

Friends of West Park Meeting 15th August 2022 - Minutes

1) Apologies

Apologies from Chair of WPLT Neil Brimer and Trustees Rob George, Bill Herbert, Rob George and Andrew Buckingham.

2) West Park Levy Trust Update

In attendance from the WPLT were Paul Black who chaired the meeting, and trustees Tony Cooper and Martyn Hunter. Also in attendance were Councillor Durham, Pippa Smaling and approximately a dozen members of the community.

Paul welcomed attendees and thanked everyone for supporting the Friends. This was quite a large meeting of the Friends given that it was held during the school holidays. Paul confirmed Neil Brimer is now the WPLT Chair with Andrew Buckingham stepping down from the role but continuing to be a trustee. Once again Paul encouraged any members of the community who are interested in becoming a Trustee to express their interest or ask any questions.

3) 2022 Site Works

Grass Cutting (DBC)

Pippa mentioned that the grassland has had 3 cuts so far this year and a fresh cut was completed just before the Jubilee. Comment raised that the grass cutters are driving too fast around the estate. The litter pick in March was well attended with the Street Champions carrying out regular picks too. Residents raised their concern that a patch of grass behind Winding way (towards the Bellway houses) has not been cut and the grass alongside the fences has not been stirmed. Pippa to pass this feedback onto the correct team manager.

Play area improvement Update (WPLT)

The play area update is completed, with some outstanding snagging still to be completed. New play area at the end of Edward Pease way is at the planning stage.

Wild Flower Planting (DBC/WPLT)

Wild flowers planted with some new areas now introduced. The contractor has got some areas wrong, and this need to be adjusted, although the public have made their own tracks through. The park is currently bone dry given the recent hot spell of weather. The bulbs for October have been ordered and the areas for planting still need to be finalised. 3k a year over 3 years for wild flower planting, do we want to renew the spending? Question asked with regards to some that have died / encouraged weeds and might change the mix (3 types of flowers) – Flowers are “annuals” so only last a year, can get some that last 3 or so years but die off 50% per year so look a bit patchy after the first year.

Notice / Interpretation Boards (WPLT)

The new interpretation boards are now installed and operational. There was one issue at Richmond Close where the resin had not set on the bolts, this has now been resolved by the contractor by adding a spot weld. We are awaiting on the design of the backgrounds for within the noticeboard area to be finalised and looking at using the space to include useful numbers to report anti-social behaviour, maybe a QR code can be used to scan with a mobile phone to take you to our website for further information. The design has changed a couple times to ensure compliance with relevant tests, the wider base makes them more stable and the laser cut holes in the design allow for air to get through. Final estimated costs are approx. 3-5k each, which is quite reasonable compared to other installation of artwork. Standard off-the-shelf noticeboards were about the same cost and theoretically these will last a lifetime. Fingerposts have been designed ready for the next phase to point to the relevant locations on the estate. Question asked from residents with regards to adding a seat next to them?

4) Proposed New Projects

Bike Track (Community Members/DBC)

Bike track discussions ongoing with Jonathan. 3 options put forward for 3 different schemes (3/5/10 years) and Jonathan has been asked for a report on it so we can eventually decide. Potentially an option to look at leveraging other funding from organisations such as Sport England. We as a trust can spend small amounts of money on feasibility studies for work to attract bigger funding – community centre is a good example of this. How does this fit in with Darlington’s other plans? What are the sports facilities we can bring to this side for town etc. This won’t happen next year but we need to look at the 3/5/10 year plans.

Fencing (WPLT)

We are aware the fence is currently broken/missing at the end of Locomotion Lane. The overall issue with replacing the fencing has been set back due to the member of staff at the merchant leaving the company, thus the quotation process has had to start from the beginning.

5) Events (WPLT)

Comment made about last of community spirit. Paul Black talked about a weekly coffee morning at his last home which was subsidised by the developer and several dozen sub-groups branched off from this for various different interests. Paul referred to this as the “post covid community recovery program” going forward. 300 people came to the Jubilee, which was a huge success, and we are looking to plan a large event for September 2025 to mark 200 years of the Railway. Do we do host a smaller event in 2023? Councillor Durham mentioned the availability of community grants for Brinkburn/Faverdale area to help getting community spaces up and running. He gave an example that a £1500 grant was issued to the Academy towards a defibrillator and 4Motion got funding for a bike for the use of disadvantaged children.

