

Neighbourhood Services

Bus Shelter Cleansing

Routine bus shelter cleansing, which is continually delayed due to competing priorities, has now been successfully completed. Neighbourhood Services Officers (NSO's), Mark and Ryan have provided a comprehensive record reminiscent of traditional time and motion studies, and Gary has produced a better looking asset map using what3words system to identify locations. This is much appreciated as we work toward operational efficiencies and it will significantly enhance our strategic planning capabilities.

Mark and Sarah (Executive Officer) met the new bus ambassador for Northumberland. The meeting was very productive. We requested numbers for each bus stop so we can look into users, and identify any bus stops that are regularly used, especially by those with accessibility needs and elderly residents, without shelters or seats. It is expected to bring any plans to the Council, and that this would be based on priority use. Mark raised the lack of stand information at Ashington Bus Station. Following discussion, it was agreed we would install the stand information if it were provided, additionally we could replace broken timetable covers. This has been provided very quickly and will be scheduled asap. It is great to have a closer working relationship with NCC Officers who can respond to these issues so quickly, and they are very grateful that we can support with on the ground help.

Litter Bins

Newly agreed litter bins have been installed. Mark will soon be leading an assessment of bin suitability to identify locations where larger capacity bins may be beneficial, with a commitment to refurbishing existing bins to prevent waste.

Play Areas

Several ongoing but minor play area repairs have been completed following a concerted effort by NSO's to tackle everything on play area inspection reports provided by NCC. Additionally, NSO's have identified issues with roundabouts at both Epsom Drive and Alexandra Road. The Executive Officer raised these directly with the play provider and they will be repaired under warranty.

Sarah is meeting Rob Delap, NCC Parks Project Officer to progress a survey about the use of and play value of Bywell Road play area. The results of the survey will inform any future decisions. This play area is owned by NCC, but the hope is that ATC would formally take responsibility. This has been under an informal arrangement in the past and is part of the ongoing legal issues that have been progressed for all play areas.

Speed signs

New batteries have been installed in those speed signs that were temperamental. We are keen to get the data from all speed signs, and to publish this like other authorities. Once NSO's have work devices, this will be prioritised.

Environmental

By the time of the meeting, all gateways, memorials, and plantings will have been visited and tidied in advance of spring. Watering will commence in the spring and equipment is being checked and tested with this in mind. There has been a lot of repair and

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maintenance work, not horticulture related, and Ryan is looking forward to focusing more on horticulture as the weather improves.

Allotments Capital

The Council approved funding for the water system at Nursery Park during the budget process, to be completed 25/26. While no other capital programmes were greenlit, prudent financial management throughout the year may enable us to carry forward revenue balances to address the outstanding roadways at Woodhorn Road, which remain our priority for capital works.

Allotment General

Allotment Officer Alan Bunker has adapted the tap systems at Woodhorn Road, North Seaton Colliery, Green Lane, High Market, and Nursery Park addressing previous infrastructure limitations. The new, more sophisticated fixings are designed to prevent operational issues during low-temperature periods, significantly improving the reliability of the water supply infrastructure. There is further work to be carried out.

A successful glass recycling trial at Nursery Park was completed, with the next UPVC recycling day scheduled for 17th February at North Seaton Colliery and Seaton Hirst. Administrative matters include anticipated notices to quit for three plot holders at North Seaton Colliery due to non-payment, and upcoming rent invoices for Nursery Park and Hirst East End plots ahead of 1st April 2025.

The team provided operational support and maintenance: Alan, Mark, and Ryan collaborated to secure the Hirst East End Allotment plot following a recent fire, repaired boundary fences damaged by Storm Éowyn at Green Lane and Nursery Park and addressed infrastructure needs including filling potholes at North Seaton using road planings. A number of plot holders enquired about the Council funding repairs to their own fences, as was done when storm Arwen hit the UK. All were informed that whilst we appreciate the Council did fund repairs in the past, due to having an underspend on events due to COVID-19, we have no budget to fund repairs this time.

