
Date/TimeTuesday 14th April 2020

13:00 – 17:35

Venue:

By Video/Teleconference Link

In attendance:

Richard Wearmouth

Jeff Reid

Malcolm Robinson

Christine Dunbar

John Woodman

Chris Sayers

Martin Knowles

Ian Swlthenbank

Advance Northumberland Chair

Present:

Ken Dunbar

Robin Earl

Colin Dickson

Pat Walker

Juliemma McLoughlin

Kim Grant (Minutes)

Advance Northumberland Managing Director

Advance Northumberland Chief Operating
OfficerAdvance Northumberland Chief Finance
OfficerAdvance Northumberland Governance &
Performance ManagerNCC Executive Director of Regeneration,
Commercial & Economy

Advance Northumberland Personal Assistant

Part:

Michael Black

Duncan Bowman

Paul Littlefair

Richard Schofield

Alan Smith

Advance Northumberland Director of
Economic Growth & InvestmentsAdvance Northumberland Development
DirectorAdvance Northumberland Project Director,
Commercial & InfrastructureAdvance Northumberland Head of Project
ManagementAdvance Northumberland Senior Project
Manager**Apologies:**

Peter Jackson

Leader NCC

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed the attendees and declared the meeting quorate.

2.0 Apologies for Absence

2.1 The Chair reported that there had been apologies for absence from Peter Jackson.

2.2 The Chair informed Board of the resignation from the Board of Christine Dunbar. The Chair confirmed that he was in contact with NCC to identify an alternative member.

3.0 Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4.0 Minutes of Previous Meetings

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 27th March 2020 were **REVIEWED** and **AGREED**.

4.2 Actions from the 27th March 2020 Board Meeting

4.2.1 Bedlington Planning application by Aldi - The Director of Economic Growth & Investments had discussed this with R Murfin of NCC. Aldi reserved matters completed subject to Planning. The Chair stated that the Planning Committee may be up and running in the near future as NCC were exploring virtual meetings following Government advice.

4.2.2 The detail of the Recovery Plan was currently being worked through and this would be made available as soon as possible.

4.2.3 Interest in Ascent developments had picked up and viewings were being held virtually. However, given the current situation, this was not being transferred into sales.

4.2.4 Travel & Subsistence Policy – the European flag logo had been removed and the query regarding disciplinary action would be looked at to ensure it was detailed within the Disciplinary Policy in due course.

4.2.5 More detail was still to be worked through around the costs for the Commissioners Quay project approval. This will be brought to a future Board meeting.

- 4.2.6 Following Board approval arrears were now written off. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 4.2.7 Persimmon letter and Advance Northumberland response to be circulated to Board.
- 4.2.8 Minutes taken by the Chair and the Company Secretary of the Special Board meeting held on the 3rd April 2020 to be circulated in a redacted format for all Board meeting attendees and unredacted to Directors only.
- 5.0 Matters Arising**
- 5.1 There were no further matters arising.
- 6.0 14th April Audit Meeting**
- 6.1 The Chair of the Audit Committee, J Woodman, gave Board an overview of the Audit Committee meeting that had been held prior to today's Board meeting. It was noted that the Finance audit had received a limited assurance report. Internal Audit acknowledged that a lot of work had been undertaken towards issues raised and improvements had been made however the audit remained as limited assurance. The actions taken as a result of the audit would be reviewed by Internal Audit at a later date.
- 6.2 A query was raised regarding why the audit remained as limited assurance. The Board was informed that the principle issues centred around the purchase order system and the fact that the Advance Northumberland system was not fit for purpose. It was noted that Advance Northumberland had put additional systems into place and would be completing a review going forward.
- 6.3 A query was raised regarding the number of limited assurances received across the suite of audit reports. It was noted that internal audit were focusing on fundamental financial controls and other reports would be the subject of attention in the future.
- 6.4 A Board member asked for assurance that Internal Audit were granted unfettered access to all information required and it was confirmed that this was the case. It was also noted that pre meetings were usually held with the internal and external auditors prior to the Audit Meeting where issues such as this could be raised with Directors.
- 6.5 The Audit Committee recommended the appointment of Mazars as External Auditor, feeling that it was important from a risk management and efficiency point of view that Advance Northumberland had the same External Auditor as NCC. The appointment confirmation appeared to be sitting with NCC Procurement. The NCC Executive Director of Regeneration, Commercial & Economy confirmed that the matter had been passed back to Mazars.

