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ISSUE 78 | MAR 12

pontnews&views

FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district

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Changes explained to keep the buses running on time

High school's production of a smash-hit musical

Ringing in a GREAT year for Britain

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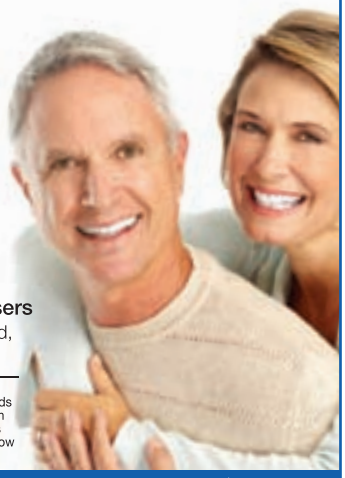

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Produced by Cian creative pr

The bell ringers of St Mary's Church Ponteland. Picture and front cover shot by Trevor Walker

Ringing in Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Year

2012 promises to be the year when the whole country joins together to put the 'Great' back into Britain! And what a year it could turn out to be.

Her Majesty the Queen celebrates the Diamond Jubilee of her reign and, of course, the summer Olympic Games will focus the attention of the world on London and the many other sporting venues around the country.

So a year of great celebrations beckons – and Ponteland it seems is determined not to miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime nationwide party. Already right at the start of the year the first event has been held locally to mark the day when the then Princess Elizabeth became Queen.

On a cold and frosty Monday February 6th morning, a twenty minute ring of bells in a series of call changes at St Mary's Church reminded passers-by that Her Majesty has been our Sovereign for no fewer than 60 years.

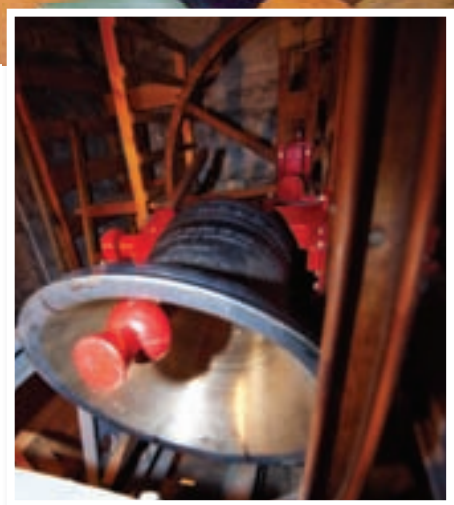
"We wanted to mark the occasion in our own way so we decided to ring early in the morning so that people would realise it was for a very special reason," said Stephen Bell who was joined by fellow bell ringers Julie Bell, 14 year-old Bea Holliday who rang on her way to the High School, Beth Clark who took time out from her University studies for a master's degree and Judith Harrington.

They've been ringing the bells every Sunday and on other special Church and Civic occasions since new bells were installed to mark the Millennium. Last year, for instance the bells were rung for 17 weddings.

New bell ringers are always welcome. Stephen, who is the Tower Captain, explained that it usually takes a few weeks to learn the basic skill of controlling the bells. The next stage is to develop the rhythm to ring with the other bells in the peal, and to ring simple changes.

After that it is possible to progress to more complicated changes known as methods.

Across the country bells are regularly rung in more than 5,000 churches all of which are listed in a guide. Enthusiasts often travel all over the country to see how many



towers they can ring in – a practice known as 'Tower Grabbing'.

"St Mary's bells are very popular with visitors who may spend their summer holidays on ringing tours," said Stephen. "We have even had ringers from America visit us!"

Accession Day marked the start of what will be a very busy year for Ponteland's bell ringers. Apart from the Royal celebrations in the coming year there's also a big sporting event on the horizon.

On one of those occasions – probably the actual Diamond Jubilee day in June – some of the bell ringers will ring what is known as a peal of 5,040 changes lasting two-and-a-half hours of non-stop ringing. "That will not only be physically challenging but an endurance feat of concentration as well," added Stephen.

Kirkley Hall (left), Newbiggin Maritime Centre (top) and Cragside will all be welcoming visitors during the Residents' weekend

County attractions throw open their doors for the weekend

Kirkley Hall Zoological Gardens will be one of a host of Northumberland attractions taking part in this month's countywide annual residents' festival.

Saturday and Sunday March 24th and 25th are the dates when attractions will be tempting visitors with either free or discounted entry to some of Northumberland's most awe-inspiring castles, gardens, stately homes and museums.

This year the Festival promises to be even bigger and better as it celebrates the fact that Northumberland is a fantastic place to live.

The event is being organised by Northumberland County Council in partnership with leading visitor attractions from across the county including The Alnwick Garden, Cragside, Bailiffgate Museum, Belsay Hall, Bamburgh Castle, Seaton Delaval Hall, Kirkley Hall Zoological Gardens, Lindisfarne Castle and Priory, Woodhorn, Etal Castle and Newbiggin Maritime Centre.

