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FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district



Masterplan for homes, schools
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Developer pledges £10.7m
if Birney Hill appeal succeeds

New enterprise hub for small
businesses launched

Parents fight to save children's centre



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New enterprise hub to blaze a trail for small businesses

A new enterprise hub providing office and meeting space to small businesses at Dissington Hall has been officially launched by MP Guy Opperman.

Fire-eater greeters welcomed 100 guests to the launch event including local SMEs and contractors who worked on the project, which was supported by Defra and the North East Rural Growth Network.

The Grade 2* listed venue at Dalton, owned by Michael and Gill Brown, is offering flexible leases, meeting rooms to let and a drop-in co-working space for home-based companies who want to join a business community.

Interior architecture and design practice Contents Design is one of five new businesses to move into Dissington Hall since November. Owner Nigel Scorer praised the hub as 'a friendly business environment with great facilities, support and staff' in a 'stunning location'.

Cameron Scott, Chair of the North East Rural Growth Network, who attended the launch event, said: "Dissington Hall Enterprise Hub is a fantastic example of what can be achieved and the potential facilities that are available across the rural areas of the North East."

Mr Opperman added: "There is no better place to grow a business than Dissington Hall. It's a great venue, in beautiful countryside, and clearly good value for money. As the economy grows I would urge potential SMEs to think about setting up here."

Dissington Hall owners Gill and Michael Brown at the launch event with MP Guy Opperman and fire eater greeters.



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Nurse who opened Ponteland's first care home dies, aged 86

By Muriel Sobo

A former nurse who set up Ponteland's first care home 30 years ago has died aged 86.

The funeral took place on January 30th of Margaret Whaley, a hard working farmer's wife, mother of three boys, gran to seven children and great gran to two more.

Margaret qualified and nursed at the RVI and then later worked at the hospital in Ponteland until it closed. Next, she set up the first care home in Ponteland in the ground floor of the old vicarage.

She was fondly remembered in a eulogy by Chris, her youngest son. Food and cooking were well appreciated - not only by the family but also by the WI, the cricket team, visiting rugby players, friends and relations.

In fact she never stopped working until her stroke eight years ago and she always helped to solve problems with the saying



Margaret Whaley in 1986 with the first year anniversary birthday cake and first residents Mrs Isobela Aubin and Mrs Violet Smith at the Pele Rest Home.

'worse things happen at sea', smiled and got on with it!

In 1985, encouraged by the local doctors Jack White and Peter Burnett, a planning application was put into Castle Morpeth Council to convert the ground floor of the former vicarage, then owned and occupied by the National Farmers' Union.

This building has been recently converted and a complex called Peel House created.

The NFU then was cutting back on its office space and Margaret, together with her nursing colleague Joyce Mills, put in a successful application to convert the ground floor for the rest home. The lease was for nine years.

The rent for the Old Vicarage was rising and the NFU was downsizing and needed less office space so in 1993 when the lease was up the entire premises were sold and builder Bellway made it their NE headquarters.

This was the time to combine the operations of Margaret's establishment with son Dan's at Grange Lea on the North Road and all residents went up the road to Grange Lea, some pushed in their wheelchairs. The move was done over a fortnight and there were now 20 residents.

Today it is still a family run establishment and Margaret is fondly remembered by many local people and their families.

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Developer pledges £10.7m for community if Birney Hill appeal succeeds

A developer appealing the refusal of planning permission for a 280-home scheme on Ponteland's green belt has pledged a £10.7m bonanza of community benefits if it succeeds.

At the closing day of the Birney Hill public inquiry, Newcastle-based Lugano Property Group produced a list of contributions it would make to the community if the Secretary of State overturns the Northumberland County Council decision.

They included: £3.6m for off-site affordable housing for rent; £1.63m for a 14,000 sq ft business hub; £1.6m for travel planning and a community bus service; £1.2m for schools and leisure; £1.2m for a community farm; and a £1m community fund.

Other benefits highlighted included the provision of 92 acres of open space and 84 'affordable' homes on site.

Both the county council and Ponteland Green Belt Group, which was representing 1,000 local people fighting to protect the green belt, said the scheme would cause "substantial harm".

Lugano argued the harm was outweighed by four reasons amounting to 'very special circumstances' – a crisis in housing land supply, need to revitalise the regional economy, development of an exemplar garden suburb designed by world renowned architect Sir Terry Farrell and the very special location of the site.

David Cooper, representing Lugano at the hearing at Newcastle Falcons rugby club in Kingston Park, said it was offering a "once in a lifetime opportunity": "The Green Belt Group's whole case revolves upon the underlying principle that once the green belt is established it is there forever. They may not put it that way but that is what it amounts to.

"To bolster that argument, they attach themselves to the coattails of the local authority in relation to the loss of openness and the setting of the Green Belt and indeed go one step further and tell you that there is no shortage of anything in this region and it will be 'alright on the night'.

"I would ask you to seriously devalue the weight given by their two witnesses which grossly exaggerates the level of harm and grossly underestimates the level of benefits."

Barrister Simon Pickles, representing Northumberland County Council, disagreed: "The proposed development would cause substantial harm by inappropriateness, impact on the openness of the green belt and landscape character, and impact on the setting of three listed buildings.

"The claim to have demonstrated that the proposal would result in an exemplar garden suburb has failed very substantially on the evidence."

Peter Dixon, representing Ponteland Green Belt Group, also rejected Lugano's claims: "The 'exemplar' garden suburb could be replicated on another site without difficulty; the only logic for the choice of site is that it is next to Darras Hall, but it would be at best a 'detached extension'."

Describing the proposed community land trust as a 'glorified management company', he said it was "beset with uncertainty" and said the special case for housing for 'movers and shakers' was "vague and anecdotal".

Planning inspector John Gray will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State after considering the evidence he has heard. A decision is expected by the end of June.

