

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**06 February 2008
5.30 p.m.
Abbey Leisure Centre, Pity Me**

Present: Councillors Wolstenhome (in the Chair), Carr, Colledge, Crooks, Kelly, Martin, Mavin, Mitchell, Moderate, Simpson, Turnbull and Wilkinson

Also in Attendance: Councillors Marsden and Rae.

Miss Claire Lancaster – Necklace Park Manager, Durham County Council
Mr Mike Ogden – Section Manager Access & Rights of Way, Durham County Council

1. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 09 January 2008

- 2.1 Subject to an amendment to correct an error relating to the date of the meeting within the heading, the minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record.

**3. Scrutiny Topic – Climate Change
Consideration of Draft Report**

- 3.1 A copy of the Draft Climate Change Report had been circulated and Members were asked for their comments further to the Report being submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.
- 3.2 Councillor Martin noted reference within the Report to work being undertaken by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC), of which Councillor Martin is Vice-Chairman. Reference was made to an upcoming Report to be produced by ANEC which would be published in Spring 2008 (a press release on ANEC website 04 February 2008 has the document "Climate Change: Key Findings and Recommendations of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group" attached). Councillor Martin noted his disappointment that details of the recommendations within this report, some of which had particular relevance for Local Authorities, had not been included within the Draft Report.
- 3.3 Councillor Martin suggested that the recommendations within the ANEC report be one of the first issues looked at by the City of Durham's Climate Change Working Group, i.e. which were relevant and how they might be implemented or achieved.

Note: *Councillor Carr entered the meeting at 5.35 p.m.*

- 3.4 Councillor Rae informed Members that, as Portfolio Holder for the Environment, she had attended an Environmental Workshop organised by the Local Government Association (LGA) in London. An interesting paper from Camden Borough Council had been circulated at this workshop, and it was felt that this would be a useful document for Members' information, and to be fed into the Climate Change Working Group. Councillor Rae also informed Members that she would be meeting with the Head of Environment & Leisure Services and the Sustainable Development Manager regarding sustainability issues.
- 3.5 Accordingly, subject to the amendments as set out in bold type below, the Climate Change Report was agreed by the Panel and was to be sent to the next Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Page 6, recommendation 3

"That, in order to ensure that the Climate Change Working Group operates effectively, **the Cabinet Member for the Environment sets up the initial Group and from this**, a Senior Officer or Member be appointed as Chair of the Group."

Page 6, additional recommendation 4

"That the recently published report produced by ANEC be considered by the Climate Change Working Group and that the Group report back to the Environment Scrutiny Panel as regards the feasibility of implementing those recommendations contained within the ANEC report that are relevant to local Authorities."

Page 6, renumbered recommendation 5

That the topic be reviewed in 12 months time (February 2009), with an interim report in 6 months time (August **2008**).

4. **"Riverbanks" – 6 Month Interim Review**

Witnesses in Attendance –

Miss Claire Lancaster – Necklace Park Manager, Durham County Council

Mr Mike Ogden – Section Manager Access & Rights of Way, Durham County Council

- 4.1 Claire Lancaster, Necklace Park Manager and Mike Ogden, Section Manager Access & Rights of Way were in attendance to bring Members up to date on developments relating to the Necklace Park Project. Claire took Members through developments over the last year, noting that as her post was fixed term due to funding, Claire would be leaving the project at the end of this week.

- 4.2 A major success story for the Necklace Park Project was the success of the Sustrans / Connect 2 bid for funding from The Big Lottery fund. Part of the funding will be made available to Durham County Council, and consequently the Necklace Park, for works to restore the Belmont Viaduct as a method of connecting Newton Hall and Brasside. Funds of around £500,000 were secured, with the types of work including structural works to the viaduct itself, land ownership issues and protecting / encouraging biodiversity. Sustrans wish to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding by July 2008.
- 4.3 Another scheme that will help to link up the riverbanks more effectively is the construction of the "Kingfisher Bridge" at Old Durham Beck. There is evidence of stepping stones being used at this location in the past, but for the last 20 years, there has been no easy crossing route. The only bridge, a narrow concrete bridge with a stile at each end, proves almost impossible for walkers with young children, and those who are less mobile to negotiate. The new bridge is flood proof that will hopefully stand the test of time with approximately £150,000 has been spend on the bridge itself, with an associated £25,000 being allocated for footpath improvements to compliment the new bridge.
- 4.4 A key site, identified by those that use the riverbanks within the City Centre as requiring works, is that of the Rotary Club Shelter located below the Castle, just along from Bella Pasta. Whilst there had been some initial thoughts as regards improvements to the shelter or a replacement, Northumbrian Water expressed an interest in this site as it may be possible for them to utilise the area to create space for a turning circle, to allow far greater access to the riverbanks. Northumbrian Water will input approximately £5,000, with the City of Durham, Durham County Council, the University of Durham and the Dean & Chapter also being involved. There may be an opportunity for improvements to the blocked pathways further upstream so that they can be could be opened up once again and indeed a funding bid has been made to The County Durham Environmental Trust (CDENT) to add to funding already in place.
- 4.5 Natural England are working as regards establishing a wetlands area at Houghall Farm by encouraging flooding to part of the land. During wet periods, people could view the wildlife from hides, but in the periods where it is drier a new permissive right of way could be established. However, this would be dependant upon the outcome of any sale of the land as East Durham & Houghall College are looking to sell the farm.
- 4.6 Another successful set of events, despite the weather, was the Durham Big Ride and its sister event for children, The Little Ride. Considering that it was the first time the event had been held, a turnout of around 700 people was very encouraging. It is hoped that next year the event would be bigger and better, possibly with an extension of the route into the city centre.
- 4.7 A Charity Midnight Walk was held in June to raise funds for St. Cuthbert's Hospice. The event was hosted by the Necklace Park and Durham County Council, and managed to raise an impressive £70,000 for the charity. Preparations are underway for this year's event, to be held 21 June 2008.

