

# pontnews&views

FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district



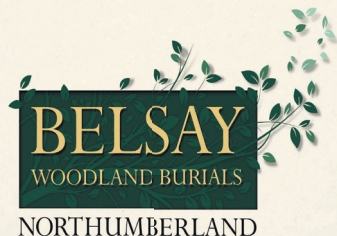
Police appeal after woman  
assaulted in park

D-day looms for £1m  
sporting clubhouse plan

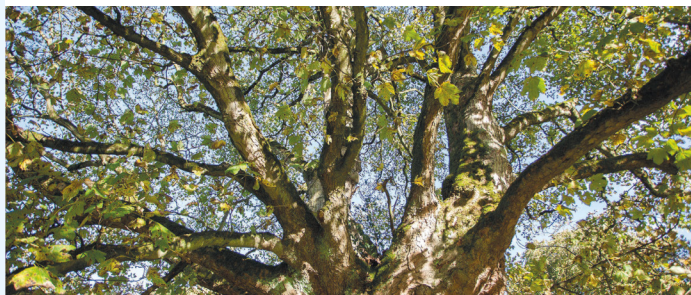
Devoted couple die a month  
apart after 67 years together

## Olé! Wheelbarrow racers raise £3,000 for local charities





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Produced by Cian creative pr





Photo: Keith Robertson

# Race raises over £3,000 for regional charities

**Two regional charities will share more than £3,000 raised in Ponteland's New Year's Day Wheelbarrow Race.**

Huge crowds gathered in the midday sun to watch the 44 teams taking part in the popular annual event, which is believed to date back hundreds of years.

The Open Race was won by James Leiper and Robert Holt, well ahead of the rest of the field in 6 min 20 sec - just two seconds slower than the course record set in 1983. They were followed by Richard and Ella Leiper in second place and third placed Jack and Daniel Johnson.

The Ladies' Race was won by Caitlin Flanagan and Erin Bright in 7 min 46 sec – the second fastest ever recorded time for the Ladies Race! Second was previous multiple winner Joanne Shallcross with Sarah McDougle and third were Charlotte Naughton and Louisa Hamilton.

The Junior Race was won by Cate and Millie Johnson, with runners-up Stephen Scope-Wilson and Joe Lin and Ella and John Leiper in third place.

The event is organised by Ponteland 41 Club and Ponteland Rugby Club with support from The Blackbird Inn and the funds generated will be donated to St. Oswald's Hospice and Tynedale Hospice at Home.

To sponsor a wheelbarrow in next year's race contact Andy Lawson at [andrew\\_lawson@btconnect.com](mailto:andrew_lawson@btconnect.com) or on 07989 355 557.



Photos by Colin Morgan Photography/leisurepics.co.uk. Cover shot: Colin Morgan.





# Stepping out for health and friendship

A group which held 50 health walks last year is now the biggest of its kind in the county, with more than 100 walkers taking part.

Ponteland's Health Walks arranges a free weekly stroll every Tuesday morning to help to boost physical and mental health, while providing a great opportunity to make and cement new friendships.

Led by a group of enthusiastic volunteers, last year 116 participants clocked up a combined total of more than 5,000 miles, the equivalent of walking from Newcastle to Beijing in China.

Organiser Gordon Allan said: "We started our weekly walks in May 2019 and I'm delighted that so many people meet up to walk and chat. Our walks last about an hour to an hour and a half, averaging around about three miles.

"However, as fitness levels improved several people wanted to walk further, so we now have a monthly Friends' Walk where we go further afield, walking five or six miles. We held ten of these walks in 2022, usually on a Friday.

"Last year, 60 people joined us for the very first time and the walks now average 35 people; although numbers can be higher. On ten walks we had over 40 walkers and on November 1 we had 50 walkers. We are now the largest Health Walks group in Northumberland.

"We are a very friendly group and many people have become good friends as a result of meeting up on our walks. A lot of our walkers go for a coffee and chat at the end of the walk.



Photo: John Hewett

"Getting out and about is very important for good mental health. Even on gloomy winter days, you feel happier and healthier simply by stepping out. I am very proud of what we have achieved. However, it wouldn't be possible without a dedicated team of volunteers who give up their own time to plan, organise and recce our walks."

The group meets outside at Ponteland Leisure Centre at 10.30am every Tuesday. To find out more, contact Gordon on 07936 135469.

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"I love my school because it is unique." Jessica Year 3



# Two Ponteland restaurants included in food industry ‘bibles’

Two Ponteland restaurants are celebrating after being included in two food industry ‘bibles’.

