

Daniel M Turner, Journal extract, in relation to *NEBBS Plastic Warriors III* event

Photographs by Cain Scrimgeour (*Wild Intrigue CIC*)

Sunday, 19 April 2026

I got up from bed at half past eight, breakfasted and moved my usual paperwork around my flat to ease the congestion. Wrote on my brightly coloured card for our event time-keeper to flash for the speakers ... '3 Minutes Left' ... '1 Minute Left' ... 'Please Close Now'. I was restricting each speaker to an eight minute slot, as best as was possible. Speaker Ellie had sent her presentation slides yesterday afternoon following her holiday to Scotland where she experienced poor internet connectivity with her laptop and consequently found it difficult to send them. This morning the Tyneside Cinema projectionist (Adam) was making final adjustments to our slides, knitting them all into one file so they would flow nicely. I needed to wash my hair and write on envelopes for each of the event speakers and helpers – containing a small gift voucher for each. I checked the operation of the stopwatch kindly purchased by Linda on her Newcastle trip yesterday and rehearsed my own presentation. There was no time to replicate the seating plan, currently designed and written in pencil on the back of a used white A4 envelope. So I just tidied it a little. I packed things together and made a flask of coffee to take with me. I had contacted four of the MBA (Marine Biological Association) Conference organisers to offer a vacant seat, but they were either unavailable or did not respond – so I sold it to a latecomer who had been communicating by email. I had attended the MBA postgraduate Conference last week over three days. Linda was due to arrive on foot at 12:20 p.m. which she did and pressed my door buzzer. I was with her shortly afterwards and we set off for North Shields Metro Station, again on foot. At the rail station there were a few minutes to wait and I showed my best friend various things from my new backpack, which had been a Christmas gift. I produced the different information sheets to place at our venue for people to pick up and she was impressed with my colour-coded speaker warning cards. Things seemed to be in hand. I felt somewhat agitated as a lot of it fell onto my shoulders to organise, but the event was now upon us. Our rail journey passed nicely and from Monument station we walked together to the cinema and made our way up to the third floor to settle at the entrance to the Gallery Screen. Here I sought assistance from the staff to bring three tables to hold Stephen's art and my information sheets.

Stephen arrived and was soon setting out some of his *Seabird Necropsy* paintings before Heather and Cain appeared and began their activities. Our guests were starting to arrive and we talked together and guided people inside the cinema. I needed to spend a while with the projectionist as he brought the lectern and its light and readied the laptop with our presentations, etc. There was a little issue with two of the presentations, but these were soon ironed out when their speakers took a look. Linda settled to talk with friends in the back row before later sitting with me at the front. It was good to see the arrivals and meet everyone. Some went immediately to their seats, others talked at the screen foyer. Time came and we were ready to begin. I gave a thirty second warning to be relayed to the projectionist by radio from one of the staff and briefly said a few rushed words to the audience before the film began. The sound was a little loud, but just left to play until I mentioned this to one of the staff a while later. For the third time now I was able to view the documentary film on a cinema screen and allow it to soak into my psyche. Each time, I did not fail to be impressed and just loved the drone footage at Cullercoats Bay including the Dove Marine Laboratory where we had carried out much seabird analysis over many years. The film progressed and I began to make a few notes in the subdued ambient light. Linda sat quietly beside me.

As the film closed, we watched the credits roll and the film end. Then I rose to say a few words of greeting and introduction to the seated audience, feeling a little more relaxed at this point after the event had successfully got underway – nicely, so far. It was about 3:45 p.m. and I asked the speakers and helpers to gather at the screen entrance in a few minutes time for a group photograph. Quite soon, Heather told me that our guest speaker had arrived. She appeared and I welcomed her and we shook hands gently. This was Dame Chi Onwurah MP. We spoke briefly and

I got her some water before it was time for our group photograph. Photographer Cain guided our group to a nicely lit area where we could form an arc together, close enough to fit into the frame. Cain's presence settled me. I was sure he would have a great image for us. He captured a few frames and we talked together again with Chi for a minute or two before Heather and I guided everyone back into the cinema to take their seats. I said a few brief words before introducing Chi and quickly handed over to her at the same time handing the role of speaker introductions to Heather. I initiated a round of applause for our special guest and she stepped forward. She was tall and kind and spoke well.