- 6.6 The Chair of the Audit Committee informed Board that the presentation from the Advance Northumberland Developments team had been very comprehensive and a useful insight into the types of risk factors they come across and how they mitigate them.

The Board:

- 6.7
 - **APPROVED** the appointment of Mazars as statutory external auditor.

7.0 Ratification of Board Decisions Made Electronically

- 7.1 There were no electronic Board decisions since the previous Board meeting to be ratified.

8.0 Performance Updates

8.1 HR Report Including Staff Survey

- 8.1.1 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the report and informed Board that it was based on data relating to the period ending February 2020 and the report was moving towards a more tabular format using graphs and charts to convey the information.

- 8.1.2 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the current headcount within Advance Northumberland at 29.02.2020 was 128 with 4 live vacancies. The following posts had been appointed:

- Head of Investments - subject to pre-employment checks
- Project Co-ordinator – subject to pre-employment checks

- 8.1.3 The Chief Operating Officer stated that labour turnover for the period 2019 /20 was 11.1% (15 voluntary leavers – annualised data). This was a 3.68% reduction compared to the same period last year. The UK average labour turnover rate was currently 15%, although this was subject to industry variations, construction has a generally high level of turnover.

- 8.1.4 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the sickness absence rates for the 11 months ending 29th February 2020 were:

Short term – 400 days
Long term – 1014 days

This equated to an average of 5.08% of working time.

- 8.1.5 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that in addition to receiving the Better Health at Work certificate and plaque for the Continuing Excellence Award, [REDACTED] HR Assistant, won the award for Health Advocate of the Year for Northumberland.

- 8.1.6 The Chief Operating Officer informed Board that there had been 1 failed drug test in February resulting in the staff member being suspended pending investigation. However, when virtual working made an investigation impossible, the suspension was lifted and the staff member furloughed. The investigation will be reinstated as soon as possible.
- 8.1.7 The Chief Operating Officer went on to confirm that an employee had been dismissed for gross misconduct, namely being under the influence of alcohol at work. The decision was upheld at appeal and there were no further stages. The case is now closed.
- 8.1.8 The Chief Operating Officer stated that 41 posts had been identified as requiring retrospective DBS checks. Checks had also been processed for 4 new appointments. Satisfactory clearance had been received for 37 of those posts and the remainder were progressing through the DBS system. No results had been received that would cause a concern.
- 8.1.9 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that, following a recommendation from the Remuneration and Nominations committee to reduce the mileage rates paid on company business, this had been implemented for all staff recruited from the 1st February 2020. A 45 day statutory consultation would be programmed in with existing staff to progress this matter.
- 8.1.10 The Chief Operating Officer stated that the NCC portal was live with mandatory training only. These were – fire safety, GDPR, Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Stress Awareness, Manual Handling. Completion rates were being monitored and as of the 29th February were 89.4%.
- 8.1.11 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the customer care training was progressing through the research stage. Six sessions were arranged for managers / leaders (29 attendees) and 12 sessions arranged for the remaining staff. These were due to be completed by the 10th June.
- Thirty two people had attended lone worker training through the Suzy Lamplough Trust.
- Ninety people had attended refresher Dignity at Work training delivered by the HR Team.
- 8.1.12 The Chief Operating Officer stated that 13 people were currently undertaking career pathways, with one successfully completed in February and the individual progressing to Senior Project Manager.
- There were currently 4 apprentices within the group studying AAT, Team Leading, IT Practitioner and Maintenance. Plus vacancies for two Apprentice Joiners.

