

DERWENT VALLEY PARTNERSHIP (DVP) BOARD MEETING MINUTES

19 July 2023, Salvation Army Hall, Consett at 6pm



Present:

Elected Representatives

CLRs Veronica Andrews, Kevin Earley, Stephen Robinson (Vice Chair), Kathryn Rooney, Watts Stelling, Michelle Walton and Alex Watson.

Partner Organisations

Mark Clelland (Vice Chair) (Derwentside Trust) and Allan Hobson (Co Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS)).

Public Representatives

Linda Acres, Lea McConnell (Chair), Helen Marley, John Marshall, Rosemary Morris, Fraser Neill and David Scott.

DVP:

Corinne Walton (AAP Co-ordinator), Lynn Dougal (Support Officer), Kath Clements and Laura Sloan (Community Development Project Officer) and Joanne Ashworth (AAP Towns and Villages Officer).

Members of the Public: 10

Presenters: Mike Allum, DCC and Cllr Kevin Early on behalf of the Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park.

Apologies: None

1. Meeting opened by the Coordinator

Corinne Walton welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through housekeeping.

Board members introduced themselves, there were no apologies and no declarations of interest.

Corinne also welcomed Mike Allum and Cllr Kevin Early who were both giving a presentation, Cllr Watts Stelling as a returning Elected Rep Board member and David Scott, newly appointed Public Rep.

2. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting (24 May 2023)

There were no comments/matters arising and the minutes were AGREED.

3. Partner Updates

Mike Allum, Spatial Policy Manager gave a presentation on DCC's Housing Strategies Principles and Priorities Paper and the consultation linked to this.

This is the first stage of the new housing strategy for County Durham and the main purposes of the housing strategy are to influence where DCC will invest in housing and allow DCC to apply for regional and national funding (a copy of the presentation can be requested).

The consultation is open to all to complete and available at www.durham.gov.uk/thehousingconversation. The closing date is 18 August 2023.

Following the presentation, the following questions/comments were noted:

- With DCC intending to build its own stock of houses, will they be kept as council owned houses or will tenants be able to buy them? It was felt that the right to buy a council house was a huge mistake and should have been kept as affordable rented properties.
Yes, they can be bought although there is a time limit, and a threshold will be applied. The idea is that the programme will be self-funded over time from rented and from right to buy properties which will allow DCC to build more houses.
- Can builders/developers be made to up their standards with regards to energy efficiency and carbon reduction regarding new properties or do they follow national guidance.
There are national standards as a starting point. If there is strong evidence from the housing strategy to go above the national standards this can be reflected in the County Durham Plan (CDP) when it gets reviewed again.
- Does DCC have the capacity to build new houses, or will it be shared with other organisations?
DCC does not have capacity now but are looking for a partner to build the properties. We will project manage them and get the revenue from them.
- Some landlords are not on the Selective Licence register which can be an issue for those tenants.
To be on the register and get it approved by government, it has to be based on evidence and we could not have a blanket cover for the whole of the county. However, there are other powers and advice that can be provided.
- How effective is the selective licensing?
The selective licensing system has penalties in place and inspections can be carried out if we are advised of an issue with properties/landlords. There are strong enforcement powers as part of the process.
- Has DCC considered building affordable properties, especially for first time buyers.
With new developments, 25% of affordable properties on a site have to be considered as first homes which have a discount for first time buyers. However, this is a relatively new scheme.
- Have DCC got the skilled people to carry out the changes by 2035, e.g. retrofitting?
Within the Economic Strategy, a key priority is looking at the skills needed for the future e.g. construction skills, green energy.
- Younger people also need houses not just older people as well as those who want to live independently, with some support.
- When building new developments, do DCC consider the infrastructure already in place, i.e. school capacity, bus services.
We do liaise with other departments as part of the planning process. We try and put developments in the areas where the infrastructure is already in place. If there are gaps in infrastructure, developers pay a contribution which goes towards filling that gap.

Lea McConnell thanked Mike for his presentation and input at the meeting.

4. DVP Funded Project Showcase

Cllr Kevin Early gave a presentation on the Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park's 'Greening our Park' project.