Haveli, in Broadway, Darras Hall, has retained its Bib Gourmand in the Michelin Guide 2022 while Eleven, in Main Street, Ponteland, has been included in the latest Good Food Guide.

Haveli's latest entry in the Michelin Guide states: "Michelin Guide's Point Of View: good quality, good value cooking. Haveli means 'grand house' and this neighbourhood restaurant is certainly very smart. Influences come from all over India; try one of the chef's signature curries. Staff combine personality with professionalism."

The Good Food Guide, the longest-standing and best-selling guide to dining out in Great Britain, was equally impressed by Eleven, which was opened in May 2021 by chefs Danny Land and Ryan Carr and front of house manager Stephen Pitfield.

Describing the eatery as an "exciting little restaurant in a Newcastle satellite village", it praises the three-course inspection meal as "a bargain".

It comprised a starter of fermented potato bread and russet apple chunks in whey and pickled walnuts topped with celeriac crisps, venison steak with January King cabbage and venison and quince sausage for the main, cinnamon cookie with pumpkin ice cream and sage caramel for pre-dessert followed by a stack of ricotta gelato, olive oil and clementine cake, and meringue dusted with clementine-leaf powder.

The Guide's inspector concluded: "Eleven is a work in progress...but the talent and creativity to be found therein is heart-gladdening."

The superb review was met with delight by the Eleven team, who wrote on the company Facebook page: "What a start to the year for us! We are delighted to have been entered into the new version of the good food guide with a rating of 'Very Good' - defined as 'Among the best in the region with attention paid to the smallest details'."

Haveli added: "We're delighted to share that Haveli once again has retained its Bib Gourmand in the Michelin Guide 2022. A Bib Gourmand is awarded for good quality, good value cooking. Using only the finest and freshest ingredients, sourced locally where possible, our team of chefs are committed to creating and serving great Indian food."

## Voters urged to check they have the right photo ID

Electors are being reminded they will now need to show photo ID when they vote in person at elections in England.

The change is being introduced by the Government and will apply to all future local elections from May and general elections from October. Electors who vote by post are unaffected.

The full list of accepted ID is available at [electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID) or you can contact the county council's election team on 01670 624811.



One of Haveli's mouthwatering dishes



Danny Land, Ryan Carr and Stephen Pitfield who launched Eleven in 2021.

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# Police launch investigation after woman assaulted in Ponteland Park

## Police are appealing for information after a masked man assaulted a woman in Ponteland Park.

The lady told officers she was walking in the area of the park between Waitrose and the Memorial Hall shortly after 6pm on Friday January 13 when an unknown man approached her from behind and grabbed her, placing both arms around her chest.

He ran off in the direction of Darras Hall when his victim kicked him, before she left the scene and reported the incident to Northumbria Police. The force launched an immediate investigation, speaking to a number of people and reviewing CCTV in the area.

A description has been issued of the attacker - a white male of average height and large build, wearing a black beanie hat with black gloves and a black snood or scarf up to his nose. He was also wearing dark trousers and a dark jacket.

Police are appealing for anyone who might have seen the man, or have information about the incident, to come forward.

Inspector Kate Benson from Northumbria Police said: "Inquiries remain ongoing following a report that a woman was assaulted in Ponteland Park. The offender has allegedly grabbed her by placing both arms around her chest, but has fled the scene in the direction of Darras Hall after the victim kicked him. She then left the area and contacted police.



"While the victim was physically uninjured, she was left shaken by the incident. Officers have already been carrying out a range of inquiries and additional, high visibility patrols are ongoing in the area.

"We would also urge anyone with information to come forward. This type of behaviour is not acceptable and as a force, we want to reassure our communities that offences like this will be dealt with robustly."

Anyone with information is asked to contact Northumbria Police by using the 'Tell us Something' page on its website – or by calling 101, quoting log NP-2023-0113-0881.

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## Harry's design wins Christmas card competition

**Congratulations to Year 7 student Harry Davis, whose winning design was chosen for Ponteland High School's Christmas card.**

Responding to the theme of peace on earth and how we can celebrate, he combined the traditional Santa on his sleigh with a 'save our planet' message.

His design was selected by headteacher Stefan McElwee from a shortlist of five finalists.





# D-day looms for £1m community clubhouse plan

A decision on ambitious plans to develop a £1m community clubhouse on Callerton Lane is set to be taken by county councillors in early February.