- 8.1.13 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the employee forum was due to meet on the 11th March 2020. Included on the agenda would be:
- Our approach to Coronavirus
 - Advance Northumberland Values
 - Review of Reward and Recognition Scheme
- 8.1.14 The Chief Operating Officer informed Board that Advance Northumberland were currently researching the best process for the introduction of a more formalised salary grades / bands / review process. This was a key strategic piece of work to ensure Advance Northumberland was (and can be seen to be) a fair, non-discriminatory employer and able to attract, develop and retain the talent they need.
- 8.1.15 The Chief Operating Officer informed Board that the Investors in People accreditation was something that Advance Northumberland wanted to look to get recognition for and were asking the Board for their support to enable Advance Northumberland to take part in the scheme. The IIP standard was a nationally recognised accreditation that seeks to support organisations who want to drive performance and embed excellence through its people and processes. It was anticipated that the initial programme towards accreditation would take between 12 and 15 months.
- 8.1.16 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the results of the Advance Northumberland Staff Survey reminding Board that the survey was issued across the business in February 2020. The survey was managed by the Picker Institute for the third year. Out of the 105 people who could respond, 85 did, which was a return of 80%. There was no extension given to the initial timeframe for completion. This compared to a return of 81.4% for the 2019 survey. The Chief Operating officer asked Board to note that, due to COVID-19, we were unable to go to construction sites or to visit other teams who do not routinely have IT access. This accounted for the lower number of potential participants. The 2020 survey replicated the questions in the 2019 and 2018 surveys.
- 8.1.17 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that, overall, the responses are improving year on year. There were some areas that required further investigation, these included:
- Access to learning and development
 - Communications
 - Employee recognition
 - Reward and Recognition
 - Work related stress
 - Customer Care / Experience
 - Time management / conflicting demands
 - Job satisfaction
 - Employee Engagement

8.1.18

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that some of the areas highlighted were currently under review:

- Communications – Google site now live as main portal for all comms. More work to do.
- Employee recognition – under review through employee forum, due to relaunch Summer 2020
- Employee Engagement – relaunch of employee forum, focus on the Big Issues
- Reward and Recognition – we have scoped the work required and are speaking to people who can provide independent support to this activity.
- Work related stress – our health advocates and line managers will be challenged to support this.
- Customer Care / Experience – training that had been scheduled to commence in April, would be rescheduled for September start
- IIP – subject to board approval - IIP will focus on all of the above areas and support the development of an action plan through the SLT.
- Conflicting demands / working additional hours – the introduction of flexitime will have led to the reduction in unpaid additional hours, however more work to be done.

8.1.19

The Board were very encouraged by the results however it was noted that focus was needed on work/life balance issues.

8.1.20

DBS Policy

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Policy explaining that this was a new policy to cover DBS searches on staff. The Board had asked the Company to undertake DBS checks on staff where they were in contact with potentially vulnerable groups. The policy had been developed in close consultation with NCC, who we are using as the route to obtain the required checks.

8.1.21

The Chief Operating Officer stated that the aim of the policy was to ensure that there was a consistent and coherent framework for Managers to follow when recruiting to posts where a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) disclosure was required and for the recruitment of ex-offenders. The policy aimed to make Managers and individuals aware of their responsibilities in relation to this.

8.1.22

Leave of Absence Policy

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Policy explaining that the original policy had been updated to reflect and improve on statutory requirements to grant paid leave following the death of a child up to the age of 18. Advance Northumberland were seeking approval to extend the cover to be available to all parents regardless of the age of the child.

The Board:

