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FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district

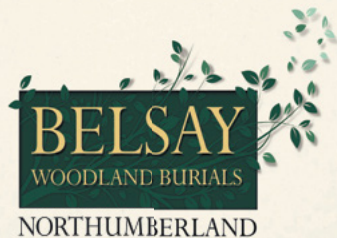


New bid launched for leisure
and retail scheme

.....
Memorial Hall car park
charges to be scrapped

.....
Sports clubs to press ahead
with plans for £1m clubhouse

**Oscar running up
funds in memory
of grandad**



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Memorial Hall marks centenary with welcome news

Ponteland Memorial Hall is celebrating its centenary with some big announcements which will be welcomed by the community it serves.

Ponteland Memorial and Ex-Serviceman's Hall (to use its full name) was opened on December 20 1922 as a memorial for the fallen soldiers of World War I. Its initial construction was funded by donations from village residents and community organisations.

Today, the hall operates as a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation and is funded predominantly through its hire as a venue for parties, weddings, markets, meetings, sports activities and awards nights. Regular patrons include Supreme Performing Arts, Ponteland Repertory Society and the Freemasons.

A fresh team of enthusiastic trustees are now taking on the challenge of re-invigorating and restoring the hall in readiness for another 100 years at the heart of Ponteland village life.

And they are hitting the ground running by announcing two key changes – the removal of the controversial car park charging system and a new team behind the lounge bar.

Chair of the Trustees John

Harrison said: "The Trustees are excited to announce that Mick Barnes and the team at The Pont Tap have taken on the running of the Unity Bar in the main lounge.

"And later this year, we will also be bringing to an end the controversial car park charging system, operated by Parking Eye. However, use and maintenance of the car park still requires funding and so we would welcome any suggestions regarding options for car park management.

"In the meantime, please remember that parking charges will still apply for a few months yet as we wait for the contract term to run its course, so don't get caught out!"

The lounge can hold up to 120 people and can be hired in addition to - or separately from - the main hall which has a capacity of 250. There are also two smaller meeting rooms with flexible set up options and attractive hire rates. Events this year will include a celebration of the King's Coronation in May, and trustees are inviting volunteers to help with its organisation. They will also be inviting



ideas on how to fund car park maintenance via the venue's Facebook page.

To find out more about hiring rooms at the hall or the

groups which meet there, visit pontelandmemorialhall.com.

The main hall is used by Ponteland Repertory Society, hosts the annual Ponteland Flower Show and is a venue for weddings.

Revised plans for leisure and retail scheme lodged

Revised plans have been submitted for a food, drink and retail development behind Rialto restaurant in Ponteland which sparked a string of objections last year.

In October 2021, Northumberland County Council's Licensing Sub-Committee approved a licensing application for the proposed market square, known as 'The Orchard', which would be made up of market stalls, retail units and food vendors and could accommodate 350 people.

The agreed licence stated alcohol sales in the outside area must stop at 11pm on Fridays and Saturdays and 10.30pm the rest of the week, while hot food service must cease at 11.30pm.

Last January a follow-up planning application was submitted by Suna Miah detailing double height shipping containers and a large canopy with a large advertising screen.

It was met with 114 objections submitted including the Environment Agency, the county council's environmental protection team and Ponteland Town Council, and only one representation in favour. Concerns included a lack of parking, noise nuisance and a negative impact on the character of the town, and the plans were withdrawn.

The new application says the revised plans have taken into account the concerns previously raised, reducing the overall footprint by 32 per cent and capacity from 350 to 250. Black larch timber cladding, light buff multi brick face and an anthracite canvas canopy replace the shipping container concept.

The accompanying design and access statement said the scheme would reinstate a village centre in Ponteland with the introduction of a 'farmers style market' with carts and stalls including a servery, florist, artisan bakery, coffee stall and three street food stands under a large canopy.



A visual of the proposed scheme.

It continued: "The scheme has the potential to deliver significant social, economic, environmental and heritage benefits for Ponteland...encouraging significant investment within the town which is greatly needed.

"The project will provide small scale start-up opportunities which will in turn create many new full and part time jobs for local people contributing towards the (county) council's ambitious jobs growth target."

According to the application, the scheme would provide 12 full-time jobs, and six part-time roles.

As we went to print there had been 60 objections lodged with none in support. They include Ponteland Town Council, Ponteland Memorial Hall and Northumbria Police, which raised concerns about noise and the proximity of the river.