In our October issue we reported how an application to vary a condition of the planning permission previously granted for the adjacent leisure centre development, to enable the felling of 12 trees to make way for the new sporting facility, had been recommended for refusal.

It had been delegated for officer decision and Northumberland County Council Planning Officer Ryan Soulsby concluded the proposal failed to address potential impacts upon protected species and their habitats, as well as the biodiversity value of the application site.

Approval would have paved the way for the submission of a planning application for the clubhouse scheme.

The application has now been referred to the authority's Strategic Planning Committee meeting on February 7 due to "significant local interest and County Council involvement with (the) wider site".

But in his report Mr Soulsby has again recommended refusal, despite nearly



Visual of the new community clubhouse.

400 submissions of support on the council's planning portal and the backing of Ponteland Town Council compared to just 19 objections.

He wrote: "The local authority's ecologist has...raised concerns that if this variation was to be permitted, it would allow the removal of 12 trees with no application submitted or permitted for a proposed clubhouse/pavilion upon the site. It is...considered that by removing the trees and in particular the mature trees, there will be a loss of biodiversity on the site for a long period."

Ponteland Rugby Club and Ponteland United FC launched a joint fundraising campaign last year for the new facility on land between the rugby and football pitches adjacent to the leisure centre. It would include changing rooms, a social space and viewing balcony and would be open on matchdays, for training sessions and club social events, as well as for wider community use.

The two clubs, who have set up a new joint company to manage the project, had pledged to replace any trees which needed to be felled.

## ADVERTISING FEATURE

### What to expect from your first meeting with a financial planner

By David Lamb CFP™ MCSI

**If you have decided you want to enlist the services of a lifestyle financial planner, what should you expect from your initial consultation?**

The first meeting should be an exploratory session where you and the financial planner get to know each other to determine if they can help you and you can work together. This should be at the planner's expense; do not pay for this meeting!

If you are a couple you should both attend the meeting (it should be a joint plan for a joint lifestyle) and hold it in the planner's office. Whether you find it tidy and functional or cluttered and chaotic could give you a fair indication of the standard of service you would expect to receive.

Being issued with an agenda confirming the date, time and location and providing a proposed structure of the meeting would also indicate an efficient and organised planner. Prepare by thinking about what you want to achieve from the meeting and

any specific questions you want to ask.

The planner should first explain how they work (the regulatory issues and their processes) and want to know about you, your family, your employment, your lifestyle and your objectives.

They will also ask you a little bit about your financial background, but if they ask too many questions about your money at this first meeting, this could mean that they are more interested in your money than you and want to sell you a financial product. If they do, you should probably look for another financial planner.

Once the planner has discovered a little bit about you, you should find out more about them; ask about their qualifications and experience and what type of clients they have. Are they similar to you?

Ask detailed questions about their processes. Do they use cash flow modelling? What are their fees and how do they measure the value of their service?

Financial planning is usually a long-term process, so working with your financial planner is going to be a long-term relationship. The planner needs to be able to get to know you, your family, your lifestyle, and – later – your money in detail.

Are you comfortable with this? Do you like and trust them? If not, you should look for another financial planner. But if you are happy, you are probably ready to go to the next stage – providing all the relevant data to produce a detailed financial plan.

Next month: finding out about fees and how the value of service is measured.





# Kirkley students hold charity walk with a difference

Kind-hearted Kirkley Hall students organised a charity walk with a difference to raise much-needed cash for the region's most vulnerable children.

Ashleigh Robson and Holly Warnaby, who are studying Animal Management at the Northumberland College campus, led two of its zoo's donkeys for a leisurely walk around the picturesque grounds to collect donations for Cash for Kids.

The donkeys – Princess and Lillian – happily toured the grounds adorned with tinsel and a collection basket where they met generous staff and students who enjoyed stroking the animals and feeding them their favourite nibbles.

Ashleigh, 18, from Newcastle, said: "With the rising cost of living and times being tough we wanted to raise money for a cause close to our hearts while doing something fun and a little bit different.

"Lillian and Princess loved meeting



everyone on campus and eating most of the grass around the grounds, and we raised money for an amazing charity."

Steven Sykes, Northumberland College Zoo's Resource Centre Manager, said: "I am so proud of Ashleigh and Holly for wanting to do something for charity for Christmas. The donkeys were only too happy to oblige and loved meeting other

students and our staff while helping raise vital money for Cash for Kids."