New tenants have been introduced to both North Seaton Colliery and Nursery Park sites, and Alan has procured hedge works for North Seaton Colliery.

Events and Engagement

February Half Term

As part of the ongoing half term programmes brought by the Youth Advisory Committee two free swim sessions have been booked for Wednesday 26th February and Saturday 1st March, both sessions 1pm to 2pm.

A further 4 free swim sessions are arranged for the Easter holidays.

Free gym sessions are being looked at in partnership with Sculpt Gym. These would be for 16-18 year olds, proposed Tuesday 25th February and Thursday 27th February.

Animating Ashington

Key points from the Positive Friends Group meeting on Tuesday 4th February 2025

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- Light Night events – the events were a huge success, attracting 3000 people over two days
- Torch Lit Procession - 109 people signed up for torch lit procession, with a target of 300 torchbearers

Upcoming events include:

- James Brunt's art project in schools (large-scale painting in Ashington)
- One Amazing Day on 31st May (featuring wrestling ring, pyrotechnics, circus performance)
- James Brunt will also be hosting a workshop at the ECO Fair on Friday 25th April, which will be funded by Walk the Plank.

Staffing Updates - Gary Taylor and Faye Parker introduced as new trainees and Reemer Bailey is leaving the council on 14th February.

Walk the Plank Action Items:

- ✓ Distribute social media pack for torch lit procession
- ✓ Find additional nominees for procession (schools, scout leaders)
- ✓ Secure locations for artwork (potential sites: cinema, cricket club fencing)
- ✓ Circulate professional photos from events

Notable Event Details:

- Free soup and bread for procession participants
- Working to involve local talent in performances
- Positive community engagement and support noted throughout

The meeting reflected ongoing enthusiasm for community arts and cultural development in Ashington.

Northumberland College Health & Wellbeing Roadshow

The Communications and Engagement Officer will be attending the event at Ashington college on Thursday 13th February. As well as information about Ashington Town Council being given out Sharon will also be promoting the February half term free swim sessions and free gym sessions, along with the upcoming ECO Fair and Easter activities.

Dukes World of Work Day

The Communications and Engagement Officer will be attending the World of Work Day event on Tuesday 4th March 9:45am at Dukes Primary School.

The school are delighted to have representation from Ashington Town Council, any councillors wishing to attend must contact Sharon as soon as possible to arrange security passes.

Hirst Working Group Meeting notes

Carla Thompson, NCC Locality Co-ordinator, provided these meeting notes:

Actions by Ian Stephenson:

- Coordinate possible change of meeting time/date
- Contact Gemma about emergency housing property
- Cascade links/info from Rachel
- Link DWP into armed forces and veterans works

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- Perform demo on social value tool in March meeting
- Link with LR about employability and equality

Project Horizon:

- Partners to contact Wayne about prevention works for repeat offenders
- Housing identified as a priority

Other Key Actions:

- Rachel to connect group with ambassadors
- Caz to share info with college and youth providers
- Wayne to update on mini op impacts throughout year
- Gemma to share info on Bernicia social action days in March
- Neil to organise session with SH in mid-late March, inviting wider partners
- YMCA to set up Hirst youth forum (Caz to discuss with SP)

Projects

Ashington Cricket Club

Trees are being delivered on Tuesday 11th February and planted on Saturday 16th February. As per Stephen's previous arrangements, Mark and Ryan are working on Saturday 16th February to support the works being undertaken by contractors.

Ashington Community Woods

Following the Council's agreement to use funding to support the Project Development Phase of Ashington Community Woods, the work has been ordered, and a press release issued.

The investment, combined with additional funding from Ward Councillors' Environment Enhancements budget, will support comprehensive consultation, steering group management and the preparation of funding applications.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2025-02-06-ashington-town-council-pledges-support-for-community-led-enhancement-of-ashington-community-woods>