- 8.1.23
- **NOTED** the contents of the report.
 - **APPROVED** the proposals for IIP accreditation
 - **APPROVED** a new DBS Policy
 - **APPROVED** the amended Leave of Absence policy subject to a discussion with NCC to ensure no conflict in terms of this approach.
- 8.2 **Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests and Data Protection (DP) Issues**
- 8.2.1 The Governance & Performance Manager introduced the report the purpose of which was to inform Board of FOI requests, data breaches and near misses dealt with by Advance Northumberland over the preceding month.
- 8.2.2 The Governance & Performance Manager confirmed that during March, Advance Northumberland had received 2 requests under the FOI Act;
1. The first request was received from a company in Denmark who wanted information around which companies had unsuccessfully bid on a tender. The data was withheld under a Section 43 (2) exemption. The response was completed within the required timescales.
 2. The second requested information around costs for flood prevention on the Morpeth Leisure Centre site. NCC were the client with regards to this site and the request was forwarded accordingly. NCC responded informing us that they had already dealt with this request. The requester was informed and the case closed.
- 8.2.3 The Governance & Performance Manager confirmed that Advance Northumberland had received no Subject Access Requests (SAR's) during January or February 2020.
- 8.2.4 The Governance & Performance Manager informed Board that, since January 2020, Advance Northumberland had 6 data breaches of which;
- 2 near misses both of which had previously been reported to Board.
 - 4 had been reportable, 1 of which had already been reported to Board.
- The breaches not yet reported to Board included:
1. A rent statement was sent in error to the wrong commercial tenant which detailed arrears owed. The Breach was reported to the ICO. Immediately following the breach, a number of actions were taken internally:
 - A staff awareness raising programme was developed and was intended to roll out across the Company. Due to the current situation this was not done, however a session was held with the Commercial staff.
 - An investigation was carried out and the findings were reported to SLT.

- Discussions were held with the relevant members of staff.
- An email was sent to all staff emphasising how important GDPR was and how to refer to the relevant members of staff.
- The data subject was visited, compensation agreed and the matter closed.

The response was received from the ICO.

2. A letter was received from [REDACTED] regarding a complaint regarding Advance Tenants and lack of action to address anti-social behaviour. The letter was shared with [REDACTED] who were not acting on behalf of [REDACTED] and were not acting on behalf of Advance Northumberland regarding this issue. We are awaiting a legal response to the letter which will be shared with the Board. This breach was not reportable given the information was limited in its nature and there was no risk to the data subject.
3. A member of staff within the Commercial Team shared a google database with [REDACTED] an external body. The database contained confidential information about the rent paid and the issues they were facing as a result of the crisis. The database was open to the third party for approximately 17 hours. The database was shared from around 16.03pm on the 23.03.2020, the staff member was asked to remove the ability for [REDACTED] to share at 17.27pm on the 23.03.2020. The share was closed the following morning, the majority of the time the database was shared was out of office hours and overnight. [REDACTED] works closely with Advance Northumberland [REDACTED] and it was unlikely that they would share or use the data they had access to.

A self-assessment was carried out using the tool on the ICO website which concluded that we should keep an internal record of the breach, the effects of the breach and remedial actions taken. There was no requirement to notify the ICO.

- 8.2.5 Board commented that they felt that staff should be informed about the background to any data breaches to ensure that lessons were learnt.

The Board:

- 8.2.6
- **NOTED** the contents of the report.

8.3 **Performance Report – Key Projects Update**

- 8.3.1 The Managing Director introduced the report giving Board a list of the current Advance Northumberland Projects updated as at 28th February 2020 for Board information and consideration and stated that a number of Directors would be joining the meeting to discuss some of the projects in more detail.

