

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE HELD ON 1ST DECEMBER, 2015

Present: Councillor C Snowball (Chair) and Councillors E Bell, Mrs J A Bell, B Burn Snr, S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster, R Meir, K Shaw, B Taylor, R Whitehead, K Younger

Apologies: Councillors B Allen, Mrs B E Allen, B Burn Jnr, Mrs H Cahill, Miss S Morrison, I Paul

Observer: Councillor Mrs G Bleasdale

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

1. PRESENTATION

Mr Tony Forster, Regeneration Manager (Durham City), from the Economic Development & Regeneration section of Durham County Council was in attendance to update Members on the heritage lottery fund bid which was being developed in respect of the Seaham Marina.

Mr Forster stated that he had requested to be present at the meeting this evening to introduce to Members the proposals considered to date in respect of the Heritage Lottery bid for Seaham Marina. He stated he was currently in the process of carrying out various briefings, first of all to County Council's Portfolio Holders and now to Town Council Members and subsequently the berth-holders and tenants on the Marina and other stakeholders prior to a full public consultation. The bid was being submitted as part of the continuation of regeneration activity seen so far at the marina. They had tried to take into account as many improvements as could be afforded, however as the whole site was managed by a CIC they wanted to bring forward improvements without adding to the maintenance liability of the CIC. He stated that the north pier was not included in the bid because of the ongoing liability attached to the pier.

He advised Members that the bid would comprise of 7 areas, i.e.

- (i) The Slope Beach,
- (ii) The North Inner Wave Screen
- (iii) The East Quay,
- (iv) Red Acre Point
- (v) North Quay and Wall,
- (vi) West Quay, Tunnels and Viewing Area
- (vii) South Quay and Coal Chutes

They had been involved in ongoing dialogue with the Lottery Fund who had advised not to submit a bid in excess of £5m as any scheme above that level would need to be of national importance, such as Stonehenge. In this respect they were intending to pitch their bid at around the £5m mark but stated that the costs would be in excess of that amount. They were therefore seeking views by conducting a consultation exercise to ascertain what should be prioritised as part of the submission.

In respect of the slope beach they had reviewed the existing railings and steps and what possible improvements could be made to beach accessibility, as part of the water sports intention was to access the sea at this location. There were, however some issues with the ease of access into the water and to the beach as this was currently not ideal. It was therefore proposed to try to create a ramped access on to the beach to allow craft to be floated into the water which would also allow easy and safe access to the beach. He elaborated on how this could be achieved with the aid of a powerpoint presentation. The proposal would include seating in the area which would be incorporated into the existing concrete ramp so in this respect they would not be taking away part of the beach.

The second area's proposal was to try and open up the north inner wave screen as detailed on the sketch, which was very much under-utilised at present. They would condense this into a narrower area, leaving the railway lines in situ. If this was not possible, however, in relation to providing a safe surface area, the intention would be to install cobbles or something similar that would mimic the railway lines going along that area and also provide a viewing point. This would allow people to feel they were out in the sea but in a much safer way than would be possible if the north pier area was included.

The third area was the east quay being the area leading down to the dock gates and pointing out to sea. What was being proposed in this location was basically a floor-scape treatment to soften the area. The existing cannon would be moved to the end of the pier, and if the Heritage Centre were successful in raising funds to commission a helmsman statue, that would be installed in this location and a seating area would be included. The brick wall would be removed so there would be no sheer walled area. The intention was to provide a soft treatment but using cobbles similar to those used in other areas rather than just having concrete or brick wall.

The fourth area, Red Acre Point, was an area which was blocked off currently for safety reasons but as it is a really good vantage point it would be advantageous to open this up if it was possible to secure funds to allow this to be done safely. At the moment there are big stones located by the sheer cliff face as you enter the car park, and these are becoming loosened over time. There are also incidents of youths climbing up the stones and creating more problems at the top of Red Acre Point. It was considered that the best way to manage these problems, whilst still allowing people to see the rock formations and the features of that area, would be to install a barrier so that no-one could drive a car up to the kerb line.

