

DERWENT VALLEY PARTNERSHIP (DVP) BOARD MEETING MINUTES

31 January 2024, Salvation Army Hall, Consett at 6pm



Present:

Elected Representatives

Cllrs Veronica Andrews, Kevin Earley, Kathryn Rooney, Michelle Walton and Alex Watson.

Partner Organisations

Mark Clelland (Vice Chair) (Derwentside Trust), Allan Hobson (Co Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service), Philip Pollard (Karbon Homes) and Joanne Waller (Durham County Council (DCC)).

Public Representatives

Lea McConnell (Chair), Helen Marley, Rosemary Morris and Fraser Neill.

DVP

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

Members of the Public: 15

Presenter: Cllr Jonathan Elmer, DCC.

Apologies

Elected Reps: Cllrs Stephen Robinson (Vice Chair) and Watts Stelling. Partner Rep: Donna Tunney (The Hub). Public Reps: Linda Acres, John Marshall and David Scott.

1. Meeting opened by the Coordinator

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

Board members introduced themselves and apologies were noted as above. Cllr Elmer was welcomed to the meeting, who was giving a presentation.

Declarations of interest were from Cllr Kevin Earley regarding the Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park funding applications - Community Garden and Men's Group Programme and the Derwent Valley Bike Club. Also, from Mark Clelland regarding the Derwentside Trust funding application.

2. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting (29 November 2023)

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

3. Guest Speaker

Cllr Jonathan Elmer gave a verbal presentation on the global climate and ecological emergencies at a local level.

Cllr Elmer gave some background about himself; he is the Green Party's national spokesperson on the natural environment and has worked in countryside management and as a consultant ecologist.

Cllr Elmer covered areas that included:

- The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, where there was a target on limiting the global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Last year the average global temperature rise was 1.48°C so we are almost at the point that would represent a risk of earth exceeding various planetary boundaries (reaching a tipping point that makes it harder to push things back in the right direction).
- The effects of climate change where carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are exceeding the natural capacity of the planet to absorb CO₂.
- The growing pressures on fresh water and its availability due to increases in population and its uses.
- Depleting natural stocks of nitrates, which form the basis of most fertilisers used for growing food and mainly used in intensive farming practices. The Raby Estate is remodelling the way they do farming and moving away from intensive farming to restorative farming. Restorative farming involves permaculture where they do not plough the land but let worms do the job and seed drill the plants. They are also using smaller vehicles that do not compact the soil as much.
- The competing uses of the landscape for housing, economic functions ie business, industrial, transport, and farming that have an impact on the space needed for natural systems to function effectively.
- A change in policy from government and councils to make more green spaces and encourage more use in public transport, cycling and walking and less reliance on using cars.

The following comments/questions were noted after Cllr Elmer's talk:

- What about the levels and effects of Sulphur Dioxide in the atmosphere?
Sulphur Dioxide/acid rain was a big issue in 1970s/1980s, and it was a consequence of burning fossil fuel, in particular coal. It is not so much a problem any more in this country as we do not burn coal at those levels. However, there are problems elsewhere such as China and India as they have high levels of pollution through burning coal.
- What size in area is considered for a local nature reserve?
As much as possible, but even if it is the size of a football pitch it would be beneficial and important for wildlife. If councils can declare a green space as a local nature reserve, it can get statutory protection from development.
- Rather than using Raby Estates, who have the funding to make the changes to less intensive farming practices, it would be better to identify average size farmers as examples to illustrate these changed farming practices.
There are many examples of small-scale farmers that have made the change, but Raby Estates was chosen as it is a good example of a large-scale farming transition and the technology they are using is available to small scale farmers at a relatively low cost.
- The changes to EU funding subsidies are going to hit farmers and it would be beneficial if as many people could be helped to make those changes to less intensive farming.
Progress has been made nationally with regards to the Environment and Land Management Scheme which is replacing the Common Agriculture Policy money from Europe.
- Is it essential we retain tree cover?

We need to retain what we have and plant a lot more. Trees are part of a natural ecosystem and play a different role in different natural environments.

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

4. DVP Task Group Updates

Corinne gave an update on the 4 Task Groups, which the Board received copies of and the associated paperwork prior to the Board meeting.

Environment Task Group

The task group met on 16 January 2024 and are continuing with project development around:

- ❖ DVP Environment Conference. Interested parties can join a time limited sub-group to plan and deliver the conference.
- ❖ DVP Climate Fresk Workshop. A workshop around climate change is on 17 April 2024, 1pm-4pm at St Patrick's Church Hall. Durham Climate Fresk Facilitators will be attending the next Task Group meeting in March.
- ❖ Derwent Valley Schools Walking Bus. Consultation with the schools and head teachers will be carried out to get ideas on how they would operate.
- ❖ Repair Cafes and Pre-loved Fashion Show. This element is in its early stages and the group are discussing location/venues and how these would work.
- ❖ Derwent Valley Community Growing and Food Network. In addition to the current initiative in Blackhill and Consett Park, the group is also looking to extend the programme to Burnopfield and Medomsley.