Last year thousands of people took advantage of the festival weekend and this year the council is keen to attract even more people as Council Leader Councillor Jeff Reid said.

"We hope that residents will take the opportunity to experience the wonderful attractions Northumberland has to offer and put the date in their diaries now. The festival promises some fantastic days out for us all to enjoy.

"It's also a fantastic showcase for the county and all the world class venues that are on our doorstep."

Marcus Clinton, Assistant Principal Land Based and Kirkley Hall added: "As a new tourist attraction in the Northumberland area we were honoured to host the launch of the Northumberland Residents' Festival and we are delighted to be taking part.

"We have continued to expand our animal collection and there are many new faces since we opened last May. We are looking forward to welcoming new customers and we hope they enjoy their experience at Kirkley Hall Zoological Gardens."

Residents will need special vouchers to receive free or discounted entry to the attractions and these are now available from the council website, local libraries, council offices, tourist information centres and sports centres along with a full list of all the attractions taking part.

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Ponteland Town Council

Grants to local organisations

The Council considered a grant application from the Tynedale Hospice at Home organisation that delivers 20 per cent of its nursing care to Ponteland residents. A grant of £520 was agreed.

Projects Report

Further revised plans for the Memorial Hall project have been received and Councillors have been to asked select their preferred option. Work on the park path lighting project is being carried out as well as work on the War Memorial project.

Skate Park

Draft Heads of Terms have been agreed with the County Council for a lease of the land required for the proposed skate park. The County Council has proposed a 125 year lease for both the skate park area and the existing Callerton Lane Play Area. An application for the remaining funding required has been submitted to Banks Mining from the Ponteland Community Partnership.

Easy Access West Road

A gravel path surface was approved for the above project which had been included within the budget for 2011-12. Some concerns had been raised in relation to lack of car parking however, it had not been envisaged at any time that a car park would form part of the proposals.

Fox Covert Lane Car Park

Additional car parking on Fox Covert Lane will be created in 2011-12. The County Council is also agreeable to clearing the tree and vegetation on the side of the road to allow a continuous pedestrian refuge from West Road to Runnymede Road. A check will be made with the contractor to see if it was absolutely necessary to remove the tree.

Proposed Bollards

It was reported that proposed works on land adjacent to Barclays Bank on Main Street can not proceed as the developer is due to shortly commence work. Improvements to the block paved area opposite St Mary's Church have been discounted due to cost, so the Council will consider installing bollards around the area to prevent parking. There was also a proposal under consideration by the Environment and Highways Working Parties to install 3 bollards at Brewery Lane. A full report on the costs of these installations will be submitted to a future meeting.

Ponteland Park Bridge Repairs

Councillors were reminded of the repairs required to the first timber footbridge nearest to the Memorial Hall. A survey had been carried out and designs had been commissioned for replacement and re-build to an acceptable standard by this April.

Ponteland Park Waitrose Bridge Coping Stones

Councillors were reminded that works were required at the Waitrose bridge to replace the coping stones that had been vandalised over a number of years. The Environment Agency had removed the stones from the river and these were currently being stored.

Request from Lions to plant trees

The Lions had made a request to plant some 60 trees in the area at the request of their Regional President. It was agreed to refer this request back to the Environment Working Party for discussion and in the meantime the Lions be thanked for their very kind offer.

Diamond Jubilee Report

The Chairman of the Diamond Jubilee Working Party reported on actions taken to date in respect of the Jubilee. Local organisations and businesses are being asked for ideas for their involvement while schools had all agreed to be involved in the production of a Loyal Address and some assistance would be required to obtain the target of 10,000 signatures. The lighting of a Beacon at the top of St. Mary's Church had been registered; discussions are ongoing relating to a possible exhibition; various organisations are making plans for the Big Lunch; and plans are being formed for a Sunday Service on 3 June.

Northumberland County Council

Councillor Peter Jackson advised that the NCC Scrutiny Committee had examined and agreed a revised policy relating to advertising by businesses across Northumberland which was much clearer.

Councillor Richard Dodd reported that the single yellow lines for Thornhill Road had been approved by the County Council. He stated that work was ongoing in relation to proposed works at the Football and Rugby pitches.

A suggestion had been made for a café in the foyer of the Leisure Centre and expressions of interest were being sought.

Councillor Mrs Jones stated that officers from the County Council had visited the area at the back of the Broadway shopping centre and it was hoped that some action would be taken to ensure this was improved.

She stated that the route of the 74 bus had been changed and would no longer go the metro station and Kingston Park because of lack of use. Councillor Mrs Jones had asked for evidence of this decreased usage.

This report is based on the minutes of the Town Council meeting on February 8th.

Councillor Rob Punton – planning to stand up for the views of the people of Ponteland

NEW COUNCILLOR ELECTED

Rob Punton has been elected as the new Conservative councillor in Ponteland Town Council's West Ward following the resignation of Richard Hutchinson.

Married with one son Councillor Punton has been a resident of Ponteland for 26 years.

