

**PROSPEROUS &
ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

STATE OF THE BOROUGH
ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH
REVIEW GROUP REPORT
NOVEMBER
2008

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Introduction

The Borough's Community Strategy identifies four key ambitions, Healthy, Strong, Prosperous and Attractive, which forms a statement of '*Working towards a more healthy, prosperous and attractive borough with strong communities.*'

Contribution to these ambitions requires the Council and its Partners to work in partnership and deliver services, projects, initiatives to improve the Quality of Life within the Borough.

The aim of this report is to highlight achievements made by the Council and its partners towards delivering of Quality of Life topics that contribute to achieving the ambition of an Attractive Borough.

An Attractive Borough is defined, as 'The natural and built environment that is valued, conserved and enhanced'.

The following Quality of Life topics, which contribute to an Attractive Borough, have been examined within this report:-

- Street Cleanliness and Waste
- Open Spaces
- Transport

Each topic is reported by the following sections, key statistics, what we know with regard to each topic within the Borough, current and planned activity and conclusions and recommendations.

Executive Summary

Review Group Membership

Councillors Mrs E. Maddison (Chair), Mrs L.M.G. Cuthbertson, Mrs S. Haigh, A.Gray and B.Lamb

Rationale

Following an extensive community appraisal and consultation a Community Strategy for Sedgefield Borough was published by the Local Strategic Partnership in 2004. The Strategy identifies the key economic, social and environmental issues facing the Borough and sets out a vision for the Borough in 2014 as a 'Healthy, Prosperous and Attractive Borough with Strong Communities'.

It is structured around these four aims, setting out a number of supporting priorities and targets to be addressed under which specific service improvements will be developed.

Four years after the first publication of the Community Strategy, Overview and Scrutiny Committees decided to undertake a review to look at quality of life issues within the Community Strategy. This is particularly useful in the final year of the Authority as this will enable these issues to be benchmarked for future reference. It is also an opportunity for Members to make recommendations, where appropriate, to the new Authority.

Four Review Groups have been established look at quality of life topics relevant to their ambition. The reviews will look at achievements, gaps/deficiencies in provision and areas in need of improvement.

Each review group will produce a report setting out its finding and recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

Following conclusion of the four reviews the reports will be combined to form a 'State of the Borough' report.

The final report from each review will be combined with the final reports from the other review groups to form a single State of the Borough report. This report will be a useful source of reference for the new Council and will provide a benchmark for future assessment.

Objectives of the Review

The Objectives of the Review are:

- To look at services provided by the Council and other agencies
- To highlight the areas that are working well and areas for improvement.
- To make recommendations via Cabinet to the new Council

Contribution to the Council's Ambitions and Community Outcomes

Outcomes of the Review will contribute to development of the ambition of an Attractive Borough and the Community outcomes of 'A cleaner, greener, sustainable Environment and Improving design and environmental quality of towns and villages'.

Process Methodology

The Review Group gathered information and evidence as follows:

- a) Through Review Group meetings held between June 2008 – November 2008
- b) Through evidence gathering and topic based presentations on:-

Street Cleanliness & Waste

Alan Suggett, Head of Environmental Services

Open Spaces

Karin Johnson, Sustainable Communities Manager

Tammy Hale-Morris, *Countryside Officer (Planning and Strategy)*

Transport

Dawn Watson, Accessibility Planning Officer, Durham County Council

Karen Lynn, Chair of the Sedgefield Borough Access to Services Group

- c) Through research and statistics from the Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy Local Area Framework
- d) Feedback from the LSP Annual Stakeholder meeting in June 2008

Conclusions and Recommendations

Street Cleanliness and Waste

Conclusions

- The Council has provided high quality street cleaning, grounds maintenance and waste collection services that has levels of high satisfaction with residents.
- Street cleansing and Civic Pride teams have made a valuable contribution to Borough's Community Safety Partnership enforcement exercises.
- The Council's GIS system provides valuable intelligence to assist residents and offices to access information on when services are being carried out within a specific area.

- The introduction of a live information system to record the accuracy of refuse collection has led to service improvements and accurate information to support customer service enquiries
- The introduction of an enhanced kerbside recycling collection service has seen a significant rise in collection rates that will provide a contribution to increase the overall recycling rate for the borough.

Recommendations

- 1) That the standard of street cleaning, grounds maintenance and waste collection services continues to meet high satisfaction levels from residents within the Borough.
- 2) Consideration be given to adopting initiatives to utilise Customer Relation Management and Geographical Information Systems to improve service delivery and customer service.

