

Minutes of Coquetdale Cluster meeting held on Tuesday 6th December 2022 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute

37.1 Introduction and welcome

J Famelton (Chairman), A Tait, C France, A Milne, I Hedley, R Aplin, J Scarpa, (Parish Cllr's), C Miller (Clerk), G Bucknall (County Council)

37.2 Apologies for absence

J Ragdick, M Milne, F Tait, L Kirkwood (received after the meeting) (Parish Cllr's), G Sanderson (Leader of Northumberland County Council)

37.3 Minutes of previous meeting held on Tuesday 4th October 2022

It was resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 4th October 2022 be accepted as a true record.

37.4 Meeting with County Council Highways Officer, Graham Bucknall

Resurfacing included in the 2022-2023 Local Transport Plan programme had been completed as follows: Greenside Bank, Flotterton; Knocklaw to Cragside; Trew hitt Hall to Netherton; B6342 to the Lee; and entrance to Harwood Forest. Several road surfaces had been dressed including the B6342 South of Rothbury; Glanton to Powburn, and Whitton Bank, Rothbury. There were some areas in Coquetdale that may be included in the LTP 2023-2024 programme. Todsteads road contractor to be on site Mid Spring, however temporary repair works were required before this. Cragend of concern, due to issues with the repaired landslip and it is understood there were problems with water. There would be the usual annual winter increase in pothole and flooding complaints, however the County Council should be able to cope with the increased workload. The roads team had been shortlisted for a national award as one of the best performers in the country. Winter services underway, grit bins topped up and gritting commenced. Individual parish concerns discussed as follows: pooling of water on Hepple bank, on a blind corner, vehicles having to swerve around it, leading to increased Health & Safety issues. There were no gullies in the area and water cannot drain into fields, however GB advised it is the landowner's responsibility to prevent water run-off, with the County Council having responsibility for contacting landowners. Hedging problematic in various areas from Swindon to the top of Billsmoor. GB confirmed it is the Highway Inspector's responsibility to contact landowners, the problem is prolific countywide but not a massive priority, with potholes and flooding of greater importance. Several drop off edges were visible on roads within Coquetdale, however placement of hoggin is a never-ending task. Permanent alteration of Coffee Bridge at Swindon would negate future accidents, however the area is within the National Park. Standing water on Main Road in Thropton, along the gutter and pavements problematic, which is a route for schoolchildren, with no nearby drain for water to flow into. An increase in traffic due to the new Spar shop would lead to further pedestrian incidents. Within Whitton & Tosson parish there is one gully full of debris at the top of the lane leading to Tosson Mill/Carterside. During heavy rainstorm leaves, road grit or soil caps off the drain and water runs straight over the top, with a request for several gullies to be placed. Slow/bend in road signage would be the responsibility of R Mckenzie, County Council. Log-in extraction had commenced at Lordenshaw with a condition survey carried out. Thanks given to GB for recent works relating to drain fixing in Hepple village, which should have solved the problems of flooding at the village.

GB thanked for his attendance and left the meeting.

37.5 Meeting with Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council

G Sanderson was unable to attend and had forwarded the following report:

“At present the County Council is working on its 23/24 budget which is always difficult but more so this year given the effects of wage and fuel inflation, both of which will cost significantly more than we budgeted for this time last year, when inflation was much less. As well as this we are not sure what kind of a Government settlement we might get this year given the messages from Whitehall. There is the ability for Councils to increase Council Tax by 5% and many if not most are planning to do that. I have said that I will do my best to keep the rise below that. I am very keen to ensure we do not reduce our key frontline services if we can possibly avoid that whilst at the same time protecting our free town centre car parking if we can. This is an expensive extra that very few Councils provide but I am still firmly of the view that it does help trade and visits to our town centres, so we will do our best! We will shortly be announcing our Queen Elizabeth Memorials programme which is based on the feedback from almost 1000 responses to our recent consultation. These will include projects around new paths, woodland and quiet reflection in and around the main towns around the County. We have recently invested in extra money for our roads, and we are finally beginning to get on top of years of underfunding. Of course, there is much still to do but people do tell me they are beginning to see the difference. I hope the Borderlands Town Deal is moving forward for Rothbury and we are seeing great things happening in our more rural areas like Ad Gefrin in Wooler, and, soon to be started, the new Maltings in Berwick and the Lilidorei project at the Alnwick Gardens which is due to open in the Spring. We have organised three Town and Parish Council conferences for January which will touch on a number of key topics we would like your views on, and we will have the key officers present for you to have time with. I hope as many as can come do so. Recently we have welcomed new Hi-Tech industry to the South East of the County bringing in over 200 new jobs. We have recently recruited a new Chief Executive as three former senior officers have now left, and we are now recruiting a new Top Executive Team so there has been some significant changes. Therefore, I am looking forward to the new year and the continuous improvements I want to see, and, in the meantime, I wish you a very happy Christmas. I am always here if I can help with any Council matters no matter how small so please get in touch anytime.”

37.6 Public Transport

The County Council were currently working with the Department of Transport on a funding package linked to improving bus services and expect confirmation of funding, terms and conditions to be finalised in the near future. Clarity regarding the funding will be key to what, if any interventions they can look at for both Coquetdale and the wider County. Transport Officer Neil Easton had suggested attending a future Cluster meeting when the above is clarified. R Aplin reported the last bus service X14 reaches Thropton at 8pm, but is then taken out of service and returns to the Ashington Depot with no passengers, which does not make much sense.

37.7 Climate Change Action Plan within Coquetdale

Rothbury Climate and Nature group are keen to work with other parishes and would be delighted for individual parishes to contact them directly.

37.8 Policing Matters

Clerk had contacted the three police representatives who receive the Cluster documents to confirm they were the correct personnel to invite to the meetings, however no response(s) had been received.

37.9 Update on Borderlands Place Programme

Nothing to report.

37.10 Roads/Traffic/Local Transport Plan

Discussed earlier.

37.11 Broadband

Factco were in the process of building a full fibre network as part of a Gigabit Connection Voucher Project with Rothbury and Thropton, which is in the final stage of the project. There were a number of hurdles to jump, for example, securing all the necessary wayleaves, with further information available at <https://factco.co.uk/projects/rothbury/>

Alncom, based in Alnwick, can also assist with rural broadband.

37.12 Crises Management/Emergency Resilience Grant Funding

Northern Powergrid had opened their resilience funding to assist communities in times of crises management. The discontinuation of telephone copper wire of great concern, however the lines can come down during storms, and in modern times need to be underground. It was thought the County Council had lobbied Parliament regarding the discontinuation of copper wire which was leading to problems in rural areas, with Clerk to seek clarification. 5G masts were now being approved by County Council with the requirement they have back-up generators for use during power outages.

37.13 Any Items from Northumberland County Council

A joint Charter between Northumberland Association of Local Council's and Northumberland County Council had been revised. Three mini conferences to be held in Alnwick, Morpeth and Hexham during January 2023. A new version of the Who's Who for Town and Parish Clerk's to be compiled and which would be available at the conference(s) and subsequently on-line via County Council web-site. Historically "Speed Dating" events had been held with County Council Officer's, and these would be available at the conferences. The next deadline for Community Chest applications open to community groups was 13/1/23, which funds costs towards community buildings, equipment and events.

37.14 Date of Next Meeting – to consider frequency of Coquetdale Cluster meetings

It was agreed the Cluster would meet three times a year in April, August and December, with the next meeting to be held on Tuesday 4th April 2023 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute. It was agreed to invite Neil Easton, County Council Transport Officer.

The meeting closed at 845pm