

pontnews&views

FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district



Explosive report alleges
collusion over housing scheme

New 20mph zones launched
around Ponteland schools

"Consternation" over
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Race aces prove a pushover in annual barrow challenge

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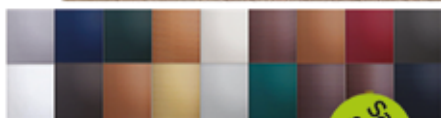
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Produced by Cian creative pr



Full speed ahead as competitors hit the track



Dave Taylor and Claire Richardson close in on finish line

Wheeling in the New Year for record-breaking feats

They are not quite silver dream machines, but Ponteland's annual New Year's Day Wheelbarrow Race threw up plenty of speedy thrills and spills – and a new event record.

Watched by an estimated best-ever crowd, 130 competitors took part in three one-mile races in a competition which is thought to date to the 14th century.

History was created in the Ladies' Race by Caitlin Flanagan and Zara Naughton who won in 7 mins 51 secs – the first time the eight-minute barrier has been broken.

Incredibly, Joanne Brown and Nicola

Conlon had to settle for the runners-up spot, despite their time of 8 mins 2 secs being second fastest time ever recorded, and three-time race winner Joanne Shallcross and her partner Hilary Ross were third.

Amy Geddes and Drew Slater won the Junior Race for the third and final time – they will be competing in the Open Race next year.

In the Open Race, James and Richard Leiper completed the course in a blistering 6 mins 20 secs in their Goodfellows Estate Agents wheelbarrow.

They equalled the second fastest recorded time, set in 1985 by Ponteland Rugby Club's Wes Dixon and Geoff Walton, who also hold the record of 6 mins 18 secs, established in 1983.

Matthew Crooks and George Hunter were second in 6 mins 44 secs and Alun Woodward and Harry Walker third in 6 mins 46 secs.

The race, which starts at noon along a circular course, is organised by Ponteland 41 Club and Ponteland Rugby Club with support from The Blackbird Inn.

Through sponsorship and entry fees, over £3,000 was raised, which will be donated to St Oswald's Hospice and Tynedale at Home Hospice.

Anyone who would like to sponsor a wheelbarrow in next year's race should contact Andy Lawson at andrew_lawson@btconnect.com or on 07989 355 557.

All images by Colin Morgan Photography



Junior Race winners Drew Slater and Amy Geddes



Caitlin Flanagan and Zara Naughton seal victory in the Ladies' Race

Bombshell report details alleged collusion over planning bid

Senior council officers colluded with a developer to win the go-ahead for a giant housing scheme close to Ponteland, a shock report by Northumberland County Council has alleged.

In a dramatic development to the now scrapped Dissington Garden Village (DGV) scheme, NCC has exposed the claimed subterfuge of several unnamed people in positions of authority and control within it.

They include a senior former planning officer who is said to have accepted “excessive” and non-declared hospitality, paid for by those “associated” with the application.

The report by Daljit Lally, NCC’s Chief Executive, was presented to the council’s audit committee last month – and its explosive contents have been forwarded to Northumbria Police.

It also alleges staff were instructed to use personal email accounts in relation to developer Lugano’s planning bid, so correspondence would be hidden from the council’s system and from Freedom of Information requests.

And it details how Newcastle-based Lugano or its advisers were invited or allowed by a very senior planning officer to write and alter parts of the report to NCC’s strategic planning committee which recommended approval of the scheme.

At the same time, council officers sought to obtain legal advice to support Lugano’s stance, the report states.

An independent investigation commissioned by NCC – following a tip off by a whistleblower – found decisions and conduct in relation to the planning application were “not transparent or appropriate”.

The report also highlights how planners’ body the Planning Officers’ Society found that had “objective criteria” been applied to the planning application, it would almost certainly have been refused.

Instead, Mrs Lally described the recommendation to approve it by NCC’s planning team as “entirely perverse given the evidence available”.

In the report, she states: “It appears that significant efforts were made by several persons in positions of authority and control within the County Council to collude with and secure a number of inappropriate advantages for the planning applicant/developer in the application in question.

“Such advantages would not be conferred on any other planning applicant in the normal conduct of the Authority’s planning functions.

“There is evidence that a former very senior Planning officer has accepted substantial hospitality (including first class rail travel, hotel accommodation and fine dining in a private room of a London restaurant owned by a Michelin starred chef) from the planning applicant/their agents in this specific planning application.

“The level of hospitality extended is excessive; and appears to have been paid for by those associated with the application. The senior Planning officer had not however declared this, contrary to the County Council’s procedures.”

It adds: “There is consequently doubt on the behaviour and



Developer Lugano had plans for 2,000 homes on green belt land

impartiality of this very senior Planning officer, who was in a significant position of authority and control, regarding the planning application in question.

“There is therefore serious concern of undue influence/conflict of interest on the part of the planning applicant, enabled by a senior officer in the Planning department having already offered and given significant hospitality to a very senior officer.

