

Northumberland & Newcastle Society AGM 2023
Tuesday 6 June

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Present:

Councillor Veronica Dunn, William Apedaile, Sue Andrews, Richard Appleby, Margaret Appleby, Sylvia Bertie, Les Brunton, Susan Clark, Jennifer Coulthard, Darden Coulthard, Dorothy Craig, Rev. Peter Dodd, Rosemary Dodd, David Down, Frances Gidman, Allan Gittins, Margaret Gittins, Katy Hodgson, Bill Hopper, Lin Hopper, Harry James, Nigel Jenkins, Jane Kendall, Elizabeth Lightfoot, Annie Lloyd, John Matthews, Jacqueline Matthews, Yvonne McDowall, Peter McGuckin, John Newlands, Patricia Nixon, William Park, Gareth Pritchard, Amanda Pritchard, Judith Robinson, Jackie Salmon, Christopher Sayers, Lester Sher, Nitin Shukla, Fiona Thoburn, Irwin Thompson, Emma Walker, Tim Wickens, Sue Wickens.

2. Apologies for absence:

Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland
David & Lesley Gee
Elizabeth Bryson
Richard & Frances Allsop
Bev Bagnall
Toby Hedworth KC
Lord Shipley
Steve Lloyd
Sir Nigel Sherlock
Lady Sherlock
Marion Anderson
Bryan & Suzanne Stanley

Welcome

Dorothy Craig opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Northumberland Golf Club and gave thanks to The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne, Cllr Veronica Dunn for attending as Society Ambassador.

3. Minutes of the 2022 AGM

The minutes have been circulated, and were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting. No matters were arising.

4. Treasurer's report and adoption of 2022 accounts

Fiona Thoburn provided a summary of the 2022 accounts.

The deficit for the Society for the year was £25,741. There has been a fall in the market value of our investment in the Charities Ethical Investment Fund of £4,313 for the year. This unfortunately is not untypical of the stock market in general for 2022.

Whilst the main administrative costs have remained comparable with last year, there has been an increase in a couple of items of expenditure.

l) Just under £3,000 was spent on computer expenses. The majority of this was in respect of the complete rebuild and design of our website. This has given us full control of our website improving efficiency and enabling us to help our profile to attract new members.

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2) Just under £2,000 was spent on marketing. This included the hosting of a Christmas drinks party last year which was an opportunity to get together and a thank you to members for their loyalty to the Society during the times when we were not allowed to meet in person.

3) The Society provided funds of just over £15,500 to the Northumberland Environmental Policy Group (NEPG). This was to support their work in engaging specialist landscape architects and the printing and distribution of the report called "Technical Report Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales - A valued landscape". This was commissioned on behalf of the Society and was produced by one of the UK's leading architecture and environmental planning practices, Alison Farmer Associates.

We continue to receive a donation of £1,000 from the Handley Trust, £150.00 from the CMF Charitable Settlement and £4,000 from the Barbour Foundation, for which we are very grateful.

The Society is fortunate to have reserves and it is using them to invest in its future. An example of this is increased activity in marketing to attract new members. Additionally, Emma and Jackie are looking for new funding to help with such items as the Society's running costs as well as a new laptop and printer.

Fiona concluded that we have much to be positive about.

Dorothy proposed that these accounts are officially adopted. Members agreed by a show of hands that the accounts for the year ended 2022 be formally adopted.

There were no questions.

5. Subscription Rates

Dorothy proposed subscription rates remain the same for the 2023/2024 period.

- Single membership £35
- Joint membership £55
- Business membership £100
- Group membership £35
- Student membership £15
- School/University membership £100

Members supported this by a show of hands.

Dorothy said that we'd like more businesses to join the Society and invited members to send in any suggestions to Jackie.

6. Chairman's report and brief updates from Committee chairs.

John Matthews gave his chairman's report.

John thanked everyone for coming to the AGM and colleagues who have volunteered to continue to serve as officers upon re-election, and who generously give so much of their time to the N & N.