Open Spaces

Conclusions

- Satisfaction levels with Parks and Open Spaces reflect investment in the Borough.
- The Borough Council has been effective in working with Parish and Town Councils and volunteers within the Community Volunteer Programme to achieve numerous awards and the continued development of Local Nature Reserves within the Borough.
- The Green Space Strategy for the Borough will create a vision for the long-term management of green spaces and highlight the potential benefits to wildlife, public health and education.
- The Council has taken effective steps to ensure that legislation regarding biodiversity has been widely communicated to raise awareness and importance of changes to legislation.
- The study being undertaken by Durham Biodiversity Partnership will provide data on protected and priority species within the Borough to enable legislative and planning policy requirements to be met.

Recommendations

- 3) Green Spaces within the Borough continue to be actively managed in accordance with the Sedgefield Borough Green Space Strategy.
- 4) Local Nature Reserves within the Borough and the Community Volunteer programme continue to be developed and supported.

- 5) Findings from the study being undertaken by Durham Biodiversity Partnership be taken into account when considering the development of biodiversity projects and planning applications to ensure that all legislation and planning policy requirements are met.

Transport

Conclusions

- Transport within the Borough is an issue and the JMP study has highlighted topics that are to be progressed through LTP2 and the Access to Services Group.
- Through funding to support Community Transport and undertaking specific projects the Local Transport Plan2 has contributed to enhancing transport provision across the Borough.
- Community Transport Schemes within the Borough provide transport solutions that enable local communities' to have access to work, training and social activities.
- The Access to Services Group plays a vital role to engage with representatives from key partner agencies to address barriers to accessing transport within the Borough.

Recommendations

- 6) Solutions to address transport and enhance the provision of transport within the Borough continue to be provided through delivery of the Local Transport Plan 2.
- 7) That engagement continues through local Access to Services Groups to address barriers to accessing transport.

Street Cleanliness & Waste

Key Statistics

- The percentage of land and highways in Sedgefield Borough assessed as having unacceptable levels of litter and detritus was 15% in 2007/2008.
- The percentage of land within Sedgefield Borough with visible graffiti was 2% in 2007/08 and with visible fly posting being 0%
- During 2007/08, 100% of reported abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours
- The percentage of household waste recycled and composted in 2007/08 was 17.98%.

A Best Value Survey undertaken in 2006 reported:

- 74.1% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way the Borough Council had fulfilled its duty to keep land clear of litter and waste, and
- 89.4% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the waste collection service within the Borough

What we know about Street Cleanliness and Waste in Sedgefield Borough

Clean streets and collection of household waste are topics that are of concern to residents within the Borough. The 2006 Best Value General Survey reported 74.1% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way the Borough Council had fulfilled its duty to keep land clear of litter and waste, this was a significant improvement on the 2003 response of 64.6%.

In addition, respondents to the Survey in 2006 expressed satisfaction of 89.4% for waste collection services and 80.8% for the collection of recyclable materials. However, there was a 5.2% drop in satisfaction with 'local recycling facilities' from the 2003 survey with 'items you can deposit' being identified as a key issue.

Performance delivery of street cleansing and waste collection services is measured through outcomes of a number of performance indicators. The table on the following page identifies performance outturn for 2006/07, 2007/08 and targets that were set for 2007/08.

Street Cleansing and Waste Collection Performance Indicators

| Performance Indicator | Performance 2006/07 | Performance 2007/08 | Target 2007/08 |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Percentage of the total tonnage of household waste arisings that have been recycled and/or composted | 25.27% | 18.57% | At least 26.00% |
| Kilograms of household waste collected per head | 417 | 405 | Less than 422 |
| Percentage of relevant land and highways that are assessed as having combined deposits of litter and detritus that fall below an acceptable level | 9% | 15% | Below 8.50% |
| Percentage of relevant land and highways from which unacceptable levels of graffiti are visible | 0% | 2% | 1% |
| Percentage of relevant land and highways from which unacceptable levels of fly-posting are visible | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Percentage of new reports of abandoned vehicles investigated within 24 hours of notification | 100% | 100% | At least 95% |
| Percentage of abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours from the point at which the Authority is legally entitled to remove the vehicle | 96.70% | 100% | At least 95% |
| Number of collections missed per 100,000 collections household waste | 19 | 17 | Less than 11 |

The above table identifies that performance targets and improvements were achieved for kilograms of household waste collected per head of population, unacceptable visible levels of fly posting and investigation and removal of abandoned vehicles.

In comparison, performance indicators relating to recycling or composting of household waste, street cleansing of highways and relevant land and the number of collections missed per 100,000 collections of household waste did not perform higher than the previous year nor meet their target for 2007/08.

The percentage of relevant land and highways that are assessed as having unacceptable levels of litter and detritus was 15% in 2007/08. This was a significant increase from the previous year's performance of 9%. The target for 2007/2008 for this performance indicator was 8.5%. It is believed that the outturn figure was not an accurate reflection of the position due to issues with the final quarter inspection. It is expected that performance in 2008/09 will improve on performance of 2006/07.