Cash for Kids is a grant-giving charity that supports children and young people affected by poverty, abuse, neglect, life-limiting illness, and those who have additional needs. To donate, or to find out more, visit [cashforkids.org.uk](http://cashforkids.org.uk).

Advertisement Feature

## Ponteland Manor celebrates its 'Good' rating



The team at Care UK's Ponteland Manor care home in Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne is celebrating receiving a 'Good' rating after a recent inspection from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Home Manager, Paula Routledge, says, "It's wonderful to have gained a 'Good' rating, with a 'Good' in all five areas inspected, and is testament to our team's hard work."

### What are some of the highlights from the report?

"We're proud of the personalised care we provide to every resident," explains

Paula, "and the report highlights how we 'Promote a positive culture that is person-centred, open, inclusive and empowering'. At Ponteland Manor, we create tailored care plans that set out people's needs and choices and how we'll meet these."

Paula continues, "We believe in giving residents maximum choice and control over their lives while treating them with dignity, respect, kindness and compassion – both areas showcased by the inspectors in the report."

"They also highlight how the Ponteland Manor team supports residents to make decisions about their care and how they spend their day. Our team empowers residents to make informed choices, whether it's showing plated meals so residents with dementia can decide what they'd like to eat, through to the varied activities programme that residents can choose to get involved in."

"Independence is central to enjoying a fulfilling lifestyle at Ponteland Manor too," says Paula. "Our 'Good' CQC report demonstrates how residents are supported to do as much as they can for themselves. But help is always on hand when needed."

Paula concludes, "I loved reading the quote from one of our dear residents, who commented that they feel well cared for and looked after."

To find out more about the 'Good'-rated care available at Ponteland Manor, please call Paula Routledge on **01661 536 032** [Paula.routledge@careuk.com](mailto:Paula.routledge@careuk.com)



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# Devoted Darras couple die within weeks of each other

**A devoted Darras Hall couple have died exactly a month apart after more than 65 years together.**

With a wide range of interests, Jim and Muriel Robertson, of Errington Road, were familiar faces in many clubs and societies around Ponteland.

Jim's memberships included Ponteland Round Table, the 41 Club, Ponteland Golf Club and Ponteland Lions where his various roles included President. He was also an Elder and Treasurer at Ponteland United Reformed Church (URC).

A keen violinist, Jim was actively involved in the organisation of Ponteland's annual Party in the Park and Music in the Park events into his 80s. He was also an accomplished author and wrote and self-published three books.

Muriel was also a member of many local organisations including the Ladies Circle, Tangent and the Ladies' Committee and Ponteland Flower Club, where she acted as treasurer. An accomplished baker, her chocolate fudge and shortbread were legendary at URC events, local fairs and fetes.

Jim was born in Cockburnspath, Berwickshire, but sadly his mum died the day he was born and he was brought up by his grandparents and his mum's twin sister at Newton Don near Kelso. An active rugby player, he played for Kelso in the early 1950s.

Muriel (née Mason), the eldest of five girls, was born in Ford Moss, Northumberland, and later moved to St Boswells in the Borders where her father was a gardener.

She met Jim in 1955 at the weekly 'Hop' dance in Kelso which was the place to be seen on a Saturday night. They married in Melrose on October 1, 1960 and lived in Berwick-upon-Tweed then Darlington before moving to Darras Hall in 1976.

An accountant by profession, Jim moved into bakery management with senior roles in Berwick and Stockton-on-Tees and then at Mothers Pride in Gateshead and Westerhope. He retired in 1994 as Managing Director at Robertsons Bakery in Carlisle. Jim also sat on more than



Jim and Muriel's wedding day in 1960

200 industrial tribunal hearings as a business representative.

Always keen on learning, Muriel was a trained shorthand typist and worked as a secretary at the council offices in Melrose before joining Jim in the bakery in Berwick in a secretarial role. She later passed various CLAIT computer courses at Newcastle College and learnt to swim at Concordia Leisure Centre in Cramlington in her late forties.

In 1972 the couple adopted three-week-old daughter Louise and two years later their son Michael was born. They were devoted to their children and grandchildren – Louise's daughters Heather, 28, and Katja, 15, and Michael's daughters Tilly, 13, and Martha, 10.

They celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary in 2020 during the pandemic and had a garden party the following year with family and friends before marking 62 years of marriage last October.

Jim and Muriel also enjoyed travelling and trips with friends included Canada, South Africa and seeing the Passion Play Oberammergau in Austria. They did, however, wait until both Louise and Michael had flown the nest before



The couple's diamond wedding anniversary party

visiting Disneyland for the first time!

