

North Local Area Committee

Meeting held 21 November 2023

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Hooper (Chair), Lewis Chinchen, Julie Grocutt, Mike Levery, Robert Reiss, Ann Whitaker, Richard Williams and Alan Woodcock

1. WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING

- 1.1 Councillor Alan Hooper, Chair of the Local Area Committee, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 One minute's silence was held to mark the recent passing of Councillor Vickie Priestley, Deputy Chair of the Local Area Committee.
- 1.3 The Chair noted that Councillor Priestley had been elected to Bradfield Parish Council in 2000, before being elected as a Ward Councillor for Walkley Ward, and for the last 20 years had served as a Ward Councillor for Stannington Ward. He added that she had been a close friend and colleague, and was respected throughout the Council and her ward. She was a talented cake baker and decorator, as well as having excellent skills in patchwork and quilting.
- 1.4 Councillor Richard Williams added that during the time he had known Councillor Priestley, he had got to know her well, along with their fellow ward councillor, Councillor Penny Baker. He said that there was a saying within Stannington Ward, "everyone knew Vickie, and Vickie knew everyone", which he felt summed up what she meant to local people.
- 1.5 Trevor Bagshaw noted that Councillor Priestley had been a good friend and a dedicated Councillor. He recalled the times they had shared on both Bradfield Parish Council and Sheffield City Council. She had a keen interest in music, and had been a patron of the Bradfield Music Festival and supported it each year. He added that Councillor Priestley would be greatly missed, and he passed on his best wishes to her family.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Penny Baker, Craig Gamble Pugh and Janet Ridler.

3. EXCLUSIONS OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

- 3.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4.1 There were no declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

5.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 September, 2023 were approved as a correct record.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

6.1 The Committee received the following questions from members of the public who attended the meeting to raise them:-

(a) Louis Farrington

What plans do the LAC or Sheffield City Council have to further develop the Rivelin Playground according to the Masterplan?

Councillor Richard Williams advised that there were some exciting plans and funding opportunities that were being considered, and confirmed that Stannington Ward Councillors would be discussing this with Sheffield City Council officers in the next few weeks.

The Chair added that Ruth Bell, Head of Parks and Countryside, would be providing an update on parks later in the meeting.

(b) Trevor Bagshaw and Simon Ogden

Mr Ogden explained that he had previously submitted questions regarding the consultation on the Stocksbridge Towns Fund Trails Project, and noted his dissatisfaction with the responses he had received. He had submitted the following questions in advance of the meeting:

We draw members of the NLAC to the brief and dismissive response from officers to the very real concerns raised at the last LAC and fully endorsed by all members present.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the STD Board has authority to make decisions about the allocation of funds, the City Council and its representatives and officers also have a responsibility as Accountable Body to ensure that the process is transparent, objective and underpinned by sound business cases as set out in the STF Governance document.

Contrary to the officer's assertion we have seen no evidence or documentation from the STD to explain the decision to abandon the Trails Project in May or why they failed to consult stakeholders or public prior to it as they had explicitly committed to do. All we have seen is a short announcement that the decision has been made.

The STD has said repeatedly and publicly that it wishes other stakeholders well in seeking to complete the Upper Don Trail. In that case we ask again why are they withholding this essential technical information, including

designs and costings from willing partners and local bodies who wish to progress it?

The Board have now also publicly branded this reasonable request 'vexatious', based on the false claim to have answered our requests and are refusing further engagement with those stakeholders who have made it as recorded in their September minutes .

This is unjustified and highly damaging to both the board and the council's reputations.

If members or officers of the NLAC have seen such evidence or documentation please share it with us so we can get on with the job.

If not we would request the NLAC to reject the response and continue to support our reasonable request.

The Chair advised that a written response would be provided to the questioners.

Mr Ogden expressed his disappointment that no discussion would take place regarding his question.

(c) Mark Whittaker, Mayor of Stocksbridge

We have a very well-respected litter picking group in Stocksbridge who do really good work and they are getting quite fed up with the vast amount of litter on the bypass, particularly on the slip-road towards Deepcar. Different authorities have responsibility but there does not seem to be a systematic litter picking regime. Community groups are enthusiastic, but it is far too dangerous a task to litter pick in this area. Could the committee find a permanent solution for litter picking on the bypass?

Councillor Lewis Chinchin declared that he was employed by National Highways, although not in relation to this particular location. He was aware that the slip road was a particular issue, and confirmed that, although within the boundary of Sheffield, it was not currently covered by Amey's network, and litter picking responsibility fell to the local authority. He agreed that there should be clear responsibility for clearing litter in this area, and confirmed that he had initiated discussions with Sheffield City Council to look at adding this site to Amey's network.

