

Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 20 March 2017 at 7.00 p.m. at Seaton Delaval Council Offices.

The meeting started at 7.01 p.m.

PRESENT:

Councillors: K Collier (Vice Chair) D Mullen (Chair) B Nixon S Stanners (Vice Chair)
 B. Swinhoe A Stanners S Dungworth L Bowman and S Hartland

IN ATTENDANCE:

S Potts – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
D Freeman – Engagement and Development Officer
Cllr B Pidcock – Northumberland County Council
G Paul – Director of Planning and Economy – Northumberland County Council
S Bucknall – Highways Delivery Manager – Northumberland County Council
Andrew Wells – Northumbria Police
Michael Gair – Northumbria Police

Members of the public - 7

CO018/17 1. Apologies for absence

All members were present and consequently there were no apologies for absence.

CO019/17 2. Disclosure of interests

Cllrs Mullen and Stanners declared that they both had registerable personal interests in item 19 on tonight's agenda and said they would withdraw from the meeting when that item was being considered.

CO020/17 3. Chair's Welcome and Civic Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that he was pleased that NCC's Director of Planning and Economy had agreed to attend tonight's meeting to give some background on the recent proposal by Coty to close its factory in Seaton Delaval. In this respect he said that item 21 on the agenda (Closure of Coty's Seaton Delaval Factory) would be brought forward and would be the first item to be considered following public question time.

CO021/17 4. Public Question Time

One member of the public raised concerns about debris accumulating in sinks and drains in the Medburn Avenue area of Holywell and near the Co Op in Seaton Delaval. In response the Clerk said that both matters had been reported previously, however, he would contact NCC again to pursue the matters.

Another resident asked a question about ownership of the Coty factory site – in reply the Chair confirmed that the whole site is owned by Coty.

PCSO Andrew Wells took the opportunity to update Council on two current police matters. He said that a number of people have now been arrested and charged with a spate of allotment burglaries that took place in late 2015/early 2016. They will be appearing in court in due course. Andrew also mentioned an increased incidence of anti-social behaviour call outs to Seghill in recent weeks – he asked residents to be vigilant and to report any potential incidents via the 101 telephone number.

There being no further questions; public question time closed at 7.10pm

CO022/17 5. Closure of Coty's Seaton Delaval Factory

Before considering the Clerks' report the Chair introduced the County Council's Director of Planning and Economy, Geoff Paul and asked him to address the meeting.

Mr Paul began by giving a summary of the history of the current Coty site from it first being established by Shultons in 1962. Shultons being bought by Procter and Gamble in 1991 and finally being transferred, as part of a merger with some of Procter and Gamble's businesses, to Coty in 2016.

He said that staff turnover at the factory was very low in comparison to the industry average and that average length of employment for each employee is 13 years. Coty is a global company with over 20,000 employees worldwide. It has a turnover of approaching £9 billion dollars and has a number of plants throughout the Europe. On completing its merger with part of Procter and Gamble's businesses it immediately announced that it planned to rationalise its European production capacity – unfortunately this rationalisation has led to the recent announcement that Coty plans to close two of its factories in Europe, one of these being at Seaton Delaval.

Mr Paul said that the County Council had held discussions with Coty's Seaton Delaval management team in July 2016 when it had become apparent that each of Coty's European plants was in competition with each other. The management team had explained to Mr Paul that because of the plants location in relation to Coty's European global distribution centre (Cologne) it carries massive transportation overhead costs in comparison to other mainland European plants e.g. France, which, despite the plants excellent productivity record makes it less competitive than Coty's other mainland European plants. Knowing that the plant was under threat the management team had asked the County Council for financial help at this time.

The County Council responded positively to this request for help and agreed to support the factory up to the maximum state aid limits allowed under European Union legislation.

However, in light of last week's announcement, it would appear that this help hasn't been enough to save the plant. Mr Paul did point out however, that no decision to close the plant has been made at this point and that a statutory consultation process will be required to be carried out before any formal decision to close the plant can be made.