Lugano chairman claims opposition numbers 'hugely overstated': see Your letters p10.

Resident speaks out in support

The planning application, rejected by the county council in October 2013, attracted 4,310 letters of opposition and 487 letters of support. One supporter, retired police officer John Chappell who is Director of Rugby at Ponteland Rugby Club, addressed the inquiry.

He said: "Young players in our senior section, if not still living at home, are forced to live outside Ponteland due to the lack of affordable housing. Any scheme that delivers this type of housing would encourage younger people to live in the village whilst also increasing the numbers of youngsters open to the sport.

"I love Ponteland. I work and shop in it every day, but to be honest it is a commuter belt with poor facilities and a crumbling infrastructure. Flood plains have been built upon and the garden village concept destroyed by inappropriate Darras palaces, all with little financial gain for the village. Stopping Lugano's development will not improve the current flooding, traffic problems or failing infrastructure.

"The Government won't pay for anything, the council can't pay for anything; so why not do it ourselves? Get the best type of development that we can - exemplar or just very good - and make sure that the developers pay handsomely for it.

"Lugano have talked about investing £13m into Ponteland. Let's hold them to it and fix the drainage, build the shops, improve the schools and leisure facilities for all of us who live in houses that were once fields."



Parking complaints a major problem

By PC Rob Anderson
Ponteland Neighbourhood Beat Manager



In the period between January 17th and February 16th we have had 11 crimes recorded for the Ponteland area.

These break down to the following offences:

- One theft from a shop
- One assault
- Two thefts
- Two burglary other than dwellings
- One damage to property
- Two damages to motor vehicles
- Two theft from motor vehicles.

Enquiries are ongoing in relation to these offences with arrests having been made.

Following on from last month's reminder regarding parking in the Ponteland area I would again like to bring the subject to your attention. Parking complaints are one of our major problems in Ponteland at the moment and a lot of it could be sorted out by thinking about where you park.

When leaving your vehicle parked anywhere think to yourself 'would I be happy with someone else parking here?' If the answer is no, then move your car and park it where it isn't a nuisance to anyone.

Here are some things to think about when parking:

- Is your vehicle blocking someone's driveway?
- Is your vehicle covering a dropped kerb where a person with a wheelchair or buggy needs access in order to cross the road?
- Is your vehicle parked wholly or partially on a pavement?
- Is your vehicle parked in a restricted area, double or single yellow lines?
- Is your vehicle parked where it could cause an obstruction for an emergency vehicle?

Please think about where you park and how it could affect other people.

If you would like some crime prevention advice please contact PC 613 Davison or myself, PC 395 Anderson, on 101.

Local police surgeries will be held on the following dates:

- CSO Paul Cotterill March 7th 9.30am - 10.30am Merton Hall, Ponteland
- PC Lee Davison March 14th 11.30am - 12.30pm at Belsay Village shop
- PC Rob Anderson March 28th 10am - 11am Waitrose, Ponteland
- PC Rob Anderson March 28th 11.30am - 12.30pm Co-op, Broadway

Engagement days for the Ponteland area are as follows:

- Merton Way, Ponteland March 11th 10am-12noon
- Broadway, Ponteland March 11th 1pm - 3pm
- Belsay March 17th 1pm - 3pm.

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Aerial view of the area earmarked for development by Trevor Walker

County council unveils 'masterplan' for new homes, schools and leisure facilities

A masterplan which would see Ponteland Middle and High School and leisure centre relocated to a neighbouring green belt site to make way for housing has taken a step closer. Chris Jennings reports.

Northumberland County Council's policy board has agreed ambitious capital spending plans for 2015-17 including a £40m investment in schools and leisure facilities in Ponteland, Morpeth and Hexham, with "a handsome share" of this sum earmarked for Ponteland.

The decision coincides with the end of a three month public consultation for the council's draft core strategy - its 15-year countywide planning blueprint.

This proposes the sell-off of an area of land off Callerton Lane which currently houses the two schools, leisure centre and fire station for housing development and the release of 281 acres of green belt for development. The green belt land at Birney Hill which is subject of a separate planning appeal (see page 6) is not included.

The core strategy proposes the release for development of 202 acres by 2031 and a further 79 acres after that date. This

includes 17 acres for housing (up to 640 homes), 138 acres for education, playing fields, leisure and open space, and 47 acres of previously developed land (the current site of leisure centre, education and fire station) for mixed use.

The plan opposite shows the proposed zone for development, between Callerton Lane, Rotary Way and Cheviot View, as well as the Clickemin Farm site NE of the A696 which forms part of the area earmarked by the Banks Group for 500 new homes.

The masterplan was unveiled at consultation events held at the leisure centre and Memorial Hall which attracted a record attendance. Of the 28 drop-ins held across Northumberland to outline the county council's draft core strategy, both Ponteland events recorded the highest number of residents.

The first saw 175 attendees and the

second 204 people, and the main issues raised included:

- too much land proposed to be removed from the green belt
- no need to improve the education and leisure facilities if Newcastle children were stopped from attending Ponteland schools
- concern over the proposed line of the bypass and the impact of its development on flooding
- no need for affordable housing
- no need for employment land
- more development will ruin the character of Ponteland
- lack of GP provision
- lack of parking in the town centre
- town centre needs to be improved

- traffic congestion and the need for a bypass
- impact of more development on flooding.

Outlining its masterplan for Ponteland, the county council said it wanted “to make best use of public owned land to develop sensible sustainable development which will help the area to thrive into the future”.

The vision envisages the development of new and improved leisure and educational facilities, which will in turn allow new housing and economic development uses on existing sites.

Plans will aim to improve access to schools – reducing congestion in the town – and include improved pedestrian and cycling links to the new facilities, as well as providing open spaces and protecting sensitive parts of the site from development.

A spokesman said the area is to be the subject of detailed master planning work and the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan Group will be closely involved in this – with the forthcoming neighbourhood plan defining the settlement boundary.

