

**Minutes  
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**25 July 2007  
5.30 p.m.  
Abbey Leisure Centre, Pity Me**

**Present:** Councillors Wolstenhorne (in the Chair), Carr, Crooks, Kelly, Martin, Mitchell, Moderate, Simpson, Turnbull and Wilkinson

**Also in Attendance:** Councillors Bell, Kellett, Marsden, Stoddart and Wilkes.

Mr Chris Tomlinson – Environmental Services Manager, City of Durham

**Apologies**

There were apologies for absence received from Councillors Colledge, Mavin and Martin.

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 June 2007**

Subject to the amendment of an erroneous reference to Grey Gables, Brandon as being *Grey Gables, Sherburn Village*, the minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Kellett indicated that in addition to the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Cassop Vale there was another such site within the City of Durham District, Pittington Hill, noted for its ice age grass fauna.

The Chairman noted that further to Councillor Martin raising the issue of the Green Space Strategy at the last meeting, and the suggestion by the Council's Sustainable Development Manager that a Member of the Panel could join the relevant Steering Group, it would be beneficial to have the Sustainable Development Manager in attendance at the September meeting to further discuss this point, amongst others.

**Review – Fly-tipping, Recycling and Litter Pickers**

The City of Durham's Environmental Services Manager, Chris Tomlinson was in attendance to bring Members up-to-date as regards the previous Scrutiny topics of Fly-tipping, Recycling and Litter Pickers. The Environmental Services Manager had recently joined the City of Durham in this role (approximately 8 weeks ago) and had previously worked as the Head of the Street Care Services Section at Teesdale District Council.

The Chairman asked that discussions start with Fly-tipping and Litter Pickers with Recycling to follow as this would likely be the topic of most interest to the Panel.

- **Fly-tipping**

The City of Durham was one of the several other Local Authorities that funded the Joint Fly-tipping Enforcement Officer (Jim Crammon), based at County Hall, Durham.

The City of Durham continues to do so though it was noted that Sedgfield Borough Council had withdrawn from this scheme. However, the scheme was going from strength to strength with a second Fly-tipping Enforcement Officer being appointed to help with the workload, with a mind to splitting the County into two areas in respect of fly-tipping, each with an Officer for each area. Members were reminded that the Joint Fly-tipping Enforcement Officer would only be able to pursue incidents of fly-tipping where there is evidence that can lead to prosecution of the perpetrator(s). Cases where there is fly-tipping that requires clearing, but where no evidence is available is the District Council's responsibility. The responsible Officer is Bob Coats, Street Scene Manager.

The City of Durham's Neighbourhood Wardens are able to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (CNEA) for littering, dog fouling, graffiti etc. However, for each type of FPN being issued, the Wardens must receive the relevant authorisations and training in accordance with the Council's enforcement policy.

The City of Durham will look to improve the information available on the City of Durham Website, for example information as regards an individual's duty of care to use reputable, registered waste contractors.

### **Questions from Members – Fly-tipping**

Members had expressed concerns as regards paint containers being fly-tipped as they cannot be disposed of via the normal household collection. The Environmental Services Manager noted that this type of waste can be disposed of at the County Council operated Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). Members agreed but noted that some more unscrupulous Contractors who would be required to pay for use of the HWRC are more likely to fly-tip than individual householders. The Environmental Services Manager reiterated that it would be an issue that could be pursued by the Joint Fly-tipping Enforcement Officer *if* there was evidence that could link back to a particular Contractor or individual; otherwise it is simply a matter of clearing the fly-tipped waste.

A Member asked for the number of prosecutions that the Joint Fly-tipping Enforcement Officer has been able to secure. The Environmental Services Manager believed that the number was around 6 for the City of Durham District, but more detailed figures could be obtained if the Member wished to know.

Another Member asked whether in cases where allotment sites had been purchased and the sites were being used for fly-tipping, could the City of Durham in some way force the landowner to clear or tidy the site. The Environmental Services Manager noted that if the site constituted a "statutory nuisance", then this would be dealt with by our Environmental Health Section, however if this was an unofficial waste disposal site the Environment Agency would investigate

**Note:** *Councillors Moderate entered the meeting at 5.35 p.m.*

Members wished to know how the City of Durham tackled problems of persistent fly-tipping, especially at locations that are known as being "hot-spots". The Environmental Services Manager informed Members that the Neighbourhood Wardens were aware of the most frequently used areas and were always vigilant.

