

# 2020/2022 Annual Report

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## Council's Response to Covid-19 Pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic the council had to adapt the way that it worked. Councillors continued to be out in the community offering their help and support where needed. Although we were able to keep our offices staffed during lockdown, we were not open to the public and simply dealt with issues over the phone and by email.

During the pandemic we continued to maintain our Food Bank distribution service in Seaton Valley and also helped to coordinate volunteers who came forward to offer their help in the community. In particular the council helped with the distribution of packed lunches to Astley High School/ Whytrig Middle School free school meal recipients and helped to deliver prescription medicines from local pharmacies.

The council also agreed to support first, middle and high schools in the valley with a funding package of £20,000 which was used to acquire additional lap tops for students who were finding it difficult to access home learning opportunities.

When restrictions allowed, our office was re-opened to the public and we resumed a full service for our residents.

During the pandemic a number of community events had to be cancelled and some of our services were curtailed; partly because of this we did not produce an annual report for the year ending March 2021, and as a consequence, this report covers the period April 2020 up to March 2022.

## Make-up of the Council

**Parish Elections were held on the 6 May 2021 and the following councillors were selected to represent their respective wards:**

### HARTLEY WARD

Susan Dungworth, David Ferguson and Jill Henderson.

### HARTLEY WARD

Les Bowman, Eva Coulson and Ann Stanners.

### SEGHILL WITH SEATON DELAVAL WARD

Sue Bowman, Eve Chicken and Graham Eastwood.

## Neighbourhood Plan

The council commenced work on the initial stage of developing the Seaton Valley Neighbourhood Plan in October 2015.

After considerable work developing the plan, and with engagement and input from residents, the neighbourhood plan was accepted by residents who voted in a Referendum held on the 29 July 2021. The plan was formally adopted by Northumberland County Council Cabinet on 7 September 2021.

The plan focuses on the protection of our green and open spaces and is part of the statutory development plan. Consequently, decisions on whether or not to grant planning permission in the Seaton Valley Neighbourhood Area will need to be made in accordance with the plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

## Neighbourhood Partnership with Northumberland County Council (NCC)

The work of the partnership is firmly embedded within the workings of the council. The relationship between NCC and Seaton Valley is very good, and the standard of work provided is well regarded by most residents.

Through the partnership agreement there is additional grass cutting in the summer months, additional weed spraying and an enhanced programme of floral planting. The council is now well into its second five year neighbourhood partnership with the county council – the current contract will run until March 2024.

## Floral Planting

The council is pleased with the county council's performance in this area of work and was particularly pleased with the quality of spring bedding this year.

The Floral Planting contract is nearing the end of its term and work has started to plan for a new contract which will begin in either April 2023 or April 2024 depending on whether or not the council takes up its option to extend the current contract period for an additional year.

## Promoting Seaton Valley

Our quarterly Futures magazine continues to be well received by many residents and is proving to be an excellent way of communicating the work of the council with the Valley's community.

We continue to attend community events throughout the year where possible and actively promote the Seaton Valley brand. We held our sixth annual photography competition at the start of this year to encourage residents to share photographs of where they live.

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This year's competition attracted over 200 entries across the five competition categories.

Our website had a refresh in 2021 with a friendlier and more modern feel with simple navigation. As well as our website we continue to share content on our social media accounts.

## Play Parks

The council's play parks are inspected and maintained on a regular basis with repairs being carried out as and when required. A number of fences were damaged during storm Arwen that have now all been repaired.

The wooden fence around The Dunes Play Park in Seaton Sluice suffered quite a lot of damage and as a consequence a replacement metal fence has just been installed. A new fence was also installed at the play park at Hastings Gardens in New Hartley to make it safer for young children using the park.

Planning permission has been granted for a new pocket play park at Northside Place in Holywell. We hope to have the park installed over the summer months.

## Allotments

The Council ring fences the income it collects from allotment rents to spend on allotment repairs and improvements.

We have continued to maintain our allotment sites and carried out quite a bit of perimeter fencing work at a number of sites. Some sites did experience damage to fencing during storm Arwen. All of the external perimeter fencing that was damaged in the storm has now been repaired.

Having an allotment proved to be very popular during the Covid 'lock-down' and this demand has continued. We have re-let a number of vacant plots at all of our sites and we are pleased that our occupancy rates have increased.

