

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Glynne Davies and Cllr Graeme Wright.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer and Responsible Financial Officer, and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant.

FGS25/120 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by the Chair Councillor Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS25/121 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Bob Walkinshaw, Cllr Sophie Robinson, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr John Tully, and Cllr Mark Purvis.

FGS25/122 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS25/123 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were received.

FGS25/124 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present.

FGS25/125 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

There were no minutes due to the previous meeting being inquorate.

FGS25/126 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

The following update was **RECEIVED** which had been sent out in advance of the meeting.

Neighbourhood Services

Ryan has been working hard to maintain and add some additional features to the Gateways and the Mining Wheel feature. These are looking impressive, some of which we have the weather to thank, but mainly Ryan's eye for what looks good. Rocks from Doves Corner and St John's have been repurposed and the features really stand out. Bulbs are also looking splendid this year. Gary has contacted Ashington Camera Club to ask if some photography could be done when they are looking so good in the sunshine.

The Memorial Garden has had a light-touch tidy but has been deliberately left as it will be redeveloped as part of the regeneration (further later in the report). All town council assets have had their first weed spray of the season.

Maintenance at play areas continues. Kompan have now returned to fix the roundabouts at Alexandra Road and Orchid Meadows; this was completed under guarantee.

Play Area signs are now ready for collection from Spotty Dog Signage. In line with our commitment to utilise in-house resources whenever possible, these signs will be installed directly by Mark and Ryan rather than outsourcing to external contractors.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Our Neighbourhood Services Officers have dedicated their exceptional skills to various town projects, which has temporarily shifted focus away from routine tasks such as bus shelter cleaning, as has occurred in previous periods. The next scheduled clean will be carried out by a local contractor. This presents an opportunity to consider establishing regular contracted cleaning schedules going forward—a full report with recommendations will be presented in due course. Our priority remains making the best use of our team's valuable skill sets, and the recent project work highlights the outstanding work Mark and Ryan are able to deliver across the town.

Allotments

Asbestos was successfully collected on Monday 7th April from Seaton Hirst and High Market by our approved contractor.

Bushes have been cut down by Bernicia near Seaton Hirst Site, but we await a further update regarding the hedge line.

Hedge and tree trimming has commenced at North Seaton Colliery site and will continue throughout the week. Please note that particular care will be taken and all hedges and trees will be checked for nests by the contractor. Courses are booked so that some aspects of this work can be carried out by Alan in the future.

Enquiries are ongoing to establish how best to recycle glass across all allotment sites, with the most recent contact being an email sent to the Secretary of State for Environment. Alan is hitting stumbling blocks each time but not giving up that there must be a better option than landfill. This expands on the window frame recycling recently progressed across some sites. Alan has welcomed new plot holders at both Hirst East End and North Seaton Colliery and has had some very positive feedback from new allotment holders. With the weather much improved and plot holders getting on with their gardens, and lots of jobs on site, Alan is a very welcome and visible presence.

Further taps repairs have been carried out at our Woodhorn Road Site.

We continue to collect rents due from 1st April for Nursery Park, and Hirst East End. We are pleased with the increase in allotment holders paying direct into the bank.

From Monday 7th April, notice has been given by DEFRA that it is a legal requirement for all bird keepers across the county to keep their birds housed due to avian flu in Northumberland – whether they have pet birds, commercial flocks or just a few birds in a backyard flock. This is in addition to existing requirements for strict biosecurity measures to be put in place to help limit the spread of the disease and keep flocks safe, which includes regularly cleaning and disinfecting equipment, clothing and vehicles when entering or exiting sites and limiting access to non-essential workers or visitors.

Notices have been put up at all Allotment sites. Since October 2024 all keepers of birds are required by law to register, therefore all those who have complied will have been notified directly about the outbreak and what they should do.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Events and Engagement

Great British Spring Clean

The Great British Spring Clean 2025 campaign was successfully conducted in Ashington with events on Thursday 27th March at People's Park and Friday 28th March at Wansbeck Riverside Park. Unfortunately, the planned third event scheduled for Saturday 29th March had to be cancelled due to insufficient participation.

