

**Northumberland & Newcastle Society AGM 2025
Tuesday 3 June**

MINUTES

1. Present:

Bill Apedaile, Richard Appleby, Angus Armstrong, Virginia Armstrong, Tim Bailey, Francine Bain, Navya Bharagida, Marilyn Brown, Pam Brown, Les Brunton, Peter Coates, Dorothy Craig, Peter Dodd, Rosemary Dodd, Brenda Donnison, George Forster, Allan Gittins, Margaret Gittins, David Goldwater, Ray Hayes, Kathleen Hodgson, Nigel Jenkins, Anne King, Liz Lightfoot, John Matthews, Eric Morgan, Jan Morris, Emma Newlands, John Newlands, Pat Nixon, Barbara Park, William Park, Peter Pescod, Barbara Pescod, Amanda Pritchard, Gareth Pritchard, Jim Railton, Jeanette Ritchie, Judith Robinson, Jackie Salmon, Lord Shipley, Margaret Shipley, Nitin Shukla, Janis Smith, Bryan Stanley, Suzanne Stanley, Tony Stephenson, Richard Taylor, Fiona Thoburn, John Barrie Thompson, Anna Walsh, Alicia Ward, Tim Wickens.

2. Apologies for absence:

Alice Brunton, Jacqueline Matthews, Jean Heslop, Lester Sher, Sue Wickens, Toby Hedworth KC, Sir David Kelly Christine Goodwin, John and Judith Bonser, Duchess of Northumberland, David and Marjorie Rochester, Geoff Wilkinson, Paul Velluet, Margaret Ball, Jon Radgick, R Neville Walker, Hugh Dixon, Helen and Gordon Cameron, Jane Kendall, Robin Bosanquet, Peter and Margaret Lowe, Ed Thompson, Bill Gibbon.

Welcome

John Newlands opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Northumberland Golf Club.

3. Minutes of the 2024 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 2024 accounts

Fiona Thoburn provided a summary of the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2024.

John proposed that these accounts are officially adopted. Members agreed by a show of hands that the accounts for the year ended 2024 be formally adopted. *There were no questions.*

5. Subscription Rates

John proposed that subscription rates remain the same for 2025.

- 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.

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

John Matthews gave his chairman's report.

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John thanked everyone for attending our AGM and for their continued support of the Northumberland and Newcastle Society, and extended a particular warm welcome to the Lord Mayor of Newcastle Councillor Gallagher, and Nitin Shukla Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, both Society Ambassadors.

John said that the Society would not be able to function without the dedication and commitment of its management team and committee members, and offered his sincere thanks to colleagues who have volunteered to continue to serve upon re-election, and who generously give so much of their time to the N & N.

John also gave grateful thanks to Society Manager Jackie Salmon for all her hard work over the past 12 months and for organising tonight's AGM and to our Treasurer Fiona Thoburn for dependably producing her detailed monthly and year-end financial reports for the society.

Centenary

We celebrated our centenary with some style with a successful party held at Kirkharle in Northumberland and with the publication of *Our City Our County*, an Anthology – a celebration of the first 100 years of the Northumberland and Newcastle Society. This was well received and is something John believes we should be very proud of as it has involved so many contributors both society members and the public. John's sincere thanks go to Editor in Chief Suzanne Stanley aided by her husband Bryan for leading on the project and to Jackie Salmon for co-ordinating the huge amount of content emailed into the office. He also thanked Ray Huntley who produces our excellent quarterly magazine *City and County* for the book's brilliant design and layout.

Kielder Update

At our last AGM John said he gave an update on the Kielder Viaduct, and is pleased to say will be the focus of another milestone celebration in 2029 as the Society will have been its owner for 60 years. Now an integral part of the 26-mile Kielder Lakeside Way and a designated permissive right of way, it would have been demolished but for the grit and determination of key members of the N & N in the late 1960's when we stepped in to purchase it.

At our prompting the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, who manage the nearby Bakethin Nature Reserve for Northumbrian Water, have been working with Forestry England and the Kielder Water and Forest Park Development Trust to clear self-sown saplings from around the base piers and viaduct approaches. This will gradually open the area to ground nesting birds and wildlife improving biodiversity. It will also open enhanced views of the Viaduct which for too long has been partially obscured by encroaching scrub.

Later this month and into June, bat surveys will be undertaken and then a specialist abseiling building conservation contractor is lined up to remove ingrowing saplings from the viaduct masonry.

