

# Notes of the Weardale Area Action Partnership Board Meeting – 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Eastgate Village Hall



## ATTENDEES

### Board Members

**Public Representatives:** Richard Lawrie (RL) – **CHAIR**  
Alison Humble (AHU)  
Stephen Thomas (ST)  
Will Wearmouth (WW)  
Kevin Roddam (KR)

**Partner Representatives:** Damian Pearson (DP) – Believe Housing  
Dan Wootton (DW) – Fire & Rescue Service  
PC Scott Ruddick (SR) – Durham Constabulary  
PCSO Chloe Gilding (CG) – Durham Constabulary  
Jeff Bell (JB) – Business Representative  
Sarah Lee (SL) – Health  
Michael Laing (ML) - Durham County Council

**Elected Members:** Cllr Helen Barrass (HB) – Muggleswick Parish Council  
Cllr Joan Carrick (JC) – Stanhope Parish Council

**Officers** Angelina Maddison (AM)  
Tracy Edwards (TE)  
Fiona Barber (FB)  
Bill Lightburn (BL)

## APOLOGIES

**Public Representatives:** Adrian Holden  
Caroline Ford

**Elected Representatives:** Cllr Anita Savory  
Cllr John Shuttleworth  
Cllr Olive Wilson – Witton-le-Wear Parish Council  
Cllr David Sugden – Wolsingham Parish Council

# **BOARD MEETING**

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A welcome was extended to new Board member, Michael Laing, who is new Durham County Council representative.

Introductions were made and apologies recorded as above.

The Chair advised that Cllr Savory had sent him a message via email and read it out. Cllr Savory highlighted the work of the WAP team in promoting Weardale and commended their commitment shown by, amongst other things, attending all three agricultural shows on consecutive weekends. She stated that they are 'flying the flag' for Weardale at all times.

## **2. Declaration of Interest**

The Chair asked that Board members declare any interests now or as they arise on the agenda. HB declared an interest in the Muggleswick Church Camping project.

## **3. Agreement of Notes from Board Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and Matters Arising**

The notes of this meeting, as circulated, were **AGREED** and confirmed as a true record by those present.

There were no matters arising.

## **4. Neighbourhood Issues**

The Chair advised that the Police representatives needed to be elsewhere this evening and proposed moving any police issues up the agenda.

Frosterley Primary School - although only the first week back after the summer break, the situation seems a lot better. Signage and visibility of signage has been improved and a speed survey carried out. Police are also working with the students.

AHu stated that it had been nice to see Insp. Ed Turner at the Weardale Agricultural Show and appreciated him taking time to attend.

Rural Watch Coordinator update. AM advised that the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) had received £1.6 million of funding to address Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). The Rural Watch Coordinator project is now being fully funded by the PCC. WAP will support and promote but not fund this initiative.

DW advised that they have been interviewing for Community Safety Responders (previously these were Tri-Responders). Successful applicants will start once medicals and all other paperwork has been completed. The CSR's will be working out of Stanhope primarily but will cover the whole Dale as required.

## **5. Presentation:**

### **Medium Term Financial Plan**

**Michael Laing (ML), Director of Integrated Community Services**

ML summarised the presentation for Board members. A copy of the full presentation is held on file – if you would like us to send you one, please contact the WAP office at [weardaleaap@durham.gov.uk](mailto:weardaleaap@durham.gov.uk)

The consultation will end on 20<sup>th</sup> October. To take part visit:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/30152/Consultation-on-our-budget-proposals-for-2024-5-and-Medium-Term-Financial-Plan-2025-2028>

ML explained that for every £10 Durham County Council receives in income:

£2.20 comes from Council Tax (The majority of housing in County Durham falls into the Band A category)

£0.50 comes from Business Rates

£5.00 is a government grant

£2.20 is raised through fees and charges e.g. parking, leisure centre charges, bin collections

Remainder is from interest

For every £10 the council spends:

£6.00 is on Adult and Childrens social care (a statutory responsibility – which is spent on 3% of the population)

£2.00 is for other statutory responsibilities (homelessness, waste removal)

£2.00 is for discretionary spending (leisure, arts, education, AAPs etc.)

In summary, the vast majority of DCC's expenditure is on statutory duties. DCC are consulting on ways in which additional savings can be made. Moving forward, inflation, wages and pressures on social care will raise expenditure. For example, regarding the cost of a living wage for providers of social care, 4% had been set aside for this year but 6% has been agreed.

DCC are currently using their reserves, but it is not possible to run a deficit budget in the long term. Back-office changes are longstanding and over 3,000 jobs have been removed since 2010.

DCC has a duty to use the money it receives wisely and welcomes input into the decision-making process. ML advised that one proposal is to increase council tax by 4.99%. He asked the Board, what other areas should be looked at?

