

**MAYOR of PONTELAND**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19**

**24th March 2019**  
**Alan Varley**

## **CONTENTS:**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **2. SUMMARY**

#### **2.1 Vision and Aim**

#### **2.2 Partnership Working**

### **3. WHAT WE DO**

#### **3.1 Councillors and Staff**

##### **3.1.1 Ponteland Town Council Status and Role**

##### **3.1.2 Website**

#### **3.2 Government Consultation and Legislation**

#### **3.3 Youth Work**

#### **3.4 Community Cleaning**

#### **3.5 Community Halls**

#### **3.6 Ponteland Park**

#### **3.7 Environment Working Party**

#### **3.8 Pont News & Views**

#### **3.9 Grants**

#### **3.10 Play Areas**

#### **3.11 Highways Working Party**

#### **3.12 Planning Committee**

#### **3.13 Development in Ponteland**

#### **3.14 Meritorious Service Award**

##### **3.14.1 Gordon Allan**

### **4. THE BUDGET**

### **5. PRESTWICK CEMETERY**

### **6. EVENTS**

### **7. CONCLUSION**

#### **7.1 Complaints and Support**

#### **7.2 Thanks**

**Appendix A PTC Councillors and Staff**

**Appendix B PTC Committees/ Working Parties**

**Appendix C PTC Representatives on Local Organisation**

**Appendix D PTC Budget for 2018-19 and 2019-20**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this eleventh anniversary year of the formation of Ponteland Town Council, I take pleasure in presenting the Mayor's Annual Report for 2018-19.

The annual report to the electors provides the opportunity to summarise the work over the last year. The report will be on the website and printed copies are available.

Ponteland Town Council (PTC) has 12 Councillors, 3 for each Ward of North, South, East and West. Elections were held on 4 May 2017. Six members of the last Council retired, five new Councillors were elected and, to fill a vacancy, a further Councillor was co-opted.

I was elected Mayor by my fellow Councillors in May 2017. My fellow councillors chose to re-elect me as Mayor in May 2018. It remains a great honour to be Mayor. The role continues to be busy. You meet many nice people and deal with a variety of issues.

Town Councillors are unpaid volunteers and they all have the interests of Ponteland at heart. Councillors ensure that decisions are taken democratically by consensus or by vote.

Council decisions are implemented by paid staff and Ponteland benefits from having excellent and loyal Town Council staff. There are four staff - one is full time, 3 are part time and their combined hours equate to 2.6 full time equivalent. The staff action a range of tasks within an overall financial responsibility of around £500,000. Last year, PTC transitioned (in a financial sense) to the digital age. Monthly cheque signing is now extinct, and all transactions are conducted 'online'. The new computer system has been introduced meaning all documents are securely stored on the 'cloud' and this continues to work well.

## **2. SUMMARY**

### **2.1 Vision and Aim**

To provide support and value for money services for the residents of Ponteland. The Council promotes pride in Ponteland and encourages the residents of Ponteland to take part in making Ponteland a place where we all want to live.

### **2.2 Partnership Working**

Much of our work is carried out with others. This includes work in Ponteland Park (with the Friends of Ponteland Park), Community Cleaning (with the County Council), Youth Work at the High School, with Ponteland Community Partnership (on Pont News & Views) and with the Darras Hall Estate Committee (for the bridle path and speed monitors).

We continue to take a collaborative approach on replies to major consultations with the Civic Society, Ponteland Green Belt group, the PCP and Ponteland's County Councillors.

We also give small grants to several local organisations that are listed in Section 3.11.

A major involvement for PTC has been in the Northumbria in Bloom competition. Ponteland won a Gold award again in 2018 for the seventh successive year. Ponteland was invited to take part in Britain in Bloom for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 2018. An enormous amount of work ensued, and enormous credit should be given to the team which, after a Silver Gilt award in 2017, were rewarded with a Gold award in 2018. My congratulations go to our Environment Working Party. Some residents plant flowers and shrubs at corners and junctions. Thanks go to those residents who have brightened up the landscape and we appreciate the support of local

businesses and volunteers too.