He worked in engineering for most of his career until deciding on a change of direction and securing a position at Newcastle Airport 11 years ago.

He says one of his primary concerns is the environment as well as having the right attitude and adopting a 'can do' approach.

"My focus as a new councillor is to help make Ponteland a better place to live and to stand up for the views of the people of the area," he said.

Why not 'Go for Gold' in Ponteland?

With the start of the London Olympic Games now less than four months away churches across the country are planning to use the greatest sporting show on earth as a fresh and innovative way to connect with their communities.

Locally the Ponteland Methodist Church – that's the church by the traffic lights in the centre of the village – plans to be first out of the blocks so to speak, by organising a 'Going for Gold' day later this month.

On Saturday March 24th between 10am and 12.30pm the Church will be throwing open its garden and doors to put on a demonstration of some 20 activities regularly taking place there, to show just what's on offer to local people to help them 'get fit in mind, body and spirit!'

There'll be taster sessions and displays encouraging local people to join in pilates, yoga, walking, kindermusic, art classes and carpet bowls; to sing with the Ponteland Ladies Choir; or to find out more about the Youth Club, Messy Church, the Pushchair Club, the Girls and Boys' Brigades, the Men's Forum, the Women's Groups, Sunday Worship, House and Prayer Groups or charity events.

All regularly take place at Ponteland Methodist Church and are either church-led or are organised by outside bodies simply utilising space in the church and its hall.

As well as the taster sessions and demonstrations on the day there'll be Barrel Organ entertainment, floral displays and plenty of refreshments including some delicious home baking courtesy of the Church's own café.

Church member Ann Cooper says nationally churches right across the UK are using the fact that the Olympics are coming to London in July as a way of encouraging greater participation in sport and cultural activities many of which actually take place in church buildings throughout the country.

"There's so much going on week in and week out throughout the year in churches such as ours, that is potentially of interest to people of all ages from the very young to the not-so-young," she said.

"Our 'Going for Gold' day we hope will demonstrate just what is available to people in Ponteland and will encourage more people to participate in the offerings of our church that involve body, mind and spirit. The fact that the Olympic Games are being held in our own country this year is a tremendous opportunity to the show the good and very varied things that happen in communities such as Ponteland."

A 'Messy Church' session at Ponteland Methodist Church

Anyone of any age will be more than welcome to attend and enjoy the free open day. More information is available from Ann Cooper (01661) 824347 or ann.s.cooper@btinternet.com

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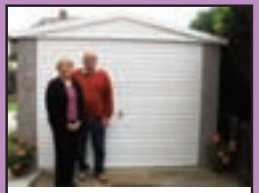

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Prime Minister David Cameron meets staff at the Waitrose head office

Thank you from local charities with that 'winning' X-Factor!

Dozens of local charities and good causes that have benefited from the generosity of their local Waitrose store in Ponteland have been saying a heartfelt thank you to their benefactor.

Every month throughout the year the store selects three local recipients to share a £1,000 donation with all the 'winners' chosen by X-Factor-style judging involving Waitrose Ponteland shoppers.

Across the country every Waitrose branch operates a Community Matters scheme which in Ponteland's case allows local store officials and staff to support 36 charities or good causes every year.

The way the scheme works is that hopeful recipients or indeed customers, put their names forward for a donation and Ponteland shoppers choose which to support by 'voting' with a green token they receive with their till receipt.

The money, says Ponteland scheme organiser Alan Allsopp can make a huge difference to those receiving the money, and to celebrate the fact recipients were invited to an afternoon at the Memorial Hall to not only meet one another but to say how they spent their donation.

Waitrose cash, said Alan, has been given to local scouts, a children's cancer charity, a dyslexia support group and campaigners working to conserve the local population of red squirrels to name but a few.

"The money has done many great things locally," said Alan. The get-together of 'winning' charities and good causes, he said, was not only an opportunity to recognise the success of the Community Matters scheme but to give charities the chance to network with one another and perhaps discuss other ways of attracting vital funding support.

"We also wish to celebrate the work that Waitrose has done to help Ponteland and the surrounding area," added Alan.

Recently the Community Matters scheme was praised by none other than Prime Minister David Cameron when he presented the Waitrose Managing Director Mark Price with a Big Society Award for the way it supports communities across the country.

Mr Cameron was told that £10m of the company's profits have been donated to more than 30,000 good causes and charities since the scheme was launched.

"The Big Society Awards are all about recognising the work that companies like Waitrose are doing to bring about a bigger, stronger society and Community Matters is helping to do exactly that," he was reported as saying.

"I have heard first-hand from some of the charities who have benefited and they are the greatest testament to the difference this scheme can make."

Mr Price added: "It is more important than ever that we play an active role in supporting and safeguarding the future of the areas we trade in and the people who live there."

Further appeal for Ponteland Memorial Hall

Since the launch of our public appeal last year £17,000 has been raised and the Committee would like to thank those individuals, families, local groups and organisations who contributed to this total, reports Treasurer David Cobb.

