

pontnews&views

FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district



£46m schools and leisure scheme
awaits Government ruling

...as Middle School applies to DfE
to offer rival GCSE provision

Decision due on Government
intervention over Local Plan

Record turnout for Annual Wheelbarrow Race

Agents for Golden Charter Pre-Need Planning



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Record crowd see tight finish to Wheelbarrow Race

A record crowd witnessed the tightest of finishes as two brothers won Ponteland's annual Wheelbarrow Race by just one second!

Richard and James Leiper beat another set of siblings, Callum and Jack Johnson, after shaving nine seconds off their time last year – completing the mile long course for the Open Race in a time of 6 minutes 47 seconds.

In the ladies race Jo Shallcross retained her title, partnered by Charlotte Condliffe, in a time of 8 minutes 51 seconds. Rosie Carr and Abby Dorani came second after slashing well over a minute from last year's time.

There was a three way photo finish to decide the result of the junior race, with siblings Max and Daisey Souter winning by a whisker from Jack Stroud and Ethan Beynon in second and last year's winners, cousins Drew Slater and Amy Geddes in third.

The Wheelbarrow Race is organised by Ponteland 41 Club and Ponteland Rugby Club, and this year funds were being raised for St Oswald's Hospice and Tynedale Hospice.

Fifty seven teams competed in the New Year's Day event, which starts and ends at the Blackbird Inn.

Cover shot and p3 pics by Nick Clark Imaging.



Fresh warning about illegal pedlars

By PC Darren Fisher and PC Ingrid Clayton



There have been 61 crimes recorded during the period from December 11th to January 14th for Ponteland and the surrounding area:

- Affray - one
- Section 47 assault - four
- Section 20 assault - one
- Common assault - six
- Harassment - one
- Stalking - one
- Malicious communications - two
- Public order - eight
- Burglary dwelling - three
- Burglary other than dwelling - three
- Theft shoplifting - six
- Theft other - six
- Theft by employee - one
- Theft from person - one
- Theft in dwelling - one
- Making off without payment - five
- Damage to dwelling - three
- Damage to motor vehicle - four
- Damage other - one
- Damage other than dwelling - one
- In charge of dog out of control - one
- Cruelty/neglect - one

What is a pedlar?

It has been brought to our attention that there have been unwanted sellers in the area knocking at doors trying to sell various items from a holdall bag. These are historically called pedlars, hawkers or door to door salespersons.

A Pedlar's Certificate can be simply applied for by any person over 18 years of age at their local police station. A simple application form is required and a small fee. If the application is approved they will be issued a badge or certificate and they will be authorised to sell door to door across the whole of the UK for one year.

The local licensing officer should run checks on the individual and will probably not issue a certificate if that person has a criminal conviction, albeit each force is different across the country. It has however been known for a person with a previous conviction to appeal the decision at court and they were subsequently issued with a badge.

Although there will be lots of genuine and polite people with Pedlar's Certificates in operation, recent reports have been made of people failing to produce badges and, of more concern, making the householder feel uncomfortable and pressurised into buying goods in their own home.

This is not right and this is the time to close your door and call the police.

There have been reports that these people have stated that they are from the Middlesbrough area. The probation service in Cleveland have been contacted and state that they have

no knowledge of this and nor would they support such a scheme. Cleveland licensing officers have also been contacted and confirmed that they would not ordinarily issue a Pedlar's Certificate to a person released from prison.

I would urge any of you to report any such incidents to the police which will allow us to check on the persons and whether or not they have the appropriate certificates.

Remember:

- It is your property and you do not need to answer your door if you don't want to.
- If you are made to feel uncomfortable on your own doorstep call the police on 101.
- They should always produce ID, not necessarily with a photograph.
- Do not feel pressurised to part with your money.
- If in doubt call the police.
- Do not let anyone in your home - even if they appear genuine.

If you have any information regarding the above or any other incidents, please email easttynedale.npt@northumbria.pnn.police.uk or call us on 101.

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Thursday 8am - 8pm, Friday 8am - 4.30pm, Saturday 9am - 12noon

*Smile evaluation appointment may be carried out by a Treatment Coordinator





Swift Government approval needed for new £46m schools and leisure complex

Call-in could scupper September 2019 opening

County council chiefs are hoping for swift Government approval for a £46m schools and leisure complex due to open in just over 18 months' time.

The council's strategic planning committee agreed that it was 'minded to approve' the Ponteland scheme at its meeting on January 11th.

But given the size and scale of the project it will now be referred to the National Planning Casework Unit for a decision by the Secretary of State on whether he wishes to call-in the application for his own determination. The building schedule will be confirmed after the NPCU's decision.