Over the two active days, more than 20 volunteers participated in the clean-up efforts. Participants included local residents, staff from Cooplands Bakery, young adults from Brightside Young Adult Services, and staff and volunteers from Northumberland Community Voluntary Action. The community spirit was further enhanced by The Wansbeck Pantry, who kindly provided free tea and coffee to volunteers following the riverside litter pick.

Jimmy France from LukLuk Productions documented both events, with the resulting footage now available for viewing on the town council's YouTube channel, website and Facebook page. Northumberland County Council supported the initiative by removing all collected waste. Additional litter picks were independently organised and carried out by children from Cleaswell Hill School at Hirst Park, and members of the Seaton Vale Residents Association, further extending the reach and impact of this year's campaign.

All team members contributed significantly to litter picking efforts and to making volunteers feel rewarded and appreciated.

Animating Ashington

Key Updates and Discussions from the meeting held on Tuesday 1st April

Events 4 & 5: Pride of Ashington and Feast of Fire

- Over **5,000 attendees** with **800 soups and loaves** served; 1,000 additional portions were donated.
- Events were praised for inclusivity and reclaiming community spaces.
- Northumberland College contributed with spiced popcorn.
- Group agreed on the potential to use spaces beyond the main street for future events.

Art Workshops by Jill Bennison

- Engaged around 100 young people, part of a wider 1,100 youth participation in arts projects.
- Artwork to be displayed around the new cinema site throughout summer.

James Brunt – 'Seeding the Future'

- Community is encouraged to interact with the land-based art, which will naturally fade in 6 weeks.
- James Brunt will also run a workshop at the **Eco Fair** at Hirst Welfare Centre, assisted by Gary and Faye.
- **Action:** Link up with local sports camps for added audience.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Mortal Fools and 'One Amazing Day'

- Mortal Fools interested in participating and growing their local presence.
- Event planned for 21st July—street closure anticipated.
- Emphasis **on youth involvement.**
- **Action:** Connect with local wrestling groups for performance slots.

Powering the Future

- Recognition of how Animating Ashington has successfully engaged the community.
- Future planning must be co-created with residents.
- Group agreed the initiative can be a strong case study to secure more funding.

Future Proofing

- A follow-up meeting or event is proposed for September.

Eco Fair - Friday 25th April

We have received funding from NCC Climate for this event, £5,000 received, thanks to Sharon. This is the first ECO Fair and Sharon is working hard to make it something special. Confirmed Activities and Participants, can all be found on the town council events page at; [Ashington Town Council Meetings List](#)

Plans are progressing well. The events page has been updated with all confirmed participants and their activities.

The fair will feature a comprehensive program including musical performances, talks, video screenings, a Hack-a-thon, and a school climate change poster display. We've also arranged a local produce market offering a diverse selection of goods, with only a few stalls still available.

Easter Trail – Bunny Hop

Starting this Friday the bunny hop, in its third year, now includes event more shops and traders – 26 in total. Gary is continuing to work hard to get more of our local traders involved in the Council's endeavours – it requires boots on the street and is time consuming, but it seems to be working. Gary has also shopped around to get the best deal on easter eggs, and these will be given out to those who have taken part at the ECO fair – encouraging attendance that way also.

Projects

Ashington Cricket Club

The Ashington memorial tree project is just under 6 weeks away from its launch date on 18th May 2025. Mark and Ryan will be installing plaques when they are ready.

Doves Corner

Progress has been made on the area enhancement project, with some amends due to top soil not being available when the contractor was on site.

- NCC have now removed the rockery and flags as planned.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

- Mark and Ryan have removed the old seats and bin and installed the new bin. Seats are on order.
- Brambledown have installed new paving and shaped the rear shrubbery. It was expected that Brambledown would install two small round beds and plant up 30 plants, buddleia and hebe. As the top soil was stalled, the plants are being looked after in our greenhouse at Hirst Park, and Mark and Ryan will install the beds when this can be progressed. This means the size and shape of the beds can be altered, but we must remain mindful that these should be low maintenance as NCC are responsible for this. Mark has liaised with NCC will draft plans to show ward Cllrs.

