

Present: Andy Harrison, Jane Harrison, Mary Sherwin, Rob George, Tony Cooper, Andrew Buckingham.

Apologies: Pippa Smaling, Rachel Mills, Jackie Buckingham.

AB gave a run through of feedback on site maintenance. Description of which paths will no longer be maintained due to underuse and therefore a deduction that it's not required. Site-wide fencing evaluation will be undertaken.

RG gave explanation of the council's obligations around risk evaluation for the bike track, and that 4Motion's maintenance of the track is beneficial to reducing the risk. The group of people using the track at the weekend was a council-funded enterprise (although funding is not in place from the council any more) but is now independent, possibly linked to 4Motion.

Fencing, Comet's Garth, Andy Harrison: Fences appear to be rotten implying that the same problem will be apparent along the length; several e-mails sent but no resolution yet. TC said that evaluation showed that it had been damaged by being hit, rather than failure; but that equally the design life is perhaps only 10 years. TC: some fencing is required e.g. by ponds, but others is purely aesthetic and needs re-evaluating in the site-wide context. AH: fences are insubstantial; is there a risk that they are insufficient for protecting from the ponds, and could the shorter type be put in which are more robust. TC: the low fence would possibly be a trip hazard; would the planting be an adequate demarcation now.

JH: the planting is possibly an issue because people might walk through and not see the water. RG: the ponds being overgrown are an issue; has spoken to a company which can mechanise the process and keep on top of it via a year-on-year maintenance.

JH: the aesthetic is not what it used to be, and no longer comparable to other developments, and is untidy; including the outlook because the trees have become overgrown, and the overgrown ponds. RG: new officer in South Park is encouraging creating sight lines by removing some vegetation. TC: description of the function of the ponds as engineered structures for containing 1 in 120 year floods. AH: the willow trees on the bank are also overgrown. TC: the landscape was planned for the trees being mature and the sight line being designed accordingly.

TC: action on ponds and trees needs to be done with respect to the site as a whole, rather than individual preferences, and an evaluation will be done. JH: no other people are attending the meeting so whose opinion is more valid than those present? JH: money being paid into the Levy, but no maintenance is being done on fences. TC: maintenance if a health and safety issue is in the responsibility of Darlington Borough Council (DBC). JH: in which case is the fencing a DBC issue. RG: in which case DBC will not necessarily repair the fence with one of equal aesthetic.

AH: therefore can a decisions be made here now to spend the money repairing the fence? RG: inclined to say that the fence will be repaired by DBC; TC added that there are materials already spare for it. AB: in summary a full fencing evaluation will be done, at cost from the Levy, and as much money as required can be dedicated; but timescales will require that this

might require feedback to the Friends etc; and that in the short term RG will arrange for DBC to repair but at Levy cost. AB: the Steering Group may not be able to get the spend past County Durham Community Foundation (CDCF). RG: the Levy already pays for maintenance in some circumstances. AB: the decision rests with CDCF. TC: should evaluate what materials exist and whether that reduces the overall value. RG: tell the contractors to pick the materials up from Bussey & Armstrong (B&A) and do it at a reduced price. **Action RG: arrange for fence to be repaired using B&A materials.**

AB: looking for consensus that the Friends are satisfied with the ponds proposal. All in agreement that the approach proposed by RG to go to specialists and form a plan is the best way forward.

AH: the area to the side of the walking route to school path on Comet's Garth is untidy; is this in the park boundary. AB: the boundary is inside of the wooden marker posts. TC: it is DBC responsibility and there may be money left from the safe routes to school; this will be considered in the wider landscape evaluation.

AB: events for this year will focus on a music festival for the summer event; because of a lack of impetus from the Friends, the group at The Forum has been proposed. JH: who will tidy up? TC: DBC are still responsible. AH: concerns that it might spill off the park with litter etc. TC: expecting 1500-2000; best previous West Park event was around 1000. AH enquired about spend; TC explained £5000 from Levy plus the same from B&A; 80% on paying for the bands. AH: could we do something more upmarket e.g. Shakespeare in the Park. TC: encouraging but requires organisational skills; The Forum involvement facilitates just a music event. TC: explanation of the second Levy fund which enables community events. AB: usage of the park is one of the best improvements that can be made, which is why any event bringing people in can lead to an improvement; a Shakespeare event is another good idea but would need some organising by the Friends. AH: can we get more people into the Friends to help organise events? RG: attendance is not dissimilar to other groups in Darlington.

Steering Group feedback: AB described the problems of having money accruing and being charged interest, therefore move some into an endowment fund for future capital projects. AH: concerned about the sensibility of collecting money from the Levy which is effectively unused. AB: evaluation of cyclical spending has been done for enhancements that are predictable and repeatable; additional money has no immediate usage therefore can be saved in a fund. AH: should it be collected at all? TC: legally it must be. RG explained that the Levy is good value compared to normal management fees. AB: do the Friends want to feed any opinions back to the Steering Group regarding the endowment proposal? Friends are in agreement that the proposal is acceptable.

Meeting ended 8.15pm.