(d) Dorothy Whittaker, member of Friends of Fox Glen Park

For the last year we have been raising funds to get the park improved. We have managed to raise over £60,000 so far, with the help of three very dynamic women on the committee. We have been supported by Parks since the beginning of the project, but now that support has lessened and some of the funding has time limits on spending. We would like to know:

- When will the equipment we have already paid for be installed?
- When we will be able to provide further equipment?
- When will a plan of the park will be received?

Ruth Bell, Head of Parks and Countryside, confirmed that a full set of written answers would be provided. She praised the Group for their fundraising efforts, and apologised that this information had not yet been provided.

7. NORTH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE BUDGET

7.1 The Committee considered a report of the Community Services Manager on the funding allocated to the North Local Area Committee for 2023-24 and the proposals for its allocation and expenditure for 2023-24 in line with the North Local Area Committee Community Plan. In addition to the Cost of Living Fund to support projects alleviating issues around the cost of living, it was noted that the North Local Area Committee had agreed to create two new funds:

- (a) The Greatest Need Fund, to meet demonstrable needs in the North; and
- (b) The Big Idea Fund, to fund innovative approaches to addressing the North Local Area Committee priorities.

7.2 **RESOLVED:** That North Local Area Committee:-

- (a) notes the expenditure against the £100,000 budget to address local priorities in the North LAC as detailed in the report; and
- (b) authorises the Community Services Manager, in consultation with the Local Area Committee Chair, to finalise the eligibility criteria and make decisions, following engagement with the relevant Ward Members, on the award of the grant funds proposed of up to £5,000 per project.

7.3 Reasons for Decision

The North Local Area Committee is asked to note the use of funding as per the previous decision of 30 September, 2021 and agree further expenditure to address the identified local priorities.

7.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected

This report is in line with the previous decision of 30 September, 2021 regarding expenditure below £5000, and the North Community Plan agreed on 26 September, 2023

8. PARISH COUNCIL UPDATES

8.1 Stocksbridge Town Council

Mark Whittaker advised that the Town Council was fully functioning on behalf of the community, with all positions now filled.

8.2 Ecclesfield Parish Council

Adam Hurst provided an update, which included the following actions by Ecclesfield Parish Council:

- Distribution of over 70 “winter warm” packs to vulnerable people in the parish;
- Improvements to all the Parish Council owned benches;
- Internal auditor gave the Parish Council’s financial and governance policies and procedures a clean bill of health;
- Delivered a successful community clean-up day in Thorncliffe;
- Progressing preparation for the local commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings;
- Continuing to give much needed grants to local community groups and organisations; and
- Progressing a meeting with the South Yorkshire Mayor about bus service provisions in the parish.

9. PARKS UPDATE

9.1 The Committee received a presentation from Ruth Bell, Head of Parks and Countryside. The aim of the presentation was to provide an overview of the varied work of the Parks and Countryside Service and further information about activities with the North Local Area Committee wards. There were 800 sites managed by the team across the city that included city parks, district parks, local parks, playgrounds, as well as sports facilities, allotments, closed burial grounds and boating facilities. Budget cuts due to austerity had meant more creativity was needed around spending, along with the need to look at other funding opportunities. She acknowledged the invaluable work of ‘friends’ groups across the city, particularly around fundraising and identifying needs. Other challenges across green spaces included anti-social behaviour, flytipping, litter and tree disease. Use of green spaces had increased since Covid, and more ‘friends’ groups had been set up. Approximately 78% of green sites in the North of Sheffield met the current ‘Sheffield Standard’. It was hoped that further improvements could be made to increase this to 100%, and there were some capital improvement plans that aimed to work towards that goal. Ms Bell praised the work of volunteers in leading activities across green spaces. She noted that the waiting list for allotments was long in some areas, and work was needed to manage this. She believed that rents were reasonable and there was a generous discount scheme for those claiming benefits. Fees had not been increased, meaning that site improvements were not currently possible. She also outlined improvements made to Ecclesfield Park and, Oxley Park and Newhall Woods.

9.2 The Chair thanked Ms Bell and attending and invited questions from those present.

Adam Hurst

A lot of our country parks have problems with off-road biking. What is being doing about this, and is it possible to identify alternative sites for this activity?

In response Ms Bell advised that complaints regarding off-road biking were dealt with on a case-by-case basis, working in conjunction with the police to identify and review access points, and noted a suggestion that was made to look at alternative sites for off-road biking.

Robert Marsden, Friends of Ecclesfield Park

We have received feedback that there is not enough seating in the play area in Ecclesfield Park. We provided 3 benches and litter bins last year.

My wife was Chair of Friends of Ecclesfield Park, until she passed away five years ago, and she had raised the question as to what had happened to the money from the pavilion.

Ms Bell advised that she would investigate these issues and provide the questioner with a full response.