Workers Memorial – St John’s Cemetery

Work by Mark and Ryan will be completed hopefully by the end of this week, but definitely by 28th April, which is Workers Memorial Day. NCC Cemeteries staff have some works to complete on the paved areas which Mark is seeking a date for.

Mark has gone above and beyond to add value and meaning to this project, which will be evident once it is complete. All publicity in regards this project will be shared post-elections.

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.

Ashington Memorial Garden

Brambledown have been appointed by NCC for the works which include the following:

Site Remediation

- Breaking up and removing existing concrete (80mm thick)
- Reducing levels for existing paving to be refurbished (155mm deep)
- Reducing levels for new paved areas (805mm deep)
- Reducing levels for soft landscaped areas (600mm deep)
- Disposal of excavated non-hazardous material off site
- Removal of existing hedge and disposal off-site
- Disposal of surface water
- Compacting bottoms of excavations

Hard Landscaping

Existing Paved Areas (Refurbishment):

- Installation of Kellen Tagenta paving (300x150x80mm) with standard pattern
- 30mm laying course material (Category 2)
- 125mm bituminous macadam road base

New Paved Areas:

- Installation of Kellen Tagenta paving (300x150x80mm) with standard pattern
- 30mm laying course material (Category 2)
- 125mm bituminous macadam road base
- 250mm GSB Type 1 sub-base

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

- 400mm Type 6F2 sub-base

Kerbing:

- Installation of flush light grey granite kerbs (200x150)
- Installation of upstand light grey granite kerbs (200x150)