The application can be viewed on the county council's planning portal using search reference number 23/00227/FUL

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Tributes paid to 'a true gentleman'

Tributes have been paid to a popular Ponteland private hire operator who has died suddenly aged 68.

Fred Davies had run J&F Cabs for 15 years and was well known throughout the local area for his reliable service with a smile.

He is believed to have suffered a massive heart attack at his home in Fairney Edge on January 30, having previously enjoyed good health.

Comments on local social media following the announcement of his sudden passing portrayed a well loved and respected servant of the community.

Jaya Malhotra wrote: "We are absolutely heartbroken to hear of Fred's passing. He was a true gentleman - whose presence will be sorely missed by many."

Derek Forster said: "Loved the man. Being picked up by him was part of the night out. A friend of ours had to have his daughter picked up, which was a first ride in a taxi on her own. Don't think anyone other than Fred would have been trusted with that one."

And Amanda J Gill wrote: "We were absolutely devastated when we got the news. I can't believe we are not going to see him again. Our talks about football on the way to the match and everything else about life in between. What a genuinely nice man, would do anything for anyone, one

of life's precious, precious souls. Our thoughts, love and prayers go out to the family. Fred will be greatly missed by many."

Fred, who had previously been a lifeguard at Heaton Pool and then worked for other local taxi firms before setting up his own business, was with former partner Jacqueline for 18 years and was a well-loved stepdad to Wayne and Rachel Young.

Wayne said: "Fred was a loving member of the family who will be very sadly missed. The best stepdad I could ask for, he was a very caring family man who would help anybody and would joke on with everyone."

Away from his beloved cab, Fred attended St Dominic's Church in Newcastle every Sunday and also enjoyed the occasional drink and meal out on a Sunday when he wasn't working.

Close friend Pauline Watson, Wayne and Rachel's aunt, added: "He was the captain of our ship, so we are all shipwrecked at the moment."

Fred's funeral was held at West Road Crematorium in Newcastle on February 27. Wayne and Pauline are to continue the business in his memory and can be contacted on 07702 714254.

A true gentleman: Fred Davies



Date announced for dog festival

Organisers of a popular canine gathering at Kirkley Hall have announced the date for this year's event.

The North East Dog Festival will return on Saturday and Sunday September 2-3 to the specialist animal and land-based training venue.

This year the festival will move to one larger field, where dogs will be able to try their paw at everything from agility to flyball, gundog scurries to dog parkour while crowd favourites such as Scentventure and fastest recall will also return.

Visit northeastdogfestival.com for more information.

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Vigilance urged after red squirrel pox outbreak

Residents are being asked to be vigilant after three red squirrels were found with squirrel pox virus (SQPV) in Darras Hall.

Ponteland Red Squirrel Group rangers have been working hard to contain the outbreak and are hoping their efforts will save the local red squirrel population.

In 2010 Ponteland lost most of its red squirrels due to a devastating outbreak of SQPV and it took several years for the population to recover its numbers.

Group members are hoping that the early intervention by Ponteland Red Squirrel rangers will allow the majority of the reds to survive. However, residents need to be vigilant and report any slow or poorly looking squirrels as soon as possible so they can be removed from the population.

Anyone with feeders is urged to:

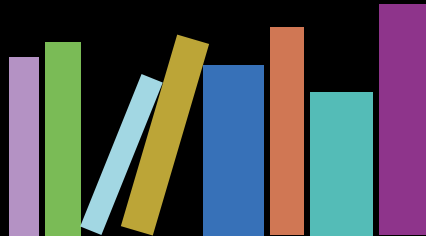
- Clean all feeders using an animal-safe, disinfectant as soon as possible
- Clean feeders weekly
- Take down any feeders that you can't monitor easily from your window or camera
- Reduce the amount of feed in the feeder to a small handful
- Join the new WhatsApp page Ponteland Squirrel Monitoring to report sightings and activity and ask for help and advice, to assist in mapping feeders and squirrel movements in the area.



Squirrel Pox Virus is fatal for red squirrels. It is transmitted by grey squirrels who carry the virus in their bodily fluids without harm to themselves. Once one red is exposed to the virus it is very contagious and is quickly passed on to other reds. It can wipe out a local population within weeks.

Research has proved that squirrel pox virus does not occur in a red population where greys are absent. Signs of squirrel pox virus include lethargy, lack of coordination, scabs, lesions and swollen eyes. Infected reds can take up to two weeks to die.