Allotment holders have been asked to donate any surplus produce to our local food pantries and receptacles have been installed at each allotment site to facilitate this.

## Seaton Valley in Bloom

We continued to work with the Valley's community groups to support the In Bloom initiative. Although we only have

a small budget to help with purchasing bulbs, plants, tubs etc. we coordinate the activities of the various village groups and help to share best practice.

Once again there were a number of notable achievements in the 2021 Northumbria In Bloom competition. The groups are working hard again in the current year to improve the appearance of our villages.

## Gardening Competition

The council continued to hold its annual gardening competition throughout the Covid pandemic.

We held a reduced category gardening competition in 2021 due to the Covid restrictions and, although the number of entries was down we were still delighted with the response and the standard of the entries. The 2022 gardening competition has returned to the pre-pandemic format.

## Christmas Events

Covid restrictions meant that we were unable to hold our usual Christmas events in 2020. However, we were still able to run our Christmas Garlands competition with the village first schools and we still had the winners turn on their lights the village lights and the Christmas tree lights.

A relaxation in Covid restrictions meant that we were able to hold our usual events in November 2021 and once again they signalled the start of the Christmas period in the Valley. We continued our Christmas Lights Design competition at each of our first schools and provided entertainment and refreshments at the switch on events.

Storm Arwen arrived in the middle of the programme of switch on events that meant we had to reschedule a couple of the events for safety reasons. However, once the storm passed we were able to hold these events. A few Christmas Garlands were damaged in the storm that will be replaced for the switch on events in 2022.

## Bus Shelters

We installed two new bus shelters, one on Tillmouth Avenue in Holywell and one at New Hartley shops.

One of our bus shelters on Beresford Road suffered considerable damage during storm Arwen. The shelter cannot be repaired and will be replaced during 2022.

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We are still experiencing high numbers of criminal damage incidents targeted at our bus shelters. We have started to replace some lower panels with metal sheets and have started using polycarbonate in the shelter windows to prevent them from being broken.

## Environmental Enforcement

Dog fouling and fly tipping continue to be two of the biggest areas of concern identified by residents, and whilst realising that we can't eradicate the problems completely, we have taken steps to actively address the matter.

Since 2019 we have funded a part time Environmental Enforcement Officer to increase the resources of the county council to tackle environmental issues in the Valley, including fly tipping and dog fouling.

We think our efforts are having some affect as the issues are becoming much more generally seen as being anti-social acts. We continue to highlight the problems and push for more penalty notices for offenders.

## Leisure Activities

We continue to fund services from the NCC Sports Development Team to help provide school holiday activities and leisure activities within our villages.

The school holiday activities are held on every school holiday with the exception of Christmas. The Sports Development Team provides multi sports, football and cricket camps in all of our villages that due to our funding are free to attend. We also fund free packed lunches for all of the children that attend the camps. Our funding also helps to finance the Sports Development Teams support to village events held during the summer.

The Sports Development Team is also delivering regular weekly activities for young and mature residents thanks to our continued funding of leisure activities.

## Youth Service

The council's contribution to this service enables the County Council's Youth Service to deliver a weekly youth club in Seaton Delaval and outreach work in the other villages where necessary.

In addition to youth engagement it enables an Engagement Worker to be employed to help develop and run ad-hoc projects for young people across the Valley.

## Public Toilets

We have been able to continue to provide some funding to ensure that the public toilets in West Terrace in Seaton Sluice and Avenue Head in Seaton Delaval remain open.

The council has now embedded this support into its base budget and has agreed to provide funds to NCC to enable it to keep both of these public toilets open all year round.

## Food Parcel Distribution

The council, in partnership with Blyth Food Bank, is providing a food parcel distribution service from our offices in Seaton Delaval so that qualifying Seaton Valley residents can collect their food parcels from a more convenient location.

We also have a number of food bank donation points in shops, community centres and Seaton Delaval Hall that are emptied on a regular basis and the donations are taken to the Blyth Food Bank.

In the last year we were able to help facilitate the delivery/ collection of 333 food parcels to support some of the more disadvantaged families in the Valley.

## Members Small Schemes Budget

In July 2020 the council agreed to allocate a one off budget of £10,000 per village to carry out specific projects.

