

Minutes of meeting of Coquetdale Cluster held on Thursday 7th March 2019 commencing 7.30pm in the Dovecote Room, Rothbury Jubilee Institute

29.1 Introduction and welcome

J Famelton (Chairman), A Arkle (Rothbury Parish Council), J Barton (Netherton & Biddlestone Parish Council), I Webb (Thropton Parish Council), G Ragdick (Glanton Parish Council), K Bell (Nunmykirk Parish Council), A Winlow (Whitton & Tosson Parish Council), V Knox (Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council),
I Hedley (Northumberland County Council), S Bridgett (County Cllr), C Miller (Clerk)

29.2 Apologies for absence

J Scarpa, Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst PC

29.3 Election of Vice Chairman

A Winlow proposed and G Ragdick seconded I Webb as Vice-Chairman, all in agreement.

29.4 Meeting with County Cllr Glenn Sanderson

G Sanderson represents the Longhorsley ward, has been a County Cllr for over 25 years, and is currently the cabinet member for local services and the environment, being ultimately responsible for anything that goes wrong with frontline services. The new County Hall administration had been in place almost 2 years with a significant amount of changes having taken place. County Hall is currently three quarters way through its refurbishment programme with the land in Ashington that had been purchased for the new building to be utilised for leisure/residential. Arch business directors and staff had changed, with Advanced Northumberland taking its place, and who would be looking to invest in land for building a new selection of council houses for sale/purchase. County Council budget had been agreed for 2019-2020, with frontline services such as cutting of road verges and road gritting not being subject to budgetary cuts. A new system of road maintenance had been implemented involving cutting out patches of bad sections of roads and relaying stronger longer lasting material, however work is still carried out by laying plodges when reacting quickly to problems. The last large snow fall had caused issues, however the policy now is to only action a pothole once. 18.6million to be spent on the Local Transport Plan covering new sections of road, and which included a large area of Coquetdale. 8million from central government secured to aid with potholes, and a range of works such as attending to flooding which cause breaking up of road services. Cattlegrids to be replaced on unclassified roads, and more money to be spent on rural B and C class roads. Safety scheme budget increased to £330K this year, with Parish Council's able to work together with County Council on schemes. £150K had been allocated to a new budget for white lining. With over 3,000 miles of road in the county money does not go far, however a big effort had been made to action rural areas. An anti-littering campaign had been carried out, as County Council spend 2.6million/year to clear refuse, and a further campaign to be carried out in the Autumn, with County Council looking to install more dashcams in council vehicles to record offenders. New waste strategy to be launched concerning the recycling rate, with an aim to reach 40percent plus recycling level, with a pilot to be introduced for kerbside grass recycling, which will increase the amount of glass recycled. Recycled materials being used in road building with trial carried out using plastic flakes mixed in with bitumen, with the equivalent of 20,000 supermarket plastic bags mixed with the tar.

A Winlow said it had been refreshing to move to Northumberland in 2005 to find no major issues with litter, however the malaise had now spread north with ever increasing problems of dog bags/rubbish, with Whitton & Tosson Parish Council collecting data. Problems are mostly occurring at weekends with the issue gradually worsening. G Sanderson said dog fouling is an issue everywhere and there is the County Council green walker's scheme which provides dog

bags etc, with details available on County Council web-site, however problems at Simonside car park would be the remit of Forestry Commission. It was suggested “do not throw litter out of cars” could be displayed on A road overhead signage, however County Council do not possess a gantry for the A1, and it is Highway’s England who are responsible for this. County Council had uploaded a video on their web-site of a hedgehog caught in a plastic beer can holder and had received 58,000 views of this which had been pleasing.

V Knox carries out litter picking at Garleigh and said once an area is clean it keeps clear for a while and litter appears to encourage litter. The Great British Spring Clean is coming up, run by Keep Britain Tidy, with information available on County Council web-site, and parishes should be encouraged to arrange litter picks, and litter picking equipment is available from County Council.