The film begins



Our group of speakers, artist, time-keeper, facilitator and organiser.

Chi told us she was from Newcastle and had also spent time living and working abroad. But she loved the Northeast of England with its pristine beaches where she could enjoy wild-water swimming. Yesterday, Chi told us, she had been along the Northumberland coast, near Amble. She said she wanted to pay tribute to our Northeast England Beached Bird Surveys group for the work we did. “When visiting primary schools, the number one topic from the children is plastics”, she said, “and how the children see the environment.” Chi had worked as an engineer for twenty years and now in her current role as an MP and Chair of the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee. She was first elected as an MP in 2010 to represent Newcastle Central and now represented Newcastle Central and West. “Plastic is a great invention, but its long-term negative impacts are far-reaching”, she continued. “Once they have broken down into micro-plastics and they are here – they are part of our North East problem. Their impact is destabilising, for example in fishing and industry. What we do in this matter is important. Well, there is a lot of voluntary work ... for example the Great British Beach Clean (organised by the MCS) which not only serves to collect litter, but also data. The government can help. A plastic bag charge came into effect in 2015 and was updated in 2021 and according to Marine Conservation Society (MCS) statistics the use of plastic bags has fallen since this initiative by around 80%. Microbeads have been banned and new initiatives on wet-wipes are being introduced. A deposit-return scheme has been more difficult to implement. The principle that ‘the polluter pays’ is important and we have ‘extended producer responsibility’ being introduced too. Improving the environment, reducing use of cotton buds and reducing marine litter in general is to be introduced in 2027. We are stewards of the environment and need to help our seabirds and waterways. Monitoring and research are needed. Plastic does not respect borders. International working is required. Change starts with people who care, with evidence turned into action. We must cut down on single-use plastic where we can and dispose of waste properly. It requires global equity.” She talked of the power of local effort and entreated her constituents to get in touch with her on these matters. Chi told the audience that plastic issues were a concern she personally shared and re-iterated that “the number one issue when talking on the doorstep around my constituency is litter and waste!” She used a hand-held electronic device with a screen to help deliver her speech and for reference as she talked, faltering ever so slightly at times as she checked her wording and facts. It had been carefully prepared. We were privileged.

As Chi finished her talk we applauded appreciatively. I had found it inspiring and hopeful and was delivered sincerely. She made for the door and I went out with her for a brief chat before she needed to leave for doorstep knocking at Lemington, a little way along the Tyne valley towards Newburn. I had previously sent her detail about the content of *Plastic Warriors* and she had made reference to this in her speech apologising that she had not seen the film and could not stay longer today. She did not wish us to think badly of her for dipping in and out of the event over a thirty to forty minute period. I did not feel that way, and was most grateful for her time, presence and careful words.

Anneliese Allen-Norris followed and talked about home improvements and differences in plastic and natural materials used within such work. One of the statistics she mentioned was that natural materials used in insulation had a one hundred times lower carbon dioxide signature than the alternative of synthetic material. She told us to also consider different plaster and paints (natural lime and clay versus plastic in the form of emulsion) and cutting out uPVC (for such things as doors and window frames) which was used in 70% of UK homes but which had only half the lifespan of natural material. Anneliese also informed how plastics wear, degrade and break into microplastic pieces which become airborne and affect waterways and cause health issues from toxins released and which can accumulate in the home. She was clever to incorporate all these considerations when renovating her own home.