John thanked Jackie Salmon for organising the event and for all her hard work over the past 12 months especially with the new website. John also thanked Fiona Thoburn who tirelessly produces her detailed monthly and year-end financial reports for the Society.

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Thanks were also conveyed to Dorothy Craig for kindly agreeing to deputise for our Vice Chair Toby Hedworth who is currently on a covid-delayed and much needed holiday to celebrate his birthday.

John gave tribute to Frank White who sadly passed away last month. A stalwart of the N & N for so many years, his charm and witty humour was enjoyed by many, especially those of us who had the pleasure of his company in management meetings. In appreciation of all the catering Frank organised for so many Society events over the years with his partner Adam, it would perhaps be appropriate to raise a glass in celebration of his life later this evening.

John mentioned a few things of note from the past 12 months:

'Technical Report Northumberland Sandstone Ridges – A valued landscape.' Commissioned by the Society and with a foreword by one of our Ambassadors, Lord Vinson, a limited number were printed at the beginning of the year and copies sent to the main donors along with several Parish Councils. It was also uploaded onto our website to ensure that it was accessible to our members.

John was pleased to be contacted recently by Whittingham, Callaly and Alnham Parish Council to ask if they could use the report in drafting their own Neighbourhood Plan. It is an extremely well-produced document which the Society should justifiably be proud, and thanks go to one of our life members David Biesterfeld for originally proposing the study and for tenaciously seeing in through to completion. John invited members to take have a closer look at the document - two hard copies were available to view.

While preparing a talk for the Alnwick Civic Society last month, John realised it was 54 years since the N & N famously purchased the Kielder Viaduct for £1.00 in old money. At the time, apart from rescuing a now scheduled monument, it merely provided walkers along the north shore of the new reservoir with a splendid viewpoint. The Society has been responsible for its care and maintenance ever since. Over the intervening years, as the popularity of both Kielder Water and the Forest has greatly increased as a holiday destination, and for a multitude of recreational activities. The creation of a 25-mile long-distance trail encircling the reservoir, taking in the viaduct, is used by cyclists, walkers and of course every autumn, hundreds of marathon runners. Its certainly taking a pounding. A structural survey reminder has prompted a zoom meeting with Forestry England and Northumbrian Water later this month to discuss its condition. John plans to suggest a small contribution from large event organisers would be appropriate which we could ring-fence for ongoing maintenance and possible future enhancement of the viaduct.

John received a call last November from Tony Henderson who is a long-time supporter of the N & N and writer with the Newcastle Journal. He had spotted a book sale notice at Anderson and Garland which included 2 bound copies of N & N reports dated 1924 – 1938 and 1946 -1956 belonging to a past chairman Charles Hunter Blair. We put in a bid but were unsuccessful. We have subsequently contacted the auctioneers to ask if we could contact the purchaser but to date, we have had no response. We have huge gaps in our records which is why it would be difficult to produce a centenary history as we planned to do but if we could somehow contact the new owner and possibly obtain copies, it would give us a head start for a future publication.

The Society provided 12 self-grown oak saplings to Kirkharle Courtyard to be included in their Queen's Green Canopy Planting in memory of our late Queen on a nearby hillside with footpath links from Kirkharle Courtyard. Our 12 trees will be part of this tribute and they said that we could have them identified with a plaque of some sort. We have been informed that the site will be fully accessible to visitors, which is just what we want, and there will be seats positioned among the trees with extensive views over the countryside.

Finally, John pointed out that several of the Society officers currently 'multitask', being members of more than one team or committee, so once again he asked if anyone feels that they may have the time, energy, and commitment to become more closely involved, please do not hesitate to come forward.

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Members gave applause. Updates were then given by chairs of the Committees.

Tyneside Committee Report by Tim Wickens

The most significant change since last year's AGM is the Tyneside and County Committees agreeing to amalgamate into a single 'Planning and Development Team'. This amalgamation was debated and agreed by the 2 committees' members at a specially convened joint meeting last October. The logic for this was to secure the long term viability of the committees through succession planning and to ensure the N&N's ongoing role as a constructive influence in planning matters.

