

## **MINUTE**

**of**

### **DAMS TO DARNLEY COUNTRY PARK JOINT COMMITTEE**

**Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in Committee Room, Council Headquarters, Giffnock, on 18 February 2013.**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Charlie Gilbert (Chair)  
Councillor Bill Butler (Vice Chair)

Councillor Alistair Watson  
Councillor Vincent Waters

#### **Attending:**

Stephen McHenry, Country Park Project Officer, East Renfrewshire Council; Julie Nicol, Principal Planning Officer, East Renfrewshire Council; Fiona Campbell, Development and Regeneration Services Planner, Glasgow City Council; John Shevlin, Account Manager, Glasgow City Council; Rachel Smith, Landscape Design Manager, Glasgow City Council; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer, East Renfrewshire Council.

#### **Apologies:**

Councillors Rashid Hussain and Paul O’Kane

#### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

1. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

#### **COUNTY PARK FUTURE FUNDING PROPOSALS**

2. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 14 January 2013 (Item 3 refers), when it had been agreed that the report on future funding proposals be continued for one month to allow funding options to be pursued by the Project Officer, with support from appropriate officers from Glasgow City Council and East Renfrewshire Council, the joint committee considered a report by the Executive Director of Financial Services, Glasgow City Council, regarding future country park funding and presenting an Outline Business Plan (OBP) for the country park. The draft OBP was attached as an appendix to the report.

The report set out the background to the partnership agreement which had led to the development and management of an area of greenspace surrounding Barrhead, Darnley and Newton Mearns as a recreational and environmental resource through the Dams to Darnley Country Park (D2D) initiative. It continued by explaining that capital and maintenance costs to date had been split between East Renfrewshire and Glasgow City councils, their allocation being dependent upon the location of individual works. Within Glasgow City Council, capital and maintenance funding had

come from developer contributions associated with neighbouring greenbelt release sites with some match funding for specific capital improvements coming through annual Land and Environmental Services allocations. Within East Renfrewshire Council, annual allocations had supported capital improvements and maintenance costs with additional match funding to support capital improvement works secured from a number of sources such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), LEADER, Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Rural Priorities and the Whitelee Community Fund. Remaining Glasgow City developer contributions would only meet country park revenue costs until mid-2014 and there is a deadline to spend these funds no later than April 2015. Whilst additional capital funding to implement priority development and management plan actions across the country park would continue to be sought through grant applications, Glasgow City Council's budgets had not been able to identify resources to replace developer contributions in terms of staffing and maintenance costs estimated at approximately £72K per annum, of which £56K were staff costs.

The report went on to outline the breakdown of activities undertaken by visitors to the park highlighting that a survey carried out in 2008 had established that there was no desire for motorised activities on the water and no wish for activities which would conflict with what respondents saw as the main strength of the country park, namely an area for peace, quiet and recreation. Approximately 127,000 people lived within 3.5km of the country park boundary and an analysis of the age distribution of the local community living close to the country park reflected an over representation particularly within the 5 -15 age group compared to the national average. This and other background information highlighted a number of key country park visitor markets which could be identified including, amongst others, local residents surrounding the country park; families with children within the 5 – 15 age group; health-promoting activity participants; environmental education programme participants; and community groups such as Scouts, Guides, and Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme participants.

The Project Officer explained that, given the lack of council core funding to meet Glasgow City Council's contribution to country park revenue costs beyond summer 2014, there was an urgent need to look at alternative sources of revenue funding to ensure that the development and maintenance of the country park, and activities within it, continued. In addition, there was a need to explore the role the local community could play in the ongoing development and/or management of the country park, in line with good practice regarding community involvement in local greenspaces. In light of this, the OBP gave consideration as to how the country park could become more financially self sustainable in the longer term. He went on to explain that a number of potential revenue funding sources had been identified in the short term to support existing staff and maintenance costs and that a number of potential grant funding opportunities had also been identified. These could support actions within the development and management plan, including initial capital funding to support country park commercial opportunities. He highlighted that a number of identified potential commercial opportunities could generate income to feed back into revenue the maintenance costs for the country park in the short term. These potential sources included, amongst others, angling permits, bike hire, catering, a campsite and specialist activities such as orienteering and wildlife studies and photography. Longer term, the country park's potential as a visitor destination, both on land and water, needed to be realised if the vision of a multifunctional greenspace was to be fulfilled. In order to realise this potential, and to establish a focus for the country park, the recreation study established that a visitor facility was considered to be vital with such a facility potentially providing, amongst other things, a café, toilets, bike hire and storage, and meeting and educational facilities. The visitor centre would also enable

potential longer term commercial opportunities and revenue generation to be pursued through a number of avenues including food and drink sales, retail opportunities, bike hire and meeting, training and event space hire.

The Project Officer continued by explaining that at a time of contracting public sector budgets, the added value of community involvement would be increasingly important to complement available local authority funding. Unlike local authority greenspace budgets which were not protected, community organisations could, and did, dedicate their resources to areas within their care. For example independent trusts, which were able to generate their own income, were often better able to survive economic downturns and maintain high quality greenspace networks. It was noted however that existing informal community activities within the country park, such as the regular volunteer group, were well established and productive and any future community involvement proposals would need to bear in mind the success of existing structures.

Supported by the Landscape Design Manager, the Project Officer commended to the committee the work carried out by the Nene Park Trust in Peterborough as an exemplar of good practice in the management of a park trust model, some aspects of which could be replicated within the D2D Country Park. He also made reference to a range of potential partnerships and mechanisms in terms of the development and management of the country park, including third sector or social enterprise involvement. Asset management along these lines could potentially formalise community involvement within Glasgow City Council owned land and fund capital improvements. Such initiatives could also benefit from potential commercial opportunities, but with a proportion of generated income being channelled to country park revenue costs, most realistically maintenance.

He concluded by explaining that the funding sources and commercial opportunities identified in the ODP had not been fully explored, nor were they intended to be exhaustive. Identified and additional avenues required to be fully developed and explored through further discussion and a full business plan would require to be completed in order for the aims of the ODP document to be comprehensively examined with a view to moving the country park towards a cost neutral basis.

Importantly, it was also stressed that the impact of pursuing potential revenue funding sources and commercial opportunities on the work plans of country park staff and the priorities already identified in the development and management plan would also need to be considered.

Establishing realistic, costed mechanisms to deliver visitor facilities, in particular bearing in mind the non-commercial nature of some, was also essential in drafting a full business plan, taking account of the aspirations of East Renfrewshire Council as set out in the recently published Proposed Local Development Plan. The creation of a visitor centre would provide a potential commercial opportunity that could raise revenue funding in the longer term. As such a delivery plan would also be required as part of a full business plan.

Given the urgency presented by the lack of core funding to meet Glasgow City Council's contribution to country park revenue costs beyond summer 2014, it was anticipated that a full business/delivery plan would need to be completed within the next three to six months.

Following brief discussion and having heard all members of the joint committee commend the Project Officer for his considerable effort in drawing together the ODP in a relatively short period of time, the joint committee agreed:-

- (a) to approve the course of action outlined in the covering report which required the Project Officer to take forward the development of a full business/delivery plan within the next 3 – 6 months with appropriate support from officers of both councils; and;
- (b) that a progress report be presented to the next meeting of the joint committee for information.

CHAIR