs but available resources must be allocated where they deliver the greatest benefit and address the most pressing requirements. The framework includes H&S, Impact & Benefit, Condition & Urgency, Value for Money, External Funding available, Waiting time & Equity. The document has been shared with all concerned alongside a request for needs.

Play Areas

ROPs are visiting on 31st October to inspect all out play areas. This annual inspection is a legal requirement.

North Seaton Colliery Play Area

The consultation for the redevelopment of NS Colliery Play Area is complete. Tree works have been carried out, and the entrance is scheduled for 11th November. Sarah is meeting with Paul from Kompan next week and then final suggested schemes will be shared with ward Cllrs.

Formal approval for the scheme, spending and funding application was delegated to the EO in consultation with ward Cllrs, therefore this will be progressed without delay.

Bywell Road Play Area

Following previous update about this NCC owned and maintained play area, we expect the survey to be sent out by NCC to establish use and value.

Events and Engagement

Hirst Working Group Meeting

Summary of action points from the meeting held on 1st October 2025.

Community Safety and Tensions Two protests have occurred, prompting the establishment of a joint engagement group (JEG) between police and community representatives. Two meetings have been held so far with plans to expand participation. The current tension assessment remains unchanged, with concerns focused on community fears about unknown elements and new neighbours.

Hate Crime Awareness A week of action is planned during national hate crime week. While the national focus is on disability hate crime, local efforts will cover all hate crime types through drop-in sessions with police and local partners. The group emphasised encouraging reporting of incidents and crimes, noting that third-party reporting is available - victims don't need to report themselves.

Community Cohesion Initiatives A cohesion group has been established with weekly local meetings and monthly strategic sessions. The focus is on "bringing the town back together" through events, activities, and projects that foster neighbourliness and connections. These initiatives will link with the resident forum and master plan work.

Funding Opportunity: The Common Ground Award offers capital grants up to £10,000 for VCSE organisations working on community cohesion. Applications open 13 October and close 21 November 2025, with funding decisions in January 2026.

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025

Youth Engagement

- New futsal sessions started on Wednesday evenings at Hirst Park Play Zone
- Playzone usage has increased with activity programmes to be shared
- Youth Providers Meeting hosted by town council (next date: 20th October)
- Discussion ongoing about multi-activity days for children during summer holidays
- Kings Trust volunteering opportunities available for young people (up to two weeks of work experience)

Housing and Environmental Improvements

Increased focus on private sector housing and empty properties, with letters being sent to properties with concerns about vacancy or untidy gardens. A pilot area drop-in session was held from Laburnum to Chestnut Street, with additional sessions on 7th October. The area is moving forward with a funding bid for full architectural street design, with Community Protection Notices and Warnings to be served imminently.

Other Activities

- Business week of action: 13th November
- Window space available at NCVA for community engagement
- Successful partnerships established with Full Circle Food Project, Willowvale, and Newbiggin Boxing Club for cooking classes and healthy living programmes

Action Items

- Wayne: Share resources, event information, and motorbike disorder leaflet
- Carla: Share all reporting methods and discuss multi-activity days with youth providers meeting; link with Rob Strettle on town designs
- Group members: Encourage reporting of incidents and share any facility use ideas with Keir

Staff Training: Managing Grant Applications and Source Funding

A comprehensive funding training session was recently attended, by the Engagement and Events Officer, providing valuable information and guidance on a wide range of funding opportunities.

The training covered National Lottery funding streams including Awards for All (up to £20,000), Partnerships (over £10,000), and the Bringing People Together Fund, alongside other lottery distributors such as Sports England, Heritage Fund, and Arts Council England.

Additional funding sources explored included;

- Landfill Community Funds through ENTRUST
- Derbyshire Environmental Trust (TARMAC)
- Funding Your Community, the DEFRA-ACRE Grant Scheme
- Supermarket funds

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025

- Biodiversity funds, and the Environment Agency.

The session also highlighted alternative fundraising methods including social investment, events, donations, in-kind contributions, and charity banks, as well as smaller community funds such as AVIVA Community Fund, Screwfix Foundation, and Coop Local Community Fund.

Key guidance was provided on funding criteria including compatibility, eligibility, and filter processes, with emphasis on summarising research sources, utilising the right people, being fully prepared with evidence of need, reading criteria thoroughly, being adaptable and ambitious, and building a convincing case.

The training provided a helpful insight into funding opportunities and will enable Sharon to signpost community groups and organisations to relevant funds, as well as enable Ashington Town Council to apply for funding for upcoming projects.

NCVA Funding Fair 22nd September 2025

Ashington Town Council was invited to participate in the NCVA Northumberland Funding Fair held on 22nd September at the Hirst Welfare Centre. The event proved to be a tremendous success, with sixty-eight appointments taking place in just three hours. The fair welcomed dozens of community organisations from right across Northumberland, with groups attending from as far north as Belford and Ingram, to Prudhoe and Hexham in the west, and everywhere in between.

Regional and national funders generously gave their time to provide advice, guidance, and encouragement to attendees, with demand far exceeding expectations. The event facilitated numerous positive connections between funders and community organisations seeking financial support. Ashington Town Council had a great day supporting community groups and organisations looking for funding opportunities and benefiting from the wealth of expertise on offer.

NCVA has indicated they will take a short break before turning their thoughts to plans for 2026 and another location. In the meantime, organisations requiring funding or governance advice are encouraged to contact NCVA directly. A big thank you to Northumberland Community & Voluntary Action for inviting Ashington Town Council to this valuable event.

Ashington Town Council Awarded Funding for Festive Events

Ashington Town Council were successful in securing funding from the **Animating Ashington Autumn/Winter Festival Fund**, part of Northumberland County Council's support for local cultural events.

The funding will deliver two exciting community celebrations this November:

- **Ashington's Christmas Light Switch-On and Lantern Parade** – taking place on **Thursday 13th November 2025**, featuring free family activities, live entertainment, and a magical Fairies and Elves themed lantern parade.
- **Ashington Christmas Craft Market with Festive Magic and Free Family Fun** – on **Friday 14th November 2025**, transforming Station Road into a festive marketplace inspired by *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, with unique craft stalls, free children's activities, and charity fundraising in support of the Wansbeck Valley Foodbank.

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025

This investment demonstrates the shared commitment of **Ashington Town Council** and **Northumberland County Council** to creating inclusive, memorable community events that bring residents together to celebrate the season.

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/>

<u>Casual Vacancy - Hirst Ward</u>	14 th October 2025
<u>Ashington Christmas Craft Market with Festive Magic and Free Family Fun</u>	13 th October 2025
<u>Ashington Christmas Craft Market with Festive Magic and Free Family Fun</u>	13 th October 2025
<u>Ashington Town Council Launches Second Round of Small Grant Fund</u>	08 th October 2025
<u>Standing Together: Ashington's Response to Recent Division</u>	06 th October 2025
<u>Ashington Town Council Celebrates ESCAPE Family Support's Success in National Awards</u>	29 th September 2025
<u>Casual Vacancy - Hirst Ward</u>	29 th September 2025
<u>Ashington Town Council Announces Exciting October Half Term Activities for Families</u>	26 th September 2025
<u>Ashington to Honour Fallen Heroes with Remembrance Sunday Parade and Service</u>	26 th September 2025
<u>Important Update: New Process for Ordering Poppy Wreaths</u>	26 th September 2025

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025

<u>Conclusion of the external year-end audit, year ending March 2025</u>	23 rd September 2025
<u>Community Celebrates the Opening of the Centenary Orchard at Wansbeck Road Allotments</u>	23 rd September 2025
<u>Full Council Meeting on 30th September 2025</u>	22 nd September 2025
<u>Election of a Town Councillor for Ashington (Hirst Ward) on Thursday 16 October 2025</u>	19 th September 2025
<u>Have Your Say – Help Shape the Future of Northumberland</u>	18 th September 2025
<u>Ashington Town Council Celebrates Community Spirit with £82,521 Investment in Local Groups</u>	15 th September 2025
<u>Ashington Pride Family Picnic 2025</u>	15 th September 2025
<u>Wansbeck Wanderers Walking Football Club Awarded £500 Grant</u>	11 th September 2025
<u>Town Councillor Election Called for Ashington (Hirst Ward)</u>	11 th September 2025
<u>Wansbeck Community Links Awarded £500 Grant</u>	11 th September 2025
<u>Ashington Community Litter Project Receives Essential Equipment from SUEZ</u>	8 th September 2025
<u>UPDATE: Information from Northumberland County Council regarding Former Quay Furniture Building on Ashington High Street</u>	5 th September 2025

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025

<u>Ashington Town Council - Casual Vacancy – Hirst Ward</u>	3 rd September 2025
<u>Ashington Youth Groups Unite for Stronger Community Impact</u>	2 nd September 2025
<u>New era for skills: North East colleges form transformational alliance to power regional growth</u>	1 st September 2025
<u>Finance & General Services Committee Meeting on 09/09/25.</u>	1 st September 2025

Facebook

Our Facebook page has demonstrated positive performance since the last Finance & General Services Committee meeting on 9th September 2025. The reporting period (16th September - 14th October 2025) shows growth across key metrics including views, reach, and engagement, with particularly strong performance in link clicks and new followers.

Since the last meeting we had 3,300 followers and this has increased yet again by 100 reaching 3,500 followers.

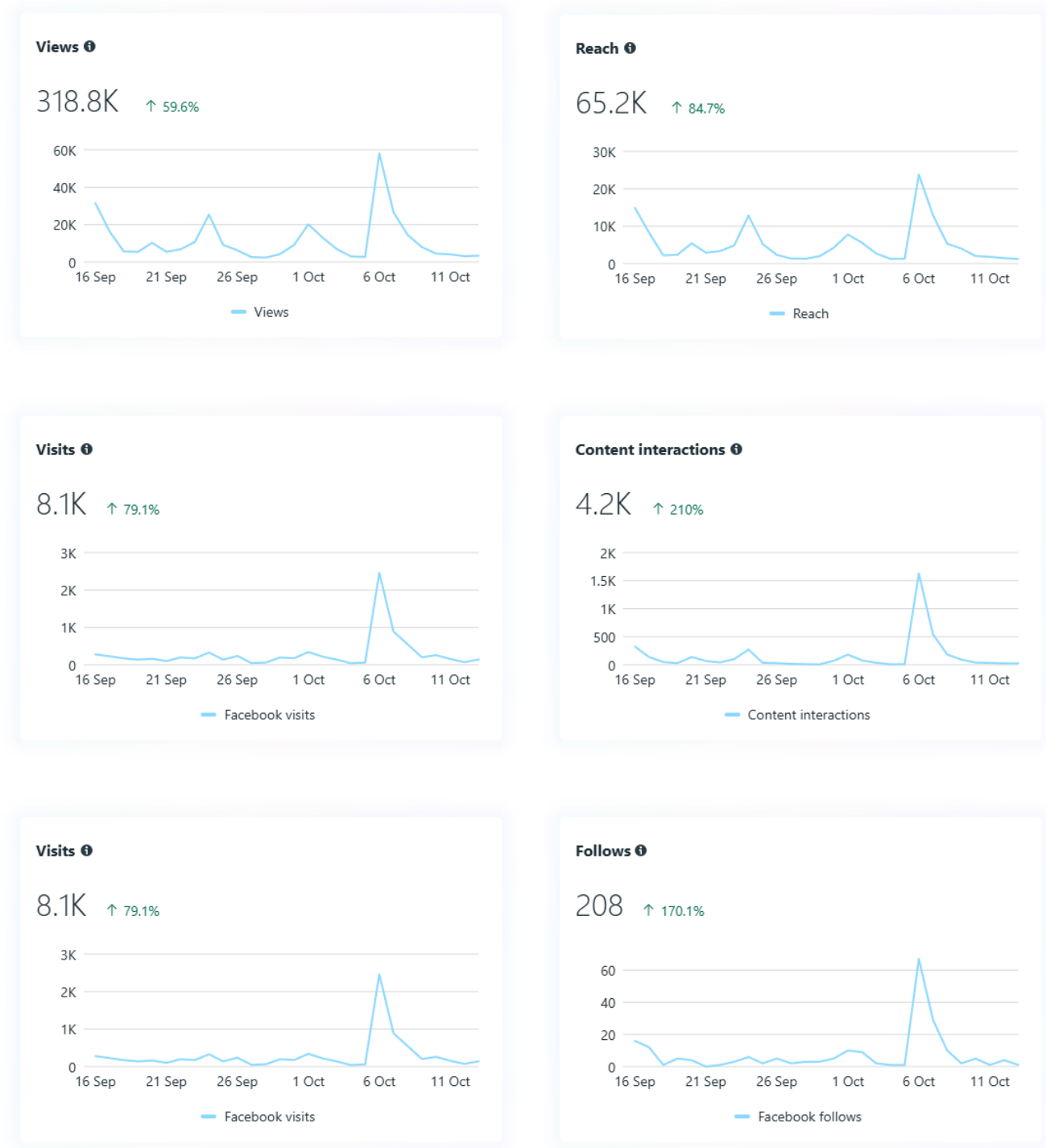
Positive posts and posts concerning Ashington in general are still showing very strong community engagement, rather than shares that we post on behalf of other organisations, with a continued effort to share posts where applicable and possible.

Efforts are still ongoing on how to optimise Facebook to ensure the biggest reach and engagement possible while we still discuss the use of advertising to boost posts, if needed.

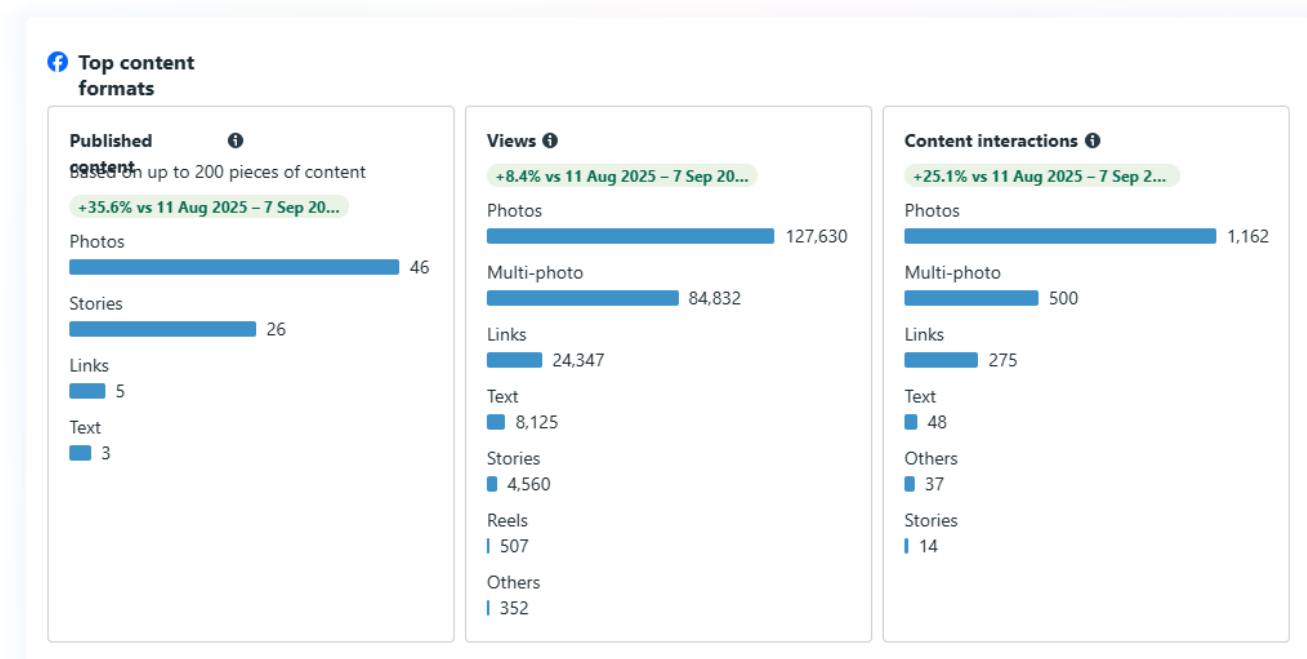
Thanks to some research and backend Facebook work, scheduling of posts has now been reduced from hours of work, to minutes. Scheduling posts in advance could have taken an hour or two to schedule a full week's worth of posts, whereas now I can schedule a hundred posts within 2 minutes.

A comprehensive report can now also be generated that offers insights such as what works best, what time of day, what day of the week gets more engagement, etc, to maximise Ashington Town Council's reach within the community.

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025



AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 9th September 2025



Top Ten Posts:

Title		Date published ↑↓	Reach ⓘ ↓	Likes and reactions ⓘ ↑↓	Shares ⓘ ↑↓	Interactions ⓘ ↑↓	Comments ⓘ ↑↓
 We, together with community leaders and local gro... Photo · Ashington Town Council		6 October 11:02	40.2K	575	132	1,1K	391
 Huge Congratulations to Nicola Hansom Beaut... Multi media · Ashington Town Council		24 September 14:42	17.8K	97	12	139	29
 AMAZING NEWS! We've just awarded £82,521 to 2... Photo · Ashington Town Council		16 September 20:29	16.2K	149	25	198	24
 https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/n... Photo · Ashington Town Council		19 September 18:44	9.4K	15	18	53	19
 Ashington Christmas Light Switch-On & Lan... Photo · Ashington Town Council		1 October 16:14	8.7K	48	40	127	33
 The Full Council Meeting will be held on Tuesday 30... Photo · Ashington Town Council		22 September 16:58	6K	10	7	18	1
 MORE ILLEGAL DUMPING IN ASHINGTON ... Multi media · Ashington Town Council		2 October 16:12	5.3K	21	5	38	12
 Community Centenary Orchard Officially Op... Multi media · Ashington Town Council		23 September 15:27	5.1K	72	9	88	5
 5 weeks and counting....Christmas Lights Update ... Photo · Ashington Town Council		8 October 14:03	4.5K	23	7	45	15
 Halloween Trail this Half Term! ... Photo · Ashington Town Council		30 September 15:30	3.6K	16	9	30	2