That being said Mr Paul said that the County Council has to assume the worst and is preparing for a negative announcement at some stage in the future. In doing so it has agreed to set a task force up within the next two weeks to address three potential issues:

- Support for up to 400 employees – retraining opportunities, job opportunity referrals and new business set up advice,
- Supply Chain – assess the potential effect of the closure on the wider employment sector and the effect on the Seaton Delaval Service Centre, and
- Site Disposal – work with the Department of Innovation and Trade to market the site to potential new occupiers – hopefully as a going concern – good reason to be optimistic on this front as the site is tailor-made for a similar operation to move into and is considered very efficient.

The Task Force will be made up of national, regional, County Council, business and Parish Council representatives and will be supplemented by Blyth Valley MP Mr R Campbell.

In closing his address Mr Paul said that whilst everyone was shocked, dismayed and/or devastated by last week's announcement he repeated his appeal to allow Coty some time to conclude its appraisal of its European manufacturing capacities and capabilities. He said that he is confident that Coty will contact the County Council as soon as it comes to a final decision and that, if that decision is to close the Seaton Delaval Plant, a Task Force will be in place to begin addressing the three issues listed above.

After Mr Paul's address there was further discussion on the matter – one of the residents present, a Coty employee said that it was almost common knowledge that the real reason the Seaton Delaval Plant is being proposed for closure as opposed to some of its European counterparts is the less onerous redundancy regulations that are in place in the UK. Another resident commented that she had heard that another arm of Procter and Gamble may be interested in taking the plant over – Mr Paul agreed to investigate this rumour. Cllr Dungworth said that she was aware that Mr Campbell had managed to secure an Adjournment Debate in the House of Commons on the matter and that the debate is scheduled to take place on Thursday 23 March.

At the conclusion of the debate Council considered the Clerk's short report and:

RESOLVED TO:

- **Note the announcement by Coty that it proposes to close its Seaton Delaval factory by the end of 2018 putting up to 400 local jobs at risk,**
- **Express its concern at the proposal and ask both the County Council and the government to do everything they can to persuade Coty to change its mind,**
- **Notwithstanding these efforts, ask both the County Council and the government to do everything they can to find another company to take over the factory as a going concern,**
- **Urge the County Council to ensure that; whatever the outcome of its negotiations with Coty and/or its efforts to find an alternative company to take the factory over; it continues to identify the current Coty site as a major employment site in all of its Planning Policy documentation, and**
- **Press the government to seek further information from Coty to justify why its Seaton Delaval plant has been singled out for closure rather than its other major plants in France and Germany.**

CO023/17

6. County Councillor Update

Cllr Pidcock said that the main issue on his agenda at the present time is the threatened closure of Coty's Seaton Delaval premises. He reiterated a number of the points made by Mr Paul and said that he is particularly concerned with ensuring that the employees of Coty get as fair a deal as possible.

CO024/17

7. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of Seaton Valley Council's Meeting held on 25 January 2017 were agreed as being a correct record and were duly signed and dated by the Chair.

CO025/17

8. Minutes of Other Committee Meetings

The minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 1 March 2017 were presented and received for information.

The minutes of the Planning Committees held on 9 February and 9 March 2017 were presented and received for information.

CO026/17 9. Street Lighting Update

Northumberland County Council's Highways Delivery Manager was in attendance to give a short presentation on the roll out of NCC Street Lighting Modernisation project insofar as it has affected Seaton Valley. He said that completion of the project will generate significant savings for his authority and will deliver a more focussed and reliable Street Lighting service. However, he acknowledged that there have been some issues with the management of the roll out itself and asked that any outstanding issues be raised directly with him.

Cllr Dungworth said that her postbag is dominated by street lighting issues and felt that management of the contract had not been managed or communicated as well as it could have been. In response the Highways Delivery Manager offered to host a Seaton Valley Street Lighting Drop in Session within the next few weeks to allow residents direct access to contract managers. The Clerk was asked to liaise with NCC to arrange this.

