

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY GROUP
THURSDAY, 21 JULY 2022**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber Area B, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road,
West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors G Williams (Chairman), J Murray (Vice-Chairman), G Dickman,
L Healy, Mrs C Jeffreys, R Jones, R Mallender, F Purdue-Horan and R Walker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

R Erwin Jones – Strategic Programmes Manager - Canal and River Trust
R Bennett – Heritage and Environment Manager - Canal and River Trust
L Beaumont – Partnerships Manager – Canal and River Trust
Councillor T Combellack
3 Members of the public

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Burch	Service Manager - Neighbourhoods
D Hayden	Communities Manager
E Elworthy	Sport Development Officer
T Coop	Democratic Services Officer

21 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies.

22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest reported.

23 **Minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2022 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chairman.

The Service Manager – Neighbourhoods provided a verbal update on the actions from the previous meeting.

24 **Access Agreement - Canal and River Trust**

Councillor Combellack, (Ward Councillor for Neville and Langar) addressed the Group, expressing her support for the Council renewing its Access Agreement. Councillor Combellack explained her concerns regarding the loss of water along some stretches of the Grantham Canal and the urgent need for appropriate repairs, dredging and maintenance that is required to prevent further water loss. Councillor Combellack advised how waterways have evolved particularly during the recent Covid Pandemic as a provision for

relaxation and wellbeing and why waterways are important for blue prescribing as they provide a valuable aid for mental health and wellbeing, including the biodiversity of wildlife the canal attracts.

The Communities Manager explained how the Council has worked with the Canal and River Trust over the years, with particular focus on the Access Agreement between the Borough Council and the Canal and River Trust for the Grantham Canal, which was set up on 1 April 2003 for 21 years, thus expiring on 31 March 2024.

Mr R Erwin-Jones, Strategic Programmes Manager for the Canal and River Trust delivered a presentation that emphasised the extent of the waterways across the whole of the East Midlands and highlighted the Rushcliffe District – Trust Navigations including the River Trent, Upper Trent, River Soar and Grantham Canal.

Mr Erwin-Jones provided information on the national income that the Trust receives, which is in the region of £215.4m from various sources including; Defra, investment and property, Boat licence and mooring fees, utilities and water development and third party income from charitable investments and donations. In addition, Mr Erwin-Jones provided a detailed breakdown of the annual investment on the Grantham Canal totalling £195,448.60, of which the Borough Council provides £40,000 from the Access Agreement.

Mr R Bennett, Heritage and Environment Manager for the Canal and River Trust continued, providing information on the annual costs for vegetation management, including; towpath cutting, hedgerow maintenance, tree works and clearance, aquatic weed and invasive plant removal, which he advised was in excess of £34,100 annually through specialist contractors.

The Group were advised that towpaths are subject to a rolling programme of repairs including reactive works such as wind damage and fallen trees, removal of fly-tipped items and occasional fencing. Vegetation is generally cut between the months of April to August allowing for a front and rear fringe along the bound surface path to create a natural habitat along the towpath, and extra cuts made around benches, signs and bridge approaches and locks. Hedgerows are also maintained and trimmed annually to allow the safe access width along the towpath, including hedge-laying which provides long term biodiversity improvements and skills and volunteer/community engagement.

In respect of leaks and water management Mr Bennett explained that unfortunately leaks do occur and that water resources are limited, Kinoulton being particularly affected in recent years. In addition, Mr Bennett advised that some sections had long been dry and had created terrestrial habitats at Cropwell Bishop. Concluding that Leaks are repaired, but unfortunately new ones will appear.

Ms L Beaumont, Partnerships Manager for the Canal and River Trust presented information on the Rushcliffe voluntary groups involved highlighting the importance these groups and individuals provide in supporting the Canal and River Trust's programme of improvements. Ms Beaumont also advised that the aim of the trust is to encourage more people to use the waterways by

educating users of the benefits of waterways on health and wellbeing including safety awareness. The Group were provided information in respect of wellbeing activities and the funding streams accessed so far, including the Thriving Community Fund and GreenSpace, adding that the programme is looking to sustain delivery into 2023/24, with further improvements at Gamston, Cotgrave and Cropwell Bishop as well as Holme Pierrepont and Hazleford Lock.

Ms Beaumont advised the Group of the Trusts slogan 'Making life better by water' and highlighted some of the health and skills benefits the canal provides within the communities it serves, giving examples as follows:

- Improved mental and physical health
- Improved nature connectedness
- Reduced social isolation and loneliness
- Improved social cohesion and civic mindedness
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills
- Increased confidence
- Pathways into volunteering and employment

The Group noted the Canal and River Trust is in its infancy, celebrating just 10 years as a charity.

