

Minutes

Community Service Scrutiny Panel

3rd July, 2007

Present: Councillors Howarth (in the Chair) Crooks, Laverick, Lightley, Mavin, Norman, Robinson, D Smith, Taylor and Young

Also Present: Councillor Marsden,
Peter Lee – Street Scene Technical Officer,
Michael Hurlow – Heritage & Design Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Moderate and Walton

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2007 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Scrutiny of Graveyards

The Street Scene Technical Officer and Heritage & Design Manager were in attendance for discussions.

Members asked about biodiversity areas of graveyards and were concerned that this was properly communicated to the public rather than allowing the perception that the graveyards were being left untidy and overgrown.

However, the Street Scene Manager informed Members that consideration had to be given to health and safety issues, maintenance and appearance, and that biodiversity sites do not lend themselves to some situations.

Members asked if the Council liaised with the Parochial Church Councils about leaving graveyards as biodiversity sites. The Heritage and Design Manager advised the Panel that the Dioceses were happy with the state of the graveyards.

The Panel decided that it should be recommended in the report that the present maintenance procedures and communication links with PCCs be continued.

It was also agreed that a copy of the Scrutiny Report should be sent to each PCC for information.

The Heritage and Design Manager provided Members with a comprehensive and exclusive list of War Graves in closed cemeteries and confirmed that there are 182 registered war graves within the 23 closed burial grounds that the City of Durham had responsibility to maintain.

The Panel were advised that there were no new figures available for the numbers of headstones requiring repairs and maintenance as repair are continually being updated. However, the Heritage and Design Manager

informed Members that one full inspection had recently been completed of all closed graveyards that the City of Durham were responsible and that fewer numbers of reports were coming through and that there was enough in the estimated budget to carry out the repairs that were required. It was brought to Members attention that if costs increase then the numbers of repairs would need to reduce.

Members were informed that there had been problems with walls of cemeteries and that this was a common problem area. Notably, at Brandon there had been a problem with subsidence due to old mining works which had prohibited access. It is this type of repairs that could increase maintenance costs in the future rather than those to headstones.

The Chair asked if the Heritage and Design Manager could make contact with a member of the dioceses and invite them to the September Panel Meeting. This was agreed.

The Chair thanked the Heritage and Design Manager and the Street Scene Technical Officer for their attendance and their invaluable input to the discussions.

4. Council Garages – Chairman’s Update

The Chair informed Members that she had had a meeting with The Housing Manager and that the situation with the inspections of Council garages had improved slightly. (As Members will recall Cabinet through out the recommendation that the Garages be inspected twice per year as there were no resources to implement this.)

Some inspection of unusable damaged garages had been carried out with a view to repair and reletting.

The Housing Manager had asked the Chair to inform Members that it would be helpful if they could report any problems of misuse, anti social behaviour or indeed any other associated problems to the relevant Housing Officer and ask that the problems be presented at the zonal meetings. If need be the Tenancy Enforcement Officer could then be involved.

Councillor Taylor stated that he was disappointed that the biannual inspections could not take place but would work with Officers. He also asked if Members could be kept informed of zonal meetings and if they could receive relevant updates.

The Chairman proposed that a short statement should be prepared for Cabinet. This would include a recommendation of the above procedure for reporting unacceptable use of council garages and also members’ request for more feedback and input into zonal meetings.

5 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Members that a site inspection of the Playing Pitches would take place on Tuesday 24 July, 2007 and that the bus would pick up at 9.30 a.m. from Dragonville. An additional Panel meeting had been arranged for Tuesday 30 July, 2007 at Broomside Lane Communal Hall to discuss the site inspection and review the Playing Pitch Strategy Report of April 2006.

The Chair asked that a copy of that report be sent out to all present Panel Member to include a list of sites visited.

A list of the work programme up to March 2008 was distributed to Members for their information.

Councillor Robinson advised Members that the new application form for housing was 24 pages in length and people needed help to complete the form or they may be deterred from completing it.

The Meeting terminated at 6.30 p.m.

Minutes

Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 30th July, 2007 at 5.30 p.m.