The new schools and leisure facilities will be built on

a site which includes the existing leisure centre, to be demolished, alongside a large expanse of sports and playing fields. Directly north of the site are residential properties along Mayfair Gardens.

Architects say the scheme will boast "bold and intelligent design" to create a single building with three different identities to accommodate a new primary school, high school and leisure facilities for the shared use of students and the wider community.

The high school will be located centrally to enjoy access to new all-weather sport facilities, a sheltered external dining area, rich habitat areas and themed art gardens, table tennis areas, group seating and study terraces.

The primary school will be located towards the southern end of the main site with views to the east.

A 'community street' area accessible to all will have a 90m long glazed internal double height area containing a public café, public library and art gallery, as well as Clip n Climb and soft play.

'The Crescent' will provide access to the various sport, leisure, performance, exhibition, events spaces, and secure visitor entrance into both the primary and high schools. Users of the leisure facilities will find a 25m swimming pool and learner pool, fitness suite, Clip n Climb, soft play, a recreation room and public café.

Facilities within the schools that the community could have access to include the sports hall, secondary school hall and primary school hall, post 16 social and study, lecture theatre and media, music and drama area.

Supporting documentation for the plans states: "The application is with regards

to the colocation of the existing leisure facilities within a new purpose built facility incorporating a 420 place primary school, a 1600 place secondary school, improved sport facilities and landscaping.

"In doing so, the proposal is considered to create a 'once in a lifetime opportunity' for shared leisure and learning centre as a community hub within Ponteland. Fundamentally, a building is proposed a whole but will maintain three separate identities."

The design and access statement continues: "The proposed scheme creates circa 20,000sqm of new accommodation. This includes approximately 2,500sqm of dedicated primary school accommodation, 10,500sqm of dedicated secondary accommodation and 7,000sqm of shared leisure, schools and community provision.



Visuals of the new combined primary and high school and leisure facility.

"The pool hall and associated changing is designed for up to 150 users, whilst the fitness suite can accommodate 100 fitness stations. Both represent a significant - and much needed - uplift from the current provision. Eight team changing rooms, designed to the relevant standards, are provided for outdoor sports alongside dedicated officials changing.

"The building is organised into three clear and distinct elements: the crescent, primary and secondary blocks. Each block is unique in its scale, appearance and use whilst being identifiably part of a larger holistic building. The crescent block, as the name suggests, is a curved element which the other two blocks 'plug' into."

There will be 450 standard parking spaces, 13 car drop off bays, eight coach bays, three midi coach bays, three minibus bays and 23 disabled parking bays.

Northumberland county councillor Eileen Armstrong, ward member for Ponteland East and Stannington, said: "This is the next step in securing fantastic new education and leisure facilities for the Ponteland area.

"Ensuring that there are top quality learning environments for our young people is a very high priority for us, and this development will provide modern facilities for students for years into the future.

"We also look forward to

providing brand new top quality leisure facilities for use by pupils, the local community and visitors to the area."

Schools reorganisation well underway

Reorganisation is already underway for the majority of schools in the Ponteland partnership as first schools became primaries and Richard Coates CE School lowered its age range to include the primary phase last September.

Whalton, Stamfordham, Belsay and Heddon-on-the-Wall have had additional classrooms constructed to enable reorganisation, and Darras Hall Primary School's new build is well under construction and will be completed by September.

Ponteland High School will extend its age range to 11 to 18 from September 2019 and receive its first cohort of Year 7 and 8 students then. The schedule for the new development aims for construction and completion of the school buildings by September 2019 to coincide with this, with the leisure elements complete early in 2020.

Pont News understands that if there is any delay to the approval by the Government, the high school element, needing additional space with the addition of Years 7 and 8, will be prioritised as the primary school pupils

"Fantastic new education and leisure facilities for the Ponteland area."

Ponteland county councillor Eileen Armstrong

could remain in present buildings for a short period.

Once the final go-ahead is given the council says it will be working very closely with all schools, parents and the local community to make sure that any disruption for students and families during development and changes is

kept to a minimum.

Ponteland Community Middle School is now an independent academy and trustees have just approved an expansion up to Year 11 which will be referred to the Department for Education for decision. See article on page 15.

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Council anxiously awaits decision on Government intervention over Local Plan

The threat of Government intervention remains over Northumberland County Council after its failure to produce a Local Plan.

In November the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid threatened 15 councils including Northumberland with direct intervention and gave them until the end of January to put forward any exceptional circumstances to justify their failure.

The new Conservative administration which took over NCC last May withdrew the former Labour-led council's Core Strategy which had already been submitted to Government, questioning both its housing projections and whether proposed green belt development could be justified.