Dame Chi Onwurah MP, special guest speaker



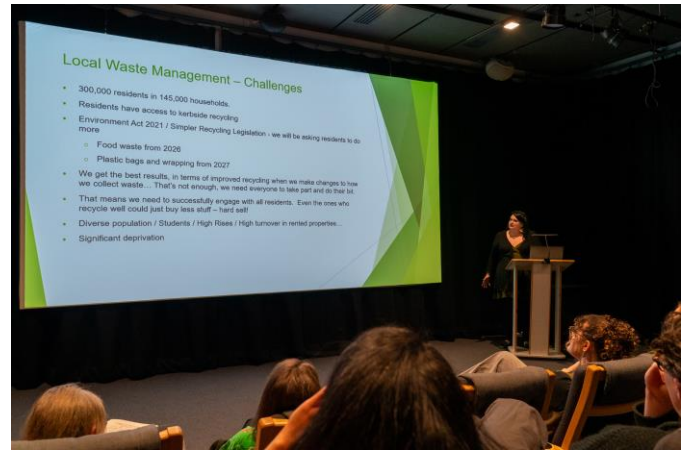
Anneliese Allen-Norris, Urban Foresight

Lutz Lemmer came next and informed that 56 companies were responsible for the bulk of the plastic problem. He noted how there were moves for a Global Plastic Treaty particularly on account of projected health problems and to reduce plastic production was key. He mentioned a new documentary (available on YouTube) which focused on the life (biofilm) living on the surface of plastics and which can lead to the creation of pathogens. “We have forgotten how to share and work together,” he said and told how local efforts could build tangible results that could be seen. He wished for town centre water dispensers to become the norm and for government and local councils to show what was possible and to regulate.

Next up was Rebecca Wilson who told us of actions by Newcastle City Council, but also the need for residents to participate in such matters as food and kerbside recycling. She said there was a lot of apathy in the resident population in respect to recycling and there were drives for more reduction and reuse of plastic within the council itself. Flexible plastics were also being collected by the council and thousands of households were able to participate. Such plastic can be recycled into flexible and rigid products such as garden furniture, buckets, sacks and stretch and shrink film. Pop-up recycling centres were also a feature collecting such items as wood, soft furnishings, hard plastics and electrical goods. Rebecca hoped for new developments to help in the sorting of waste materials and praised the many volunteer litter-pickers throughout Newcastle. ‘Reduce, reuse and recycle needs to become part of our cultural DNA!’



Lutz Lemmer, regional Greenpeace campaigner



Rebecca Wilson, Newcastle City Council

Ellie Davison followed, informing about the history of the NHSN (Natural History Society of Northumbria) which would celebrate its 200th birthday in 2029. Amazingly bitterns were now present and booming at their Gosforth Nature Reserve while the recently instigated Ouse Burn Way project would tackle habitat neglect and water quality issues with regular volunteer litter pickers already in action and biological recording underway. At roadsides the litter problem was constant, with food and drinks containers, polystyrene, car parts, agricultural items, plastic bags, cigarette butts and all sorts collected and some of which had been present in the hedgerows for decades. She wished to emphasise a natural angle during litter picks as well as the sociable side while their volunteers included a lichenologist, botanists and birders. Bones had been a regular find, including that of the skull of a fox.

Dr Hannah Lloyd-Hartley came next and educated us about plankton and its different forms, creating the base of the marine food web. Plankton absorbs much carbon dioxide, sequesters carbon and forms the basis of fossil fuels. Its blooms can be visible from space and can produce biotoxins which accumulate in shellfish. Phytoplankton produces 50% of the air we breathe. Hannah told how plankton can, when they reproduce, engulf microplastic pieces. Ingestion can lead to physical damage of the organism, reduced feeding efficiency, and altered behaviour. Fish larvae were found to have a higher uptake of microplastic than true crabs. “Plastics just get smaller, they don’t disappear,” Hannah emphasised. Some of the photographs she showed indicated how plankton held plastic particles within. Zooplankton is eaten by many marine organisms and is part of the reason for transference of microscopic plastics within the food chain and ultimately affecting humans.