Present: Councillors Howarth, Crooks, Lightley, Norman, Robinson, D Smith, Taylor and Young

Also Present: Councillor Lodge
Mr Andrew Jackson, Technical Support Manager
Mr Peter Lee, Street Scene Technical Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mavin, Moderate and Walton

2. Review of Playing Pitch Strategy

The Chair went through the original Playing Pitch Strategy Scrutiny Report and Members agreed that the first three recommendations from the original report should be incorporated into the review. The Technical Support Manager advised that Leisure Services were currently drafting a Marketing Strategy that covered indoor and outdoor activities, and there would be opportunities to promote outdoor pitches. The Technical Support Manager went on to inform the Panel that there were strong links with Durham Sport.

The Chair asked the Street Scene Manager what the procedure was regarding the next year's usage of playing surfaces. The Street Scene Technical Officer informed the Panel that toward the end of the Season sporting clubs are asked if they will be requiring use of the pitch for the following season. However, clubs rely on sponsorship and may not be placed to advise of their intentions.

Councillor Taylor advised the Panel about the situation at Brandon United, that they had no lease therefore were unable to obtain grants that in the past Brandon United has been criticised that they were not community based, however this had changed.

The Street Scene Technical Officer advised that the situation had been appeased but a long term plan was required. A number of pitches in the district are former colliery welfare ground, there are some that the Council does own but CISWO have covenants on them and there are stipulations of use in the deeds.

Councillor Taylor advised the panel that Brandon United were a victim of their own success.

The Technical Support Manager advised that the Legal section and the Club were to get together to see what can be done. Three months has been given to see what kind of lease is available.

The Chair asked about who is responsible for the upkeep of the changing facilities. Street Scene Manager advised that it was half the responsibility of the Council and half the responsibility of the hirer. Clubs who apply are advised that there are no attendants on site and that as hirers, they are responsible to keep the changing

rooms tidy and secured. Hirers are given a telephone number to ring to advise of any problems as they occur rather than waiting until the end of the hire period.

The Chair asked Members to compare the findings from last years' playing pitch site inspection with this year.

Bearpark had improved a great deal on the inspection in 2006.

Councillor Lodge advised that the City of Durham should promote the fact of their ownership of the grounds, and that no credit was given to the good work of grounds maintenance.

Panel Members also advised about problems with trespass especially with quad bikes. The Panel agreed that a recommendation should be incorporated into the review about signage. The panel asked the Technical Support Manager if the signage time frame could be brought forward to include recreation grounds. The Technical Manager advised that Pride of Durham funding had a budget of £40,000 Which had been divided into, £10, 000 set aside for bins; £10,000 set aside from seating; £10,000 set aside for bus shelters and £10, 000 set aside for painting of play equipment.

Members were concerned about problems with drainage, again the Technical Support Manager advised that there was a Capital fund of £15,000 available to investigate the problems with drainage and advised that it was important to carry out a survey before spending. Some of the £15,000 would be used for remedial work to relieve problems in the short and mid term. Officers would decide on the priority of work to each ground.

With reference to recommendation no. 23 of the original playing pitch scrutiny report, the chair advised that the Council will continue to support partnership working, working with communities to bring additional funding, e.g., Bowburn Park. Members suggested that partnerships with the County Council should explore of the suggestion of using school playing fields during the summer holidays.

Members also suggested with reference to recommendation no.23 that more use of Durham City News be made to highlight coaching events.

The Chair and Members warmly thanked Mr Jackson and Mr Lee for their attendance at this meeting and at the site inspection.

Note: 6.30p.m. Mr Jackson and Mr Lee Left the meeting

Any Other Business

The Chair advised Members that the Review of Scrutiny of Council Garages Recommendations and the Review of Scrutiny of Permanent Site Provision for Gypsy/Travellers – Recommendations had been agreed by Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 26th July, and would subsequently going to Cabinet on Wednesday, 5th September.

Meeting Terminated at 6.45 p.m.

**Community Services Scrutiny Panel
1st Draft Report for Discussion:**

Scrutiny of Closed Graveyards

1. Background

The Panel were tasked with scrutinising closed Graveyards within the District with the purpose of obtaining an overview of the Council's responsibilities for closed church/graveyards.

Panel Members discussed and agreed the scope of the scrutiny and a scrutiny planning sheet was produced. Members agreed that War Graves be included within the scrutiny.

The Panel meetings were attended by the Street Scene Technical Officer, the Environmental Services Manager and Heritage and Design Manager.

2. Aims and Objectives

To determine what is a closed graveyard; how does a graveyard become closed; how the Council became responsible for closed graveyards/cemeteries and whether adequate attention is given to maintenance and standards of repair.

