

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 7:00pm on Tuesday 6 October 2020, on-line via Zoom.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Mark Purvis (Chair)	Victor Bridges
Marjorie Chambers	Nicola Chambers
Avril Chisholm	Matthew Cuthbert
Stephen Fenwick	Brian Gallacher
Lynne Grimshaw	Lawrence Henderson
Jim Lang	Liam Lavery
Ken Parry	Pauline Thompson
Bob Walkinshaw	Tom Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Administration Officer (minute taking)
Stuart McNaughton – Northumberland County Council
Rachael Bateman – Northumberland County Council
Members of the Public – 0

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

There were no members of the public present.

C20/901 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Eleanor Armstrong and Kris Lavery.

C20/902 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

There were no disclosures of interest from members present.

C20/903 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING.

The minutes of the last meeting held on the Tuesday 21 July 2020, were agreed and signed as a true record.

C20/904 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MINUTES.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

C20/905 5. NORTHUMBERLAND RAIL LINE.

The Chair welcomed Mr Stuart McNaughton and Ms Rachael Bateman (Northumberland Council – NCC) who provided members with a detailed update on progress to date and the forthcoming public consultation exercise. Members were requested to contribute to and help promote the upcoming public consultation exercise.

Members were reminded that the top-level objectives of the project were to ensure:

- Public transport journey time from Ashington to Newcastle of less than, or as close as practicable to, 30 minutes.
- Existing freight paths to remain unaffected but with improvements in terms of efficiencies and journey time.
- Six new stations at Ashington, Bedlington Station, Blyth Bebside, Newsham, Seaton Delaval and Northumberland Park.
- Safeguarding for future expansion of the route and services.

Mr McNaughton reported that the project is progressing through the Department for Transport's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP). The Develop stage concluded in December 2019 with the completion of the Outline Business Case which demonstrated that the project shows high value for money. Members were advised that the project had now moved onto the Design Stage with the following key work streams:

- The Outline Design of the scheme.
- Procurement of Principal Designer and Contractor.
- Achievement of Planning Consent.
- Updated Business Case reflecting post procurement costs for the project and any scope changes arising from Outline Design and the Planning Process.

Ms. Bateman advised that the Northumberland Line Consultation would be launched in late October for a period of 4 weeks. Members were informed that, given the increased local restrictions and the severity of the coronavirus pandemic, the consultation would use an online consultation package called "Citizens Space" although there would be an option of more traditional means of engagement.

Members were further informed that the consultation would be further promoted via mailout to predetermined addresses at the start of the consultation period and communication with stakeholder organisations. Press releases were also to be prepared and

information was to be posted via dedicated social media outlets. Information was to be available online via the NCC website.

The Town Council was asked to share news that the consultation was going live and was asked to encourage residents to engage in the consultation process.

Ms. Bateman informed members that, as the scheme moved on there would be a range of opportunities for Town and Parish Councils along the line to get involved, contribute to and sculpt the wider social impact of the scheme. NCC was keen to work with the Town Council to promote and excite local communities and would be looking to create a network of Northumberland Line champions.

Resolved:

That:

- (i) The Town Council contribute to, and help promote the upcoming public consultation exercise; and**
- (ii) As the project further developed, the Town Council provide feedback on the range of social value projects being developed by Northumberland County Council.**

C20/906 6. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr. Matthew Cuthbert presented the following report;

PRACTICAL WORKS:

Ashington Entrance Features – Work on the retaining walls for the two Ashington entrance features was scheduled to commence on-site on Thursday 8 October. The features would be located on the B1334 (North Seaton roundabout entrance) and A196 (Stakeford Bridge entrance) Work will include soft landscaping and tree planting. New ‘Ashington’ signage has arrived safely.

Allotments Capital Works Programme – Work to improve roadways at North Seaton Colliery Allotment Site was safely completed in September. Further allotment improvement works were also completed during the summer including significant roadway and fencing works at Wansbeck Road Allotment Site and roadway works at High Market Allotment Site.

Paddock Wood & Park – Preparatory works to install 3 heavy-duty cast-iron bins in the area around the Paddock Wood Play Area had been undertaken. There had been a delay in the bespoke bins arriving, due to Covid-19 but planned works should be completed by November.

A new piece of play equipment for the Paddock Wood Play Area was also due to be installed that had been funded by Cllr. Jim Lang through his County Council Members Local Improvements Scheme. The arson and vandalism issues in the area had also been raised with Northumbria Police and Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service.

Ashington Play Areas – regrettably there has been a clear spike in vandalism to play areas and equipment in recent months. These issues had been reported to Northumbria Police.

Peoples Park Play Area – The Town Council was not consulted, involved, or included in any assessment, risk or otherwise, of the selection of the location and opening of a COVID-19 Testing Station within the nearby car park.

As members were aware, residents, parents and town council members were understandably concerned regarding any perceived risks to children and adults and an urgent decision had been taken to close the Play Area from Monday 28 September. The closure would of course be kept under review but would likely be linked to the presence of the testing station.