- **Litter Pickers**

The Environmental Services Manager reiterated that the Neighbourhood Wardens have the authority to issue FPNs for littering offence which now includes chewing gum and cigarette butts.

In order to help alleviate a possible increase in the numbers of cigarette butts being discarded straight on to the pavement following the smoking ban introduced in England on 01 July 2007, some bins within the City have been retrofitted with ashtrays in their top surface. Also it was noted that some Public Houses have installed their own cigarette bins themselves as a result of the smoking ban.

The Environment Services Manager also referred Members to the high standards of street cleanliness within the District, as shown by not only the Best Value Performance Indicator BV199, but also by the high standards recorded in Local Environment Quality (LEQ) surveys which have even more stringent criteria than BV199. Also the LEQs take into account more than just litter; they include graffiti and fly-posting. The only areas that the City of Durham did not excel at were regarding the level of detritus within the street scene and relating to litter along the Riverbank footpaths.

Specifically for the Riverbanks, two additional redeployed members of staff have been allocated to litter picking and tidying duties to improve the quality of these important prominent City Centre footpaths. In addition to help prevent littering along the Riverbanks; there will be provision of extra litter bins and seating subject to agreement with the City of Durham's Cultural Services Department.

To help improve the situation as regard detritus, the City of Durham intends to replace the existing ride-in compact pavement sweeper (Johnson C50) with a new machine as the primary lease on this machine has now expired but to negotiate a secondary (reduced) lease on the existing thus having two operational machines. This will allow the rota to be increased to six-weekly from the current twelve weekly, however this has yet to have OMT agreement at this time.

- **Questions from Members – Litter Pickers**

Members noted that since the smoking ban for England was introduced on 01 July 2007 that some employees of shops along the main streets within many villages have been discarding cigarette butts whilst on their work breaks. The Environmental Services Manager noted businesses were approached regarding this potential problem in advance of the smoking ban coming into effect and that if Members had any specific issues, they could be raised with Neighbourhood Wardens or in more serious cases with the Environmental Health section.

A Councillor noted that the bushes alongside the route down from the Railway Station into the City Centre seemed to be a collecting point for various forms of litter and presented Durham in a very poor light to visitors despite the high scores for BV199 and the LEQs. The Environmental Services Manager believed that the land in question was probably owned by Railtrack and therefore was not included within the survey as Railtrack is responsible for its own land. It may be possible to liaise with them to improve the situation.

Members asked questions relating to the dog foul bins located across the District. Whilst it was agreed that the use of wheelie bins was not the most visually attractive, they were cheap, durable and practical especially in the ease of emptying for the staff i.e. they do not require the staff to delve into them to recover the waste, they can be uncoupled from their anchor point and emptied as any other wheelie bin.

Some Members wondered whether it could be possible to source funding from local pet stores or veterinary practices by allowing advertisements to be placed on the dog foul bins. The Environmental Services Manager explained that a similar idea had been brought up at another Authority and the sponsors had proved unreliable and that whilst the idea did have merit, practically it was difficult to achieve. Some Members recalled that a scheme of sponsored bins that had taken place in the City of Durham District 6 or 7 years ago.

- **Recycling**

The Environmental Services Manager explained that the Durham County Council has secured funding from Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) for “swing tickets” (similar to luggage tags) which affix to the handle on Residents’ wheelie bins. Previous schemes where sticker had been placed on bins lead to an increase in the volume of recycling.

As regards encouraging people to reuse plastic bags for shopping or indeed to have a more sturdy regular shopping bag are laudable, but ideally should be nationally led. In fact the Durham County Council had wished to have local scheme whereby shops would charge for plastic carrier bags, but the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) wished to delay any local initiatives in lieu of a national agenda coming from the trial in Ireland where paper bags had replaced plastic and reuse of other bags was more widespread.

