

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 9th July, 2018.

Present: Cllr Sonia Bailey(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Louise Baldock, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston,

Officers: Andie Mackay(CS), Steven Hume(CHS), Reuben Kench(CL&E), Graham Clingan, John Angus, Jane Salisbury, Jamie Stephenson(EGDS),Judith Trainer, Sarah Whaley, Gary Woods(DCE)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Derrick Brown(Chairman), Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE

PLA 22/18 Evacuation Procedure, Audio Recording and Housekeeping Procedures

The evacuation, audio recording and housekeeping procedures were noted.

PLA 23/18 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Evaline Cunningham declared a personal non prejudicial interest in relation to the item 'Monitoring the impact of previously agreed recommendations' Countryside sites as Cowpen Woodland area was in Cllr Cunningham's Ward.

PLA 24/18 Monitoring the impact of previously agreed recommendations

Consideration was given to the impact of previously agreed recommendations. There were outstanding recommendations from the reviews of Countryside Sites, Flooding, Fire Safety of High Rise Residential Buildings (Task & Finish), Asylum Seeker Services (Initial), and Billingham Event Infrastructure (Initial).

FIRE SAFETY OF HIGH RISE RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

It was agreed that the progress update Fire Safety of High Rise Residential Buildings would be deferred for consideration at the next Place Select Committee meeting.

COUNTRYSIDE SITES

- The Progress update on Countryside Sites was presented to the Committee, the main topics discussed were as follows:

- The draft of the overall strategic plan had been prepared however was not quite finalised as Officers were waiting for a couple of pieces of work which would feed into the plan. The Plan was to be based around 4 themes which were

- Landscape heritage of Countryside sites
- Services and activities which take place at the sites.
- Publicity and information provided to the public
- Recreational access and infrastructure which allowed the public to enjoy those sites.

- Habitat Management Plans were discussed and were to be prepared on a habitat by habitat basis which included Grassland Management, Woodland management and the management of Invasive Non-Native Species.

- External funding for physical improvements to countryside sites was highlighted in particular the £44,000 which was available for the redevelopment of the area around the main car park and Station House at Wynyard Woodland Park. £43,500 had been secured from the Environment Agency for Six Fields. Funding was currently being sought for new cycle links to Thorpe Thewles and Billingham Beck Valley Country Park. Updates were also given on Honey Pot Wood at Whitton, Stillington Forest Park, Roundhill Ingleby Barwick and Mount Leven Yarm.

- In relation to recommendation 3, working with external partners to carry out management functions and deliver associated services, it was highlighted that an Art collective known as 'Missing Piece' were now established at the former Station House at Wynyard Woodland Park. Discussions were ongoing regarding a possible lease of the former visitor centre at Billingham Beck Valley Country Park and at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park, the former visitor centre was now leased to Billingham Environmental Link Project.

- In terms of recommendation 4, maximising the use of community and volunteer involvement in countryside sites, it was highlighted that the Council continued to operate volunteer activities at the country parks. Work was also being carried out with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust's Wild Green Places at sites across the Borough.

- Regarding recommendation 5 which focused on the promotion of countryside sites and what was being done to increase the number of people using those sites, Members were informed that there was a new contemporary style of welcome signage which would be rolled out across the parks. In addition there was also a new booklet ('Out and About') which showed where people could walk and cycle across the Borough.

- Recommendation 6 was to explore the use of modern technology to enhance visitor experience. A funding application had been submitted to Nesta in March 2018 however the bid was unsuccessful - the Council would learn lessons from the projects being taken forward through the programme, and would integrate this learning into future plans for countryside sites.

Members raised questions in relation to the six fields and whether the works there were complete and if water would be added to the wetlands. Officers explained that the major works were complete and regards to the addition of water, hollows had been created which were designed to fill naturally and would be identified as semi-permanent water habitats but would be dependent on ground conditions. Ecologists had given assurances that in relation to the field being dry in summer and wet in winter it would provide very useful habitats for certain species of plants and animals. Some of the areas were to be seeded with seeds collected from the wetlands at Billingham Beck Valley Country Park to give them a helping hand.