Ultimately, we needed to consolidate the combined resources and skills of the separate committees. As we have successfully run a shadow team for the last 6 months, we will be asking the AGM to officially endorse this amalgamation. Whilst the combined team has significantly increased workload in assessing and preparing material for each meeting, nonetheless it works well in practice through a 'slicker' and more accessible model that team members can readily participate in.

The team maintains its now established online monthly meetings schedule via the Zoom platform interspersed with 'in person' quarterly meetings. Zoom is particularly practical given the wider spread of members from what were the 2 separate committees.

The bulk of the team's work continues to be monthly review of planning applications and listed building consents for our 3 local authority areas. The team's increased workload is indicative of dealing with 3 local authorities planning applications instead of 2, but equally of developers' continued confidence and interest in our Region, thus the importance of our role in protecting and promoting built and natural heritage assets.

Since last October the joint team has reviewed and commented in detail on a total of 103 planning applications / listed building consents, of these we supported 48, made neutral comment on 17 and objected to 38 (i.e. less than 37%). This illustrates not only the N&N's positive approach, but equally the team's amazing response to exponentially increased demand, in October 2022 (before amalgamation) the Tyneside Committee reviewed 7 applications against 24 in February 2023 for the joint team. Amalgamating the 2 committees was essential to maintain and manage demand on our limited volunteer resources, on behalf of the N&N I record my deep gratitude to colleagues for their continued and greatly valued commitment.

With the launch of the new N&N website our planning comments are now publicly available and individually linked to each of our 3 local authorities planning portals. This allows visitors to the N&N website to readily view the Team's work and to view outcomes of individual planning applications via the easily accessible embedded links. Looking ahead we will explore how we can present these outcomes directly to show how the N&N makes a difference in influencing planning decisions.

In addition to our core work we:

- Had a substantial role in supporting Newcastle City Council's position in judicial proceedings to block the proposed development at Plot 12, Newcastle Quayside;
- Emphasise the importance of climate change measures in planning decisions through our 'Empathy Architecture' mission statement;
- Promote the importance of the Region's heritage in the local media as key strategic assets in sustainable development (e.g. ITV Tyne Bridge interviews);
- Reinforce and promote the need for collaboration with local authority partners to ensure heritage is embedded in strategic planning;
- Work proactively to engage and empower communities in widening interest, awareness and protecting our amazing diverse heritage;

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- Actively engage with owners of important 'At risk' heritage assets, facilitating constructive dialogue with other partners to secure their future (e.g. Cooperage).

In addition to our monthly meetings team members enhance the profile of the N&N through active and enthusiastic participation in:

- Newcastle Conservation Advisory Panel (NCAP);
- Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE);
- Historic Environment Advisory Panel (HEAP);
- Newcastle Culture Compact.

Our participation in these forums is of great importance as it gives the N&N a potentially powerful voice in local decision making and means that we play a constructive and positive role in shaping our great City and regional environment. We recognise with the addition of the much wider geography of Northumberland forming a major element in the team's work that we will need to identify and work with more partners across the Region.

In addition to the Planning and Development Team I now chair the monthly meetings of NCAP and together with colleagues we have re-energised it's role and relationship with Newcastle City Council and we are actively seeking to do the same with industry partners.

We continue to work with a range of partners and lead on a Heritage Strategy for Newcastle, this work has been progressed into Heritage and Culture having a key role in the City Council's Inclusive Economic Strategy for Newcastle.

Numerous other noteworthy areas of work are undertaken by the Team reflecting the many interests of colleagues and we look forward to the next twelve months with excitement.

In order to maintain the N&N's commitments we need and are always keen to encourage new members to join us, particularly those with professional experience but equally people with a passion for this really interesting and rewarding work. If you or a family member or friend would like to become more involved in work of the Planning and Development Team you would be very welcome - please contact either Jackie Salmon or myself.

Tim Wickens – Tyneside Committee chair.

Membership & Activities Team report by Emma Walker

At the last AGM, I said the coming year would be a transition period between the pandemic and normal life. "A time to consolidate our existing activities and experiment with new initiatives. Testing the water to see what works and what doesn't."