Proposals for new school buildings will be scoped out soon – and packages of local authority funding put in place. The council will also be negotiating with private landowners to facilitate the plans.

The spokesman said: “It is currently intended that additional funding will come from a combination of capital receipts from development of council land, augmented by borrowing.”

Coun Grant Davey, leader of Northumberland County Council said: “These proposals for Ponteland show that our budget is a budget for the whole of Northumberland – not just the South East. Communities like Ponteland deserve this sort of ambition and investment.

“We want to focus firmly on the future prosperity of all our communities – with a drive for educational excellence, job security and a multi-million pound investment in the local economy.”

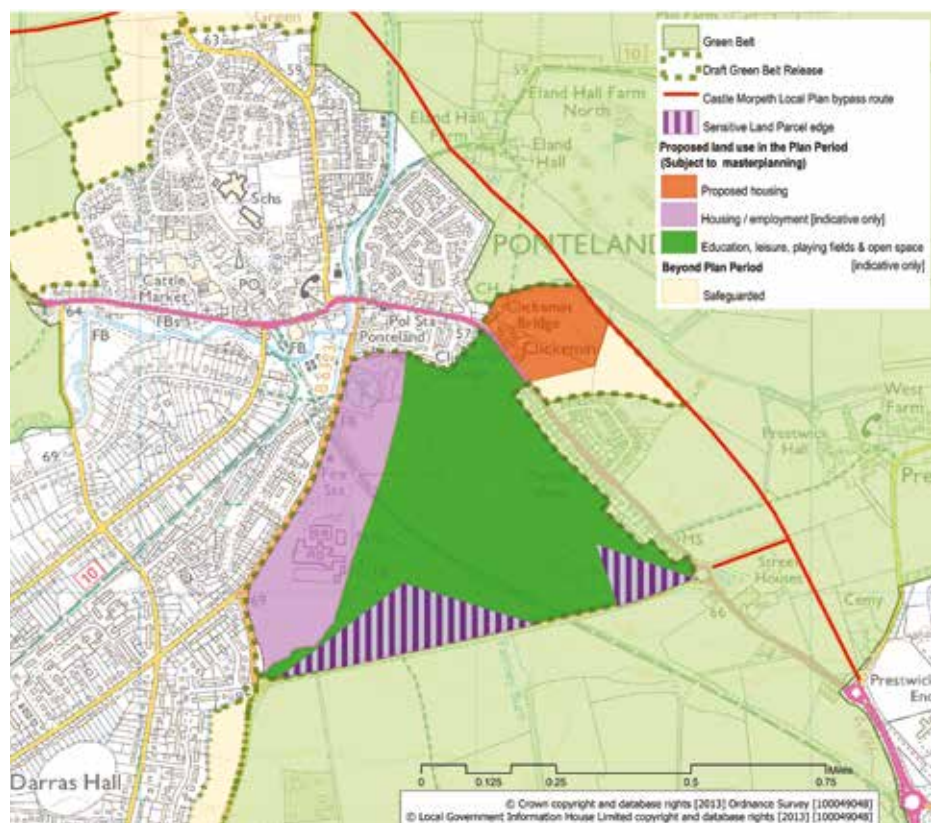
Campaigners against green belt development have given the plans a hostile reaction, however.

MP Guy Opperman said: “This is an attack on the very character of Ponteland and Darras Hall... The amount of the land they want to strip out from the green belt is enough for 5,000 new houses. It is a terrifying prospect.”

For a full response to the draft core strategy consultation by Ponteland Green Belt Group visit: pontelandgreenbelt.co.uk



Record attendance: The Memorial Hall drop-in event



Balancing the books

Other capital spending plans include a new bus station for Hexham, £19m on affordable housing in areas including Prudhoe and Shilbottle, and £6m on a new depot and fire station for Alnwick.

The council said its budget has been set in very tough financial conditions and due to central government funding cuts it also needs to make £44m of savings over the next two years - on top of the £160m that has already had to be saved over the last five years.

It has identified four key areas where it will make savings: driving efficiencies by

finding innovative and improved ways of working; working closely with partners to manage demand for services; stimulating economic growth and generating income.

They include £26m of savings from efficiencies, such as smarter use of information technology and reviews of council assets and library and tourism services, while £8.47m would be from income generation, £2.9m from service cuts, and £6.3m from controlling inflation.

But there will be also be a 1.99 per cent increase in Council Tax in each of the next two years.

Your letters

The Editor
Dont News & Views



Two proposals for development of Ponteland's green belt dominate this month's bumper postbag...

Opposition to Birney Hill scheme is 'hugely overstated'

Last week the inquiry into our proposals for Birney Hill Farm heard the views of local residents and objectors.

Many references have been made to the supposed 'tidal wave' of objections the application is alleged to have attracted. However, even by superficial analysis the objections are not what they seem.

The great majority of the 4,000-plus letters are not individual letters of concern, but standard 'pro formas' repeating the same points. This is hardly surprising as, when people are asked if they are against something that is portrayed to them in negative terms, they will normally oppose it.

Closer analysis of these pro formas also shows a further pattern. In many instances multiple copies were submitted from individual households, often including copies signed on behalf children of school or pre-school age.

While it is open to anyone to object to a scheme, this does rather present a misrepresentation of the real extent of opposition. Conversely, of the several hundred letters of support, the great majority are individually written, expressing their particular reasons for supporting the project.

Inevitably, there will be an argument that whatever the merits of our proposals 'turkeys don't vote for Christmas' and any significant development in a location such as this will attract opposition.

Indeed, local politicians, including Councillor Peter Jackson and MP Guy Opperman, have expressed at length their support for local objectors. However, they have failed to identify realistic or viable alternatives. In reality, the delays in the development plan and the release of Green Belt in Northumberland have been the responsibility of their own political colleagues.

In short, you can't have it both ways.

