

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT MERTON HALL ON 12TH OCTOBER 2022

Present: Councillor K Overbury (in the Chair)

Councillors S Ahmed, C Caisley, R Dodd, J Ford, A Hall, A Varley and K Woodrow.

PUBLIC QUESTION

A question had been submitted to the Council by Mr Reed relating to the A696. The question had been circulated to Councillors in advance and read as follows:

“It’s long been scientifically established that noise can be bad for your health. Such a source of damaging traffic noise is created by the appalling condition of the A696 carriageway at Bell Villas in Ponteland. This concern has previously been raised with Ponteland Town Council and NCC highways department. The response I have is ‘carriageway improvements are planned but cannot proceed as Streetworks will not give approval to the plan.

Additionally, my complaint 101007802059 to NCC highways department regarding flooding due to blocked gullies on this stretch of road, highways have stated that they plan to clear all blocked gullies when these carriageway improvements are carried out.

Are Ponteland Town Council aware of such a plan?

Could Ponteland Town Council publish details of the scope of carriageway improvements and confirm they will mitigate the traffic noise risk?

Are Ponteland Town Council aware that the impasse between NCC highways and Streetworks is stalling efforts to carry the required drain clearing and hence reduce risk of flooding?”

Councillor Overbury responded with the following:

The Town Council are unaware of the Streetworks approval that you have mentioned in your question.

We would also expect that NCC highways would carry out the clearance of blocked gullies once any carriageway improvements had been carried out. NCC do carry out regular cleansing of gullies along the A696.

When your question was received, NCC were asked for their comments and any further information they could provide us with. The following responses were received from the Highways Manager and Highways programme departments at NCC:

Response from Highways manager

We have planned minor patching and drainage works to be undertaken at the location referred to, however due to Gas Board works we are unable to undertake these works until they have completed their repairs. As well as patching repairs we have also asked our Asset Management Team for this route to be considered for a full resurface treatment under our Local Transport

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PUBLIC QUESTION(Continued)

Plan (LTP). Obviously, I cannot comment on whether or not this will be chosen but will ensure that we complete patching repairs as soon as possible.

Reply from Highways Programme

Whilst funding for capital maintenance of roads has increased over recent years, it is still insufficient to meet all the needs for repairs across the County. This inevitably means that decisions on relative priorities of repairs needed must be made to make the most effective use of the funds that are available. This is done as objectively as possible, taking into account actual road condition, usage, and importance, when determining the priorities of maintenance work to be undertaken.

In addition to the minor patching and drainage works that the Highway's team are proposing, we will give consideration to including this section of road in the 2023-24 Local Transport Plan Capital Maintenance Programme. However, we are unable to guarantee that this road, when considered against all other competing maintenance priorities within the County, will be included in next year's LTP Capital Maintenance Programme. I can however assure you that it will continue to be monitored and given consideration when developing future programmes.

You have also asked us about publication of the details of the scope of 'carriageway improvements' and to confirm that they will mitigate the traffic noise risks. Unfortunately, the County Council do not provide us with this information. We can see if we can locate it for you if you can tell us specifically if it is just this area you are concerned about (i.e. Ponteland).

The Deputy Mayor asked if the County Councillor Dodd or Chair of Ponteland Town Council Highways Working Party had anything to add.

Councillor Dodd stated that he would raise this issue with Councillor John Riddle who was the Portfolio holder for Local Services to investigate the matter. He pointed out that Councillor Darwin was the County Councillor for the East ward and he would also raise this with him. He mentioned that funding was an issue as the County Council had to make significant savings next year.

Councillor Hall responded as Chair of the Highways Working Party and said that this issue had been discussed at a previous Highways meeting and he would ensure it was on the agenda for the next meeting to be held in late October/early November. He assured Mr Reed that the Town Council shared the concerns he had raised but ultimately highways was the responsibility of NCC.

Mr Reed mentioned an email he had received from a senior team leader at NCC highways who had indicated that it was the permit from Streetworks that was holding up the project, not funding. He also disagreed that the drains were cleared. They were still blocked. The road had been flooded to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. He

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PUBLIC QUESTION(Continued)

said residents could not stand at the bus stop at Cecil Court due to flooding issues on the road.

Councillor Varley also sympathised with the issues raised. He had previously walked the area with the Highways Manager at NCC and he explained that he had been advised that gullies were only considered to be blocked when the water does not go away.

In conclusion Mr Reed was thanked for his question and for attending the meeting. He was advised that the issues raised by him would be discussed at the next Town Council Highways Working Party.

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Greenwell, L Darwin, S Johnson and N Sehgal.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hall declared an interest in minute number 57.

53. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 8th JUNE 2022

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13th July 2022 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

54. MATTERS ARISING

Minute 45 Report of Multi Agency meeting held on 16th June

It was reported that the Mayor had agreed to contact Councillor Stewart after the summer.

Councillor Overbury pointed out that the last page of the minutes where the date of the next meeting was set out had been changed to reflect the cancellation of the September meeting due to the period of National Mourning.

55. PLANNING

(i) Planning Committee

Minutes of meetings held on 24th May and 7th June 2022 were circulated for information.

The Deputy Mayor mentioned that an updated map of Medburn had been acquired and copies could be made available to Councillors if needed.

(ii) Report on recent planning decisions

There were no reports.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

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56. GRANT APPLICATION

A grant application had been received from Sport Tynedale to provide continued assistance to individuals in their pursuit of sporting excellence. A grant of £250 had been given to the organisation last year.

RESOLVED – A grant of £250 be awarded to Sport Tynedale.

57. LETTER FROM ROTARY CLUB OF PONTELAND RE SANTAS SLEIGH EVENT IN DECEMBER

A letter from the Rotary Club relating to the above event had been circulated to Councillors for information.

Councillor Hall updated members on progress made to date and plans for the event. It would likely take place over two evenings rather than three and the sleigh would stop at designated points as it was impossible to cover the whole area. He reported that permission had been given by Northumberland County Council to hold the event.

RESOLVED – The information be noted.

Note – Councillor Hall declared an interest in the above.

58. COST OF LIVING AND ENERGY CRISIS

A report by the Mayor had been circulated.

The report mentioned a meeting the Mayor had had with the Reverend Jona Sewell from Ponteland Methodist Church. Two suggestions had been made one of which was to do some work to produce a ‘what’s on’ leaflet for Ponteland showing where the warm spaces were located during the winter months.

A further suggestion had been made for the Town Council to purchase two sheds to provide mini food banks. One would be for the Methodist Church which still required agreement from the church and one for the Town Council.

Both sheds would be painted red, insulated and shelved. It was proposed to locate the Town Council shed on the corner of the Mayor’s driveway as there was no other suitable site. It was envisaged the sheds would be open between 9am and 5pm – Monday to Friday and residents would be asked to donate non-perishable items for anyone in need to take food or toiletries. Collections would be limited to 5-6 items per person.

There was a long discussion on this item however Members were concerned at the likely possibility of vandalism and the location of the Town Council shed. Other locations such as the car park or the Memorial Hall were suggested.

Members asked if there were such initiatives elsewhere in the country. The Clerk reported that this was an idea from the Mayor based on towns and villages who used red phone boxes for community assistance.

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58. COST OF LIVING AND ENERGY CRISIS(Continued)

Councillors did not feel able to approve the suggestion at this time and needed more information on how this would work, and some research carried out about what was already available. It was agreed that the issue of assistance with the energy/cost of living crisis should be a regular agenda item for discussion. The Mayor would be able to discuss this further and provide more information at the next meeting. Some research would also be carried out regarding initiatives already being undertaken.

It was also suggested that the Town Council should signpost anyone in need to the Northumberland Communities Together team at NCC. The Clerk stated that a recent referral had been made by the office staff.

RESOLVED – The issue of the energy and cost of living crisis be included as a regular agenda item for discussion and that the Mayor report further on the suggestion for a red food shed and provide additional information at the next meeting. Details of other initiatives already being undertaken would be researched.

59. NOTICE OF CONCLUSION OF AUDIT

A report by the Clerk in relation to the above had been circulated. The report stated that the External Auditors Report and Certificate had been received on 22 September and this was circulated to Councillors together with a copy of sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Annual Return (AGAR). The auditors, PKF Littlejohn had not raised any issues with the Town Council.

The information was displayed on notice boards and on the Town Council’s website on 27 September for a period of 14 days. The information had to be published by the 30 September.

RESOLVED – The Council approve and accept the External Auditors Report and Certificate for 2021-22 and sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR.

60. EVENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the Events Working Party held on 20 July 2022 had been circulated.

The meeting had discussed various issues such as Party in the Park, Remembrance Sunday and Operation London Bridge. Sadly, HM the Queen had died on 8 September and the various arrangements made had been put into place. Remembrance Sunday had been organised and the Chair pointed out that refreshments would be provided at the Memorial Hall by volunteers free of charge.

There was some discussion re the Council’s future involvement in Party in the Park. Various issues had arisen with the event this year. A suggestion had been made to consider offering a grant to the organisers of the event rather than involve the Council in the various issues such as booking toilets and invoicing for the stage etc.