Muriel passed away at Hexham General Hospital on November 14 aged 86 following a stroke and Jim died on December 14 at the same hospital after a number of falls, aged 88. They have been buried alongside each other at Nenthorn Cemetery near Kelso.

Paying tribute, Louise said: "They were much loved by all the family and will be greatly missed by everyone who knew them."

Michael added: "The family would like to thank the staff at Hexham General Hospital for their compassion and sensitivity during the final weeks and days of both of their lives. They were only separated a short time and are now back together after a wonderful life."



# Your letters

The Editor  
Pont News & Views



A new Darras Hall resident's horror at the lack of glass recycling service in this month's letters...

## Luddites or visionaries?

**I wonder if the inhabitants of Darras Hall objected to the installation of poles when telephones were first introduced to the estate?**

I doubt they were Luddites but saw the benefits they brought.

We had a problem with our telephone cable some years ago and the telephone engineer said it was damaged because the cable to our house had not been laid in a duct 0.5 metres below the ground as it should have been when the house was built, but was just put about 250mm down straight into the ground without any duct.

He said this was common for a lot of the properties on Darras, especially those built in the 1970s and 80s, hence a lot of duct problems on Darras.

If your property broadband is already supplied via an existing serviceable duct or a pole it is easy to replace the copper cable with a fibre optic cable. If not, and you want or need a high speed optic fibre connection to your house, the road has to be dug up to install a duct or a pole has to be installed.

Economics mean a pole is quicker and cheaper as it can service multiple houses and makes it easier to maintain the cables in the future.

Having a pole outside your house does not reduce the value of your property. On the other contrary, not having high speed broadband does reduce the value of your property as families now want or need that facility to accommodate modern family life or working from home. I know of property sales that have fallen through because there was no high-speed broadband to the property.

Can I please have a pole outside our house? We're sick of the poor broadband speed we have to endure and frequently can't even stream BBC iPlayer without buffering, in spite of paying BT for what they call a high-speed fibre connection - because that only goes to the cabinet which is a long way from our house and we still have the old copper cables from there.

**Lawrence Connelly**

*Beech Court, Darras Hall*

## Horried to find no glass recycling service in Darras Hall

**I feel so passionate about this subject I wanted to contact you as I don't normally send these type of emails.**

Last week I was shocked to receive notification from the County Council that there is not a facility to recycle glass in my area.

I have recently moved from Gosforth to Ponteland and recycle as much as I can. I was horrified to find out that glass is not collected, especially as there is so much media coverage about 'saving' the planet!

I have spoken to the refuse collection department this afternoon and apparently they do not have the resources to collect glass in many areas of Northumberland.

I am hoping you can help to publicise this as I am sure if there was public pressure this could be changed.

**Dr. Julie Tweedlie**

*Highview, Darras Hall*

**March issue deadlines:** The deadline for all copy and adverts for the March issue is Monday February 13. Door to door distribution will be from Monday February 27 to Friday March 3. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the March issue. Please visit [ponteland-tc.gov.uk/pont-news-and-views](http://ponteland-tc.gov.uk/pont-news-and-views) for online issues and all updates.

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 u3a

Meetings and talks at St Mary's Parish Centre are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 2pm. Our next two talks will be: February 1 – AGM and faith tea; March 1 – Spring flower demonstration by Sandra Dickinson. We welcome enquiries from anyone wishing to join Ponteland u3a by calling the membership secretary on 01661 824953.

## Ponteland Wildlife Talks

Our next talks are on Tuesday February 7, when we have our AGM and Jane Austin Walker's talk entitled 'Northumberland's Wildflowers', followed by Ian Glendinning's 'Two squirrel families' on Tuesday March 7 and Ian Beddison with 'First Steps With 8 Legs, an Introduction to Spiders and Harvestmen' on Tuesday April 4. The venue is St Mary's Parish Centre and start time 7.30pm. £2 entry includes refreshments.

## Callerton Garden & Flower Club

Our next meeting will be at 2pm on Wednesday February 8 at Ponteland CIU, where Marjorie Read will be giving a demonstration entitled 'I am going with the family'. All visitors welcome £7. Refreshments are available in the bar after the meeting for a small charge.

## Ponteland Senior Gentlemen's Club

On Monday February 13 at 2.30pm we have John Martin speaking on The Suez Canal and the 'Ever Given' Saga at St Mary's Parish Centre.

## Ponteland Village WI

Food for Thought will be the theme of our evening on Tuesday February 14, at 7.30pm in St Mary's Parish Centre, Ponteland. We meet monthly and subgroups include Walking Group, Dining Out, Walking for Softies, Dog Walking and Book Club. If you would like to give us a try, email [pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com](mailto:pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com). Look for Ponteland Village WI on Facebook.

## Ponteland Local History Society

On Thursday February 16 at 7.30pm Barry Mead will give a talk entitled 'Happy days digging up the past' at St Mary's Parish Centre. Visitors welcome - £2. The History Society Archive will be open for inspection at

Ponteland Library on Friday February 3 between 1.30pm and 3.30pm.

## Ponteland Methodist Church

Sunday worship 10am and 6.30pm. First Sunday each month Bouncy Church 9am onwards - lovely breakfast, bouncy castle, crafts, all age short service 9.40am in addition to normal church service. Monday - 1pm to 4pm 'Open Door' friendship café/ warm space. Tuesday - Boys Brigade with Girls' Association. Thursday - Toddlers, Men's Forum, Women Together. Saturday - walking group and Coffee Shop Strollers. Room hire: contact [anncooperx@gmail.com](mailto:anncooperx@gmail.com) or call 01661 613502. For Minister Rev Jona Sewell email [revjsewell@gmail.com](mailto:revjsewell@gmail.com) or call 01661 822057.

## Line dancing

We meet on Wednesdays at 6.30pm at St Mary's Parish Centre where we have lots of laughs, friendship and exercise to music. The cost is £3 per session. Dancing is at beginner and intermediate level. New dancers are always welcome. Free taster session offered. Contact Rosemary Gray (01661) 822493.

## Rotary Ponteland

Why not begin the New Year by giving something back to your local community? Rotary Ponteland meets at the Britannia Hotel, Newcastle Airport, each Tuesday, alternating lunchtime and evenings. The club is involved with wide range of activities in the community, our schools and newly formed environmental group PAGE. We also organise a number of events in the village to raise funds to support local charities. If you are not able to attend regular meetings, we hold occasional Zoom meetings where you can "drop in". To learn more please visit [rotaryponteland.org.uk](http://rotaryponteland.org.uk) or contact John Cooper at [info@rotaryponteland.org.uk](mailto:info@rotaryponteland.org.uk).

## Ponteland Ramblers

Ponteland Ramblers is the local branch of the national charity Ramblers, dedicated to removing barriers so everyone can enjoy the pleasures of walking. We organise walks in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and north Durham led by local members.

These are usually of 5-6 miles on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month and longer walks every other Sunday. Why not join us - you can come on a couple of walks without any obligation to join - you will be very welcome. For details of forthcoming walks, please visit our website [ramblers.org.uk/ponteland](http://ramblers.org.uk/ponteland).

## Ponteland Writers

We regularly write to prompts and also have a visiting published author for more in-depth sessions. Some of us write purely for pleasure and others have had work published. Come and join us for motivation and practice. £2 a week. We meet every Wednesday evening From 7.30pm to 9.30pm at Ponteland CIU Social Club, Merton Way.

## Friendship Group

Age UK Northumberland has launched a new weekly friendship group every Wednesday from 10am to 12pm at St Mary's Parish Centre. It's a great chance for older people living in the area to get together and enjoy a whole host of activities such as board games, arts and crafts, music, or just to have a nice cuppa and a chat.

## Merton Hall library and coffee morning

Merton Hall's coffee morning and free library is now open on Fridays from 9.30am to 11.30am. New or nearly new book donations would be appreciated - they can be dropped off on Friday mornings.

## Ponteland Ladies Choir

We meet on Mondays, term time, at 7.30pm at Ponteland Community Primary School, Callerton Lane. We sing a wide variety of music. Please contact Susan on 07710 418780 for more details. New members welcome - no auditions required.

## Ponteland Ukulele Band

We are a friendly group of mixed ability ukulele players and meet every Tuesday at the CIU Club from 1pm to 3pm. New members welcome.



# ‘Still some way to go’ for county council after damning governance report

An independent board advising the senior leadership at Northumberland County Council in the wake of a damning verdict on corporate governance has issued its first report.

The Challenge Board chaired by former Newcastle City Council Chief Executive Pat Ritchie CBE was appointed after an independent review concluded governance at County Hall was ‘dysfunctional, distracted and unhealthy’.

The review by a team of experienced former local authority chief executives headed by Max Caller CBE, which reported last June, found officers operating in a ‘harmful’ working environment in a ‘climate of fear and intimidation’.

