

DARLINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

20th December, 2004

PRESENT – Councillor Harker (in the Chair); Councillors, Lewis, Lyonette and Ruck.
(4)

APOLOGIES – Councillors S. Robson and Hartley; Mr. Brown, Mr. Leighton, B. Denham, A. McGrath, D. Reed, and C. Prior.

ABSENT – Councillors Newall and Thistlethwaite.

Officers Attending – The Environment and Sustainability Manager, the Countryside Rights of Way Officer, the Assistant Countryside Access Officer, the Local Nature Reserves Officer and the Sustainable Development Officer within the Department of Development and Environment; and the Assistant Director Environmental Services within the Department of Community Services.

Representing Outside Organisations –

Darlington and District Committee Council for the Protection of Rural England –
Miss G. Gibson

Darlington Parish Councils –
Mrs. Kettlewell

Darlington Residents Panel –
Mr. R. Atkinson

Darlington Senior Citizens Association/GOLD –
Mr. A. Christian, Mrs. P. Eastwood.

Darlington Soroptimist International –
Mrs. A. Robinson

Durham Wildlife Trust –
Mr. T. Coult and Mr. C. Evans

Local Residents –
Dr. A. Britton, Ms. A. Carlyon.

The Tees Forest –
Mr. S. Blenkinsop.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest report at the meeting.

23. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Forum held on 27th September, 2004.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

24. MATTERS ARISING - With reference to Minute 17(d)/Sep/04, in relation to Climate Change, the Environment and Sustainability Manager advised that the Working Group will report initially to the Local Strategic Partnerships with this Forum receiving regular updates and reported that the first meeting had taken place on 9th December, 2004.

With reference to Minute 18/Sep/04 in relation to the WRAP Funded Recycling Awareness Raising Project, the Environment and Sustainability Manager informed Members that the research as a consequence following the visit to Darlington is still incomplete and currently being assessed externally but it was a positive event and did increase recycling during the 'high publicity' period.

IT WAS AGREED – That the position be noted.

25. WILDLIFE IN DARLINGTON – Mr. Terry Coult, Durham Wildlife Trust gave a presentation to the Forum on Wildlife In Darlington, but in particular with regard to the Great Crested Newts In Darlington and the implications.

He advised that they were a declining species across Europe, the United Kingdom and the Region and the Government initiative to conserve these newts. He also highlighted various legislation i.e. the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Act and outlined the Licences required for any development or survey work which may impact on Great Crested Newts, which includes a 500 metre radius of terrestrial habitat which is protected by legislation.

Mr. Coult also gave a list of options as a way forward including the production of a strategic plan for Great Crested Newts in Darlington.

General discussion ensued on the general status of development within Darlington; current surveys being undertaken by the Planning Department with regard to the Great Crested Newts; Other European protected species in Darlington;

IT WAS AGREED – That the thanks of this Forum be extended to Mr. Terry Coult for his informative and very interesting presentation.

26. COUNTRYSIDE EVENTS PROGRAMME – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of the completion of another successful year of Countryside Events. The submitted report highlighted the various events that had taken place over the past year, including the Darlington Story Felling Festival held in partnerships with the Tees Forest and Northern Arts, a Fungal Foray attracting over 30 people into Dinsdale Woods, the first Walking Festival carried out in partnership with the Primary Care Trust, Darlington Ramblers and many others as well as drumming workshops and a wind in the Whinnies Day. In total the Countryside Events Programme has attracted over 1100 people to its various activities. The Countryside Team have also produced two leaflets as a way of distinguishing between the largely urban based walks that explore the history and culture

of the town and a new programme aimed at promoting the new and improved countryside wild spaces for Darlington.

IT WAS AGREED – That the report be noted.

27. THE DESIGNATION OF FOUR NEW LOCAL NATURE RESERVES: MAIDENDALE NATURE AND FISHING RESERVE, GENEVA WOOD, BRANKIN MOOR AND ROCKWELL – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of this Forum of the designation of our new sites in Darlington being Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve, Geneva Wood, Brankin Moor and Rockwell as statutory Local Nature Reserves. Each of the four sites has great value at a local level due to their close proximity to large populations of local residents and easy access from the town centre. Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve will also play a vital recreational role to the existing and new residents of Firthmoor once the fishing facilities are opened in 2005. The submitted report also highlighted the statutory requirements on local authorities to establish Local Nature Reserves; the benefits of declaring sites as Local Nature Reserves in seeking external funding and grants; and with more than 60 hectares of Local Nature Reserves now declared, the Council is well on its way to meet both its own and English Nature's target of 1 hectare of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population within 1 Kilometre.

Discussion ensued on the above and particular reference was made to the Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve and the need for security at the site; and Brinkburn Pond. Reference was also made to the need for Visitor Centres at these sites.

IT WAS AGREED – That the report be noted.

28. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) to update Members on the current status of Darlington Borough Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan which the Council is obliged to produce as a consequence of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Initial proposals are to be in place by the end of March, 2005 to coincide with the second Local Transport Plan which needs to be submitted to Government by July, 2005.

It was also reported that as part of the consultation process, a questionnaire has been sent out to the general public and the results of this survey will be available for the Forum to discuss at the next meeting.

IT WAS AGREED – That the report be noted.

29. FREE TREES – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of this Forum of the Free Trees Scheme to be run in 2005. The Free Tree Scheme is an annual promotion, which is run before the spring each year and this year will run between January and March, 2005; and the trees available this year will be Rowan, Wild Cherry, Dog Rose, Oak, Birch and Hazel. Individuals can apply for up to five trees and community groups and schools can apply for up to 30 trees.

The representative from the Tees Forest informed the Forum Members that the Tees Forest were lending their support to the scheme and also to advise that they were offering 'free trees' also.

IT WAS AGREED – That the report be noted.

30. QUESTIONS – There were no questions raised.