And that is exactly what we have done.

In terms of consolidation, we held a packed and varied programme of events, from walks to talks and Zooms. We visited new places, engaged with new speakers and welcomed new members.

A particular highlight of our events calendar was a public lecture held at the former Mining Institute in Newcastle on the theme Power in the NE of England. This superb afternoon of talks, organised by Les Brunton and featuring two absolute experts in this field, attracted not only members and non-members alike but resulted in substantial media coverage and new members for the N&N.

It is, therefore, our intention to hold another such public lecture in the coming year.

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We also experimented with new initiatives. Our inaugural Christmas drinks party was a huge success and thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended – so we will definitely be repeating it this year. We'll be publishing details of this – and all our events – in City & County so do keep your eyes peeled.

The website I mentioned last year is now up and running after a complete rebuild and design by Jackie and is already proving its worth with several new features including an online shop for the purchase of N&N merchandise. We tested the water at Christmas with cards and calendars. Unfortunately, the cost of producing the calendars is just too great to make them viable but the cards were very well received and so we will expand our range this year.

This brings me to publicity. We were lucky to secure the design for our Christmas card free of charge from an emerging NE artist who had just been invited to exhibit at the annual Royal Academy of Marine Artists exhibition in London.

I wrote and issued a press release and the story was picked up by (among others) the Northern Echo (incidentally, the second largest circulation print newspaper in the region.) And no sooner had that happened than orders for our cards started to appear on our new website from across Darlington and North Yorkshire.

So, while publicity can not magic new members out of thin air, what it does is tell people who we are and what we do and direct them to our website.

In terms of media we are now well and truly established as the go-to source for comment on all things architectural and heritage and recent headlines have included:

- The Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) has called for action now to stop Tyneside being subject to a proliferation of high-rise buildings ...
- 'It's an icon' says the N&N – Joy and relief after £40m restoration of Tyne Bridge is finally confirmed
- A sad day at Newcastle Odeon 20 years ago as the credits rolled for the final time despite efforts by the Northumberland and Newcastle Society to preserve the building, ...
- Power to the people - the Northumberland and Newcastle Society held timely presentations on the subject of Power in North East England

I remain absolutely of the view that the best advert for the Society are its members and that we need to set out our stall and our banners wherever and whenever we can.

I made a start with the Alnwick heritage fair last autumn and we hope to attend more such events – cost permitting. Costs, actually, are a challenge for our committee this year. Catering, room hire, stall fees ... they've all gone up and up in price, making me mindful of the Mr Micawber principle; that expenditure must not outstrip income if misery is to be avoided.

So, Jackie and I are going to embark on a process of applying to charitable trusts for funding – and, hopefully, if we are successful, we will be able to freeze our event costs for members.

We are also about to embark on a large-scale public consultation with a view to producing our centenary book. It will be a compendium of the 100 buildings that matter most to the people who live in this city and this county. Some will be of historic importance in their own right, I expect. Others won't be – but what I hope they will all do is encourage the wider public to think about buildings and why they matter. By asking them to take part in this process we will raise our profile and, through their involvement, sell our book. But I also hope the effects will be more esoteric. I hope the book will also show how buildings can evolve and remain relevant – how lucky we are to have such a breadth of architectural styles encompassing so much of our long history and how the buildings and structures of our city and county are intrinsically intertwined with us, the people who built and use them.

So, it has been a busy year. The coming year will be busier and none of it possible without the unfailing good humour, commitment and experience Bryan, Chris, Sue, Les and, of course Jackie, bring to every meeting. I thank them all.

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I would like to pay tribute to Frank White. When I first joined the events committee as it was then, some 15 or so years ago, Frank seemed to me to be the beating heart of it. Good humoured, kind and hospitable to his core, he brought a conviviality to our committee meetings and to our events that made each a joy to attend. I liked him enormously and I'd like to extend the sympathies of this committee to his friends and family.