Within the concrete blocks it would be possible to have higher areas which could include interpretation panels and tell the history and heritage of the dock area. It was also proposed to put in a 3 metre high fence with tensile wires going across which would enable people to see through but would prevent anyone physically climbing over. There would be a gated access into the rear of that area so that any students, for example, who were studying geology could do so in a more managed and safe way.

Still within Red Acre Point where there is a cave, it was proposed to carry out some sea defence work and install a barrier about 1 metre high to deflect water coming into the cave and further undermining the concrete and car park. The proposal for this area i.e. the flight of steps that people currently use to climb to the top, would be to install a new set of steps, which would still not be DDA compliant, however they would be a lot safer than the ones presently located in that area. These would be installed on top of the existing flight of steps using the existing foundations but would include flat resting areas. The tensile wire would be extended to stop people jumping across. Interpretation panels would be incorporated within the concrete and would include pictures and stories that the people of Seaham had provided. Obviously the consultation exercise would encourage more ideas to be submitted. Mr Forster pointed out that there used to be a lighthouse and a chimney for the lime kiln in this area and it was hoped to erect a replica or a vertical structure on the top.

North Quay was a particular problem as the rock face was eroding. An approach had been made to Natural England to suggest the area be netted however their response was a definite no as they stressed the rock face had to undergo natural coastal erosion. Consideration was then given to looking at ways to get people along the area safely, again using cobbles or similar materials to mimic the railway line, which would carry on around the dock path. Existing barriers would be replicated by using a combination of materials at certain points, but with a different block to signify the railway line. He stated that the railway line had ran between the two tunnels and although they would like to try and retain them, this may not be possible. In this case they proposed to provide a concrete block structure where this was possible and put in a 3 metre high fence that would be part wall part fence with a void behind. As Natural England were clear that the wall must crumble naturally it was necessary to have a means of getting behind the wall to clear out the debris. The hope was to still allow people to see the rock face, however consideration had to be given to the kittiwakes that nest in that location, as well as to coastal erosion. It would be intended to have interpretation panels in this location also and as there would be no room for seating, it was considered that the concrete formations could be used as rest areas.

The West Quay tunnel and viewing area is a very wide and quiet area and the proposal would be to make it a wider public area and hopefully expose the railway lines which may be buried behind soil and grass. With regard to the tunnels in that location the Dock Company had stated that they did not want to open one of the tunnels as it opened up to the south dock which was a commercial area and vehicles passed above. One of the other tunnels would require a lot of work to stabilise it and would therefore be cost prohibitive. Mr Forster stated, however, that it may be possible to open up the front of the area by 3 or 4 metres and possibly have free standing interpretation panels installed.

There was a need to include the tunnels in the funding submission as the bid should demonstrate to the Heritage Lottery fund that the tunnels had been considered. It was proposed to stop public access at the steps that lead up to the top of the dock area.

In the area that is locally known as Mercers' folly, earlier consultations had indicated that the public would love that area to be re-opened. At the top of the cliff face, and built into it at the moment there is a flight of steps which is the only access down. The proposal would be to bring the access point down to an area so that people could walk out on to a walkway which could stretch along to the Surestart building as shown in the sketches and which may also include a sheltered area with lighting and seating. If this was the case it would be possible to have a kiosk installed and this could be used to provide an educational point whilst providing good views.

In relation to the area that everyone sees when in the marina, across from the waterside, the coal chute voids are very obvious. There is a coal chute at Beamish which has been examined and surveyed and which may have come from the south dock, however it won't fit into any of the three voids in this location. It is proposed therefore to reinstate something in the area that looks very much like a coal chute but it won't be a functioning coal chute, however it would enable people to see what it actually looked like in the past. At the moment the whole cliff face was deemed out of bounds which is why the proposal was to stop public access at the steps as detailed above. The vegetation in the area would be removed to make it more visually appealing.