I Webb would like to see Northumberland a plastic free county - County Council are to concentrate on glass recycling firstly and then food waste, with a joint authority meeting to be held, with plastic deposit schemes the way forward, however funding would be required from central government for this.

I Webb commented problems with road signage with the majority being filthy and some falling apart. Problems with signage should be reported to the County Cllr who would feed back to the area office. A small group of parish and town representatives to meet up with County Council to discuss issues, along with Northumberland Association of Local Council’s, and which are currently looking at public W/C’s and road signage, and small jobs within parishes to discuss whether some PC’s could carry out maintenance jobs within their parish. A Winlow reported Whitton & Tosson already have a reporting system in place with G Bucknall County Council and do carry out a small voluntary service.

V Knox reported an instance when a road had been flooding and drains reported as broken, with three separate County Council teams then looking at the problem but had all failed to fix it, and there seems to be different teams of people passing jobs onto another team - it appears difficult to find the correct personnel to action works. G Sanderson stated the County Council is not supposed to be working like this and County Cllrs are there to represent the parishes.

The last 6% of the county are the hardest places to reach as regards broadband, and it appears the last 2% area is not going to work through Openreach, and NCC need to have in place another way forward, with meeting to be held next week and paper to be presented to Cabinet regarding broadband voucher scheme for these areas.

The programme for conversion of streetlamps to LED is back on track, with some lamps still to be actioned throughout the Rothbury division. There are planning rules for outside lighting, particularly if near or within a National Park, and concerns can be reported to County Council.

29.5 Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 6th September 2018

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 6th September 2018 were accepted as a true record.

29.6 Matters arising from previous meeting held on Thursday 6th September 2018

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

29.7 Cluster Group’s future, aims and objectives

I Webb of Thropton Parish Council stated most parishes appear to have similar problems which should be shared and there is more power speaking through one voice, with particular concern

over planning applications for housing, with elderly people mostly occupying dwellings and young person's needing to be encouraged into villages. County Cllr stated the situation will only become worse under the current Core Strategy plans, with a level of 15% low cost housing for Coquetdale, being a large reduction to existing. Ongoing concern about the closure of Rothbury hospital beds and County Council should be aware of the degree of feeling about this. Thropton now has planning proposals submitted for 100 dwellings which is out of proportion in a village of currently 220 properties, with incremental high end homes being proposed.

County Council is trying to encourage volunteering and there are positive ways for older people to take an active role within the community. I Webb stated there is already a tremendous amount of social activities for the elderly. Rothbury is earmarked in the Local Plan as a place for elderly person housing, such as Rodsley Court, however affordable housing cannot be met unless market value homes are also built. County wide there are options for new council housing with 20 affordable homes due to be built on Whitton View extension with proposals underway to move these to the area opposite Middle School.

29.8 Policing Matters

Inspector had transferred with Acting Inspector a former Neighbourhood Sergeant from Ashington/Bedlington area, with new inspector to be appointed in next few weeks.

29.9 Roads/Traffic/Local Transport Plan

County Cllr reported B6341 Rothbury to Thropton road to get new drainage/resurfacing; resurfacing at Rothbury Bridge to top of cemetery bank and to include Cinders Bank; resurfacing from Hepple to Elsdon with funding reserved for resurfacing and surface dressing on B6341, and further funding for Bilsmoor bank and surface dressing; B6344 Sharperton to Flotterton and Thropton to Flotterton; County Council looking at a design/preparation of scheme for Blackburn Bridge; repair scheme at Callaly; repairs to Coffee bridge; Works to retaining wall at Monkridge Hall Elsdon; Shillmoor Bridge and Debdon Lake bridge repairs - widening of Debdon Bridge had not been looked at the present time; C178 to receive maintenance through Biddlestone quarry funding; carriageways on A696 to be actioned; Trewitt Hall to receive surface dressing; Harwood gate to Rothley crossroads to be actioned; and £30K repair to be carried out on path from stepping stones to Thrum Mill Rothbury where bank has collapsed. There is a scheme in the pipeline to install 20mph speed signage past Rothbury Middle School. G Sanderson also wished to concentrate on rural roads next year.