“The matters highlighted in this report have been notified to Northumbria Police where appropriate.”

Lugano’s proposals for 2,000 new homes and other facilities on 257 hectares were handed a minded-to-approve resolution in 2017 by the then Labour controlled council.

But the Conservatives, voted into power in May that year, withdrew the previous core strategy and developed a new Local Plan, which required the reassessment of the DGV bid.

A year later, Lugano made serious allegations against NCC and council leader Peter Jackson, Mrs Lally and cabinet member for planning John Riddle, with writs then issued in the High Court.

But in January 2019, the DGV application was withdrawn just days before going in front of the council’s strategic planning committee again, where it was to be recommended for refusal.

Lugano then withdrew its High Court action, which cost the council £273,389 in defence costs, and Lugano Dissington Estate Ltd has now gone into administration.

A Northumberland County Council spokesman said: “We have a statutory obligation to uphold the duties required as a planning authority.

“It is only right and proper that when significant matters of concern are brought to our attention, that we investigate these fully, and report and act on the findings.

“These related specifically to the professional conduct and inappropriate behaviour surrounding a significant planning application, which was subsequently withdrawn.

“To confirm, the employees referred to in this report are no longer employed by the council. The report will be fully considered by audit committee at its next meeting.”

A Northumbria Police spokesperson said: “Northumberland County Council wrote to us in March last year raising a number of concerns.

“In June, we confirmed in writing that having considered this information, we could not find anything which would warrant a criminal investigation.”

Lugano Property Group declined to comment on the report.



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I N D E P E N D E N T

Control warning to dog owners

By PC Phil Oliver, Ponteland Neighbourhood Officer

There have been a number of recent reports of dogs out of control across the Tynedale area.

Owners are reminded they have a legal responsibility to ensure dogs are kept under control at all times and that failure to do so can lead to a police prosecution. A dog seen dangerously out of control in a public place and causing injury to a person or assistance dog can be seized or subsequently destroyed.

Legislation does allow a farmer or landowner authority to shoot a dog seen to be worrying livestock. It is important that dog owners stick to rights of way and permissive routes, keep dogs under control via a lead and secure when on their premises and avoid areas of livestock where possible.

Parking issues

There have been several reports of inconsiderate parking made to police since the start of the year, specifically on Middle Drive, near Darras Hall Primary School, and on Thornhill Road, near Ponteland Primary and Richard Coates schools at the start and end of the school day. Police, and Civil Enforcement Officers from Northumberland County Council, have been making regular patrols in the area at relevant times and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Any motorist parked on single or double-yellow markings may be subject to a Parking Charge Notice (PCN) from the County

Council, so please bear in mind the associated restricted parking hours for areas with single yellow marking. Those parked in an obstructive or dangerous manner may be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice by the police. Motorists should not park:

- near entrances to the school car parks
- at or near a bus stop
- opposite or within 10m of a junction, except in an authorised parking space
- opposite a traffic island or (if this would cause an obstruction) another parked vehicle
- where the kerb has been lowered to help wheelchair users and powered mobility vehicles
- in front of an entrance to a property
- on a bend.

Contact the police team

Please do get in touch if you have any policing issues you wish to bring to the attention of the team. A member of Neighbourhood Policing Team can be contacted via northernprudhoeptmailbox@northumbria.pnn.police.uk. Information in relation to crime can also be reported confidentially to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or via the Crimestoppers website.

Public warned of disruption from school and leisure scheme

Council chiefs admit they are prepared for disquiet from the public over the four-month closure of a well-used Ponteland car park to facilitate the creation of a new £43m schools project.

Bosses at Northumberland County Council (NCC) are said to have conceded there may be public "consternation" due to the decision to shut the site, off Callerton Lane, from January 13th until late May.

It will remain off limits to motorists until the building of new high and primary schools, community leisure centre, café, library and fire station are close to completion.

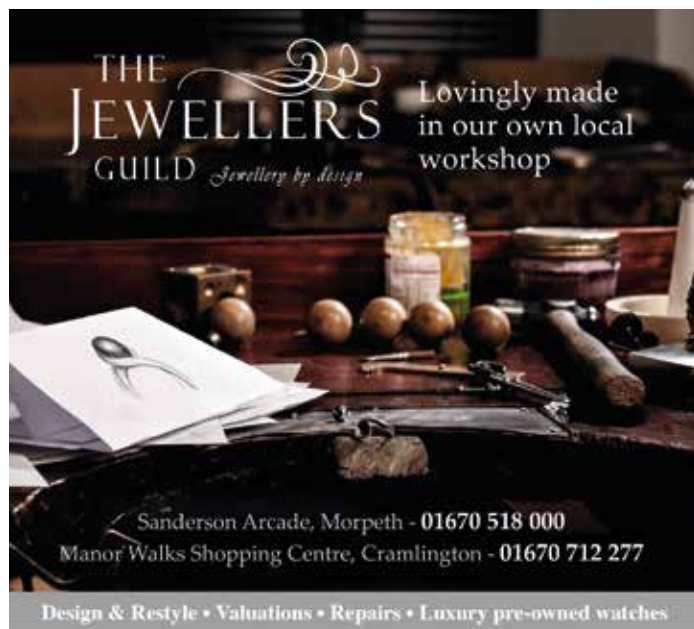
Built by construction firm Kier Construction with funding by NCC, the development started in December 2018 and the schools are expected to open in September.

