

AGENDA 11, Enc vi)

Ashington Town Council/Northumberland County Council

Draft Report of The Hirst Park Liaison Meeting, held at 10:00am on Tuesday 7th March 2023, at Hirst Park Pavilion

Present:

Cllr Pauline Thompson (Chair), County Cllr Ken Parry, Neil Dawson - NCC Countryside and Green Spaces Manager, Jimmy Reith – Parks and Green Spaces Team Leader, Michael Bryant – NCC Neighbourhood Services, Sarah Bredin-Kemp – NCC Hirst Park Revival Project Co-ordinator, Carla Thompson - Park Development Officer, Sarah Eden - ATC Town Clerk

1. Welcome

Cllr Pauline Thompson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Peter Bowman (Michael in attendance from the Neighbourhood Services team), Cllr Vicki Brown and Cllr Mark Purvis.

3. Disclosure of Interests

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests in items on the agenda as required by the Code of Conduct for Members and by the Localism Act 2011 were received.

4. Dispensations

No dispensations.

5. Previous Meeting

a) Meeting Report

It was **AGREED** to receive and approve the accuracy of the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 5th October 2022, with typing errors amended.

It was later agreed to amend page 3, 8b) Play Zone which referred to gates being broken – this should be clarified to show it relates to the dam gates on the water feature.

b) Actions from meeting

The parts for the **dam gates in the water feature** are waiting to be installed. The feature is expected to be switched on for Easter, weather permitting.

It was previously questioned why a **MOU** was the preferred arrangement in respect of the Town Council contribution to Hirst Park Maintenance. It was discussed that at this moment there was no issue with the current arrangement, so an alternative would not be explored unless dictated by legal.

County Cllr Ken Parry commented that he was sure the budget for the revival of Hirst Park included an outdoor gym. Neil clarified that had this been part of the agreement, the funders would most definitely have sought progress. It was discussed that perhaps an outdoor gym was explored but then not included in the final plans. It was agreed to do some investigations, but accepted that the information may not be available.

Ashington Town Council agreed to support a calendar of **Action Days** in Hirst Park, that would encourage horticultural jobs to be done with the help of volunteers. Sarah BK updated that the abilities of those who volunteer in the park are better suited to the raised beds of the rose garden, and that all other maintenance and horticulture is carried out by NCC Neighbourhood Services.

AGENDA 11, Enc vi)

Ashington Town Council/Northumberland County Council

Draft Report of The Hirst Park Liaison Meeting, held at 10:00am on Tuesday 7th March 2023, at Hirst Park Pavilion

Actions Days have been superseded by the development of more social and community driven initiatives. These have been shared with Sharon at ATC to publish across Town Council media. A report of the development work is detailed below:

Report of Development Work, March 2023

Since the previous meeting (Oct 22), Hirst Park development staff have been busy supporting and facilitating the community's use of the park in a variety of activities and events including:

Warm Hub

The Pavilion has been open as a warm space since November, offering hot drinks, friendly company, and food. Feedback has been excellent; many people have told us that coming to the Pavilion has been a lifeline out of loneliness and isolation.

Volunteering

Development staff run two guided horticultural volunteering groups per week in the park, with support from the park keeper (NEAT). The volunteers are diverse in age and support needs. The horticultural volunteers are proud to be making a visible difference in the park while learning new skills, particularly in the rose garden.

Volunteers have also supported events including the unveiling of the Jack Charlton statue, the clothes swaps, Christmas, and Halloween fairs. Several volunteers have run sessions sharing their skills in martial arts, art and crafting.

Seasonal Activities

Around Halloween, we hosted family-friendly crafts activities. We featured an interactive digital Halloween trail around the park. We worked with Heart of the Hirst at their Halloween Fair. Many Christmas-themed activities took place in the park, including: a celebration event for volunteers, Christmas card making, children's crafts and the very popular Christmas Fair (partnered with Heart of the Hirst). We also worked with community link workers to contribute towards their Canny Little Christmas campaign.

Exercise Classes

There have been 12 chair yoga sessions and 6 Choi Kwang Do sessions led by instructors.

Clothes Swap

The monthly Clothes Swap events continue to grow in popularity. These events invite people to bring along clothes (in good condition) to swap for others, reducing waste and recycling amongst the community. The idea was proposed by a member of the community and continues to be facilitated by volunteers.

Children's Activities

During weekends and school holidays, we continue to deliver a variety of family-friendly activities. Most activities have an educational element relating to the park, the natural environment and biodiversity.

Forest Schools

The Hirst Park Revival Project funds a forest school tutor who has been engaging local schools and home educators, inviting pupils for action-packed days in the park in which they learn about the local flora and fauna, the importance of protecting the environment and more.

