

## **MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND EVENTS COMMITTEE HELD ON 24TH OCTOBER, 2017**

Present: Councillor K Shaw (Chair) and  
Councillors R Arthur, Mrs J A Bell,  
Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs K Brace,  
S P Colburn, S Cudlip, Mrs V Cummings,  
Mrs S Forster, Ms R M Gratton,  
G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy,  
Mrs S Pratt, T Shepherd, B Taylor,  
R Whitehead, Miss L Willis

Apologies: Councillors Mrs B E Allen, E Bell,  
D Cummings, D McKenna,

*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 26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2017**

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 Proposal from Member of the Public to Create an Equestrian and Falconry Centre at Dawdon Park**

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that Members had asked him to invite Mr Des Consitt to attend this meeting to discuss his proposals and to involve allotment and grazing holders so they could share their views on Mr Consitt's proposals.

#### **Mr Des Consitt**

Mr Consitt stated that he is a local resident and a founding member of Greenscape Project which started in 2015 following a £4k grant from the Big Lottery which enabled the project to take a group of children away to do

outside activities. On the return of the trip Greenscape asked the Town Council if they could bring back into service the allotment patch at Hill Crescent. Once approval was given by the Town Council Greenscape started to fundraise for the equipment on the site as well as continuing with the outdoor activities to engage with young people. The age range Greenscape work with are between 10 – 14 years old. To date they have attended two residential courses the first being a camping trips with walks into the woodlands and the second being paddle boarding at the Marina which 10 children took part in.

In 2.5 years Greenscape has pulled down £31K in funding. All of the work is carried out by Mr Consitt and Mrs Alison Hough on a voluntary basis. In 2018 Greenscape are hoping to host an 'after school club' to do evening work with the young people as they have recently purchased some bat detectors.

Mr Consitt stated that the new project is to try and develop the site to benefit the wider community of Seaham. The site is proposed to contain allotments, equestrian arena and stable block, falconry centre, tea room, sensory garden and sensory room.

There are approximately 4 allotment holders who are using the site and 2 people who stable their horses on the site. The plan is to keep that area and bring it up to date with wheelchair access which Greenscape will try and find funding for along with updating the water system and electricity supply. Greenscape want to create a community allotment where people with learning disabilities can come along and use the facilities as well as make it all inclusive for everyone to use. There will be no livestock kept on the allotments it will be purely for growing. The site with the horses and ponies can stay until the holders decide they no longer want to be there then the land will revert back for growing.

The horse riding arena is around about 60 x 40 metres which has already been priced up and there will be roughly 12-15 stables. The stables will be used for Greenscape horses which they will have on site. There will also be stables kept open for people who want to bring their own horses onto the site. Mr Consitt stated that the horse riding is not just about the arena it's about the therapeutic value as well as a leisure/tourism activity. Mr Consitt discussed hippotherapy which is around people with mobility/autism problems and stated that he had been in contact with Mr Darren Edwards who had informed him that the movement from horse riding was good for people with mobility problems as it strengthens the core and leg muscles.

The Falconry side will be a static display with flying displays and will be tailored to the size of the birds which are kept. This will also act as a therapeutic base. Mr Consitt stated that there is not a lot of information available on therapy using birds so hopefully Greenscape can set a precedence.

It is also proposed to have an old English tea room with areas for breast feeding, dog walkers, cafeteria and outside seating area. It is envisaged that

the allotments holders could sell their produce to the tea room. This could be taken either in payment or via a rent reduction whichever way they want to use it.

Mr Consitt stated that he has held discussions with Mr Edwards about the Sensory Garden which would be of beneficial use to people who have autism, downs syndrome and learning disabilities. There are 6 organisations within Seaham who would use this facility as they currently have to travel outside of the area.

Mr Consitt stated there are four elements to the site which will all lead into each other. Mr Consitt will contact people in the community to see how things can be tailored to individual's needs. He also wants a training programme for young people so they can learn about the different elements on site.