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60. EVENTS WORKING PARTY(Continued)

A further meeting had been requested by the organisers to discuss the 2023 event. This would be held after the Remembrance Sunday event.

At present, Councillors were minded to suggest that the organisers apply for a grant for the event rather than involve the Council in the various bookings etc that had to be made. This could be discussed further following the meeting to be held with organisers.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Minutes be approved.
- (ii) A meeting be held with the organisers of Party in the Park regarding the Council's current views on their involvement and the possibility of a grant being made available to cover booking of necessary items. A further report would be submitted following that meeting.

61. ENVIRONMENT WORKING PARTY

Minutes of meetings of the Environment Working Party held on 25 July and 28 September 2022 had been circulated. There were several recommendations for approval as set out below:

25 July meeting

Minute 3 relating to the rockery on Main Street

- (i) The Council agreed to the painting of the inside of the bus shelter at the rockery and to the removal of seats and installation of two new seats at an angle to the back wall. Costs would be in the region of £1500 to £2000 depending on the type of seats purchased.
- (ii) The Council agreed to move the seat outside of the Peel House entrance away from the shade and to purchase another planter to match the existing green one in situ at a cost of £350.

Ash trees within Ponteland Park

Quotes had been sought for work to remove Ash trees within the Park that were infected with Ash Dieback. Several trees had been identified and quotes had been sought for their removal.

The Council agreed to accept a quote of a maximum of £4080 from Barry Streets, a local tree surgeon which was based on a day rate. The trees would be removed in December/January time however an application would have to be made to NCC as the trees were covered by TPOs. One urgent removal was needed, and a five-day notice would be submitted to NCC.

28 September meeting

Minute 3 relating to the wall behind the rockery on Main Street

The Council approved a quote of £3332.00 plus VAT for repairs to the wall at the back of the bus shelter on Main Street. This would be funded from the rockery project budget heading.

61. ENVIRONMENT WORKING PARTY(Continued)

Minute 3 (ii) – list of watching brief items

The Council approved the purchase of two new bins one to be placed at the North Road location outlined in the report to the meeting. This was subject to permission being granted by NCC. There was a second request for a bin further up North Road that was still under discussion. The second bin could be used at this location or retained as a spare.

Minute 3 (iii) – allotments

(i) The Council approved the sum of £2500 to acquire the wood to fence off the new plots at the allotments.

(iii) The Council approved the sum of £855 plus VAT for the cutting of the hedges at the allotments and agreed that both items would be funded from the projects budget heading.

Minute 4 Platinum Jubilee commemorative tree

(i) The Council agreed to the purchase of two Oak trees. One for Dunsgreen to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee, and one for the main park entrance in memory of HM the Queen at a cost of £195 each which included VAT.

RESOLVED – The minutes and the recommendations set out above be approved.

62. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd stated that County Councillors were working on their Local Transport Plan (LTP) priorities.

He mentioned that issues had been raised relating to the new Emily Davison school. He assured members that NCC were dealing with the issue and changes had been made. He was in regular contact with the head teacher from the school and the head of education.

He also reported that Ash dieback was a widespread problem across the county which was currently being discussed by the County Council.

County Councillor Jones agreed that Ash dieback was a serious issue that required attention.

She reported that the County Council had agreed its inclusivity plan a few weeks ago. As part of that a community resilience event had been held to discuss the issue. It discussed what communities can do without help, what they can do with a little help and what they could not do.

She mentioned the Northumberland Communities Together team who were able to access help from other departments and agencies for those in need in communities. She shared examples of how they had helped people who were struggling to access help.

63. MAYOR’S REPORT

A report by the Mayor had been circulated for information. The report detailed various events that had been attended by the Mayor and others in September.

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64. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

(i) Minutes of Newcastle Airport Consultative Committee held on 6 September 2022

A copy of the above minutes had been circulated. Councillor Varley had attended the meeting as the Council's representative. He explained that he had been trying to find out the route of the construction traffic for the new solar farm and he advised members of why the particular route had been chosen.

Councillor Varley was asked if he raised the issue of parking with the Airport and he stated that this was raised regularly.

65. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORT

The Accounts Committee approved payments totalling £50,450.47 for August and £34,004.38 for September.

A copy of the monthly budget reports were also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliations for August and September 2022.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the disclosure of the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of schedule 12A in the 1972 Act as indicated below:

66. STAFFING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 27 July had been circulated.

The Chair of the Committee gave a brief update on the current situation in the office.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – THE NEXT MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL WOULD BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 6.15 P.M. AT MERTON HALL

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