This money has been ring fenced for capital improvements and will not be used for day to day repair and maintenance.

The most pressing priority for the Committee is to completely replace the central heating system to the ground floor of the hall.

The upstairs rooms already benefit from a separate, recently installed system as operating costs are lower for two separate systems. However, the ground floor system has multiple leaks and is now over 40 years old including the boiler!

It is well past the normal lifespan that could be reasonably expected for a modern system and is very expensive to run, both in gas consumption and in ongoing repairs – more than £2,000 has been spent on repairs since Christmas 2011.

It is these high operating and repair costs which have prevented the Committee raising sufficient funds from income to enable replacement.

The total replacement cost including improved insulation, preliminary works, and reinstatement is in the region of £65,000 and this work needs to be done this summer.

Previous donations and hall reserves can meet £25,000 of this cost leaving a £40,000 shortfall. Applications to a number of grant giving bodies are pending but many shun Ponteland as we are considered to be an affluent community that should be able to meet its own social needs. The current level of contributions certainly does not reflect this!

The Memorial Hall was built by public subscription in 1922 and as such is owned by the people of Ponteland. It is our responsibility to keep it operating.

The Committee would welcome new active members with an interest in, and the energy to fund raise. It would also welcome further donations for this essential project.

The hall office has limited opening hours but messages can be left on 01661 822603. A Committee member will then make contact.

Long-running bistro saga goes on

A second appeal has been submitted by the developers in the on-going saga of plans for a new bar and bistro at Ponteland's Bell Villas.

Last edition we reported that a planning application had been rejected by councillors for a second time for the proposed development at the former Co-op store on the grounds that it would result in the loss of valuable retail floor space in Ponteland.

Now comes news that the developers are to appeal against the refusal decision for a second time. A Government planning inspector had already ruled in favour of the refusal at an earlier appeal hearing.

The long-running saga began a year ago when councillors rejected the application following objections from local people, Ponteland Town Council, the Civic Society, the Methodist Church and MP Guy Opperman with opponents claiming that Ponteland already has more than enough pubs and bars and any new development could result in a noise nuisance, anti-social behaviour, late-night disturbance and traffic problems.

The second appeal is not expected to take place until the early summer and meanwhile agents will continue to market the property.

Your letters

A call for a clampdown on nuisance and dangerous footpath parking and news that the Over 60s club has folded after 60 years in this month's letters...

Clampdown needed on footpath parking

I am appalled at the people visiting this estate parking on the footpaths. Cars are bad enough but the lorries and vans of the developers who park on footpaths when they should be on site really should be brought to book.

Having lived on this estate since the 70s it to me is going downhill, the whole character changing with all the developments.

We constantly have problems with gas pipes leaking on the footpath I believe from heavy vehicles parking on the path.

Suggestion: how about painting the kerbs yellow all around the main roads on the estate making vehicles park in the gutters; it is illegal to park on footpaths. Where are the parking officers or police?

A good amount of fines could be collected and if they were caught again, points on their licences.

Sometimes I have difficulty passing between hedges and vehicles, my clothes getting dirty on the vehicles and hedges. Also wheelchairs and prams not able to pass, in some cases having to go on the road.

I also agree with Verity Shipley re dog mess in Pont Park; it is mainly the dogs not on leads and running loose. The owners sometimes are unaware of their dogs fouling (I pick up after mine – it's always on a lead). It's also bad on estate footpaths, and because dogs will be on leads there is no excuse that it's not picked up.

Phew! Feel good that I have got those points off my chest. Sorry, but they needed to be said.

S Hair
Runnymede Road
Darras Hall

Over 60s Club closes after 60 years

The Ponteland & District Over 60 Club opened in 1952 regretfully closed in December last.

As Chairwoman I would like to thank the Committee for the encouragement and help they gave me, also members past and present for their welcome and friendship over the last 11 years.

All the remaining funds have been sent to the Ponteland Memorial Hall building fund.

Margaret Roe
Canterbury Way
Woodlands Park
Wideopen

Ten happy years recalled

Referring to Mr Henderson's letter complaining about the size of the McCarthy & Stone development, I would say it is the finest building in Ponteland serving a more useful purpose to the community than the Blackbird Inn and tucked well away.

McCarthy & Stone have a reputation for high standards all round and I have every confidence that the buildings and grounds will prove a real asset to the town.

Whereas retirement apartment buildings are not always popular as a development it is a fact that they are important requirements in a community as the percentage of older people increases.

Mr Henderson seems to overlook the fact that one day he might need such an organisation to look after him. My mother-in-law was in a McCarthy & Stone apartment for 10 very happy years and believed it prolonged her quality of life compared to living in her own home with no roof tile problems, gardening or robberies.

Maurice Hall
Darras Hall

2012 CELEBRATIONS

Are you planning any celebration events to mark Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee or the London Olympiad? If so Pont News & Views would love to hear from year.