Councillors were informed that at this current time there were no intentions to charge for “bulky waste” collections, unlike some neighbouring Authorities. However it was to be noted that there is evidence that where Authorities have charged for these types of collection that there has been only minor increases in fly-tipping in the initial stages.

It was noted that the County Durham Furniture Forum can prove to be quite selective as regards the item that they would accept and this can lead to delays in removal of items for collection. The Sustainable Development Manager is looking at the possibility of working with reuse and recycling organisations.

The successful Green Waste Recycling bin trial in the Carrville and Belmont areas may be expanded to encompass more of the District if grants or funding can be sourced. Any decision as regards this would need to go to O.M.T. and Cabinet accordingly; however any recommendations to Cabinet would need to reflect the Durham County Council’s Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy which has been reviewed recently and will be published soon. This Strategy is particularly important as if plans for an increase in the use of aerobic digestion are approved, then it could be that any pre-emptive decision to increase green waste recycling via the current trial system could be unnecessarily costly and be rendered redundant by the diversion of such waste to an aerobic digester. Also an increased use of collection vehicles would have an associated increase in carbon emissions. Again changes in Local Government across the County area may have an impact on any such increase in the provision of green waste bins.

The current Contract with Premier Waste as regards the Kerb-It recycling collection runs until April 2008, and the Contract will go back out to Tender for another 2 year contract.

The Environmental Services Manager circulated copies of an interim report from Premier Waste regarding the Parc Orange Bag Trial for the recycling collection of hard plastics and card waste for Members' information.

Members were informed that refurbishment of goods for resale, similar to "Bulky Bobs", a scheme ran in Liverpool were more use as practical training for apprentices and that often the facility is heavily subsidised in order to maintain the training aspect. Accordingly, it would not be possible for the City of Durham to operate a scheme on a similar scale.

As regards the City of Durham setting an example by adopting good internal recycling practise, the Environmental Services Manager stated that he and the Sustainable Development Manager were looking at the formulation of an Internal Waste Strategy for the Council. This would not just focus on paper and cans but also on old computers, ink cartridges etc. i.e. all forms of waste produced by the Council.

- **Questions from Members – Recycling**

Some Members wondered whether charging for collections would prevent some residents from putting out unwanted furniture and similar items out on the street for extended periods of time (prior to informing the City of Durham about the need for a collection) where quite often the furniture is taken by youths in order to make dens or to create bonfires.

It was also queried by Members whether there was a separate facility for the recycling of computers and their peripheral devices, as it was likely this would be an area where the amount of "waste" would increase quite dramatically in the future. The Environmental Services Manager noted that indeed old computers could be taken to the HWRCs to be recycled and also noted that cathode ray tube (CRT) monitors count as hazardous waste and must be disposed of accordingly. Indeed computers are now (since July 2007) classified under "electrical waste regulations".

Some Members wondered whether reuse could be the key, but some other Members had experience where it was shown that often the cost of obtaining software licences for these old computers was more expensive than, or as expensive as, obtaining new machines (which often come with the software included) and also there would be issues with the requirements for electrical testing.

The Chairman noted that it may be beneficial for Members to visit the Aerobic Digester at Thornley Station within Easington District, operated by the Durham County Council. Panel Members agreed that this be looked into for a future meeting.

**Note:** *Councillors Kellett and Marsden left the meeting at 6.28 p.m.*

Members asked whether there has been a good uptake of the Parc Orange Recycling Bags within the trial areas. Whilst the Environmental Services Manager did not have any exact figures, a rough estimate was in the region of 70%. Some problems as regarding splitting of bags were being addressed, thicker bags are being sourced and the colour will be changed to purple because Sainsbury has changed the colour of their bags to orange and this could lead to confusion.

### **Any Other Business**

There were no further matters to discuss.

### **Actions for the next meeting:-**

- Further discussions with the Environmental Services Manager regarding recycling.
- Sustainable Development Manager to be in attendance to discuss any Internal Waste Strategy, the Panel and the Green Space Strategy Steering Group and the upcoming Scrutiny Topic of Climate Change.
- That Councillor Rae be invited to the next meeting as the Portfolio Holder for the Environment.

The Meeting terminated at 6.40 p.m.