The group would like to recommend, to the Board, the following project for funding:

- ❖ **Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park** – Derwent Valley Bike Club, £12,000.
The project is to add value to the existing bike club at Blackhill and Consett Park by encouraging a wider range of users to access active travel opportunities in the Derwent Valley area.

Cllr Watson thought this was an excellent scheme and promoting more cycling has environmental and health benefits. He proposed that this project is supported.

The Board APPROVED to fund Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park £12,000 from the 2023/24 Area Budget.

The Task Group has a budget allocation of £34,739 and with the above proposal of £12k agreed by the Board, an amount of £22,739 remains. Therefore, the group would like to recommend to the Board that they approve the proposed project cost breakdown:

Derwent Valley schools and community growing scheme - £14k
Derwent Valley Walking Bus school scheme - £5k
Pre-loved Fashion Show and Local Repair Cafes - £5k

- ❖ **Digital Voice for Communities CIC** - Digital Voice Video Project, £10,000.
A series of videos which will show the impact on health and wellbeing, based on up to 8 DVP funded health and wellbeing activities.
- ❖ **Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park** - Community Garden and Men's Group Programme, £10,350.
Expanding on the existing community garden programme, with more of a focus on older men (age 50+) and working collaboratively with local men's groups.
- ❖ **St John's Ambulance** - Derwent Valley Primary Schools First Aid Training, £6,120 (submitted from Contingency Budget Fund).
First aid training for 18 primary schools in the DVP area.

Total funding request £26,470.

A balance of £8,530 remains to be allocated and further discussions around project development to utilise the remaining balance will be discussed at the next task group meeting on Wednesday 28 February.

Cllr Walton asked how the organisations, that will be involved in the Digital Voices Video project, will be chosen? John O'Connor (HWB Task Group Chair) said there will be a cross section of organisations that can reflect the themes in the action plan. It will be an opportunity for the organisations to promote the work they do and direct people looking for those services. The Task Group will decide and approach the organisations who they consider will be suitable for the video.

A Forum member asked if the St John's Ambulance project included defibrillator training. Corinne advised that it does not and covers basic first aid training only. However, the Mini Medics project supported via the Contingency Budget will cover defibrillator training.

There were no further comments and the Board APPROVED to fund Digital Voice for Communities, Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park and St John's Ambulance from the 2023/24 Area Budget.

Towns and Villages (T&V) Task Group

Funding of £210k has been fully allocated to the task group and before the group ends, they will be meeting on Tuesday 13 February to receive an update on the projects supported so far and to review the monitoring.

The first of the town centre events programme was Christmas in Consett on 9 December and was well attended. A further 3 events are planned for 2024 – Brass, a summer festival and a Christmas event – more details to follow in due course.

Cllr Shield asked what the delivery date is for the Community Speedwatch vehicle and what is the implementation date for the school's 20 is Plenty zones in Burnopfield and Medomsley. Corinne advised that an update will be given at the 13 February Task Group meeting.

5. Project Genesis Trust (PGT) £10k Funding Proposals

Back in September 2023 PGT offered £10k discretionary funding to the DVP which the Board accepted to help support community-based projects.

The process for awarding this funding is at the discretion of the Board and the Board were asked to consider the following options to utilise the money:

1. To consider the unsuccessful DVP Contingency Budget proposals (due to oversubscription), which have not been subsequently supported by a Task Group. These are:-
 - Sport Works, Inclusive Youth Club for Young People in Consett, £10,000
 - 1st Dipton Scout and Guide Group, Nights Away and Outdoor Activities, £8,225
 - Consett Heart, Consett Heart Activity Days (Culture and Heritage), £8,238.90
 - Randoms Retreat, Random's Retreat Rewilding, £5,000
 - Derwentside Detached Youth Project, Derwentside Detached Youth Project in Leadgate, £9,000
 - Hamsterley Mill Residents Association, Hamsterley Hall Sculpture and Seating, £5,000
 - Durham County Council, Classical Music in Consett Bus Station, £6,000
2. To contribute to the shortfall of £7,496 towards the third ranked DVP Contingency Budget project which only received part funding.
 - NHS Foundation Trust, Blackhill Community Allotment, Young People's Project. Full funding request of £10,540 but received part funding of £3,044.

The remaining PGT Discretionary Fund of £2,504 could be allocated to an alternative project.

3. To consider new project proposals received specifically for the PGT funds. One expression of interest has been received (although no call out undertaken and no agreement made as to how process would work) from:
 - Derwent Valley Sports Initiative CIC, £10,000. The applicant has put forward 2 options – one for improved heating system in the new gym or for to purchase gymnastics equipment.

