

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON
23RD JUNE, 2015**

Present: Councillors Mrs M R Baird, E Bell,
Mrs J A Bell, Mrs G Bleasdale,
B Burn Jnr, S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster,
N R Page, K Shaw, C Snowball, B Taylor,
R Whitehead, K Younger

Mrs C Hindmarsh, S.E.A

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

**1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF TOWN PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE FOR THE ENSUING YEAR**

RECOMMENDED Councillor E. Bell be appointed Chair of this Committee for the ensuing year.

(Councillor E Bell in the Chair)

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.

**2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE TOWN PROMOTION & DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE FOR THE ENSUING YEAR**

RECOMMENDED Councillor C Snowball be appointed Vice-Chair of this Committee for the ensuing year.

3. 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.

4. PRESENTATION

The Chair welcomed Mr Niall Benson from Durham County Council to the meeting. Mr Benson was in attendance to provide Members with an update on the current work of the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership.

Mr Benson began by thanking the Town Council for the kind invitation and opportunity to speak at the meeting. He stated that rather than providing information on past achievements he would be informing Members on the future direction and intentions of the Heritage Coast.

Firstly, the Partnership has now adopted a new logo, which has a brighter seaside colour palette and which reflects the involvement of other key stakeholders such as Sunderland and Hartlepool and not just Durham. The website has also been refreshed and updated.

Secondly, due to the significant funding cuts over the last five years a social enterprise or charity called the Heritage Coast Trust is being added during 2015 underneath the auspices of the Partnership. This will enable new and alternative sources of funding to be accessed and to allow the Partnership to trade and obtain revenue from the sale of merchandise. This will allow the Partnership to reduce dependency on public sector funding in favour of generated revenue and grants from other sources which were previously inaccessible.

Thirdly, the Management Plan/Annual Business Plan is due to be updated as it hasn't been updated since 2010 due to the Planning system undergoing significant changes during the intervening time period. The draft plan is more streamlined and target focussed with a stronger link to research and evidence based topics. This will be circulated for consultation in the very near future and Mr Benson encouraged the Town Council to provide comments as it will provide clear direction for the next 10 years of what the coast will become and is intended to increase the rate of recovery. Visitor attendance figures provided by Visit County Durham indicate visitor numbers to the East Durham coast have increased year on year from 2011 to 2012 by 12% and from 2012 to 2013 by 13%. Figures aggregated for the whole of County Durham have now become available which enables the business case to be based on accurate data and should attract new businesses.

Mr Benson highlighted that the shore to the north and south is designated for over wintering birds by UK and European legislation and the biggest disturbance factor is dogs. Once hard data is available it may be necessary to look at how to control dogs in winter as well as summer.

Fourthly, with regard to the England Coastal Path the signage between Seaham and Wearmouth bridge is now in place and there are now 19 interpretation panels, funded by Sunderland City Council, at each of the entrance points. This links Park Lane interchange to Seaham station and the panels enhance a wonderful three hour coastal walk. The intention is to produce various products such as leaflets to increase knowledge and in so doing increase tourism. This will continue and link Hartlepool station and the new Horden station when it comes into service.

Mr Benson mentioned the problems facing the Little Terns at Crimdon who are facing a sand eel shortage. There is also significant work being undertaken with local landowners to the north and south to secure/fence high tide routes which will protect roosting birds and prevent their nesting sites from being disturbed. He then went on to talk about the beach care programme and the various initiatives and partners such as Nicola Beldham's team of volunteers "the unofficial Seaham beach care crew", McDonalds, Sainsburys, North East Water who are all actively involved in maintaining

the beaches of Seaham. It is the intention to hopefully extend this southwards by encouraging similar activities with relevant requirements for skills and insurance cover.

The Heritage Coast is an active member of Destination Seaham and it is Mr Benson's firm belief that the protection of the coast will be more effective through integration with all stakeholders both within and outside of the local area. The Coastal Streams Partnership structure is about to change from a loose organic structure into one closely aligned with specific themes.

With regard to the England Coastal Path to the south over 100,000 people use the path annually with each car park receiving over 30,000 cars per annum some approaching 60,000. More data is required and for the path to the north 5077 people have used it between Christmas and the end of May. Historically, car parks such as at Noses Point, the former Dawdon Pit, seven years ago no cars used it and now there are some 40,000 using it. The traffic is only set to increase coming from the north as well as the south so new business opportunities are there for anything from an electric bicycle network to shops selling local delicacies, there is the potential for a lot of business to be driven by visitors using a very simple asset such as a path. The Heritage Coast Partnership is involved as the custodian with responsibility for maintaining the standard of the path itself and helping to extend the benefits which is increased footfall and customers enjoying local facilities and making purchases from local businesses.

The prevalence of sea glass attracted people from far and wide to Seaham to collect it on the beach, an individual was here recently from Baltimore, USA.

Mr Benson highlighted the importance of the National Trails website pointing out that it is free to publicise attractions, accommodation and events etc.

Mr Benson mentioned the information panels which have been installed to the north which detail the history of the local area and the origins of Sunderland, sometimes quite gruesome or unsavoury aspects and occurrences. All of this enhances the experience and makes it an exciting and enjoyable walk.