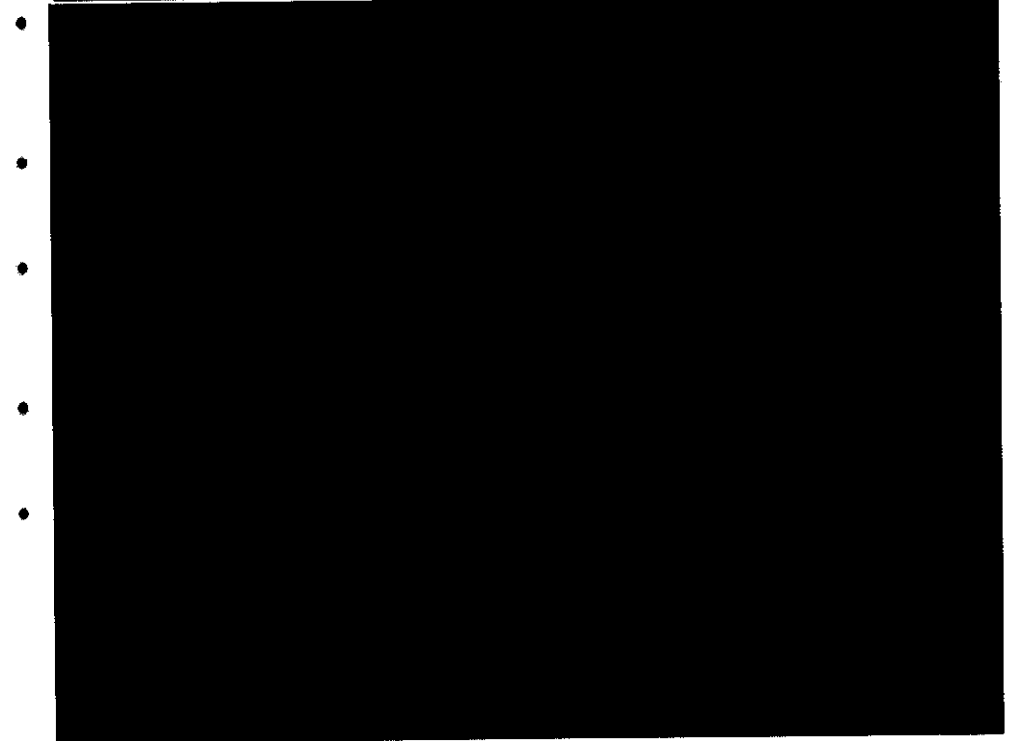
- 8.3.2 The Managing Director confirmed that the Advance Northumberland Projects document was currently in the process of being updated to the end

of March 2020 and this document would be made available to the Board at the earliest opportunity.

8.3.3

The Director of Economic Growth & Investments gave a brief overview of the following development projects;

- Amble - Anchor store secured, work ongoing to secure supporting retailers.



- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

8.3.4

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
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The Board:

8.3.5

- **NOTED** the report.

9.0

Other Approvals

9.1

9.1.1

[Redacted]