This will cost about £12,000.00 which will be covered by the generous grant we received last year from the Railway Heritage Trust. My thanks to Tim Bailey, Principal of our corporate supporters, X site architecture for acting as Viaduct Project Manager for the Society and for letting the contracts on our behalf.

John said he would welcome any suggestions from members as to how we spend the remainder of the Railway Heritage Trust grant which amounts to about £10,000 on improving the viaduct.

Membership

Emma will be talking in her report about the ever pressing need to continue to recruit new society members and as always, John said he would like to gently remind you that if we all could get one newcomer, we would double our membership overnight. This year sadly saw the winding up of the Ponteland Civic Society, this followed the Morpeth Civic Society a year or two ago. Generously, both groups presented the N & N with residual funds as a donation. It clearly demonstrates how much we need to focus on growing our own membership to be able to survive and thrive.

Funding -Business Development Sub-Group

As well as finding new members, a constant concern is funding for Society activities, and we are thankful to have received grants from several local organisations and from generous individual philanthropic benefactors. To increase our fund-raising efforts, the management team have suggested setting up a small business development group dedicated to source potential grants which we know are available to civic societies such as the N & N. This does however take time and requires practical knowledge and expertise in this sector. John said he would like to take this opportunity

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to ask if anyone would be interested or know a friend or a former business colleague who would be able to help. Just contact Jackie or Emma and they will provide further details.

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

Membership & Activities Team report by Emma Walker

Emma began by paying thanks – in this 80th anniversary year of VE Day - to our own Glorious Few; the Membership and Activities Committee. Emma said she is always grateful to and thankful for the small number of people who make up this committee, for their commitment, enthusiasm and willingness to manfully tackle whatever obstacles lie ahead of us.

The obstacles last year were large and plentiful. On top of a full, monthly programme of events, there was a garden party, outdoors in a field with sheep and with no running water or electricity. There was the annual public lecture which may have lacked sheep but always involves a considerable amount of work. And of course there was the book to which many of them contributed. On that subject, Emma said that we have sold around 287 books and are about to place it in Waterstones Newcastle, Morpeth and Hexham.

Sadly, we have said goodbye to committee member Chris Sayers and Emma would like to thank him for giving us his time and energy so willingly for so many years. Emma said she is delighted that we have 3 new members. Pam Brown, and Dorothy and Malcolm Davies, all already proving to be great additions to the team, bringing fresh ideas and suggestions and showing a willingness to turn their hands to anything, from manning the tea urn and selling raffle tickets, to helping with catering and the general running of events.

Last year we entertained roughly 584 people at our events and so far this year we have hosted 189 attendees – bearing in mind there is no garden party this summer, this is an excellent figure and one upon which we shall build at coming events. These include, in June, a private tour of Gosforth Park Nature Reserve and, in July, a private tour of Whalton Manor Gardens.

In September we are teaming up with Save Britain's Heritage for a walking tour of Newcastle, in October we will hold our annual public lecture, in November we will enjoy a private tour of Trinity House and the year will draw to a close in December with our annual Christmas drinks party.

We are also seriously looking at ways in which we can live stream events – such as our annual lecture. Details of our events can be found on the website and also in the quarterly City and County magazine. Once again, we are indebted to the Barbour Foundation, for its support in funding the magazine and I would like, on behalf of the Editorial Committee, to remind you all that contributions (in the form of articles) are always welcome. It is one of the increasingly few publications not engaging with AI, so if you'd like to put pen to paper or run some article suggestions past them then do get in touch.

Membership stands at 395. Last year it was 391. The two figures are very close. So close, you may think our committee has been sitting on its hands for the past year, but the truth is that as fast as we are bringing new members in, nature is claiming some of our older ones.

Over the year we have gained around 30 new members, including our two latest business members – Adelphi Architecture and Adelphi Consulting Engineers. We have to run to stand still so to keep that figure steady is a remarkable achievement particularly at a time when, as John said, societies across the country are struggling.

However, having put the focus firmly on events last year, it was always our intention to put membership in the spotlight in 2025. The best advert for the N&N is its existing members and the best way of raising awareness of our work and what we do is by going out and telling people. So this year we have given talks to anyone who'll have us and if you know of groups that might be interested in an N&N talk do please let Jackie know.

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Emma said she has given 2 talks in residential care homes to admittedly small but encouragingly enthusiastic residents. And, while they may not be in a position to join the society, they have boosted our coffers and bought copies of our book.

One area of membership that does concern us is county membership. We are very mindful that we are the Northumberland and Newcastle Society and not just the Newcastle Society. So, as well as ensuring our events are as geographically spread as possible, we are looking at ways of raising awareness of the SoC in the more rural areas of the county.