And, in that spirit of conviviality, I hope you will all stay for a drink and something to eat and I'll be more than happy to answer then any questions you may have.

Emma Walker – Membership & Activities committee chair.

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7. Election of Directors, Officers, Ambassadors and Committees.

Dorothy read out the list of members standing or retiring in 2023:

Directors (Trustees)

John Matthews
Toby Hedworth KC
Emma Walker
Tim Wickens

Officers

John Matthews (Society Chairman)
Toby Hedworth KC (Society Vice Chair)
Fiona Thoburn (Honorary Treasurer)

Ambassadors

The Lord Mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne
Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland
Lord Shipley
Lord Vinson
Nitin Shukla (new appointment)

County Committee - disbanded

Nigel Jenkins
Prof Richard Allsop
Annie Lloyd
Jim Railton
Dorothy Craig

Editorial Committee

Nigel Jenkins (Editor)
Suzanne Stanley
Emma Walker - retiring

Membership & Activities Committee

Emma Walker
Bryan Stanley
Susan Clark
Christopher Sayers
Les Brunton

Northumberland Environmental Policy Group - disbanded

Lester Sher - retiring
Andrew Joicey - retiring
David Biesterfeld - retiring
Bill Cowan - retiring
Robbie Howard - retiring

Tyneside Committee – disbanded

Tim Wickens
Bill Hopper
Bev Bagnall

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John Matthews
Charles Fleming
Toby Hedworth KC
Clare Stephenson – retiring
Judith Robinson - retiring
Alan Grant – retiring
Jean Baty - retiring
Keith Whitfield - retiring
Tony Stephenson - retiring

Planning & Development Committee (new)

Tim Wickens
John Matthews
Toby Hedworth KC
Nigel Jenkins
Annie Lloyd
Dorothy Craig
Richard Allsop
Bev Bagnall
Bill Hopper
Charles Fleming

By show of hands members agreed to all of the proposed elections and retirements.

8. Member of the Year Award 2023

Dorothy said that the ‘member of the year award’ was intended to show our thanks and recognition to members who give outstanding service to the Society. This year, we have chosen Les Brunton of the Membership & Activities committee.

Emma Walker gave thanks to Les:

“Working alongside Les on the Membership and Activities Committee is an absolute pleasure. Not only is he endlessly pleasant and cheerful but the level of commitment and experience he brings to each and every meeting make him an invaluable asset to the N&N.

“Our recent public lecture Power in the North East of England was a huge success on many levels. It brought us to the notice of the media and to the wider public and even attracted new members. But most importantly it was interesting and exceedingly well informed and we have Les to thank for it. Working with a former industry colleague he devised its structure, sought the speakers and brought his customary care and attention to every detail. It truly was an excellent job.

“He is a very worthy recipient of this award and it is given with our gratitude and admiration.”

Emma presented Les with a certificate and a Fenwick voucher. A short biography of Les will appear in a future edition of *City & County*.

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Les thanked Emma and the committee. He said that the illustrious people (many of whom were N&N Society founder members) touched on in the Power in the North East lecture were reflected in the great work currently going in in the north east at places such as NAREC and Catapult.

9. Any other business

Nitin Shukla said he was privileged to have been asked to become a Society Ambassador. He thanked everyone for making him feel so welcome including at the 2022 Christmas party. Nitin said he intends to contribute towards building on the Society's success through his work and networks. It is an exciting year ahead with the centenary and he thanked the N&N for the work it does.

Gareth Pritchard asked how recruitment efforts are going. John Matthews said the inevitable decline in members during the covid period has plateaued. There are currently around 412 members. We have estimated that our effective reach could be in the region of 25000 if we take into account our group members. We have also made a big effort to distribute over 1000 flyers at key locations. John reminded members that if we all recruit just one person, we will double our numbers.

It was agreed to report on membership figures at all future AGMs.

Cllr Dunn said she is amazed at what she has heard this evening, and intends to join the Society and get more involved. She is very interested in planning applications, having served on the NCC Planning Committee.

There was no other business.

Dorothy Craig closed the meeting at 7.43pm