

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 7th December, 2015.

Present: Cllr Derrick Brown(Chairman), Cllr Sonia Bailey(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Bill Woodhead

Officers: John Angus, Mike Chicken, Graham Clingan, Jamie McCann, Dale Rowbotham, Marc Stephenson, Graham Birtle, Sarah Whaley(LD)

Also in attendance: Representatives from Guide Dogs for the Blind and RNIB.

Apologies:

1 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation Procedure was noted

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cunningham declared a personal interest in relation to item Monitoring/Action Plans regarding the Review of the Future of Countryside Sites as a number of the woodland parks which were referred to were within Cllr Cunninghams Ward.

3 Minutes for Signature - 5th October 2015

Consideration was given to the minutes from the meeting which was held on the 5th October 2015 for signature.

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

4 Draft Minutes - 2nd November 2015

Consideration was given to the minutes from the meeting which was held on the 2nd November 2015 for approval.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

5 Monitoring / Action Plans

Members were asked to consider the assessments of progress contained within the attached progress updates on the implementation of previously agreed recommendations.

The main points discussed were as follows:

Review of Road and Footpath Investment

- Members raised questions in relation to velocity patching and the cost involved at £200k, and had any other authorities been approached to agree a collaborative purchase arrangement, as it was felt that if something was not done then the current situation the authority was experiencing with potholes would stay forever. Officers explained that there was no agreement currently to

buy the required equipment with other authorities and the purchase cost of the machine was at least a third of the total highway maintenance budget. Where velocity patching had been used in other areas on heavily used roads the patching itself did not last long enough. It seemed that velocity patching was only suitable for lightly used roads. Due to the fact that Stockton's roads had a high volume of traffic a decision had been made not to go ahead with velocity patching as it was not deemed viable.

Review of the Future of Countryside Sites

- Officers highlighted that site visits had been carried out to the three country parks within the borough. Wynyard Woodland Park had the highest footfall and the greatest potential for outdoor recreation and commercial activities, such as cycle hire. Members heard that Track and Trail Cycles had already been operating on a temporary basis at the park offering bike maintenance advice for park users. A formal lease was to be entered into with the Council and Track and Trail so they could continue to offer their cycling services to the public.
- The Committee was informed that land was allocated for housing developments close to Wynyard Woodland Park which could see an increase in footfall.
- Billingham Beck probably had less potential for development and was mainly seen as an area for walkers and dog walkers; however there was a possibility for the area to be used for people to achieve their Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park had established its own friends group which was involved with the management of the site, however Cowpen Bewley had less footfall than Billingham Beck or Wynyard Woodland Park.
- Work was on-going to develop management plans for main habitat types across all main countryside sites. Plans would identify management works to be implemented each year.
- Funding had been secured from the Environment Agency for Wynyard Woodland Park for the creation of a wet woodland habitat, and for the creation of wet grassland at Billingham Beck.
- With regard to working with external partners in the near future the Council would be inviting expressions of interest from businesses and other organisations wishing to put forward proposals for the country park buildings or other assets. Members were informed that due to the complicated nature of the 'expressions of interest' process the progress assessment for this recommendation had slipped. Businesses had however already been contacting the Council showing interest in these sites.
- Discussions were on going with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust(TVWT) regarding the Trust adopting responsibility for habitat management and community engagement at Bassleton Wood and the Holmes LNR and Black Bobbies field LNR. The Trust may also be able to deliver environmental education packages at Council countryside sites.
- The Committee heard that the Council continued to run activities with

volunteer teams. Stockton Borough Council had developed a volunteering strategy in partnership with Catalyst which would be rolled out in the next few months. The authority would continue to sign-post people to volunteering opportunities.

- Officers informed the Committee that a new template for park signage was currently being developed with the Design and Print team. This would be rolled out as and when opportunities arose to install new signage or replace outdated signage.

- With regard to the recommendation to explore the possible use of modern technology, there had been no progress to date however this would be included in the strategic plan.

Members had some concerns with how busy Wolviston Back Lane was which made it difficult to access Cowpen Bewley Woodland park from Billingham. Officers agreed to investigate and report back.

It was heard that a youth worker had been appointed by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and Bilingham Town Council to work at Harringtons Pond Billingham. Residents had informed their local Councillor that they had not been informed of this. Anti-Social Behaviour had been reported at the pond previously and it was felt that residents should have been consulted before work had commenced. Officers confirmed that this would be investigated.

Review of A Boards.

The main points discussed were as follows:

- Site visits had been carried out in Stockton Yarm and Norton to observe the extent of obstruction A-Boards were having on pedestrianised areas on the High Street and the effect it was having on shoppers.

- A policy had been implemented and was largely self-regulating. The authority had adopted a light touch enforcement approach where appropriate. Guidance had been published and issued to all businesses in Yarm and Norton.

- It was heard that there had been positive improvement in relation to policy compliance in Norton although there had been an increase in the number of A-Boards on the high street, they were being displayed much better and complied with policy. Issues had been reported, however, in relation to outside cafes. Tables and chairs outside were acceptable as long as they did not cause obstruction and had rails/banners defining the seating area. The rails were to enable visually impaired pedestrians to identify that there was obstruction/obstacles.