In an online message, Ponteland Town Council said it had been advised by NCC that the west end of the bridleway between Rotary Way and Callerton Lane would be out of bounds.

The Town Council added: "A temporary footpath diversion will be maintained through the Middle School site, but there will be no provision for horse riders or cyclists whilst the closure is in place."

At project completion the existing Ponteland leisure centre will be demolished and sports pitches established.

A spokesperson for NCC said: "This temporary bridleway closure and footpath diversion, and the car park closure, are essential to allow work to progress on the new schools and leisure development."



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Speed reduction schemes put brakes on motorists

Drivers have been warned to go slow after three new road safety schemes to protect hundreds of Ponteland schoolchildren on their way to and from the classroom went live.

The 20mph zones have been introduced outside Darras Hall Primary, Ponteland Primary and Richard Coates Primary, which are among those prioritised due to concerns about fast-moving vehicles.

Similar initiatives are planned for Ponteland Community Middle School and Ponteland High School as part of a county-wide road safety upgrade by Northumberland County Council over the next two years.

Highways chiefs say the speed reduction may also help the environment by encouraging previously concerned parents to leave their cars at home and walk their children to school without fear of accident.

Over 80 Northumberland schools are now protected by the low-level speed limit, with 164 in total being earmarked under the programme.



Speed crackdown as 20mph school zones come into force

Councillor Glen Sanderson, Cabinet Member for Environment and Local Services at NCC, said £350,000 was being allocated from each year's Local Transport Plan to drive forward the scheme.

Cllr Sanderson added: "Residents are rightly concerned about the volume of vehicles travelling at high speed through their communities.

"Slower speeds bring obvious benefits to places and people – particularly outside schools. They help to encourage walking and cycling by reducing the

risk and severity of collisions, and the reduced speed makes it easier for people to cross roads.

"The public have told us they want more 20mph limits around schools and we've been investing significant resources, wherever this is appropriate, to make it happen as soon as possible.

"From Berwick to Blyth and across to Haydon Bridge, scores of 20mph zones have been introduced improving safety for pupils, parents and carers, teachers and residents."

ADVERTISING FEATURE

What should a good financial planner be doing for you?

By David Lamb, Lamb and Associates

A good financial planner needs to get to know you really well.

It is essential that they get to know you first and get to know your money later. Going straight to the money is like a doctor putting his glove on before you tell him what is wrong.

Most decent financial advisers get to know the hard facts; your income and expenditure, assets and liabilities. But a good financial planner will want to know a lot more about you, your family, your history, what you want to achieve - and when.

They should aim to understand your current and desired lifestyles - in a future article we'll consider the main components of your lifestyle. Understanding how your money will flow through your life is essential.

This can be a very intimate and

personal experience; hence they need to consider the chemistry between you - discussed in my last article which you can find at lambandassociates.co.uk/blog.

Once they understand you, they can then consider how they can help you achieve your lifestyle with the resources you have available. You should expect this to be done, effectively using a set of accounts, including a net worth statement, income and expenditure statement, tax calculations and cash flow projections.

When these are prepared, you will be ready for a planning meeting.

The planning meeting should discuss the assumptions made (eg life expectancy, inflation, rates of return) and it is essential that you have confidence in the assumptions. If

not, you cannot have confidence in the outcomes. When you understand where you are and where you are heading without any planning, you will be ready to plan your future.

What your planner should not be doing is doing your planning for you; it is unlikely that you will buy into it and therefore not commit to it. Financial planning works well when you work with your planner.

To get best results, you should do your own planning, with your planner merely facilitating the meeting and using their skill and experience to guide you. They should also be there to think outside the box when necessary.

A good financial planner should be working with you to help change your life. That's value for money!

Rosie future for new sign language club

A Ponteland schoolgirl with perfect hearing has turned teacher to help classmates learn how to speak without talking.

Not only has inspirational Rosie Bell, 12, founded a new group to support fellow pupils at Ponteland High School to learn sign language, she is also in charge.

The Year 7 student picked up to the hand signalling code due to not being able to speak well at a younger age.

She quickly gained an understanding of British Sign Language (BSL) and Makaton, another sign programme.

Last month, she established the school's British Sign Language (BSL) Club, where she uses Wednesday lunch breaks to teach her peers in years 6 and 7 and sixth formers.