The Core Strategy had proposed 24,320 new homes for the county by 2031 plus an additional 2,000 houses at Dissington Garden Village.

However, last June Council Leader Peter Jackson said new statistics from the Government 'suggests...that the requirement for housing in our county may very well not be as high as has been proposed previously'. He added that the council wanted to use this information 'to review the need to build on acres of green belt land'.

The new Local Plan will determine the number of houses required, but the authority has published a new report to demonstrate a five year housing land supply which proposes

18,880 dwellings for the period 2011-31 - significantly less than in the previous Core Strategy.

The council said the new Local Plan will include far more detailed planning policies, following a comprehensive review and update of its evidence. It is due to be submitted to Government for examination by Summer 2019, with adoption by Summer 2020 and public consultation starting this Spring.

The impasse has led to a delay in decisions on major housing schemes for Ponteland. The National Planning Casework Unit has sat on plans by Banks Property for 400 homes at Clickemin Farm since last Spring, which the former Labour-led county council said it was 'minded to approve'.

And the Conservative administration has announced it is to revisit another 'minded to approve' decision it inherited - for the proposed 2,000-home Dissington Garden Village - by sending it back to committee for reconsideration, given the changes in policy on green belt development and housing numbers.

As we went to print on January 22nd the county council said it was reaching the final stages in the process of preparing its response to Government on the Local Plan.

However Coun Jackson had earlier responded to the Minister's warning, saying: "Be in no doubt that the new administration... is determined to pull out all the stops to ensure a sound process which will be delivered as quickly as possible. I look forward to working positively with the Government to that end."



The advertisement is for Meadowfield Auto Centre, featuring a yellow background with white snowflakes and pine trees. A circular logo on the left says 'EST 1984' and 'Meadowfield AUTO CENTRE'. A black box on the right contains the text 'PONTELAND'S ONLY CENTRALLY LOCATED MOT CENTRE' and 'WINTER OFFERS AVAILABLE!'. A black banner across the middle reads 'MOT ★ SERVICING ★ REPAIRS'. Below this, the contact information is listed: 'Call us on 01661 872220' and 'or email info@meadowfieldautocentre.co.uk'. The address 'Meadowfield Industrial Estate, Ponteland, NE20 9SD' is shown, flanked by two wrenches. The website 'www.meadowfieldautocentre.co.uk' is at the bottom.

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Your letters

The Editor
Pont News & Views



A complaint about a Christmas church service and a thank you for a good citizen in this month's letters...

Relieved motorist thankful after car keys handed in

I would like to thank the person who handed my car keys into the village Post Office, saving me a lot of trouble and cost.

I believe I must have left them somewhere near the recycling area behind Merton Way shopping centre on New Year's Day.

It was suggested to me at a Merton Hall coffee morning the following week that I try the Post Office and when I asked – lo and behold the keys had been handed in!

It would have cost me at least £150 to obtain a new set from the Skoda garage.

I am most grateful to whoever found the keys and hope you get this message of thanks. It was a great relief; I didn't expect to get them back.

Hilda McCormack

Runnymede Road, Darras Hall

Community deserves better than rushed Christmas church service

It's 4.30pm, it's Christmas Eve, but we are not in St Mary's Church getting even more festive than the weeks and days and today has already built up to.

We are instead in the car going home as the service, which was rushed through, has finished.

Now I don't want this letter to appear as a shot at the new vicar who has not done a service in Ponteland before, as there are enough other long standing colleagues in this church to know what our Christmas services look and feels like.

No hymns to get the children singing along, then the last hymn finishes and everyone looks around to mutually realise...that's it then!

A packed church from a strong community deserves better next year please.

Dale Wighton

Beech Court, Darras Hall

March issue deadlines: Delivery of the March issue will start on Monday February 26th and be completed by Friday March 2nd. The deadline for all copy and adverts is Monday February 12th. If you are aware of any missed properties please contact the editor at pontnews@cian-pr.co.uk or call (0191) 5191306. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the March 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.

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What's on...

Ponteland Photographic Society

Ponteland Photographic Society meets at Merton Hall at 7.30pm every Monday in February. On February 5th Verity Johnson will speak on 'It is what it is'. New members welcome. See pontelandphotographicsociety.co.uk

Ponteland Means Business

Ponteland Means Business meets at the Diamond Inn from 8am to 9.30am on the first Tuesday of each month. Next meeting February 6th. Contact Brian Russell at brian.russell@profitabilitygroup.co.uk or on (01661) 872004.

Ponteland Wildlife Group

Our meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday February 6th in St Mary's Hall, Thornhill Road, is our AGM and Cathleen Thomas will give an update on work and status of our red squirrels. Atholl Swanson will give a talk about 'The River Coquet from Source to Mouth' on Tuesday March 6th. Admission for both meetings costs £2 including refreshments. Open to all.

