



Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday 11th March 2021 via Zoom at 6.30m

Present Cllrs L Wearn, S Allcroft, L Aynsley, P Broom, G Castle, P Edge, B Gridsale, J Humphries, M Harrington, J Lyford, J Parker, S Patience, M Swinbank, A Symmonds, G Watson and L Wood-Mitchell.

In attendance P Hatley, Town Clerk & Chief Officer; J Pibworth, Assistant to the Town Clerk; T Kirton, Project & Funding Officer; Beth Gascoigne Owens

The Mayor welcomed Councillor John Parker to the meeting and advised that she would arrange an online meeting with him.

C20/143 Questions from the public

The Town Clerk reported that there had been several questions from the public on a number of common themes, including the one submitted by the member of the public who joined the meeting.

Public Toilets

Councillor asked if Councillor Castle would like to comment first.

Councillor Castle agreed that the toilets were inadequate and advised that NCC had allocated £1mill to improve toilets, which they own, across the county. Although not finalised he felt sure that Alnwick would get a share of the money in the next financial year. He added that an attendant would not be practical in their current layout.

The Town Clerk advised that he would reply to the member of the public. He advised that no charging could be made whilst they remained NCC owned/managed but if the Town Council managed them then charging could be made.

Councillor Watson explained that the refurbishment of the toilets had been discussed and that once they were redesigned, and if the Town Council took them on, it could include some form of charging system.

Councillor Swinbank advised that the Town Council had been trying for a number of years to get some serious work done on the toilets. It is a reoccurring issue which the Town Council have been pushing hard to get a complete refurbishment.

30 mph speed limit

Councillor Wearn advise that the public question concerned the area into town over Denwick Bridge which is 60mph zone. They feel that the 30mph limit could be moved back over the bridge. She also advised that the Town Council had requested the 30mph limit at the bottom of The Peth be moved to the other side of the Lion Bridge.

Councillor Castle advised that NCC do not as policy move 30mph limits in non-residential areas. He felt that the 30mph limit might be able to be moved back before the Alnwick Garden car park entrance.

Councillor Harrington explained that it was a building site for the next 2 years so it would seem sensible to move the 30mph limit to improve safety.

Councillor Swinbank advised that Chris Thompson from NCC had confirmed that a temporary 30mph limit could be put in place.

Councillor Wearn left the meeting and Councillor Watson took the chair.

Councillor Symmonds explained that people coming over the Denwick Bridge underestimate the width of the pavement and road. He proposed that NCC were asked to install a temporary 30mph limit on Denwick Lane.

Councillor Castle suggested the Town Council took the matter to Chris Thompson at NCC. Councillor Wearn re-joined the meeting.

Councillor Broom agreed with the comments made and felt that heavy vehicles turning signs would also be helpful. Long term he felt that more speed monitoring signs could be to be looked at.

Dog Fouling & Litter and Item 8 Street Cleanliness

The Town Clerk advised that these issues had been discussed a number of times at previous Full Council meetings. He advised that Beth Gascoigne Owens the member of the public who had joined the meeting was keen to work with the Town Council.

Councillor Wearn advised that this was a national issue, and that people should be encouraged to take their litter home with them. She advised that some actions had been agreed including provision of dog bag dispensers and signage.

Councillor Lyford proposed taking the agreed actions forward. She felt there was more that could be done including bag dispensers and more bins. She asked how much of NCC resource was provided in Alnwick.

Councillor Castle explained that Alnwick Town Council were invited to become an agent of the Green Dog Walkers Scheme but had not taken this forward. He felt that the Town Council should encourage people to sign up to the scheme. Stats are available but it is unable to get this parish by parish and that it is also impossible to name and shame.

Councillor Watson agreed with Councillor Lyford to push ahead with agreed actions. He felt it was a very small minority of dog owner who cause the issue and that these were the people who needed targeting and offered to photograph offenders to pass onto NCC.

Councillor Wearn felt it might not be a safe action and felt that the Town Council should work with the Enforcement Officers on the issue.

Councillor Harrington felt that the Town Council should target people, with leaflets, in the areas where dog fouling is a real issue.

