

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**18 April 2007
5.30 p.m.
Abbey Leisure Centre, Pity Me**

Present: Councillors Wolstenhome (in the Chair), Graham, Kinghorn, Leake, Marsden, Pitts and Turnbull

Also in Attendance: Councillor Hepplewhite

Apologies

There were apologies for absence received from Councillors Colledge, Simpson and Walton.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 March 2007

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record.

Draft Report – Riverbanks

Members considered the draft report and the following amendments were made.

- Under point 3.4.3, paragraph 2 the final sentence to now read:
“In reality this forms a much longer-term aspiration and would only be achievable through lengthy negotiations with landowners and the public.”
- That recommendation 1 be amended to:
“The Panel greatly welcomes the excellent progress being made by the Riverbanks Management Group and feels that it is essential that the City of Durham maintains strong representation on this group.”
- That an additional recommendation, 5, be added:
“That the City of Durham continues to consult with the relevant stakeholders and partners as regards works and activities on the riverbanks and works together with these groups to promote activities through the appropriate channels.”

Subject to the above amendments, the report was approved by the Panel and should be sent to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

Members noted that it may be advantageous for City of Durham staff that are actively patrolling and working on the riverbanks to be able to issue fixed penalty notices as a punishment and deterrent to those who litter.

Draft Report – Temporary Road Closures

Members considered the draft report and the report was approved by the Panel and should be sent to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

Note: *Councillors Graham and Kinghorn left the meeting at 6.10 p.m.*

Some Members noted that a difficulty that can be faced by events organiser can be finding suitable liability insurance, and Members wondered whether the Council could have a list of suitable Insurers which could be given to organisers.

Any Other Business

The Chairman extended his thanks to Members for their attendance at Panel meetings over the last year. Also those Councillors who were not standing at the upcoming elections were thanked for their contributions during their time with the City of Durham.

The Meeting terminated at 6.11 p.m.

**REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL –
Submitted to Cabinet 21/01/07**

REVIEW OF SCRUTINY TOPIC: BIODIVERSITY

The Panel was tasked with reviewing the Scrutiny Topic of Biodiversity.

1. BACKGROUND

The topic had originally been looked at last year, reported to Scrutiny Committee 05 September 2005. The report was subsequently submitted to Cabinet 24 October 2005 and approved.

2. AIMS

The purpose of this report is to bring Members up-to-speed as regards the progress made since the initial scrutiny of the topic.

3. ACTIONS

At the meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel, 19 September 2006, the Council's Sustainable Development Manager was in attendance and gave a run down of the work undertaken in the last year relating to Sustainable Development, of which Biodiversity issues are one strand.

4. OUTCOMES

The main points to note were:

- The Council had completed a "Parks Audit" based on Green Flag Criteria.
- The maintenance of "Biodiversity Areas" – now called Wildlife Meadows has been refined and improved e.g. contracts are in place with local farmers as regards annual "hay cropping".
- Some sites will have Yellow Rattle introduced as this species of plant can help to increase the biodiversity value of an area over time.
- Interpretation Panels for the Wildlife Meadows will be produced in consultation with local Residents.
- "Learning Lunches" have been held regarding the subject of the "Natural Environment and its association with Quality of Life". It was noted that these could be repeated if further interest was received.
- As part of the planning process, the Council's Sustainable Development Manager reviews applications as regards energy efficiency, transport impact etc.