Members expressed the concerns of residents and the anger that's felt about the loss of water and that the Access Agreement should not be used entirely on maintaining the towpaths, but that the Trust needs to address the leaks and blocked culverts to maintain the flow of water. Members added that they are aware of the lack of funding and that there was a need for the Council to examine the Access Agreement and to consider a detailed programme of where the money should be spent.

In response, Mr Erwin-Jones stated that he recognised Member's frustrations, but advised that the canal's classification as a remainder waterway means that large scale funding is not an option, and the Trust is only able to make small patch repairs with the limited resources it receives. Mr Erwin-Jones added that the Trust is exploring options to generate income at the north end where the canal meets the River Trent. Ms Beaumont added that vegetation works are essential to make the towpaths safe for public access, adding that there had been a noticeable increase in footfall during the Covid pandemic which has continued.

Members advised that the Trust raised its profile within the local communities, and suggested they contact community groups to explore if there is any voluntary support or funding available or for the Trust to consider fundraising for specific projects to raise the profile of the charity.

Mr Erwin-Jones explained that the process for improvements is complicated and that the Trust were willing to work with the Council to find solutions to some of the Members concerns, adding that low levels of water are being reported across the whole canal network and with the rising temperatures experienced recently the situation can only get worse.

It was noted that in respect of volunteers and fundraising the Trust confirmed it would look to increase voluntary support and promote the charity.

Ms Beaumont added that the canal is a beautiful asset even without water and needs to be protected for future generations.

Members asked what was being asked of by the Council in providing the Access Agreement and whether officers could explore alternative arrangements between now and when the agreement expires in 2024. Members suggested a further report to update the Group on the arrangements for the new access agreement be added to the scrutiny Group Work Programme before the od agreement expires.

The Communities Manager explained that the current agreement covers the towpath maintenance and improvements and emphasised the importance of green and blue infrastructure on communities, highlighting the benefits of health and wellbeing activities the waterways provide.

In concluding the Trust board members expressed their appreciation for inviting them to the meeting to present what the charity had been working on under the current Access Agreement and thanked the Council for their continued support. The Trust also acknowledged the comments and suggestions made by the Group.

It was **RESOLVED** that the communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) Noted the presentation and the work undertaken by the partnership with the Canal and River Trust and the work undertaken by the current access agreement
- b) Made comment on future arrangements for when the current agreement expires in 2024
- c) Requested that a further report be brought to Communities Scrutiny Group before the current agreement expires in 2024

25 **Sports Development in Rushcliffe**

The Communities Manager delivered a presentation to inform members how the Council delivers its Sports Development function, including funding, club support and promotion of major events and competitions such as Cricket World Cup and the Tour of Britain.

The Communities Manager explained that the Council tracks sport and physical activity using Sport England's annual Active Lives Survey, which consists of an adult survey (16+) and a separate survey targeting children and young people (u16's). The Communities Manager advised that the surveys provide data at a local, county and national level, on types of activity and activity levels.

It was noted that Rushcliffe has higher than average activity levels compared to Nottinghamshire and England and these are monitored through the Active

Rushcliffe Health Partnership, made up of representatives from sport and health partners within Rushcliffe. The key priorities being 'increase participation in sport and physical activity with a focus on the inactive'.

The Communities Manager advised the Group that from data, experience and new ways of working there are many barriers to residents taking part in sport and physical activities which can be defined as follows:

Personal – insufficient time, motivation, lack of social support, fear of injury or feeling self-conscious

Environmental – access to safe and convenient sports facilities, green/blue spaces, walking and cycling networks

Socio-economic – access to disposable income, with many residents having to prioritise paying bills and feeding families, particularly in the current cost of living climate.

In overcoming some of these barriers the Communities Manager advised the Group that since its implementation in 2020, the Reach Rushcliffe Fund has supported 7 physical activity projects, the Holiday Activities and Food Fund (HAF) has supported 591 children and young people by providing access to school holiday programmes that provide physical activity, nutritional activities and a meal.

The Communities Manager advised the Group that in line with sports England and Active Notts strategies the Council uses data to help understand and target where support is needed most and tackling underrepresented groups, in particular women and girls, residents with disabilities and residents on low incomes. The Group were advised that the Council works with partners to facilitate programmes and activity targeted at these groups.