Current and Planned Activity

The Council's Street Cleanliness and Waste collection services have achieved the ISO 9001 quality standard and services are undertaken through the following key functions:

- Street Cleansing
- Grounds Maintenance
- Refuse Collection and Recycling

Street Cleansing

The Council's Street Cleansing services include:

- General Litter Picking
- Removal of fly tipping
- Removal of dog fouling, graffiti and fly posting
- Emptying of litter and dog waste bins
- Channel sweeping
- Pavement washing and the removal of chewing gum in town centre areas
- Collection of dead animals and hypodermic needles on public open space

The service is provided through three area teams, each equipped with two compact sweepers, two large sweepers, two green machine sweepers, pavement washer/gum removal machine and a dog-foul collection machine.

Cleansing schedules are carried out in accordance with the code of practice on Cleanliness Standards. These standards include, dog fouling cleansing of open spaces to be carried out on a monthly schedule and removal of graffiti and fly posting and tipping is undertaken within 24 hours of being reported.

There are no defined principal shopping areas within the Borough, but Town Centre areas are cleaned on a daily basis. Hotspot areas, for example school areas are cleaned before and after school and following lunchtime. High density housing areas are cleaned twice weekly and initiatives to identify problem areas include neighbourhood walkabouts involving local residents, councillors and wardens.

The Council's Environmental Services has also undertaken a number of education and awareness programmes in higher-litter areas, including working with Town and Parish Councils and with schools. The Council was only one of two local authorities to participate in the International "Clean up the World" and the "Clean up the Schools" campaign.

The Borough's neighbourhood warden programme has also had a significant impact on street cleanliness with responsibilities for fixed penalty notices and reporting abandoned vehicles.

There are over 1,100 dog and litterbins within the Borough and through partnership with Town and Parish Councils, the Council have issued over 1.5 million free 'dog poop' scoop bags from over 20 outlets.

Civic Pride Teams

Sedgefield Borough Council established Civic Pride Teams to contribute to raising the standard of street cleansing and the general environment within deprived areas of the Borough. The Civic Pride Service also includes a "Life Long Laundry" services that collects unwanted household furniture and electrical goods.

Due to its success, Civic Pride Services has been combined with street cleaning services and mainstreamed as a Borough Council service. Funding was approved for a second Civic Pride team. Throughout 2007/08, the Civic Pride teams have undertaken 624 jobs that have been an additional contribution to street scene services.

Street Cleansing Services also play a key role with supporting Sedgefield Community enforcement exercises through removal of rubbish from gardens and yards, and a general clean up of the streets and back alleys.

Grounds Maintenance

The principal services for Grounds Maintenance are grass cutting, flower and shrub bed maintenance, verge and hedge cutting. In addition, the service also includes forestry and tree works. Partnership arrangements are in place with some Town Councils to improve service delivery that include storage and operating vehicles from local facilities locations within the Borough to gain efficiency savings in both undertaking work and fuel costs.

Grounds Maintenance services are undertaken by three area teams plus one specialist tree team. The three teams between the months of March to October each year carryout approximately 15 cuts of 325 hectares of open space, 10 sports fields and 2 closed churchyards within the Borough.

High profile areas such as gateways to town centres are cut more frequently and the service has made effective use of integrating services in their work planning for example, litter picking would be undertaken before grass cutting to prevent shredding of litter on open spaces.

There are over 90 miles of tended hedges within the Borough that are cut twice yearly in partnership with local farmers. There are over 14,000 urban trees, 388,000 sq metres of shrub beds and 7,000 sq metres of flowerbeds. There are 16,000 plants and 20,000 bulbs per year planted within these areas.

The Service has increased monitoring of its work to ensure service standards are met and improved. A tree inspection and maintenance programme has been undertaken by utilising the Council's GIS system to gather intelligence to identify and log the type, condition and location of trees within the Borough. Intelligence gathered from the maintenance programme has led to an

evidence based prioritised work programme. In addition, street cleaning and grass cutting schedules are included within the GIS System to enable both officers and residents to access information on when services are being carried out within a specific area.

There are no performance targets for Grounds Maintenance but outcomes of their service delivery contribute to targets and actions contained within the Sedgefield Borough Open Space Needs Strategy, Play Strategy and Green Space Strategy.

Refuse Collection & Recycling

Refuse Collection

The Borough Council as a waste collection authority has a duty to provide a service for the collection of municipal waste, including household waste and litter. Household waste includes material collected from domestic refuse bins, plus items such as white goods, bulky waste, e.g. furniture and carpets, garden waste, clinical waste, litter, fly-tipping and parks waste. Municipal waste comprises household waste plus commercial trade waste.

As identified, responses from the 2006 Best Value Survey reported 89.4% satisfaction with the waste collection service. The Council's refuse collection service is a 'wheelie bin' system that collects from approximately 40,000 domestic properties and 750 trade premises on a weekly basis. During 2007/08, there was 403kg of household waste collected per head of population, which is a reduction from 454 kg in 2005/06.