Following different documentations from Duham County Council offsite the key problem in East Durham is that there is not enough bridle paths. Greenscape will ask Durham County Council and landowners to open up the paths and to try and work on some of the circular routes which is doable with the right frame of mind and ideas to drive it forward. This will open up opportunities for business's and people who want to visit the east coast. A lot of equine people like to holiday with their horses so there are opportunities for business people. If someone comes to the town for the day they on average will spend £15 in the town but if they come and stay overnight this will rise to £60 per day/night. The revenue for equine activities in Durham is £1.5m. There are approximately 130 full time jobs and 87 part-time jobs. These statistics are from organised professional livery yards/stables and the statistics are backed up from the Horse Society. This is a great potential for income into East Durham. The north-east coast is currently the hottest place for the development of equine activities.

Mr Consitt stated that Greenscape is about conservation and there will be a programme of the planting of hedgerows, fruit trees, looking after wild spaces, and Greenscape will continue to build bird/bat boxes so the environment will be looked after inside and outside.

Mr Consitt stated that there have been concerns about parking and Greenscape will be looking to remove the verges at Edith Street so it easy for vehicles to turn around and the top of Edith Street is big enough for horse trailers and lorries to turn around.

Mr Consitt ended his presentation by saying the project is only as big as you can imagine it to be and he will be hoping to create employment and training.

The Chair opened up the meeting for questions by the Members present:

- 1) A Member questioned how much the project will cost and what sources of funding are there?

*To see it fully grown it will cost £400-£500k. There are sources of funding out there which Mr Consitt has started to look into. He has met with someone who has stated he will need a robust business plan and a long term lease from the Council to be able to access funding. This is European funding money so it isn't going to cost the Town Council anything unless the Town Council want to contribute and to be part of the project.*

- 2) There are a lot of rumours that the allotments are going to be taken over is that the case or are the people who have the allotments going to be staying there?

*Yes they can stay there it's up to them to decide when they want to come off the allotments/grazing land. There are about 5-6 people there and they can stay, no-one wants to move anyone off.*

- 3) This is an interesting proposal is Mr Consitt aware of any similar schemes like this or is this a most adventurous scheme that you have seen around or is it something new and innovative or has it been tried and tested previously and if so, has it been successful? The purpose of the question is about longevity as the Town Council would need a certain degree of longevity and this scheme wouldn't be bound to failure within a short period of time?

*Mr Consitt stated that he hadn't looked at the success rate as such because it is a unique project. If it was a standalone horse riding centre then questions would be asked about how many people will use the centre. However, the four elements together is going to be unique. Groups of young people will be able to access all of the elements. It is a fantastic opportunity to set up horse riding hacks along the coast as this gives access to miles and miles of coast. The A19 is a natural barrier so there aren't many horse riding centres on this side. Crimdon is the nearest place and there is an opportunity to set up a long day hack where riders can stay at Crimdon Caravan Park and horses could be stabled in Pony World. Hacks can also take place in and around Hawthorn. It is about engaging with the landowners to access certain parts of the fields.*

- 4) So the key to this is obtaining funding and if you couldn't get funding the project wouldn't be successful?

*Yes the key is to obtain funding. The ultimate goal is to make the project self-sustainable which I am sure it will be after receiving feedback. It may be a struggle in the beginning but Mr Consitt stated that he believed in it and he is willing to go unpaid.*

*Falconry centres on their own are not great at making money on a business term we are looking towards the therapeutic value for Falconry its all of the elements together which should make it work.*

- 5) If this project takes off what qualified people do you envisage you would require in respect of vets etc and also insurance cover?