Ponteland U3A

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month in St. Mary's Church Hall at 2pm. Our AGM will be held on February 7th followed by entertainment and a faith tea. The speaker at our March meeting will be Keith Stewart on 'The Railways to Ponteland and Darras Hall'. Visitors are always welcome; there is no charge. Visit u3asites.org.uk/Ponteland or call (01661) 824953.

Kirkley WI

Our next meeting will be held on Wednesday February 7th at 7pm in the Blue Room at Kirkley Hall. Our speaker is Nikki Willis from the Red Cross, who will talk about and demonstrate some aspects of First Aid. Guests always welcome. Find out more at kirkleywi.wordpress.com

Ponteland Senior Gentlemen's Club

At our meeting at 2.30pm on Monday February 12th in the lounge of Ponteland Memorial Hall, Colin Buxton will talk about 'RNAS 8 Sqn - An Early History of Naval Aviation'.

North East England Group of the Alpine Garden Society

On Monday February 12th at 7.30pm at Ponteland Social Club in Merton Way we welcome Elspeth MacKintosh to talk to us about 'New developments in our Alpine area'. Elspeth has been working on the restoration of Alpine house at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh. The charge to visitors is £2 per meeting. Email neegroup@agsgroups.org or visit alpinegardensociety.net/groups/North-East-England or find us on Facebook.

Ponteland WI

Our next meeting will be at 7pm on Tuesday February 13th in the lounge of Ponteland Memorial Hall when we are looking forward to a musical evening led by Mr and Mrs Michell. Visitors welcome.

Ponteland Village WI

On Tuesday February 13th our member, Lorna is talking to us about 'Have needle, will travel' and we will be making something to take home. We meet on the second Tuesday each month at 7.30pm in St Mary's Church Hall. Contact us via email at pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com or our Facebook page 'PontelandVillageWI'.

Ponteland Lions Club

Our monthly business meeting will be at 7.30pm on Wednesday February 14th in Merton Hall and we have a social event on the evening of Wednesday February 28th. The charity fund bookstall and collection of spectacles for recycling will be on Saturday February 24th at Waitrose from 9am to 4pm. Come along and meet us - guests are welcome. Ring 0845 833 9913 or visit our website.

Ponteland Memorial Hall fundraising evening

The Memorial Hall is holding another fundraising evening at the New Rendezvous restaurant in Ponteland on Monday February 19th. Gather your friends and family together - apply to the Memorial Hall office for tickets costing £18 by email at infopmh@yahoo.co.uk or call (01661) 822603. Please support this vital community asset.

Embroiderers Guild Ponteland Branch

On Monday February 26th from 2pm to 4pm at Ponteland Memorial Hall we have 'Not so Hardanger'. Explore this technique with an expert tutor. All welcome, whatever level of experience - cost for visitors £4. Contact Secretary Penny Ford at penelopeford636@btinternet.com or on (01670) 788278.

Ponteland Civic Society

Our first meeting of 2018 will be held at Ponteland CIU Club, Merton Way, on Monday February 26th at 7.30pm when Maureen Kesteven will talk about 'The National Garden Scheme - its History, Achievements and Gardens'. Do join us - visitors are most welcome (for whom there is a nominal charge of £2).

Women's World Day of Prayer Service

The Women's World Day of Prayer Service will be held in St Matthew's RC Church on the West Road on Friday March 2nd at 2.30pm. Everyone is most welcome to attend and there will be refreshments in the hall afterwards.

Rotary Club of Ponteland

Rotary Club of Ponteland meet every Tuesday at Ponteland Golf Club. The meetings alternate between lunch times (1st and 3rd Tuesdays) and evenings (2nd and 4th Tuesdays). New people members are very welcome. Contact Alan Hall at alanhalleef@msn.com or on (01661) 860284.

Audio Book Group

The group is for people who have visual impairment or face barriers in reading printed books. 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 in Ponteland Leisure Centre on the first Monday of each month from 10.30am-12noon. Membership is free. Contact Michelle Watson at mwatson@activenorthumberland.org.uk or (01670) 622562.

Ponteland writers

A friendly group with mixed writing ability and experience. We meet every Wednesday at Post Box coffee shop from 7pm to 9pm. New members welcome.

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Fitness coach gives disabled children Paralympic dream

A Ponteland fitness coach with a passion for disability sport took a group of disabled children to a GB Para Athletics event in Manchester.