So get in touch to tell us what you will be doing to make 2012 a memorable year in Ponteland and we'll happily cover your celebrations in future issues of the magazine.

On a personal note Muriel Sobo who compiled our report on Page 3 about the bellringers well remembers as a young schoolgirl the day the sad news broke of the death of the much loved King George VI.

"The head teacher called an assembly and gave us the news which came as quite a shock because we had not realised the King was not in the best of health," she says.

"The adults were subdued and somber.

"Coronation year was joyful and Northumberland Education Committee gave all the county's children the Arthur Mee book on Northumberland.

"Some lucky people were able to watch the Coronation on small black-and-white television sets and I made my first scrapbook of press cuttings but none were in colour."

Letters on all issues are welcomed by Pont News & Views but the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher. The Editor reserves the right to amend any submitted letters for legal or other reasons. All letters submitted should include the writer's name and address.

April issue deadlines: The April issue will be delivered on April 2nd and 3rd. Deadline for all copy and adverts is Thursday March 15. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the April issue.

What's on...

Ponteland Market
The previously known Ponteland Farmers' Market has now been re-named Ponteland Market and has been moved to a Friday. In March the Market will be held on 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th at Merton Way from 9am to 4pm

County Council surgeries
Your local Northumberland County Councillors Richard Dodd, Peter Jackson, Veronica Jones and Eileen Armstrong are available to meet constituents on the first Saturday of every month from 10am-11am at Waitrose supermarket, Ponteland. Their next surgery is on March 3.

Fairtrade Big Brew
Saturday, March 3rd at St. Mary's Church Hall from 10.00am - 1.00pm, Monday March 5th at Ponteland Methodist Church from 2pm to 4.30pm and Saturday 10th March at St. Matthews Church Hall from 10.00am - 1.00pm.

An Alpine Society talk on Holehird Gardens in the Lake District

North East Group of Alpine Garden Society
Guest speaker on Monday March 13th will be Margaret Wilkinson, a volunteer from Holehird Gardens in Windermere. She will be talking about the garden and her work there and illustrating her talk with pictures. Alpines are well represented in the garden growing in troughs, alpine houses and rockeries. The worldwide section of alpine plants provides interests the whole year round. Meetings take place at St Mary's Hall, Thornhill Road with doors opening at 7pm for a 7.30pm start. There's a small charge of £2 to visitors. More details from Terry Teal at t.teal@btinternet.com or (0191) 4132574.

Ponteland Floral Art Club
7.30pm to 8.30pm at Ponteland Memorial Hall on Tuesday March 20th

'Go for Gold'
An open invitation to find out more about activities regularly taking place at Ponteland Methodist Church – 'the church by the traffic lights'. 'Taster' sessions and displays; barrel organ entertainment; refreshments with delicious home-made baking. Saturday 24 March from 10.00am – 12.30pm. Free entry.

Ponteland Civic Society
The annual general meeting on at 7.30pm on Monday March 26th in St Mary's Church Hall, will be followed by a talk by Bill Saunders on the 'Quayside' – a virtual tour of the area pointing out buildings, events and associated people. Visitors are welcome for a nominal charge.

Ponteland High School
Production of the hit high school musical 'Grease'. Four performances – including a matinee on Thursday March 29th at 1pm – starting Wednesday March 26th at 7pm.

Tickets are now on sale at £5 and £3.

Merton Hall AGM
Tuesday April 24th at 2pm. Would you like to help with the Operational Committee – three vacancies currently still exist. Tea/Coffee/ Hot Chocolate served Mondays to Saturday from 9.30am to 11.15am at 30p per mug or cup. Come and see what activities take place or could you start a new group. Contact the Booking Clerk on 0775 795 2759. For all other enquiries call 0775 795 2771 or email mertonhall123@gmail.com

Ponteland Repertory Society
The Society presents 'Blood Brothers' in Ponteland Memorial Hall from Wednesday April 25th to Saturday 28th. Originally written as a play by Willy Russell and first performed in Liverpool in 1981, the songs were added at a later date but the story remains the same. It tells the story of twins born into a large working class family and what happens to them when their mother decides to let one of them be adopted, in both a funny and tragic tale. Tickets are available from butcher Alan Newton on Merton Way – telephone (01661) 822985.

Attendance Allowance
A talk from Age UK Northumberland, to increase the awareness of Attendance Allowance, will take place in Merton Hall on Tuesday 13th March at 2.00pm. This talk will explain the financial benefits of this non-means tested benefit, the qualifying criteria and what advice/ support is available. There will also be an opportunity to find out more and ask questions about Age UK Northumberland's services.

NEAT AND TIDY CLEAN-UP!

Ponteland Mayor Councillor Peter Cowey, members of the Town Council and officers from Northumberland Youth Service recently joined young litter pickers to clean up the area around the local youth centre.

Between them they collected 15 bags of rubbish which made a noticeable improvement to the appearance of Callerton Lane.

