



Berwick Town Council

Newsletter



November 2023

A message from the Mayor

It's now 15 years since the creation of Berwick Town Council, yet in some ways it still feels like yesterday. The intention was to ensure that the town still had local representation similar to that of Parish councils, even though the majority of the services that had previously been provided by the Borough Council were now the responsibility of the County Council.

15 years on, and my biggest frustration is having to tell a resident "Sorry, that's a County responsibility" or "we haven't got the resources/budget to tackle the empty shops in the town centre". It goes against everything that we, as councillors, believe in. We want to make a difference, we want to improve our town, and as volunteers we give of our time and enthusiasm unstintingly.

It's not all bad news however, we have had our successes too:- upgrading Flagstaff Park and Spittal play parks; replacing the Xmas lights on the New Bridge and in town centre; creating our own team of wardens to maintain our benches/play equipment/ planters and hanging baskets; and moving our office onto Marygate (filling an empty shop unit at the same time), allowing residents and visitors a face to answer their queries.

In the current economic climate, we are aware of the difficulties created by rising household bills and we have always prided ourselves on having the lowest comparable precept in the County, aided significantly by the contribution from the Freemens Estate. If we do have to raise the precept, it will not only be to cover rising overheads, but also to provide the budget to make those smaller changes in town which have a bigger impact.

Cllr John Robertson, Mayor of Berwick-upon-Tweed

Christmas Lights and Trees

We don't want to be the ones to have to break it to you, but Christmas is coming, and we're hoping to do our bit to brighten up the town.

Traditionally, we co-operate with the Rotary Club on Town Centre decorations – and this year will be no different with our stock of decorations filling Marygate and Castlegate, Hide Hill and side streets. The Rotary Club in turn will support the lights on the New Bridge, and provide the Christmas Tree in the town centre.

As ever, it's more complicated than that. Storm damage means we have paid for replacement lights for the new bridge, and for replacements in our stock of lights. Those storm damage replacements alone come to over £20k in the last two years.

Changes in technology and what's deemed to be safe means we have to take a long hard look at locations where we've provided trees with lights on in residential locations. Currently we're not persuaded those are good options, and we'd like to see more use made of natural or permanent trees in those locations.

Looking forward, we know we need to take a long hard look at how we mark Christmas, and how we contribute to the regeneration of the town centre. Early in the New Year we'll be putting out a call for suggestions as to how we do Christmas lighting in future, and to find out what you want from us.

In the meanwhile, an early Merry Christmas everybody!

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War Memorials



Berwick upon Tweed has three very lovely war memorials on public land. They're in Castlegate, Queens Gardens, and in Spittal.

They're fine memorials that are a public way of remembering the losses we experienced as a community. No organisation, or council, should claim to own a war memorial. They're sites to be maintained and looked after, not possessions, and whoever looks after them does so on behalf of all of us

All three war memorials in Berwick became the responsibility of Northumberland County Council in 2009; that was a result of government deciding to abolish Berwick Borough Council. In 2012-13, Northumberland County Council decided it would prefer to transfer war memorials to parish councils, along with a welter of other things like benches, playparks, litter bins and the like.

That didn't change the underlying fact that war memorials belong to the community, not to organisations, and it was a top down decision that needed to be implemented sympathetically.

Since 2017 there have been negotiations between NCC and the Town Council to make sure that the war memorials that are transferred to the Town Council are safe, and well maintained. Those negotiations are ongoing, but while they're ongoing, the memorials remain the responsibility of NCC.

As a Town Council we don't control what happens with our war memorials; we facilitate the services of remembrance, and we make sure the Remembrance Parade is safe. Some times we prompt NCC about maintenance, and sometimes we pay for some work to be done ourselves. We'll advise on what seems to be appropriate usage of the memorials. We'll also assist on issues of precedence or attendance (such as the wreath being laid on behalf of the monarch always being laid first) but we're acutely aware the memorial, and the service, belong to the community, not us.

We'd like to see the war memorial at Castlegate renovated, and access made easier for disabled veterans, but that's for the future. Right now we hope you can join us on Sunday 12th November, at any or all of the three monuments, and remember with us those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Mayor's Award



We're holding our annual celebration of achievement and excellence in Berwick in March 2024. It's your chance to help us identify Berwickers who have done something special. Do you know someone who has achieved, excelled or done something outstanding?

Last year's awards were given to Isabel Lister at Northern View, Tom Matthewson a long time volunteer for Berwick Cancer Cars, speedway rider Leon Flint, Margaret Johnson, Secretary of the Berwick and District Friends of Dementia group and the Spittal Gardening group.