9.1.2

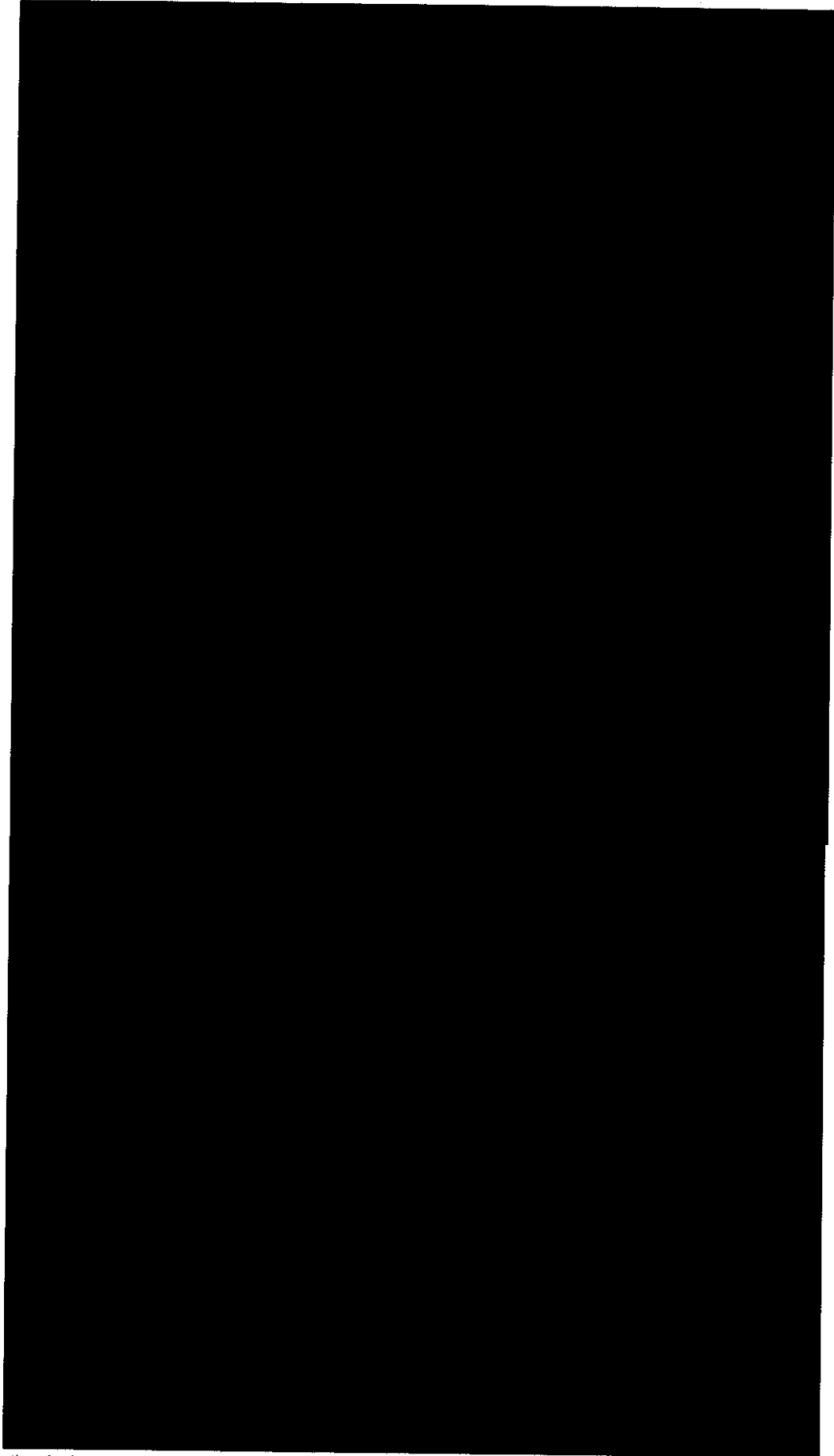
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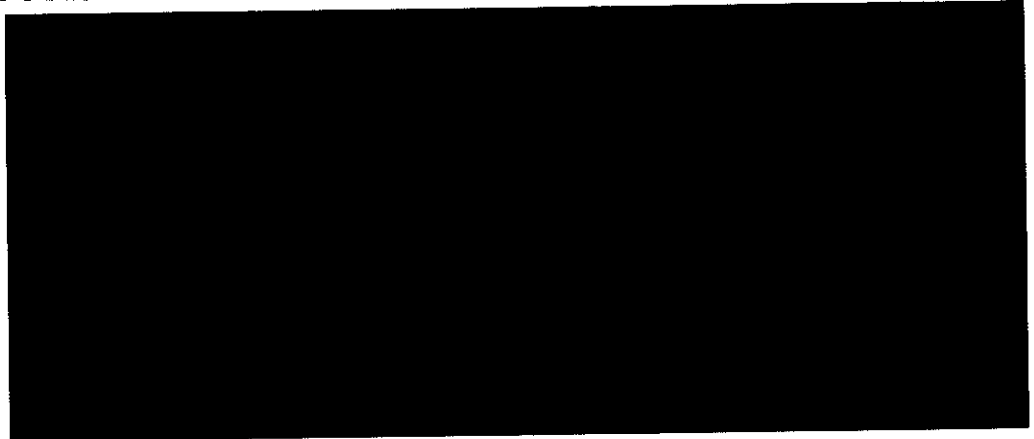
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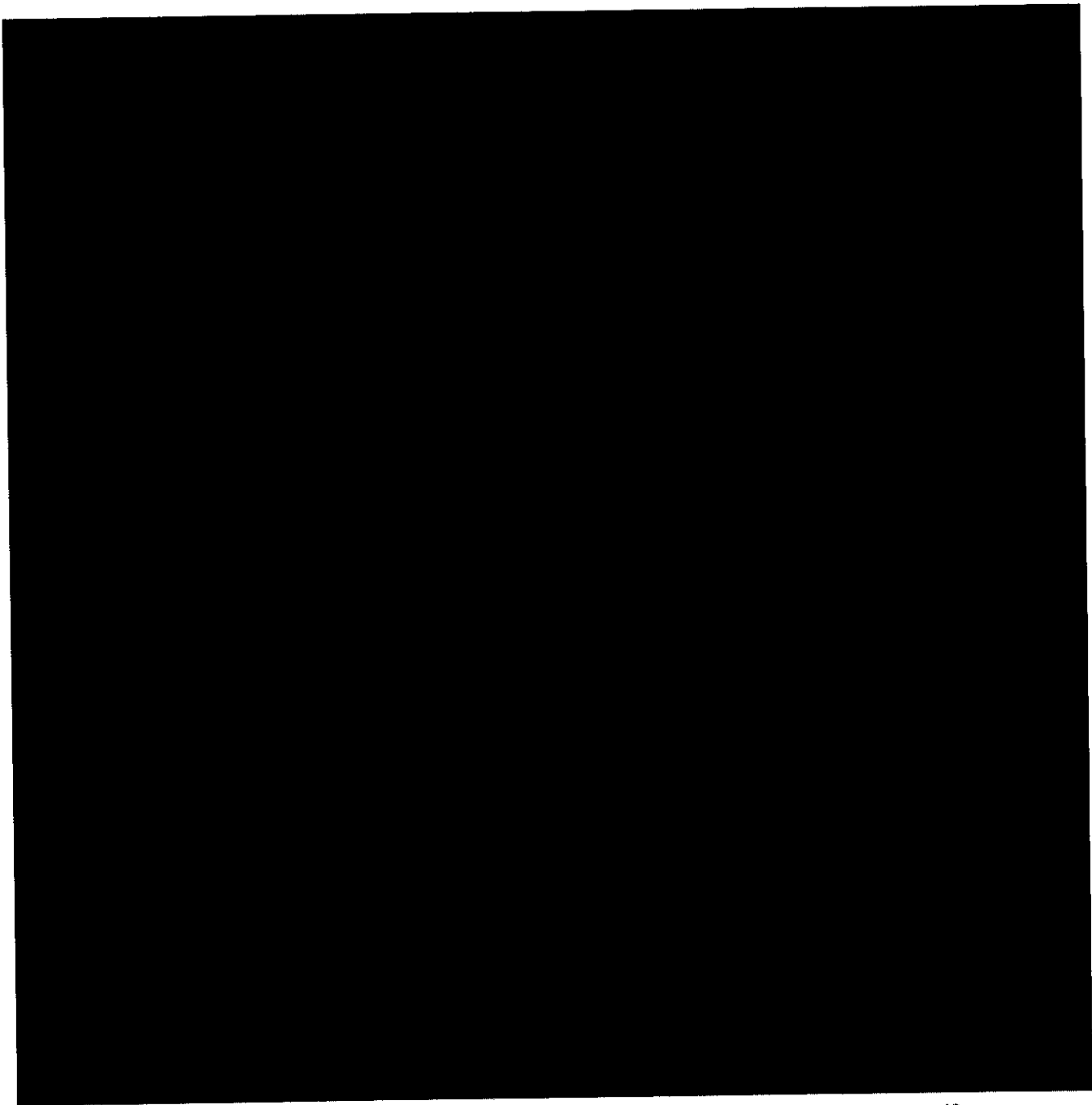
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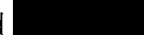


Part 2 - Confidential



[Handwritten Signature] CHAIRMAN

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS	
Minutes of Previous Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Redacted]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery plan detail to be made available to Board when complete.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CQ Project Approval to come to a future Board.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Redacted]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Redacted] Advance Northumberland response to be circulated to Board.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes taken by the Chair and the Company Secretary of the Special Board meeting held on the 3rd April 2020 to be circulated in a redacted format for all Board meeting attendees and unredacted to Directors only.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Committee Development Team presentation to be circulated to Board.
HR	[Redacted] y
Performance Updates – Key Projects	[Redacted]

	
Closure of Construction Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KD to reach out to those developers to explore how they are remaining open. • Board asked  could employ local labour to accelerate the site re-opening. • Board requested a report focusing on how the development can be brought back on site. • Amend the recommendation to add the approach to central government.
COVID 19 Finance Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cashflow report to be presented at every Board meeting.

