

## **MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND EVENTS COMMITTEE HELD ON 5<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2016**

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

Apologies: Councillor Mrs S Forster, I Paul, K Younger

*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. 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. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 24TH NOVEMBER, 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.

### **3. PARKS AND EVENTS SERVICES**

The Committee considered the Deputy Town Clerk's report which provided an update on the following items.

#### **3.1 Police Community Partnership Project**

The Chair welcomed PC Warren Gibson of the Seaham Neighbourhood Policing Team who was in attendance to provide Members with information on the Police Community Partnership Project in Deneside.

PC Gibson began by thanking the Town Council for the opportunity to attend the meeting. He gave a brief background on his time working in Seaham and then proceeded with an abridged version of his presentation which had been utilised for a number of stakeholders as part of this project. The project was based in Deneside which has high levels of social and economic deprivation and the highest levels of hospital admissions for children and young people in County Durham.

Members viewed video footage taken by the police helicopter during a major incident and which highlighted the levels of anti-social behaviour that had occurred in the locality and the level of police resources required to deal with such an occurrence.

Historically Deneside is considered to be an insular community where there is a distrust of public organisations such as the government, county council and police.

In February 2013, the objectives of the project, set by the Chief Constable, were to gain greater community engagement, increase social capital, improve community activities for young people, increase confidence in the police and partners thereby reducing demand for the police and partners. Reducing holiday hunger was an additional objective set by the stakeholders of the project.

The project team completed engagement training by a company called Mutual Gain and this led to door to door discussions, questionnaires, focus groups at the Seaham Youth Centre and open forum meetings to gain an understanding from the community however unfortunately the people who they wanted to reach wouldn't participate. In order to resolve this a coffee morning was held at a resident's home where other local residents felt more comfortable attending and providing their views. The following comments were received:

- Lack of amenities.
- No access to groups or session for young people mostly due to poverty.
- Most on benefits with nothing to do.
- Lack of understanding and trust with authorities i.e. resources are spent on what organisation decides without asking the residents.

This resulted in a group of eight residents being formed with a view to it providing details of what the true needs and wants were in that area and then being supported in achieving them. This process was supported by the AAP and Durham County Councillors.

The first idea was for a fun day event which was held on the grassed area behind Ryton Crescent which had usually been a site of various acts of anti-social behaviour. The AAP provided funding for small rides and attractions. The residents (approximately 70 children took part) had the responsibility for clearing the area of litter to enable the grass to be cut and then keeping it clear for the six weeks in the run up to the event, which they did and a great time was had by all and as a result £750 was raised for future projects.

Following on from that initial event and at the request of the community an emergency services day was organised. The fire brigade, police, paramedics and air ambulance helicopter attended to allow local residents to meet with them in an informal manner rather than while they were officially doing their jobs.

The residents group then decided to put together their own craft session one

day per week for young people and this was an instant success with up to 50 children attending each week.

A participatory budgeting event was held centred on the Seaham area. For information this is where an amount of money is available for projects (£26,000 in this case) and a number of organisations/local groups etc. (16 in this case) could submit bids for their projects and then local residents (573 in this case) vote to determine how the money is allocated. As a result most of those attending managed to obtain some funding for their projects.

*A short video presentation of the participatory budgeting event was then viewed by the Committee.*

PC Gibson then continued stating that the Deneside Action Group had obtained £4,500 from the event to go towards play equipment. The group has moved forward and has a constitution adopted, various members have health & safety certificates and food and hygiene certificates and all have been DBS checked for safeguarding purposes and a safeguarding policy has been adopted for the group. The group are also applying for charitable status and have some secured various sources of funding and have some substantial funding applications submitted pending consideration with regard to a proposed play park. They have been involved in such community initiatives as collecting sea glass from the beach which was then made into a sculpture by a local artist and displayed as part of the recent Durham Lumiere festival.

There is an agreement with Durham County Homes that a play park may be sited subject to planning approval and the group are seeking support from the Town Council to adopt on-going responsibility for the play area in terms of insurance, maintenance and repair.

Additional initiatives have been junior gym memberships, circuit training sessions, swimming sessions and football coaching for those normally excluded to promote healthy lifestyles, reduce childhood obesity and provide an interest to detract from anti-social behaviour.