Jo Shallcross, who runs The Barn at Thorneyford Farm, Kirkley, took the 12 children and also one adult who have a variety of physical and learning disabilities to the induction day at Sportcity, where they took part in wheelchair racing, long jump, sprinting and throwing events.

The largest concentration of sporting venues in Europe, Sportcity was developed for the 2002 Commonwealth Games. It includes the 48,000 seat City of Manchester Stadium - now home to Manchester City FC, as well as the National Squash Centre, Manchester Regional Arena, English Institute of Sport, Manchester Velodrome and the Tennis Centre as well as a state-of-the-art gymnasium. It holds over 400 events each year.

Triathlete Jo, who qualified for the world championship being held in Hawaii this October after winning her age group at Ironman Wales last year, first set up a children's disability triathlon five years ago.

She said: "I really felt the children I coached needed a challenge and to prove to everyone around them that they are capable of so much more. The triathlon has been a huge

success, but I found that apart from this one event the children weren't doing anything else.

"I was at a conference about disability sport when I heard about the GB para athletics induction day. I knew I wanted to involve the group I coach and a few others from the disability triathlon also came along. Watching everyone take part at the event was fantastic; a lot was learnt and confidence grew."

Jo, whose clients at The Barn are aged from three to 80, plans to help some of the group who were spotted as having a talent for wheelchair racing pursue this, and is arranging for an athletics club to work with a nine-year-old girl who enjoyed sprinting on her frame.

Funding for the trip came from main sponsor Future Energy, Arc Build, Ponteland Rugby Club, Emma Larsen and The Barn, paying for transport and team t-shirts and hoodies.

Jane Etherson and her daughter Abbie at the Sportcity induction event and the full group with Jo Shallcross.



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LOCATION OF AIRFIELDS OF BRITAIN CONSERVATION TRUST PLAQUE

The Town Council agreed some months ago to take up the offer of a plaque from the ABCT in commemoration of Ponteland Airfield which was located off Limestone Lane and used as a night landing ground for 36 Squadron between 1916 and 1919. The plaque has now been received and councillors considered a report suggesting two locations for it - one near the Rotary Club yew tree in the park and one at the Memorial Hall entrance off Darras Road. Various other suggestions were made and the council agreed to defer this for a month to allow the Clerk and Councillor Hall to view the sites and discuss installation options with a local builder.

PHARMACY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Town Council considered this document which they felt was comprehensive in its findings. Members expressed some concern about Stamfordham, whose GP practice was closing soon meaning villagers would have to travel for Ponteland for medical services including prescriptions. It was agreed that this comment would be part of the response to be sent to the County Council by January 31st.

2018-19 BUDGET

The Town Council approved the budget for 2018-19, agreeing a precept of £404,383 to be requested from the County Council. This represented a 2% increase on a Band D property - a practice that had been followed for a number of years. The Council agreed to set aside a sum for projects and to assist towards items relating to anti-social behaviour, including CCTV.

HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY

The Town Council agreed two recommendations from the Highways Working Party, which had met on December 15th. One related to a consultation document for a temporary road restriction at the entrance to Dunsgreen which the Council agreed to accept and this would be reported to the County Council by the deadline date. A consultation document had also been issued for a 20mph limit at Jackson Avenue and the Council again agreed to support the request. Concern continued to be expressed regarding lighting levels in Ponteland. The Town Council regularly reminded the County Council about the poor lighting levels in some areas including Callerton Lane and North Road. The Clerk agreed to contact the Head of Technical Services at NCC about this.

This report is based on the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on January 10th.

Town Council plea for extra traffic calming measures


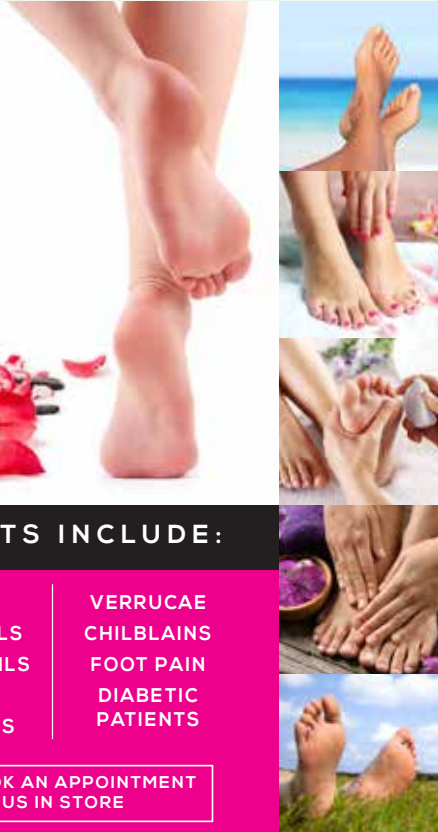
An appeal for new traffic calming measures has been made to Northumberland County Council to address the problem of drivers speeding in Ponteland.