AGENDA 11, Enc vi)

Ashington Town Council/Northumberland County Council

Draft Report of The Hirst Park Liaison Meeting, held at 10:00am on Tuesday 7th March 2023, at Hirst Park Pavilion

Fairs with Heart of the Hirst

We continue to work with Heart of the Hirst to deliver four yearly community fairs in the park.

Other groups and activities

The Pavilion is home to several other groups, including a singing group, an art group, and a history group. We work closely with community link workers and host a weekly drop-in alongside their health walking group.

We work closely with Full Circle Food to create a schedule of complimentary events and activities in the park.

Support in the Community

As well as scheduled activities, park development officers offer a friendly and reliable presence in the park. We are very often required to handle delicate situations with vulnerable people and signpost to social services, homelessness teams, drug and alcohol abuse support, mental health support and Citizen's Advice.

Importantly, we have been able to develop friendly and trusting relationships with local people who would have otherwise been isolated.

Coming up next...

Over the next few months, we will be working on Springtime activities, planning our summer events and working on the legacy of our project. Upcoming events include:

- ❖ International Women's Day (partnered with Full Circle Food), 8th March
- ❖ Clothes Swap, 23rd March
- ❖ Easter Fair (partnered with Heart of the Hirst), 9th April
- ❖ A Fantastical Audio Trail, open from the 10th to the 14th of April (partnered with Hive Story Tellers and Bait)
- ❖ International Festival (date TBD) (partnered with Northumberland County of Sanctuary)
- ❖ Celebrations related to the Coronation in May, TBD

Summer plans are already starting to take shape and will include:

- ❖ An end-of-project celebration, summarising the Revival Project
- ❖ A Miners Picnic event, involving 5 local schools at the end of the Summer term. In partnership with schools, Beamish Museum, and Northumberland Archives. 11th of July
- ❖ Heart of the Hirst Summer Fair, 30th of July

6. Heritage Lottery Funding

Neil updated that funding of both Sarah BK and Carla's post was until the end of September 2023. Although the project was expected to initiate a 'friends of' group, this has not happened and would be unlikely to have any longevity without officer support.

The development work that is being delivered by Sarah BK and Carla is unusual in the Green Spaces department of NCC, but it has proven to be what is wanted and needed in the park. Demand for these activities and the roles within the park have resulted in a petition on Change UK, which has reached 300 signatures. As a result the petition will be received at the NCC's Local Area Council.

Neil has set up a meeting with Paul Brooks from Northumberland Communities Together, the department of NCC who usually deliver this type of work, to seek support and advice.

AGENDA 11, Enc vi)

Ashington Town Council/Northumberland County Council

Draft Report of The Hirst Park Liaison Meeting, held at 10:00am on Tuesday 7th March 2023, at Hirst Park Pavilion

Sarah E clarified that whilst the contribution from ATC was not linked to funding the posts that end in September, it was important to share what is being achieved and delivered with the town council. If in the future funding is sought to support this work, the Council will be fully aware of the work.

Funding for the roles is more than £50k. The meeting agreed that feedback from Northumberland Communities Together was the first step, then further and more detailed discussions could take place.

Cllr Pauline Thompson queried the potential for income from the large space occupied by Full Circle, and that this was a larger space in view that ATC did not utilise the polytunnels as expected. Although ATC still have keys for the space, it is unlikely that plants will be propagated in the future. Neil confirmed that heads of terms have not been drawn up yet; this was with Estates. The space is provided free of charge at the moment as it is recognised as a benefit to the community, and Full Circle are effective caretakers of the building. Neil agreed this could be raised in the future.

7. Maintenance of Hirst Park

A written update provided by Peter Bowman, detailed below, with additional information from Michael.

General Maintenance

- Footpath edging and shrub maintenance is all but complete for this season. Shrubs have been allowed to grow out rather than cutting down this year, and anything deemed overhanging onto footpaths or dangerous has been dealt with.
- Bowling green seasonal works have been carried out; this includes any treatments which were required. The back boards have been looked at and any repairs will be carried out in the next week or so, with some back filling behind the boards to be done as well.
- A pre-cut of the grass will be carried out towards the end of March (weather permitting).
- Any weed spraying of kerb lines will take place before the end of March.
- Repairs required for benches to be carried out as and when able.
- General pavement and road cleansing duties continue throughout the year, including bin emptying, litter picking and the use of the road sweeper as and when required (these all increase during the summer months).

Michael added that the damage caused throughout the park continued to be bins being set on fire, plants stripped of leaves and these scattered which then have to be picked up, wet pour damage and wilful interference with playground equipment which is found in the bushes.

Horticulture

At this time of year we concentrate on beds being weeded and shrub maintenance. Jimmy raised that allowing the shrubs to grow out not only improved appearance with less bare soil on display, but it allowed staff time to be used elsewhere.

As detailed above the bowling greens have moss treatment and are scarified at the end of March.