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Check out all the Book Festival details from Greater Morpeth Development Trust and Northumberland Library Service

Oscar runs up funds for charity in memory of grandad

Caring Oscar Wren decided to arrange a charity run to raise funds for Parkinson's UK when his beloved grandad was admitted to hospital after a fall.

But sadly Alan Meldrum, who had the debilitating condition, died on February 4 after contracting pneumonia. As Alan had celebrated his 84th birthday while at the Freeman Hospital, Oscar chose an 8.4km circuit around Ponteland.

Mum Gill said Oscar and younger sister Elodie had a "lovely relationship" with their grandad and grandma Carole, who visited the family home in Darras Hall every Tuesday.

No stranger to running, the nine-year-old does the Junior GNR every year and competes in Darras Hall Primary School's cross country competition. On Sunday February 19 he was joined by dad Geoff on his fundraising run and hopes to raise £300 for the charity.

Oscar said: "When grandad was in hospital I wanted to find a way to help him and other people with Parkinson's. I remembered how Captain Tom had raised money during the pandemic and thought I could do the same thing by doing a sponsored run."

Gill added: "We are immensely proud of Oscar and his determination to honour his grandad in this way. He saw how much Parkinson's affected him and wanted to raise this money to help others who are going through the same thing. Dad was a real family man with a big heart and a wonderful sense of humour. We miss him dearly but I know he would have been so proud of Oscar and everything he has achieved."

Donations to Oscar's appeal can be made at justgiving.com/fundraising/oscar-wren



Running up funds for charity: Oscar Wren. Pics by Barry Pells.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

The cost - and value - of financial planning

By David Lamb CFP™ MCSI



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The cost of the service is an important factor when deciding to work with a financial planner, but equally important is to understand the value that the planner provides.

Obviously financial planners need to be paid for their service, not just to earn a living or cover their business expenses but to cover the liability they take on when they provide financial advice.

Traditionally the cost of financial advice was met by a commission on the sale of a financial product, creating an incentive for a financial 'adviser' to sell a financial product. Since 2012, the cost of advice has usually been covered by an 'adviser fee' paid from a financial product.

But genuine financial planning should not be dependent upon the sale of a product; you should be prepared to pay a separate fee for professional services.

In your initial meeting with your prospective financial planner, spend time getting to understand their fee

structure. Do they charge by the hour, one overall fixed fee or a series of fixed fees as you progress along the process? What is right for you?

If the fee is to be paid from a financial product, the 'planner' will be relying on selling a product. At this point, it is probably best to end the meeting and look for somebody else.

Once the financial plan is complete, you may require financial advice and it is important to understand how you will pay for this. Will you be invoiced or will the fees be deducted from the recommended product? If the fees are deducted you need to understand, not only how much they are, but the effect on your investment these fees could have.

What rate of return does the planner expect to achieve for your investments (the research should not be based

upon past performance)? Consider these returns then deduct all fees. Is this value for money?

If the fees are based on percentages and are to be deducted from the product, consider if you would write a cheque separately for this advice. If not, look for another financial planner.

What are the charges for ongoing advice? Are they solely taken from the product? If so, this could cause a conflict of interests because the adviser may not want you to spend your money. Again, you may want to look to look elsewhere.

Ask the adviser how they will measure the value of their service. Can they provide specific benchmarks to help you achieve your objectives and your desired lifestyle? If not, the search for a good financial planner continues.



David Comeskey and John Chappell of Ponteland RFC with some of the trees earmarked for removal. Photo by Barry Pells.

Clubs to press ahead with clubhouse scheme despite planning setback

Leaders of an ambitious bid to develop a £1m community clubhouse in Ponteland say they are to press ahead with a full planning application this year.

Ponteland United FC and Ponteland Rugby Club say they were encouraged by the positive comments made by several members of Northumberland County Council's Strategic Planning Committee about the proposed scheme at a meeting on February 7.

The committee rejected an application to vary a condition, which was part of the initial plans to build the adjacent school and leisure centre complex that opened in 2020, to enable the removal of 12 trees to make way for the sporting clubhouse.

Officers had recommended refusal on the basis the request to vary the condition should have formed part of a full planning application for the clubhouse, despite receiving nearly 400 letters of support compared to 24 objections.