Funding from the DVP enabled the Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park to make improvements and increase biodiversity in the park through woodland and hedgerow planting, vegetation clearance and bulb and herbaceous planting (a copy of the presentation can be requested).

Following the presentation, it was opened up to comments/questions:

- What is happening with the car park?
It has gone quiet, and this will be chased up. The funds should still be there and there are plans for electric vehicle charging points to be installed.
- Part of the plan for the park is to look at a safe crossing on Laburnum Avenue by the park gates which could link up with the Derwent Walk.
- What provision is made for seating in the park?
The Find and Fix team will be repainting the signage and they will be asked if they can renovate the seating.
- Has provision been made to encourage wildlife in the park?
Wildflowers have been planted to encourage bees, insects, birds, etc and bird boxes and insect hotels have been installed. There are often deer in the park, and we happened upon a badger sett too.

Lea thanked Cllr Early for his presentation.

5. Task Group Updates

Corinne gave an update on the 4 Task Groups.

Environment Task Group

The task group met on 27 June and agreed the themes in their Action Plan which includes Reducing energy consumption – heat, transport and electricity and Recycling, reuse and waste reduction. The group has agreed to look at project development rather than an open call out for projects.

The next task group meeting is on 19 September at St Patrick's Church Hall, Consett.

Employment, Education and Training (EET) Task Group

The task group met on 26 June and received a presentation from Derwentside College who gave an update on the DVP funded project 'Progression and transition readiness for young people finishing compulsory education'.

A skills survey, developed by AAP staff, will be circulated shortly to local businesses with a September deadline for responses.

Members of the task group recently attended an Employment Forum, led by Karbon Homes.

The group is still reviewing their Action Plan and once this has been finalised, they will be doing project development rather than an open call out for projects.

The next task group meeting is on 7 September at Glenroyd House.

Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Task Group

The task group met on 7 June and received an update on two DVP funded projects – I am ME and the Dementia Friendly Choir and a presentation from Hope into Action who are a homeless charity.

The group has agreed to do project development rather than an open call out for projects and to assist with this, the group will hold a HWB Forum event instead of a regular meeting in September. The event is aimed at increasing collaborative working with HWB related partners and is open to community groups and organisations who are linked to the group's themes (Suicide Prevention, Social Isolation, Bereavement Support and Physical Activity). The event will consist of networking and HWB themed engagement activities and will be held on 27 September, 3.30pm-5.30pm at Consett Salvation Army Hall.

Towns and Villages (T&V) Task Group

A subgroup of the task group met on 13 June to discuss ideas around Consett Town Centre events and marketing. Following the meeting, the task group would like to recommend that the Board approve the proposed expenditure (£48,225), with the breakdown as follows:

- Town centre events programme totalling £35,000:
 - Christmas in Consett (December 2023) £8,000 (in Middle Street)
 - Consett Brass Festival (July 2024) £4,000 (a multi-site event using the park and town centre)
 - Consett Summer Carnival (August 2024) £15,000 (in Middle Street/Front Street). It is anticipated that the British Cycling event (previously held in 2019) may return to Consett in summer 2024 and that the summer carnival could be scheduled to coincide with the cycling event.
 - Christmas in Consett (December 2024) £8,000 (in Middle Street)

- Promotional opportunities totalling £13,225:
 - Improved signage in and around the town centre, e.g. car parks, local retail areas, leisure facilities £8,000
 - Enhancement of existing websites and social media platforms, e.g. Visit Consett website £3,225
 - Publicity campaign using up to 26 bus shelters for advertising £2,000

The following comments/questions were noted:

- Attracting people to Consett is fine but the town centre needs to be kept an attractive place to visit. Concerns were raised about the state of the planters and Cllr Watson said he has been in touch with DCC's Regeneration team and was advised that they intend to power spray Front Street once Middle Street has been completed.
- Joanne Ashworth has spoken to the Regeneration team who have confirmed that the work on Middle Street will not interfere with the Christmas event that is planned for later this year.
- Are there any public toilets during the events?
As the events are relatively short (1-2 hours) there has not been a requirement for toilets, but this could be looked into.
- When will the invites for the HWB Forum be going out and is there any publicity?
There will be invites going out but they will be targeted at specific groups/organisations linked to the HWB themes. Anyone who knows of any organisations who would be interested in attending the event are asked to contact the DVP Team.