The Service has a number of performance indicators which are monitored regularly to ensure service standards are met. An important performance indicator is the number of missed collections per 100,000. The target for 2007/08 was to miss no more than 11 per 100,000 collections. During 2007/08, performance was 17 collections missed per 100,000 collections of household waste. Resolving missed collections of waste can be a burden on resources and can cause disputes between residents and the Council as to who is at fault for not collecting their waste.

In 2008, the Council introduced a new system to record the accuracy of collecting refuse from properties within the Borough. At the point of collection, information is recorded that can identify the time and date of the collection and an explanation if a bin is not collected. The system provides live information to the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and provides accurate information that will support queries regarding missed collections.

Recycling

Recycling within the Borough is carried out by a curtilage kerbside collection scheme, six strategically placed recycling sites within the Borough, and

through waste that is processed to create a type of compost at a waste Digester.

April 2004 saw the introduction of a 'kerb-it' recycling scheme introduced in partnership with Durham City, Chester le Street and Easington District Councils to collect recyclable goods including paper, cans, steel tins and glass from all households within the Borough. The Kerb-it scheme contract was for four years and ceased in April 2008.

As identified, responses from the 2006 Best Value Survey reported 80.8% satisfaction with the collection of items for recycling but feedback reported that residents wish for more items to be included within the collection of recyclable materials.

During 2007/08, the future of recycling options was the topic of an in-depth Overview and Scrutiny review. Following its conclusions, the Review Group made a number of recommendations that included the continuation of a kerbside collection service in partnership with existing District Councils and the service be enhanced to include additional materials. An enhanced kerbside collection service was launched in April 2008 and included the collection of glass, newspapers, magazines, cans, cardboard and plastics using a 55 litre capacity green box and bag.

In comparison to the previous year, implementation of the new scheme has seen in the first five months of operating the tonnage of recyclable materials collected from the Kerbside increase by over 55%.

The percentage of the total tonnage of household waste arisings that had been recycled had increased from 12% in 2003/04 to 25.27% in 2006/07. The target for this indicator for 2007/8 was 26%. Performance for 2007/08 was 18.57%, well below target performance of 26%. This was due to operational difficulties with the Digester at Thornley, which resulted in none of the digested waste being able to be classified as recycled waste.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Taking into account all the information provided the Review group conclude that:-

- The Council has provided high quality street cleaning, grounds maintenance and waste collection services that has levels of high satisfaction with residents.
- Street cleansing and Civic Pride teams have made a valuable contribution to Borough's Community Safety Partnership enforcement exercises.
- The Council's GIS system provides valuable intelligence to assist residents and offices to access information on when services are being carried out within a specific area.
- The introduction of a live information system to record the accuracy of refuse collection has led to service improvements and accurate information to support customer service enquiries
- The introduction of an enhanced kerbside recycling collection service has seen a significant rise in collection rates that will provide a contribution to increase the overall recycling rate for the borough.

Recommendations

- 1) That the standard of street cleaning, grounds maintenance and waste collection services continues to meet high satisfaction levels from residents within the Borough.
- 2) Consideration be given to adopting initiatives to utilise Customer Relation Management and Geographical Information Systems to improve service delivery and customer service.

Open Spaces

Key Statistics

- **A Best Value Survey undertaken in 2006 reported**
that 74% of respondents within Sedgefield Borough were satisfied with Parks and Open Spaces,

89.3% of respondents within the Borough considered that Parks and Open Spaces had improved since the last survey in 2003/04, and

79.6% of respondents had used parks and open spaces within the last 12 months.
- **The number of Local Nature Reserves within the Borough has increased from 1 to 6 since 2003.**
- **National Accredited Green Flag Status was achieved for Bishop Middleham Wildlife Garden**

What we know about Open Spaces within Sedgefield Borough

Background

The Borough enjoys a semi-rural location and extensive areas of green space. There are well-maintained parks within each major centre and strong investment amongst local Town and Parish Councils in Britain in Bloom awards and enhanced horticulture services.

The 2006 Best Value General Survey identified that the proportion of residents who were satisfied with parks and open spaces in the Borough was 74%, a significant increase from a baseline performance of 49% in 2000/01. 89.3% considered them to have improved since 2003/2004. 79.6% of all respondents reported having used 'parks and open spaces' in the last 12 months. This is a similar level of usage as reported in the 2003 General Survey when 76.4% of respondents had used these services in the last year.

Current and Planned Activity

Open Spaces and biodiversity

Open spaces have an important role to play in meeting a range of objectives that include providing a resource of biodiversity, promoting health and well-being, attracting visitors to an area and achieving sustainable development.

Local Authorities have a statutory role in managing green space i.e. to sustain biodiversity so that it can support a wide variety of plants and animal species in their natural habitats.