In the first instance, we are going on a mini tour of the county and setting up our stall at a series of summer fairs. On Sunday 21st of June we shall be at the Ovingham goose fair. On 30th of August we will be at Bellingham show and on 7th of September we shall be at Etal show. So why not come along and say hello and please do tell your friends, better still bring your friends and even better still persuade them to join.

We're also looking at the possibility of holding either open days or invitation only coffee mornings in areas such as Rothbury and Alnwick and Emma is grateful to Virginia Armstrong and to Jim Railton for their thoughts, advice and suggestions as to how to go about this.

Emma's thanks also extend to Jackie and to all those of you who attended our events over the past year –and added that we hope to see you again very soon.

Members gave applause.

Planning and Development Committee Report by Tim Wickens

The Society's amalgamated 'Planning and Development Team' (P&D), is now officially 2 years old, since last year's AGM we welcomed new member Eric Morgan, who brings unparalleled practical knowledge of commercial surveying in Newcastle. Eric chaired the Society's public lecture '*Living or Dying – The future of City Centre Retail*' in October 2024, members may also be familiar with his excellent contributions to *City and County*.

The Team is working well through its established monthly meetings via the Zoom platform, interspersed with 'in person' quarterly meetings, giving us a good balance given the wide geographical spread of members.

With no let-up in practical challenges we face in assessing and preparing material for 3 planning authorities, the volume and diversity of planning applications we scrutinise to select those that demand detailed comment requires ongoing effort and honed working practices to maintain a manageable workload. Our workload is indicative of dealing with the 3 local planning authorities (LPAs) for Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland, all with substantially different profiles. Changes in working practices within the LPAs creates additional challenges for us, *e.g. still requiring proof that you're human to access Newcastle City Council's planning portal*, and these challenges are likely to continue.

Achievements

Developers continue to have confidence and interest in our region, as was eloquently appraised by Leo Fenwick and Tim Bailey in their excellent presentation at the N&N's 2024 annual lecture. Equally encouraging is this appears to be translating into the P&D Team's work, as we supported 52% of planning applications we reviewed in 2024, objecting to only 12% ,thus indicating that most applications are of good or reasonable quality.

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| P&D Team activity 2024 | Totals | % |
|---|---------------|----------|
| Total applications reviewed | 592 | |
| No comment | 407 | 69 |
| Detailed comment of total applications reviewed | 185 | 31 |
| Support | 96 | 52 |
| Object | 22 | 12 |
| Neutral | 67 | 36 |
| N&N comments confirmed recorded by LPA | 161 | 87 |
| LPA Decision concurs with N&N comment | 127 | 79 |

These outputs demonstrate our constructive approach to encouraging sustainable development, whilst reinforcing the importance of the N&N's role as guardians of built and natural heritage assets. **I again, on behalf of the N&N record our gratitude to colleagues for their continued and greatly valued commitment.**

Last year we reported concerns at proliferation of applications for large scale solar farms and mixed quality of proposals to convert relatively modern agricultural buildings to dwellings under permitted development rights. These concerns remain valid although it seems there has been an overall reduction in schemes that are particularly poor. In addition, multiplying numbers of HMOs in Newcastle along with minimum space standards and proposals for tall buildings continue to feature. The P&D Team has created and reviews its generic policy statements to deal swiftly with relevant planning applications so we can focus on specific local implications of such schemes.

In addition to its routine work, the P&D Team responded to the public consultation on the UK Government's proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). These reforms are likely to substantially impact this region and the N&N commented extensively on the proposals, specifically on loss of local influence on decision making.

The North East Combined Authority (NECA) published its draft Transport Plan in 2024 and we contributed detailed comment to the public consultation. We support the key ambitions of the plan, particularly the aim to integrate public transport as we see this as a critical element in delivering sustainable development within effective strategic local plans.

Measuring Success

Our planning comments are published via the N&N website, with applications individually linked to the 3 authorities' planning portals, facilitating ready access to view outcomes for individual planning applications via the easily accessible embedded links.

We believe two good benchmarks for assessing our contribution to planning matters are: first, the N&N being specifically referenced in individual planning officers' reports to local authority planning committees; and second, the outcomes from these planning hearings reflecting our comments. In 2024, we were specifically referenced in 161 planning officer reports (87% of our total comments) and in 127 (79%) of these the LPA outcome mirrored our submission. This suggests a very creditable return that acknowledges the Society's valued presence in the planning system.

