

October 2023

A Message from the Mayor



Welcome to October's edition of our newsletter. This month we're asking for your thoughts on a number of upcoming projects, including the future of Grove Garden South and the impact of electric bikes on the town. Please take the time to email us with your ideas.

This issue also looks at some of the plans we have to improve the look of Marygate.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers of Heritage Open Days for once again creating a fascinating programme of events last month, that showcased the history of the town.

October sees the Literary Festival present an exciting and thought provoking series of live events in the town in its tenth year of operation. We also have events by the innovative Berwick Music Series which continues its exploration of the influences of folk music on classical music. The Council is delighted to support these events that enhance Berwick's cultural life and bring visitors to the town.

Cllr John Robertson

Marygate Plans



The Town Council has unveiled its plan to brighten up Marygate. Cllr Graham Brown addressed the public attendees at the council meeting on 25 September with a plan to reduce clutter, slow traffic and improve how the empty properties look. He said "It's a quick plan to try to improve the town centre without spending a fortune and hopefully getting it done in a reasonably short period. Some of it is down to the county but we can do some of it ourselves."

"Regarding the 'clutter' we can move trees, benches and bins, and we can add additional trees in planters which have proved to be very popular. We think a line of winter flowering trees down the cobbled strip on the wide side of the street will look great."

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The aim is also to remove the digital sign boards and replace with a window based board.

The initiative to encourage owners of empty properties to take up the council offer of 'decals' in their windows is ongoing. "I think most people understand we don't have the power to do much with properties which we don't own but at least this helps how they look."



The County will be approached and encouraged to clarify issues around the numerous 'A' boards being used to advertise businesses and the location of fast food vendors currently located in the centre. They will also be asked to replace the missing lights at the top of the Berwick lanterns and relocate the Jubilee lamp to the Queen's Garden.

County's agreement will also be sought to create a 'table junction' at the top of West Street which would raise the road level to slow traffic and improve access for pedestrians.

"None of this will necessarily transform Marygate into the shopping venue it once was. Retail has changed and big shopping units are not sought after. However if this makes the centre a better place to visit and enjoy then it's worth it and it builds on the arrival of the new shops and conversions that have taken place."

Financial Reporting

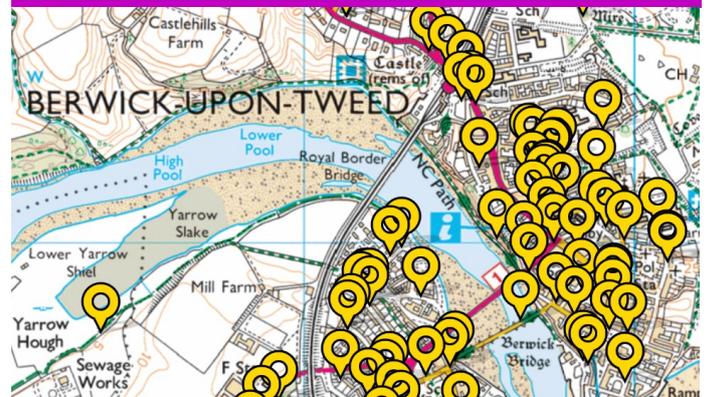
From time to time we get queries that arise from the amount and volume of financial information we publish. Sometimes it's not helpful that we're not allowed to edit it for clarity, but that's the rules.

Let me give you an example. We provide a list of all payments as a routine part of reporting to committee. The amounts shown are the amount we've paid to the supplier. If we pay £100 for supplies, then that's what is reported. The problems arise if VAT is included in the purchase price.

The Town Council isn't registered for VAT. We are however allowed to reclaim VAT we pay. So if we've paid £100 for something, that includes VAT, it's only actually cost us, once the VAT has been reclaimed, £100 minus £16.67 VAT, or £83.33.

It probably would be better if we could work out, with our accounting software suppliers, a way of reporting purchases by the excluding and including VAT prices, to help keen students of our accounts marry up purchases to payments. We'll work on that.

Fix My Street Update



Many of you have been using the Fix My Street website to report local problems (like fly-tipping, blocked drains, broken paving slabs, graffiti, etc.) directly to Northumberland County Council. The website address is fixmystreet.com and it's an easy and quick way of reporting problems, and receiving updates from NCC as they fix the issue.

