

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON  
25TH JUNE, 2014**

Present: Councillor E Bell (Chair) and  
Councillors B Allen, Mrs B E Allen, R Arthur,  
Mrs M R Baird, Mrs J A Bell, Mrs G Bleasdale,  
B Burn Snr, B Burn Jnr, Mrs H G Cahill,  
S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster, R Meir,  
Miss S Morrison, N R Page, I Paul,  
C Snowball, R Whitehead

Apologies: Councillors K Shaw, K Younger

**1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests, prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

**2. PRESENTATION**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Mr Tony Forster from the Regeneration department of Durham County Council who was in attendance to address Members on the possible future development within Seaham.

Mr Forster began by saying that with the regeneration of the town over recent years, he considered that Seaham had been put firmly back on the map following the loss of the 3 collieries and the subsequent decline in the area that followed. Seaham is certainly now a coastal destination of choice with increased visitor numbers.

He then gave a brief report on the regeneration strategy that had been commissioned and produced in 1994 to restructure Seaham. This had been achieved with the creation of employment, taking away the industrialisation, the restructuring of housing, and continuing towards the aim of turning Seaham into a leisure town because of the sea and the coast. In excess of £300m of investment had been secured, 2,500 jobs created, 1m square feet of floor space created, mainly through the enterprise zones. With the benefit of hindsight a mixture of smaller buildings with larger buildings would have been preferable. The population was stabilised from that which would otherwise have gone to other areas for jobs.

From an infrastructure point of view there was the A19 link road into the town, the town centre link road which connected the heart of the town to the main arterial routes; a big part of that restructuring exercise was to remove the non-conforming businesses that were in the town centre which would have constrained on regeneration, i.e. removing Dock Company warehouses and the two warehouses that were on the site where Byron Place shopping centre is now.

There is now a huge warehousing and distribution facility with a rail head for easy transportation of bulky materials and the port connectivity with the new road. The town centre was subsequently redeveloped and the enterprise zones introduced. This attracted inward investment into the town and a better balance of industrial development which, at the time, had the desired effect. There is now expansion space and there are signs that the market is recovering. As such the first place investors will be directed to will be the industrial parks within the town rather than the Hawthorn Industrial Estate. St John's Square became run down and has subsequently been regenerated to retain as many public services as possible within the Square i.e. the Health Centre, Job Centre, County Council Contact Centre and a spare piece of land which will probably be utilised as a car park. So with Byron Place at the bottom and St. John's Square at the top the intention was to draw people through the main shopping area of Church Street. Balancing houses was a big issue - Dawdon and Parkside areas were improved and new housing developments were created. There were other improvements along the promenade and the Terrace Green.

The regeneration strategy did not, however, take into account the leisure factor. Now the Seaham Marina is in place, the opportunity to introduce leisure back into the town is available; the marina being the coastal hub and the link to the coastal footpath and cycleways. There has been £5m development and there is another £5m Heritage Lottery Bid to restore the Georgian Quay to restore one of the coal-chutes from Beamish among other things; activities such as kayaking and canoeing are being promoted and other water based activities encouraged. The marina has 77 berths and there are 49 moorings already taken. The business unit has 3 units taken, 2 awaiting legal completion and 3 serious enquiries. In addition the County Council occupy 2 units and therefore the block is almost three quarters full. On estimation it is believed that 150,000 people have visited the marina since it opened, which on average equates to 300 people per weekday, a figure which increases to an average of 500 on a weekend. Tourism investment and growth in that sector is the main focus of Durham County Council who link in with Sustrans and the Durham Heritage Coast.

With regard to the development proposals going forward, there are a number of key sites around the town centre. There are plans for 450 new homes over the next 15 - 16 years. There is still an aspiration for hotel and leisure at a more realistic price to appeal to a different clientele than Seaham Hall. The County Council are working with the owners of the piece of land opposite Byron Place and the Dock Company to protect that triangle from the roadside all the way down to the dock control building as a potential development plot in the future - not just development for housing but for event space where an assortment of activities could take place. They also want to further develop the offer for small businesses, both retail and offices, do further public realm improvements and other work in the marina. There is a £2m bid into the Coastal Communities Fund to try and get power to the boatyard so that boat repairs can take place. This will put people into the business units to offer water sport activities.