Members of the Town Council's Highways Working Party have written to the Highways Authority requesting additional action.

The Town Council has no statutory responsibility for road safety but has already installed permanent speed indicator display signs in 11 locations to notify drivers of their speed and encourage better speed awareness.

Northumbria Police has also partnered with members of the community to set up a Community Speedwatch initiative, which monitors speeds of vehicles using speed detection devices.





Vehicles exceeding the speed limit are referred to the police, with the aim of educating drivers to reduce their speeds, and in cases where education is ignored and evidence of repeat or excessive offences is collated, enforcement and prosecution can follow.

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Middle school academy to press ahead with expansion plans

The trustees of Ponteland Community Middle School have agreed to progress plans to extend its intake to include Years 9, 10 and 11 after two-thirds of respondents to a consultation backed the proposed expansion.

The six-week consultation which ran until January 8th had 636 responses, of which 78% were PCMS parents and 9% PCMS staff, and 10% staff at Ponteland High School.

There were 62 objections received, including from Northumberland County Council's Executive Director of Children's Services, Ponteland High School, three of Ponteland's four new primary schools and five Newcastle primary schools.

However, support came from the North East Futures University Technical College (UTC), Newcastle University and Ponteland Town Council. Of the 495 PCMS parents who responded, 71% were in support.

The background behind the move to pursue an expansion from 600 to 1,050 pupils stemmed from the initial decision by NCC to restructure the Ponteland schools system from three tier to two tier, which included a proposal to close PCMS.

Its governing body earned a reprieve after successfully applying to the Department for Education to become an academy independent of local authority control from September 1st 2017.

But other schools in the Ponteland Partnership went ahead with the education restructure, creating new primary schools in Belsay, Darras Hall, Heddton on the Wall, Ponteland, Stamfordham and Whalton.

Six of these schools are now joining forces in a new Multi Academy Trust (MAT): Belsay Primary School; Darras Hall Primary School; Ponteland High School; Ponteland Primary School; Heddton on the Wall St. Andrews Primary School; and Richard Coates CE School.

After Ponteland Community High School said it could not guarantee places for PCMS pupils whose parents opted for three tier in the new hybrid system at Year 9, Ponteland Academy's Board of Trustees announced the plans to expand up to Year 11.

PCMS had said the high school would have to infill its Year 7

intake with pupils from outside Ponteland to take the place of those who went to the middle school academy. But that could have forced dozens of pupils who attended PCMS to travel to Prudhoe, Kenton or Walbottle for secondary education after Year 8.

Other reasons given by PCMS for the need for the expansion included plans to build thousands more homes in and around Ponteland over the next decade.

The report by Ponteland Academy's Board of Trustees on the consultation concluded: "With no guarantees being offered for the integration of PCMS children into Ponteland Partnership schools we are putting forward our own solution.

"We have always been guided by what parents tell us they want for their children and for the community, and they are telling us that they want us to extend.

"We propose to continue as a middle school but with an upper school alongside...our solution would give parents genuine choice over the education of their children in Ponteland and we believe that this will enhance the overall quality of educational provision."

The Trustees have submitted a business case to the DfE which sets out full proposals, including a £5m three-year build programme to include seven new classrooms and specialist facilities, and await its decision. If approved, the first intake of Year 9 pupils would be in September 2019.

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Volunteers wanted for tree planting day

On Saturday February 17th Ponteland Community Partnership is asking for help to plant 100 trees along the old railway line from Rotary Way towards the Airport.

Over the decades this stretch of the bridleway has suffered from its exposure to the elements and many of the original trees and shrubs have just disappeared.

We aim to reinstate trees to encourage a wind break and habitat for the existing wildlife, giving them suitable conditions for nesting, feeding on berries and insects whilst increasing their safety from predators.

We also hope to encourage more of the community and visitors to use, enjoy and understand the heritage of the rural setting of the bridleway.

Once the trees have been planted wild flowers will also be added to this area later this year – all part of sustaining and encouraging more wildlife.

If you are interested in giving up a couple of hours to join us, the Countryside Officer and other like minded volunteers please register your interest on the contact page at pontelandcommunitypartnership.co.uk and you will be sent more information about the event.

Any volunteer under the age of 18 should bring an adult with them.

Support Fairtrade Fortnight to help end exploitation of overseas producers

By Steve Helm

Ponteland is once again marking Fairtrade Fortnight with events highlighting efforts to end the exploitation of people who produce the things we love to eat, drink and wear.

