**Sunderland Green Spaces Forum Meeting date: 13th March 2018, 18.30 – 2-.30, The Chester’s Pub**

**1.Present**: Victor Cadaxa (Friends of Herrington Country Park), Gillan Gibson (CPRE), Tim Wright (Red Machine Allotment Association- chair),Simone Price (Wear Rivers Trust), Kirsty Pollard (Durham Wildlife Trust - minutes), Shirley Carr (Friends of Hetton Lyons Country Park), Kathy Pickering ( Friends of Hetton Lyons Country Park), Ashley Sutherland (Friends of Mowbray Park and Tunstall Hills Protection Group), David Newrick (Sustainable Sunderland), Graeme Jobes (A Space 2 Grow),

In attendance: Ian Richardson (Assistant Head of Services, Sunderland City Council), Debbie Hall (Sunderland City Council), Steve Liddle (SCC)

Apologies: Allan Rowell, Paul Brickle, Susan Nolan

**2. Notes from previous meeting**

These were agreed.

**3.** **Matters Arising**:

* All present approved the proposed change to the terms of reference to refer to blue as well as green infrastructure.
* Bank account was opened on the 1st March

**4.** **Sunderland City Council’s management of allotments and parks – achieving future sustainability**

Ian Richardson(IR)– provided some history for Sunderland Council Service Areas: Since 2010 they have been through several budget cuts which has resulted in a lot of restructuring. Management of green spaces changed from an intensive frequent approach to a responsive approach (delivering services as and when it is essential) and now in a non-intensive frequency based approach. The team are aware this has resulted in reduced environmental quality in the city and has an impact on the city. As a result from a meeting with Elective Members £1.2 million are coming back into Services which will be allocated to Street Cleansing Services.

About one year ago there was a management restructure which has resulted in a few changes of roles.

They are aware that their focus has not been on green spaces over the past 10 years but this is going to change and they are want to look forward at how the team can have more of a dialogue and work more with groups involved in green spaces in Sunderland. Conversations need to start to find out what people want to be happening in green spaces and what support is needed from the council eg. Providing links on websites, how groups can become constituted

In response to rumours about Park Trusts etc, the Team would like to assure the group that there are no imminent plans towards this. The Parks Trust model is definitely something that they will need to look into as an option for the future but there will be no imminent changes towards this yet. They currently have an HLF bid in process (Local Parks) which will include looking at alternative models for managing parks and will be looking at fees, charges and other streams of income.

Tim Wright – asked the Group for comments, thoughts or questions for the Team on broader issues and themes.

VC- We need stronger voluntary groups and suggest that SCC could provide greater signposting on their website for volunteering opportunities and the Friends Groups.

IR – agreed this would be a good step forward and there is a need to think about who will be volunteering, what their volunteering reasons are and how long they will be volunteering and then look at how we can support them in this. And how we can work together with other organisations and group such as the probation service, youth groups and businesses.

Debbie Hall – Sunderland City Council (SCC) are looking at their website and getting signposting to opportunities. Currently if people contact them Debbie will tell them how they can get involved with the right group.

Shirley Carr (SC) – Suggested Friends of Groups could promote on www.sunderlandservice directory.co.uk <https://www.sunderlandservicedirectory.co.uk> The DO-IT website <https://do-it.org> is another option-FHCP currently using this although not had any uptake through it yet.

IR – Will have discussions with SCC Communications Team to see how we can better provide links and signposting to events/activities and groups. Also the need to use technology for tracking and greater promotion of events/activities and groups.

IR – still wanting to ensure Green Flag status on parks which currently have this so will be ensuring more regular inspections and greater transparency to see what the issues are.

VC – Worth noting that voluntary groups can access funding opportunities that local authorities can’t but there might be barriers for group eg. The application process or the monitoring and evaluating – perhaps something that SCC could offer support with.

Discussions about previous public surveys done in parks and reference was made to the 2006 survey which was agreed that this was an overly complex survey to be accessible. IR agreed there needed to be a simpler survey to capture public opinions and attitudes towards the parks and what members of the public want to see happen in the parks.

All agreed there needed to be greater dialogue between SCC and partners working in green spaces. All agreed the value of looking at better partnership working in the future with support from local organisations such as Durham Wildlife Trust, Wear River Trust and Universities.

 IR – added that there is budget available through the Area Committees – SIB and Community Chest which would be worth looking into.

SC – Commented that The Friends of Hetton Lyons Country Park were not consulted or involved in the Trim Trail and would like to be involved in this sort of scheme in the future. VC – added that Friends of Herrington Country Park were involved in it. IR – accepted that the groups should be involved in this type of activity in the parks.

DL – request that the Service Team should feedback to SGSF on other successful schemes or activities in parks in other parts of the country.

Simone Price – asked if SCC have volunteer groups set up similar to Gateshead Council Countryside Volunteers. Debbie Hall replied that historically this type of group existed but not something the council have currently as don’t have the staff resources.

Tim Wright – Commented that the SGSF would welcome continuing the dialogue with SCC Services Team and questioned how this might be taken forward.

Action – Need to ensure SCC pass on the Green Flag reports and management plans for the parks.

**5. Open Space**

Update from Friends of Mowbray Park : Friends group quite small and have very limited capacity. Currently they support events and Heritage Open Days, report any issues in the park and respond to any unsuitable developments in the park.

Suggestion that businesses could possibly help with practical works in the park.

Durham Wildlife Trust can offer some support through Young Volunteers program and Siemens Volunteer Task days.

Action – Sunderland City Council to put out an appeal for support for the Friends of Mowbray Park.

**6. Feedback from interim Committee** Item deferred due to time restrictions

**7. Dates for future meetings**:

* June 5th – Work of the Wear River Trust
* September 11th – AGM
* November 27th - Clive Greenwood, SCC

Suggestions were made for Key Note Speakers: Councillor Michael Mordey

**8. Any Other Business**

* Carbon management group is being reconstituted and changing name. Dianne Pattison is the contact.
* Friends of Hetton Lyons Country Park gave details of 2 day ‘Cycle Cross Event’ event in Jan in the park which was very successful with 5,000 people , 320 volunteers
* Tunston Hills Protection Group delivering guided walks, dawn chorus event in May and fungal Foray in August. They also focus on facing issues which pose a threat to the site, organise school visits, litter picks and give talks to groups. However, they have lost a few members recently so have reduced capacity currently.

**9. Next Meeting** 5th June 18.30 – 20.30, The Chester’s Pub