The clubs had also pledged to replace the sycamore and willow trees with at least 50 more trees, including additional screening. The clubhouse would be accessed via a footpath from the existing school/leisure complex car park; there would be no vehicular access.

Ponteland RFC's director of rugby, John Chappell, who addressed the committee, said after the meeting: "There are around 100 trees which screen Mayfair Gardens and Fairney Edge from the existing pitches and the

location of the proposed clubhouse and none of these would be removed.

"The 12 trees we would need to remove are located between the football and rugby pitches and we would replace these with at least 50 new trees on site to create a wildlife haven. The balcony area of the clubhouse would face the two pitches and not overlook any housing.

"We want to reassure the residents that we want to be good neighbours; we don't want to upset people. We want to do the best we can for our kids but not at the expense of our neighbours.

"Once we have the plans drawn up we want the opportunity to have that discussion with them, and we would intend to hold a public consultation event at the leisure centre to display the plans and answer any questions."

Ponteland has had sporting clubs since the late 19th century and Ponteland United FC moved to the Callerton Lane site from the Queen Elizabeth playing fields by Richard Coates School in 1966.

Today more than 800 boys, girls and adults take part in football and rugby but the lack of appropriate clubhouse facilities is inhibiting progress within the national league pyramid, as the absence of such a facility means the club does not meet required standards.

A fundraising appeal was launched last year and the clubs say they have already raised a significant sum towards the overall projected build cost.

Support for the scheme also came from Ponteland Town Council and town councillor Susan Johnson addressed the February 7 meeting, saying the clubhouse would provide "an excellent amenity" which would "enhance the sporting provision in Ponteland".

Ponteland East county councillor Lyle Darwin voted in favour of the application to vary the condition, saying there would be no reason for the clubs to fell the trees prior to receiving planning approval for the clubhouse itself.

His Ponteland North colleague Coun Richard Dodd encouraged neighbouring residents on Mayfair Gardens and Fairney Edge to talk to the clubs about the plans, adding: "Ponteland probably has more trees per head than any other town, although for some every tree is sacred."

But summing up committee chairman Coun Trevor Thorne said: "There's got to be a reason to cut down trees and remove hedgerows. We haven't got a reason in front of us today."

Three councillors voted in favour of the club's application, while two others abstained.



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Your letters

The Editor
Pont News & Views



Sporting clubs left without a clubhouse have been “abandoned” by Northumberland County Council, according to our correspondent in this month’s letters...

County council should fund clubhouse on old playing fields

The original Ponteland High School needed to be replaced. A new school could have been built on the adjoining playing fields but the Education Authority felt that this would make it difficult to operate the school during the period when the new one was being built and that an alternative site had to be found.

After looking at various options it concluded that the preferred location was the Ponteland Village Recreation Ground. This had the additional benefit of bringing the new development closer to the centre of the village.

However, the County Council was aware that this meant that the various buildings on the Recreation Ground would have to be demolished.

Most of the facilities contained within those buildings were subsequently re-accommodated within the new complex, along with the two new schools, but some were not.

The latter included changing and showering facilities for the outdoor sporting activities of soccer, rugby, cricket and athletics, a clubroom with bar and kitchen, a cricket pavilion and a fire station.

By way of compensation the sports clubs have since been offered an awkward shaped triangle of land, too small to accommodate a decent combined clubhouse. The site is covered with mature trees, most of which would have to be felled. The County Council has

refused to grant planning permission for the felling of these trees on two occasions.

A building here would require a vehicular access to get to ‘front of house’ parking, to permit the delivery of food and drink and so on, and for the collection of refuse.

That access would have to be taken off Mayfair Gardens, a quiet cul-de-sac, largely occupied by elderly residents, hardly the place to introduce new licensed premises. The access would have to break through the 10ft high security fence designed to protect the schools from unwanted visitors.

None of this makes any kind of sense.

The County Council has built a replacement fire station on the old High School playing fields.

The same thing needs to happen regarding the various other facilities that have been lost.

There is sufficient space here to provide an adequate site for a combined clubhouse and to create an area of public open space to make good on the loss of the former recreation ground.

However, to proceed as the Council has been doing, laying the cost and responsibility for replacement at the club’s door is entirely wrong. These voluntary organisations provide endless hours of healthy outdoor activity for the young people of Ponteland and the wider area.

They need to be fully supported in this, not simply abandoned and left to their own devices in this way.

The County Council, to suit its own short-term ends, removed these various facilities and it is the Council’s job to organise and fund their replacement.