- The Council has formed a “Green Space Steering Group” and has allocated a budget to this group. Tenders were invited to conduct an “Open Space Needs Assessment” and the North East Community Forest (NECF) was appointed. Consultation with user groups will take place, an audit of provision/quality/value, analysis of under or over provision and review of opportunities for providing new open spaces. Knowledge gained by NECF will be valuable in the future in helping when considering development opportunities as this Assessment will consider all open spaces, not just the sites previously labelled as “biodiversity” areas.
- The establishment of the “Friends of Witton Dene” as a pilot scheme has been well received. It is hoped that a site management plan can be drawn up for Witton Dene and that similar Friends Groups can be set up for other sites across the District.
- Amongst other awards, the City of Durham achieved a special award from Northumbria in Bloom for best biodiversity project. The Council’s large scale ambition and long term goals in this area were considered important factors in securing this award.
- Funding has been awarded from SITA for access improvements to Ponderosa, Holiday Park and Flass Vale.
- Heritage Lottery Fund bids have been applied for Wharton and Bowburn Parks
- Formation of a programme of Friends Groups Establishment – Management Plans – Costs, building up relationships and public confidence is felt to be essential in this regard. Formal site management plans are good evidence and by producing these, it could only help to strengthen any case regarding the obtaining external funding.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the work of the Council’s Sustainable Development Manager and other Officers be continued and built upon and that the subject of Sustainable Development to be considered an important factor in decision making.
2. That Biodiversity sites now be referred to as “Wildlife Meadows”.
3. That the topic of Biodiversity (to be read Sustainable Development) be reviewed in 6 months time.

Unauthorised Parking on Council Owned Land – Review June 2007 – Enforcement

Please find set out below a brief statement from the Council's Technical Support Manager, Andrew Jackson as regards the standard procedure for dealing with issues relating to unauthorised parking on areas of Council owned land.

Please note that the procedure has not changed from that which was reported to the Panel previously and it is reiterated here simply for Members' information.

- The procedure that Neighbourhood Wardens currently follow when tackling a vehicle that is parked on Council owned land is to take a digital photo, which includes the date and time and the registration is noted. A letter is then sent out to the owner explaining that they should desist from their unauthorised parking. If the unauthorised parking continues the Wardens can request assistance from the Police and call at the owners address and again explain that the unauthorised parking should stop. If any damage has been caused to the Council land any costs associated with reinstatement would be sought, the digital photographs giving a record of the state of the area before and after works.

- If the vehicle in question is a works or company vehicle it can often be helpful to contact the company direct and allow them to resolve any situation internally. Most large companies have a policy as regards the parking of such vehicles as to help avoid unnecessary fines / penalties.



INTERIM REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

Submitted to Cabinet 21/01/07

SCRUTINY OF UNAUTHORISED PARKING ON COUNCIL OWNED LAND

The Panel was tasked with reviewing the Council's approach to tackling the problem of Unauthorised Parking on Council Owned Land. The topic was scheduled for a "mini-review" in September / October 2006, specifically to look at the procedure for allocations being developed for the provision of additional parking spaces across the District.

1. BACKGROUND

The subject was allocated from the Scrutiny Committee to the Environment Panel, the initial proposal for the topic coming from the Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Panel. The reason for the suggestion being there was an apparent lack of formal policy or procedure when allocating priority to the provision of additional parking.

2. AIMS

It was hoped that the relevant Officers could report back to the Panel regarding any progress made in setting up a structured methodology for allocating a "weight" to each proposed scheme for additional parking, to ensure that schemes were allocated in a fair and consistent manner, balancing needs of Residents and available funds.

3. ACTIONS

At a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel held 17 October 2006, representatives from Property Services were in attendance to update Members regarding progress relating to the allocation of schemes. Whilst 38 individual schemes had been identified, to ensure that there was match funding from Durham County Council in appropriate cases, a meeting with Officers from Durham County Council would take place to discuss the list of schemes further.

Also it was wondered by Members whether the £50,000 budget from the Housing Revenue Account could be transferred to another account so that scheme in "non-Council house" areas could benefit from the funds. If this was not possible, Members still wished the funds to be utilised to ensure the continued allocation of this fund.

4. OUTCOMES

Due to staff sickness, whilst progress had been made some further work was required in this regard. Accordingly, Members felt that it was perhaps unfair to judge the new procedures until further developments had been made.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Members questions regarding to the £50,000 budget (outlined above at point 3) be addressed.
2. That a budget of £50,000 be allocated again for the next financial year.
3. The Panel agreed that the subject should be reviewed further in six months time.