Now that the system has been running for a few months, NCC have published a report on how the service is working. You can read their presentation on the Town Council's website (Berwick-tc.gov.uk) and here's a QR code link to the page:



Electric Bike Scheme

As part of Northumberland County Council's The Big Northumberland Gear Change, Berwick has been chosen to pilot Northumberland's electric bike project.

NCC has purchased the bikes and has asked Berwick Town Council to make arrangements to house the first bikes.

NCC has also commissioned Cycling4Everyone to deliver the training, which is the first in the North East. The training is offered for free and is principally aimed at Berwick traders, however individuals will be considered depending on their needs.

Once the training is complete the cargo bikes can be borrowed to assess their practical use. This is where we come in. To help us decide how to approach this, let us know if you would be interested in using this service and what your thoughts are on the scheme. Email us at info@berwick-tc.gov.uk

Grove Gardens South



Over the summer, council took the decision to temporarily close Grove Gardens South play area to try and reduce the incidents of anti-social behaviour associated with the site. At its most recent meeting, after listening to representations made by local residents and others, the decision was taken to permanently close the site.

The land at Grove Gardens South is owned by the Town Council, but is subject to restrictive covenants imposed by NCC when they transferred the play park to the Town Council. We need to have a conversation with NCC about the future of this patch of land, which is hard to access between houses. Before we do that though, we'd like to hear from Berwick residents. Given that the shape of the land and the complicated access to it makes it hard to manage as a play area, what should we do with this patch of land? Email Gareth at town.clerk@berwick-tc.gov.uk with your ideas for the site.

CCTV



Berwick Town Council has funded the provision of CCTV in the town centre since 2015. It's a substantial item of spending each year, and the cameras and the kit that supports them has a finite lifespan.

Not everyone knows how the system works. The cameras are linked to the police station, where there's a bank of screens and some video recorders. There's also a control panel in the police station that lets someone sitting at the desk control some of the cameras.

What there isn't is a dedicated team of camera operators watching the screens. That's what the system was enabled to do, but in practice now the police use the cameras after a crime has been committed, to gather evidence to detect the offenders or to support a prosecution. We don't even know how often that happens.

There isn't any evidence available as to how effective CCTV is in preventing or detecting crime. We've asked the police to let us have any evidence they've got, but none has been forthcoming. We've asked the Police and Crime Commissioner why they don't fund the provision of CCTV as a central part of the funding of the police. They referred us back to the police.

In some areas CCTV is funded by upper tier authorities (the same level as NCC); in other places it's funded by retailers, or landlords, or by partnerships around specific areas of economic activity, like the one around the night time economy in Newcastle. Some of Blyth's latest tranche of government funding to level the town up is going into CCTV and a partnership approach to retail theft.

In Berwick we only have the Town Council funding CCTV, and we have no evidence that it's having any impact. We think those are good enough reasons to be having a conversation with local residents about whether CCTV in the Town Centre is working, and should be paid for by the residents of all of the town, or by a broader mix of sponsors and partners. Email us with your thoughts at info@berwick-tc.gov.uk.

New Deputy Mayor



Cllr Graham Brown was unanimously elected as deputy Mayor at September's council meeting. He has been a town councillor for 2 and a half years having moved to Berwick 16 years ago from his home town of Newcastle. 'This is a great town and like everyone else I want to see it thriving. I have absolutely no ambitions to one day become Mayor which is what often happens to deputies, but in this role along with my fellow councillors and countless other volunteers I hope I can contribute to a better Berwick.'

October's Meetings

The Town Council has two meetings in October, both of which will be held in the Town Council offices on Marygate:

Monday, 2 October

Staffing and Corporate Resources 6.00pm

Monday, 9 October

Planning 6.00pm

Both meetings are open to the public, but sections of the Staffing and Corporate Resources meeting may exclude the media and public from the discussion if staffing matters are discussed (Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960).

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 Walkergate on Tuesday and Friday 10:00am-1:00pm or telephone NCC on 0345 600 6400.

THE MAYOR'S CHARITY PRESENTS

all proceeds to 

SATURDAY 16th DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS CEILIDH

Guildhall Berwick

HOTSCOTCH CEILIDH BAND

BAR & BUFFET £25 per ticket

7pm - 11.30pm

TICKETS FROM JOHN ROBERTSON C/O WEST ST DAVID GORDON TEL 07834 666901