*There will be veterinary fees and things like that we are currently in the process of looking at all of those types of things. We are two thirds of the way through looking at costings etc. We won't put figures out there because we haven't got them all in yet.*

*The idea of today is to ask the Town Council for a letter of support and the guarantee of a long lease subject to a robust business plan. The letter gives us the opportunity to write to funders so we can understand who is interested so that will start the process. The Town Council will still have the option to change their minds once the business plan is in place if they do not think the project will work.*

*One of the aspects Greenscape were looking into was setting up carriage rides along the seafront which could take people for afternoon teas at Seaham Hall.*

*The qualified people required will be people who know horses /falcons. We do have a lady involved who has over 30 years' experience.*

- 6) Anyone who is currently on site you say can stay on as before and then it was contradicted later on by saying these allotments will fall under the management of Greenscape and they will not be allowed to be passed on. If you are going to let the allotments carry on as before then surely there is no reason whereby you can't cordon off the allotments and grazing sites for the holders off these sites to let them go on as before so that is a contradictory statement. Have you looked at any other sites within Seaham to progress this or is it easier to go ahead and get the whole lease for the whole site including the allotment sites and remove people who have been there for decades?

*Many different sites have been looked at. In 2006 Mr Consitt stated he contacted the Town Council and a presentation was given about a Falconry Centre and a Fishing Pond and it went nowhere. The Parks Manager at the time was contacted and he stated that he was carrying out a search on another piece of land which was actually smaller than Dawdon. We were then told that there was nowhere in Seaham with that kind of acreage.*

*Greenscape looked into the fields which Mr Wheatman owns which is 34 acres in size which he stated he would sell but he would only sell both fields as you need access from one field to the other and at agricultural value it would be too expensive.*

- 7) Is your project still going to be viable if the existing allotment holders stay on the site?

*The funding is the big question I can only ask the Town Council for the letter of support. If Greenscape go to a funder and ask for £150-£200K they will not look at the application if someone else has an interest in the land. It would need to be overall ran by Greenscape*

*we would need to have control of the land. The allotment holders can stay but they would need to come under the control of Greenscape and they would pay Greenscape like for like rent. The grazing land as the site develops it is hoped that alternative grazing can be found in Seaham and if not then the Town Council would be ultimately responsible for that.*

A Member stated that they do not think the Town Council should lose control of the land for the allotment holders. Mr Consitt stated that the situation at present is that there is an 8.5 acre site which generates £722 to the Town Council and this project could bring thousands to the Council and also bring money into good causes for the Council. The Council needs to ask itself if they think this is a viable project to take Seaham into the future.

- 8) If an allotment holder comes off will you have the say that no one else gets the allotment?

*No that allotment will be filled by someone from the waiting list just like the Council does.*

### **Mr T Crowley**

Mr Crowley asked where Mr Consitt was getting the financial information from as he thought it was between himself and the Council what he paid for the grazing land. Mr Consitt's figures are too accurate. Mr Consitt stated that he was given the information from a friend. Mr Crowley questioned whether this information was given to Mr Consitt via a Councillor or Officer of the Council. Mr Consitt stated that it wasn't. Members also stated that they did not hold this information.

Mr Crowley stated that there two glaring omissions in Mr Consitt's presentation with regards to parking as the road is a bridle way and bridle ways are not to be used by traffic. The land is 8.5 acres and the allotments take up 1.5 acres of the site. Mr Crowley stated that he is holding a meeting on Thursday with the National Allotment Association as if the land is not going to be governed by the Town Council then the allotment and grazing holders would wish to govern the site themselves.

Mr Crowley stated that the holders have spoken to riding and falconry sites and they have stated that the site is not big enough. Houghall College has 450 acres and you are talking about having four projects on 8.5 acres.