It is unreasonable to criticise a developer for proposing a scheme in the absence of a new development plan when you have principal responsibility for its progress. Equally, it is unreasonable to oppose Green Belt release 'per se' when it is your own political colleagues who have led on the Core Strategy process.

It should also be noted that an earlier report in this publication, it suggested that the scheme would provide 17.9 hectares (44 acres) of open space. In reality the proposal places over 90 acres of the site into community ownership, facilitating public access to land for community benefit and enjoyment. This is one of the many significant advantages the proposals will deliver and overall the package of benefits far exceeds that offered by any other proposal.

With a General Election looming, an element of political 'grandstanding' is inevitable. However, this posturing should not detract from other numerous opportunities and benefits that this project offers.

Let's ensure that we look deeper than simply counting numbers of letters to gauge community opinion. At the inquiry day set aside for the Green Belt Group and local residents, less than 30 people were in attendance and on most days it has been considerably less than this. This is in very stark contrast to the number of objection letters submitted to the Council. Indeed at recent comparable inquiries into housing proposed in Morpeth (which attracted less letters of objection), several hundred people attended with standing room only on the opening days.

So let's ensure we have some balance and proportionality. Yes, there are people who feel they have legitimate objections, but the numbers are hugely overstated. These should not drown out the voices of the many supporters, nor the very compelling community and other benefits this opportunity offers.

Richard Robson

*Chairman, Lugano Property Group,
Melbourne Street, Newcastle upon Tyne*

Housing plans for Callerton Lane need a rethink

I see that the latest county council plan for the future of Ponteland envisages the demolition and clearance of all the existing public buildings along the east side of Callerton Lane.

I assume this would include the swimming pool, the sports centre and the fire station together with the middle and high schools.

The land thus cleared is apparently to be made available for new housing.

Such a proposal is unsatisfactory on a number of counts.

These various buildings were erected on land designated as green belt and in order to help preserve the rural scene the various developing agencies were required to screen them from view with landscape planting. Over the years that landscaping has grown effectively to a point where the casual visitor might well be unaware of the existence of these buildings. It has been a particular 'planning' success and makes for an attractive southern approach into the village.

The speculative house builder, on the other hand will have different priorities. They like to have their wares on full view. They talk about the need to achieve 'kerb appeal'. The days of the landscaping would be numbered. At the very least the county's plan has to include conditions that would ensure the retention in the long term of this splendid run of tree and hedgerow planting.

The county's assumption is presumably that, following demolition, sites will be found to accommodate replacement buildings elsewhere. There is talk of building a new leisure centre and new schools. However, if the present locations were to be given up for housing these various public facilities would have to move further out - the kind of approach to planning that led to the health centre being dumped on the industrial estate.

This is no way to build up a community. Public facilities need to be grouped together at the heart of a settlement, close to the point where the principal public transport routes intersect, in order create a strong community focus, to maximise accessibility and provide opportunity for the different uses to interact and share facilities.

These proposals as set out in the latest "Core Strategy" document have to be reconsidered. If it makes economic sense to replace these various structures they need to be rebuilt in a similar location and carefully grouped to feed off, and support, one another.

John Hague

High View, Darras Hall

Civic Society offers no alternative to county council plan for Callerton Lane

In his letter in the February issue, the Chairman of the Civic Society, Mr P. Ham, states its objection to the draft Core Strategy proposal to use green belt land to the NE of Rotary Way to accommodate the relocation of the school and leisure centre facilities and release the land along Callerton Lane for housing.

However, the Society does not offer an alternative solution.

The county council has stated that the release of this green belt is identified for education, playing fields, leisure and open space (Cllr Allan Hepple, NCC's Policy Board Member for Planning, Housing and Regeneration, p6 December issue).

However, what is not mentioned is that the land on Callerton Lane to be vacated was originally green belt before the leisure centre and the schools were built on their current sites.

How the county council expects to achieve this aim with the very limited budget is open to question. Would it not be better to rebuild the schools on their current sites as apparently being proposed for the high school at Prudhoe?

As far as the Merton Way shopping centre is concerned, the Neighbourhood Planning Group survey carried out in late 2013 identified a need for a greater variety of shops but it did not cover how this was to be achieved.

After the PCP had been informed by NCC that discussions with the preferred developer for the regeneration of the Merton Way shopping centre were at an end, the PCP did write to NCC's in house development arm, Arch, requesting that the Town Council and the Partnership be kept up to date on any progress with this project, on at least a quarterly basis.

This letter was sent at the end of October 2014. To date we have not received a reply, although we have reason to believe that consultants have been engaged to assess the possible commercial opportunities that might be achievable as part of the shopping centre regeneration.

We can only reiterate the invitation to the Civic Society to attend our monthly meetings in order to be kept more aware of the current situation.

Brian Prickett

Chairman, Ponteland Community Partnership

Infrastructure development is both inevitable and necessary

The Pont News article entitled 'Plans to release green belt land opposed at drop-in event' (February issue) raises some interesting points.

Of the 11 bullet points the one positive point which I am sure we would all agree with is 'town centre needs to be improved'.

All the rest appeared 'negative' in terms of 'no need...' and I feel we must recognise that in order to achieve the good things we desire then some sacrifices will have to be made – especially if we are to raise funding for all the infrastructure that is needed.

Some important infrastructures were identified in the bullet points; for example 'education and leisure facilities', 'GP provision', 'parking in the town centre', 'flooding defences'. But two of the bullet points appeared contradictory – 'concern over the proposed bypass' and 'traffic congestion and the need for a bypass'.

I believe we should leave it to the experts in council planning to ensure construction and development is both appropriate and will blend in with existing architecture. We simply cannot please everyone's view of what looks nice.

The bullet point 'more development will ruin the character of Ponteland' will raise a lot of eyebrows I am sure. What character? Most visitors now see the 'centre' of Ponteland as rundown - sad, empty buildings, no development and falling behind other centres due to lack of development.