Marco Biagi, Member of the Scottish Parliament, in recognition of what has been done by the group so far has taken the process back to Scotland and it has been introduced into Scottish law. David Ramsden, Chief Executive of Children in Need is to look at how to apply aspects of the process within his organisation. The Swedish Police Force have also asked for a presentation on the process as they wish to improve how they engage with their communities.

Evidence that the project has been successful is demonstrated by an increase in confidence and major changes in attitudes and behaviours in Deneside. More and more people are getting involved and crime and anti-social behaviour has reduced which has reduced the resource demands on public services. Analysts have forecast that rolling this process out force-wide could save Durham Constabulary up to £3.5m.

In the longer term the Deneside Action Group has aspirations for a 3G/4G Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) pitch / sports arena enabling year round sports activities for local children. In the shorter term the Group began due to a lack of amenities in Deneside and so they would like to have a safe local park which Deneside children can enjoy without having to travel as is the case now. There is currently a funding bid of £50K for a play area which when combined with previously sourced funding will almost pay for the kind of play area the Group desire. Durham County Homes have agreed the area of land can be used for this purpose but there is still a question over ongoing maintenance of the proposed play area and surrounding grass.

PC Gibson subsequently made the request that the Town Council take responsibility for the play area and maintenance of the surrounding grass etc. The aim would also be for the Group to eventually take over responsibility themselves for such aspects as inspection and maintenance of the play equipment and cutting the grass.

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

- (i) *A Member raised the issue of other play areas having been damaged and asked whether this could be the case again with this play area.*

PC Gibson acknowledged this risk but highlighted that the Group had been made aware that the residents of Deneside would need to look after and protect the play area themselves as it was for their benefit.

- (ii) *A Member informed the Committee of a recent initiative to install a Christmas tree in Ryton Crescent and highlighted that the local community had decorated and looked after it. This was a prime example of how a community will protect improvements for the benefit of all even when sceptics thought it would be vandalised or stolen.*

PC Gibson stated that at the first public meeting held with regard to the project that an individual who attended had only negativity for Deneside and the proposal. That same individual had a complete change in attitude after the Christmas tree had been installed.

- (iii) *The Chair highlighted that the local Councillors from Deneside Ward, many of whom were present at the meeting, had not been involved in this project from the beginning but had now been fully integrated.*

PC Gibson stated that the reasoning behind why elected Members/organisations had not been involved from the start was that the ethos had been to allow the community to determine their needs directly at their pace and not at the pace of elected officials or contributing organisations so that they didn't take over the project. Members of the public, not familiar with this kind of exercise can become intimidated by large organisations railroading them which results in those people not taking part which of course is not what was wanted here.

The Deneside Group recently saw one of their large grant applications, to fund craft materials and cooking equipment, approved and this has brought about a significant change in attitudes as it was thought, by the Group, that it wouldn't be successful. The Group have also had to move venue regularly for their activities but after a successful Christmas party at Seaham Youth Centre they are hoping to have a more permanent base there for various activities.

- (iv) *A Member raised the issue of whether people from other areas had been involved or if it was solely for the residents of Deneside as there were concerns that it might create a silo community.*

PC Gibson stated that the project was initially just for the residents of Deneside with the plan to create a nucleus which could initially be kept at a manageable level until it was self-sustaining. Once that was achieved the idea would then be to encourage children from other areas to join in and indeed children from Parkside, Dawdon and the town centre. With regard to the project resulting in a silo community PC Gibson highlighted that this project was being progressed by the people of Deneside and there was nothing to stop other areas of Seaham running with similar projects of their own. The big driver for the people of Deneside has been that they have no leisure facilities whereas other parts of the town do.

- (v) *Members complemented the project and highlighted that historically anti-social behaviour had been common in Deneside but this project was definitely making a difference and changing attitudes and behaviours for the better.*

PC Gibson thanked Members for their kind words and stated that improvements in behaviours were borne out by information from the housing provider which now had full occupancy in this area where before this had been unheard of due to the social problems that were previously present.