A short discussion ensued with the following comment/questions noted:

- Regarding the expression of interest from Derwent Valley Sports Initiative, would be happy to support gym equipment but not the heating system.
- Preference was given to support those applicants who applied under the Contingency Budget fund.
- Has Derwent Valley Sports Initiative explored other funding options, specifically around a new heating system? It was noted that they have been sign posted to other funding sources.

Corinne clarified the outcome, which the Board AGREED to, which is to contribute £7,496 shortfall to the third ranked project (NHS Foundation Trust) from the Contingency Budget. The remaining funds of £2,504 would go to the next ranked project which is Sport Works. We would have to go back to Sport Works to ascertain if they could deliver their project with the reduced funding.

6. DVP Board Meeting Schedule 2024-25

The Board were asked to note the dates for the forthcoming financial year's Board meetings:

Wednesday 22 May 2024 (AGM)
Wednesday 17 July
Wednesday 25 September
Wednesday 27 November
Wednesday 29 January 2025
Wednesday 26 March

Board meetings will commence at 6pm and likely to be held in the Salvation Army Hall, Consett (subject to confirmation).

The above may change depending on when the pre-election period (purdah) is, specifically relating to the local mayoral elections and the general election – date yet to be confirmed.

The Board AGREED to the above dates.

7. DVP Priorities for 2024-25

As the AAPs will be changing to Local Networks from April 2025 (more information on the new networks will be given in due course), the Board were asked to consider alternatives to the current 3 priority task groups. It was suggested that the DVP has fewer task groups or one overarching task group that would be time limited and would end in March 2025, prior to the new Local Networks starting in April 2025.

Corinne outlined some of the reasons for reducing the number of task groups that included: the current priorities have been around for a while, forthcoming elections are likely to impact on funding decision/allocation timescales, one overarching priority can include several themes/priorities and a project development process can be more focused. Also, the process for project monitoring would remain unchanged if the Board chose one overarching priority.

Corinne stated that ultimately, it was the decision of the Board as to whether they wished to reduce or retain the number of priority task groups moving forward.

Following a brief discussion, the Board were in favour of one overarching task group as they felt that it may be more productive with a broader range of topics and a greater input from a variety of people.

As the Board agreed to one overarching task group, Corinne advised that this would be set up in readiness for the 2024/25 financial year.

Corinne made a special thanks to the current Task Group chairs for their input and participation in those groups as well as thanking those who have been involved in all the task groups over the years. An informal thank you event for all group members would be arranged in due course.

8. Meeting Close and Date of Next Meeting

Before the meeting closed Cllr Shield took to the floor to highlight an opportunity for the Board to consider regarding the ex-catalogue store in Middle Street, Consett, which closed many years ago. Cllr Shield has been in discussion with the County Durham Christian Life Centre (CDCLC),

who have already established facilities in Peterborough, Middlesbrough and Newcastle, regarding use of the building for community religious aspects. It is not a church, but a community facility delivered by a church organisation.

He has had discussions with senior council officials to ascertain if this could be brought to the Board and for the Board to consider supporting this organisation to acquire and develop the building. The building is valued at around £200k-£225k; the CDCLC has funds of approx £150k. He stressed that he is not suggesting that the DVP make up the shortfall, rather that this could be an opportunity whereby multi agencies could be involved in this, accessing grants to allow the building to be used for the benefit of the community.

There needs to be a robust business case with proactive agencies who can be involved without impacting on existing community hubs in the area. He is asking the Board to consider inviting active participants to a Board meeting and consider a proposal to develop a business case in conjunction with CDCLC to see if this can be facilitated.

Cllr Walton wondered about the criteria around AAPs not able to fund religious groups. Cllr Shield said this is the community aspect of the organisation rather than the religious aspect.

Jeff Baker, on behalf of Consett Salvation Army, said that they have been in Consett for 145 years and have been working in the community with little funding from DCC. With a focus on the social aspect, they regularly supply community meals, hold community groups with speakers, mother and toddler groups plus they hold a Christmas Toy Appeal and more. He feels that they should have been approached about this and is not very happy about the prospect of another organisation that will certainly be a duplication of what is already out there. Cllr Shield reiterated that this would supplement not duplicate and would service what the gaps in provision are.

Philip Pollard said he has come across religious organisations before and that on face value they look great but when you get into the detail those religious aspects start to come into it. With regards to the cost of the building, he asked if any feasibility studies have been carried out around potential costs such as asbestos, state of the building, etc. Cllr Shield said the ground and first floors are in remarkably good condition, but they were unable to access the second floor as it is blocked off.

Rosemary Morris said as this is a big proposal with a lot of information to take in, she would like more time to consider this before making a decision. Cllr Earley also asked if there was anything that could be circulated about this.

Lea concurred with Rosemary's comments and suggested that further consideration could be made at the March Board meeting.

Lea thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday 20 March 2024, 6pm at The Salvation Army Hall, Consett.