Members requested that all Councillors receive the booklet ('Out a About') detailing the walks and cycle paths around the Borough.

It was suggested that information should be available to Councillors' to enable them to inform members of the public the different kinds of vegetation and wildlife which could be found in and around the area. Officers agreed that this would be a good way to promote the area with the use of digital technology and smart phones and would look into this further.

Members highlighted that there was a walk page on the Councils website which enabled members of the public to use their smart phones to follow the walks.

Questions were raised as to how the Council was progressing with the England Coast walk. Officers explained that this was a national initiative to create a continuous footpath around the whole of the coast of England and the area which Stockton Borough Council was involved with ran from Newport Bridge to the Hartlepool boundary. Phase 3 was now underway which was to build a causeway across East Saltholme Pond. There were minor works to complete on the Hartlepool side however it was expected that the Stockton Borough part of the scheme would be complete by November 2018.

FLOODING

The Progress update on flooding was presented to the Committee, the main topics discussed were as follows:

- In terms of recommendation 2, 'SBC further develop the expertise of the operative currently engaged in dealing with flooding issues'. Officers explained that progress had not been made as had been hoped, however significant research had been undertaken using colleagues through APSE and other authorities. Significant amounts of information had been gathered as to how other authorities tackled flooding issues. The business plan detailed what Stockton needed to do based on the geographical and topographical area from September 2018, and would then make a recommendation as to how that service would be provided and what resource was needed approximately 1 month from starting that work.
- In relation to recommendation 3 which was to produce a formal programme to replace older style gullies, it was highlighted that all gullies had now been identified and there was over 4000. Older style gullies were now considered in line with highways maintenance programme. Where highways maintenance schemes were going ahead older style gullies would have a risk assessment and the ones causing the most problems would be replaced with the maintenance programme.
- Where it was recommended that SBC evaluate the available software systems which could assist with future cleansing and maintenance, it was highlighted that a new highways management system had just been installed. Highway and street lighting maintenance were to be put on the system with gullies and drainage following a few months down the line.

ASYLUM SEEKER SERVICES

The Progress update on Asylum Seeker Services was presented to the Committee, the main topics discussed were as follows:

- In terms of clear pathways (recommendation 1), Stockton now had an established multi-agency asylum group which looked at asylum migration issues. The group had already met twice and was very well attended. As it was an external contract a lot of the support provided was reliant on the voluntary sector and therefore part of the role was to recognise the positive contribution the voluntary community sector had on supporting asylum seekers. This had been communicated to the Home Office as part of its consideration for the new asylum seeker contract which was currently out to tender.

- in terms of room-sharing amongst unrelated adults, representation had been made to the Home Office in terms of the stance of the Place Select Committee which was also part of the consultation within the Home Office contract discussions which happened at the end of 2017. As yet it was not known what the Home Offices position would be in terms of room sharing, however it was known that Newcastle had attempted to remove room-sharing from their programme which was defeated in court. Investigations were taking place in Stockton to try and determine the true scale of the problem relating to room-sharing.

- In terms of information sharing, Stockton was still very well represented on the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) and there was closer working relations in terms of information sharing with the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

Members expressed their disappointment and frustration in relation to the Government's stance on asylum and that they still continued to foster a hostile environment towards people seeking sanctuary. In addition it was also disappointing that Local Authorities were not permitted to bid for parts of the new contract.

Discussion took place around the relationships between schools and asylum seekers as serious issues had been identified in relation to children being moved from one school to another very quickly. Officers explained that they had taken Members concerns to the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) where the contract provider who attended the Partnership had asked for specific examples to enable them to look into it further. The current policy was, where children were in key year's i.e. taking exams, they would not be moved unless it had been requested by the family due to issues they may be experiencing. It was explained that there had been very little issues reported by individual schools indicating that things were improving. Members requested that schools that were experiencing problems regarding moving children were contacted directly to understand their experience of what was happening.