Beth Gascoigne Owens agreed that publicising the Green Dog Walkers Scheme would be preaching to the converted. She wondered if the money could be used on other actions and that fines could be part of the solution.

Councillor Symmonds agreed with Councillor Lyford about the provision of additional street furniture. He also agreed with Beth Gascoigne Owens. He asked if there was any other good practice from other councils which the Town Council could use.

Councillor Humphries reported that some people regularly let their dogs out of the house unattended.

The Town Clerk felt that NCC should be pressured to provide the data.

RESOLVED: i) That officers liaise with NCC officers to get data; ii) to purchase relevant street furniture; iii) Leafletting the areas with high levels of dog fouling; iv) Alnwick Town Council sign up to the Green Dog Walkers Scheme

Councillor Wearn confirmed that the Town Council were happy to supply litter picking equipment to groups in Alnwick.

Beth Gascoigne-Owens confirmed that litter was a localised problem around where young people congregate such as Swansfield Park, Peter's Mill and Alnwick Community Centre. She felt that the type of litter (e.g. condoms, empty alcohol bottles) was also concerning as it formed part of a larger anti-social behaviour issue.

Councillor Castle congratulated Beth on the job she was doing. He felt that the Town Council could loan out litter picking equipment for groups to. He also confirmed that there were some rural areas which had litter.

Councillor Watson that not all young people were causing all the problem as he had seen a much wider cohort of people dropping litter.

Councillor Harrington reported that he had done some litter picking to target problem areas. He suggested that council staff were used to clear any hot spots.

Councillor Swinbank felt that it needed to be a partnership between the Town Council, NCC and residents. He felt that if everyone picked a bit of litter when they were outside this would help with the issue.

Councillor Wearn asked if council staff could be asked to check any areas identified as problem areas. She advised Beth that the bus station did not belong to the Town or County Council but that the Town Council do contact Arriva on a regular basis regarding the litter. She was happy that Beth contacted the Town Clerk to pick up litter picking equipment.

Beth Gasgoine-Owens left the meeting.

C20/144 Apologies for absence

None.

C20/145 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Castle declared a non-pecuniary interest in all County Council matters.

C20/146 Approval of the Minutes of the Last meeting (11th February 2021)

The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 11th February 2021 were tabled for approval.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2021 were agreed as a true record.

C20/147 Matters Arising

None.

C20/148 Mayor's Report

The Mayor reported that there had been no civic activities since the last meeting but had been activity around the Alnwick Partnership Advisory Group meetings.

She reported that the 176 cherry trees from the Japanese Embassy had been delivered and that a new planting plan will be sent to the Embassy tomorrow.

C20/149 Updates

a) County Council

Councillor Castle reported that PURDAH started on March 26th which means that no candidate can use Town Council facilities to promote their own electoral interest. If anyone needed advice, they should contact NCC.

Chromebooks have been donated to DCHS from a Newcastle business. He advised that DCHS had confirmed they were 150 short to provide every child with a Chromebook and wondered if the Town Council could consider some money to purchase Chromebooks.

Councillor Broom advised that money, including £2,000 to DCHS, had been given to each school for the purchase of Chromebooks. He also felt that he must congratulate NCC's snow clearing crew who had cleared all paths every day.

Councillor Castle reported there was an issue with Alnwick Town Junior Football Club

The Town Clerk declared an interest in the item and left the meeting.

Councillor Castle advised part of the planning approval the football club were given a condition to install a cycle/footpath and wondered if the Town Council would consider contributing to the costs of the cycle/footpath at the appropriate committee.

Councillor Patience explained that whilst planting trees at the football club she had spoken to the volunteers and agreed with Councillor Castle that the cycle/footpath were key to the wider town and should be discussed at the appropriate committee.

Councillor Allcroft felt the request should go to the next Finance & Policy Committee for further discussion.

Councillor Wearn felt that chairs of committees could visit the football club.

Councillor Symmonds asked if they were requesting a contribution or a loan.

The Town Clerk re-joined the meeting.

Councillor Symmonds asked if, following the leaked report about Advance Northumberland, he wondered if assurance that council taxpayers of Northumberland would not be penalised.