Youth participation worker Luke Bramhall commented: "Everyone who took part made a real difference to the environment around Ponteland Youth Centre.

"The young people were keen to improve their local surroundings and they showed great community spirit to give up their time during their half-term holiday to take part in the litter pick."

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ASSISTED LIVING

Raising the charity stakes is all the fashion at Panache!

A family owned ladies fashion boutique in the heart of Ponteland this Spring celebrates five years in business during which time it has raised many thousands of pounds for deserving charities.

Eileen Hulme and her daughter Louise run Panache of Ponteland with the help and support of her other daughter Andrea who dresses the windows, son David who creates the shop's artwork and adverts and husband John who chips in now and then with some timely advice.

After originally opening in Merton Road the business was relocated two years ago to a prominent position on Main Street where it offers customers a fabulous range of elegant and stylish outfits for weddings, race days or those very special occasions.

The fashion house's reputation has spread far and wide with customers travelling from as far afield as Cumbria, Berwick and Harrogate when they are looking for something extra special to wear.

Panache stocks some of the most stylish collections including Gold – one of Ireland's most sought-after designers; Personal Choice; Zele; and Frank Lyman to name but a few.

"Many of our customers tell us that they like to shop at a small, independent boutique because we can offer something completely different to what is available on the High Street," said Eileen.

"The move to our new shop has proved a great success with customers old and new, and being in a prominent location has also increased our passing trade. One customer travelled by taxi to our shop to buy an outfit she had seen in the window as she passed through Ponteland on a coach tour from the south of England to stay at Otterburn for the evening!"

Over the past five years the family has organised over 20 fashion shows to raise more than £10,000 for charities including Charlie Bear for Cancer Care at the Freeman Hospital, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, Tyne & Wear Women's Refuge, Age-Related Macular Degeneration, Breast Cancer Care and many others.

"The shows give customers a great chance to see our clothing ranges on 'real women' because all the models are customer volunteers and their support has been greatly appreciated and welcomed," said Louise. "At the same time they have given us the chance to raise a great deal of money for worthwhile causes."

A fashion show has just been staged at Matfen Hall and a ladies lunch is also planned there for April 18th. A lunchtime event will also be staged at Fratellis in Ponteland on Wednesday May 2nd from 11.30am to 2.30pm.

Eileen Hulme and her daughter Louise have raised more than £10,000 for charity through their Panache boutique

"We will be raising money for a few different charities this year including St Oswald's Hospice, the NSPCC and Friends of the Laing Art Gallery," added Louise.

Panache is also arranging on open weekend in the shop on March 17th and 18th and Louise and her family are issuing an open invitation to customers old and new to join them over the weekend in celebrating the fifth anniversary of the business.

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Budding Shearers 'caged'

Following reports of anti social behaviour involving young people playing football in inappropriate places where damage may be caused or nuisance caused to residents, a number of acceptable behaviour agreements were drawn up between youths and their parents, Northumberland County Council, ISOS housing and the police.

Whilst these ABAs have been effective, the agencies involved also want to provide a suitable football facility for young people, especially during the dark nights when grassed pitched are waterlogged and in darkness.

Funding was found to pay for three evening 'Cage Football' sessions in January in the car park of Ponteland High School/ Ponteland Middle School. This supervised mobile, floodlit football pitch comes with its own expert coaches to encourage all of Ponteland's budding Shearers to improve their skills.

Fairtrade accolade for Ponteland school

Students and staff have won Fairtrade School status for Ponteland High, thanks to their campaigning efforts against the exploitation of farmers and suppliers in the third world.

The school has just learned that it has won the right to include the "We are a Fairtrade School" logo on its letterhead, and received a certificate marking its achievements.

Ponteland High qualified for the award after submitting a bid in December, showing how it was spreading the Fairtrade Foundation message in lessons, special events and the sale of Fairtrade products in school.

Students and teachers have been involved in raising awareness in support of the movement's bid to secure fairer prices, decent working conditions and sustainability for producers in the developing countries.

Activities have included BTEC Business students delivering a Fairtrade presentation to senior members of staff to secure whole-school support for the organisation, and a Fairtrade community coffee morning, organised by Year 13 Business students as part of their coursework.

Ponteland High students also spread the word by running activities for younger children from the area's other schools.

They are currently preparing for another round of events to raise awareness of the Fairtrade movement's aims. This year's Fairtrade Fortnight runs until 11 March.

Crimes are low but help would still be welcome

By PC Paul Henery
Ponteland Community Beat Manager

Total Policing

A total of five crimes were reported for the period from January 15th to February 15th.

They were as follows:-

- Two burglaries (non dwellings)
- One theft from motor vehicle
- One sexual assault
- One common assault

Two arrests have been made in relation to these offences. However, enquiries are on-going and further arrests may follow.

LMAPS meeting and surgeries

The next LMAPS meeting is at 9.30am on Thursday March 20th in the Children's Services Centre on Thornhill Road, Ponteland.