The Board were invited to make comments and to ask questions:

- Could back-office functions be shared with other local authorities? ML advised that this already happens in some areas – especially specialist teams e.g. Environmental Health Labs. However, he also shared that there is a reluctance in other departments to do this e.g. planning. He confirmed that there will be more opportunities to share back-office functions as we move to a Combined Authority.
- Are the numbers of children requiring support going to increase as other areas are seeing a significant increase in numbers of children requiring SEN support. ML advised that the expenditure for Adult Social Care is relatively stable although he acknowledged that this could easily be unbalanced with a few complex need cases. He advised that more children are being diagnosed with autism and SEN which triggers statutory provision and therefore the responsibility is increasing for DCC. He noted that advances made in medicine mean that people are living longer often with increasingly complex medical needs which all comes at a cost to the Local Authority.

- Whilst trying to remain politically neutral, it is difficult when money has been perceived to be wasted (e.g. the abandonment of the plan to move County Hall) to think about savings in areas where the money is needed. A need for a new discussion was proposed to determine as a society what we want, what can be cut and what can be saved – showing the costs of cuts and the cost of services in the process. It was also suggested that if budgets are cut then those who proposed cutting them don't get the right to complain if something goes wrong. In effect, do we want to make cuts, or do we actually want to increase expenditure? ML responded that council officers give advice to elected members who in turn make political decisions. He shared the adage "It is not possible to have your penny and your bun". He noted that these are hard conversations to have with people who are already struggling to make ends meet sharing that over 40% of those eligible for Housing and Council Tax benefits are working people. ML advised that he would feel personally ashamed if cuts are made to services which these people use and rely on.
- Concern was raised for the future given the experience of Middlesbrough council who have overspent their budget and Birmingham Council which has recently announced measures just short of bankruptcy. ML reassured Board members that Durham County Council is a financially well-managed authority which takes a cautious approach. He advised that it is the job of the council officers to stop elected members making unsound financial decisions.
- ML advised that income has been affected particularly since the pandemic as there has been a downturn in existing and forecast business activity. Office buildings are no longer needed, and housebuilding has dropped – each of these have affected DCC's income stream.
- ML advised that DCC's financial reserves are reasonably healthy when compared to other authorities. Guidance suggests that councils should hold 5% of their budget in reserve and DCC does not fall under this level although it is close to it. Durham County Council is a large authority, and its population has increased slightly. It is a precarious situation as it only takes another event such as Storm Arwen or a landslip on a road or a couple of complex medical need social care packages to unbalance the books.

The Chair confirmed that the consultation is open until 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023. He encouraged Board members to take the posters provided and encourage people in their community to have their say. ML reassured Board members that this is an active consultation and ideas are welcome – often it is a fresh pair of eyes that suggests an idea which has not been seen by those who are too closely involved.

The Chair thanked ML for his presentation.

## **6. Weardale Action Partnership Update**

### **Weardale Agricultural Show**

AM advised that the team had received positive feedback whilst attending Weardale Agricultural Show. Important issues identified were tourism – some wanted more, some less – and road improvements. AM congratulated the show on their ethos of activities being free for children once the entrance fee had been paid. AM also advised that the WAP team had been working within their networks to assist Durham University in providing an artist tent which had been a big success.

### **Wolsingham Show**

AM advised that the ladies lunch hosted by Cllr Savory had raised at least £2,500 for Weardale Community Hospital. Attendees at the show were pleased with the work done with regard to walking routes in Weardale. The Wolsingham Wayfarers reported that they had distributed over 2,000 walking leaflets over the two days. ML observed that the agricultural day had seemed very busy in comparison with previous years and stated it would be interesting to see their attendance figures.

### **DurhamLearn**

AM spoke about DurhamLearn's Multiply project designed to teach people numeracy skills. She advised that the DurhamLearn team are happy to attend community groups to talk about this. AM reminded Board members that they had received by email a full programme of DurhamLearn's courses (not just numeracy and literacy) which are available to residents of County Durham. Any Board member who would like physical copies of these is welcome to contact the WAP team to arrange.

### **Weardale WordFest**

Board members received a flyer detailing the programme for Weardale WordFest which takes place at the end of October. AM advised that she has also arranged for The Story at Mount Oswald to link in with the organisers of WordFest. Board members were asked to promote WordFest within their local communities.

### **Weardale Museum**

Board members are all invited to the launch event of the Methodist Tapestries project on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> (2:00pm – 7:00pm) and Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> (11:00am – 4:00pm) September at St John's Chapel Town Hall. This project has received some funding from our Small Grants Fund.

