

Item 6

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
14 December 2004

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman) and

Councillors D.R. Brown, Mrs. B.A. Clare, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray,
M.T.B. Jones, J.P. Moran, R.A. Patchett, Mrs. C. Potts and A. Smith

In Attendance: Councillors D.M. Hancock, K. Henderson, J.G. Huntington, J.M. Khan and
T. Ward

OSC(3)15/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

OSC(3)16/04 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9th November, 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OSC(3)17/04 COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT - UPDATE

It was explained that Jonathan Elmer, Countryside Officer, was present at the meeting to give an update on Countryside Management Initiatives.

The Countryside Officer explained where the Countryside Management Team fitted into the newly restructured Council. He explained that they were part of the Sustainable Communities Team within Neighbourhood Services Department. This enabled similarity in types of work to be drawn together e.g. energy efficiency etc. He also outlined the staffing structure of the Team.

He explained that his presentation would cover work in which the team had been involved and what initiatives were proposed.

The Committee was informed that the Team had been involved in four "on the ground" projects which included :

- **Bishop Middleham Allotment Community Wildlife Garden Scheme** which had been developed in conjunction with local residents. The area had also been declared a Local Nature Reserve. The project had been 75% funded by the Countryside Agency.

➤ **Brussleton Rail Trail**

This Scheme involved a dis-used railway line in the vicinity of The “Locomotion” the National Railway Museum at Shildon. The Scheme involved making the old rail trail route accessible from the Museum. The Scheme was about to go out to tender.

➤ **Whitworth Historic Landscape Route**

This involved land in the ownership of the Shafto Estate in the valley of the River Wear. An engineering specification had been developed for the scheme. A Licence Agreement was needed from Durham County Council.

➤ **Ferryhill Carrs**

This area had been declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest and had also been declared a Nature Reserve. The project involved the installation of a new footpath to the bottom of the valley and improvement to access making it available to wheelchair users etc.

The Countryside Team had also been involved in the “Walking to Health” initiative. Walking Groups had been established in various parts of the Borough and would be extended to include Ferryhill, Sedgefield and Fishburn within the next 8 – 9 months. The walks were targeted at the 50+ age group suffering health problems. Around 3,000 walkers had taken part in the scheme. 53 volunteer walk leaders had been trained at Jubilee Park which had been used as a Training Centre. The Programme was a three year initiative of which this was the final year. The Team was looking to mainstream fund the initiative in future with around £20,000 needed per year.

English Nature’s Wild Spaces Scheme which was also a three year scheme had also been undertaken by the Countryside Team. The Scheme involved the declaration of various sites as Local Nature Reserves which were chosen on the basis of proximity to large developments etc. Areas which had been chosen included Ferryhill Carrs, Brierley Park, Cobblers Hall and Castle Eden Cycleway.

Events programmes were also produced by the Countryside Team including various activities etc., which were included in a leaflet distributed to libraries, schools, etc.

The Countryside Team had also been working with residents and community groups involving them in looking after sites including management and maintenance tasks.

In respect of planning applications, the Countryside Team also commented on proposed developments and considered whether they had an ecological impact.

In response to a query raised by the Member in relation to approaches for suggested schemes, officers explained that in some instances

Parish Councils contacted the Borough Council regarding proposed schemes. The Borough Council then looked at priorities and prioritising sites.

Members of the Committee also raised a query regarding the feasibility of parks, etc., closing at dusk in particular Castle Eden Walkway. In response officers explained that to close the walkway at dusk would restrict access to genuine walkers. It would also be extremely costly in terms of wardens, fencing, signage, etc.

In response to a query raised by a Member in relation to volunteers, it was explained that the only criteria was that they live in the area.

The Committee also raised a query regarding the feasibility of linking various sites e.g. Ferryhill to West Cornforth. Officers explained that the main area of concern would be maintenance of the sites. Sites would need to be staffed and secured. There was, however, support for spending in those areas.

Reference was also made by Members to the need to complete the circular walking tour round Newton Aycliffe by including an area around Woodham Golf Course. Officers explained that negotiations were being held regarding future development of the area.

In relation to the Walk to Health Programme, Members raised a query regarding the role of the PCT in the Programme. Officers explained that the Council was trying to work in partnership with the PCT in relation to the Programme of activities to produce a healthier lifestyle.

Regarding the Shildon Rail Trail extension and accessibility, Members raised a query regarding signage etc. Officers explained that interpretation consultants had been employed to develop interpretation signage for the wider area.

It was suggested that a site visit be held to various schemes to enable Members to become acquainted with some of the schemes.

AGREED : That a site visit be held to various schemes and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.

OSC(3)18/04 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Committees work programme for review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that this was to be a standard item on each Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It set out details of ongoing and future reviews and anticipated items for the next six meetings.

Members were up updated on the progress of the ongoing reviews.

AGREED: That the work programme be approved.

OSC(3)19/04 REGENERATION OF NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH OLDER PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING - REVIEW GROUP - MEMBERSHIP

It was explained that at the last meeting of Council, Councillor Mrs. B. Clare had been appointed to the LSVT Shadow Board and therefore was not eligible to continue to be a member of the above Review Group. It was suggested that Mrs. J. Gray be appointed to that Review Group and that Mrs. B, Clare be appointed to the Street Safe Initiative Review Group.

AGREED : That Councillor Mrs. Gray be appointed to the Regeneration of Neighbourhood Services Review Group to replace Mrs. B.Clare and that Mrs. B. Clare be a Member of the Street Safe Initiative Review Group.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Liz North Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237