CO027/17 10. Services and Partnership Update

The Clerk presented the Services Officer's report for information and referred in particular to a number of items:

- Good response to Newsletter article advertising allotments for immediate occupancy.
- 2017/18 Allotment invoices have been sent out and payments are now being made.
- Work on Fountain Head roundabout is likely to start within the next two weeks
- New bark chippings have been laid at New Hartley senior play park.
- New Seaton Delaval in Bloom Group now up and running – Seghill in Bloom group also making good progress – new flower bed has been installed at village entrance (from Annitsford). New Hartley group has adopted a flower bed at Hester Bungalows.
- Gardening competition entries are now open.
- Seghill's spring bedding will remain in place until after this year's Gala.
- Successful litter picks were held in Seghill and in particular at Seaton Sluice
- Floral displays in uniform containers are to be placed in front of all of the Council's Gateway Signs.

CO028/17 11. Play Parks Update.

The Clerk spoke of his report which outlined the progress that has been made over the 18 months or so with regard to updating a number of the Council's play areas. The report went on to inform the Council about a number of issues relating to the possibility of accessing additional S106 funding for the replacement park at Deneside and provided an update on potential available funding to upgrade the next park on the Council's Renewals and Replacement Programme schedule i.e. Seghill Welfare. After considering the Clerk's report; Council:

RESOLVED TO: note the developments discussed in the Clerk's report and agree, subject to the S106 monies outlined in paragraph 8 of his report becoming available to:

- **Confirm that it wishes to develop a small play park at Seghill Welfare with any remaining funding in its Renewals and Replacement Fund,**
- **Agree to pay third party legal fees associated with finalising negotiations to agree a Deed of Variation on the existing S106 agreement at the Wheatfields development,**
- **Take steps to clear the existing equipment from the current Deneside Play Area; once the new Play park is installed, and**
- **Delegate responsibility to Ward Councillors to work with the Council's preferred play park provider, Kompan, NCC and Seghill residents to both agree the design of the park and agree a suitable location for the new park within the Welfare grounds.**

CO029/17 12. Withdrawal of Citizens Advice Surgery

Council received the Clerk's report which informed it of the disappointing news that the weekly Citizens Advice Surgery delivered from the Council's offices has been withdrawn.

Members asked the Clerk to thank Citizens Advice for the service it has provided over the last three years and to pass on its good wishes (as he has been unwell) to the volunteer who has provided the service for the last year or so.

CO030/17 13. Art Stop

The Engagement and Development Officer's report provided a summary of this excellent project that has been delivered across the Valley over the last three months. Members wanted to express their congratulations to the young people involved, and to both Emma Rudd and Sarah Hudson who have led on the delivery of the project.

All of the original art works and voice boxes have now been installed and vinyls will soon be appearing on some of the Council's Perspex bus shelters.

A small ceremony to celebrate the completion of the project, attended by Cllr Stanners was held on Saturday 18 March at the bus stop outside the gym on Avenue Road.

CO031/17 14. Retail Support

Another of the Engagement and Development Officer's reports provided a summary of the works that have been carried out to improve the appearance of some of Seaton Delaval's high street shops. Again members were pleased with the outcome of the exercise and indicated that a similar, but reduced version of the scheme could be considered for 2017/18. Cllr Dungworth asked how the success of the scheme is to be measured and suggested following the completion of the works up with a targeted questionnaire to the affected businesses.

CO032/17 15. Neighbourhood Plan/Public Enquiry

The Clerk spoke to his report and confirmed that the Public Enquiry to hear Barratt's appeal against the County Council's decision to refuse planning permission to build 285 new homes at New Hartley is to commence on Tuesday 13 June 2017. It will last for six days and will be held at New Hartley Memorial Hall.

