

Environment Select Committee

A meeting of Environment Select Committee was held on Monday, 8th December, 2014.

Present: Cllr Nigel Cooke(Chairman), Cllr David Wilburn(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Mick Womphrey

Officers: Graham Clingan (Countryside & Greenspace Development Manager), Craig Willows (CFYA Service Manager), Graham Birtle, Jenna McDonald(LDS)

Also in attendance: Brian Scrafton(Chair, Friends of Ropner Park), Dave Munt(Chair, Billingham Angling Club), John Mann(Administrator, Teesside Environmental Trust), David Kitchen (Chair, Teesside Environmental Trust), Jeremy Garside (Chief Executive, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust)

Apologies: Cllr Jean Kirby, Cllr Ray McCall, Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg, Cllr Bill Woodhead

1 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation Procedure was noted.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes for Signature - 28th July 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th July 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 - 3rd November 2014

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2014.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

5 Review of the Future of Countryside Sites

Members of the Committee were provided with background information on the following Countryside Sites:

Billingham Angling Club(BAC):

- BAC had a link with Stockton Youth Services and would like to explore this further.

- Although BAC had a positive working relationship with Stockton Borough Council(SBC), it was highlighted that there were concerns relating to the payment of legal fees due to lack of partner funding elsewhere

Friends of Ropner Park(FoRP):

- Members heard that grants had been spent on facilities and attractions such as the playground, pavilion, public toilets and the Band Stand.
- FoRP was run by a Committee of volunteers, except for the café staff, who worked from a small budget. Any profits are used to pay for concerts in the park. They rely on the council for the maintenance of the park.
- The pavilion, where the café was located, was becoming too small for the high volume of business.

Tees Valley Wildlife Trust(TVWT):

- TVWT was an independent charity that covered the whole of the Tees Valley and offered education and community engagement activities as well as land management.
- TVWT worked as much as possible in partnership with SBC, and needed to work hard to generate funds.
- Work undertaken by TVWT had been successful despite economic difficulties

Teesside Environmental Trust(TET)

- TET had a strong focused vision to create a nature reserve of international importance at Salthome
- In 2013, 4,000 school children visited Salthome and the site has won the United Kingdom Heritage Lottery Award for Education.
- Salthome had over 100 active volunteers who work on specific jobs/projects.

Members raised the following points and questions in relation to the four sites :

- What functions were best delivered by the Local Authority? The Chairs of BAC an FoRP informed Members that the best functions delivered dealt with insurance matters, legal issues and funding
- Regarding any support from SBC to produce advertisement leaflets, it was highlighted that SBC funded and printed the newsletters for Ropner Park
- Questions were asked relating to the scope for Partnership involvement. Members heard that there were great opportunities for more volunteers and there was potential to expand and contribute to existing sites
- Views were sought regarding development plans, and possible changes to the models used. It was highlighted that the Chief Executive of TVWT would have left more responsibility for overall land ownership and management with SBC

The Committee asked the representatives from the four sites for views on Green Flag Status. Responses included:

- The maintenance of Green Flag status could create too much pressure on the countryside site

- Green Flag status was perhaps less relevant in relation to wildlife and work within the voluntary sector
- Many people were not aware of what Green Flag status meant
- Green Flag status was a useful educational tool when making people aware of the environment and could also be used for benchmarking

The Administrator from TET highlighted a range of issues relating to points which should be addressed before taking on the responsibility of any countryside sites. The range of issues included:

- Managing public expectations
- Governance and management arrangements
- Skills and access
- Capital and revenue funding
- Land Tenure

The CFYA Service Manager informed Members that there had been significant reductions in resources in the past four years within CFYA and staff numbers had reduced from 16 to 3. CFYA had registered volunteers but not all are actively engaged. With the reduction in staff it has reduced the capacity for supervising volunteers and has limited the delivery of effective volunteer days.

AGREED that the information be noted.

6 Work Programme

Consideration was given to the work programme.

AGREED that the information be noted.

7 Chair's Update

The Chair provided no update.