This funding has been used for a variety of projects including; the acquisition of a number of picnic benches for installation throughout the Valley, a contribution to the resurfacing of the pathways and the replacement of the old metal benches in the Memorial Park, Seaton Sluice; the design, build and installation of the ornamental arch at New Hartley; a contribution to the Community Orchard in Holywell; and the installation of the large free standing hanging baskets and removal of the cobbled areas in front of the Elsdon Avenue shops in Seaton Delaval.

Work is progressing to agree outstanding schemes in both Seghill and Holywell which we hope to be able to deliver later in 2022.

## And something to look out for in 2022/23...

### Village Plan Update

Our last village planning exercise was carried out in 2015, so as part of the 2022/23 budget exercise it was agreed to commission an update of these plans.

Your Back Yard, a community interest company, has again been commissioned to carry out this work which will aim,

through the use of focus groups and questionnaires, to highlight resident's priorities. The council will then be able to target its resources at the priorities identified by residents.

### Play Areas

As mentioned above we hope to be able to deliver a new pocket play area in Holywell later this year.

## Desktop Analysis of the Council's Income And Expenditure –

### Where Does our Money Come From?

Approximately **84%** of the Council's total income of **£678,120** in 2021/22 came from its annual precept which it served on Northumberland County Council. The Council's precept was **£572,170** which is collected via residents Council Tax bills. Seaton Valley Community Councils Band D equivalent Council Tax for 2021/22 was **£121.10**, which equated to approximately **£2.33** per week.

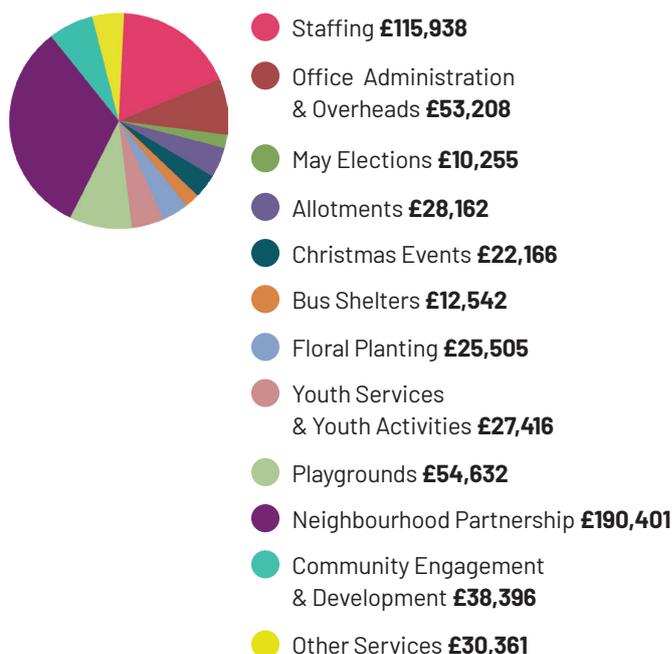
The Council received grant support from two of its County Councillors totalling **£11,030** to help fund schemes in Seaton Sluice (Memorial Park resurfacing works) and in Seaton Delaval (improvements to Elsdon Avenue shopping area). It also received a refund of **£53,100** in respect of previous year's overpayments on its Neighbourhood Partnership contract with NCC.

Additionally, the Council collects rent on both the two flats it owns above its offices (£11,850) and on the allotment sites it manages throughout the Valley (**£19,230**). In total this income amounted to **£31,080** in 2021/22.

Miscellaneous income amounted to **£2,740** and the Council processed internal recharges to services of £8,000 giving total income for the year of **£678,120**.

### Where do we Spend Our Money?

In 2021/22 the Council spent **£608,980** on a range of services, salaries and running costs. These costs are summarised in the Pie Chart below.



### Reserves

As at the 31 March 2022 the Council's usable reserves (after allowing for a minimum reserve level of £90,000) totalled **£172,530** a breakdown of which is shown in the table below:

Types Of Reserve	£
Playgrounds - Repairs And Renewal Funds	86,300
Flats - Building And Maintenance Fund	5,000
Unallocated Reserves	81,230
<b>Total Usable Reserves</b>	<b>172,530</b>

Should you require any further information relating to the Income and Expenditure of the Council then please contact the Clerk, Simon Potts via

telephone on:  
**0191 2379870**

or via email at:  
**Clerk@seatonvalleycommunitycouncil.gov.uk**