Litter Bins – Work to install new litter bins in the town centre (bus stop area) had commenced with further bins to be installed around the town in coming weeks, including the agreed removal of several old / column mounted bins.

Horticultural Service & Hirst Park - As members are aware, the major changes to the floral presentations on Station Road had been undertaken – a major logistical exercise in this current climate!

Watering and maintenance work had also been carried out season round. Further maintenance work and improvements to the Memorial Garden, Mining Wheel and planter's town-wide had been undertaken and had received positive comments from the public who have noticed improvement.

The Town Council horticultural services had operated from Hirst Park Growing Zone on an informal arrangement and discussions to secure permanent presence via a formal tenancy or lease were ongoing.

GENERAL ITEMS:

All ATC staff are well and had continued to work from the Town Hall in a safe manner. The building was however closed to the public and any visits had to be by appointment only and urgent.

Wansbeck Square (including customer services) remained closed to the public and the Town Council was seeing a noticeable increase in calls coming through to regarding NCC issues.

Food Transportation - ATC staff had assisted Northumberland Communities Together during the summer with further food transportation from Ponteland to Real Deal Plus in Ashington and to County Hall.

Ashington Garden Competition - The Virtual Garden Competition took place with a good number of entrants. Due to Covid-19 all entrants received feedback from ATC's Horticultural Officer and gift vouchers from Wansbeck Garden Centre.

Community Litter Picks (Great British September Clean organised by Keep Britain Tidy) – unfortunately the three litter picks at People's Park, QEII Country Park and Paddock Wood had to be cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Restrictions dependent, the Town Council would look to take part in Keep Britain Tidy's 2021 campaigns.

Remembrance Day 8 November – ATC staff had met with representatives of the Ashington Branch of the Royal British Legion and Ashington Churches Together. Due to Covid-19 a small / short service had been planned for Remembrance Day if permissions were granted.

Ashington Christmas Lights Switch-On Event – The proposed Christmas Light's Switch-On event, planned for Thursday 26 November, had been cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. The Christmas Lighting Feature competition with schools in the town would still take place.

C20/907 7. APPLICATION FOR FUNDING SUPPORT.

- **Parkhead and Wansbeck Powersports.**

The group had requested £700 to purchase wood and materials to improve the organisations power lifting platform.

The group highlighted that the activities they provide support a range of people including a significant number of disabled people. The activities help build confidence and self-esteem for its members.

The main activity of the organisation was to provide gym facilities for both able and disabled people in Ashington.

The organisation has been based within the Hirst Welfare Centre for several years and have approximately 1,000 beneficiaries.

- **Cambois Rowing Club**

The Club had requested £670 to refurbish 25 sets of oars. The Club highlighted that in addition to this application further improvement works to the Club's boats were planned to take place.

The Club has over 40 active members with ages ranging from 11 to 75. The Club tried to keep membership costs low so as not to act as a barrier to anyone joining the club.

Members of the club regularly competed throughout the year at regattas as well as the club hosing events on the River Wansbeck which brought visitors to the town.

Resolved:

That:

- **Parkhead & Wansbeck Powersports be awarded a grant of £700**
- **Cambois Rowing Club be awarded a grant of £500.**

C20/908 8. PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENTS.

Cllr. Lynne Grimshaw presented proposals for new equipment for two play areas, Bywell Road Play Area and the Wansbeck Riverside Park Play Area.

Following discussions, it had been agreed that there was a need for some extra pieces of equipment in the play area at Wansbeck Riverside Park. Quotes had been received for equipment options and styles of equipment specifically aimed at younger children.

Damage had also been sustained to the wet pour surfacing at the Bywell Road play area and a quote for had been obtained for both surface repair and the replacement of a vandalised swing.

Resolved:**That:**

- **An additional item of play equipment be installed at Wansbeck Riverside play area at an agreed cost of £5,527.00.**
- **Work to be carried out to repair the vandalised play equipment and wet-pour surface at Bywell Road play area at a cost of £4,778.70.**

C20/909 9. BUDGET WORKING GROUP 2020/21

The Town Clerk requested members set up a budget working group to discuss the 2021/22 budget.

Members were reminded that in determining draft budgets in recent years, the Council set up a smaller Budget Working Group to look at all financial options and prepare a draft for Full Council. This group undertook the preparatory work, considered any capital schemes, new growth or one-off areas of work and presented detail to fellow members at formal Committee Meetings and Full Council for full discussion and consideration. Members were reminded that the Budget Working Group had no delegated decision-making powers.

It is acknowledged that the establishment of the Budget Working Group was very beneficial and smoothed the budget process for all members in properly discussing and appraising all relevant and emerging material matters and planned projects.

Resolved:**Recommendations:**

- (i) That the Town Council establish a small Budget Working Group to prepare a 2021/22 draft budget, with fully appraised options, for the consideration of Finance & General Services Committee and Full Council; and that**
- (ii) The Budget Working Group membership consist of: The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Business Chair and Vice Business Chair of the Council and the Chair and Vice-Chair of Finance & General Services Committee. (6 Members)**

C20/910 10. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

To be agreed.

The meeting closed at 8:40pm