## **7. Towns & Villages Funding Update**

BL gave a short presentation on the status of Towns & Villages funding in the Weardale AAP area. He advised that full applications have moved forward for three projects. Each have received positive feedback and a quorate response has been received by email.

BL advised that all projects have to be approved by the WAP Board and been subject to a full technical appraisal and a grant offer made by the end of this financial year. Therefore, decisions need to be made before the end of this calendar year.

### **1. Update on Projects**

#### **Ashcroft MUGA (Stanhope Parish Council)**

- Tender process complete. Specialist outdoor sports pitch contractor appointed
- Contract pre-start meeting due to take place next week.
- On-site works will commence end of this month – precise date TBC.
- MUGA will be out of use for a period of 6 weeks, so will be reopened for public use early to mid-November.

#### **Weardale Way Works (DCC - North Pennines AONB Partnership)**

- Full application submitted & summary information circulated.
- Slight reduction in funding request since consideration of the EOI – to £44K
- Requesting Board ratification (previously circulated by email)

#### **Killhope Interpretation (Killhope Lead Mining Museum)**

- Full application submitted & summary information circulated.

- Funding request is in line with EOI – for £27K.
- Requesting Board ratification (previously circulated by email)

### **Christmas Lighting Infrastructure Frosterley (DCC Highways)**

- If this application comes forward it will now focus solely on Frosterley
- To be coordinated & submitted by DCC Highways on behalf of project partners.
- The intention is to install a permanent power supply for Christmas lights.
- Works are priced - awaiting formal confirmation on future responsibilities from local community partners before the application (for £10,668) can be submitted
- Whilst any application would be processed this year, infrastructure improvements would be carried out next year i.e. in preparation for Christmas 2024

### **Muggleswick Church Camping Project (Muggleswick with Edmundbyers PCC)**

- Full application submitted & summary information circulated.
- Since this time the DCC Community Resilience Fund has confirmed an offer of 30K towards the project (subject to planning approval, a decision on which is imminent)
- EOI submitted to the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) is due to be considered by the Fund's Governing Group on 25th September – for £100K
- If this is supported the Church would move on to full application – with a final decision expected at end November.
- Church needs to have secured min 30% of its funding (£66K) before it can submit its intended application to the Benefact Trust. It currently has £45K funding secured.
- The Benefact Trust application would be for £25K, and would provide the balance needed to realise the project (assuming REPF bid is successful). Decisions are made within approx. 2 months.
- If the AAP feels able to make an offer, similar to the Community Resilience Fund, with release of grant conditional on all statutory consents being approved and all funding being secured, this will most likely open the door to an early application from the Church to the Benefact Trust – which would be really beneficial to the project.

(The REPF is a government fund which is looked after by Durham County Council.)

Board members were asked to:

1. Note the progress in implementation of the Ashcroft MUGA Refurbishment Project - **NOTED**
2. Ratify the approval of the application from DCC (North Pennines AONB Partnership), for Weardale Way Works (£44K) - **RATIFIED**
3. Ratify the approval of the application from DCC (Killhope Lead Mining Centre), for Killhope Interpretation (£27K) - **RATIFIED**
4. Consider approving the application from Muggleswick Church – All Saints, for Muggleswick Church Camping Project (£50K), conditional to all statutory approvals being granted and full match funding being secured – **Board members APPROVED the proposal to provide a conditional offer as outlined above.**
5. Note the position in respect of the proposed Frosterley Lighting Infrastructure application – **NOTED – Board members noted that representatives of Frosterley Village Hall need to decide they accept the relevant additional**

**responsibilities.** AM requested a meeting be convened as a matter of urgency to ensure all parties understand their responsibilities.

6. Reaffirm priorities for any remaining funding to enable associated applications to be prepared – **Board members noted that timescales are now too tight to look at any new proposals. Board members AGREED that remaining funding should be directed towards play area improvements and that this should be progressed.**

## 8. Area Budget Overview

**2023/24 Area Budget - £100,000**

### Allocated Funding

Close Knit Community	£5,000
Weardale WordFest	£10,000
Weardale Together	£2,485

### Application circulated by email - for ratification by Board

- **The Story Train – Citizen Songwriters CIC £17,932**

The project was discussed; no additional comments or conditions were made.

**Email circulation prior to meeting – Board APPROVED the project.**

## 9. Other WAP Funding Streams

### Fun & Food

No applications have yet been received for October half-term provision. The WAP team welcomes applications from any group and is happy to work with them to develop both their provision and their application.

### **Board Ambassador Feedback – Witton-le-Wear Youth Club Summer Holiday provision – Alison Humble**

AHu advised that on the day she had visited there had been a show by a shadow puppet theatre on the morning. She began her visit as the children were having lunch. None of the attendees were over 12 at this session but the venue was buzzing with children who were full of confidence and taking part in a range of activities. Youth workers were supported by parents.

