

## Environment Select Committee

A meeting of Environment Select Committee was held on Monday, 3rd November, 2014.

**Present:** Cllr Nigel Cooke(Chairman), Cllr David Wilburn(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Jean Kirby, Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg, Cllr Steve Walmsley, Cllr Mick Womphrey, Cllr Bill Woodhead

**Officers:** Graham Clingan(DNS), Craig Willows(CFYA), Graham Birtle, Jenna McDonald(LDS)

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** Cllr Ray McCall

### **1 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **2 Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Maureen Rigg declared an interest as a Member of Friends of Preston Park.

### **3 Minutes for Signature - 23rd June 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2014 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

AGREED that the minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **4 Draft Minutes - 28th July 2014**

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 28th July 2014.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

### **5 Review of the Future of Countryside Sites**

Members received a performance review on the future of countryside sites from the Countryside & Greenspace Development Manager. The report provided Members with an overview of performance information relating to the Council owned countryside sites.

The Committee was asked to view the report giving consideration to the significant budget reductions made with Direct Services and across other service areas in recent years. It was highlighted that other operational budgets had been reduced, limiting capacity to manage and maintain Stockton Borough Council's(SBC) open space assets, including countryside sites.

Members were provided with information on each of the following areas:

- Development of sites and facilities
- Management/Maintenance
- Promotion/Visitor Information

Members noted the following key points:

- Of a total capital spend of £860,800, approximately 80% had been secured from grants and other external funding sources
- The involvement of partner organisations such as Groundwork, Nacro, Probation Services and other non-commercial organisations enabled SBC to deliver projects at a relatively low cost.
- It was important to consider the future management and maintenance implications of capital schemes. Some schemes may result in increased revenue costs, but those which replaced high-maintenance or deteriorating assets could reduce revenue costs.
- Countryside sites required management interventions and on-going maintenance
- It was standard practice to set out objectives for a site in some form of management plan which identified the broad management approaches that would be adopted and the specific actions and maintenance operations which would help to achieve those objectives
- Due to resource issues, it had not been possible to allocate staff to prepare and update site management plans. Consequently the plans were out of date and did not reflect the level of staffing and other resources currently available to manage and maintain these sites.  
It was highlighted that without management plans in place it was difficult to measure performance
- The Green Flag Award Scheme was a benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK. Between 2005 and 2011 various SBC parks held Green Flag status. Members heard that in order to apply for Green Flag status, management plans were required which meant that SBC had not been able to apply for Green Flag status since 2011.
- Data from the Borough's Residents Survey and Viewpoint Panel demonstrated that the public were generally highly satisfied with the parks and green spaces in the Borough
- Approximately half of the Borough's residents visited parks and green spaces at least once a month and the vast majority of residents visited these places during the course of a year
- Of the 56 designated Local Wildlife and Geological Sites within the Borough, 18 were owned by SBC, with 14 in positive conservation management. It was highlighted that with reducing resources, the Council's future ability to manage and maintain the wildlife value of these and other sites may diminish.
- Individual volunteers carried out a number of tasks at the Borough's country parks and other countryside sites. It was highlighted that the number of volunteer days had reduced since 2011

- Providing supervision and support for volunteers was a time consuming role, but had clear benefits for the council and individuals
- Some 'corporate volunteering' took place on countryside sites, and local friends groups also got involved in project work and other aspects of developing and managing sites.
- The Ranger Team formerly ran events programmes and supported a range of community activities and educational visits. This activity no longer took place, although some events and visits still occurred without the direct involvement of the ranger staff.
- A recent Viewpoint survey showed great variations in the public's knowledge of different countryside sites. Many more people visited the main country parks compared to smaller wildlife sites, but there were also significant differences in the popularity of those country parks
- Information on countryside sites was provided on the Council's website. Site leaflets were largely out of print and in some cases out of date. Some on-site signage was of high-quality, but again some of this information was out of date and there was a lack of consistency in the design and appearance of this signage.

AGREED that the performance information be noted by Members.

**6 Work Programme**

AGREED that the information was noted.

**7 Chair's Update**

The Chair provided no update.