Would you like to nominate that special someone for the Mayors Award for Achievement in 2024? Nominees should be residents of Berwick or have close connections to the town. The award ceremony will take place in March 2024, date to be confirmed.

Please send your nomination, with details of why you think they should win to Steve Cozens at our office or email assistant@berwick-tc.gov.uk Please include your name, address, email and contact number and send us your nominations by 31st December 2023 .

The Old Bridge

The little wins are always satisfying. Quite often we receive complaints about problems that fall outside our responsibilities. This never stops us from trying to find a solution and advocating for our residents. A case in point happened last month. A resident raised the issue of coaches using the Old Bridge to leave town.

As this is the responsibility of the Highways Team at NCC, we approached them requesting clarification as to whether the bridge's weight restrictions would allow for the weight of a coach. The NCC Highways Team promptly got back to us letting us know that coaches would not comply with the Traffic Regulation Order on the bridge but agreed that the current signage could be misleading as they imply the restrictions are for goods vehicles only. They therefore agreed to replace the signs with a clearer alternative and contact the coach company who our resident complained about to remind them not to use the bridge.

We don't always have the authority to affect change but we're always keen to approach those that do to try and find solutions to problems.

CCTV



Did you know we're coming up fast on the 25th anniversary of Berwick having a town centre CCTV system?

We didn't even know that when we asked you, via this newsletter, what you thought the future of town centre CCTV should be. We got a wide range of answers, and, by chance, a local expert on CCTV also popped into the office to share what they think the future of CCTV is.

We get that, for some people who responded, CCTV is a symbol of how much we care for the town, that we want to exclude anti social behaviour and help shops deal with retail theft. Right now though, we're not sure if having this kind of CCTV is the best way of doing that.

Other people who responded pointed out that the original plan was for our CCTV to be part of a systematic approach to safety that included pub watch, shop watch, radio connections between businesses and police officers

Actively monitoring the screens in the police station. That framework of connections used CCTV, but CCTV was less effective without the whole framework.

If you were designing a framework for connecting shops and businesses in 2023, would you use radios, or WhatsApp? Would you have a bank of screens in a darkened room in the police station, or a 5g feed of camera images to a mobile phone?

One of the mistakes we're wary of making is doing the same thing we've always done because we've always done it that way. Given how much the framework our CCTV operates in has changed, we need to ask ourselves some more questions. Thank you to everyone who responded to our consultation, and we'll keep you updated as to future plans.

Alex Gibson



It is with great sadness that Council has heard of the death of former councillor Cllr Alex Gibson. Alex was an active, industrious councillor who gave fully of his time and energy, especially in connection with his passionate commitment to improve play facilities for young people in the town. Alex was dogged in his work, and willing to lead partnership working with other organisations in his efforts to improve local environmental services.

Well known in his local community, Alex was the epitome of a local councillor who knew every inch of the place he served.

Alex stepped down from Council only when his health worsened, and the Mayor, Council and staff who knew him send their condolences to his family and friends. Full Council will observe a minute's silence at its meeting on 27th November to mark his passing.

November's Meetings

Monday, 6th November: 6pm
Communities and Local Services Committee

Monday, 13th November: 6pm
Planning Committee

Tuesday, 14th November: 6pm
Budget and Administration Committee

Monday, 27th November: 6pm
Council Meeting

All Meetings are held in the Town Council offices, 84 Marygate and are open to the public.

Agendas are published on our website and are displayed in our office windows. Please come along and find out more about what we do.

Remembrance Sunday 2023

Services in Berwick, Spittal & Tweedmouth, 12th November

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| 9.45 am | Civic Service of Remembrance,
Berwick Parish Church |
| 10.45 am | Service at the War Memorial,
Castlegate |
| 12.00 pm | Service at the War Memorial,
Tweedmouth |
| 12.30 pm | Service at the War Memorial,
Spittal |
| 6.00 pm | Evening Service,
St Andrew's Wallace Green |



JOIN US FOR CAROLS AND GOOD CHEER!

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS



FRIDAY 1ST DECEMBER
4PM TO 6PM AT THE TOWN HALL



Read All About it!

Get an email copy of this newsletter

Make sure you get a copy every month by joining our mailing list. Simply email info@berwick-tc.gov.uk and ask to be added. Next month's newsletter will turn up in your inbox at the beginning of the month.

Contact the Town Council

You can email us at info@berwick-tc.gov.uk or telephone us on 01289 302391. Alternatively you can pop into our office on Marygate. We're open to the public 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday.

Contact Northumberland County Council (NCC)

If you have a question about NCC services you can speak to someone in person in the Library on Walker-gate on Tuesday and Friday 10:00am-1:00pm or telephone NCC on 0345 600 6400.