A number of policies and legislation exist at a national, regional and county level to encourage a holistic approach to green space management. This includes improving access to the countryside and setting targets for wildlife and the number of local nature reserves that are managed for improved biodiversity. Significant improvements have been made with regard to developing natural green space and biodiversity within the Borough and are aimed to comply with the following policies and strategies.

Green Flag Awards

The 'Our Town and Cities: the Future' (known as the Urban White Paper) places managing parks and open spaces at the heart of the 'urban renaissance' and recommended that local authorities achieve the national



Green Flag Award Presentation

accredited Green Flag award for management of parks and open spaces. The Council has demonstrated partnership working in assisting and advising Town and Parish councils within the borough to apply for Green Flag status.

Through active community involvement and partnership working

with Bishop Middleham Parish Council a converted allotment site in Bishop

Middleham was developed into a Wildlife Garden. The development of the Wildlife Garden provides valuable greenspace for a variety of habitats and species including great crested newts and in 2007, the Wildlife Garden successfully achieved the Green Flag award.

Following the achievement of Green Flag Status for Bishop Middleham Wildlife Garden the Borough Council has assisted a number of the Town Council's in applying for Green Flag Status for their parks and open spaces.

Open Space Needs Assessment

The *Rural White Paper* focused attention on improving public access to the countryside and set targets for wildlife and improved biodiversity. This Paper was followed by the Government's '*Biodiversity Strategy for England: working with the grain of nature*' of which the key aim is to halt or reverse decline in

biodiversity. This was mandated by Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Notes 3 (Housing), PPG 17 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation) and Planning Policy Statement 9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation).

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 is the key driver to local authorities publishing Green Space Strategies. It states that local authorities must undertake assessments of the extent to which open spaces meet the needs of and benefit people, wildlife, biodiversity and the wider environment.

Sedgefield Borough Council commissioned a comprehensive Open Space Needs Assessment (OSNA) to establish the demand for, supply of open space within the Borough, and assess its quality and accessibility. The findings from the survey were published in January 2007. The OSNA survey identified supply of open space in the Borough across the following five types:- parks and gardens, natural green space, outdoor sports space, children and young people's space and informal green space. The table below outlines supply for each settlement area.

| Settlement | Typology | Supply |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ferryhill | Parks and Gardens | Significant under supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Under supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Sufficient Supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Under supply |
| Chilton | Parks & Gardens | Significant under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Sufficient provision |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Sufficient provision |
| | Children & Young People's Space | Sufficient provision |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient provision |
| Bishop Middleham | Parks & Gardens | Significant under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Children & Young People's Space | Under supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Insignificant under supply |
| West Cornforth | Parks and Gardens | Under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Under supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Under supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Under supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| Fishburn | Parks and Gardens | Under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Under supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Under supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| Trimdons | Parks and Gardens | Under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Significant supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Under supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| Shildon | Parks and Gardens | Under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Under supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Under supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Significant supply |

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Newton Aycliffe | Parks and Gardens | Significant under supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Significant supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Significant supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Under supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| Sedgefield | Parks and Gardens | Sufficient supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| Spennymoor | Parks and Gardens | Sufficient supply |
| | Natural Green Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Outdoor Sports Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Children and Young People's Space | Sufficient supply |
| | Informal Green Space | Sufficient supply |

The OSNA recommended the development of a Green Space Strategy to identify a vision for the Borough containing an analysis of the strategic context and current situation regarding the Borough's Green Spaces.

Green Space Strategy

Green space strategies establish a vision for the use of green spaces within a given area. They establish the goals that a local authority or partnership would like to achieve through the management of green space, and identify the resources and protocols necessary to achieve these goals (*CABE Space, undated*).

Sedgefield Borough Council's Green Space Strategy is currently being prepared and is scheduled to be completed by March 2009. It will not only identify how green spaces can be improved but will create a vision for the long term management of our greenspaces, whilst harnessing the potential for green space to play a role in providing benefits to wildlife, public health and education.

Data Intelligence

Durham Biodiversity Partnership has been commissioned to carry out a study to collate data on protected, as well as priority species and habitats within the Borough. The study is due to be completed by January 2009 and its findings will be vitally important to aid the Council and new Unitary Council in meeting legislative requirements and planning policy (PPS9- Biodiversity and Geological Conservation).

In addition, mapping of the ecological corridors and natural greenspace distribution has been uploaded onto the Council's GIS system 'Sustainable Communities' theme.

Legislation

A number of changes have been made to the Habitats Regulations 1994, which increase the legal protection given to European Protected Species (EPS) in England. Under the former Habitats Regulations it is an offence to deliberately kill or cause significant disturbance to these protected species, to deliberately destroy their eggs, or to destroy or damage a breeding site or

resting place used by them. The amendment now means that it is also an offence if you accidentally damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 has also been amended to reflect the changes to the Habitats Regulations, and a number of species now receive increased protection, including the water vole (April 2008).