People will have to displace their grazing places. It's not just about horses eating grass it's about letting them run free. The land is put to good use it is excellent and we have never had a quibble or complaint with the Town Council. People want to carry on grazing and for their families to continue this. There are disabled people on the allotments. The allotments are not the best they could be but we are taking the representative to visit Hall Street Allotments on Thursday which is one of the best sites to show him. If the Town Council helps the allotment holders and grazers they will get the

allotments up to Hall Street standard. People are not going to move from the site as they have rights and they intend to exercise their rights. The site is too cramped for four projects. Councillor S P Colborn asked the Chair if he would ask Mr Consitt to move as he stated it was like looking at “Little and Large” and it was annoying. Mr Consitt asked if the Member was “heightest”. Mr Crowley continued if the Town Council will grant a long term lease let the allotment and grazing holders have it. The holders weed and maintain the site. Mr Crowley stated he had been on the site for 33 years and some of the grazing license holders have re-seeded the grass and erected new fencing out of their own pockets and are now asking for the Town Councils support.

The Chair opened up the meeting for questions by the Members present:

- 1) You say you have never asked for anything in the past and you want to bring the site up to standard so what kind of investment are you looking at?

*Most of the work carried out at the site was carried out by the pit and the pit has been shut since 1992 and there has been no investment by the Council since then. We have had no reason to complain but it is coming to the point where the fences and gates are starting to rot. Mr Crowley stated that he had placed a gate on one of the alleys in 1996. Mr Crowley noted that he now realises that there are all sorts of grants which can be obtained and the Council should be the catalyst for license holders to do that.*

- 2) A Member questioned whether anyone had applied for funding?

*No, we didn't know you could until now.*

- 3) A Member stated that you would need to form an Association then it is fairly easy to get grants.

*Mr Crowley stated that they intend to form an Association and they want to make the site more accessible for disabled people.*

- 4) A Member stated that he agrees with Mr Crowley and investment does need to be made on the allotments. The only good allotments are Hall Street. You stated you have been there for 33 years so how much do you think you have spent on the site?

*I have been on that site for 33 years and I didn't know how much other people were paying until it appeared on Facebook. Mr Consitt knows to the penny what they are paying I find that to be absolutely disgusting.*

A Member noted that Mr Consitt may have sent in a Freedom of Information request to get that information. Another Member stated that the Councillor meant how much besides your rent have you spent on the site?

*We have done this at our own expense. We have to de-weed the site and fertilise it. We need to sort the disabled access out as there are*

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*disabled allotment holders. There are about 5 or 6 people who have 1 allotment and they work it between them over the summer.*

- 5) How many people will be affected if Mr Consitt's project was to go through?

*All of the allotment holders which there are 11 of them and there are 6 grazing license holders which affects 15 horses. Everyone is losing sight of the horses and the horses are the most important thing. Many people come to the site to talk to the horses even from outside of the town. The wildlife on the site if it is allowed to develop will be killed there are rabbits, weasels, moles and stouts it is a jewel in your crown.*

- 6) If the project is successful what will you do with your horses?

*We would have to find good homes for them, some may be able to keep them. Some of the horses may have to go to slaughter as Mr Crowley stated he would rather have a horse put down than condemn it to a life of misery.*

- 7) A Member questioned that in Mr Crowley's letter he stated there are newts on the site do you know if there are any grey crested newts because if there are they are protected by law?

*Mr Crowley stated he did not know.*

- 8) A Member stated that the proposal from Greenscape has stimulated Mr Crowley and others to think about having an allotment association and the Member assumes that Mr Crowley is aware that the Council have a number of leases granted to allotment holders. Presumably you are speaking on behalf of all 17 license holders that you wish to have an allotment association to self-manage with the support from the National Allotment Association and you will tie in with Hall Street Allotments to get improvements to the site?

*Yes we have let it drift but we have been stimulated into action.*

The Deputy Town Clerk suggested that Members should go and have a look at the site themselves.

Mr Crowley stated that when Councillors see the land they will see it's a Nonsense for someone to be wanting to put an arena on it. The land falls from the south to the north and falls from the west to the east and if you take the lowest point to the highest point its 25-30 foot difference. There is also interesting archaeology up on the site.

The Chair invited allotment holders to speak but they declined as they felt that Mr Crowley had spoken on their behalf also.