The Communities Manager explained that the Council facilitates community sport and physical activity through working with a range of partners and that Rushcliffe is fortunate to have three professional sports clubs to work with to deliver the Council's priorities, including Trent Bridge Trust, Nottingham Rugby and Positive Futures . In addition, the Council introduced Rushcliffe parkrun at Rushcliffe Country Park and due to its success and demand a second parkrun is due to start at Cotgrave Country Park later this year. Local sports clubs and athletes are supported through various sports grants, for example Coach Scholarship Scheme, the Elite Sports Grant and Rushcliffe FANS (Free Access for National Sportspeople).

In concluding, the Group were informed that the Council community sport and physical activity work programme is underpinned by both the Rushcliffe Leisure Strategy and the Rushcliffe Playing Pitch Strategy. The Sports Development Officer is responsible for reviewing the Playing Pitch Strategy action plan every 2-3 years due to the changing nature of supply and demand for pitches, which ensures that priority sites are supported for investment and improvements.

Members asked officers what was being done to overcome the barriers seen from other cultures and what was being done to keep costs down and target

activities and support to those families affected by social economic barriers. The Communities Manager explained that there is work going on in the background and funding streams to assist families, providing examples at Trent Bridge with specific programmes aimed at African-Caribbean and other ethnic minorities and the Active Food Fund. The Sports Development Officer added that last year, (summer 2021) 600 children who qualified for free school meals were provided access to activities during the summer, Christmas and Easter and that Nottinghamshire County Council have a programme of similar events for this summer.

Members asked specific questions in relation to the retention of sports coaches and whether there were funding streams to train new coaches. The Sports Development Officer explained that it had been difficult to get some experienced coaches back after the Covid pandemic and that a number of activities do rely on voluntary coaches, adding that Notts Active are delivering a programme of first aid and safeguarding courses to support the recruitment of volunteers. The Council offer a Coach Scholarship Scheme which provides funding to support new and existing coaches to complete coaching qualifications.

Members commented on the data provided on the types of activity and activity levels measured for 2020-2021 in respect of children and young people and what were the Council's expectations for improvement. The Sports Development Officer explained that these figures were based on the Active Lives survey allowing officers to target specific areas where inactivity was more noticeable. The Sports Development Officer added that a pilot scheme was introduced in Keyworth involving the children and Young People's Centre, Keyworth Primary School and Keyworth Football Club to support with the delivery of activities. An example of the Council's intervention during Covid was to provide activity packs to families living in social housing who may not have had access to a garden or open space during this time. In addition, the Communities Manager explained that this was not a quick fix and officers were exploring longer term interventions that could possibly be rolled out across the Borough.

Members asked if there were other opportunities to deliver activities in the Boroughs green outdoor spaces other than park run that could be supported by the Council's partners and clubs. The Sports Development Officer advised that there are other activities such as community gardens at Keyworth and Cotgrave and that officers across the County were developing a walking and cycling action plan which was reported to the Council's Growth and Developments Scrutiny Group in July 2021.

Members asked specific questions regarding inter-school competitive sport and how might the Council support such activities. The Group were advised that the Council has a good relationship with the School Sports Partnership who is responsible for school sport in the Borough. However, school sports at a competitive level is down to the individual schools to provide, and with Covid and cuts to school budgets the return of such activities has been slow.

Members congratulated officers on a detailed and positive report and expressed their thanks to the Sports Development Officer on the work she had

done and her commitment in supporting families across the Borough to improve their activity.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Group received a presentation of the work undertaken by officers in delivering the Sport Development function and that they discussed future activity in promoting sport and wellbeing to our residents.

26 **Work Programme**

The Chairman presented the report of the Director -finance and Corporate Services, which detailed the proposed Communities Scrutiny Group Work Programme for 2022/23.

Councillor Jones requested that the establishment of a Youth Council scheduled for 19 January 2023, is not to put back to a future meeting.

Members requested that a further report in respect of the Access Agreement for the Canal and River Trust be brought back to a future meeting of Communities Scrutiny Group in the new year.

The Chairman informed the Group that the work programme detailed below was subject to approval by the Corporate Overview Group on 6 September 2022.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Work Programme below be approved:

6 October 2022

- Council's External Communications Strategy
- Customer Access Strategy
- Work Programme

19 January 2023

- Establishment of a Youth Council
- Corporate Enforcement Policy
- Work Programme

16 March 2023

- Carbon Management Plan
- Environment Policy
- Work Programme

The meeting closed at 9.48 pm.

CHAIRMAN