The implications of these amendments have led to consideration to be given to the presence of protected species and follow good practice guidance to avoid committing an offence. In some cases, development/management practices may need to be modified or rescheduled to a less sensitive time of year and where this is not possible or adequate, operators may need to apply for a license to remain within the law.

The European Protected Species (EPS) found within the Borough are

- Bats (all species)
- Great Crested Newts
- Otters

The *Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006* placed a duty on Local Authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity as part of their activities under section 40 of the Act. The new duty makes biodiversity a natural consideration in policy forming and the decision making process in public bodies. It stresses the need to put biodiversity as a core component of sustainable development, where it underpins economic development and prosperity and offers a range of quality of life benefits.

To raise awareness, the Council has published a document entitled 'Biodiversity and the law how it affects you' to inform staff and elected Members and is available in hard copy and from the Council's website.

Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

A *National Indicator 197- Improved Local Biodiversity* was introduced in April 2008. It requires Local Authorities to report annually on the number of Local Wildlife Sites, also known as County Wildlife Sites, they actively manage to improve biodiversity.

Local Nature Reserves within the Borough and have increased from one in 2003 to six in 2008. These are located at Ferryhill Carrs, Byerley Park (Newton Aycliffe), The Moor (Newton Aycliffe), Castle Eden Walkway, Bishop Middleham Wildlife Garden and Cow Plantation. In addition, a partnership has been created to provide advice to Great Aycliffe Town Council in the management of two of their Local Wildlife Sites at Aycliffe Nature Park and School Aycliffe Wetland

In managing these spaces the service has two overall aims, to improve biodiversity and to ensure good public access and involvement.

A vital contributing factor to the development of Local Nature Reserves has been partnership working and the creation of a number of community groups (known as friends groups) that were set up for each of the reserves. Friends Groups are very active with members volunteering to carry out practical improvements on their respective reserves. In total



LNR Volunteers

approximately 90 members of the community are involved in the management of Nature Reserves. It is essential that communities are involved in the development and management of their countryside to help to increase local pride 'ownership' and thereby reduce anti-social activity through informal policing and applying for recognition through various award schemes.

A volunteer programme established by the Council's Countryside Team ensures that members of the public can be involved in their local countryside. The volunteer programme includes

- Countryside Volunteers
- A Volunteer Warden Programme with approximately 20 volunteers to which the majority are also Friends Group members.
- Volunteer Tree Wardens that is operated with the Council's Tree Preservation Officer.
- Volunteer walk leaders, which is operated with the Council's 'Walking the Way to Health' Officer.

Awards

The following awards have been achieved for Local Nature Reserves within the Borough.

Bishop Middleham Wildlife Garden –

- Conservation Award (Durham Wildlife Trust) 2004;
- Environment Award (Durham County Council) 2005;
- Green Flag Award 2007

Byerley Park

- Environment Award (Durham County Council) 2008

Ferryhill Carrs

- Northumbria in Bloom (Durham Villages Trophy – Best Conservation Project 2008) – Gold Award
- Northumbria in Bloom award (Best Conservation Project) 2005.

Further development of Local Nature Reserves

A significant number of improvements have been made to developing the Borough's Local Nature Reserves. However, there is potential to improve access and biodiversity through further development of existing reserves and to create new Local nature reserves within the Borough. The following have been identified as potential areas of development. It is intended that detailed information will be included within the Borough's Green Space Strategy.

Ferryhill Carrs

Following a consultation exercise and in partnership with Network Rail and Durham County Council a formal Planning Application is to be submitted to develop a pedestrian bridge over the East Coast Mainline to improve access to The Carrs Local Nature Reserve in Ferryhill.



An access point to the The Carrs LNR at Ferryhill

The Moor LNR

There is potential to develop the Moor LNR will enable the reserve to include a sustainable urban drainage system for the new housing development. The sustainable drainage system

will aim to mimic the natural drainage of a site to minimise the impact of urban development on the flooding and pollution of waterways and provide an attractive feature, which can also have a number of biodiversity benefits.

Newton Aycliffe

A new LNR could be created for Newton Aycliffe. The proposed site is located between Aycliffe Village and Newton Aycliffe Industrial Park (behind Bickford Terrace). The site is currently owned by Sedgefield Borough Council and provides an important buffer, as well as informal recreation resource for local residents. A culverted stretch of Demon's Beck currently runs through the site, and has resident population of water vole. The site has huge potential to be enhanced in terms of access and provision of site furniture, as well as potential for biodiversity improvements.

Fishburn Natural Reserve & Trimdon Natural Reserve

The sites are located on former colliery land owned by Durham County Council. This land provides the potential to establish two nature reserves that are managed by natural processes rather than traditional means, with near wild breeds of livestock allowed to roam un-impeded throughout the sites. In addition, the sites will also provide good public access, interpretation and educational resources.