The next police surgeries are as follows:-

PC Henery on Saturday March 10th at 12 Noon in the Co-op, Broadway, Darras Hall

CSO Ruddick on Saturday March 17th at 9.30am in Merton Hall, Ponteland

PC Davison on Saturday 24 March at 11.30am in Belsay shop

Appeal for help

Although crimes are low in Ponteland at the moment I would ask for readers' help with two burglaries that took place at Opal Computers on the Meadowfield Industrial Estate and St Mary's Church, North Road, Ponteland where the collection plate money was stolen.

Anyone who saw anything suspicious activity on the evening of Wednesday January 26th at about 10.30pm in Meadowfield or perhaps saw someone near the Church on Friday January 6th please contact the Police on 101 or ring Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

DANGEROUS DRIVERS WARNED

A successful road safety scheme is set to be rolled out once again across the county by the Safer Northumberland Partnership.

New road signs warning bikers about the dangers of speeding and cornering will be put up on accident blackspots on rural roads throughout the county..

Councillor Anita Romer, executive member for public protection, said: "Over the years there have been a number of lives lost on roads in the county. Last year there were no fatal motorcycle accidents during the months when the signage was out in Northumberland.

The scheme, which runs from April to October each year, the peak time for motorcycle traffic on Northumberland's rural roads, is underpinned by enforcement; motor patrols officers and local neighbourhood officers will be patrolling the counties roads taking positive action with anyone caught speeding or riding dangerously.

MP CLAIMS U-TURN 'VICTORY'

MP Guy Opperman says victory may be in sight to save the Ponteland Greenbelt.

After fighting plans by Newcastle City Council to allow 3,500 houses to be built between Callerton and Ponteland he claims the authority 'now seems to accept we were right after all.'

After 15,000 responses and huge support from Ponteland residents he says the Council has admitted it has been able to 'identify' more deliverable housing sites and there is less need to build on greenbelt areas.

He said: "This sign of a U-turn is great news for our campaign. I sincerely hope we see the threat to the Ponteland and Callerton greenbelt lifted once and for all."

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Why not give bowls a try?

Ponteland Bowling Club is situated in the heart of Ponteland next to the Memorial Hall and is run as a private club by its members.

It has an excellent clubhouse and a bowling surface that ranks among the best in Northumberland.

The club has been in existence since 1923 and prides itself on offering a full range of opportunities for anyone interested in the game or wanting some exercise in a good social atmosphere.

Club teams compete in both the Ladies and Men's Northumberland County leagues as well as a number of other local leagues catering for a range of skill levels. But there are also opportunities to take part in national competitions and a few years ago two Ponteland members won the County Pairs Competition before going on to win both the English Bowling Association Pairs title followed by the British Isles title.

While such achievements are a great source of pride to the club they are rare and regular league games are the bread and butter of most members. Some, however, prefer to play in a more relaxed way and each morning the green is available for informal roll-ups.

Currently there are membership places available for both ladies and men of all ages and abilities. A number of qualified coaches within the club can introduce new starters to the game or help existing players to improve their skills.

For the past two years Ponteland Bowling Club has organised 'taster' sessions on some Saturday mornings to give non-bowlers the chance to try the game for themselves and they have proved very successful in introducing new members to the club.

This season the club opens on Thursday April 19th and will again be holding 'taster' sessions on the four Saturdays in May.

CURTAIN UP ON A SMASH-HIT MUSICAL

Summer nights are coming early to Ponteland this year thanks to a new production of the hit musical 'Grease' at the High School and students are hard at work rehearsing for the show's opening night at 7pm on March 28th in the Memorial Hall.

Tickets for four performances of the show – including a 1pm matinee on Thursday 29th March – have just gone on sale priced £5 for 'premium' seats in the front two rows and £3 elsewhere in the hall.

"This is a massively popular show particularly among young people and there's a real buzz of excitement about this school production," said the show's director English teacher Christine Heath.

Everyone at Ponteland High will get a chance to join in the fun thanks to a fund-raising 'Grease' themed day for both students and staff, and an art competition to design promotional posters and tickets.

The Ponteland St Mary's Singers gave a wonderful performance whilst raising £1,000 for a local charity, at their Christmas concert.

The singers give twice yearly performances in aid of various good causes, and the Christmas concert donation was made to Diabetes UK Newcastle Voluntary Support Group.

Pictured handing over a cheque to the Group's John Pearcy are Musical Director June Reed and Treasurer June Nesbit.

U3A AGM

Terse initials for one of the most successful organisations in Ponteland. The Univeristy of the Third Age is an international organisation for people over the age of 50 who are not working – in other words a sizeable percentage of Ponteland residents!

The recent U3A AGM was attended by more than 130 members out of a total membership of well over 300. If you are thinking of joining don't be put off by the word 'University' because it is not like that at all. In truth it is an association where those with skills and interests share them with others to continue learning right into their Nineties.