To establish who owns closed church/graveyards within the District and which other organisations/ individuals may have responsibility for maintenance.

To ascertain how much money the City Council allocates for the management, maintenance and upkeep of closed graveyards in comparison to the actual amount of works needed.

3. Actions

Members agreed that Officers from Environment & Leisure and Heritage & Design should be invited to attend the panel meetings.

The Council's Procedure for Closed Churchyard Memorial Management was made available to Members for their information. This procedure was adopted by Cabinet at their meeting on 20th September, 2006. This report can be found in the Members' Room.

4. Outcomes

The term "closed graveyards" generally means that the graveyard has been closed for burials by an Order in Council under the Burial Act 1853. Also, a graveyard is closed when there is insufficient space to provide a new grave and continued use would be a risk to public health or stopping further burials would prevent nuisance. People who have bought a grave-space and the graveyard then becomes closed would still be able to be buried in that graveyard.

When an Order in Council is made, Parish and District Councils may object to the closure if they believe there is sufficient space for additional graves or if the closure is being applied to avoid the cost of repairing and maintaining the graveyard.

When an order has been granted maintenance responsibilities remain with the Parochial Church Council unless they serve written notice on the Parish Council to transfer responsibility on to them. The Parish Council could then in turn serve written notice on the district council. However the parochial church council must ensure prior to the takeover that all walls and fences were in good condition.

Maintenance responsibilities particularly include health and safety aspects but also include grass, shrubs and trees. Headstones are the responsibility of the family and heirs but the council has the power to prevent dangers to graveyard users.

City of Durham is responsible for the maintenance of a number of closed graveyards across the district however, in some cases the responsibility is shared with the parish council. General Maintenance included grass cutting and visits take place every 10-14 days throughout the summer. Headstones at most closed churchyards are treated with herbicides around the base to control growth.

Vandalism or damage is reported by maintenance personnel, litter collection does not regularly take place, but it is removed as it accumulated or interfered with maintenance.

Regular safety inspections are carried out by Heritage and Design together with the Council's Health and Safety Officer checking on headstones. Works identified as a result of the safety inspections are paid from capital works budget. Environmental Services hold budgets for grass cutting and some general maintenance.

It was suggested that some selective graveyards may become biodiversity sites. However, in most cases it would be inappropriate also communications with the Parochial Church Council would be required. The Diocese is reported to be happy with the levels of grounds maintenance currently carried out.

Officers explained that there is a budget of £25,000 set aside for repairs but if costs increase then the numbers of repairs being carried out will need to reduce. As the inspections of the graveyards have progressed there are fewer repairs needed. In some graveyards grounds maintenance and some minor works have been carried out by volunteers, for example dry stone walling at Quarrington Hill.

It was noted that closed graveyards are vulnerable to anti social behaviour and as a result Neighbourhood Wardens check on the graveyards.

War Graves

The majority of War Graves are marked by the Commonwealth War Grave Commission's (CWGC's) familiar standard war pattern headstone, however there are a significant number that are marked by private memorials in accordance with the wishes of relatives. Only the commission can verify whether memorials/headstones mark war graves or not.

All memorials failing the safety testing procedure, with inscriptions between 1914 and 1947, and requiring works to make them safe are checked against the register provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in order to verify from the CWGC's own definitive records as to whether or not the memorial constitutes as a war grave.

If a memorial is found to be included on the CWGC's register and is therefore a war grave then the City Council will not carry out any works to it. The memorial will be recorded, photographed, its location plotted on to an ordnance survey plan and its condition reported in writing to the CWGC.

Once confirmed the Commission will obtain permission from Team Rector to undertake repair works and the works will be scheduled next time the travelling war graves caretakers are in the vicinity.

Details of all of the registered war graves within the City of Durham district can be found within the register published from records by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The register contains a list of all of the churchyards/cemeteries within the City Council's district containing registered war graves and also other burials in the care of the war graves commissions.

There are problems with subsidence at Brandon Cemetery and grounds maintenance is unable to tend the war graves due to health and safety.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That City of Durham Council continue to work closely with Durham Diocese and that Heritage and Design department and The Council's Health and Safety Officer continue to inspect the graveyards.
- 5.2 That the good work of Environment Services, grounds maintenance team continue in closed graveyards.
- 5.3 That Neighbourhood Wardens continue to monitor graveyards and advise of any problems.
- 5.4 That Members be requested to check on the condition of any closed graveyard in their area and report litter problems to the Street Scene Officer and any evidence of anti-social behaviour to the Neighbourhood Wardens.

Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Review of Scrutiny of Playing Pitch Strategy (City of Durham Council's Recreation Grounds)

1. Background

The Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned in July, 2001 by City of Durham Council, Durham County Council and Sport England in order to assess the playing pitch requirements in the District both at that time and over the following five years.

Following a request by Cabinet in January 2005, the Playing Pitch Strategy had been referred to Scrutiny Committee prior to being adopted by Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee had subsequently referred the Strategy to the Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

The Community Services Scrutiny Panel initially scrutinised the Playing Pitch Strategy from October 2005 to April 2006. During the scrutiny the Panel asked for a site inspection of the Council's recreation grounds this took place March 2006.

In order to carry out this review the Panel arranged another set of site inspections of Council owned recreation grounds in July 2007.

2. Findings

The Panel visited several recreation grounds in March 2006 and further site inspections were carried out in July 2007.

The Panel found that the recommendations following the site inspections in March 2006 had been carried out. Window frames to the front of the sun lounge at Esh Winning recreation ground had been replaced. The changing rooms at Bearpark recreational ground had greatly improved.

Following the site inspections it was noted that the signage at some of the recreation grounds was either in need of updating or lacking.

Drainage was found to be a problem on some recreational grounds. The Technical Support Manager advised that a survey would need to be carried out to determine the current problems and how they can be remedied.

3. Recommendations

General

1. That the recommendations with regard to the promotion of each sport, as made in the City of Durham Playing Pitch Strategy and approved by Cabinet, should be actively pursued to further develop pitches and facilities for participants of both sexes, across the full age range.
2. That through City Council initiatives and communication with partners, encouragement should be given to incorporate playing pitches into cohesive community provision that reflects both local and District needs.

City Council Pitches

3. That all playing pitches in City of Durham ownership are retained for recreational use.
4. That in accordance with the conclusions in the Playing Pitch Strategy, the availability, condition and maintenance of all City of Durham pitches should continue to be monitored and reviewed.
5. That in accordance with current practice, where a pitch is under-used, reasons should be carefully analysed and measures to improve take-up considered, taking a flexible approach to supply and demand.

Changing Facilities

6. That particular attention is given to increasing availability and improving facilities for female players as and when the need arises.
7. That increased community engagement is pursued to extend the use and concept of ownership/ responsibility for premises.
8. That facilities be regularly inspected and appropriately maintained.
9. That notices be posted stating expectations of appropriate use.
10. That in accordance with present practice user clubs be asked to either remove all sports gear at the end of their season or arrange acceptable storage with the Council.

Maintenance and Drainage

11. That a survey be carried out to investigate problems with drainage and to carry out necessary works to alleviate the problems.

Playing Pitch Signage

12. That funds be allocated for playing pitch signs and changing room notices, separate from Pride in Durham initiative. It is important for members of the public to know that the recreation grounds are owned and maintained by the City of Durham.

Working with other Organisations

13. The Panel urges continued and supportive working with partners to fulfil and secure playing pitch needs throughout the District and to maximise participation in sports activities i.e. co-operation with organisations such as Sports Governing Bodies, Durham County Council/Schools, Durham University, and Private Clubs. To that end, the Panel makes the following recommendations:-

- a). Durham County Council/ Schools

14. That the City Council maintains close communication with County Council Officers, particularly the Schools Sports Partnership Manager, to explore ways of extending links, shared use and sports promotion.

15. That the Council seeks to further involve schools in the development of Community Hubs, either centred around existing Leisure Centres or schools in areas without such a Centre. The move to Extend School Day Timetables opens up opportunities for this and scope for partnership in provision of activities and tackling transport needs.

b). Durham University

16. That further research be made into recruitment and training of more sports coaches; this work to be across the City Council, County Council, School Sports Partnership and University. Joint funding bids could be considered.

17. That the Durham City News be used to recruit more potential sports coaches and attract suitably qualified coaches, who may not currently be actively involved, back into coaching.

c). Private Clubs

18. That encouragement be given to clubs that currently use City Council pitches and facilities, and that where appropriate, new joint initiatives be considered.

Additional Recommendations

18. That the Community Services Scrutiny Panel reviews the Playing Pitch Strategy in July 2008