Whether it is 'refurbishment' or 'rebuilding' of Merton Way is a debatable point - but does it matter? It just needs doing and we can't please everyone! Let ARCH get on with it as quickly as possible otherwise we will be still talking about it in 2030.

One key bullet point missing I feel is there is a great need for facilities which will support younger people and families. We are a family community but very little exists to attract families to spend money locally and such businesses would help the area prosper and create jobs for our younger residents. It should also help the more elderly residents appreciate and enjoy the benefits of a thriving, updated infrastructure and environment.

We must all recognise that before Darras Hall and even Ponteland was ever built it was all green belt. All our houses were built on green belt including the one you live in.

Infrastructure development including 'town centre needs improving' is inevitable and necessary but needs funding. We must all recognise that change is needed and none

of us will get exactly what we desire – we have to compromise. The population is growing, demanding up-to-date facilities and infrastructure - we can't stand still with antediluvian attitudes.

Peter Sutcliffe

Middle Drive, Darras Hall

Accident waiting to happen in Brewery Lane

I have been meaning to write for some time about the parking spaces in Brewery Lane Ponteland in front of Taylor's Pharmacy.

It surely is just a question of time until something unfortunate happens to a car driver or pedestrian.

I have witnessed some truly awful parking with many cars being parked with the majority of their rear ends protruding into the road, meaning you have to negotiate your way round them as you turn in left from the Main Road.

I have also witnessed some bright sparks reversing back down Brewery Lane to return to the Main Road. The added problem of the huge Waitrose delivery lorries just compounds the problem.

As the Waitrose store is so busy should the access to this car park not be more closely monitored? I cannot be the only person to be concerned about this.

Jane Bonnar

Hawthorn Way, Darras Hall

Improved hygiene a must for public toilets refurbishment

I note with relief that the council is at last considering the refurbishment of the public toilets in Thornhill Road.

I am surprised to read, however, of agreement that the existing toilet provision is working well.

On what basis has this decision been arrived at? Quite apart from the inconvenience arising from waiting for occupancy, the unavoidable handling of the single access door by all users contravenes the most basic levels of hygiene. Modern public toilet layouts have a doorless open access for this very reason.

Safeguarding of public health should be the prime consideration of the new toilet design. The existing building fails to meet that criteria.

Keith Robson

Middle Drive, Darras Hall

April issue deadlines: Delivery of the April issue will start on Thursday March 26th and be completed by Tuesday March 31st. The deadline for all copy and adverts is Monday March 9th. If you are aware of any missed properties please contact the editor at pontnews@cian-pr.co.uk or call (0191) 3408422. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the April issue.

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.

What's on...

Ponteland Library: World War I Display

Friday February 13th – Wednesday March 11th. 'Lest we Forget 1914 -1918'. This moving display tells the stories of the brave men commemorated on the Wylam War Memorials who gave their lives in the First World War.

Fairtrade Fortnight: February 21st to March 8th

Celebrating the impact of Fairtrade and turning a spotlight on the producers who grow the products we love - cocoa, sugar, and tea. The Methodist Church Fairtrade Open Door will be at 2pm on Monday March 2nd and St Matthew's 'Big Brew' will be on Saturday March 7th from 10am to 12noon. All welcome.

The Bridge

The Bridge is a relaxed, informal church service where everyone is welcome. We meet most Sundays in Ponteland Methodist Church Hall at 9.45am with activities for kids up to year 6. The service on March 1st will be at 4pm and will be a family service. Other services in March: 8th, 15th, 22nd. Contact thebridge.ponteland@gmail.com or (01661) 822057.

Audio Book Group

The group is for people who have visual impairment or face barriers in reading printed books. It is an opportunity to share books, listen to different authors or old favourites, and hear other people's views. Each month members take home an audio book, then return to the next meeting for an informal and relaxed discussion lead by the group leader. We meet at Ponteland Library on the first Monday of each month from 10.30am -12noon. Membership is free. Contact Ros.Markham@northumberland.gov.uk or (01661) 823594.

Ponteland Wildlife Group of the Northumberland Wildlife Trust

On Tuesday March 3rd we welcome Dr Colin Scrutton, a former curator of fossils at the Natural History Museum, to present illustrated talk 'Orchids: the Art of Seduction and Deception'. The meeting starts at 7.30pm in St Mary's Church Hall in the village. All are welcome; cost £2 including refreshments.

Ponteland U3A

Our speaker at the monthly meeting on Wednesday March 4th is Tom

Dacre whose topic is 'The Peoples Kitchen'. We meet in St Mary's Church Hall at 2pm on the first Wednesday of the month. Visitors are welcome. No charge. Visit u3asites.org.uk/ponteland or ring (01661) 822225 for more information. Our next meeting will be on April 1st.

Kirkley WI

Kirkley ladies look forward to hearing all about the role of the Street Pastors in Newcastle when Mike Johnson joins them at their meeting on March 4th. Members also have the opportunity to enter a competition themed on 'Old Newcastle'. Guests and new members always welcome. Meetings are held in the Oak Room, Kirkley Hall, on the first Wednesday of the month.

Line dancing

We meet every Wednesday at 7pm in St Mary's Church Hall. Our next term begins on Wednesday March 4th. We have lots of laughs, friendship and exercise to music. The cost is £20 for ten sessions. Dancing is at Beginner and Intermediate level. New dancers are always welcome, free taster session offered. Contact Rosemary Gray on (01661) 822493.

Events at St Mary's Church

Friday March 6th 2.15pm - Women's World Day of Prayer service on organised by members from all the churches.

Mothering Sunday March 15th - All Age Worship at 10am. Choral Evensong at 6.30pm.

Saturday March 21st - evening concert by Northern Preclassica.

Palm Sunday March 29th - many of the congregation from St Mary's will start their service at Richard Coates School at 10am, and process with Jazz the donkey down Thornhill Road to church. All are welcome to join us.

