

Minutes of Coquetdale Cluster held on Tuesday 4th April 2023 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute

38.1 Introduction and welcome

J Famelton (Chairman), A Tait, F Tait, C France, A Milne, I Hedley, R Aplin, J Scarpa, (Parish Cllr's), S Bridgett (County Cllr), C Miller (Clerk)

38.2 Apologies for absence

Northumbria Police, G Sanderson (Leader of County Council)

38.3 Election of Chairman

Deferred until June meeting.

38.4 Election of Vice Chairman

Deferred until June meeting.

38.5 Minutes of previous meeting held on Tuesday 6th December 2022

It was resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 6th December 2022 be accepted as a true record.

38.6 Meeting with County Council Transport Officer

Thropton Parish Council had asked County Council to consider extending the X14 bus service during night-time hours, further to a proposal from Parish Cllr R Aplin. County Council had acknowledged the request and asked for proof of the level of interest. R Aplin had compiled a social media post with approximately 150 positive responses received out of 500. However at the present time the County Council had advised there was no justification for extending the service. County Council had confirmed the last X14 bus returned empty to the bus depot at Ashington as low user numbers could not justify picking up passengers and returning to Morpeth Bus Station. In the near future the bus was to be stored at the Alnwick bus depot

38.7 Meeting with Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council

Glen Sanderson had forwarded the following report:

“The County Council is currently looking at the potential impacts of the analogue telephone switch over on residents and businesses. There is no significant impact in the short term, however to continue to use landline phone lines beyond the end of 2025 users will need to plug telephone equipment into a powered router. Clearly this has the potential to be affected by power outages and we will be communicating with parish councils in the new year to help explain this in more detail as well as some key messages to support more vulnerable members of the community. Many of the services beyond 2025 will still continue to use copper lines currently in place and the timescale for the ultimate withdrawal of copper telephone lines has not yet been agreed. There will also be a withdrawal of some mobile phone services with 3G services being withdrawn during 2023 and 2024 and 2G services planned to be withdrawn sometime in the 2030s. Focus by mobile suppliers will be on 4G and 5G coverage. Again, the impacts of this will be communicated in the new year. In relation to the issue of overhead lines, unfortunately a significant part of Northumberland is supplied by copper lines that were either directly buried into the ground, were laid on top of the ground in armoured cables (which over time have become buried) or are in ducting that has been significantly

damaged or blocked over the years. In these cases the provision of new lines (including fibre) overhead, via poles, offers a significant saving. The use of these poles has meant fibre has been taken to some communities that would otherwise not have been financially viable within some of the national and local funding schemes. For obvious reasons overhead lines are not the favoured solution, some suppliers are investing heavily in mole ploughing solutions to put lines under the ground, but as noted this is not always going to be possible.”

County Cllr advised copper requires a small electrical current, with fibre requiring constant electrical current. The proposals had come from Central Government, along with proposals to switch off 2G and 3G, and were not the responsibility of the County Council. It was therefore agreed to invite the M.P. and a Department for Media, Culture and Sport Minister to attend a public meeting. Individual Parish Council members of the Coquetdale Cluster would be asked to report the proposal to their Council’s, and as members of the Coquetdale Cluster, would be obliged to finance the meeting.

Proposals for a new leisure centre within Rothbury discussed. Due to the poor state of the current facilities at Rothbury Middle School, the County Cllr had encouraged parishioners to lobby Glenn Sanderson for improved facilities. C France did not believe there is a need for a multi-million pound leisure centre in Rothbury, and any proposal would have to be guaranteed to be sufficiently used to justify the costs. A Milne believed a leisure centre would be well used by residents and visitors, with comparisons made to Ponteland.

38.8 Climate Change Action Plan within Coquetdale

Brinkburn and Hesleyhurst Parish Council had created a bio diversity action group, relating to matters such as the fact there are fewer insects and lack of bio diversity in fields. The group were fundraising to create strips of meadow along road verges. The Parish Council, local residents and Northumberland National Park Rangers were assisting in creating meadows, and relaying parish hedges. Seventeen people had carried out a community litter pick. A photo gallery had been organised to encourage people to become involved.

38.9 Policing Matters

Northumbria Police were planning to attend the next Cluster meeting.

38.10 Update on Borderlands Place Programme

The Borderlands Place Programme had not met this year. Investment plans were currently being formulated, with the emphasis being on the social aspect of housing and potential leisure. However funding is only for economic benefit/capital business projects.

38.11 Roads/Traffic/Local Transport Plan

The B6342 had been surface dressed last year, however materials were now deteriorating, with County Cllr having reported problems.

38.12 Broadband/Copper telephone lines

J Scarpa believed a telephone line should be retained in Upper Coquetdale as all public telephone boxes will have been removed by 2030. County Cllr advised in his opinion the battle to save public telephone boxes had been lost, that is why masts are being installed, and each new mast being built needs to contain a back up generator.

38.13 Crises Management/Emergency Resilience Grant Funding

Some parishes and community organisations had received grant funding, with a maximum £20K available. County Cllr had submitted an application to Northern Powergrid to cover several parishes within Coquetdale, and had contributed £20K towards resilience management through his Small Members Scheme. Diesel or gas powered generators were preferred, as opposed to battery back up versions. The bid includes a number of satellite telephones which could be installed within communities.

38.14 Any Items from Northumberland County Council

The North East devolution proposals discussed. The Metro Mayor would answer to nobody, and the devolution appears to be a precursor to a Regional Assembly. County Cllr stated we should be devolving to the lowest grass routes possible, not the opposite, and in the next 10 or 15 years, local Council's could be lost. Rural Northumberland will not matter, and a huge regional council is of great concern. The funding related to the devolution proposals do not justify the impact it will have on the region.

38.15 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Coquetdale Cluster will be held on Tuesday 1st August 2023 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute.

County Cllr advised a public meeting regarding leisure provision is to be held June/July in Rothbury, with County Cllr G Sanderson to be in attendance.

It was agreed to invite Alncom, the company involved with implementing broadband schemes in Coquetdale, to the next Cluster meeting.

The meeting closed at 815pm.