John Hague
High View, Darras Hall

April issue deadlines: The deadline for all copy and adverts for the April issue is Monday March 13. Door to door distribution will be from Monday March 27 to Friday March 31. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the April issue. Please visit 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: March 1 – Spring Flower Demonstration by Sandra Dickinson; April 5 – Veteran Tree Project – Northumberland by Nick Johnson. We welcome enquiries from anyone wishing to join Ponteland u3a by calling the membership secretary on 01661 824953.

World Day of Prayer Service

This year's WDP Service will be held in St Mary's C of E Church, Ponteland, on Friday March 3 at 2.15pm. The service has been written by the Christian women of Taiwan. Tea will be served in St Mary's Parish Centre and everyone is most welcome to attend.

Ponteland Wildlife Talks

Our next talks are on Tuesday March 7 with Ian Glendinning's 'Two squirrel families' 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

The next meeting of the Callerton Garden & Flower Club will take place on Wednesday March 8 at 2pm at Ponteland CIU. Jane Armstrong will give a talk on Capheaton Garden. Visitors welcome £7. Refreshments are available in the bar.

Edwardian Dancing

Come and join us to learn the Quadrilles, the Lancers and some couple dances. No special steps are needed. Lovely music from the early 1900s. Three classes are planned in the main hall of Ponteland Community Primary School on the following Fridays in March - 10, 17 and 24 from 7pm to 9pm, followed by a dance there on March 31 from 7pm to 9.30pm. Singles and couples welcome. This is for everyone. A small charge is made to pay for the hall. Contact Mike for more details on 07818 271287.

Community litter pick

Local groups are joining forces for a community spring clean. The Council for the Protection of Rural England

Northumberland Branch, Ponteland Action Group for the Environment and Rotary Ponteland are holding the joint litter pick on Sunday March 12, meeting at the Darras Hall Estate Committee car park on Broadway at 11am. The event is aimed at families but all will be welcome and equipment will be provided. Contact jane.hodson.hamilton@gmail.com

Ponteland Senior Gentlemen's Club

On Monday March 13 at 2.30pm we have Geoff Hughes speaking on 'Newcastle Through The Ages' at St Mary's Parish Centre.

Ponteland WI

We welcome members and visitors to our monthly meeting being held on Tuesday March 14 at 2pm in Merton Hall, Ponteland. This month we look forward to a presentation by Pat Hodgson on her inspirational garden at the Beacon, Stocksfield. Celebrating the beginning of Spring, the competition is for a daffodil in any medium, so get baking, drawing and knitting and join us for a floral extravaganza.

Ponteland Village WI

Our varied evenings continue with a talk on Fire Safety by Northumberland Fire Service at our meeting on Tuesday March 14 at 7.30pm in St Mary's Parish Centre. 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. Look for Ponteland Village WI on Facebook.

Ponteland Local History Society

On March 16 at 7.30pm at St Mary's Parish Centre, Dr Winifred Stokes will give a talk entitled 'Fat Cows and railway lines: The link between the agricultural and industrial revolutions in the North East'. Visitors welcome £2. The History Society Archive will be open for inspection between 1.30pm and 3.30pm on Friday March 3 at Ponteland Library.

Ponteland Friendly Stitchers

The next meeting will be on Monday March 27 from 2.15pm to 4.15pm in the Hive Bar, Ponteland Leisure Centre, when Barry Mead will give a talk on needles. Visitors are welcome

- fee £5. For more information please contact emmadenham52@gmail.com

North East of England Alpine Group

Spring Show and Plant Fair on April 1 at Hexham Auction Mart. Plant sales 10am till 3pm. Show opens approx 11am. Admission £3.

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 now meet every Monday from 11am to 1pm at Ponteland Social Club in Merton Way.

Creative Writing Classes

Places currently available for one or two new members; beginners and more experienced writers are equally welcome. These classes will inspire and encourage you to write poetry, short fiction and memoir and to share and develop your writing through stimulating workshop sessions in a friendly and supportive group. We meet on Wednesday mornings in Ponteland and Dinnington. Email claire@claire276.plus.com for more information or to arrange a free taster session.

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 or call 01661 613502. For Minister Rev Jona Sewell email revjsewell@gmail.com or call 01661 822057.

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.