AHu observed that Witton-le-Wear Community Centre benefits from all-weather courts which gives it the potential to run a number of groups e.g. netball, tennis. AM advised that the Centre has been offered support from DCC's Partnership and Community Engagement Team, DCC Building Services as well as other technical support. These offers of support, alongside that of the AAP team, has been readily available and offered on multiple occasions. A way of enthusing the local community is required. AM advised that the youth club has been a resounding success and that people will travel to attend.

### **Board Ambassador Feedback – The Story Train Summer Holiday Provision – Stephen Thomas**

ST advised that he had attended a session on 17<sup>th</sup> August and had been very impressed with the scheme, the children present were engaged in the activity which was well put together and well presented. The passion that the project lead has for

what he is doing came through and everyone seemed to be loving it. Unfortunately, only 4 children attended despite 20 having signed up. Potentially a problem with publicity and reach. It is a fantastic initiative, and it is a shame that not more children participated on the day.

Board members were encouraged to publicise any such activities in the future. AM advised that although drop-in activities can sometimes work, the Story Train does not lend itself to utilising this methodology.

TE advised that she is currently in discussion with DCC's Arts Team to investigate bringing their events to Weardale in 2024 as part of the Fun & Food programme.

TE advised that applications for October half-term provision opened on 21<sup>st</sup> August.

## **10. Neighbourhood Budget**

### **Cllr Savory**

#### **2023/24 Neighbourhood Budget**

- Tables – Wolsingham St Thomas' Centre
- Frosterley Seating Area x 2 - Durham County Council

#### **2023/24 Small Grant Fund**

- Hurdles – Eastgate Sheep Show
- Marquee – Wolsingham Parish Council

#### **Coronation Fund**

- Summer concert – Wolsingham Parish Council

### **Cllr Shuttleworth**

#### **Neighbourhood Budget**

- Frosterley Seating Area x 2 - Durham County Council

#### **Small Grant Fund**

- No current spend

#### **Coronation Fund**

- Coronation Lunch Event – Rookhope Village Hall
- Coronation Lunch Event – Barrington Bites

### **Frosterley Seating Area x 2 – Joint Application – Cllr Savory & Cllr Shuttleworth**

The project was discussed; no additional comments or conditions were made.

**Email circulation prior to meeting – APPROVED by Board.**

### **Amendment to Neighbourhood Budget Application 2022/2023**

#### **St Johns Chapel Town Hall – Windows**

Board members were advised of an amendment to a Neighbourhood Budget grant of £1,000 which had been allocated for new windows in St John's Chapel Town Hall in 2022/23 financial year.

The Town Hall needed urgent electrical update and the committee had requested a variation to the usage of the above funding. This has been granted by Cllr Shuttleworth and approved by the Funding Team. The Neighbourhood Budget will now be used for electrical work in the Town Hall as per the previously circulated application.



## 11. Neighbourhood Issues

### **Fire Service attendance at Weardale Agricultural Show**

AHu asked why the Fire Service did not give a demonstration at Weardale Agricultural Show as they have in previous years. DW advised the Fire Service like to attend but that staffing issues, budget constraints and availability of an appliance prevented them from doing so. It is hoped that the new Community Safety Responders will increase staff availability in future.

## 12. Countywide Partner Issues

### **Breast Cancer Screening – Location of Mobile Unit**

SL advised that she has a role within Cancer County Durham. They are currently looking at the Breast Cancer Screening unit and its presence in the area. It used to be sited in Crook but currently women must travel to Bishop Auckland for screening. Discussions are underway with regard to bringing it back to the area and consideration is being given to sites other than Crook. She stressed that she is not the decision maker and that the discussions are still in an early phase but feels that the Board could potentially have some input into the decision-making. The Board welcomed a future discussion once more is known.

The Chair stated that Stanhope Parish Council had recently been made aware that there is a chance that the AAP office will be moving out of the area. AM confirmed that this is one of the proposed savings from the MTFP. ML commented that it was logical to have the team central within Weardale and the Dales Centre fits this. AM reminded the Board that the closest DCC building would be in Crook and siting us there would reopen old concerns of 'everything stops at Harperley'. The Chair suggested that Board members write in as part of the budget consultation that they would not support the moving of the AAP team out of the Weardale AAP area. He noted that the connection the team have with the local community is directly related to their location within Weardale – it is key to the team's role. AHu observed that it would be a false economy as it would lead to greater expenses due to increased travelling. AM noted that people often pop into the office to ask the team's advice on various issues.

## 13. Dates and Times of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Weardale Action Partnership Board will take place on Thursday **19<sup>th</sup> October at 6:00pm – Eastgate Village Hall.**

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.