Byerley Park Local Nature Reserve Habitat Improvements

There is potential to undertake various habitat improvements within Byerley Park that could include a wetland creation and woodland restoration.

Country Park Ferryhill/West Cornforth

There is potential to develop a large scale project to create a country park/national nature reserve by joining up land currently owned by the Borough Council and Durham County Council. The site would incorporate the restored Thrislington quarry and Thrislington National Nature Reserve (Special Area of Conservation), Ferryhill Carrs and the woodland across the mainline.

The aim of the project would be to increase and improve public areas, reduce anti-social activity, and create a site, which would have the potential to attract tourism into the County.

Trimdon Three Villages – Promoted Green Route

Through enhancing existing public rights of way there is potential to create a circular route between the villages of the three Trimdons. The proposed route would incorporate a number of important habitats (woodland and wetland) and the establishment of a new wildlife garden/play area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Taking into account all the information provided the Review Group conclude that:-

- Satisfaction levels with Parks and Open Spaces reflect investment in the Borough.
- The Borough Council has been effective in working with Parish and Town Councils and volunteers within the Community Volunteer Programme to achieve numerous awards and the continued development of Local Nature Reserves within the Borough.
- The Green Space Strategy for the Borough will create a vision for the long-term management of green spaces and highlight the potential benefits to wildlife, public health and education.
- The Council has taken effective steps to ensure that legislation regarding biodiversity has been widely communicated to raise awareness and importance of changes to legislation.
- The study being undertaken by Durham Biodiversity Partnership will provide data on protected and priority species within the Borough to enable legislative and planning policy requirements to be met.

Recommendations

- 3) Green Spaces within the Borough continue to be actively managed in accordance with the Sedgefield Borough Green Space Strategy.
- 4) Local Nature Reserves within the Borough and the Community Volunteer programme continue to be developed and supported.
- 5) Findings from the study being undertaken by Durham Biodiversity Partnership be taken into account when considering the development of biodiversity projects and planning applications to ensure that all legislation and planning policy requirements are met.

Transport

Key Statistics

The 2001 Census reported

- 73.1% of residents with Sedgefield Borough travelled to work by private motor vehicle (car, taxi or motorbike), *compared to a national average of 65.27%* and
- Usage of public transport for travel to work was 7.2%, compared to national average of 11%.

The 2006 Best Value General Survey reported

- 70.92% of respondents considered that public transport in the Borough has got better or stayed the same in the previous three years, *mirroring the national average of 70.49%, and*
- The proportion who thought that the level of traffic congestion within the Borough had got better or stayed the same is 51.57%.
- Over £1 million of investment for a range of improvements to be made within the Borough over a five year period including accessibility and road safety schemes through the Durham County Council Local Transport Plan

What we know about transport within Sedgefield Borough

The Borough's road infrastructure provides access to the Region, the A1M Motorway travels through the Borough with access junctions located at Bradbury and Newton Aycliffe. In addition, the A167 provides a link through the Borough to travel to the town of Darlington in the South and Durham in the North. The A689 provides a link to the A19 and the A177 provides a linkage to Stockton and Durham.

There are two Railway Stations located within the Borough these are at Shildon and Newton Aycliffe and provide rail travel from within the Borough to the Region.

Residents' methods of travelling to work were identified in the 2001 Census. The proportion of the population who travelled over 20 km to work was 12.4%, compared to 14.16% nationally. Travelling to work by private motor vehicle (car, taxi or motorbike) was 73.1% compared to a national average of 65.27%. The Borough's wards with the highest percentage of people using a private car to get to work are Woodham (46.26%), Greenfield Middridge (44.19%) and Sedgefield (43.99%).

Travelling to work by public transport was 7.2%, below the national average of 11%, and walking/cycling was 11.9% compared to the national average of 13.3%.

In 2005, Sedgefield Local Strategic Partnership commissioned JMP consultants to undertake a survey with stakeholders and partners on transport and highlighted the following issues within the Borough.

Access to health

- *Hospitals are outside the Borough and can mean difficult journeys for patients and visitors*

Access to education

- *Reduced access to educational courses on an evening due to limited bus services*
- *Same day travel from one educational establishment to another costly for young people*

Access to employment

- *Public transport to industrial estates is not adequate*

Crosscutting issues

- *Community transport, particularly for older people and people with disabilities is limited*
- *Expense of transport for the young, elderly, disabled and people from deprived areas*

Findings from the 2006 Best Value General Survey reported 70.92% of respondents considered that public transport in the Borough has got better or stayed the same in the previous three years, mirroring the national average of 70.49%. The proportion of respondents within the Borough who thought that the level of traffic congestion within the Borough had got better or stayed the same is 51.57%.