Good Friday April 3rd 11.15am - Raising of the Cross on Coates Green. Joint church service.

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 and Broadway, Darras Hall. Their next surgery is on Saturday March 7th.

Ponteland Senior Gentlemen's Club

Our speaker on Monday March 9th is Mr L Turnbull whose talk is

entitled 'Railways before George Stephenson'. Meetings are usually held on the second Monday of every month in the lounge of Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road, at 2.30pm. Contact Secretary Brian Edlin on (01661) 820198.

North East England Group of the Alpine Garden Society

On Monday March 9th we will be delighted to welcome plant ecologist John Good whose talk will cover 'Alpines in a Changing World'. Our meetings take place in St. Mary's Hall, Thornhill Road, Ponteland. The charge to visitors is £2 per meeting. Details from Terry Teal at t.teal@btinternet.com or (0191) 4132574. Our Northumberland Spring Show of bulbs, woodland plants and alpine in flower is on Saturday March 28th at the Wentworth Leisure Centre, Hexham and open to the public from 12noon - 4pm. Plant sales from 10.30am. Entry £3 (AGS/SRGC members free).

Ponteland Village WI

On Tuesday March 10th we are having '100 Years of Fashion' with Gaby Sutton. We meet on the second Tuesday each month at 7.30pm in St Mary's Church Hall. Contact us at pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com or on our Facebook page 'PontelandVillageWI'.

Ponteland Bible Society lunch

Ponteland Bible Society is holding a lunch at the United Reformed Church on Wednesday March 11th at 12noon. Tickets will be on sale in each of the churches.

Darras Hall WI

Meeting at 2pm on Thursday March 12th in the meeting room of the URC Church, Broadway, Darras Hall. Margaret Dodds, a Heritage Guide from the Tyneside Cinema, will be telling us the story of the News Theatre from its opening in the 1930s to its continuing popularity today. Visitors are most welcome.

Ponteland Methodist Church Spring Concert

Ponteland Methodist Church welcomes Graeme and Valerie Danby and the University of Sunderland Choir on Saturday March 14th in the church at 7pm. Light refreshments after the concert. Tickets costing £7 can be booked with Syd Cowan on (01661) 824459 and paid for at the door.

Pasadena Roof Orchestra performance

The Pasadena Roof Orchestra is performing on Sunday March 22nd at Newcastle Falcons Gold North Suite in support of CHUF. For more

information contact Ponteland Charity Group on (01661) 823606.

Girlguiding Easter Fair

The Girlguiding 6th Ponteland Rainbow Easter Fair is being held on March 28th from 10.30am-1pm at St Mary's Church Hall. Stalls include crafts, preserves and jams, phoenix cards, bric-a-brac, books, plants, tombola, raffle, bottle stall, cakes. There will also be tea, coffee and refreshments on offer.

Ponteland Civic Society

The next meeting of Ponteland Civic Society will be on Monday March 30th at St Mary's Church Hall at 7.30pm. The Annual General Meeting will be held, followed by a talk on 'The Great Fire of Gateshead 1854' by historian Richard Stevenson who will be our guide to the disaster which shook the North East. Discover the reasons and consequences of the fire on that fateful night. At our meetings, which are followed by the opportunity for a cup of tea and a chat, visitors are most welcome for whom there is a nominal charge of £2.

Ponteland Photographic Society

Our 2014-15 session ends on March 30th: there will be no meetings during the summer. The new session will begin on September 7th. Come and join us then if you are a keen photographer or simply a beginner who would like to learn more in the company of enthusiasts. Meetings are held on Monday evenings at 7.30pm in Merton Hall. More information at pontelandphotographicsociety.co.uk

DIARY DATES:

General election hustings

Churches Together are organising a General Election hustings with all the candidates, at the United Reformed Church on Friday April 24th at 7.30pm. More details next month.

Embroiderers' Guild Ponteland Branch

No March meeting. We next meet on Monday April 27th at 2pm at Ponteland Memorial Hall for 'Exploring Stitches' – Applique. Branch Workshop. For further information contact eg_ne_ponteland@btinternet.com or (01661) 881395.

Ponteland Beer Festival

The second annual Ponteland Beer Festival will be held at the Sports Centre on Friday April 24th and Saturday April 25th. Tickets can be purchased online at pontelandbeerfestival.co.uk



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Ponteland Community High School Report

Pressure on for Oxbridge-bound students

Some of the world's most prestigious universities have offered places to sixth formers at Ponteland High...providing they get their grades this summer!

Year 13 students have high targets to aim at as they celebrate offers for degree courses at top universities including Oxford and Cambridge.

Around 85% of the year group has applied to go to university this year and offers have been made to students to study subjects as diverse as law, business with Japanese, astrophysics and equine therapies. Applications have also been made to drama schools, for art foundation courses and for internships with major companies.

Charlotte Burrin and Matthew Ross are both set to go to Cambridge to study medicine, while Dan Aston and Joseph Pilsbury have also received offers to study medicine – Dan at

Plymouth and Joseph at Birmingham.

Jamie Carpenter has received an offer to study mathematics at Oxford and Rosie Clear Hill has an offer to study biology at Oxford following a gap year when she will be working in Central America.



Top university offers: Dan Aston, Jamie Carpenter, Rosie Clear Hill, Charlotte Burrin, Matthew Ross and Joseph Pilsbury.

Head of Post 16 David Hicklenton said: "I can only applaud the hard work of our team of dedicated tutors. It is their guidance, support and hard work that provides the much needed help in ensuring our students have such success with their applications to university."

U19 netball team qualifies for national finals

Ponteland High's U19 netball team has qualified for the national finals after beating five sides in the regional heat at Northumbria University's Sport Central.