Rosie Bell with the tools of her trade

Rosie won permission from teachers for the go-ahead, booked a suitable room and enlisted the help of professional support staff.

She then publicised the club by designing and displaying a poster around school, with the first session last month attracting 20 students.

Said Rosie: "I learnt sign language because when I was little I couldn't speak so I had to learn Makaton and BSL to communicate with people. As I got older, I could speak but I continued to use BSL."



She shows classmates how to sign

"I like it because it helps people who are blind, deaf and have speech impediments. This is a great opportunity as I've just started high school."

So keen is Rosie to see progress that she has even laid on homework handouts for fellow pupils to take away for more practice.

Since starting at the Callerton Lane school in September, staff say she has impressed with her positive attitude and approach to all aspects of learning.

She has also been proactive



Rosie turns teacher once a week

in getting involved in other activities, proving herself a great ambassador for school life.

Headteacher Kieran McGrane said: "Rosie is a force of nature and a great addition to our school. She brightens our school with her presence and positive nature."

"It is fantastic that Rosie has been so keen to set up this club and I am sure it will go from strength to strength in supporting her peers in learning how to use sign language."



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Your letters

The Editor
Pont News & Views



Mayor criticised over planning approval comments in this month's letters...

'Appalled' by building go-ahead

I refer to David Butler's letter and the response from the Mayor of Ponteland Town Council, Alan Varley, both of which appeared in the December issue.

I am appalled by the Mayor's statement that "whilst the committee spent a good deal of time discussing the application, members could find no grounds on which to object to the plans to build in Ladywell Way".

Over 50 local residents individually submitted many very valid material planning objections to this proposal, all of which would appear to have been dismissed totally out of hand. This small triangle of land was originally deemed too small to accommodate a dwelling, and this is surely still the case.

Construction will entail the destruction of three large, mature sycamore trees, a very sad loss to the local environment, and the erection of a house in a style quite out of keeping with the adjacent properties, and which will be sited very close to the carriageway with no room for a footpath.

The alignment and location of the garages very close to the kerb line will require the highway to be 'stopped up' at this location. The adjacent field is currently extensively flooded right up to the boundary hedge at the rear of the site, and the lake so formed will probably remain throughout the coming winter.

It is noted that at the official Northumberland County Council planning meeting, three of Ponteland's county councillors voted against the proposal, whilst the casting vote to approve the application was then made by the out-of-town Chairman.

Donald L Chambers
Ladywell Way, Ponteland

Snow screen to how times have changed

I had to smile at the comments from the Mayor of Ponteland, Councillor Alan Varley, about the snow warden scheme.

Years ago, it was the neighbouring thing to do and everyone mucked in – cleaning paths etc - when it snows.

Sadly, it's not the case anymore, this has been proved by actually having to ask people to volunteer. Where has our community spirit gone?

Joan McGowan
Rowan Drive, Ponteland

February issue deadlines: Delivery of the March issue will start on Thursday February 27th and be completed by Wednesday March 4th. The deadline for all copy and adverts is Thursday February 13th. 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...

Farm Market

Dates for Wilde Farm Market, which meets at Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road, are Sunday February 2nd, Sunday March 1st, Sunday April 5th and Sunday May 10th, all from 10am-2pm.

Kirkley WI

A talk about the work of The Peoples' Kitchen will feature on February 5th when the group holds its monthly Wednesday meeting at 7pm at Kirkley Hall. Guests are welcome and information is at kirkleywi@hotmail.com

Ponteland Senior Gentlemen's Club

The next meeting is on Monday February 10th at 2.30pm in the lounge of Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road, when Michael Porteous will talk on 'Rasputin'. Visit pontelandsgc.co.uk

Ponteland Village WI

The group's next meeting, at 7.30pm on Tuesday February 11th in St Mary's Church Hall, Thornhill Road, will include a talk from Susan Taylor on 'Full-time Mum to Skin Care Entrepreneur'. Members meet on the second Tuesday of each month, with details on Facebook or by emailing pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com

Ponteland WI

Norman Kirtlan will give a talk and slide show on 'Forensic Art' at the group's meeting at 7pm on Tuesday February 11th in Merton Hall, Merton Road. New members are welcome for a programme of meetings, lively play reading group and monthly lunches.

Ponteland Lions Club

The club's monthly business meeting is at 7.30pm on Wednesday February 12th in Merton Hall, Merton Road, and a Charity Fund book stall will be at the Ponteland branch of Waitrose on Saturday 29th, from 9am to 4pm. Visitors are always welcome to join in the club's activities. Call 0345 833 9913.

Friends of Kirkley Hall

At 2pm on Wednesday February 12th at Kirkley Hall, David Richards will talk about 'Litter and Fly Tipping - The Scourge of Our Time'. At the same time on Wednesday March 11th, Liz Clark, of Northumbrian Hedgehog Sanctuary, will tell how the animals are nursed back to health and released to safe areas. Entry is £2 for members and £3 non-members. Information on is 07470 708 535, friendsofkirkleyhall@gmail.com and www.friendsofkirkleyhall.org

Callerton Garden and Flower Club

Demonstrator Christine Ogle will attend the club's meeting at 2pm on Wednesday February 12th, in the downstairs lounge of Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road. Visitors welcome at £7.