Splash Park

There has been significant damage to the water pump feature which may need to be an insurance claim due to the severity of the damage and the significant cost to repair/replace it.

AGENDA 11, Enc vi)

Ashington Town Council/Northumberland County Council

Draft Report of The Hirst Park Liaison Meeting, held at 10:00am on Tuesday 7th March 2023, at Hirst Park Pavilion

Minor repairs have been carried out, such as protective caps replaced on the small gates. A cleaning agent will be applied to the surface and power washing over the next week or so.

The splash park is being re-commissioned on the 15th March, ready for the anticipated opening for Easter weekend.

Staff

Stuart has joined NCC on an 18/24-month Horticultural Apprenticeship and will assist and learn from Michael alongside the additional seasonal driver operative. This operative will hopefully be with us from Monday 3rd of April, and will allow us to provide 7-day coverage in the park.

Toilets

Toilets will be available throughout the 6 months from April to October and will be cleaned by NCC staff, one visit per day for a deep clean and then monitored by staff within the park.

Other comments

Neil invited any further comments from Michael. Michael raised that sometimes the plants just started to look well and then were removed for the next seasonal planting, visitors also commented on this being wasteful. It was discussed that this is commonplace with commercial, formal, seasonal planting and as seasons are more unpredictable they often do just start to look their best, and then they're removed.

It was discussed that there was a move to a combination of formal seasonal planting and sustainable planting. Often the plants removed from formal beds could be reused in the less formal beds, to good effect; this is more likely with spring bulbs and plants. Michael commented that some of the beds would have looked very bare had it not been for the plants donated by ATC from Station Road, and that more shrubs are needed. It was discussed that operatives tasked with removal and planting would not have time to replant spring plants and shrubs, but there was a possibility that volunteers could help. Sarah BK advised that Full Circle had recycled some plants with their Eco Club.

Michael raised an issue with dog owners using the tennis court as a contained space for off-lead training, etc. Sarah E asked if there was a demand for a dog zone. Carla responded that park users were previously asked about this, and they did not want one. Cllr Ken Parry alluded to the on-going issue with dog fouling on the sports field and the petition received in respect of this. Michael confirmed that incidents were being recorded.

Michael raised that the main issue park users mentioned to him was dog fouling and the lack of lighting, linked to feeling safe. It was discussed that the potential funding for improvement of the Multi Use Games Area/Tennis Court, to create a PlayZone, being led by Active Northumberland, could also offer more lighting.

In regards feeling safe in the park, the Help Point was raised. It was agreed that more information was needed on how it is being used.

Michael also raised that users often mentioned being able to buy a tea/coffee and having a café. Sarah BK agreed this would be appreciated but that the kitchen wasn't equipped to deliver this. Sarah E suggested that if there was a demand, you could offer a contract to a mobile unit, similar to that offered to ice-cream vans during the summer season. It was discussed that refreshments did bring more litter issues.

AGENDA 11, Enc vi)

Ashington Town Council/Northumberland County Council

Draft Report of The Hirst Park Liaison Meeting, held at 10:00am on Tuesday 7th March 2023, at Hirst Park Pavilion

8. Hirst Park Budget

Neil provided a breakdown of costs for Hirst Park going forward. The costs were presented for agreement by ATC in April last year when the MOU was agreed. The original agreement, which is renewed each year, pledges a contribution from ATC of £23,680. At the time of the first agreement this represented 50% of the additional costs. The £23,680 contribution now represents 43% of the additional costs.

Additional staff costs

1 full time band 3 operative (operating on one weekend day between April and October)	£30,298
1 seasonal band 3 operative for 7 months of the year April to October (operating on four midweek days and one weekend day)	£18,370
Winter maintenance by NEAT, 3 hours a day on Sat and Sun during the winter (5 months, 40 days)	£2,661
Initial staff cost pre Hirst Park Revival (0.5 FTE Band 3)	£14,314
Additional staff cost from January 2020 onwards	£37,014
Other additional running costs, plant, fuel, tools, water play maintenance etc (see below)	£18,137
Total additional annual park running costs from January 2020 onwards	£55,151
Proposed ATC annual contribution to annual running costs at 50% of overall additional annual park running costs (capped at £23,680)	£23,680

Other additional annual costs

Gator hire	£3,750.00
Grass cutter hire	£4,800.00
Additional water supply and disposal costs	£2,000.00
Splash pad annual winterisation cost	£2,685.00
Splash pad annual spring recommission cost	£2,902.00
Additional materials/fuel/ tools/equip	£2,000.00
Total	£18,137.00

9. Date, Time, and Venue for the next meeting

Sarah E suggested members may wish to meet earlier than June given the pressing issue of the end of funding for Sarah BK and Carla. It was AGREED to schedule the next meeting for Thursday 11th May as a day when the pavilion would be free and hopefully there would be a positive response from Northumberland Communities Together.

END