The Board agreed to APPROVE the above expenditure of £48,225 from the Towns and Villages Improvement Fund.

6. DVP Contingency Budget 2023/24 and DVP Forum Event

Contingency Budget

At the May Board meeting, the Board agreed to split the Area Budget of £119,902 across the three task groups (each receiving £35k) and to have a contingency budget of £14,902.

The Board were asked to decide how they would like to use this budget and the following options were suggested:

1. To support the work of the Task Groups (recommended projects which are not able to be supported from the group's allocated budget due to oversubscription).
2. To support projects/initiatives that do not fall within the three priority themes (e.g. community safety, youth activities, support for voluntary and community sector).
3. To support the creation of a participatory budgeting (PB) activity to encourage devolved budget decision-making in the local community.
4. To support the communication element of the DVP's work (e.g. additional editions of Derwent Valley News).

Before the Board decided, a lengthy discussion took place which included the following comments:

- Can funds be applied for via the HWB Task Group at their September Forum to support those families who are unable to afford school uniforms, coats, shoes, etc?
The HWB September Forum event is not inviting funding proposals as it is about getting HWB related partners and organisations/groups together to work together to identify gaps/support required locally, to help us formulate potential project proposals.
- It was felt that Option 2 above fits in with what the contingency fund is trying to achieve which is to address the issues that do not fall under the task group themes.
- It was felt that if the contingency fund is allocated too early there will be nothing left to support emerging projects that may need help.

- To make the contingency fund a fair process, there should be an open call out so all organisations (subject to eligibility criteria) can apply.

The Board reached a consensus and agreed to Option 2, which is to support project proposals that do not fall within the three priority themes.

After further discussion as to how the process for the contingency fund would work (ie reviewing proposals, budget amount, application process, etc), Corinne summarised the outcome, which the Board agreed to:

An open call out for project proposals will be undertaken and it will be made clear that it is not linked to the DVP's 3 priorities (employment, health and environment). Applications will have to adhere to the AAP budget criteria, ie £5k minimum can be applied for (an expression of interest form will be completed initially before successful projects complete the full online form). A short Board meeting will be held in October, possibly on Teams, to specifically look at the project proposals. The call out for the contingency fund will be promoted over the summer.

Forum Event

At the May Board meeting, the Board were keen that we hold a Forum event sometime this year. Prior to Covid we regularly held Forum events, and these were a good opportunity to showcase projects supported by the DVP, for local priority setting, community information stalls, etc.

It is proposed that we hold a Forum on Saturday 25 November, between 10am – 2pm with the venue to be confirmed. The event would be open to all.

The format could include workshops (eg local priority themes, arts and crafts for display locally, partner themes/topics), other engagement activities, networking, etc.

The Board advocated the idea of hosting a Forum subject to discussions and planning.

7. Community Engagement Review Update

Corinne gave an update on the Community Engagement Review and showed the presentation slides, compiled by Gordon Elliot, Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement (a copy can be requested).

Following the review and the consultation, a report on the proposed model went to Cabinet, and agreed, on 12 July.

A local network model will replace the current AAP model and will be based on the current AAP funding team and staffing, the boundaries may change depending on the Boundary Commission review and the branding will change from AAPs to Local Community Networks. The funding structure will change with a simplified funding and application process, a more strategic approach to the work of the local networks will be adopted and AAP Boards will be replaced with Local Network Panels who will still have decision making responsibilities. Local AAP Forum members will become part of the wider Durham Community Network, although the details of how this works at a local level are still to be decided on. More information about the review and

the report are available to view online.

The changes are due to take place in May 2025 and there will be a project plan put in place to make the transition from AAPs to the new Local Networks.

Rosemary Morris said she supports the new proposals and likes many of the changes such as having longer term plans and projects and attendance at the groups by the Councillors.

8. DVP Board Chair Closing Comments

Lea McConnell thanked everyone for attending and thanked Mark Clelland, the previous DVP Chair, for his contribution over the last year.

9. Meeting Close and Date of Next Meeting

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday 27 September 2023, 6pm at The Salvation Army Hall, Consett.