The team, U16 regional champions three years ago, beat Queen Elizabeth, Teesside High, Durham High, Royal Grammar School and Carmel College to finish the day runner-up to Newcastle High. They will now compete against the best in the country at the national finals at Ellesmere Port on March 14th.

The U14 team, hampered by an injury to key player Lucy Walby which ruled her out, finished a creditable 5th place.

A big well done to the players and also a massive thank you to the parents who are always keen to help out with transport, scoring and cheering the teams on!



U19 team: Rachel Cripwell, Sophie Reay, Alex Reeman, Julia Elder, Grace Lambert, Charlotte Fraser and Sophie Wainwright.



U14 Team: Mia Andreyeva, Lucy Dodd, Elsa Atkinson, Cathryn Walby, Fran Burrin, Lucy Fraser, Ashleigh Clayton, Yasmeen Amer and Lucy Walby.

Students join forces with Rotary Club

By Meenoo Rezaei, Year 10

Students are to join forces with Ponteland Rotary Club to help generate new fundraising initiatives to benefit the local community.

Plans include high school musicians playing at a Rotary lunch, a sponsored golf tournament for Northumberland schools at Ponteland Golf Club and a Christmas market where students could provide some stalls.

Grocery giant Waitrose, which has a branch in Ponteland, has also agreed to become a corporate member of the Rotary Club.

Ponteland Rotary Club President Alan Hall said: "We are excited at the prospect of working with local organisations such as Waitrose and the high school. We feel this will be beneficial to our whole community and would like to encourage more of our local businesses and business people to become corporate members of the Rotary Club."

Anyone interested can contact Alan at alfonse2010@icloud.com



Pictured l-r are: Y10 students Alex Elliott-Smith and Meenoo Rezaei, Patrick McAlindon (Waitrose, Ponteland), Alan Hall and Caroline Parkinson (Ponteland Rotary), Jackie Holmes (Waitrose, Ponteland), and Kieran McGrane (Headteacher, Ponteland High).



Ponteland Sure Start centre users campaign against closure plans.
Cover shot by the Hexham Courant. Photo above courtesy of ncjMedia Ltd.

Parents fight to save children's centre

Worried parents are campaigning to save a threatened children's centre in Ponteland.

Northumberland County Council is looking to close five Sure Start centres, including one in Thornhill Road on the site of Ponteland First School, as part of a bid to make £44m in savings over the next two years due to Government austerity cuts.

The centre, open Mondays to Thursdays, provides a range of services for hundreds of families with children aged under five including drop-in sessions and other activities for children and carers, as well as advice on health, childcare and early learning.

It also has close links with health visitors, midwives, nursery nurses, childminders, schools, day nurseries, speech and language therapists and others.

The council says 473 families registered to use the service last year, which it is now considering providing in other community venues, such as the library and church halls, and vowed any chosen would be

appropriate for the various activities.

However users living as far away as Belsay, Matfen and Stannington say the purpose built centre and its services, such as family support work, baby club and parenting classes, are invaluable. Campaigners claim 93% of parents in Ponteland with children aged up to five years are registered and 68% are actively engaged.

Parents held a demonstration at a council consultation event held at the centre to show their concern. Mum-of-two and chairman of the centre's parent group, Maria Lunn, said there had been 2,000 users in the last three months alone: "The other four centres have another Sure Start centre within three miles. Our closest is Prudhoe.

"There's no way you could run the same services from St Mary's church hall, the library or the Memorial Hall. You can't have babies in an old draughty hall; our centre has underfloor heating. The whole thing is just crazy – it is wrong. It would be a disaster if it closed."

Coun Robert Arkless, policy board member for children's services said no

decision had yet been taken: "We have now received detailed comments and suggestions from many of the parents, childminders and others who use the Ponteland Sure Start centre, both in writing and at meetings we have held with users of the centre and with the advisory panel.

"These have included a number of constructive proposals about how we might maintain the services which most matter to local people, and how the children's centre building could be used in future to support local families. We will be looking carefully at all of these suggestions before making final decisions about the way forward.

"We are actively pursuing a solution which reduces costs and continues to provide a wide range of support to parents of young children in Ponteland and the surrounding rural areas."

The campaigners have launched an online petition which can be found at: epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/74224



PLANNING

Concern was expressed at the contents of a consultation paper regarding planning in Northumberland which would appear to weaken the role of parish and town councils in the planning process. The Council also discussed a Government document regarding building on brownfield sites. Councillors were asked to read the document and submit any comments to the Clerk. The Mayor and the Clerk were requested to submit appropriate responses to both documents by the deadline dates.

PROJECTS REPORT

A meeting is to be arranged with the Council's solicitor regarding finalisation of the land survey.

ENVIRONMENT WORKING PARTY

Recommendations from the Environment Working Party which met on January 19th agreed included:

- Closing up the gap between Waitrose car park and the park on the park side
- A uniform style of dual purpose bin replacements in the park that were more aesthetically pleasing
- Replace some bins in the park at Dunsgreen, the Lions seat and the Millennium bridge and removal of the open bin next to the Field of Hope in the park
- Obtain quotes for further soft surfacing around some pieces of equipment in

Callerton Play Area and obtain a new 'Tidy Bear' bin for the play area

- Approve a policy to replace any trees that had to be felled by planting one or two trees in a similar location wherever possible and if it was reasonable to do so
- Approve a policy to retain the green spaces owned by the Council in perpetuity for the benefit and enjoyment of residents.
- Approve expenditure to have the area near to the Pele Tower and Verger's cottage in the Council's ownership tidied up and inform the residents of the Peel House development that this work would be taking place.

HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY

The Council agreed a recommendation by the Highways Working Party, following its meeting on January 16th, to include an article in Pont News & Views asking residents to suggest locations that might benefit from the installation of new lighting via the county council street lighting replacement project programme. The Working Party will review the ideas and submit a list to NCC.