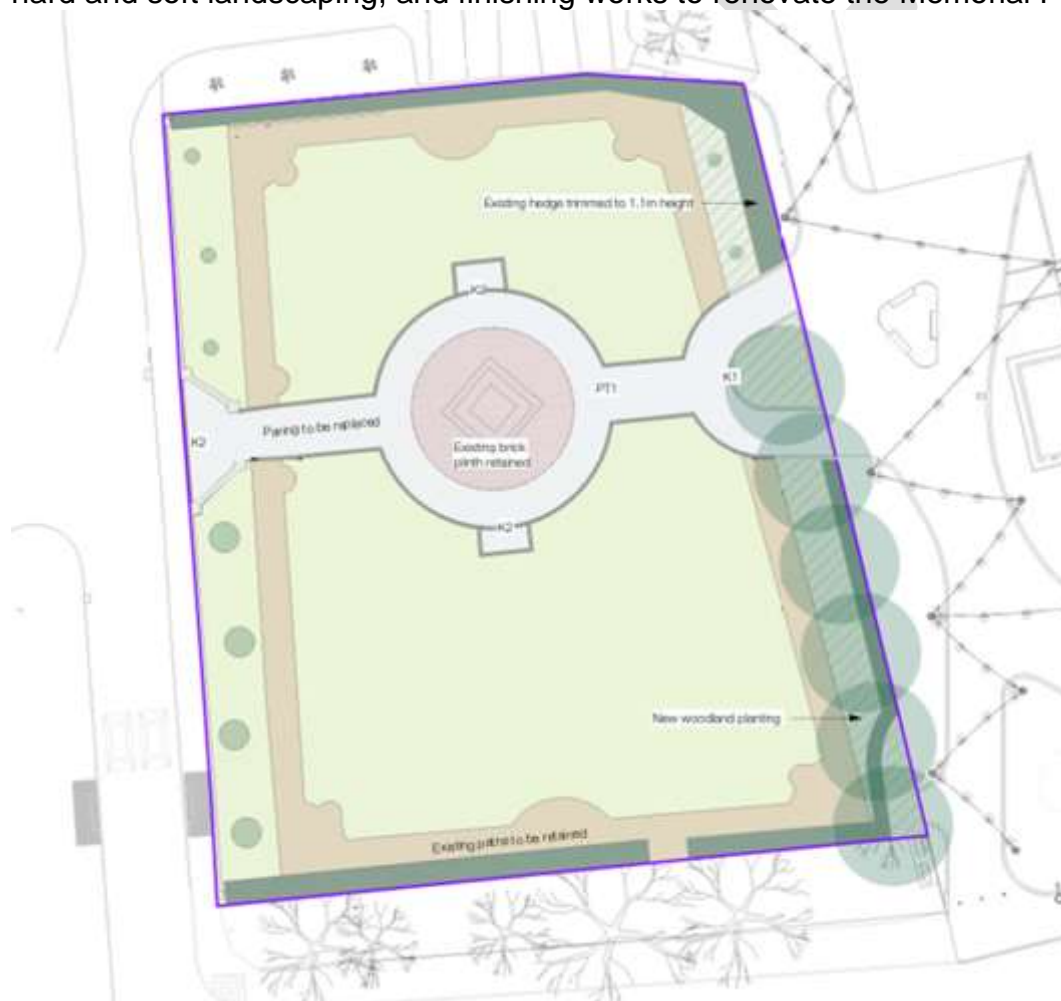
Soft Landscaping

- Low-level woodland planting
- Topsoil to planting bed (350mm deep)
- Subsoil to planting bed (250mm deep)

Project Scope

- Total area of works: 356 m² (3,832 ft²)
- Refurbishing existing paving: 157 m²
- Installing new paving: 84 m²
- Woodland planting area: 115 m²

The project will be delivered over a 3-week program and includes all necessary site preparation, hard and soft landscaping, and finishing works to renovate the Memorial Park Projects.



ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

IT and Communications Changes

Scribe Accounts and Allotment Management

We have transitioned from excel to Scribe for all accountancy and allotment database management. This has streamlined how we process invoices, purchase orders and payments. As we move forward and realise the full potential of the system, budget monitoring will also be streamlined, as well as VAT and asset management.

Cllr Graeme Wright asked if the Scribe servers were EU or US for GDPR purposes.

Reaching out via video

You will no doubt have been impressed with the swim videos produced by LukLuk Productions. These worked as a promotion of this amazing initiative offering free family swims, as well as a PR opportunity for the Council. We are looking at using this amazing and affordable method of communicating with residents more widely. A video was created to showcase the Council's efforts in the Great British Spring Clean. We plan another for Grant recipients in 2025.

The possibility of radio

Following some successful stints on Koast Radio, one only this morning, a regular slot has been offered. This is an exciting opportunity to reach residents via another output and share what we are doing, as well showing the Council's personality via a live broadcast. Having officers and Councillors discussing upcoming projects and events is a great way to create positivity about the town. We will discuss this in greater detail with Koast in the coming months.

Website and Social Media PR

Northumberland Line Making Significant Progress with New Station Opening

The Northumberland Line team announced that Newsham Station was open to passengers on 17 March 2025, offering a 21-minute journey to Newcastle. A drop-in event was held in Blyth on 11 March to share more information with residents. Accessibility features have been reviewed with local groups, and construction is progressing at all remaining stations. Updates continue to be shared online and via the project's digital newsletter.

Ashington Town Council Awards Vital Funding for Equipment to Community Woodlands Parkrun

Our £500 small grant to the Ashington Community Woodlands Parkrun to support safety improvements and enhance the weekly event for participants and volunteers was shared. The funding will be used to purchase new finish area equipment, walkie-talkies for emergency communication, and umbrellas for volunteers. The Friends of Ashington Community Woods will provide storage for the new kit.

The Ashington Town Council Easter Trail Returns! - Sat 12/04/25 to Fri 25/04/25

Ashington's Easter Trail returns for 2025, inviting families to collect stickers from participating town centre stores and claim a free Easter egg at the Hirst Welfare Centre on 25 April during the Eco Fair event. Over 25 local businesses and national retailers are taking part in this fun and free community activity.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Youth Advisory Committee Launches Youth Survey: Have Your Say!