Ponteland Community Partnership

Come to observe a meeting and share your ideas, concerns and expectations

for improving the quality of life in the community. All welcome. The next meeting is at 7pm on Wednesday February 19th in the new venue - Bishop Merton Room, St Mary's Parish Hall, Thornhill Road. Visit: pontelandcommunitypartnership.co.uk

Ponteland Local History Society

Sarah Reay will give a talk titled 'The Half-shilling Curate: A Personal Account of War and Faith 1914-1918' at 7.30pm on Thursday February 20th at St Mary's Parish Centre, Thornhill Road. Visitors welcome £2.

Ponteland Railway Films

Railway and archive films will be shown on Saturday February 22nd in Ponteland Parish Hall, Thornhill Road, Ponteland, at 3pm and 7.30pm.

Embroiderers Guild

Ponteland Branch
Embroidery discipline blackwork will feature in a mini-workshop run by Lynne Hardy at Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road, from 2pm to 4pm on Monday February 24th. All welcome at £4, with membership of the branch and the Embroiderers Guild is open to all, whatever their level of experience. Further information from secretary Penny Ford on 01670 788278 or penelopeford636@btinternet.com

Ponteland Civic Society

Mike Duffy, well-known for informative historical talks about the North East, starts a new season with a discussion of 'Lindisfarne - Yesterday and Today' at 7.30pm on Monday February 24th at Ponteland Club, Merton Way. Visitors welcome at £2.

Ponteland Wildlife

Group Meetings

On Tuesday March 3rd Chris Metherell will give a talk on 'Isle of May Uncovered' at 7.30pm in St Mary's Parish Centre, Thornhill Road. Admission £2 and includes refreshments.

World Day of Prayer Service 2020

With a theme of 'Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk!', written by the women of Zimbabwe in Africa, this event is at 2.30pm on Friday March 6th at United Reformed Church, Broadway, Darras Hall. The service will be followed by refreshments.

Whistling Sheep Ceilidh Band

The band's fundraiser ceilidh in aid of mountain rescue is at 7pm on Friday March 6th at Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road, with families welcome, food included and a bar available. The band meets on alternate Mondays after school at Ponteland High School. Visit: whistlingssheepceilidhband.btck.co.uk

Pont Badminton Club

Enthusiasts meet every Friday evening between 7.30pm and 9pm at Ponteland Leisure Centre, with adults of all ages assured a warm welcome. Turn up, or call 07986 388822 for more information.

Ponteland Methodist Church Carpet Bowls Club

This friendly club meets on Mondays from 1.30pm to 3.30pm and Fridays from 7.30pm to 9.30pm. Experience not necessary. For further info contact Barbara on (01661) 824652.

Inner Wheel Club of Ponteland

This group meets the first Tuesday of each month, with speakers, cups of tea and occasional days out. Any lady interested should contact Eleanor Carr on (01661) 871768.

Ponteland Photographic Society

Members, from beginners upwards, meet in Merton Hall at 7.30pm each Monday to enjoy a varied programme which includes visiting speakers who expand knowledge and expertise. The society endeavours to be inclusive and welcoming. Visit www.pontelandphotographicsociety.co.uk

Line Dancing

Dancers meet every Wednesday at 6.30pm in St Mary's Church Hall, Thornhill Road, offering laughs, friendship and exercise to music, at £20 for 10 sessions. Dancing is at beginner and intermediate level and new dancers are welcome. A free taster session is offered. Contact Rosemary Gray (01661) 822493.

Walking For Health

A free weekly short health walk takes place every Tuesday, starting at 10.30am at Ponteland Leisure Centre. All welcome. Assistance dogs only. Contact Gordon Allan on 07936 135469 for more information.

Ponteland Village Bridge Club

Players of Duplicate Bridge meet every Friday at 7pm at Merton Hall, Merton Road, with about 20 boards tackled. Partners can be found, if needed. Contact Pete Ford on peteford24@hotmail.com or 07739 208 308.

Creative Writing Group

Led by a qualified tutor, this club aims to inspire and encourage the writing of poetry and stories through stimulating workshop sessions in a friendly and supportive group. New or experienced writers welcome. It meets on Wednesday mornings at 9.30am in members' homes around Ponteland. Contact Claire at claire@claire276.plus.com or on (01434) 605276.

