

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 9th January, 2008.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell (Chair), Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

Officers: I. Robinson (DNS), P. Mennear, M. Jones (LD)

Also in attendance: A. Slater (British Waterways), J. Whyte (Yarm Town Council), A. Guest (Yarm School)

Apologies: Cllr Hilary Aggio, Cllr Jackie Earl, Cllr Mrs Kath Nelson, Cllr Mick Womphrey

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

2 Minutes of the Meeting Held 28th November 2007

Consideration was given to the content of the draft minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2007.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2007 be forwarded to Council for consideration.

3 Minutes of the Meeting Held 5th December 2007

Consideration was given to the content of the draft minutes of the meeting held on 5th December 2007.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th December 2007 be forwarded to Council for consideration.

4 Review of River Based Leisure Facilities

As part of the review of River Based Leisure Facilities Members received evidence from Alan Slater (British Waterways), Parish Cllr John Whyte (Chair of Recreation, Yarm Town Council) and Mr Andy Guest (Director of Games, Yarm School).

Following correspondence in the local media surrounding the efficiency of the fish pass at the Tees Barrage and correspondence received from campaign groups including the Anglers Conservation Association, A Slater was invited to update the Committee on the current situation. Since construction the Tees Barrage had been under the ownership of various organisations and was currently under the remit of British Waterways. A radio tagging monitoring programme would be necessary to provide conclusive evidence as to the routes taken by migratory salmon through the Barrage. So far a comprehensive programme had not taken place however British Waterways are now under a legal duty to do so.

A Slater outlined some of the factors involved in fish migration and the Barrage. He noted that the number of fish in the river since the Barrage was put in place

had increased year on year and the rod catch figures demonstrated this. The Barrage had a positive effect on the water quality of the river.

The Barrage cleaned and controlled the water flow in the river and provided a safe area for fish. The Fish Pass was one cubic metre in size and created to help fish flow into the river when there was not enough water to get over the main gates. However, if there was enough water to get over the main gates, this would be the way of entry for fish as they would always choose the direct route. The fish pass was effectively a 'back-up' system for when this was not possible. It was also thought that fish travelled through the canoe course although the monitoring programme would be conclusive on this.

A distinction was made between coarse fishing and migratory fish. A. Slater stated that the River Tees was the best coarse fishery in the country and those who fished for migrating fish/salmon were in the minority. The Barrage allowed the Tees to be a 'Triple A' standard in terms of coarse fishing as it prevented salt water from moving upstream.

A Slater believed that the campaign groups did not take into account various environmental factors. He informed the Committee that the bedrock of the Tees meant that the river was particularly susceptible to climate change. He noted that Salmon could not survive in water temperature higher than 20 degrees Celsius, and therefore when the River Tees was warmer the fish would not enter. However the Barrage did not have an effect on this, and temperatures were also high above the impounded stretch immediately affected by the river.

The number of Seals that lived by the river had increased, which also affected the number of Salmon as they fed on the fish. A. Slater noted that it was planned to put two electronic 'Seal Scarers' in place to confront this issue.

A. Slater compared the River Tees to the River Tyne, which was the best Salmon fishing river in the North of England. He stated that the River Tees was still recovering from being the most heavily polluted river in the north and was 25 years behind the Tyne in terms of water quality improvements.

J. Whyte, Chair of Recreation, Yarm Town Council, and A. Guest, Director of Games, Yarm School, informed the Committee of their views on use of the river in the Yarm vicinity and put forward their case for a leisure facility for canoeists at the Old Vinegar Works Site at Eaglescliffe/Yarm. J. Whyte stated that Yarm Town Council were concerned that the river was not being used to its full potential at Yarm and noted that the Navigation Study in 2002 identified this site as the best location for a leisure facility. There was a landing block at the site that was built by the Environment Agency when they were working on flood defences, and this could be used by canoeists subject to further works. A. Guest added that there was ample room at the site to accommodate a building to store equipment, and changing rooms.

J. Whyte and A. Guest noted that there were other sites where a leisure facility could be built, however believed that these sites would not be as suitable as the Old Vinegar Works site. It was noted that any sites close to the existing watersports clubs on the river could lead to difficulties when they applied for funding, due to the desire of governing bodies to avoid duplication, and that

additional facilities would need to be developed nearer to Yarm than the Stockton end. However, it was thought there may be scope for at least a slipway between Stockton and Yarm.

The Committee discussed the issue of public access to the Old Vinegar Works site via the main road. Ownership of the land was also discussed, and it was believed that if Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council owned the site then it should be used to its best potential. It was also commented that the site should be reserved for leisure. I. Robinson was requested to seek further information on the site, and other possible sites for a leisure facility.

The type of structure needed at the site was discussed, and noted that a slipway should be located closer to the railway bridge than the road bridge. It was queried how canoe clubs sustain themselves and it was noted that many clubs hire out their buildings as function venues. It was noted that clubs could also hire out mountain bikes etc.

A Guest stated that he believed there was a demand for access to the calmer sections of the river nearer Yarm for the more recreational user who might be affected by conflicting uses and the more serious sporting user in the Barrage/Town Centre area, and also improved access would allow for an increase in touring rowing. He stated that Stockton and Thornaby Canoe Club were often moving their base and J Whyte stated that member of the River Tees Watersports Centre had capacity issues. I. Robinson suggested that evidence would need to be gathered to support the need for any leisure facility in Yarm and to develop a business case in order to make sure that the river could sustain another canoe club. He stated that he would arrange a meeting with J. Whyte, A. Guest, and A. Slater to discuss this further.

CONCLUDED that:

1. I. Robinson to forward further information on possible sites.
2. the evidence received be noted and thanks be extended to the witnesses for their contribution to the Committee's work.

5 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer noted a need to schedule further meetings in February/March 2008, and stated that he would forward dates to members.

The Scrutiny Officer also noted that the Scrutiny Liaison Forum would be meeting in February to discuss future scrutiny reviews, and asked for suggestion from the members.

CONCLUDED that:

1. The Scrutiny Officer would forward details of further meetings.
2. Members would forward suggestions for the next review.