Other activity:

- Our refreshed P&D Team Empathy Architecture public lecture presentation has received good feedback and has attracted further interest;

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- Active lobbying and support for partners key projects for **'At risk'** heritage assets, e.g. **Keelmens' Hospital and St John's Cemetery, Elswick**;
- Engage with owners of important heritage assets, e.g. **The Cooperage**, facilitating constructive partnership dialogue to help secure their future;
- Collaborate with LPA partners to embed heritage in strategic planning, e.g. **meeting with Rob Murfin, Northumberland CC**; and influencing **Newcastle Cultural Plan**;
- Work proactively with community partners to widen interest, awareness and protect our amazing globally significant diverse heritage.

In addition to this **team members actively enhance the profile of the N&N** through:

- **Newcastle Conservation Advisory Panel (NCAP)**;
- **Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)**;
- **Historic Environment Advisory Panel (HEAP)**;
- **Creative Central NCL**.

Active participation in these forums ensures we have **a constructive and positive role in shaping our great City and regional environment**, this is ongoing work and requires us to continue to **identify and work with more partners across the region**.

New Members

We are **keen to encourage new members to join us**, including those with professional experience but equally people with a passion for this interesting, rewarding work and opportunities to represent the N&N in partnership roles.

If you or a family member or friend would like to become more involved in work of the P&D Team you would be very welcome - please contact either Jackie Salmon or myself.

Members gave applause.

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

John read out the list of members standing or retiring in 2025:

Directors (Trustees)

John Matthews
Toby Hedworth KC
Emma Newlands
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
Nitin Shukla

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Editorial Committee

Nigel Jenkins (Editor)
Suzanne Stanley

Membership & Activities Committee

Emma Newlands - chair
Bryan Stanley - secretary
Les Brunton
Susan Clark - retiring
Christopher Sayers – retiring
Pam Brown – new appointment
Dorothy Davies – new appointment
Malcolm Davies – new appointment

Planning & Development Committee

Tim Wickens - chair
Nigel Jenkins – vice chair
Bill Hopper – vice chair
John Matthews
Toby Hedworth KC
Annie Lloyd
Dorothy Craig
Bev Bagnall
Alison Gajdus
Oliver Donnelly
Jon Radgick
Navya Bharagida
Richard Neville Walker
Charles Fleming - retiring
Eric Morgan – new appointment

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

8. Member of the Year Award 2025

John said that the member of the year award is intended to show thanks and give recognition to members who have given outstanding service to the Society. This year, the Trustees have chosen Annie Lloyd of the Planning & Development team.

Tim Wickens gave thanks to Annie:

“It has been my pleasure to work with Annie since I joined the N&N Society in 2017 and even more so following the formation of the Planning and Development Team. As an outstandingly committed, experienced and knowledgeable member of the team, Annie is a true inspiration to colleagues and a great asset for the N&N.

The subsequent success of the P&D Team is due in no small part to Annie’s influence and ability, she has been instrumental in re-energising the N&N’s relationship with CPRE, bringing invaluable expertise and local

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knowledge to our work. Annie's infectious enthusiasm has actively encouraged new members to join and add great contribution to the team.

Despite the challenges of dealing with substantially increased demand for 3 local planning authority portfolios, Annie's contribution has been an example to all, in addition to this Annie has been immensely helpful in supporting the Society's safeguarding responsibilities as well as our response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) public consultation.

Annie is a highly respected, valued and appreciated colleague and more than worthy of this award.

To show our appreciation, we would like to present Suzanne with a certificate and a £50 Fenwick voucher.

Congratulations, Annie!"

Members gave applause, and as Annie was not in attendance, Jackie Salmon will ensure Annie receives her certificate and voucher.

9. Any other business/Q&A

Suzanne Stanley thanked the other contributors to the centenary book, particularly John Matthews for his articles on the history of the Society and the Kielder Viaduct.

Barrie Thompson urged that the Society looks to the future and embraces renewable energy sources in its policies. Nigel Jenkins and Tim Wickens said that the N&N's policy on renewables is that solar panels should be installed on roofs, car parks and commercial buildings, not on best value agricultural land.

Peter Dodd commented on the issue of empty historic buildings such as Henderson Hall in Benton. John Matthews said the N&N is instrumental in seeking a positive outcome for the building and maintaining dialogue with the key partners.

John Newlands asked if the N&N can 'up the ante' on progress with the Cooperage. Tim said we are 'plugging away', trying to keep dialogue going with the owners.

The meeting was then closed.