Mr Benson then went on to speak about water quality and how it was of extreme interest to both the Town Council and the Heritage Coast Partnership. He said that the new Coastal Streams Partnership has been developed and was an exciting way for all relevant stakeholders to work towards improving water quality. Debris, mainly litter, is washed down to the coast via streams and rivers and this all affects the coastal water quality and affects the aquifer drinking water. Coastal streams concerns those stream which don't feed into the River Wear and this covers East Durham. The Partnership is trying to work with the industrial estates and rural agricultural community to improve their practices to make sure the water quality is kept at the highest level as quite a lot of this water doesn't flow down the streams but goes into the aquifer. Mr Benson highlighted how crucial the involvement of the Town Council would be given the

number of denes with coastal streams in Seaham and the benefits and improvements for the environment which are possible.

There is a catchment improvement project with £60K of funding at Castle Eden Dene to research the impact on water quality as the area is a perfect representative study environment for the whole of the UK as it combines industrial pollution with rural areas which are largely unpopulated, there is a sewage system and a world class natural environment. It has therefore attracted such funding for research by organisations such as Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency and Mr Benson was keen for the Town Council to support the Coastal Streams Partnership project and to become involved in any way it felt appropriate.

At this point Members were invited to ask any questions and the following comments were made:

- (i) Members wished to understand if the intention was for designated bird sanctuary areas.

Mr Benson said it was more appropriate to educate so that everyone could learn to live with the birds to enable them to thrive so that they continue to breed here and are not forced to move onto somewhere else.

- (ii) Members also voiced an opinion that had Durham City been on the coast a huge amount of investment monies would have been spent to ensure the environment was suitably protected.

- (iii) Members highlighted the ongoing problems with coastal pollution as a result of mine water.

- (iv) Clarification was requested on how accurate the figures quoted for numbers of visitors at cars and on the path actually were and how they were obtained.

Mr Benson stated that most of the car parks had electronic counters installed which recorded the numbers of cars using them and therefore the data at present isn't completely accurate. It is intended that such devices will be fitted to all car parks to enable fully accurate data capture for visitor numbers and eventually it is hoped to be able to present this information in real time.

- (v) A Member voiced disappointment that the original designation of East Durham Heritage Coast was being absorbed and lost as a result of the new branding of the Heritage Coast. It was felt that a huge amount of work had been done over many years by the Town Council to support, protect and nurture the coast and often this had not been supported by other larger coastal authorities who seemed to have left major problems which adversely affected the Durham coast unchallenged.

Mr Benson acknowledged the passion of the Councillors and highlighted that often relationships can be difficult but necessary to enable partnership working with neighbouring authorities to work effectively. The 6000 new houses proposed to the north of Seaham in Ryhope, currently going through the planning process at Sunderland City Council, will have an impact on visitor numbers to the coast and such an increase needs to be managed correctly. He went on to say that the branding can be tailored to reflect any of the communities along the coast as required to enable suitable marketing opportunities to be utilised.

- (vi) A Member reiterated the importance of the beach cleaning initiatives and how important it was that local businesses were involved with staff giving up their own time to take part.

Mr Benson informed Members that additional funding had been secured so that the member of his team who helped support and coordinate the beach care programme could remain in post in the short term and he hoped that further funding would be found to extend this even further.

- (vii) Clarification was requested with regard to what dog controls would be best to protect the ground nesting sea birds.

Mr Benson informed Members that dogs responsibly controlled on a lead cannot disturb the nesting sites and therefore would be the best solution enabling the owners and their pets to enjoy the coast without adverse effects on the sea birds. Of course the need for the owners to pick up after their pets was also an essential requirement.

- (viii) Members highlighted previous attempts by the Town Council to have dogs banned from the beaches during the summer months to keep them clean and safe for the enjoyment of children and their families. In discussion, Members reiterated their concerns that dog mess was proven to cause health problems when people come into contact with it and protecting the health of children playing on the beach had been a main driver for the Town Council's campaign.

At this point the Chair thanked Mr Benson for his informative address and his passion and continued work in protecting the coast. Mr Benson then left the meeting.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information now reported.

5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 31ST MARCH, 2015

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.

6. SEAHAM HARBOUR ACTIVITY CENTRE (SHAC)

RECOMMENDED the letter of support sent to endorse the bid proposal made by Durham County Council to Sport England for funding, be noted.

7. VISIT COUNTY DURHAM PUBLICATIONS

a) Wednesday Grapevine

RECOMMENDED the copies of the Wednesday Grapevines dated 15th and 22nd April, 6th and 27th May, and 3rd June 2015 published by Visit County Durham, be accepted.

8. FUTURE SPEAKERS

As no definite arrangements had been made with regard to future Speakers, Members were asked to make suggestions with regard to who they would like to extend invitations to, and the following suggestions were made:

- (i) Mr Tony Davos, Limestone Landscapes
- (ii) Mr Bob Latimer.

RECOMMENDED the Town Clerk extend invitations to the two individuals detailed above to attend future meetings of the this Committee

9. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

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