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

Coun Richard Dodd reported on ongoing abuse of the car parks at the back of Merton Way. It was hoped that the necessary Parking Orders would be in operation soon which would stop this

unauthorised use by businesses. He reported that the County Council would be approving a two year budget on February 25th and he reported on the various proposals included within the document. Consultation was currently underway regarding subsidised bus routes which would affect some of the services in Ponteland.

MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor's Diary

A list of events and meetings attended by the Mayor during January was circulated to the Council. The Mayor also reported on his attendance at the recent Birney Hill Inquiry and stated that a decision was expected on or before June 29th. He also stated that he had attended a Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) meeting relating to a proposed employment initiative which would involve NALC offering advice on employment issues to parish and town councils.

Reports by Town Council representatives on local organisations

The Council received a number of reports from Councillors. Coun Christine Greenwell reported on her attendance at the Richard Coates Education Foundation and Coun Joyce Butcher reported on her attendance at the Memorial Hall Committee.

This report is based on the minutes of the Town Council meeting on February 11th.

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Entries for golf competitions welcomed

By Stewart Blair

The traditional St George's Day Golf Competition and Dinner and the popular fundraising Am/Am Golf Competition, both organised by the Rotary Club of Ponteland, will be held at Ponteland Golf Club on Tuesday April 21st and Tuesday May 12th.

All the proceeds from the Am/Am will be donated to well regarded Rotary charities.

The competitions are fourball team competitions, teams comprising four men, four ladies or two men and two ladies. The three best stableford scores count at each hole.

Catering will be available all day on the day of the Am/Am, when all competitors are invited to join Ponteland Rotarians for dinner provided by Alan Marriner in the clubhouse at 8pm provided that they apply when entering.

A traditional three course St. George's Dinner has been arranged for the evening of April 21st when all competitors and their friends will be made most welcome.

The winning team will get a prize as well as the best mens', ladies' and mixed teams on both occasions.

Entries enclosing entry fees, address, telephone number or email address, the names of the players in the team and their handicaps, and a preferred starting time should be sent to: Stewart Blair, 45 Cheviot View, Ponteland, NE20 9BH (tel 01661 822367, email stewart.blair1@virgin.net) on or before Monday May 4th.

Residents invited to sign up for garden waste collection service

Ponteland residents are being invited to sign up for Northumberland County Council's garden waste collection scheme for 2015.

The paid-for service sees green waste collected by the council each fortnight for a fee of £26 for 20 collections.

Last year 21,300 households across the county opted into the service, resulting in the use of 23,000 bins, creating nearly 7,200 tonnes of waste which was collected and made into a rich compost/soil conditioner.

All residents who used the kerbside collection service last year will receive a letter from the council inviting them to take part again. These letters contain a calendar displaying information of collection days. The day and/or week of collection may have changed since last season.

However, if last year's subscribers haven't received a letter to renew their subscription to the garden waste collection service by the end of February, they should contact the council so that they can be issued with their unique reference number.

New customers can apply to join the scheme from February 2015 by phoning the new local phone number for their area (details available on the council's website) or 0845 600 6400.

To continue to receive the service, residents are required to pay by March 31st.

For more information or to pay for your garden waste service at northumberland.gov.uk/garden



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People of the Bahamas the theme for Women's Day of Prayer

By Kathy McMenamin

The Women's Day of Prayer will be marked on March 6th at St Mary's Church at 2.15pm with afternoon tea in the church hall to follow.

The theme this year will feature on the people of the Bahamas. The British Government brought an end to the slave trade in the 1830s before this became a reality.

The airfield used during WW2 became Nassau's international airport. Today, it is vital for tourism which provides half the jobs in The Bahamas.

Bahamian lifestyle and culture have been greatly influenced by the West Africans who arrived as slaves and the British, who colonised the Islands. This gave The Bahamas their culinary variety and rich heritage of music, dance and arts.

Although The Bahamas is one of the most prosperous countries in the West Indies, there are also areas of great deprivation. Self Government was achieved in 1964 and full independence within the Commonwealth in 1973.

Regional plant heritage group to meet in Ponteland

By Muriel Sobo

Ponteland is the new home of meetings of the North East Plant Heritage Group.

Plant Heritage is a countrywide plant conservation organisation which supports the National Plant Collections and the North East group has members from Yorkshire to Edinburgh.

They have regular meetings with a variety of topics for talks and they are coming to the Memorial Hall since it is an accessible venue with good parking. They already have popular plant sales at Kirkley Hall in June and Blagdon Hall in July. In the summer they are arranging bus trips to gardens in Dumfries and Yorkshire.

The North East has 17 of the National Plant Collections, two of

them on the Darras Hall Estate, the Leucojums, or snowflakes to you and me, and the herbaceous Potentillas.

Kirkley Hall has Fagus, that's beech trees, Belsay Hall has Irises and Blagdon has Acers or maples, Sorbus and Alnus – alders.

The first meeting of the group in the Memorial Hall is on Saturday March 14th at 2.30pm and there will be a presentation on the Rhododendrons at Muncaster Hall in Cumbria.

The meeting is open to anyone interested in plants and their conservation and both visitors and new members are very welcome. For more information from local chairman David Goodchild, email david@potentilla.org.uk or call (01661) 823145.

Church hosts chamber choir concert

Newcastle chamber choir Northern Praeclassica is performing a programme of early church music in Ponteland.

Ave Maria will be a concert of sacred music from European Renaissance and Romantic composers, including Palestrina's Missa Brevis and Allegri's Miserere.

The 24-strong choir was formed in 1973 to perform sacred music from the 16th century, but now embraces choral music from all periods.

The concert is being held at St Mary's Church on Saturday March 21st at 7.30pm. Tickets costing £10 (£8 for concessions) are available from JG Windows in Newcastle or from Ted and Lynne Henderson on (01661) 823393.

Proceeds will be shared between Northern Praeclassica and will contribute to the replacement of the church central heating boiler.



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