Ponteland Methodist Church

Sunday services are held at 10am and 6.30pm, with children's activities during the 10am service. The 'Open Door' café is on Mondays from 1pm to 4pm serving soup, home-bakes & drinks. Toddler club is on Thursdays at 9.30. A warm welcome is given to all activities, including walking groups, carpet bowls, Girls and Boys Brigade, fellowship groups, prayer meeting. Contact Ann Cooper (01661) 824347 or anncooperx@gmail.com

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Jason Long as the White Rabbit, with Jasmine Lever as Alice



Becky Conroy, one of two actresses to play Alice



Jules Stevenson Warrender as The Mad Hatter

No holes in flawless production of classic tale

Audiences were taken to a theatrical wonderland of their own when amateur actors staged their version of one of the world's most famous fantasies.

The Ponteland Repertory Society with its Preppies Youth Theatre's musical version of 'Alice', based on Lewis Carroll's nineteenth century story Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, proved a box office hit.

However, the Rep's players admit their modern interpretation of the classic, by James Leisy and Carl Eberhard and shown at Ponteland Memorial Hall, proved a challenge as real as any they have known.

They say the songs, which were new and unknown to the cast, had to be learned from scratch, a process which demanded concentration and endless rehearsal.

Director Jonny Woollett was credited with using all his drama coaching and theatrical skills to craft a final and genuinely intriguing production.

The leading role of Alice was shared between Becky Conroy and Jasmine Lever, young actors from the Preppies, who proved convincing in their roles and made for interesting Alices.

Rep spokeswoman Lesley Eltringham said: "They are to be congratulated on rising to the difficulty of the role and the solo songs which they sang so well in performance thanks to the leadership of the Musical Director, Amy Baker.

"Similarly many other actors contributed to a successful show, including Jules Stevenson Warrender as a very crazy Mad Hatter and Jason Long as the neurotic White Rabbit.

"Tweedledum and Tweedledee provided comedy played by the two teams of Abi Cuthbertson and Gigi Tanner and, in alternating performances, Amy Sparshott and Amelia Long.

"All the cast, backstage crew and front of house team, too many to name, worked hard to give our local, loyal audience a fun, pre-Christmas evening."

The Rep's next productions are Romeo and Juliet, at Hexham Abbey on Friday, February 14 and Saturday, February 15th, and The Importance of Being Earnest, at Ponteland Memorial Hall from Thursday, March 26 to Saturday, March 28.

Ponteland Rep and Preppies welcome interest from people who would like to join a friendly amateur theatre group, and information available by emailing secretary@pontelandrep.co.uk

Bookworms respond to libraries' consultation

A 12-week public overview on the future shape of Northumberland's library service – including that in Ponteland - has received more than 1,800 responses in its first month.

Launched in December, Northumberland County Council (NCC) is asking residents to submit their views on how the service should be delivered in the years ahead.

Council chiefs hope the consultation will identify the most valued aspects of libraries and barriers to use, with the results helping them focus on priorities.

The review comes three years after a previous shake-up led to the controversial switch of Ponteland's library to a new site amid annual budget cuts of £100,000 to 2021.

However, a new library for the town is part of a £43m school and leisure development expected to be completed by the summer.

As a statutory service the council is required to carry out a public consultation exercise if changes to libraries are proposed.

Cllr Cath Homer, NCC's cabinet member for Culture, Arts, Leisure and Tourism, said: "Thanks to everyone who has already submitted their feedback, we are delighted with the response so far and would encourage everyone to share their views.

"Northumberland's library service has undergone many changes in recent years, however we feel that now is the time to take a thorough look at the service and make sure that it is serving the needs of our communities both now and into the future."

The questionnaire is online at bit.ly/NCCLibraryConsultation and as a paper copy in all libraries.

Ponteland's is one of four planned new libraries in Northumberland, with others in Alnwick, Morpeth and Cramlington.

Group gets in tune to better health

A Ponteland keep fit leader is boosting wellbeing by encouraging people to stretch their vocal chords instead of their muscles.

Janet Walton, who has run her Fabulous Fitness 50+ exercise classes for the past seven years, has set up the Ponteland Community Singers.

Through the group, she aims to inspire better personal health by participants launching into song – and two dozen people are already in tune to her idea.

That's how many attendees are taking part in the married mum-of-one's sessions, which take place from 1.30pm to 3pm on Thursdays at the United Reformed Church, on Broadway.

Janet, of Edgehill, established the group in August after a chance watch of the two-part TV show *Our Dementia Choir*, presented by actress Vicky McClure.

She said: "Dementia is so heart-breaking but the joy that singing brought to those in the show was joyous and I knew I had to try to bring singing into the community.



Members of the Ponteland Community Singers prepare to perform

"We now have the Ponteland Community Singers, which is not a choir, it's an all-inclusive singing group made up of people who love to sing, whether in tune or not.

"Singing can be an excellent form of exercise for your lungs, strengthening your diaphragm and stimulating circulation.

"According to health experts, it can also help strengthen throat and palate muscles, which help reduce snoring and sleep apnoea."

Janet added: "It's also a natural anti-depressant which by releasing endorphins, the feel-good brain chemical, you can feel uplifted and happy.

