

Minutes of Coquetdale Cluster meeting held on Tuesday 1st August 2023 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute

40.1 Introduction and welcome

J Famelton (Chairman), A Tait, F Tait, J Sutton, C France, R Aplin, J Scarpa, S Bridgett, N Fisher, (Parish Cllr's), I Hedley (County Council), G Sanderson (Leader of the Council), C Miller (Clerk), G Buckingham. G Carter, L Stevenson (Alncom), K Scott (Rothbury Climate and Nature)

40.2 Apologies for absence

J Ragdick, Northumbria Police

40.3 Election of Vice Chairman

J Scarpa proposed and seconded as Vice Chairman and duly elected

40.4 Minutes of previous meeting held on Friday 23rd June 2023

It was resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 23rd June 2023 be accepted as a true record.

The possibility of reinstating the swimming pool had been raised with M.P. at the previous Cluster meeting, however no feedback had since been received. G Sanderson advised County Council were looking at options regarding the current facilities.

GS left the meeting.

40.5 Meeting with Alncom

G Buckingham, G Carter and L Stevenson from Alncom present.

By 2025 a number of Coquetdale residents would continue to be connected to copper packages. Openreach would not switch copper line off without there being fibre or alternative, being OFCOM ruling. County Council had turned around a large number of mobile mast planning applications, the majority in areas where there is currently no mobile phone reception, with battery back-up being installed. 4G signal is now available where it hadn't been previously. The way the government projects and contracts are running, people do get forgotten about. The expectation that all residents will have broadband to access their land line will likely be extended, however eventually every household will need to have a broadband connection. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) run the whole operation delivering broadband to the UK, under extremely tight deadlines to achieve by 2025, which will not likely happen.

G Carter advised Alncom were not responsible for turning the copper off, and it would therefore be difficult to say when it would be unavailable in Coquetdale. Wayleaves and costs being the main factor. A lot of broadband installation is government funded, with another company being awarded the contract to build the infrastructure in the whole of Northumberland.

S Bridgett advised the company that had been awarded the contract had submitted a bid full of promises that would be hard to deliver. Alncom's bid had targeted hard to reach areas, however the company who had won the contract had not carried out any surveys or knew the area, and it would be impossible for them to deliver what they had promised. Government had repeated the same mistakes, and there would still be areas that have nothing, with County Hall staff having raised concerns. The infrastructure should be built within three years by GoFibre. Whitton and Tosson parish would get fibre broadband, which is included in the scope of Go fibre's contract. Alncom confirmed equipment is currently being upgraded to a higher strength wireless in the Fontburn area. however the Government voucher scheme was currently paused.

It was agreed to invite Go Fibre and Inorthumberland to the next Coquetdale Cluster meeting.

GB, GC and LS left the meeting.

40.6 Climate Change Action Plan within Coquetdale

Katie Scott from Rothbury Climate and Nature distributed information relating to a Climate Change Action Plan within Coquetdale. The County Council had declared a climate emergency during 2019, and a bio diversity emergency this year. Included in their action plan is community support. Community Group Rothbury Climate and Nature had been formed a few years ago, and which is an umbrella term for groups such as the Tree Wardens, Repair Café, Rubbish Friends, Transport and Energy. RCN is a non registered charity, with its own bank account and insurance. Each individual Parish Council could declare a climate and bio-diversity emergency and compile an action plan, or there could be one overarching document. The Coquetdale Cluster could work together with strength in unity. J Sutton asked what constitutes an emergency, as the word perpetuates fear and could be taken to the extreme. J Scarpa advised that the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee, who report to Brinkburn and Hesleyhurst Parish Council, were also concerned with the wording and did not believe they were in a position to make such a declaration. Brinkburn and Hesleyhurst Parish Council had not therefore declared a climate emergency and were concentrating on biodiversity. The media states there is only one consensus, however there is a lot of dispute. Parish Council's are not experts, it would be inappropriate for them to declare an emergency. R Aplin believed the danger in thinking Parish Council's were not competent is that nothing gets done, a declaration of emergency is recognising an emerging problem. Hesleyhurst parish were involved with residents who had relevant experience, and looking into change of land use. I Hedley advised a constituted group would be able to access funding for climate change issues through the charitable/community sector. J Sutton commented hedgerows had been destroyed in the 1970's which had led to animal destruction, we should return to this and nature can look after itself. Hesleyhurst PC were looking to regenerate hedgerows, and farmers being encouraged to grow crops.

40.7 Policing Matters

There were no recent crimes that had been reported that would provide any obvious concerns to the community in the Rothbury area.

40.8 Update on Borderlands Place Programme

There was no information regarding the Borderlands Place Programme.

40.9 Roads/Traffic/Local Transport Plan

R Aplin advised there is a move to start a group in the locality to monitor and develop footpaths, who could liaise with organisations to oversee what is happening locally, for instance with the footpath between Rothbury and Thropton, which had not been completed due to financial reasons. However there were issues with landowners, all areas are not public rights of way, and not everybody takes litter or dog dirt home. Northumberland National Park Authority currently look after paths in their area, and County Council have a Footpaths Officer. Any paths not registered by 2026 may well disappear. S Bridgett advised there is an individual in Northumberland who frequently registers Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) which then allows off road vehicles onto farmers land which creates problems. In one instance, Natural England had declined to prosecute as there had been no signs up warning people not to do this. Local residents had submitted an application to open up a section of the Railway Line between Rothbury and Brinkburn, and which would be heard at County Council Committee later in the year. There had also been problems with off road bikes within Whitton and Tosson parish. K Scott advised the Climate and Nature transport group had been lobbying for the footpath between Thropton and Rothbury to be completed. C France of the opinion that any footpaths should be dual use, for pedestrians and cycles. I Hedley advised the definitive rights of way maps were available on County Council website.

40.10 Broadband/Copper telephone lines

Discussed earlier.

40.11 Crises Management/Emergency Resilience Grant Funding

County Cllr advised there had been a delay due to personnel managing the Northern Powergrid funding requesting insurance details from village halls.

40.12 Any Items from Northumberland County Council

S Bridgett understood Black Rock, one of the largest investment firms in the world, and to write of carbon emissions, had expressed an interest in the Rothbury Estate. Hollinhill and Rothley Parish Council were meeting 2/8/23 to consider the community buy out route. G Sanderson, Leader of the Council was meeting with Northumberland National Park Authority to discuss funding options. Planting trees would mitigate flooding problems, however J Famelton commented that peat already does this. S Bridgett advised everything is protected for as long as the government says it is protected, such as an SSSI.

County Council were in the process of organising a community meeting regarding the Rothbury swimming pool situation.

Annual Town and Parish Council Conference to be held at County Hall 5/10/23, 2pm to 6pm, with market place, a training session, and also a Q&A session to be held with G Sanderson.

The next deadline for community groups (not Parish Council's) to apply to County Council Community Chest funding is 30/9/23.

Mobile library service being trialed, with consultation on the service available.

40.13 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Coquetdale Cluster will be held on Tuesday 5th December 2023 commencing 730pm in the Dovecote Room, Jubilee Institute.



C Miller, Clerk

The meeting closed at 830pm