- Stockton High Street had seen a 16% reduction in A-Boards from 82 to 66 and A Boards were being displayed up against shop fronts. The number of Street cafes had dropped, however some had materialised in narrow streets such as Silver Street.

- Stockton Council was continuing with the minimising of unnecessary street furniture.

- Concerns were raised in relation to bollards on pavements causing obstruction however it was explained that these were present in Stockton High Street to prevent vehicles from driving onto pedestrian areas especially on market days when traders were setting up.

- Since the issue of the guidance, Yarm High Street had seen a reduction of A Boards from 68 to 59 and also a reduction in street cafes which had dropped from 12 to 11. Shop displays had increased however from 21% to 36%. A number of businesses were using flag type banners which moved in the wind which did not comply and businesses would be advised to move them. Concerns had been raised in relation to the number of swinging A Boards, as this type did not comply with policy and would be addressed. Although not all compliance criteria was being met progress had been made.

Representatives from the Guide Dogs for the Blind and the RNIB were in attendance at the meeting and were given the opportunity to address the Committee. Their comments were summarised as follows:

- High Streets were becoming increasingly difficult for the visually impaired to get around, not just on days when refuse was collected.

- In an ideal world streets would be cleared of all street furniture however it was recognised that businesses needed to advertise.

- Prior to the meeting one of the representatives had ventured along Stockton High Street and had encountered various problems. Street cafes had furniture which had no colour contrast to the surroundings and without barriers making it difficult to be seen. It was highlighted to the Committee the importance of using bright contrasting colours as it helped visually impaired pedestrians negotiate obstacles. It was also difficult to teach manoeuvres around street furniture if it was moved as people tended to use mental maps when negotiating their way around.

- The RNIB had put together a report explaining how to manoeuvre around street furniture and getting past such things as A Boards and wheelie bins. A leaflet had been published called 'Who put that there' which was available for Members.

- In relation to the colour contrast of street furniture against its environment, it became increasingly important for those people losing their sight to enable them to distinguish objects. Light and weather also affected how those losing their sight could identify obstacles so the stronger the contrast the better.

- Officers explained that street cafes had been given a period of time to provide barriers for street cafes and it was now a suitable time to enforce this.

- Officers informed the Committee that the policy was applicable to all shops within the borough apart from those which were on privately owned land.

- Members and local businesses were invited to have a blind folded walk with a Guide Dog to help understand the everyday issues visually impaired people faced on a daily basis.

- Members felt it was now time that a harder approach to enforcement was introduced as local businesses had had plenty of time to understand and comply with the new policy.

- Officers agreed to a harder approach to policy enforcement.

AGREED that the assessment of progress contained within the monitoring report be noted.

6 Scrutiny Review of Kerbside Waste Collection

Members were provided with a presentation on Kerbside Waste Collection.

Additional points were highlighted as follows:

- Stockton Borough Council were ranked 322 of 352 authorities in terms of recycling for 2013- 2014.

- 613.4 tonne per household per year was being collected in Stockton which was in the lower 25% range and more than most other authorities were collecting on an annual basis. It was noted that too much waste was being produced and not enough recycling was taking place in Stockton.

- There appeared to be a marked difference in the behaviour and attitude of Stockton residents towards recycling than in other areas.

- The recycling material collected in Stockton was of a good clean quality and therefore brought in revenue, unlike some other authorities.

- Brief discussion took place around the differing methods authorities used to recycle e.g. the number and types of receptacles and whether this impacted on resident behaviour patterns.

- Most other local authorities general waste collection was reducing however Stockton's was increasing.

- It was considered that due to the capacity available in wheelie bins as a result of weekly collections residents took the opportunity to dispose of waste that could otherwise be disposed of at Haverton Hill. Officers informed the Committee that it wasn't uncommon to find microwaves, carpets or electricals in the general waste bin.

- When the green waste collections end each year some residents were putting grass cuttings in the general household waste bins. Members asked if there was a demand for all year round green collections where Local Authorities were charging?

- - The Committee was informed that there was a demand for green waste collection all year round which could incur an approximate cost of £25 per annum per household.

- Members stated that they knew of residents who did not recycle at all as they

firmly believed the recycling went to the same land fill sites as the general household waste.

- Other Local authorities were collecting general household waste on a fortnightly basis however Stockton Council was still offering a weekly collection. Members asked whether fortnightly collections would help reduce the amount of household waste and increase recycling or would people find elsewhere to discard of their rubbish?

AGREED that the Scrutiny Review of Kerbside Waste be noted and that officers respond to Members questions at a future meeting of the Place Committee.

7 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed to the Committee that an officer from Thirteen would be addressing the Committee and providing information at the next meeting which was to be held in January 2016.

Members were asked to consider future topics for future reviews as the Scrutiny Liaison Committee would be meeting early in the New Year to consider those put forward. Members could send suggestions individually and/or discuss together at the next Place Committee meeting.

The Committee gave consideration to the work programme 2015-16.

AGREED the Work Programme be noted.

8 Chair's Update

There were no updates.