

## Appendix 2

### EIT Review: Sport, Leisure & Recreation

#### The Role of Groundwork in Greenspace Regeneration

##### **Background**

1. Groundwork North East is a charitable organisation which delivers a wide range of environmental regeneration projects and programmes across the region, including all five Tees Valley local authority areas. There is no one single model for how Groundwork operates in these different areas, and there are variations in the partnership arrangements with each local authority; for example, with some providing 'core funding' to Groundwork and others engaging Groundwork on a project-by-project basis, as is the case in Stockton. Groundwork also works with many other public, private and third sector partners.
2. At the meeting of the Arts Leisure and Culture Select Committee on 21 July 2010 it was agreed that as part of the Sport Leisure and Recreation EIT Review officers should reconsider the findings of the previous study undertaken in 2004 "to examine the need and opportunities for a Groundwork Trust operation in the Tees Valley, north of the River Tees"<sup>1</sup>.

##### **Groundwork Feasibility Study 2004**

3. The study was commissioned by the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit, in conjunction with Groundwork UK and the Borough Councils of Darlington, Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees, and carried out by the BE Group. The Phase 1 report summarises the findings of a desktop review of relevant policies, strategies and plans, together with a summary of the detailed consultations with all key partners and stakeholders.
4. The Phase 1 study reflects an overall view that:  
*"Groundwork is seen as an asset in that:*
  - *It is an effective vehicle for accessing additional financial resources.*
  - *It can draw in additional expertise, based on national experience.*
  - *It introduces another organisation with the capability to mobilise local community participation and capacity building.*
  - *It is an organisation with experience of working in partnerships.*
  - *It is independent of the local authority sector".*

However, the report also highlights a common message that:

*"Groundwork should not and must not replace or undermine the activities and responsibilities of any existing agency or organisation. The role must be to enhance the existing activities, adding value, or to introduce solutions to known un-addressed gaps."*

In the case of Stockton there was some concern that:

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<sup>1</sup> Groundwork were already operating at this time in Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland

*“Groundwork working in the Stockton area may result in the duplication of services and a false raising of expectations and aspirations amongst local communities. Groundwork was perceived as being successful where a Local Authority has large service gaps, which is not the case for Stockton Borough Council, which has an ‘Excellent’ rating”.*

5. Concerns were also raised at that time concerning the long term management and sustainability of projects undertaken by Groundwork.
6. On the other hand the study did recognise that due to Groundwork’s charitable status it was *“able to tap into funding streams that are currently inaccessible to the Borough Council”.*
7. Overall the initial research found *“strong support for the principle of a Groundwork presence in Darlington and Hartlepool”*, while the situation in Stockton was *“less clear”*. The report suggests a good level of support amongst regional and sub-regional organisations, and from Stockton’s community and voluntary sector groups. However, it states that from consultations with Stockton Council *“there appears to be only limited support, and limited evidence, of where Groundwork might have a contribution to make”.*
8. On the basis of this Phase 1 report no further feasibility work was undertaken at that time.

#### **Current situation and future options**

9. Since 2004 there have been changes in the way Groundwork operates, and it has increasingly developed capacity to operate outside the former Groundwork Trust boundaries. In 2009 the various local Groundwork Trusts were amalgamated to form Groundwork North East.
10. Over the past 2-3 years Stockton Borough Council has developed a closer working relationship with Groundwork. This has increased local capacity to deliver greenspace regeneration projects, and has added value to projects and programmes being delivered by the Council.
11. Most significantly Groundwork currently lead on the delivery of some high-profile projects under the Stockton River Corridors Programme (the Programme Manager being funded jointly by Groundwork, Stockton Council, British Waterways and the Environment Agency). Projects include Phase 1 of the Tees Heritage Park and River Routes in Stockton. Groundwork have also been commissioned by the Council to undertake other ‘stand-alone’ projects (e.g. the regeneration of Harewood Pleasure Gardens in Thornaby) and Groundwork also deliver schemes on non-local authority land in partnership with other public, private and third sector partners.
12. However, it should also be recognised that the Council itself has an excellent track record in delivering similar greenspace regeneration schemes ‘in-house’, with well-established processes in place to ensure effective, joined-up working between the relevant sections of the Council. The Council has developed sound working relationships with local community organisations and partnerships, and through partnership working has also been able to secure significant external funding (as stated in the Baseline Report, in recent years the Countryside & Greenspace team has secured £6 of external funding for every £1 of SBC capital expenditure).

13. In the future therefore it is proposed that the Council should continue to work with Groundwork as a project partner where this delivers added value, but also retain 'in-house' capacity to develop and deliver schemes.
14. The Council's partnership with Groundwork should be kept under review to ensure there is no 'duplication of services' as highlighted in the 2004 study. However, the recent success of Groundwork in securing external funding and delivering projects with local communities (with a degree of independence from the Council) suggests the organisation should have an on-going role to play in local greenspace regeneration projects and possibly other environmental regeneration activity in the Borough.