6) Community Feedback

Becks

Concern was also raised with regards to the beck along Locomotion Lane as this is starting to pile up with cuttings and overgrown with weeds and it was causing people who live along there to no longer use their front doors. Pippa confirmed that there has previously been work carried using trimmers in the water out to try and cut the reeds but they keep coming back. Paul Black spoke to Northumbrian Water to improve the areas around the beck. Steven Thompson from Northumbrian Water is going to visit the site to take a look.

Pathways

Resident commented that pathways are becoming a problem, especially up from the bridge at Timothy Hackworth Drive (first right as you walk half way up the path) where there’s an issue with water drainage where it has previously been dug out for drainage. Every 2 years the levy fix the paths, any dangerous issues should be raised straight away with DBC and they will decide whose responsibility is to fix it. Confirmed that Council own and responsible for the park and basic maintenance.

Dogs and Waste Bins

Issue with dog waste bins overflowing with none available in the middle of the park with large areas without a bin. Pippa confirmed that the bins need to be close to entry/exits of the park to make more efficient when emptying the

bins. All bins are dual purpose. Question raised with regards to increasing the number of bins available and looking at a contractor to empty the bins instead of DBC?

Question about dogs on/off leads in the park. Do dogs need to be on leads? Pippa confirmed that the only area where dogs are required to be leads is in the Play area due to the Dog Control Order. Can we have a fenced off area to let dogs off leads? Councillor Durham questioned how it would be policed? There were some complaints from the residents that people travel to the park to walk dogs off the leads.

Village Issues

Issue raised with regards to the 4 bins in middle of village overflowing and the stonework being dirty due to people sitting on it as there are no benches nearby. This area gets power washed every 3 years or so. Potential concern that benches will increase ASB. Because these issues are outside the remit and responsibility of WPLT, they should be referred to Bussey & Armstrong direct.

ASB

Concerns over ASB in the estate, loud house parties and motorbikes etc, Councillor Durham mentioned that the Police are sorting out "Clear Signposting" point of contact for ASB etc.

Parking

Parking issues near school, HGV struggling to get round and mounting the curbs causing damage. Double yellow lines ignored and bollards have been tried before. The roads were tracked to the size of the vehicles by design, drivers are at fault if they mount kerbs. Deliveries to Nursery reversing back towards the school. Because these issues are outside the remit and responsibility of WPLT, they should be referred to Durham Constabulary direct. Suggestion made to report the vehicle with a photo to company who it belongs as they will be responsible to fix any damage. Comments about parking for flats residents, Sunday/Monday are the best days as hairdressers/café is shut but the area is very busy all other days. Allowance for only 1.4 car spaces per house in the 2000s when the estate was developed. With regards to the school traffic, suggestion made to pop into the school to remind parents to park correctly, or use the Aldi carpark and walk across.

Flooding

Behind flats near the bin sheds, 3 disable bays flood as rain comes off the bin shed, resulting in 2-3 inches of standing water. Leaves from trees are blocking the drains. Because these issues are outside the remit and responsibility of WPLT, they should be referred to Bussey & Armstrong direct.

Trees

Trees blocking the no entry sign behind Coop and residents have witnessed a couple of cars going the wrong way out of the one-way system because of this. The trees are also blocking the streetlamps and making it very dark at night. Because these issues are outside the remit and responsibility of WPLT, they should be referred to Bussey & Armstrong direct.

Netomnia

Councillor Durham mentioned spoke about the good work that Netomnia have done to improve broadband speeds in the village. Residents have been written to but not a lot of people have taken the service up as yet.

Wildlife

Suggestion made about the purchase of some bee hotels and bird boxes around the park? Is it possible to look into a community bin for compost to make our own compost instead of paying DBC £38 per household for green bin collections. Pippa mentioned that the compost needs to be turned so it doesn't ignite. Grants are available for funding for gardening groups etc.

WPLT Online Presence

We spoke about increasing our online presence, for example all minutes should be publicised. Residents asked if there was a consultation for the projects. Tony confirmed that the bigger events have had consultations in the past, including the recent new noticeboards and play park work.

Levy Payments

Question asked with regards to bad debts, and an example where Kingston won't let a resident pay as the previous home owner had not paid it. County Durham Foundation (CDF) had a policy where they wouldn't chase debt, Kingston won't allow debt and they actively chase it.

7) Any Other Business

None were raised, but individuals were able to chat to trustees after the meeting about individual questions. Community expressed thanks for the opportunity to be heard and the Trustees thank all those that attended.

8) Time of next meeting

14th November 2022.