Councillor Castle confirmed that as he was unsure of the outcome of any discussions.

Councillor Grisdale asked how Councillor Castle felt about the financial health of NCC. Councillor Castle confirmed that NCC's finances, including reserves, were very healthy.

RESOLVED: To collect further information about the financial contribution required by the Alnwick Town Junior Football Club and discuss at March's Finance & Policy Committee.

b) Advisory Groups

i. Sustainable Travel

Councillor Swinbank reported that the Alnwick Greenway was still being worked on with positive responses from NCC and landowners. The group have also been working on Alnwick's LTPs and staycationing in Alnwick and will be working with the Retail & Town Centre Advisory Group on how this will affect traffic and parking.

ii. Retail and Town Centre

Councillor Harrington reported that the group met fortnightly and had been working on an incubator unit within the town for start-up businesses. They had met with the Gentoo who own the residential units opposite the bus station. The Town Trail app will be ready next week and planning has started for the Christmas diary.

iii. Climate Change & Natural Environment

Councillor Patience reported that the Advisory Group had a presentation about a Climate Change event on Saturday 23rd October. Updates on the Thomas Percy site update and the Cricket pitch site and tree planting. The next meeting will be discussing the Climate Change Action plan and the strategy which has just come out from NCC.

Councillor Castle advised that Climate Change will move back to the top of the agenda with NCC. He also advised that there was a Green recovery challenge fund available for environmental groups across the country to apply for funding and advised he would send details to Councillor Patience.

Councillor Broom asked if the Project & Funding Officer could be used to source funding for Advisory Group projects.

iv. Heritage

Councillor Grisdale reported that the Heritage Advisory Group were meeting on March 30th and that the focus would be on the Heritage Days in September.

v. Housing, Economy and Employment

Councillor Lyford reported that the Project & Funding Officer had invited a wider group of people to attend and that the group would have their first meeting the following week. They would focus on the CAPs and look at potential ESF funding and how this might be used in Alnwick.

They may split Housing from Economy and Employment.

The Young Persons Housing Needs Report had been presented and Councillor Patience advised that a discussion would be taking place with the person who had concerns about the report.

RESOLVED: To note the updates.

C20/150 The Cobbles

The Town Clerk reported that some progress had been made through the Alnwick Forum. He reported that NCC had provided 3 options the first of which had been discarded. The remaining two options will be sent out to councillors.

He explained there had been more information on the potential materials being proposed.

Councillor Aynsley asked if there would be a reduction in the number of car parking spaces available in the 2 designs. Councillor Wearn confirmed that both designs would give slight increase in spaces.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the cobbles could be added to March's Planning agenda, He asked councillors to send any comments to the Town Clerk or to attend the meeting.

Councillor Castle explained that the cost was much lower than expected and although it didn't include any ancillary works would cover most of the work. He felt it was important that a public consultation took place.

Councillor Broom asked if parking in the other direction had been considered. Councillor Wearn advised that it was one of the suggestions that had been put forward.

The Town Clerk said he would chase NCC on this. Councillor Broom advised that this had been the cars had parked in the past and may stop some of the accidents with Town Council street furniture.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

C20/151 Elections

The Town Clerk explained that any questions about the forms to be completed councillors should go to officers at County Hall.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

C20/152 Website Update

The Town Clerk advised that he had planned a run through the new website. He advised that as this would take some time he would send the link to councillors. Officer training is being arranged for April and an update will be able to be given in May.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

C20/153 Covid 19 Remembrance Garden

The Town Clerk explained that at the last meeting it was agreed that the Town Council would create a Covid Memorial Garden in Green Batt Gardens and a small working group be set up.

RESOLVED: To set up a working group is set up for the creation of a Covid Memorial Garden and that Northumberland Estates be invited to part of a small working group.

C20/154 To receive the Minutes of the Committees

Minutes of the Planning, Highways & Transport Committee (18th February 2021) were tabled to be received.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Planning, Highways & Transport Committee held on 18th February 2021 were received.

Minutes of the Cemetery Committee (25th February 2021) were tabled to be received.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Cemetery Committee held on 25th February 2021 were received.