Trust had broken down to such an extent that senior officers and councillors had resorted to making thousands of Freedom of Information requests to obtain information and confidential council reports were watermarked with names because so many had been leaked, the review found.

Following Mr Caller’s call for ‘new, seasoned local government professional leadership at the top of the organisation’, the authority agreed a £209,000 severance agreement with Chief Executive Daljit Lally who left at the end of July.

Her replacement Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive at Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, (pictured) joins in February.

The new advisory board, which also includes Harrogate Council CEO Wallace Sampson OBE, two experienced council leaders and local authority legal experts, is advising NCC leaders on reviews of



the corporate plan, constitution, codes of conduct for councillor and officer behaviours, and the establishment of a performance appraisal scheme.

Its report to a full council meeting on January 18 gave a mixed verdict on progress to date, saying that while recent changes at the most senior officer level have had a positive impact on the atmosphere in County Hall and there was less antagonism between political groups, ‘there is still some way to go’.

It said: “There is passion for Northumberland and a clear determination from just about everyone to improve governance and behaviour and to get back to being focused on doing the very best for Northumberland’s residents, businesses and visitors.”

Council Leader Glen Sanderson was commended for his consultative and positive approach and his drive and focus to ensure the council responded quickly to the Caller report. The board said: “We are genuinely impressed by the way the council has initiated, gripped and made progress on its improvement. This is particularly the result of the focus and drive shown by the Leader.”

But the new report found that ‘the current haste is generating a degree of mistrust’ and that the challenge ‘is bigger than some think’.

There were rebukes for those responsible for the recent leaking of papers linked to some standards complaints, slammed as ‘clearly unacceptable’, and the suspected use of social media by councillors acting anonymously to ‘feed conspiracy theories or the focus on the past or personalities’.

Another criticism levelled was the ‘weaponising’ of the Code of Conduct over recent months: “We have heard of large numbers of complaints. Some being seen to have been done on a tit-for-tat basis.”

Members and officers are instead encouraged to draw a line under the past antagonism, ‘park that and move on together’ with the biggest challenge being the longer term need for change on culture, including the rebuilding of trust.

The Challenge Board is to issue bimonthly reports to a Member Oversight Group as its work continues.

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## Council plea over harmful balloon releases

**Northumberland County Council is appealing to the public to use alternatives to balloon and lantern releases for events and memorials which can have a devastating impact on wildlife and the environment.**

While balloon or lantern releases can be carried out with good intent, they also have a long and devastating impact on the environment – and the

council is strongly discouraging people from doing it.

Once released, they very quickly drop back down to earth with their tattered ends and floating pieces being eaten by marine life, or other animals becoming tangled in the debris causing injury, illness and great suffering.

Although biodegradable options are available, these still take months or even years to break down and can still cause horrendous painful deaths to animals. Meanwhile, lanterns set

off in warmer months can travel long distances and have been known to cause a fire risk.

The council is encouraging people to use other less damaging ways to pay tribute to a loved one such as planting a tree or flower bed, using jam jar lights, or organising a memorial walk for a chosen charity.

More information on balloons and sky lanterns is available at [northumberland.gov.uk/Protection/Environment.aspx#skylanternsandheliumballoons](http://northumberland.gov.uk/Protection/Environment.aspx#skylanternsandheliumballoons)



# Northumberland Skills launches new part-time courses for 2023

**More than 100 part-time courses and apprenticeships are available across Northumberland for anyone looking to gain a new skill.**

The latest course guide from Northumberland Skills – Northumberland County Council's post-16 education provider – is now online and includes a wide range of courses, many of them free.

From careers in teaching to brushing up your tech capabilities with an IT course, cooking like a pro and scriptwriting, there is something for everyone. Venues include Prudhoe and Morpeth, and many courses can be studied online from home.

Coun Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council (pictured), said: "Whether you want to advance your career, retrain, find employment or explore new skills – we hope you will find a course for you.

"New skills can boost your career and confidence, as well as offering a great opportunity to meet new people



and improve health and wellbeing. I hope residents will take a look online at the Northumberland Skills website to find out more about what's on offer across the county in 2023."

Part-time courses are available in subjects such as Arts and Creative, Business, Catering, Digital, Education, Health and Social Care, Employability, English and Maths, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Languages.

Apprenticeship training programmes are also available for those looking to earn a salary whilst gaining a trade or learning new skills to boost career opportunities.

Many of the courses are free for those who are eligible and Northumberland Skills' friendly team is available to answer any questions residents have about course choices and financing their studies.