The U3A groups in Ponteland range from art to writing and take in book groups, computers, history, foreign languages and music to name but a few of those on offer.

There is no limit to what can happen and being a member opens up a lot of social contacts and activities. If you are interested the secretary is Annabel Andrews on (01661) 871042.

Mary Short just loves 'her' garden

Can you help Mary dig for victory?

Do you have a little bit of spare time on your hands to help Athol House residents keep up the high horticultural standards that have twice helped win Northumbria in Bloom Silver and Gold awards?

Shortly after winning the Gold award in 2008 flash floods swept through the garden and residents had to vacate their rooms for almost 12 months while they were dried out, repaired and redecorated.

Undaunted long-term resident Mary Short took up her trowel again to get the garden back to its best.

Mary has worked diligently in the garden for many years planting, weeding and cutting back to great effect and she is happy to regularly buy plants with her own money.

Other residents help as and when they can but in 2010 a posse of High School students led by Hannah Seeber bought plants for the garden which was a great boost to Mary.

She says: "I love the garden and I am quite happy with the plants when I can forget everything else."

Residents are hoping that ISOS which now runs the complex may be able to provide some financial support but while it will all be down to Mary again, volunteers are needed to lend a helping hand by perhaps giving up an hour or two of their time on a regular basis.

Anyone interested in helping can call at Athol House on Callerton Lane or give Mary Short a call on (01661) 820584.

Obituary: Mrs Val Cuthbertson

Val Cuthbertson the wife of a former Ponteland Parish Council Chairman, Bill Cuthbertson has died after a long battle with cancer.

Val also served as Mayoress of Castle Morpeth Borough Council between 2001 and 2002 alongside her husband Bill, who was Mayor at the time.

During that time she particularly enjoyed meeting children at schools and was tireless in her fund-raising efforts for local charities, particularly the Yellow Brick Road Appeal of the Children's Foundation.

Mrs Cuthbertson was born in 1933 in High Heaton, Newcastle, to George and Lydia Wilson. She joined the Women's Royal Naval Service (Aux) in 1950 and was a keen rifle shot, regularly shooting at the Ponteland Military Range.

She wanted to join the Women's Royal Navy, but her parents persuaded her to attend secretarial college in Newcastle. She became a secretary at Byker Police Station where she met Bill, a Police Constable at the time.

Bill and Val married in 1960 and had three children – Shaun, Andrew and Fiona. Both Shaun and Fiona were born with severe special needs and died in early childhood.

Through the 1970s and early 80s, Mrs Cuthbertson worked at Church High School in Jesmond as an administrator, before moving to Darras Hall in 1984 where she became an enthusiastic gardener.

She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2009 and passed away peacefully on Tuesday, January 24, at her home.

Her son, Andrew Cuthbertson said: "Val remained resolute that she would fight her illness and was always appreciative of the support from the Ponteland Medical Practice, Northern Cancer Centre at the Freeman Hospital and more recently from Macmillan Cancer Support and the Tynedale Hospice staff who visited her at home.

"She will be fondly remembered by all her family and friends."

Mrs Cuthbertson's cremation took place at the West Road Crematorium on Monday 30 January.

Tributes to Val Cuthbertson

Bus service changes explained

Managers from Stagecoach visited Ponteland during February to meet with representatives from the Town Council and Northumberland County Council to explain what measures they were taking to improve punctuality and reliability of their bus routes to Ponteland and Darras Hall.

Ponteland Town Council had set up a special email address to receive feedback about the services following complaints from residents who were finding the services unreliable.

The initial complaints were forwarded to Stagecoach and a meeting was requested by the Council to find out what could be done to improve matters.

At the meeting Stagecoach explained that, since 29th January buses from other routes were being combined with the buses used on the Ponteland services, so that any late running buses would be replaced at Eldon Square by another ' on time' vehicle, bringing more reliability to the services.

Robin Knight, Commercial Director of Stagecoach North East who attended the meeting commented: "We are concerned that our Ponteland services have suffered from poor timekeeping and believe that this is unacceptable.

"In order to improve reliability, we have changed the way the buses on these routes work. We will continue to monitor the performance of the services and report our findings to Ponteland Council "

Malcolm Bell Operations Manager of the Stagecoach Slatyford Depot pointed out that inconsiderate parking by building contractors and by parents at school times in Darras Hall all added to the problem and he also showed concern for the fact that roads on the bus route were not being gritted during bad weather.

A few changes to the timetable have taken place since the meeting the most significant being that the 09.21 from Darras Hall to Newcastle is now scheduled to depart five minutes earlier at 09.16 from Middle Drive and at 9.24 from Ponteland. New timetables are available at Eldon Square bus station.

It was suggested that meetings should take place on a regular basis to monitor the quality of the Ponteland services and it was therefore agreed that the next meeting would take place in April.

In the meantime residents can continue to send their comments about the bus services to the bususers@ pontelandtowncouncil.co.uk email address.

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