"Making music in any form is also

relaxing, and singing releases stored muscle tension and decreases the levels of a stress hormone called cortisol in your blood stream.

"It can also improve blood circulation, meaning more oxygen reaches the brain, improving mental alertness, concentration, and memory."

Janet's classes, aimed at people of all ages but mainly catering for the over-50s, sing a variety of standards by Matt Monro, Perry Como, Doris Day, Dusty Springfield, Petula Clark and Lionel Ritchie.

Car parking is available, and each class costs £5 which pays for refreshments before and after singing.

More information is available from Janet on (01661) 823435.

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Ponteland Schools and Leisure

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Dear Resident,

WE have been back in full swing after the festive period and continue to make good progress with the Works, having just completed week 62 of our programmed 85 weeks period for the construction of the Schools, Leisure Centre and Community Crescent Hub. The new community Fire Station is complete and went operational mid-January 2020.

During January we have continued to progress the external envelope to all areas and have made significant progress to all areas. The buildings are now almost fully weathertight, and the teaching wings to the Primary and Secondary Schools have progressed extremely well, with the finishing trades significantly advanced to these areas. The works are planned to progress with the close-out of the teaching wings then progressively move through the Crescent areas, working in a northerly direction.

Overall, works are progressing well, and the Project is on track for hand-over in summer 2020.

What works you will see in the next 4 weeks?

- Dropping of scaffolds to all elevations of the Secondary School.
- Continue to progress M&E installations to the Secondary School.
- Continue to progress the internal fit-out to the Secondary School
- Complete Brickwork to the Primary School.
- Continue to progress M&E installations to the Primary School.
- Continue to progress the internal fit-out to the Primary School
- Continue to progress external works to the Primary School.
- Continue to progress partition works to all Crescent areas.
- Continue to progress M&E installations to all Crescent areas.
- Substantially complete Curtain Walling installations to all Crescent areas.
- Continue to progress installation of swimming pools to the Pool Hall.
- Progress installation of all services to the Pool Hall.
- Progress connection of roof top mechanical equipment.
- Continue to progress installation of M&E services to the Spa and Gym areas.
- Progress with the demolition of the existing Fire Station.
- Progress with the construction of the Southern Car Park.

Since returning at the beginning of January, we have been fortunate with the weather, and are making the most of the drier spell that we have been experiencing. We hope this continues as it will allow significant progress to be made to both the building and the external areas, and help to keep the site and surrounding roads and paths clear. There are a number of large crane lifts scheduled over the next month or so, to allow the placement of the roof top mechanical equipment, which is fundamental to the operation of the building as a whole.

Through January, we have had a few post-completion items to undertake at the new Fire Station which were requested by the end user. We are happy to say that these works are now complete and as noted above, the Fire Service took up occupancy of the facility mid-January.

Watch Points through February

- **Daily traffic movements in and out of the site**
- **HGV deliveries with M&E services materials, Finishes materials, and miscellaneous deliveries**
- **Installation of curtain walling systems**
- **Installation of Roof Top Mechanical Equipment, especially crane operations**
- **Demolition operations to the existing Fire Station building.**

CSR & Project Quick Facts

The Project has once again been registered with the construction industry Open Doors Week, which runs week of 16th March 2020. We plan to conduct 2 tours per day – 9:30am and 1:30pm – from Monday 16th March through to Thursday 19th March 2020. You can register and book on to a tour at the following link: https://opendoors.construction/site/550#loc_about. This is a great opportunity to see the project as we approach the final stages and provides a glimpse of what's to come when the project is handed over this summer.



If you have any concerns or queries regarding the works, please feel free to contact us:



Roddy Graham
Project Leader
07849 098786
ksne.ponteland@kier.co.uk



Andy Todhunter
Operations Lead
07773 243081



Fairness in trade is the talk of the town

Stories of female empowerment through equality of world trade will be told in Ponteland this month and next to encourage residents to think more closely about where they source their goods.

The tales will take front stage in events organised as part of the Fairtrade Fortnight 2020, which runs from February 24 to March 8 and is aimed at promoting financial fairness in business.

Ponteland has been recognised as a Fairtrade Town, one that encourages companies to use Fairtrade products and practices, since 2012.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2020 sees individuals, firms and groups across the UK highlight the work of people who grow food and make clothes but who are often exploited and underpaid.

Tales of empowerment will be told at St Mary's Church on Sunday, February 23 and Wednesday, March 4, and at Ponteland Methodist Church's Open Door Cafe on Monday, February 24, from 1pm to 4pm.

They will also be heard at St Matthew's Church annual Big Brew on Saturday, February 29, from 10am to noon, and at Merton Hall's Fairtrade Coffee Morning on Friday, March 6, from 9.30am to 11.30am.

All sessions feature a Fairtrade Stall, with that at St Matthew's also having a tombola, raffle, and cake and bric-a-brac stalls.