C20/155**a) Payments**

PAYEE	TOTAL	VAT	DETAILS
S J Carr	£241.38	£0.00	Materials
GCS Leisure Buildings	£1,504.00	£250.67	Greenhouse for Community Allotment
TrailTale Limited	£1,380.00	£230.00	Tourism route app
Glasdon	£4,760.52	£793.43	Seats and bins
Davidsons	£26.91	£4.46	Materials
SLCC Enterprises Ltd	£90.00	£15.00	Virtual Practioners Conference
Mole Country Store	£44.99	£0.00	Safety clothing
The Northumberland Estates	£2.99	£0.50	Materials
Diamond Group	£16.92	£2.82	Printing/copying charges
Playdale Playgrounds	£631.66	£105.28	Replacement rope and fixings
Northumberland County Council	£2,700.00	£0.00	Rent for Greenwell Lane (Mar-June 2021)
Wylam Nurseries	£876.88	£32.75	Trees for Community Projects
J Pibworth	£792.09	£130.34	Rubber matting for cemetery, electricity top-up for Covid patient, Covid products, stationery
Total	£13,068.34	£1,565.25	

* Indicates LGA 1972 s137 Expenditure

The following invoices were paid by direct debit & were reported for information:

Barclays Bank charges (Dec-Jan)	£49.78	£0.00	Bank charges
British Gas	£28.08	£0.00	British gas contract
Biffa	149.64	24.94	Trade waste Dec
BT	£150.47	£25.08	Phone (Cemetery / Greenwell Lane (Jan)
Corona Energy	279.13	13.29	Electricity charges Jan 2021
NCC	£11,591.28	£30.00	Payroll Jan 2021
	£12,248.38	£93.31	£

RESOLVED: To approve the payments £13,068.34 and note the direct debit payments of £12,248.38.

b) Bank Reconciliation

The Assistant to the Town Clerk explained that expenditure was currently at £306,226.98 and Income at £425,701.50. All transactions balance to the bank statement at the end of February 2021 and there are 4 cheques not cashed totalling £19,782.64. She explained that the value of the non-cashed cheques would decrease as most payments are now made through BACS.

All creditors from 2019/20 are now cashed. The first day of Internal Audit has taken place with the rest of the days in July.

Councillor Allcroft asked what the 4 uncashed were for. The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that the main outstanding cheques was £15k for The Playhouse. Councillor Castle advised he was on the board of The Playhouse and would chase this.

C20/156 Correspondence

The Town Clerk reported that he had received a request from Doctor Syers of Alnwick Medical Group to come to speak to the Town Council. He advised that he would invite Dr Sayers to present at April's Full Council meeting.

C20/157 Any Other Urgent Business

Councillor Castle explained that the Hotspur Tower is closed for at least 3 weeks. Part of the front keystone has been damaged and the initial thought was that it had been hit by a vehicle but CCTV footage had not found evidence to support this. Engineers were concerned when they inspected so the highway was closed immediately. As a consequence, NCC realise that traffic flow options, signage and potential technical solutions need to be considered for when the Tower is open and closed. At present the residents of Prudhoe Street, Green Batt and Lisburn Street are suffering massively increased traffic flows.

Councillor Swinbank reported that matter of the Tower being the crux of any traffic questions in Alnwick has been bought up by the Sustainable Travel Advisory Group. Over the last few months there have been a number of meetings with stakeholders and that the priority for everyone is to get the Tower open again.

Councillor Aynsley asked who the stakeholders for the Tower were. Councillor Swinbank advised that it was Northumberland Estates, the owners of the Tower, Historic England and NCC who owned the Highway.

Councillor Castle reported that he would request a temporary 20mph speed limit until the permanent one is put in place.

Councillor Broom explained that as a resident of The Maltings he was certainly seeing the increased traffic flow and that this was causing safety issues for pedestrians. None of the streets were designed to take increased traffic flow and that the main issue was at junctions. He reported that he had seen an ambulance in town this morning and asked if Narrowgate could be opened on a temporary basis to give access to emergency vehicles.

The public meeting closed at 8.24pm.