- 4.8 The Necklace Park was showcased at the international event Design of the Times 2007, held at the Baltic Square, Gateshead. The event highlighted sustainable tourism issues, of which the Necklace Park was an exemplar project. Over 20,000 people attended the event, with foot traffic of over 3,000 on the first day passing by the Necklace Park display.
- 4.9 A tile mural was installed in the Grotto at Old Durham Gardens and was formally unveiled as part of the national Heritage Open Days in September 2007. The mural design was developed by mixed ability youngsters and mainstream arts students from New College Durham and was mounted and installed by young apprentices from Service Direct.
- 4.10 Work in securing a circular walk at Finchale Priory have suffered a set back after negotiations between English Heritage and the landowner of the Finchale Caravan Park broke down over another issue. However, Durham County Council have refurbished the toll bridge at Finchale which is an important development in improving access.
- 4.11 The City of Durham Tourism Section are developing a number of guided walks and leaflets that highlight the riverbanks areas within the city. The City of Durham are working with the Necklace Park team and a local guided walks leader to produce the leaflets, hopefully in time for the spring season. It is hoped that these leaflets will encourage tourists and visitors to explore beyond the Cathedral peninsula.

Note: *Councillor Turnbull left the meeting at 5.55 p.m.*

- 4.12 Mike Ogden, Section Manager Access & Rights of Way, briefly explained to Members work that would continue after Claire leaves the project. As the Necklace Park was an aspect of the Durham City 2020 Vision, a funding bid to One North East has been submitted to allow for two full-time posts based with the Rights of Way section of Durham County Council for a three year period. In the interim period between Claire leaving and any new appointments being made, Mike will deal with the County Council aspects of the Project, with Harvey Dowdy, Regeneration Manager dealing with City of Durham issues.
- 4.13 Mike explained that key tasks for the Project would be:
- to manage the implementation of the Belmont Viaduct scheme.
 - to oversee a bid for Lottery funding for works at the Riverbanks Gardens.
 - to continue works relating to improvements to footpaths alongside the riverbanks, e.g. at the Galilee Chapel / Fulling Mill etc.
 - to feed into the Durham 2020 Vision process, e.g. sites at Elvet Waterside, the former Ice Rink site relating to access issues.

Note: *Councillor Mitchell entered the meeting at 6.00 p.m.*

Note: *Councillors Colledge, Martin, Simpson and Wilkinson left the meeting at 6.00 p.m.*

- 4.14 Members thanked both Mike and Claire for their attendance at the meeting and wished Claire all the best in her new post at South Tyneside Council, managing the £60 million regeneration of the Spanish City.

5. Any Other Business

- 5.1 No further matters of business were raised.

6. Actions for the next meeting:-

- 6.1 The City of Durham Sustainable Development Manager, Jonathan Elmer will be in attendance to update Members as regards progress with Wildlife Meadows and other Biodiversity issues.

The Meeting terminated at 6.10 p.m.

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

REVIEW OF SCRUTINY TOPIC – RIVERBANKS, NECKLACE PARK PROJECT

1. BACKGROUND

The Environment Scrutiny Panel had looked at the topic of Riverbanks and a Report was agreed by the Panel in April 2007, subsequently agreed by Scrutiny Committee in June 2007 and finally Cabinet in September 2007.

One aspect of the Report was that of the Necklace Park Project, one of the first projects to be delivered from the 2020 Visioning exercise to help improve Durham City Centre. It was believed that there was not enough access for the public to the river and banks area, not only in physical terms, but also in terms of knowledge, i.e. the history and heritage of many of the “jewels” situated along the River Wear. The idea was originally developed via a feasibility study from the Visioning Project.