Trevor Bagshaw

1. One-third of the city was situated within the Peak District National Park. To what extent do your activities connect with the Peak District National Park Authority to address the issues that occur in those parts of Sheffield, and how do they work together to work to address those needs?
2. Over the last five years, the Sheffield Wildlife Trust and its partners have secured £3.2m of the National Lottery Heritage Fund. That project closes in spring, and the money is all spent but there is a 10 year forward plan. How does Sheffield City Council plan to invest in those parts of north Sheffield that are not park sites or woodland? Should we be doing more to publicise what the Council is trying to do, and open up volunteering opportunities for people?

Ms Bell advised that Sheffield City Council had very strong links with the Peak District National Park, and noted that some sites were managed by partnerships that has faced similar budget challenges.

In response to the second question, Ms Bell noted that these issues would be discussed with relevant partners, such as Sheffield Wildlife Trust and Green Estate. She explained that the Parks and Countryside team had an oversight of woodland areas and public rights of way. She advised that any further queries could be directed to her at ruth.bell@sheffield.gov.uk

The Chair noted that three of the Councillors present were members of the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee, and had received a briefing on the Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Project. He also advised that Mr Marsden speak to his local councillors present regarding seating in Ecclesfield Park play area.

Councillor Richard Williams added that the Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Project had been an excellent project, and although coming to an end, had now been extended. He suggested that it would be useful to bring a summary of the project to a future Local Area Committee, to discuss its achievements.

10. PLAYZONES PROJECT

- 10.1 Josh Blunkett and Thea Kerwick, Project Officers in the Sports, Leisure and Events team, provided an update on the PlayZones Project.
- 10.2 Mr Blunkett advised that the project was still in its infancy, and involved looking at developing outdoors sports facilities, funded by the Football Foundation, which was a collaborative approach from the Football Association, the Premier League and national government. He explained that the overall aim of the project was to increase physical activity and recreation through sport and play via improved multi-game uses rather than the traditional model currently seen in parks. There had been a thorough site identification process to look at where best these might fit, and which areas might benefit most from the first phase. One of those identified was Ecclesfield Park. The current site had been identified as needing improvement, and had not had a lot of use recently due to its low quality, which led to people travelling outside the area to alternative sites. A consultation process had been carried out between July and September 2023, aiming to get as much engagement as possible, and to spread awareness of what a PlayZone could look like. The Football Foundation had carried out some research and discovered areas that were not commonly used and, in order to increase usage, had set some criteria. This included having floodlights to enable year-round usage, having high quality surfacing, having a viewing area and having an activation plan. Work was being carried out with community organisations and providers to see what opportunities they could offer for a mixed-use approach, i.e. some 'free to use' time, private 'pre-paid' bookings and also activity session bookings. The report was almost finalised, and it was hoped to get the community's thoughts on design aspects of a PlayZone, and how it might best serve the community. The engagement included an online survey and targeted outreach to provide representative views. The response had been positive and had given the team the confidence to progress the project. A full application for Ecclesfield Park would now be submitted to the Football Foundation by the end of 2023, which would then be subject to feasibility funding and evaluation before progressing in 2024.
- 10.3 Andrew Towler of Ecclesfield Parish Council queried whether there would be any basketball provision, as he knew there were many people who were keen to see this.
- 10.4 Mr Blunkett confirmed that basketball had been the second highest priority for the area, and he hoped that this could be offered. Engagement had taken place with the national governing body for basketball and local community groups that were able to provide this.
- 10.5 Adam Hurst asked how the floodlighting would be managed and policed, whilst also preventing anti-social behaviour.
- 10.6 Ms Kerwick advised that a bat survey would be carried out, and lighting would come on automatically as the site was accessed for a booking, so as to reduce energy costs.
- 10.7 Mr Blunkett added that as part of the activation plan, different times for preferred usage were being considered. There was anticipated to be management and/or

community organisation presence on site, thus reducing the risk of anti-social behaviour.

- 10.8 Councillor Julie Grocutt noted the need for a bat/ecology survey. She added that Sheffield Sharks carried out community outreach work and that they had some knowledge on dealing with anti-social behaviour at the design stage.
- 10.9 The Chair thanked Mr Blunkett and Ms Kerwick for the update and noted that it was a very useful pilot scheme for North Sheffield.
- 10.10 The Chair expressed his thanks to Isabel Male, Local Area Committee Officer, who was leaving her post at the Council. He noted that she had been an excellent team member and had been a valuable asset to the North Local Area Committee.
- 10.11 David Luck added that Ms Male had always had a very positive approach to her work and had been a huge asset to the team and to the city, and would be hugely missed.

11. FRIENDS OF GRENSIDE PARK UPDATE

- 11.1 No update was available for this meeting.