Ashington Town Council's Youth Advisory Committee launched the "HAVE YOUR SAY! Ashington Youth Survey" to gather feedback from young people on life in the town and what improvements they'd like to see. The initiative follows previous successes such as free swim sessions at Ashington Leisure Centre, which were introduced based on youth feedback. A new promotional video has also been released to highlight the benefits of the swim programme. The survey is open now and will help shape future youth-focused services and activities.

Civic Head Visits Escape Family Support To See Impact Of Town Council Grant

Our grant of £3,000 to ESCAPE Family Support earlier this financial year, helping the charity continue its vital work with Ashington families. Civic Head Cllr Caroline Ball visited ESCAPE to see the impact of the funding, which supports core services such as 24/7 helplines and accredited training. In 2023/24, 15% of ESCAPE's service users were from Ashington, with most families reporting improved wellbeing. The Town Council's support has helped the award-winning organisation meet rising demand and continue making a real difference in the community.

Ashington Town Council Supports Newbiggin Football Club with Grant for Volunteer Training and Pitch Maintenance

Our small grant awarded a grant to Newbiggin Football Club to support volunteer training and pitch maintenance. The funding will go towards line paint for the pitches and enrolling volunteers in Level 1 and 2 Grounds Management Association courses. This investment in skills and facilities will ensure high-quality playing conditions and long-term sustainability for the club, which plays a key role in the community. Civic Head Cllr Caroline Ball presented the grant and praised the club's commitment to grassroots football.

Ashington Town Council Supports Bomarsund Welfare Cricket Club's Initiative for New Changing Room Facilities

Our small grant to support Bomarsund Welfare Cricket Club with a grant to improve changing room facilities at Stakeford & Bomarsund Welfare. Civic Head, Cllr Caroline Ball, recently presented the cheque, which will go towards the installation of a new modular building to serve the club's growing community of over 100 members — including men's, women's, and junior teams.

The proposed building, supplied by Budget Shipping Containers Ltd., will feature four changing rooms to accommodate players and match officials, with a focus on inclusivity and shared community use. The new facilities will also benefit local football teams, the bowls club, and other users of the Welfare site.

With just £1,500 left to raise, the project is well on track thanks to the Council's support and ongoing fundraising. The upgraded changing rooms promise to be a long-term asset for the whole community.

Ashington Town Council Supports Butokokan Judo Club's Digital Advancement Initiative

Our small grant to support Butokokan Judo Club with a grant aimed at enhancing the club's digital training capabilities. Civic Head, Cllr Caroline Ball, was delighted to present the cheque, which has enabled the club to purchase tablets and protective covers for use during sessions. The new equipment gives students easy access to British Judo Association resources, helping them engage with up-to-date grading materials and improve their learning experience. For

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

competitive members, the tablets will also allow for performance recording and technical analysis, supporting better self-assessment and coaching feedback.

This investment in technology will benefit judokas of all levels and strengthen the club's development going forward.

Ashington Town Council Supports Blossoming Communities Six Week SPRING Into Action Wellbeing Programme

Our small grant presented to Blossoming Communities, a Community Interest Company, to support their "SPRING into Action" wellbeing craft programme. The six-week programme, held at Hirst Park Pavilion, aims to reduce isolation and improve mental health through creative activities. Previous initiatives showed significant positive outcomes, with 100% of participants reporting improved wellbeing. Ashington Town Council is proud to support this important community initiative.

Ashington Town Council Supports The Evergreens Over 60s Club Grant for New Bingo Machine

Our small grant to the **Evergreens Over 60s Club** for the purchase of a new bingo machine, replacing their old broken one. The club, which provides a social hub for Ashington's senior residents, uses bingo sessions to foster social interaction and mental stimulation. The grant will help restore an important aspect of their weekly gatherings, enhancing the quality of life for members. Ashington Town Council is proud to support such valuable community initiatives.

Ashington Cricket Club Commemorative Tree Project Nears Completion as VE Day 80th Anniversary Approaches

The Ashington Cricket Club's commemorative tree project, marking the 80th anniversary of VE Day, is nearing completion. Over £20,000 was raised to fund the installation of 177 personalised plaques honouring Ashington residents who lost their lives during WWII. The Reiverdale Scout Group, alongside local historians and professionals, has been instrumental in the project, handling both research and hands-on work, including tree planting.