### **3. WHAT WE DO**

#### **3.1 Councillors and Staff**

The Town Clerk and staff carry out mandatory functions required by law such as the production of agenda, minutes and public accounts. Added to these functions are the daily tasks which make Ponteland a good place to live. A few examples are:

- (i) Maintenance of Ponteland Park
- (ii) Public Conveniences at Thornhill Road
- (iii) Prestwick Cemetery
- (iv) Allotments
- (v) Gritting of Merton Way, Broadway and other key paths.
- (vi) Play areas
- (vii) Some grass cutting (on Coates Green and other key areas),
- (viii) Christmas Lighting
- (ix) Environmental activities (such as removal of graffiti and repair of damage)
- (x) Litter picking/Dog waste bins,

##### **3.1.1 Ponteland Town Council Status and Role**

Northumberland has 148 Parish and Town Councils. Ponteland is one of the bigger Councils serving approximately 11,000 residents. During the year we have over 60 meetings through our Committees, Working Parties and Council. Meetings require agendas, minutes and working documents as well as the implementation of decisions. There are also a number of ad-hoc meetings. In addition, the Council tries to send a representative to outside bodies that influence life in Ponteland. The organisations are listed in Appendix C.

The Town Council holds a full meeting of Councillors on the second Wednesday of every month. Before the meeting starts there is a public question time where written questions are answered. The public are welcome to attend meetings of the full Council, our Planning Committee and Cemetery Committee.

Quite often, residents ask for clarification on what is a Town Council responsibility and what is a County Council responsibility. PTC is not the decision maker on Planning, Highways, Schools, Health, and Social Services. These services plus many others are the responsibility of Northumberland County Council (NCC).

##### **3.1.2 Website**

The PTC duties are listed on our website and the address is: [www.ponteland-tc.gov.uk](http://www.ponteland-tc.gov.uk)  
The site includes Councillors details, minutes and agendas, copies of Pont News and Views, budgetary details and news. Thanks go to the staff for their work on updating the website.

#### **3.2 Government Consultations and Legislation**

Ponteland Town Council is a consultee on planning matters and replies to all consultations and we always meet the deadlines.

PTC supports the prioritisation of developing brownfield sites. PTC and thousands of Ponteland people had objected in particular to three outline planning applications for housing development

in the Green Belt. The change in administration at NCC and their stated commitment not to build on Green Belt sites has brought welcome relief, so much so that two major developments have been withdrawn by their proposers - by Lugano at Dissington and by Banks at Clickemin

### **3.3 Youth Work**

The provision of youth work is currently being reviewed in Ponteland. There have been some cases of anti-social behaviour in Ponteland that have necessitated increased monitoring by the Police. PTC remain committed to closer involvement with the Police and other organisations in Ponteland to tackle such unwelcome behaviour in our community. PTC has spent in excess of £7,000 on repairing and updating the CCTV system and, furthermore, purchased CCTV cameras, located at Merton Hall which gives a good view over Main Street and the entrance to Ponteland Park.

### **3.4 Community Cleaning**

The main responsibility for the general cleanliness of the Community (grass cutting, litter removal, graffiti removal, etc) lies with the County Council. However, in order to augment this work PTC has spent over £15,000 on litter, dog waste collection and additional grass cuts from NCC.

We have a good working relationship with the NCC Neighbourhood Services Team, but litter is a recurring problem and we need help to reduce its impact. The assistance of several residents in picking up litter is greatly appreciated. PTC has increased the number of litter picker volunteers to around 16 and this helps to improve the quality of life in Ponteland. More volunteers are still welcome.

Fly Tipping is a problem and there is a contact on the NCC website home page called "Fly Tipping". Please report any dumping of bags, commercial waste or rubble to this website.

I had hoped to announce the arrival of an Environmental Enforcement Officer, employed by NCC in Ponteland for two days per week, but paid for by PTC. Unfortunately, this employee's arrival has been delayed.

### **3.5 Community Halls**

Village Halls provide cohesion to the community and there are a number of Community Halls such as Dalton and the Memorial Hall which are supported financially by PTC. Councillor Alan Hall is a member of the Committee of the Memorial Hall.

Merton Hall is self-financing and continues to grow its income. Trustees include Councillor Greenwell who is the Treasurer and Hall Manager, plus Councillors Ahmed and Johnson. Merton Hall has a Committee that runs day to day operations and the Hall has around 35 volunteers.

Ponteland also benefits from four self-funding Church halls - St Mary's, the URC, St Matthews and the Methodist Church.

### **3.6 Ponteland Park**

Maintenance of the Park has continued to benefit from the help of the Friends of Ponteland Park (FOPP). Ponteland Park is our major asset and continual investment is required to maintain this much-loved facility.

### **3.7 Environment Working Party (EWP)**

The Environment Working Party improves Ponteland's appearance. Great efforts are made with floral displays and the 2018 display was special leading to another Gold Award in Northumbria in Bloom – for the 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year and, for the first time, a Gold award in the Britain in Bloom competition. Thanks go to our contractors, Iain Clough, Michael Champion, Jim Scott, Derek and Calum Sherlock, our Town Clerk Kath Mavin and the Chair and members of the Working Party. I must also thank all of the volunteers who assisted with both entries last year. In particular, Robin Ramsay, Joyce Butcher and David Goodchild.