Mr Forster stated that he was continuing the Council/Town Council consultation briefings up to Christmas ahead of the more public consultations in the New Year and it was hoped to finalise the funding submission by March and submit the bid by April at the latest. There is a wealth of history on the north dock and therefore the consultation exercise would seek views on what should be focussed upon.

At this point comments and questions were invited and the following questions were asked:

- (i) There was a query about the possible use of cobble stones which may be difficult to walk upon. Mr Forster stated that because of the location the use of real cobbles would result in a very slippery surface so the intention would be to use a material to provide a flat surface but would still give the appearance of a cobble.
- (ii) Had any consideration been given to a swimming pool? A Member commented that whilst on holiday he had seen a construction which, when the tide went out, left a swimming pool area. Mr Forster stated that the swimming club in the slope beach area had raised the possibility of swimming pool provision at every consultation. This was something that could be considered for the future in the slope beach area.

Mr Forster stated that with regard to the trimmers and commercial huts located on the north quay, consideration was being given to carrying out some sort of interpretation work to turn them back into what they would have been in the past.

He asked that any views or suggestions from the Council be submitted back to him for possible inclusion in the funding submission.

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

2. 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.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3RD NOVEMBER, 2015

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of these meetings, copies of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman

4. TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS ISSUES

4.1 Temporary Road Closure – North Railway Street

The Council was asked to note that a 300 metre length of the above road was temporarily closed for a period of 2 days by means of a Notice under Section 14(2) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act, 1984 to enable carriageway resurfacing works to be carried out. This temporary road closure was advised by Durham County Council on 17th November, 2015 and an alternative route was made available during the closure.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

4.2 Car Boot Sale Traffic Congestion

Members were reminded that consideration was given to this issue at a previous meeting of this Committee when further clarification was to be sought from the relevant departments of Durham County Council. The responses received from the Planning and Highways departments of Durham County Council, which provided the history of the car boot fare approval process and the legal requirements under which it operated, had been circulated to Members.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

5. PLANNING ISSUES

5.1 Monthly List

RECOMMENDED the list of planning applications referred to all Councillors since the last meeting, namely 5374 to 5376 as circulated be noted.

6. REVISED BUDGET FOR 2015/16 AND PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 2016/17

The Committee considered the estimates for planning and environmental services, a copy of which had been previously circulated. These outlined revised budgets for the current financial year and the proposed estimates for the next financial year covering all income and expenditure issues. Members agreed to accept the proposed estimates pending any revisions as a result of consideration at the next Budget Sub-Committee meeting to take place on Wednesday 2nd December 2015.

RECOMMENDED the estimates be provisionally approved, subject to review at the at the next Budget Sub-Committee meeting on Wednesday 2nd December 2015, with the intention of the Council setting its precept at the January Full Council meeting.

7. COASTLINERS UPDATE

A Member provided an update of an address given by Mr Pete Myers of Northern Rail to a recent meeting of Coastliners. His address was in relation to past, present and future and with regard to the future, he had stated there were 3 bidders in relation to the new 10 year franchise, these being a German owned company, a 70% French owned company and a Dutch company. The result was expected to be announced in the next 2 or 3 weeks. Details of the various improvements made to Seaham Station were also included in his address. The only negative issue as far as Northern Rail were concerned had been under-capacity with insufficient carriages being available at peak times.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information now reported.

8. LIMESTONE LANDSCAPES

The Committee was asked to consider a further communication from Mr Tony Devos of Limestone Landscapes, a copy of which was circulated, which had been received following the Town Council's notification that it was unable to provide monetary support to the Village Atlas scheme. The communication asked for 3 options to be considered in respect of non-financial support.

RECOMMENDED Mr Devos be advised that Seaham Town Council agree in principle with option 'a', with options 'b' and 'c' being discounted at the present time.

9. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

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