The Council and residents from New Hartley have joined together and will play an active role at the enquiry, and will need to spend considerable time and resource to both prepare and submit evidence at the hearing.

As a significant number of the individuals involved in planning for the public enquiry are the same individuals that are involved in developing the Council's neighbourhood plan the Council;

RESOLVED TO: delay any further work on developing its Neighbourhood Plan until the outcome of the Public Enquiry is known.

CO033/17 16. Lone Working Policy

The Clerk gave a little background relating to an incident that had highlighted the need to introduce a Lone Working policy for the Council's employees and briefly summarised the draft policy submitted for approval attached as Appendix 12A to his report.

Members said that they were in total agreement with the draft policy submitted and asked that it be applied in its current state to Councillors too; until such time as a separate policy could be drafted solely for application to Councillors.

RESOLVED TO: Approve and adopt the Lone Working Policy attached at Appendix 12A to the Clerk's report and to review the operation of the policy after a period of six months.

CO034/17 17. Bank Reconciliation

Council agreed to receive the report, and noted that the Council's bank accounts had been successfully reconciled to its financial records.

CO035/17 18. Asset Register

The Clerk presented the Councils' latest Asset Register which identified all assets in Council ownership. Members asked a number of questions about specific assets and then:

RESOLVED TO: approve the makeup of the Council's Asset Register attached as Appendix 14A to the Clerk's report.

CO036/17 19. Risk Register

The Clerk presented his report which highlighted the main risks facing the Council analysed across a number of categories. The report assessed the likelihood and potential impact of such risks and described the control actions that are in place to mitigate the identified risks. After considering the risks identified Council:

RESOLVED TO receive and approve the Risk Register attached as Appendix 15A to the Clerk's report and to encourage all members to take an active role in the Council's risk management processes.

CO037/17 20. Community Fund Requests

Cllrs Mullen and Stanners (S) reconfirmed their Personal Disclosable Interest in the first item to be considered in this report and left the room.

The remainder of Council members considered a request from the Trustees of Seghill Colliery Institute for a grant of up to £2,000 to fund a full condition/structural survey on their building. The Council agreed with the need for the survey and:

RESOLVED TO: agree to provide a grant of up to £2,000 from its Community Fund to the Trustees of Seghill Colliery to fund a condition/structural survey of Seghill Community Centre, subject to the receipt of two official quotes.

Cllrs Mullen and Stanners (S) returned to the meeting.

The second item for consideration concerned a request for public seating to be located on Seaton Delaval High Street in the vicinity of the Council Offices. A number of elderly/infirm residents had requested such seating to act as a resting place during shopping trips.

RESOLVED TO: fund the purchase and installation of a Public Seating Bench at a cost of circa. £800 to be located on Astley Road in the vicinity of the Council's offices.

CO038/17 21. Budgetary Control Update

In presenting his report the Clerk said that the line by line analysis shown at Appendix 17A presented a similar position to that shown in previous reports. A number of issues were highlighted in his report, but all had been raised in previous budgetary control updates.

Updated income and expenditure projections suggest that the Council's budget is likely to be underspent by circa. £28,000 at the end of the financial with a significant proportion of the underspend relating to less demand than expected on both the Council's Community Fund and Bus Shelter Maintenance budgets.

RESOLVED: to note the budgetary control position presented in the Clerks' report.

CO039/17 22. Dates of Future Meetings

In noting the dates of future meetings Council agreed to move the Planning Committee meeting scheduled to take place on Thursday 6 April to Wednesday 5 April 2017

2017	Committee/Council	Time	Venue
Wednesday 5 April	Planning	6 pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday 26 April	Full Council	7 pm	St Mary's Church, Holywell
Thursday 11 May	Planning	6 pm	CANCELLED
Wednesday 17 May	Annual Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting	6.30 pm	New Hartley Memorial Hall
Thursday 8 June	Planning	6 pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices

The meeting closed at 8.45 p.m.

Signed by the Chair:

Dated: