



Northumberland County Council

Ashington Town Council
Town Hall
65 Station Road
ASHINGTON
Northumberland
NE63 8RU

Your ref: SMcM-SE2907

Our ref: SMcM-SE2907

Date: 11th August 2025

Dear Sarah

Town Council Motion regarding the former Co-op building 'Central Arcade'

Thank you for contacting the County Council regarding the recent motion relating to the former Co-op building in Ashington town centre. Please see below a reply setting out the council's position on this.

Current Position

The County Council shares the Town Council's views that the Central Arcade, known locally as the former Co-op building is an important heritage asset and prominent building in the town centre.

- We agree that this Grade II listed building is of architectural, historical, and cultural significance to Ashington as already recognised by this listing.
- The County Council agrees that improving buildings with historic character could be a key component of the town's wider regeneration strategy in the longer term.
- We can confirm, working with the Town Council and the owner, that we will continue to seek support from funding mechanisms, partnerships, and strategic frameworks to support the restoration, or enhancement of the building.
- This includes engaging UK Government, the North East Combined Authority and national partner agencies such as Historic England (whose funding tends to focus on conservation areas at risk and can only be used to fund Grade II buildings if within conservation areas) to raise the need for funded programmes to intervene in this agenda. For example, there is currently a national pilot regarding High Street Auctions which may in the longer-term assist with this agenda.
- Whilst the Council will continue to make the case for investment, it's important to note that the area does not have any overall conservation area status, this is on the basis that this building is the sole listed building in the town centre meaning there is not the quantum of buildings to establish this status. Government initiatives through Historic England usually require a focus on conservation areas and in particular those at risk.

**Sarah McMillan, Director of Economic Development & Growth
Place and Regeneration**

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Regenerating Ashington Programme

The County Council is currently focused on delivering the £36m Regenerating Ashington Programme which builds on the Council's investment and leading role in the reopening the Northumberland Line to passenger services, with over 400,000 passenger journeys on the line since it re-opened.

- The Ashington Regeneration Programme includes defined projects such as Portland Park cinema, Wansbeck Square and public realm and connectivity improvements to the town.
- There is currently no project or funding that we're aware of which could support the acquisition or restoration of this building, however we will continue to seek opportunities and explore options in the longer term.

Next Steps

In terms of immediate steps, we have been in touch with the current owner of the building and subsequently asked senior representatives from Advance Northumberland to attend a site visit, meet the owner and evaluate if any potential interest from an Advance Northumberland perspective.

- Advance Northumberland colleagues visited the building on 21 July 2025. The majority of the building is tenanted by independent businesses and community groups.
- The visit confirmed the condition of the building is in decline and significant investment will be required in the short term to maintain it.
- Advance Northumberland intends to do further exploratory work on the potential for the building's future use on the back of their recent visit.
- As plans for regenerating Ashington progress the County Council will consider the potential of key properties including the former Co-op building to ensure the town centre offers a strong mix of uses and complements planned developments.
- As noted in your email the option of community right to bid under the Localism Act 2011 is also available under certain circumstances. More information is available on the NCC Website at [Northumberland Community Rights information](#).

Enforcement

As noted above our Advance colleagues have positively engaged with the owner of this property recently and we will continue to explore options for the building. This will include discussion on any further assessment of the property in regard to determining the extent of any works required and how this could be resourced.

With regard to any potential enforcement action the Council is actively reviewing the situation linked to the above engagement.

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Should it be necessary, the Council has powers under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The relevant powers include:

- **Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990** – This allows the Council to serve an Amenity Notice on the owner if the condition of land or buildings adversely affects the amenity of the area. Although more commonly used for unlisted buildings or those in Conservation Areas, this power can also apply to listed buildings where targeted external works can address obvious neglect or visual harm.
- **Section 54–56 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** – This enables the Council to serve a Repairs Notice on the owner, specifying the works considered reasonably necessary for the proper preservation of the listed building. If the owner fails to carry out these repairs within a specified time, this power can lead to further steps, including compulsory purchase.
- **Section 47 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** – As a last resort, the Council may consider initiating a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). This allows the authority to acquire the building with the aim of either undertaking the repairs directly or transferring ownership to a body (such as a Building Preservation Trust) committed to its restoration and ongoing care.

Our primary objectives are:

- To remove any immediate risks to public safety, which may require urgent intervention.
- To halt further decay and loss of historic fabric through timely and appropriate repairs.
- To secure the long-term future of the building in a way that respects its heritage significance.

We are committed to using these powers carefully and proportionately, ensuring that any action taken is based on sound evidence and appropriate expert input.

We will continue to assess the situation and engage with relevant parties to determine the best course of action.

I hope you will find this reply helpful, we will keep in close touch on the above matters with your team and please feel free to share the above reply with elected members as appropriate.

We are happy to meet once the above exploratory work has been progressed if that would be helpful too.

Yours sincerely

**Sarah McMillan, Director of Economic Development & Growth
Place and Regeneration**

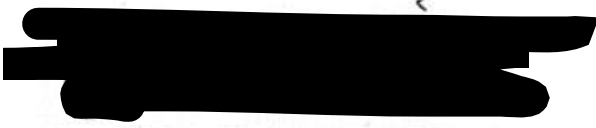
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