The unveiling ceremony will take place on Sunday, 18th May at 11am at Ashington Cricket Club, coinciding with the national VE Day commemoration. The community is invited to attend the event, with refreshments available afterward. This memorial, coordinated with support from Ashington Town Council, will stand as a lasting tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Election Notices

Northumberland County Council has issued notice for local elections on Thursday, May 1, 2025. There are 6 County Council seats and 18 Town Council seats available in Ashington. Details are continually updated on our news and democracy pages, as well as Facebook.

Northumberland County Council Launches Green Spaces Maintenance Survey

Northumberland County Council invited residents to take part in a consultation on the maintenance and biodiversity of green spaces across the county. The survey, which takes around 10 minutes to complete, aims to review current grounds maintenance practices to better support nature recovery while keeping spaces safe and attractive. The deadline for responses is 21st April 2025, and the survey can be accessed through the NCC website. For more information, residents can contact the Northumberland County Council directly.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Moving Forward: Transforming Bus Travel in Ashington

Ashington Town Council, in collaboration with Northumberland County Council (NCC), is working to enhance public transport infrastructure in the area. Recently, stand information was installed at Ashington Bus Station to improve passenger guidance. The council is also developing a strategy to upgrade bus shelters, focusing on accessibility and comfort. In addition, they are supporting the repair and upgrade of timetable cabinets. This initiative aims to improve public transport, with a focus on accessibility, efficient resource use, and providing better information for residents. For updates on bus services, residents can check NCC's online timetables and live travel map.

Pride of Ashington Torchlit Procession Illuminates Community Spirit

On March 21st, Ashington celebrated local heroes during the Pride of Ashington Torchlit Procession, which took place at Hirst Park. Over 200 torchbearers, each representing a community nominee, carried flames through the park to honour those who have made significant contributions to the town. The event, part of the Animating Ashington programme, was supported by Northumberland County Council and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Torchlit Procession culminated in a dramatic "Feast of Fire" finale, drawing 5,610 attendees over two nights. The event recognized volunteers and compassionate individuals who make Ashington a special place.

Ashington Town Council announces Free Easter Activities

Ashington Town Council has announced a range of exciting activities for the Easter half-term break, focusing on family-friendly, environmentally conscious events. The highlight is the first-ever ECO Fair on Friday, April 25th at Ashington Hirst Welfare Centre, featuring local environmental projects, expert speakers, workshops, and free activities. In addition, free swimming sessions are offered at Ashington Leisure Centre on selected dates in April, with 80 slots available per session. The Bunny Hop Easter Egg Hunt, running from April 12th to 25th, invites children to collect stickers from 25 local shops and claim a free Easter egg. These events reflect the council's commitment to sustainability and community well-being.

Important Update for Ashington Residents: Transition to Digital Landlines

BT is hosting a drop-in session in Ashington on May 28th, 2025, from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM at Ashington Library to explain the upcoming Digital Voice switchover. By January 2027, the UK's traditional analogue landlines will be replaced with digital technology, offering enhanced call quality and new features. BT representatives will explain how Digital Voice works, its benefits, and how the transition will affect current landline services. Attendees will learn about the necessary equipment and how to connect their phone to their broadband hub at no extra cost. Key features of Digital Voice include HD call quality, spam call blocking, voicemail, and more. No booking is required, just drop in to get more information.

Candidates Announced for Northumberland County and Ashington Town Council Elections

Northumberland County Council announced the candidates standing in the County and Town Council elections on Thursday, 1st May 2025. Ashington Town Council will have contested elections across all wards. Details are continually updated on our news and democracy pages, as well as Facebook.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Ashington Town Council Celebrates Another Successful Year of the Great British Spring Clean

Ashington Town Council is celebrating another successful year of the Great British Spring Clean, with significant contributions from local volunteers, particularly the Ashington Community Litter Pickers, who have collected 1,280 bags of litter in 2025. The initiative is part of a nationwide effort, with over 150,000 volunteers participating across the UK. Key partners, including Northumberland County Council and the Ashington Community Litter Project, have supported the campaign. The Council also hosted clean-up events at People's Park and Riverside Park and continues to provide litter-picking equipment for volunteers. Residents are encouraged to join future initiatives to help maintain a cleaner Ashington.

