

DARLINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

23rd October, 2006

PRESENT – Councillor Harker (in the Chair); Councillors Hartley and D. Lyonette.(3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor F.S. Robson.

APOLOGIES – The Mayor; Councillors Lewis, Lister, S. Robson and Ruck; Mrs. L. McGhee, Mrs. A. Robinson.

ABSENT – Councillors Lawton and Newall.

Officers Attending – The Assistant Director of Environmental Services and the Planning Officer within the Department of Development and Environment.

Representing Outside Organisations –

Alzheimers Disease Society –
Mr. J. Rodwell

Council for the Protection of Rural England –
Mr. G. Gibson

Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists Field Club –
Mr. B. Denham

Darlington Senior Citizens Association –
Mr. A. Christian and Mrs. P. Eastwood

Durham Wildlife Trust –
Mr. C. Evans

Groundwork West Durham and Darlington –
Mr. N. Potter

Member of the Public –
Mr. M. Dunstone

Whinbush Residents Group –
Mr. K. Fridd

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

19. PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY – The Director of Community Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to consult with Members of this Forum on the draft Playing Pitch Strategy prior to formal consultation (also previously circulated).

It was reported that work began on the Playing Pitch Strategy in 2004 and data was collected between July, 2004 and October, 2005, and following analysis of that data, an Action Plan was completed in March, 2006 with five key themes. The significant amount of detailed information was collected using the specified Sport England methodology which produced a detailed picture of the current provision of playing pitches in Darlington.

The Playing Pitch Strategy is a five-year plan to protect, maintain and improve playing pitch provision and there are currently 90 sports pitches throughout the Borough, 74 of these available for public use. The Strategy includes football, rugby, cricket pitches and one astroturf hockey pitch.

The submitted report also detailed the consultation process with key stakeholders; the 'vision' for the Playing Pitch Strategy; the objectives of the strategy; and the key issues identified.

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out on the Strategy with any recommendations being included within the final document.

Members of the Forum were pleased to note that there was a Strategy in place.

IT WAS AGREED – That the draft Playing Pitch Strategy be approved.

20. OPEN SPACE STRATEGY – The Director of Community Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to consult with Members of this Forum on the draft Open Space Strategy (also previously circulated).

It was reported that work has been ongoing for the past 15 months on the production of an Open Space Strategy and the strategy has been developed following the Best Practice Guidance produced by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) Space. The Strategy covers the built up area of Darlington town and the three largest villages in the Borough namely, Heighington, Hurworth and Middleton St. George and aims to provide, protect and enhance a variety of high quality, accessible open green spaces throughout the Borough.

The submitted report detailed the scope of the strategy; its vision and aims; and the key issues that have been addressed by the strategy and the financial implications for realising the vision and association action plans.

A Sustainability Appraisal and Equalities Impact Assessment have been carried out on the Strategy and any recommendations will be included within the final document.

It is intended that following an extensive consultation process a final version of the Strategy will be presented to Council towards the end of 2006/early 2007.

Members of the Forum were pleased to note that there was a Strategy in place to protect open spaces, especially the wild spaces. A question was raised with regard to CCTV in parks and open spaces and the Assistant Director of Environmental Services responded that this is being considered and there was a programme in place of rolling out CCTV in open spaces prioritised by the record of anti-social behaviour.

There was a query with regard to the policy of lighting in open spaces and the Assistant Director of Environmental Services responded that this was excluded from South Park on the advice of

the Heritage Lottery Fund, but that it was being considered as part of improvements for the Denes.

There was also a query about shutting off parks at night and the Assistant Director of Environmental Services explained that in discussions with the police and fire brigade, a policy decision had been taken to leave the gates to parks and open spaces open at night to provide access for emergency services and to help avoid them becoming 'no go' areas.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services also advised the Forum that this was an aspirational strategy which would take time to deliver as finance is available. The focus is to protect and enhance the open spaces but the Strategy does allow for disposal of land where this is not valued and better use can be made and in these circumstances, some of the funding received from disposal will go towards the Strategy.

IT WAS AGREED – That the draft Open Space Strategy be approved.