Current and Planned Activity

Local Transport Plan

The strategy and associated policies to improve transport within the Borough are identified within Durham County Council's second 5 year Local Transport Plan (LTP2) that covers the period 2006 -2011. The plan was prepared in partnership with all District Councils within the County, Local Strategic Partnerships, main operators and providers of transport and the public.

The main aims of LTP2 is to address national priorities between central and local government, better accessibility and public transport, improve road safety, contribute to the quality of life and health and reduce problems of congestion and air quality within County Durham.

In comparison to the previous Local Transport Plan, LTP 2 places greater emphasis on accessibility together with a new bus strategy. In addition, it has been integrated with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and engagement with Local Strategic Partnerships through Area Programmes and less reliance on major schemes as solutions.

However, two major LTP 1 projects did contribute to improving the quality of strategic routeways and corridors within the Borough with the completion of the A689 Sedgefield to Wynyard Dual Carriageway and A167 Chilton Bypass.

Sedgefield Borough has strong links with Durham County Council to deliver the second Local Transport Plan. Through the Sedgefield Programme, a range of improvements will be made over a five year period including accessibility and road safety schemes with all schemes totalling over £1 million. This work was carried out in partnership with public, private and voluntary sector organisations in the locality and through consultation with members of the public.

To date LTP2 projects carried out within the Borough include:

Road Safety Schemes with chevron advanced direction signs at Woodham Roundabout and a pedestrian refuge island in Sedgefield Village. In addition an electronic sign will be fitted near to East Howell in order to reduce accidents on the bridge near to the site.

Access improvements including disabled access improvements at Lilburn Close, Shildon and Footpath links Broom Road, Ferryhill and Filmco Corner, Sedgefield

Public Transport improvements at Newton Aycliffe & Heighington Rail Stations, a new shelter and construction of a level boarding area in Sedgefield and various Bus Stop Improvements Ferryhill, Shildon and West Cornforth.

Community Transport Operators

Community Transport Operators are independent of private or public organisations and are non-profit organisations. They have the ability to plug

many gaps to provide a valuable service by providing safe, accessible transport solutions to their local communities that enables them access work, training and social activities that may have otherwise been prevented by cost or lack of public transport.

There are a number of Community Transport Operators within the Borough including Cornforth Partnership, Social Resource Centre and Shildon Community Bus Group. Communicare, a provider based in Easington, are also now working with other community transport operators within Sedgefield Borough.

The Cornforth Partnership located in West Cornforth currently manages a Community Transport Scheme to give residents across Sedgefield Borough access to a variety of services, by offering safe and cost effective community transport. The scheme has two 17-seater minibuses that are driven by Midas trained volunteer drivers and is currently used by 49 member organisations to provide transport for local and regional journeys.



Shildon Community Bus has operated in Shildon and the surrounding areas for over 20 years. The scheme operates under a Section 19 Bus Permit for the use of voluntary and community organisations. It has recently received £20,000 of investment through the

LTP in addition to funding they are putting in themselves to purchase an additional Community minibus.

The Social Resource Centre, based in Ferryhill, also offer CT for local residents specifically around health related trips. They have a contract with NHS County Durham for this work and are now linking up with Communicare to meet additional need. This partnership has also secured £22,000 of capital funding from LTP2 funding in addition to capital funding raised by the partnership to purchase a fully accessible vehicle. It is to be noted that whilst capital funding is available it can be difficult for Community Transport Operators to obtain funding for revenue support.

Access to Services Group

Sedgefield Borough LSP has established an Access to Services Group which aims to address key issues facing residents of the Borough in relation to transport and accessibility issues. In addition, the Group works towards the sustainability of community transport and seeks to influence LTP2 funding within the Borough. The Group is comprised of representatives of Sedgefield Borough Council, Durham County Council, County Durham Primary Care Trust, Community and Voluntary Sector, Community Transport Operators and Bus Operators.

With regard to addressing transport issues, the Access to Services Group has liaised with relevant partners to create an action plan to address issues identified by the JMP Study. Actions to date have included working with NHS

organisations to make public transport timetables available to patients and visitors and promote the awareness of Community Transport Schemes within the Borough.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- Transport within the Borough is an issue and the JMP study has highlighted topics that are to be progressed through LTP2 and the Access to Services Group.
- Through funding to support Community Transport and undertaking specific projects the Local Transport Plan2 has contributed to enhancing transport provision across the Borough.
- Community Transport Schemes within the Borough provide transport solutions that enable local communities' to have access to work, training and social activities.
- The Access to Services Group plays a vital role to engage with representatives from key partner agencies to address barriers to accessing transport within the Borough.

Recommendations

- 6) Solutions to address transport and enhance the provision of transport within the Borough continue to be provided through delivery of the Local Transport Plan 2.
- 7) That engagement continues through local Access to Services Groups to address barriers to accessing transport.