Ellie Davison, Nat. Hist. Soc. of Northumbria



Dr Hannah Lloyd-Hartley, Cefas

Then it was my own turn to speak and I talked about our Northeast England Beached Bird Surveys group and the fulmar project with its international and regional implications, and I mentioned a few findings. I showed how we found many species washed up on our beaches apart

from fulmars and not just seabirds, too. The northern fulmar project was used to monitor the health of the North Sea and aiming for a reduction in the level of plastics within the fulmar to mirror that found in the arctic. Since instigation of the project in 2002 a reduction in fulmar ingested plastics was becoming evident. In a similar way we have been investigating other Northeast England seabirds such as guillemot, razorbill and little auk. My slides included several members from our regional group working with me at the Dove Marine Laboratory as we processed and investigated seabirds, collecting and storing tissues and information. Our four main university students since 2018 were shown and with whom I had worked and supported on their academic projects.

Our final speaker was twenty-year-old environmental science student Matthew Harrison with whom I had worked in the laboratory at Cullercoats (Newcastle University) and Northumbria University on black-legged kittiwakes since last autumn. He told us about his third-year dissertation project and how the UK kittiwake population had decreased by more than 70% in the past forty years or so, with pollution as one of the contributory factors. He showed his map of other kittiwake studies in the northern hemisphere and homed into our own such study which included the past winter's laboratory work. Our results had shown how poorer muscle condition related to increased plastic load and that we had recorded a higher plastic load in first-year birds compared to older kittiwakes in Northeast England during 2010 to 2021. From twenty Northeast England kittiwakes whose stomachs I had rinsed we had found a plastic frequency of occurrence of 35%.



Daniel Turner, event organiser and speaker



Matthew Harrison, Environmental Science student

Our facilitator, Heather, wound up the speaker section and we broke for ten minutes, coming back together at 5:35 p.m. for a final period of discussion with questions from the audience. One question concerned seabird age in relation to their plastic load while another was worded thus... "Which body of people or which organisations can help implement the ideas of not using or regulating microplastics in the world today? Who would finance the research, etc." Matthew and I tackled the former question about plastic load in seabirds while the other speakers chipped in over the following ones. I needed to find the projectionist to ask him to stop the final slide from playing, so missed part of the question period. Heather tempted questions from the audience and concluded the session, while I finished with a few words of thanks to everyone. I ended by saying that we could all play our part, but it was also the responsibility of business, industry and government to play their role in the tidying up of the major plastic issues we experience.

Thanks to Heather and Jake, the speaker section had run smoothly. One of our speakers was unable to attend so this released a little time pressure. Heather carefully introduced each speaker and Jake worked his magic to indicate how their time was diminishing as their eight minute allocations progressed. He indicated the time cards gently and without intimidation. After each speaker the audience gave a round of applause. Heather was able to offer pertinent words following each speaker before the next one began and she nicely led the question and discussion session,

fielding questions to our speakers who were lined together close beside the lectern. I was most pleased with the way the afternoon had progressed and how everyone had played their part. As the attendees filtered away, student Matthew returned to thank me for assisting him with his final-year study. That was nice. Stephen tidied away his paintings after his wife arrived to help. I had informed the audience that we would seek their feedback in one form or another over coming days. Linda and I made for the café to relax with a pot of tea after everyone had departed.



Part of Stephen's *Seabird Necropsy* exhibition



Artist Stephen Livingstone with Ellie Davison

Unfortunately I lacked time to view Stephen's *Seabird Necropsy* exhibition today or to speak in any detail with him. I had, of course, seen several of his super painting creations from this exhibition which numbered more than twenty items, on previous occasions. I wanted to see more! His offering today held two or three paintings that were new to me. Should anyone know of a suitable temporary location for his exhibition – please get in touch. The following web link talks of Stephen's work ...

Please follow this Web Link to a news item about our event on 'Cultured North East' website ...

<https://www.culturednortheast.co.uk/p/putting-plastic-pollution-in-the>



Event slide: Sponsors, supporters and helpers



Scene in film – NEBBS at work in Dove Marine Lab

Note. To find and download this document online, please follow this link to the '*Plastic Warriors III*' tab on the website of *White Wings Publishing*... and scroll a little way down the page:

<https://www.whitewingspublishing.co.uk/plastic-warriors-iii/>