- (vi) *A Member highlighted that current Town Council policy is to concentrate on play centres of excellence but, after hearing the details of the proposal, it may be time for the Town Council to rethink this with a view to supporting the proposed play area at Deneside in terms of future maintenance and insurance as it constitutes a special case. Such a decision would of course be a major financial responsibility for the Town Council for years to come. It was therefore questioned whether, within the current or future funding applications, additional allocations had been included for ongoing repairs and maintenance. Such monies would help to reduce the financial burden on the Town Council as it's well know that the cost of maintaining and repairing this kind of specialist equipment isn't cheap.*

PC Gibson acknowledged the potential financial burden on the Town Council and that anyway of reducing this would of course be appropriate. As the Group is in its infancy it is difficult to tell how it will continue to develop but at present it seems to be strengthening day by day. The vision has always been that the Group will be self-sustaining and not reliant on support from

public services or outside organisations. Securing suitable insurance presents a problem to a residents group of this nature but potentially a number of individuals may be able to be trained to conduct daily inspections and complete minor repairs.

- (vii) *In conclusion Members once again complemented the work done and what had been achieved by all those involved in the project. It was highlighted that the Council would need to give the matter detailed consideration before being able to make a decision as to whether it can help in anyway.*

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

RECOMMENDED this item is deferred for consideration to the next meeting.

### **3.2 Seaham Christmas Light Switch-On 2015**

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update on the event highlighting how well received it had been and requesting any feedback from Councillors who had attended. A number of Members commented on how nice the traditional lights were and how they were improving year on year. Also that feedback from the public had been excellent and although it had been a windy night all had thoroughly enjoyed the event.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

### **3.3 Lord Byron and the Promotion of Seaham**

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update on the proposed promotion of Lord Byron, Seaham and Ada Lovelace.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) The Council note the information.
- (ii) The Deputy Town Clerk continues to work on the Lord Byron and Ada Lovelace promotions as detailed in his report and reports back to this Committee at a future date for further consideration.

### **3.4 Proposed Event – Battle of the Somme Anniversary 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016**

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update on the proposed event to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of the Somme. A Member sought further assurances with regard to the proposal and it was agreed for the Deputy Town Clerk to report back to Members with further details concerning the organisation of the event.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) The Council note the information.

- (ii) The Council approves the event in principle and the Deputy Town Clerk reports back to this Committee at a future date for further consideration once more definite proposals have been determined.

### **3.5 Animals on Allotment Sites**

The Committee considered the findings of recent work and site visits conducted by the Allotments Sub-Committee with regard to animal welfare on allotments sites. In discussion, Members considered the various issues associated with problems encountered and agreed with the recommendation of the Sub-Committee that there be closer monitoring and welfare checks carried out on a monthly basis and closer partnership working with the allotment associations.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) The Council note the information.
- (ii) Closer monitoring and welfare checks be carried out on a monthly basis and closer partnership working with the allotment associations.

### **3.6 Risk Management Issues**

RECOMMENDED the Council accept the Deputy Town Clerk's report of risk assessment carried out in relation to the various issues reported.

## **4. RISK ASSESSMENTS – PARKS AND EVENTS ISSUES**

The Council was reminded of the requirement as part of the corporate governance arrangements, for risk assessments to be undertaken in relation to various activities. At regular intervals Members had been provided with reports on progress made in this area and the Committee was advised of the process involved in carrying out initial assessments made of risks in a range of parks and events activities. The Committee noted the process followed in assessing the risks.

RECOMMENDED the Council formally agree to accept the risk assessments covering the various items now reported.

## **5. DAMAGE TO BOATS IN SEAHAM MARINA**

The Council's representative for Seaham Marina provided details of damage sustained by boats in the marina during the recent period of inclement weather as a result of dust/grit being blown against the boats. After detailed discussion Members felt as this was private land and a private facility that it was for the boat owners to resolve with the marina management and the Seaham Harbour Dock Company. As this is private land it was highlighted that it would only involve Durham County Council if there was a wider public nuisance that impacted on nearby property such as damage to homes or cars as had occurred in the past in Robert Street & Robert Square etc. A local County Councillor stated the matter would be raised with the marina management at the earliest opportunity.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

**6. TERRACE GREEN**

A Member requested clarification with regard to the acquisition of the area of land known as the Terrace Green. The Committee was advised that in accordance with the previous instructions of Members the former plan provided by Durham County Council had been amended to ensure the Town Council would only acquire the grassed area of the Terrace Green and not the surrounding car parking or paths.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

**7. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES**

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