The plaque, given by the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust, has been sited in front of Merton Hall's conservatory. This plaque commemorates the use of Ponteland Airfield between 1916-19.

### **3.8 Pont News & Views**

Pont News and Views (PNV) is a popular publication. It is self-financing and distributed to all residents. We congratulate Chris Jennings, the Editor who runs PNV.

### **3.9 Grants**

Each year PTC allocates a small amount of money to help local organisations in their work in Ponteland. Recipients of the grants in 2018-19 include:

Holy Saviour Church Milbourne  
Community Action Northumberland  
Ponteland Rugby Club  
Ponteland Rotary Club  
Ponteland Lions (grants towards installation of defibrillators)  
Dalton Village Hall  
Great North Air Ambulance  
Ponteland Memorial Hall  
Ponteland Community Partnership  
Darras Hall Estate Committee  
Sport Tynedale  
New Year's Eve firework display  
Tynedale Hospice at Home  
North East War Memorials Project  
Richard Coates Primary PTC (for publication of the history of the school publication)

### **3.10 Play Areas**

PTC is responsible for Play areas at Callerton Lane, Twizell Place and Guardians Court. The Town Council held a long lease with NCC for the land where Callerton Lane play area and the skate park were located. NCC needed that land back to use as the exit point for the construction vehicles to the new schools & leisure complex. NCC is providing a new location for a play area but has also agreed to provide a temporary area further up Callerton Lane until construction is completed. This area will only contain a reduced number of pieces of smaller equipment but will provide a facility during the construction of the sports and leisure complex.

### 3.11 Highways Working Party (HWP)

There is now a restriction on the speed limit to 20mph on Jackson Avenue and a temporary parking restriction on Dunsgreen.

We have Speed Indicator Signs to remind motorists that there is a speed limit on local roads. The HWP has increased the focus on speeding in Ponteland through the installation of additional Speed Indicator Display Signs (SIDS).

Car parking remains an issue of increasing concern in Ponteland. It is clear that additional building in the town has not been matched by extra car parking provision. Furthermore, Ponteland's proximity to Newcastle Airport has led to some abuse of our free parking spaces. The HWP monitors abuse of parking in Ponteland and is liaising with NCC over enforcement.

The major plans to improve parking in the Merton Way area came to fruition during the summer of 2018. Disc parking in County Council owned car parks was also introduced. I think that we can now agree that this is a vast improvement and thanks are due to Councillors Greenwell and Dodd for their dogged persistence.

The HWP is an active group and it benefits from the attendance of an NCC officer at meetings. Thanks are due to Jeanette Dodd, the Deputy Clerk for administering the work.

### 3.12 Planning Committee

The PTC Planning Committee, chaired by Councillor Mrs Johnson, meets every two weeks. The number of planning applications that the Town Council is consulted on is increasing as the amount of development in Ponteland grows. Ponteland has a high number of planning applications averaging 202 per annum over 8 years. Our Planning Committee examines each application seriously, only making objections on material planning considerations.

YEAR	APPLICATIONS CONSULTED	OBJECTIONS BY PTC	REFUSED BY NCC
2011	183	16	5
2012	194	9	3
2013	185	12	6
2014	205	21	5
2015	210	10	3
2016	216	22	9
2017	214	29	2
2018	215	33	1
<b>UPDATE AVERAGE PER YEAR</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>19 (9.4% of applications)</b>	<b>4 (2% of applications)</b>

Residents are reminded that Ponteland Town Council is a Planning **Consultee** and it is not the Planning Authority. PTC does not make the planning decision. The Planning Committee reviews all applications for the parish area carefully. They comment on some and submit an objection where they feel it is necessary.

### **3.13 Development in Ponteland**

As previously mentioned, the schools and leisure complex application is now under way. It is supported by NCC, PTC and parents of those children who will become users.

Development in Medburn is causing much concern to residents, particularly those whose properties front The Avenue. I recently visited that road to see the damage caused by the construction vehicles and it is truly horrific.

The development of the Police HQ site for housing is also proceeding. All three of these developments will have an effect on the traffic in Ponteland and it will not be favourable at certain times of the day. Please be aware of this and I would like to encourage you all to think about whether your car journey is really necessary.

### **3.14 Meritorious Service Award**

The effort required to make Ponteland a success cannot be achieved by the Council alone. PTC thanks all those residents who put in time as individuals or through organisations to enrich the quality of life in Ponteland. Each year a meritorious service award is made. In the Council office, there is a board that lists the recipients of the Council's Meritorious Service Award and it is time to add a new name for this year.