Subsidence building up on B6342 at White Bridge near to Simonside junction, which had been raised before, and County Cllr would report this.

G Sanderson stated it is important for Parish Council's to submit their LTP proposals.

C road from Pauperhaugh of concern.

29.10 Broadband

County Cllr had met with Openreach who are in the process of completing Hepple. Some areas to be re-looked at with one in particular from Harehaugh past Holystone Grange/Deuce Hill, with poles already in place; Lorbottle, Whittingham and Callaly section to be completed. From Alwinton to Makendon would likely be the most expensive route in the County. Sharperton, Farnham and Holystone are all on, however Low Farnham does not appear to be connected, with County Cllr to check. Addycombe estate to have new cabinet installed.

29.11 Planning

County Cllr had criticised the County Council policy of 15% affordable housing in Coquetdale included in the draft Northumberland Local Plan which had been classified as 25% earlier in the process, with Rothbury Parish Council commissioning a consultant to make a submission to the consultation. When the assessment had been carried out, a certain amount of data had been based on lower super output areas used for census data, with the Rothbury division divided into three areas. When calculating house prices all data had been included for properties within the National Park which is governed by the National Parks Development plan, not the Northumberland Local Plan, and should not have been included. County Cllr had been extracting postcode information and using data from land register to take house prices for those postcodes to give an accurate reflection of house prices, and when removing National park areas, a different average house price had evolved, which potentially puts Coquetdale back into the 25% affordable housing bracket. Local Plan would see the return of settlement boundaries which were lost when Alnwick District Council ceased.

Glanton and surrounding parishes were making representation regarding the windfarm element of the plan on the inappropriateness of designation of most of the north of the county as being suitable for wind turbines. G Sanderson said if there was not a policy that shows balance in view of location of onshore turbines, those people who want to see this happen would not allow the plan to proceed. In layman's terms, if an application did come forward and local people were opposed, it would not get planning permission - G Sanderson feels very strongly that there will be no further onshore turbines but rules have to be followed to get the plan to inspection. Some people would like to see the National Park area extended to include Rothbury.

29.12 Priorities from individual Parish Councils

Whittingham Parish Council had advised they no longer wished to be part of the Coquetdale Cluster.

J Barton had concerns about parking in Netherton for village hall events, with one parishioner parking in such a way that no vehicles can get through the main street, with parishioner having been spoken to but problems continuing, and asked for advice on how to proceed. G Sanderson suggested personnel from Highways NCC could visit site but parking is an extremely difficult situation to deal with.

29.13 Renewable Energy

J Barton asked if renewable energy could be used in recycling food waste - this could happen if a plant was set up by the new combined authority, but would be extremely expensive. I Webb asked if NCC have a policy for the provision of electric car charging points. G Sanderson said a percentage of new parking spaces would be rapid car charging points, but as it is a rapidly changing policy not too many spaces are being implemented at the present time, and they can only be located in short-term car parks. County Cllr had approached County Council Design Team to look at reorganising car parking in Rothbury, they are looking to incorporate cycle stands and there would be potential for charging points. Signage indicating long term car parking spaces to Haugh car park are to be erected in the centre of Rothbury in the near future.

29.14 Any Items from Northumberland County Council

I Hedley said although Parish Council's cannot apply, the Community Chest would reopen in the new financial year, which is aimed at community groups.

29.15 Finance

Nothing to report.

29.16 Any Other Business

I Hedley reported Myra Blakey, a retired longstanding Chair of Netherton and Biddlestone Parish Council, having been Chairman for 32 years, had passed away.

Any questions or queries, G Sanderson can be contacted by email at any time.
Suggestions for speaker at next meeting to be forwarded to Clerk.

29.17 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Coquetdale Cluster will be held on Thursday 12th September 2019 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute.

The meeting closed at 9pm.

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