FGS25/127 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2024/25

a) Updated Budget Report

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED** and those commitments carried forward were **AGREED**.

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid (including Bank Reconciliation)

The schedule of accounts paid and to be paid was **RECEIVED** and the accounts paid were **ENDORSED** and those to be paid **AGREED**.

FGS25/128 NCC NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP MEETING, 18TH February 2025

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**.

The Executive Officer informed the committee that the upcoming agenda for the next meeting has been distributed to partnership members and all councillors have received it via email, as the meeting will involve an in-depth discussion.

Cllr Pauline Thompson reported on her recent site visits with officers in the Hirst area, describing the conditions as deplorable. She noted that even the CEO of Advance Northumberland, who had initially doubted the severity of the property conditions, offered an apology after witnessing them firsthand. She recommended verifying reports on the Fix My Street platform due to the sometimes-lengthy response times from Northumberland County Council.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw reminded the committee that from 1st May, a new council and board will be established, noting that priorities will need to be determined once this transition is complete.

Cllr Pauline Thompson expressed frustration at having raised the same concerns for 20 years, emphasising the urgent need for effective landlord legislation and penalties for backyard accumulations, which she described as dangerous fire hazards.

Cllr Caroline Ball mentioned that the CVS had organised a photographic exhibition featuring the Hirst area, which was subsequently displayed at County Hall to significant displeasure from County officials due to the poor state of the area depicted.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

Cllr Marjorie Chambers highlighted that Fix My Street response times can extend to 76 hours. She also raised concerns about street sweeping operations, particularly on the Main Street, noting that the number of operatives has been reduced from six to five.

Councillor Caroline Ball commented that landlord licensing would be ineffective without proper enforcement mechanisms, as current regulations fail to prevent waste accumulation by landlords.

Cllr Louis Brown acknowledged the committee's shared frustration, noting that insufficient staffing and resources continue to hamper progress. He suggested allowing the incoming Council to attempt to make meaningful improvements.

Cllr Paul Wright discussed the exhibition and proposed drafting a formal response regarding the inappropriate representation of the town. The Executive Officer advised that a better understanding of the exact details of the photography should be done prior to any formal response, noting that the photography may have had a specific theme.

Cllr Caroline Ball suggested that the new Council should implement a positivity campaign to highlight and promote the favourable aspects of Ashington.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers inquired about the duration of the exhibition in the CVA window and whether its removal could be requested. The Executive Officer repeated that more information was needed, which would be sought the following day.

Cllr Pauline Thompson shared an account of following a street sweeper vehicle, observing that it merely circulated through Ashington without performing any actual sweeping before returning to the depot. This occurred despite assurances during a partnership meeting that vehicles were equipped with tracking devices. She recommended verifying whether these trackers are operational and monitoring performance effectively. The Executive Officer confirmed that sweepers would not have sweepers down if their load was at capacity.

Cllr Glynn Davies alleged that other towns, specifically Cramlington and Morpeth, receive preferential treatment under the Partnership scheme. The Executive Officer clarified that Cramlington do not have a partnership agreement.

Cllr Louis Brown concluded that if these issues persist, the council should consider withdrawing from the partnership agreement.

FGS25/129 DOG FOULING IN ASHINGTON

This item was raised by former Cllr Gemma Hemsley and Cllr Mark Purvis. The meeting received a report on dog fouling and the enforcement measures in place as provided by NCC, including actions to address dog fouling in Ashington, engagement with NCC to improve enforcement and awareness efforts.

