

Alnwick Town Team

Minutes of the meeting of Alnwick Town Team held at **5.30pm on July 4th** at The Pavilion, Alnwick Garden.

Present: Cllr. Alan Symmonds (Chairman), Mark Brassell (The Alnwick Garden), Cllr. Gordon Castle (NCC), David Taylor (Chamber of Trade), Eileen Blakey (EB) (Alnwick in Bloom), David Lovie (Civic Society), Tim Kirton (Alnwick Town Council).

1. Apologies for absence

Philip Angier (Local Living), Carlo Biagioni (Chamber of Trade).

2. Minutes of the last meeting, held Wednesday June 13th 2018

Approved as a true and correct record.

3. Matters Arising

Pg. 2, Cherry Trees: The Mayor reported he had written back to the Japanese Embassy; planting will take place in 2019-20. MB said three different species will be supplied so some research will be needed on the three types but Alnwick Garden will help wherever it can.

4. Borderlands: Updates on Dumfries conference and Chamber of Trade/Loving Alnwick events

MB said that some good ideas had come out of the joint Garden/Chamber of Trade/Loving Alnwick event, giving the correct impression of ambition, and these will be forwarded to Janice Rose at NCC. The extension of the Aln Valley Railway had caught MB's imagination.

The Chairman expressed concerns that many of the ideas raised at the event appeared to have a potentially heavy revenue requirement; it must be remembered that Borderlands would only fund capital so projects must be able to prove that they are viable in terms of revenue funding.

TK and MB reported on the Borderlands conference held at Dumfries during July, which had been very much an exercise in gathering information from grass roots level by the Borderlands partners to inform the draft "Deal" which would be prepared by the end of September for submission to the Scottish and UK governments. "Borderlands" was still quite fluid and a decision on its structure and method is not expected before the end of 2018, with the first projects not expected to be approved until 2019.

5. Great Exhibition of the North Alnwick days: August 11th and 12th: Update

The Chairman reported that this year's Alnwick Music Festival was now not going ahead; all the technicians needed to delivering the Music Festival will be tied up with moving the equipment out of the Playhouse (in preparation for its refurbishment) to the former Lindisfarne School and this would have some effect on the Great Exhibition of the North Alnwick Days: The stage will still be available in the Market place on the Sunday and in Northumberland Hall as a wet weather option but the Music Festival seating will obviously not be there; bringing seating in for the Saturday and Sunday would cost over £3,000 which is prohibitive. The intention is to advise attendees to bring their own folding chairs/groundsheets to create a picnic atmosphere. A full programme for the Saturday and Sunday has been approved and will be in place, organised by Ann Walton, and The Playhouse will be hosting the Globe Theatre company performing Shakespeare so the Great Exhibition weekend will take place but without seating in the Market Place. The Chairman said the Music Festival will return in 2019.

MB requested a schedule of whom will be performing and where to publicise this and enhance attendance,

6. Town Centre Working Group meetings and Town Centre empty property survey – progress

TK and DL reported that numerous responses had been received from the agents handling the empty premises in Alnwick. A number of premises were under offer or there was firm interest, conversely at least two currently occupied premises will be vacated later this year because of retirements. Agents have responded positively to the Town Council's offer of help fill empty units by notifying agents of expressions of interest and enquiries top the Council and by providing links between Council and agents' websites.

EB asked whether she could be advised of any interest from agents in putting exhibition materials in vacant property windows. **Action: TK**

7. Market Place Whole Year Strategy for events and activities – survey

TK and PA reported that a questionnaire has been jointly drawn up and will be issued to all Market Place businesses imminently with returns requested by July 11th. The questionnaire invites businesses to make comments on how their businesses are impacted upon by Market Place activities and events, whether they wished to see more events and if so of what type, whether businesses would participate in future events, when additional events should take place in the year, and comments ion infrastructure improvements.

8. Updates

a) Alnwick Garden – Mark Brassell

- The proposed play village had received planning approval the previous day and funding is now being sought to deliver it.
- The Alnwick Garden's opening hours are being extended to 8pm for 27 days during the summer holidays, enabling late arrivals at The Garden to get extra time there.
- Father Christmas tickets went on sale the previous Monday and have already recorded the biggest ever demand.
- The Christmas light show will take place between December 13th and 24th. This will be a traditional light show featuring reindeer, Christmas Carols and snowmen in and around The Garden to attract more evening visitors. The Alnwick Garden wants to be THE go-to Christmas destination in the North-East. More information will be provided later in the year.

b) Alnwick in Bloom - Eileen Blakey

- The AiB Painting Competition Awards Ceremony was scheduled to take place on the coming Friday evening at The Alnwick Garden.
- The Northumberland in Bloom judges would be in Alnwick on Friday 13th July.
- The garden competition will be held in August, along with the Sunflower Challenge for children aged 16 and under.
- Paintings from the Children's painting competitions are hoped to be displayed from Monday and Tuesday next week until after the NiB judges' visit.
- DT suggested that the paintings be used for a series of postcards which could then be sold.

The Chairman said that the effort, energy and enthusiasm of the AiB Committee is never diminished and asked that our appreciation of their work be recorded.

c) Chamber of Trade – David Taylor

CT said that the joint CoT/Loving Alnwick/Garden Borderlands event was well attended; the three partners are writing up a plan from the event and even if we don't get anything from Borderlands funding we should make use of the projects suggested at the meeting.

d) Civic Society – David Lovie

DL advised that the Heritage Lottery Fund have received the final report on the "Heritage Heroes" book. £1560 would be returned to HLF as the project had come in under budget.

The Civic Society's Newsletter was circulated; this issue features a full letter from Michael Conzen complimenting the Heritage Heroes book and a report on the Civic Society's Civic Award.

e) Local Living/Alnwick Markets – Philip Angier

Philip Angier was unable to attend this meeting but provided a written update:

- Taste of the North (23rd/24th June) passed off well with great weather.
- Saturday saw footfall slightly above expectations, some great music including the Bryne School Band from Norway and a full market; Sunday conflicted with England vs Panama football match and – despite fine weather – a much reduced attendance. So footfall across the w/e was down on last year.
- Trading conditions remain challenging (as they are across the whole retail sector). Even when footfall is good, conversion of footfall into spending is noticeably less than in previous years. Conversations with traders suggest year on year sales are on average down by between 5% and 10% - a couple are bucking the trend but not many.
- Local Living are looking forward to the Food Festival (22nd/23rd September) - and continue to work hard to maximise the impact of the weekly markets

f) County Council – Cllr. Gordon Castle

- GC advised that a new heritage lantern had been bought for Chapel Lane to replace the unsuitable modern light fitting.
- The former NCC Depot on Willowburn has been advertised for sale for industrial/commercial uses only (housing will not be allowed)

g) Town Council – Tim Kirton

Initial works have started on the improvement of the bus station with the removal of the redundant queue barriers and the painting of the barriers which remain. The rest of the works are still awaiting the signing of the new lease between Morrison's and Arriva.

EB advised that AiB had not yet fulfilled their obligation to undertake the environmental improvement works at the bus station.

9. Any other urgent business

None

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting

5.30pm on Wednesday August 1st 2018, at Alnwick Garden Pavilion