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Latest news from Ponteland Town Council

Budget and precept 2023-24

The Town Council approved its budget and precept at a meeting held on January 24. A precept of £448,715 would be requested from Northumberland County Council and for the fourth year in a row, this represented a 0% increase on a Band D property. A sum of money will 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.

e-petition lodged with NCC by residents of Jameson Manor

Residents of Jameson Manor attended the meeting to discuss their recently lodged e-petition with Northumberland County Council which requests improvements to reduce speed travelling out of Ponteland past their estate entrance. They want to open dialogue with the Town Council as to whether any additional signage or speed monitoring equipment could be implemented. Ideally they hope a crossing can be installed to allow pedestrians to access the pavement on the left hand side of the road. Councillors listened to all the comments made and agreed that this would be discussed at their next Highways Working Party meeting. The two residents in attendance will be advised of the outcome from that meeting.

Grants paid

The Council approved a grant of £250 towards the Ponteland Beer Festival for 2023 being held on June 2-3. A payment of £1,500 was also awarded to Dalton Village Hall.

Permission to use Ponteland Park

The Council approved an application from Ponteland Rotary Club who had applied to use Ponteland Park to host the Duck Race which this year will be held on September 3.

New commercial mechanical workshop given green light

Plans for a new commercial mechanical workshop in Ponteland have been approved despite objections from neighbouring residents and the town council.

Ben Lomas had applied for planning permission from Northumberland County Council to change the use of an existing agricultural shed and build a new agricultural store on land adjacent to Jackson Avenue.

There were eight objections lodged with concerns raised including the location being inappropriate in a residential area with a large number of young families and narrow roads unsuitable for agricultural vehicles, and noise.

But members of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Committee, meeting on February 13, followed the officer's recommendation and unanimously approved the plans.

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New Chief Executive joins County Council

Northumberland County Council's new Chief Executive has taken up her post.

Dr Helen Paterson, formerly Chief Executive at Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, brings a wealth of local government experience to the role – including as an Executive Director at Sunderland City Council and the Chief Executive of Wrexham County Borough Council.

Helen said: "I'm delighted to have joined Northumberland County Council and I'm looking forward to getting to know this beautiful county better – as well as meeting staff and residents."

Council leader Cllr Glen Sanderson said: "We're very pleased to formally welcome Helen to Northumberland – her skills, experience and in-depth knowledge of local government will bring a real boost to the council and the county. We're all looking forward to working together for everyone over the coming years."



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Boy left 'scared stiff' after alleged abduction attempt

A boy was left "scared stiff" and unable to sleep after an attempted abduction while he played with a friend on a Ponteland housing estate.

The 11-year-olds were playing out on their scooters on Barnaby Way on the Jameson Fields estate at around 6.30pm on Monday January 31 when a man in a black Range Rover Sport drove up to them and asked them to get into the car.

The boys ran off and police were immediately informed, and an investigation was launched. Officers interviewed both boys and received a clear description of the driver and the car.

Speaking shortly after the incident, the mum of one of the boys told Pont News: "He has been off school for two days; he was scared stiff. He can't sleep. His sister is picking him up from school so he doesn't have to walk home alone."

Launching the appeal for information on February 1, a Northumbria Police spokeswoman said: "We received a report that at 6.40pm yesterday two children were asked to get into a car being driven by a man on Barnaby Way, Ponteland.

"Both children ran off immediately and were unharmed but were left shaken. Enquiries are currently ongoing as to the circumstances surrounding the incident and extra officers are in the area today to provide reassurance."

There was no update on the police investigation as we went to print but anyone with information is asked to contact Northumbria Police on 101 quoting NP-20230131-1062.

Man bailed after Darras Hall burglary

A 27-year-old man arrested after reports of a break-in at a home on Runnymede Road, Darras Hall, on Sunday January 29 has been bailed.

A helicopter from the National Police Air Service was called in twice by Northumbria Police to assist their hunt for the suspected burglars and enquiries are ongoing.

Budget set to protect services and focus on growth

A Council Tax increase of 2.99% with a further 2% increase in the adult social care precept has been proposed by leaders at County Hall for next year.

The budget proposals include a £223m capital programme for 2023/24 including £92m to improve and regenerate towns and communities across the county, over £19m for housing, £31m for schools and £35m for road and path repairs and flood prevention schemes.

A discount equivalent to 1% of the Band D council tax increase is also being recommended for some residents for the next year to help with the ongoing cost of living issue.

Council Leader Glen Sanderson said it was a "fair and balanced budget which will offer extra support for those who need it most".



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