BILLINGHAM EVENT INFRASTRUTURE

- The Progress update on Billingham Event Infrastructure was presented to the Committee, the main topics discussed were as follows:

- In relation to recommendation 1 which highlighted the need for Billingham International Folklore Festival (BIFF) to fully consider the wellbeing of performers it was suggested that a condition of use be added to the 'evidence of progress presented to Committee - June 2018' column between the 2nd and 3rd

paragraph as follows;

'The conditions of use of the village by BIFF will require BIFF to address the wellbeing of performers, staff and volunteers'

- As Stockton Borough Council were the land owners and BIFF would be occupying the event village via a licence, Stockton Borough Council were able to impose conditions.

- BIFF were exploring additional funding streams.

- BIFF were considering the frequency of the event in order to reduce the annual burden of the infrastructure costs as recommended by the Place Select Committee.

Members found the report very positive and encouraging and thanked Officers for the work that had been undertaken.

AGREED that:

1) The Progress Updates be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed.

2) further information be provided as requested.

**PLA
25/18**

Scrutiny Review of Parking on Grass Verges (Task & Finish)

Consideration was given to the Outline Scope and Project Plan of the Review of Parking on Grass Verges (Task & Finish).

The main issues/services that would be covered by the review included:

Parking on grass verges and the damage and resulting mess it caused was a regular source of complaints from local residents.

The review would identify the measures that could be put in place to deter inappropriate parking and clarify the actions that could be taken against those who inappropriately parked on grass verges.

The review would examine the cost of repairs, the extent to which preventative measures could reduce these costs and whether there was scope for generating income from fines etc.

The main topics discussed were as follows:

The Team Leader of Scrutiny explained that 3 to 4 Members of the Committee would be required for this review to undertake initial work and come back with findings to the Place Select Committee in October 2018.

All Members would be written to asking for specific examples experienced in their wards to help identify issues and come up with possible solutions. Jamie Stephenson Senior Car Parking Engineer and John Angus, Projects Officer for

Highways, Transport and Environment would also be supporting the task and finish group.

It was expressed that this was a review where Members could make a real difference to residents who were experiencing issues with parking on grass verges, such as unattractive scarring and the obstruction of traffic. It was also discussed that where some estates which had not yet been adopted by the Local Authority, an understanding of the law would be required to help tackle problems on those estates.

Members discussed a particular problem, where a construction vehicle had parked on a grass verge and damaged the grass near a property the builder was working on. An Enforcement Officer attended and an agreement with the builder to re seed the verge on completion of the work was reached.

It was felt that some of the issues surrounding parking on grass verges went hand in hand with the school run where it had been witnessed that some parents were parking half on and half off the grass and some were even parking fully on the grass at some schools. It was felt that where a car had been seen to churn up mud on a grass verge there should be some kind of redress.

It was suggested the Middlesbrough Council and other neighbouring authorities be approached to understand how they tackled similar issues with the possibility of adopting best practice.

Discussion took place around the practicality of whether parking on grass verges could be stopped. Suggestions were made that if an obstacle such as a bollard were to be erected then this could be one measure that could be adopted.

It was agreed that Councillors Louise Baldock, Sonia Bailey, Paul Weston (and either Councillor Woodhead or Perry) would form the Task and Finish Group for this review.

AGREED that:

The draft scope and project plan of the review be approved.

PLA 26/18 Work Programme 2018-2019

Consideration was given to Work Programme.

The 3 remaining reviews for the rest of the year had been provisionally mapped out, all of which were for completion by March 2019 prior to the next local elections.

It was possible that Bring Sites (Recycling) would be a Task and Finish review in order to do a more in-depth River-Based Economy Review.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

PLA Chair's Update

27/18

The Chair had nothing further to report.