Steve Helm, Chairman Ponteland Fairtrade Town Steering Group, said: "This year the focus is on the special role of women farmers producing cocoa for our chocolate."



Anna Robinson offers advice at a Ponteland Fairtrade stall

"We will hear a story of female empowerment and the art and joy of storytelling. They will tell their stories to the world, in communities, to both young and old."

"All are welcome to these events, to find out how the small extra cost you pay for Fairtrade products, helps people work their own way out of poverty, with dignity."

Student Max has world at his feet

Talented Ponteland footballer Max Thompson has netted a prestigious scholarship with Premier League side Newcastle United.

The Year 11 Ponteland High School pupil, who excels as a goalkeeper, will take up the offer next season.

School chiefs say Max is a highly promising player and securing the scholarship is a tremendous achievement.

They hope it is his first step on a ladder to become a full-time professional footballer.

Headteacher Kieran McGrane said: "Max is a fantastic young man who has combined day release at Newcastle United with maintaining a keen focus on his academic studies."

"He is a delightful student who is humble and modest about



Footballer Max Thompson

his sporting achievements.

"Max can now set his focus on preparing well for his GCSE exams knowing that his immediate future is secure. We wish him all the very best."

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Ponteland Town Council update

Grants go-ahead

Councillors approved grants of £250 for the Ponteland Beer Festival and £500 for Tynedale Hospice at Home, which will support a volunteer-delivered patient transport service which assists people to attend hospital and clinical treatment appointments.

Ponteland Town Council budget for 2020-21

The council approved its budget for 2020-21 and agreed a precept of £422,018 which would be requested from Northumberland County Council. This represented no increase on a Band D property and a less than a two per cent increase on the precept. A sum of money would be made available for projects. The council also considered its current reserves and agreed to consider using general reserves if necessary to fund agreed projects. It was agreed to increase allotment rents by £1 across the board for 2020-21 and details of the increase in cemetery fees should be considered by the Cemetery Committee in the first instance and agreed at a future council meeting.

Remembrance Sunday

A suggestion for a display of poppies at three locations in Ponteland in November has been made. They were an idea for a display at Coates Green, the sensory garden and the Pele tower. The Clerk was asked to check if any permission for temporary displays was needed. A plea for knitted or crocheted poppies of 3in to 4in in diameter is expected to be made at a later date. In the meantime, anyone interested in assisting should contact Councillor Karen Overbury at k.overbury@ponteland-tc.gov.uk or ring the council office on (01661) 825092 to leave a message and Councillor Overbury will reply.

Northumberland County Council report

Councillor Richard Dodd reported that Northumberland County Council was currently going through its budget process for 2020-21. He reported he had a meeting with the Highways Manager to discuss work to be carried out at the Merton Way north car park. He also reported that by the end of the four-year term of the current administration, over £100m would have been spent on roads and potholes in Northumberland.

This report is based on the minutes of the Town Council meeting on January 15.



Members of Ponteland Ramblers take a break from a walk

Ramblers take new outdoor programme in their stride

Walking enthusiasts have put a spring in their steps by announcing an exciting new six-month programme of fortnightly strolls around the region until late summer.

Ponteland Ramblers will go up hill and down dale – and along riverbanks and even across a famous coastal causeway – during their thirteen Sunday walks which run to July.

Starting on February 9 with a seven-mile hike around Corbridge, they will also take in a selection of the North East's most beautiful, and interesting, locations on other days.

These include Hayden Bridge, Burnopfield, Holy Island and Rothbury – and even a Lake District weekend.

The group also hosts half-day walks, which can be extended to full days and with the option of a pub lunch, on the second and fourth Wednesday of every month.

A group spokesman said: "The Ramblers is a national charity whose goal is to protect the ability of people to enjoy the sense of

freedom and benefits that come from being outdoors on foot.

At regional and local level, it is involved in protecting and expanding the infrastructure and places that people go walking.

"If you enjoy the fantastic coast or countryside of the area, want to improve your fitness and enjoy the company of likeminded people, give these walks a go,

"The Ponteland group always welcomes new members, without any initial obligation."

Ponteland Ramblers, one of the many groups affiliated to the national Ramblers, has been involved in several local footpath improvements.

These include the establishment of a right of way from Darras Hall to the edge of the estate, which is now provided with a convenient bridge and is well used by locals.

For full information about Sunday walks, visit www.ramblers.org.uk/ponteland or call Steve Edwards on (01661) 886310.

Information about Wednesday walks is from John le Rolland on (01661) 825408.



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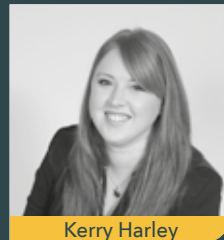
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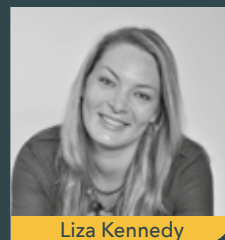
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