

DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21 JUNE 2017

(Subject to approval by Committee on 24 August 2017)

**P9. MONITORING OF OUTCOMES FROM THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016-20 – GROUND MAINTENANCE** – The Assistant Director, Community Services presented a PowerPoint presentation in light of decisions made around the MTFP which included a significant reduction in resources resulting in a saving of £380k.

Particular references were made to the number of employees and grass cutting service standards before and after the budget cuts in October 2016 and Members were advised that the grass cutting standard had dropped resulting in grass growing longer, becoming harder to cut and looking untidy when it was left.

It was stated that the grass cutting had commenced in early April and that two full cycles had been completed with the Town Centre and Inner Ring Road being cut more frequently.

Members were pleased to note the excellent work of Community Groups which included maintaining open spaces, gathering of leaves for collection by the Council, litter picks and painting of play equipment.

Details were provided of the seven out of 24 Borough Roundabouts currently sponsored by businesses and the efforts being made to encourage businesses to maintain Council planted roundabouts rather than sponsorship.

Scrutiny Committee noted that the budget for flowers for Roundabouts was now £10k which is substantially less than in previous years.

Details were supplied of ongoing work to secure Durham Wildlife Trust looking after some of our Open Spaces including The Whinnies, Geneva Wood and Brankin Moor and of residents of West Park and Central Park paying a levy to ensure green spaces on those estates were maintained.

Discussion ensued on the exhaustive Health and Safety Document and insurance restrictions provided for Volunteer and Community Groups; household insurance generally covering people who wished to cut their own grass verges outside of their property; imminent launch of a Members' toolkit containing advice and guidance and a list of do's and don'ts for Volunteers.

Serious concerns were expressed on the reduced maintenance, condition and overall look of the Borough's roundabouts and open spaces in Darlington and it was felt that if this was not improved Darlington could gain a difficult reputation that could discourage businesses to come to Darlington.

Following a question Members were advised that Wildflower Meadows and verges had been created in recent years, some successfully, and although this did not necessarily save money, further experiments would continue.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Assistant Director – Community Services for his informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee requests Cabinet to re-investigate resources to maintain, to a reasonable standard, the Boroughs roundabouts and provide further grass cutting to open spaces in Darlington to ensure businesses are encouraged to come to Darlington.

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