Nationwide campaign 'Come on in' will invite you to come in to the world of the people who grow our food to see what life can be like when farmers and workers aren't paid fairly.

By coming to events in Ponteland and sampling Fairtrade products including tea, coffee, cake and biscuits, you help the poor to work their own way out of poverty with dignity.

The events in Ponteland include:

- A "Big Brew" in St Mary's Hall from 10am to 12noon on Saturday February 24th
- A Fairtrade Coffee Morning in Merton Hall from 9.30am to 11.30am on Friday March 2nd
- A "Big Brew" in St Matthew's Hall from 10am to 12noon on Saturday March 10th
- Others are planned in the URC and Methodist Churches - see posters for details.



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Ponteland Community High School Report

Ben elected to represent Northumberland at the British Youth Parliament

A Ponteland High School student has been elected to stand in the British Youth Parliament for the first ever time.

Sixth former Ben Guadagno has been elected to be a representative for Northumberland, after securing more than 1,000 votes from Year 9 to Year 13 students across the county.

His election followed a week of canvassing and campaigning by our candidates, with Kieron Gibson (Y11) and Natalie Edge (Y12) also standing.

Ben will be in office for two years - initially as a deputy member of parliament and then as a full member. The post involves liaising with other MYPs across the country and

coordinating campaigns that young people across the UK have voted for.

Ben stood on a platform of 'putting the concerns of young people first' at its heart. As well as wanting to lower the voting age to 16/17 in certain circumstances, he also wants to campaign for the recognition of young people's issues such as tuition fees, the plight of young carers and the mental health of all students.

He will get the chance to debate with other MYPs in the House of Commons next year with John Bercow presiding.

Headteacher Kieran McGrane said: "Ben is an outstanding young man and very deserving of his electoral success. I have no doubt that he will make a positive impact in his new role and enjoy the experience."



Premier League prospects Liam and Will secure soccer scholarships

Two PCHS students have been offered two-year football scholarships by the region's two biggest clubs.

Premier League prospects Will Brown, who plays for Newcastle United FC, and Liam Miller, who is on Sunderland AFC's books, start their full-time training and scholarships in September.

Both pupils have been outstanding assets to the school and have continually shown a determination, desire and maturity when managing school work with a hectic training schedule. They have continued to represent the school football team despite having regular football commitments with their respective clubs.

PE teacher Chris Doig said: "I would like to congratulate Liam and Will on their achievement, thank them for all they have done while at the school and wish them every success in the future. Well done."



Strokes of success for indoor rowers

Once again our students have excelled at the Northumberland School Games Indoor Rowing Championships.

Of the five students who entered the competition four received medals, with two gaining Gold, and two Silver.

Maisie Aspinal won the Year 9 Girls' Gold by a convincing 30m whilst the Year 10 Girls' race was much closer with Lucy Cardno just pipping team-mate Anna Styles by 3m to claim Gold.

Year 10 student Will Viney was defending champion, having won his age group in the two previous years. Unfortunately, and despite a massive effort at the end to pull back an 18m deficit, he came up just short by 6m in a very tight race in securing Silver.

All four rowers will now go on to represent Northumberland at the Regional Championships.

Restaurant throws party to celebrate 10th anniversary

Ponteland Italian restaurant Fratelli threw a party for friends, clients and suppliers to mark its 10th birthday.

In what was described by director Fabrizio Saba as "a wonderful night", guests enjoyed a sumptuous Italian buffet, live music and comedy and magic from Flash from Britain's Got Talent.



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County and city council shared services move will save taxpayers £1.8m

A merger of some back office services will save Northumberland taxpayers nearly £900,000, the authority has announced.

The county council has agreed to share the cost of delivering transactional services such as council tax and business rates collection, revenues and benefits, and staff payroll with Newcastle City Council.

The move will see around 200 city council employees transferred to work for the county council under TUPE arrangements, moving into new office accommodation which has been identified in Northumberland this summer.

The shared services initiative is in line with national and local government reform and is expected to save £895,000 over the next three years for each council, a total of almost £1.8m. Transactional services cost both authorities about £11m a year.

Newcastle's Cabinet Member for Resources, Coun Veronica Dunn, said: "Over the last seven years Government cuts have had a profound effect on councils up and down the country. As a result, they have had to explore new ways of providing services.

"Newcastle has a proud record of finding innovative ways of doing more with less. Coming together with our neighbours

in Northumberland will, I believe, deliver savings that can be reinvested back into sustaining vital public services that people depend upon."

Northumberland's Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Coun Nick Oliver, added: "All councils continue to face significant pressures to reduce costs, while at the same time continuing to provide essential high quality services to our communities and our residents.