A member of the public stated that if you are learning disabled children to ride you need to have an indoor arena and the basic cost for an arena is £140k. She also mentioned driving horses along the coast which Mr Consitt



**9400**

had referred to and that 18 years ago a horse went over the cliff after it was spooked by traffic. There is more traffic these days and it would be impossible to go to Seaham Hall. Someone would get hurt. Mr Crowley stated that horses and falconry will never mix as horses can be spooked so easily.

RECOMMENDED that a site visit is arranged between now and the New Year by Councillors and the proposal is then brought back to this Committee.

**3.2 Seaham Town Park Cricket and Rugby Club Long Term Lease**

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that he is still awaiting further information from the Town Council's Solicitors and Valuers with regards to a price.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

**3.3 Northumbria In Bloom**

The Deputy Town Clerk proposed to promote the recent success with signs stating "Best Coastal Resort" Winner – "Gold Medal Winner" on prominent sites in the town including its obvious gateways.

The Deputy Town Clerk also proposes to bring back The Best Kept Garden competition and will work with members of the public who have shown an interest.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) The Council approve the new signage.
- (ii) The Deputy Town Clerk to work with members of the public to reintroduce the Best Kept Garden competition.

**3.4 New Drive Playing Fields & Partnership Work with the Harbour Cricket Club**

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that he had received approval for sport users using the New Drive playing fields to be able to use the Cricket Clubs toilet and changing facilities in the short term.

It was agreed that this item should be taken back to the next meeting of the Parks and Events Committee for further discussion once the purchase has been completed which is imminent.

A Member questioned how much the Town Council had paid for the purchase of the New Drive playing fields from Durham County Council. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that including fees the overall cost was £18k.

RECOMMENDED that this item should be taken to the next meeting of the Parks & Events Committee

9401

**3.5 Remaining Large Free Public Events for 2017**

RECOMMENDED this item is for information purposes only.

**3.6 Meeting with Seaham Sports Users to Improve Facilities in Seaham**

A meeting was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017 with sports users and the meeting was very positive. The meeting related mostly to discussions about New Drive. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that staff had opened the changing facilities at the Harbour Cricket Club at the weekend and they were unused. Only one person is pushing for the facilities at New Drive. It was noted that a meeting of Dawdon Working Party will need to be arranged shortly.

A Member questioned whether any further proposals were raised at the meeting. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that this was going to be a regular meeting as the Clubs had found it quite useful. The Member stated that he would like to be involved in the meeting but it was stated that the meetings were more for Officers and sports clubs and that the Officers would report back to this meeting. It was noted that only one person is suggesting what the Council's priorities should be in one particular place. Ultimately it is for Councillors to decide where the money will be spent.

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information.

**3.7 Red Star Football Lease**

The Red Star Football Club have requested for their lease to be extended to 25 years. It was noted that this will be taken to the Council's Solicitors and Valuers for further clarification and when this information is received it will be brought back to this Committee.

RECOMMENDED that this item be placed on the earliest Parks & Events Committee agenda once the information has been received from the Council's Solicitor and Valuer.

**3.8 Civic Show – Leeks and Vegetable Competition**

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that a Member had raised the proposal for the Town Council to hold a vegetable show. He noted that it can take events years to come to optimum and it was maybe worth holding off for a year to see how the event takes off at Peterlee Show.

A Member suggested that the Town Council should contact vegetable growers for their opinions and if they show an interest then the event should be brought back. A Member stated that an Officers report should be provided to the Council to see if the resources and funds are available to hold this type of event and whether the Town Council have the capacity to host it.

RECOMMENDED that the Deputy Town Clerk provides a report to this Committee to ascertain if hosting this event is financially viable.

9402

**3.9 Risk Management Issues**

RECOMMENDED Members note the information being provided.

**4. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES**

RECOMMENDED the Council note that the Deputy Town Clerk will where possible encourage the press and media to promote the positive projects discussed at this meeting.

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