Key Points including:

- CCTV Limitations: CCTV footage cannot be used as direct evidence for issuing fines due to proportionality concerns raised by NCC Legal under current regulations.
- Available Enforcement Options: CCTV can be used indirectly to identify problem areas and guide patrol patterns.

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

- Informal warning notices have been given as deterrents by ATC Officers when we are aware of culprits.
- Pavement markings have proven effective as preventative measures in other areas and will be used in Ashington.
- Enforcement Challenges: Officers lack powers of detainment.

Statistics: Between January 2024 and February 2025, 107 dog fouling complaints were received in Ashington with no Fixed Penalty Notices issued and only five warning letters sent.

Proposed Actions include:

- Direct NCC patrols to problem areas
- Implement pavement marking in hotspots
- Explore community education initiatives
- Consider engagement with NCC's Green Dog Walkers program

Cllr Caroline Ball questioned the effectiveness of dog warden officers, expressing concern about their inability to utilise CCTV footage or properly enforce the regulations they are tasked with upholding.

Cllr Marjorie Brown recalled a previous initiative where a substantial enforcement team was deployed on the main street to address cigarette littering issues. She noted that a personal acquaintance had received a £75 on-the-spot fine for discarding a cigarette. She suggested that Northumberland County Council should implement similar enforcement measures in known problem areas for dog fouling.

It was AGREED to note the report.

FGS25/130 NORTH SEATON COLLIERY PLAY AREA REDEVELOPMENT

The draft documents for North Seaton Colliery Play Area Redevelopment were **RECEIVED**, and it was **AGREED** to advertise the opportunity.

FGS25/131 CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV) MEETING, 5TH March 2025

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**.

The Executive Officer informed the committee that a problematic area has been identified behind Bubbles Bar. She reported that while the light stand at this location is currently non-operational, once repairs are completed, a camera will be installed at the site to monitor activity.

FGS25/132 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was AGREED the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, permitted under Section 1 (2) LGA 1960, due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted. The matter is commercially sensitive.

FGS25/133 FESTIVE LIGHT PROCUREMENT

The outcome of the tender evaluation process was **CONSIDERED** and the appointment of a supplier for the supply, installation, maintenance, and storage of festive lighting displays was **AGREED**.

The Council initiated a procurement process to identify a preferred supplier for the Festive Lighting. This process included issuing an invitation to tender, receiving and reviewing

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th April 2025
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

submissions, evaluating the proposals based on agreed-upon criteria, and conducting presentations to the evaluation panel.

Proposals were assessed against several weighted criteria, including Experience (20%), Proposed Scheme Approach (25%), Technical Ability (20%), Quality and Sustainability (20%), and Presentation (15%).

The evaluation panel consisted of Cllrs Louis Brown, Marjorie Chambers, and Pauline Thompson, alongside officers Sarah Eden, Mark Air, and Sharon Parmley.

Five contractors submitted proposals and were shortlisted to deliver presentations. Two additional contractors conducted site visits but ultimately did not submit proposals.

Following the evaluation process, the panel recommended Blachere Illumination as the preferred supplier for the Festive Lights under a five-year contract.

Beyond scoring highly in the evaluation, Blachere's presentation particularly impressed the panel by demonstrating a commitment to building upon existing displays, extending lighting into public areas around the bus station, and offering the adaptability needed to reflect ongoing changes in the public realm and local development.

Financial implications will be addressed as part of these discussions, with costings to be developed in line with the Council's agreed annual budget of £41,000.

The meeting resolved to formally approve Blachere Illumination as the preferred supplier for the provision of Christmas Lights for the town. Members authorised the Executive Officer to enter detailed negotiations and discussions with Blachere Illumination regarding the specific terms and conditions of the contract.

Cllr Glynn Davies inquired whether the committee could proceed with implementation or if ratification from the Full Council would be required. The Executive Officer confirmed that Christmas Lights were within the remit of the Finance and General Services Committee.

Cllr Pauline Thompson noted that the selection of the preferred supplier for the Festive Lights was straightforward, with a clear frontrunner among the candidates.

FGS25/134 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 10th June 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

Meeting ended 19:15pm