"By exploring opportunities to provide joint financial services, this will help us to look at ways we can continue to achieve high quality frontline services in a cost-effective and more efficient way."

Bringing staff together will create a single workforce of over 400, and formal consultation with staff affected will now take place.

Virgin Media scraps plans to bring broadband to Northumberland

Virgin Media has scrapped plans for broadband expansion plans into the county.

Currently not available in Northumberland, Virgin Media offer broadband coverage up to Northumberland's borders in neighbouring North Tyneside, Newcastle and Gateshead and were in talks with the council to expand their coverage into Northumberland for the first time.

However, Northumberland County Council has revealed these plans have now been halted.

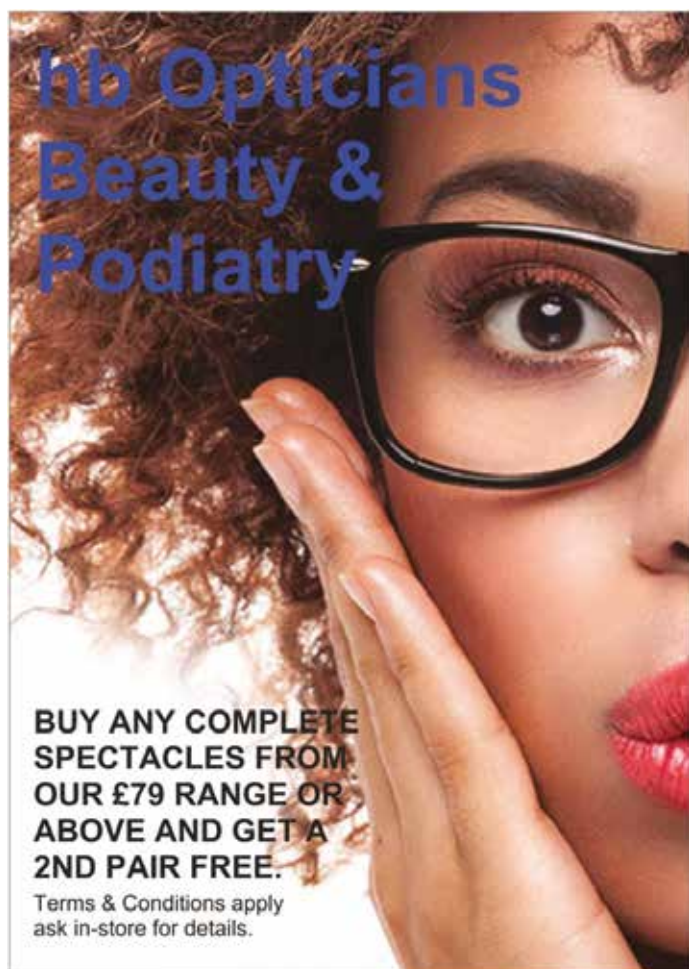
County council leader Peter Jackson said: "We are very disappointed that Virgin Media has made the decision to halt plans to extend broadband coverage to include Northumberland.

"We are keen to attract investment and new businesses into Northumberland and providing broadband is crucial to this and is something we were working with Virgin Media to provide.

"As a council, we have supported Virgin Media at every opportunity and have specifically flagged up approved planning applications for new housing and commercial developments while also promoting the Cable my Street website in flyers, newsletters and via our iNorthumberland superfast broadband website.

"I have written to the company expressing our concerns and have now received a response from Virgin Media that states there are some locations within Northumberland which could have previously been in scope, however, due to rising business costs they are now deemed uneconomical for them to progress.

"They have offered to meet with us in the New Year to continue our dialogue where we hope to look at potential opportunities for the future."



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Former Coates School pupils' memories sought for tricentenary book

A local author writing a book about the 300-year history of Coates School is appealing for memories and photos from the last six decades from former pupils and staff.

Muriel Sobo, who is a regular contributor to Pont News, is busy writing the final chapter of the book, which will celebrate the tricentenary of the school next year.

It will concentrate on the period from 1959 when the third building the school has occupied was completed.

Muriel, of Darras Hall, said: "The Coates school on Thornhill Road is the third location for the school in its almost 300 year history. It was completed in 1959 and officially opened in 1960 when the Minister for Home Affairs came up from London and the Bishop of Newcastle performed the dedication.

"Many of the pupils present at those times will still be around today and I would appreciate any memories of that occasion and also memories of the school in the years since. Tell me what it was like; the ups and downs, the best memories, the funniest teacher – and of course any photos. I can copy those and return originals.

"This is the last chapter in the story of Coates which I'm compiling to celebrate the 300th anniversary in 2019."

Contact Muriel at muriel.sobo@talktalk.net or call her on (01661) 871969.



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