#### **3.14.1 Gordon Allan**

It therefore gives the Town Council great pleasure in presenting this small token of appreciation to Gordon Allan.

## **4. The Budget**

PTC works hard to minimise the increase in local precept.

In 2018-19 the PTC part of the precept for a band D household was £72.43 and this increases to £73.87 in 2019-20 – an increase of only £1.44. This demonstrates our commitment to delivering value for money services.

The budget precept for 2018/19 was £404,383 and for 2019-20 will be £414,591. Details of the budget breakdown are included in Appendix D.

## **5. PRESTWICK CEMETERY**

The running of Prestwick Cemetery became PTC's responsibility in 2013. PTC pays NCC a service level agreement for some work in the Cemetery but in addition, certain activities such as hedge cutting, and minor improvements are carried out by PTC. Since PTC took over responsibility we have had good reports from residents and we monitor the service and pricing offered by other authorities.

For information there are on average 14 burials a year at the Cemetery. The number of burials of cremated remains has risen to 14 this year. There are also on average 5 burials in the woodland section each year.

The cemetery is self-financing, and it is run at no extra cost to Ponteland precept payers. In 2017 the Council agreed to a significant improvement in the design and layout of the cemetery.

## 6. EVENTS

There have been a number of memorable events during the year and these ranged from prize giving events for gardeners and students to fund raising concerts.

It is evident that Ponteland people are turning out for events and in record numbers too.

- On New Year's Eve, fireworks in the village pulled in the numbers and on 1 January, Ponteland's annual wheelbarrow race was witnessed by a large crowd and the winner's name was added to the Display Board in the Council office.
- In April, the Beer Festival, now over three days attracted around 3000 people.
- Big attendances were reported for Party in the Park and Music in the Park in June and at the Rotary's Duck Race in September.
- This was followed in November by a Remembrance service and refreshments in the Memorial Hall for many attendees. Last year was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the end of World War 1. the Town Council worked closely with the Vicar of St. Mary's Church, Reverend Paul Allinson to commemorate this event. The Primary schools helped with summer planting with a WW1 theme of Poppies in some areas; a bug hotel was constructed by the schools which is located in St Mary's Churchyard; the Primary and Middle schools participated in a poster competition; grants were given for tea parties in care homes in Ponteland; volunteers at St Mary's made some commemorative kneelers which are located in the Church; silent soldiers were on display at the War Memorial; a special service was held for schoolchildren including one of the nurseries on the 9<sup>th</sup> November at St. Mary's; afterwards crosses with the name of the Ponteland men killed in WW1 were planted in St. Mary's garden of remembrance; wreaths were also placed on each of the three Commonwealth War Graves in the churchyard; the Remembrance Day event at the War Memorial was attended by many more people and commemorative orders of service were handed out. The overall winner of the poster competition had their artwork on the front cover and many more were included inside. Two pupils from the High school read out the names of the fallen at the Remembrance Service. Refreshments were provided afterwards at the Memorial Hall. The day finished with a Celebration of Peace with the lighting of the Beacon at the top of St. Mary's church. Hundreds of people came together to sing song. Candles and lanterns were handed out; the bugler played the Last Post and many people viewed the display in the Church. The volunteers of St. Mary's Church laid on refreshments afterwards at the Parish Centre. Our thanks must go to all those who worked so hard to make these events happen. Thanks, are also due to the businesses who had poppy displays in their windows.

## CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Complaints and Support

There are a number of issues that recur as complaints. We ask local residents for their continued support please in avoiding:

- littering, speeding, inconsiderate parking, parking on verges and pavements and unauthorised overnight parking

and, we thank and ask for the continued support of residents please in promoting:

- greenery in frontages and hedges and colours in borders

### 7.2 Thanks

In summary, what we achieve is the result of work by all Councillors, particularly those who chair a committee or working party and I would like to thank all our unpaid, volunteer Councillors.

A big acknowledgement must go to our dedicated office staff, namely, Kath Mavin our Town Clerk, Jeanette Dodd, our Deputy Town Clerk, Caroline Thompson our Administrative Assistant and Bev Wales, our Receptionist.

Last but not least are our Contractors, Iain Clough, Michael Champion, Jim Scott and Derek & Calum Sherlock whose work is appreciated by everyone in Ponteland. We are often told by residents how magnificent the displays look.

I speak for all the Councillors when I say a very big **THANK YOU** to everyone for all your hard work and dedication.

Alan Varley  
24<sup>th</sup> March 2019

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