Audrey Kingham, Joint Interim Director of Children's Services and Director of Education and Skills, said: "From advice and guidance about future careers to making learning work for you, we have a brilliant team of friendly lecturers here to support, motivate and inspire you to succeed.

"We recognise that people are busy with existing commitments to work around and juggle – that's why we've ensured that many of our courses are flexible.

"This means that some are available to complete online at a time and pace that suits you, and some are blended courses, which involves some time spent face-to-face and some in a digital classroom."

Find out more about the wide range of part-time courses for adults on the Northumberland Skills website.

*Hats & Glad Rags*



Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm.

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# New year, new role for Ponteland's police officer

*By PC Graeme Harbottle, Ponteland Neighbourhood Policing Team*

**Hello readers, I do hope that 2023 is starting off in a positive way for you all.**

I have now left my position as the Police Officer within the Ponteland Neighbourhood Team to take up a new role with Northumbria Police so unfortunately this will be my last article for Pont News & Views.

I wanted to thank you for all of the correspondence I have received via the local Neighbourhood Policing Team's mailbox.

A direct replacement has not been appointed yet but I wanted to let readers

know that you can still contact the East Tynedale Neighbourhood Policing Team mailbox address and an officer who is based at the Prudhoe Police Office will deal with any issues, concerns or give advice.

I will remain in contact with the officers at the Prudhoe Police Office to help and assist them, should any issues in our area arise that they may need my help and experience with.

I am keen that the links I have established with our local businesses, schools and leisure facilities as well as all of the residents are maintained, for the benefit of the local community.



It has been a pleasure working within our area and as a resident of Ponteland I will always have an added interest in this area to ensure it is a nice place to live.

Readers can continue to contact Northumbria Police's local neighbourhood policing team mailbox at the following address  
[easttyndale.npt@northumbria.police.uk](mailto:easttyndale.npt@northumbria.police.uk)

## Bowling club celebrates centenary

**Ponteland Bowling Club is opening its green for a series of taster sessions for potential new players in April and May as it marks its centenary.**

The club, located behind the Memorial Hall, is offering free tuition and the use of bowls and appropriate footwear to anyone interested in attending any of the sessions, which start on April 26.

It has also secured a match against a celebrity Bowls England side which will take place on Wednesday July 12, as part of the 100th birthday celebrations.



Saturday evening bowling in 1947

All are welcome to watch the match, and food and refreshments will be available on the day.

The club offers a variety of bowling opportunities to members of all ages

and abilities - from casual play with friends, mixed roll ups, friendly matches against other clubs, men's, women's and mixed club competitions and county league competitions. Benefits include improving your overall fitness levels, coordination, social life, and mental wellbeing.

Many members also play indoors during the winter months and there is an active all-year-round social programme with quiz nights, dotty dominoes, BBQs, coffee mornings, club meals and dinner dances.

For more information visit [pontelandbowls.com](http://pontelandbowls.com) or contact the club secretary on 07940 923286.

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# Good attendance rewarded with a tour of St James' Park

**Good attendance was rewarded with a tour of St James' Park for 20 Ponteland High School students.**

The Year 8, 9 and 10 pupils visited Newcastle United FC's home ground and the Newcastle United Foundation's new community centre NUCASTLE.

They were selected for the trip as a reward for either improved school attendance or attendance at after school tutoring sessions.

The visit involved a tour of the stadium, team building activities and the chance to play computer games in a state-of-the-art esports studio.

Assistant Headteacher Mark Warland, who arranged the trip, said: "The visit was thoroughly enjoyed by all students (and staff)!"



## Find a walking route to suit

**Keen walkers are being invited to check out a website which has a variety of routes in Northumberland to download and print free of charge.**

The 'Walking in Northumberland' site includes walks from half a mile to 12 miles+ and advice on suitability for pushchairs and wheelchairs. Books of walks and details of all the walking groups in the county can also be found.

John Harris, who maintains the website, said: "With Spring on its way we start to think about getting out to walk in the beautiful English countryside again, but where to find new and interesting walks?"

"There is so much walking information on the web but it is difficult to find. Walking in Northumberland (part of the Walking in England website) has brought it together in one place so whether you are walking from home, or away on holiday, you will be able to find a walk suitable for you."

The site can be found at:  
[walkinginengland.co.uk/northumberland](http://walkinginengland.co.uk/northumberland)

[www.ponteland-tc.gov.uk](http://www.ponteland-tc.gov.uk)

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