In terms of the 6 development areas – at the North Dock that triangle previously mentioned is regarded as 'key' as a gateway into the marina; North Railway Street where Aldi is extending; there is improvement planned for the old Co-op site. Castlereagh Road and Tempest Road, an area that has been overlooked, as conditions allow that area will be targeted in the future. Blanford Place also presents development opportunities and then the focus will be back on Church Street.

At this stage questions and comments were invited and the following is a summary of the comments made:

- (i) One area of concern to the Town Council is where the Golden Lion public house is located. *The County Council is aware of the situation of the 2 pubs and the car park in between and they are in constant dialogue with the owner. They would prefer to acquire the area by negotiation rather than go through the compulsory purchase route. They do have the area very much on their radar as a focus along with the other areas previously mentioned that detracted from their other work.*
- (ii) The other area of concern is in relation to provision of leisure facilities. *The County Council are well aware of this concern and as part of the Seaham and Murton Masterplan, the triangle previously mentioned could accommodate a swimming pool if funds were ever available. From a local authority point of view this was not possible to deliver at the moment however future private developers may come along to realise this. There is also the SureStart location and if an opportunity presented itself there would be a number of other sites to consider.*
- (iii) The film studio – is it still planned to proceed? *As far as he is aware it is still planned to go ahead however this would not be in the short term due to global economic climate.*
- (iv) Going back to what has been said previously about water sports activities, many children in the town cannot swim and the provision of a swimming pool is regarded as a priority by many, even if it is included as part of the new school site. *Mr Forster said he realised how important a swimming pool is to the town and gave assurance that it had not been forgotten; but the circumstances have to be attractive enough to the private sector for this to be delivered..*
- (v) Parking beside Seaham Contact Centre is it going to be free? *There is no intention to put meters on this site. There is not really anywhere within the town centre to accommodate another car park and the County Council are looking at other places in the town to try and resolve the parking issue.*

- (vi) There is a rumour that Seaham Leisure Centre is to be closed and the land used for housing. *Mr Forster stated that he could categorically state it would not be used for housing and he was not aware of whether it was closing or not.*
- (vii) In Durham City they have a park and ride system – would there be any potential for this for events in Seaham? *The County Council would not see this as viable but from a marina point of view where the works on the pier will take at least 2 summers to complete, they are aware that the car parking would be massively reduced so therefore they will be looking at securing some form of shuttle bus service for along the sea front, however this cannot be guaranteed.*
- (viii) Can we get our things back from Beamish to retain them permanently in the town? *The County Council has had discussions with Beamish and if Heritage Lottery funding could be secured they would try to open up a recess and have some kind of theatre there i.e. the coffeepot, putting a coal chute in as part of the Heritage Trail.*
- (ix) Can we have a fish restaurant at the marina? *Originally planning consent for units down there were workshop and office, with the exception of the café. There is now a wider Planning consent available and an advert will be going out to obtain expressions of interest with preference being given to marina related businesses, i.e. Seafood.*
- (x) Can we have appropriate signage to direct visitors from outside the town to car parking areas? *Signage has been recognised as being needed.*
- (xi) In respect of employment – the two sites we have which are close to A19 and away from residential areas, i.e. the former site of Cumbrian Seafoods and Robertsons - would these be included? *There is an estate management issue there at the moment as it is not owned by Durham County Council. There is a need for Business Durham to be involved so that the estate at least looks in pristine condition and he will take this back to re-emphasise this.*

At this stage the Chair thanked Mr Forster for his informative address and he then left the meeting.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 20TH MAY, 2014**

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of this meeting, a copy of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

### **4. VISIT COUNTY DURHAM PUBLICATIONS**

RECOMMENDED the recent edition of the Wednesday Grapevine dated 11th June, 2014, a copy of which had been previously circulated, be noted.

**5 PRESS OPPORTUNITIES**

RECOMMENDED the Council note that no press opportunities existed from this meeting.