2. AIMS

The aim was to inform Members on progress of the Necklace Park Project, and to give information about future plans.

3. ACTIONS

The Necklace Park, whilst being one aspect of the Visioning Project for delivery by 2020, only had funding for the Necklace Park Manager post for two years. The Manager, Miss Claire Lancaster, would be leaving the project in February 2008. Accordingly, the Necklace Park Manager attended the February meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel to speak to Members.

4. OUTCOMES

- Belmont Viaduct / Connect2

Plans to re-open Belmont viaduct were given a major boost with the announcement in December 2007 that the project was to receive £500,000 of Big Lottery funding.

The viaduct scheme, which will benefit walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, made it onto the final short-list of 79 projects competing for £140M as part of the national Sustrans “Connect2” project. The 19th Century viaduct, unused for 40 years connects Belmont with Newton Hall. Once opened, the viaduct will provide a safe, traffic-free route for local people and visitors.

- Old Durham Beck / 'Kingfisher Bridge'

Work has been completed on a new crossing at Old Durham Beck in the Maiden Castle area of the City. The crossing, missing for over 20 years, is complemented by £25,000 of path and safety improvements. The flood-proof crossing is known as 'Kingfisher Bridge' and is accessible for all providing an essential link that creates an attractive circular walk from the City Centre and back. A stone plaque bearing the name of the Necklace Park features on the side of the new bridge.

- Rotary Club Shelter and Galilee Chapel / Fulling Mill Footpath

The removal of the Rotary Club shelter is scheduled with the requisite funding in place. Further associated funding has been agreed to improve footpaths and access in the area between the Galilee Chapel and Fulling Mill further upstream.

- Access at Houghall Farm

The Necklace Park Team has been working with Houghall Farm and the Environment Agency to improve access to the site and generate more interest in the wildlife and ecology in the area. The Environment Agency in October 2007 confirmed that £90,000 of Higher Level Stewardship funding is available to be spent on creating an extensive wetland area, bird hide and two new public footpaths for the general public to use.

Further work is planned in connection with Durham University Sports Department who have plans for a 'green gym' in the area and could benefit from the Houghall developments. The Necklace Park has been leading on these negotiations.

Works are dependant upon ownership arrangements of the site as the College have been agreed.

- Durham Big Ride

Over 700 people took part in the inaugural Big Ride which set off from Aykley Heads and took in over 25 miles of Durham's roads, towns and villages in September 2007. The Little Ride was held within the Necklace Park and entertainment was provided for all who attended. Both rides were a huge success and planning has already commenced for next year's event which will be even bigger.

- St. Cuthbert's Hospice Midnight Walk

In June 2007, over 550 women and children took part in the inaugural Hospice Midnight Walk hosted by the Necklace Park and Durham County Council which raised more than £70,000 for the charity. This project raised the profile of the Necklace Park and exhibited the potential of the Park for events, sports and community activities. Planning is well underway for this year's event which will be held on the 21 June 2008.

- Design of the Times 2007 (DOTT07)

A year and a half of design and sustainability activity came to a close in October 2007 with a spectacular showcase at Newcastle / Gateshead. This included a detailed interactive display about the Necklace Park, a sustainable tourism debate which included the Necklace Park as an exemplar project and the DOTT07 Community Awards ceremony, where the Project was nominated for two awards.

- Old Durham Gardens Tile Mural

The ceramic mural has been developed by mixed ability youngsters and mainstream arts students at New College Durham on behalf of the Necklace Park. It is in situ in the grotto at Old Durham Gardens and was formally unveiled as part of the national Heritage Open Days series in September 2007. The Mural itself was skilfully mounted in a wooden frame by young apprentices from Durham County Council's Service Direct.

- Finchale Abbey / Caravan Park

The Necklace Park remains committed to opening up this area of the City for more public access, but unfortunately, recent issues between English Heritage and the landowner at Finchale Caravan Park have meant that negotiations have been put on hold. However, Durham County Council have refurbished the toll bridge at Finchale which is a very positive development for this popular area.

- Walks Leaflets

The City of Durham are currently developing a number of guided walks and corresponding leaflets for the riverbank areas of the City. Working with the Necklace Park and a local guided walks leader, the City of Durham's Tourism section are in the process of writing the copy of the leaflets and designing the layout in time for the arrival of new tourists in the spring season.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel noted the work of the outgoing Necklace Park Manager for her attendance.

Therefore the following recommendations are made by the Panel:-

1. The Panel supports the funding bid, lodged with One NorthEast, which will enable replacement Necklace Park staff to be appointed and help ensure the Necklace Park Project continues to flourish and grow.
2. That the topic be reviewed in 12 months time, or as appropriate.

