

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Thursday 7th December 2006

at 10.00 am

**in the Main Hall, Owton Manor Community Centre,
Wynyard Road, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

Councillors R W Cook, S Cook, Gibbon, Laffey, London, A Marshall, J Marshall,
Richardson, Wallace, D Waller and Wright.

Resident Representatives:

Ted Jackson, John Lynch and Iris Ryder

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 Minutes of the meetings held on 29th September 2006, 2nd November 2006
and 13th November 2006.

**4. RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE
COUNCIL TO FINAL REPORTS OF THIS FORUM**

No items.

**5. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRED VIA
SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

No items.

PLEASE NOTE VENUE

6. CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS / BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS

No items.

7. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- 7.1 Railw ay Approaches – Position Paper - *Scrutiny Support Officer*
- 7.2 Railw ay Approaches – Evidence from External Agencies – Covering Report - *Scrutiny Support Officer*
- 7.3 Railw ay Approaches – Access for All Small Schemes - *Director of Neighbourhood Services*

8. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of Next Meeting – Thursday 18th January 2007 commencing at 10.00am in the Main Hall, Owton Manor Community Centre, Wynyard Road, Hartlepool.

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

29 September 2006

Present:

Councillor: Stephen Wallace (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob W Cook, Shaun Cook, Pauline Laffey,
Frances London, Ann Marshall, Carl Richardson, D Waller and
Edna Wright

Resident Representatives:

James Atkinson and Iris Ryder.
Lesley Hall, HVDA.

Also present

Officers: Peter Scott, Director of Regeneration and Planning Services
Alistair Smith, Head of Technical Services
Geoff Thompson, Head of Regeneration
Richard Waldmeyer, Principal Planning Officer (Policy Planning
and Information)
John Lewer, Public Transport Coordinator
Ian Jopling, Transportation Team Leader
Jonathan Wistow, Scrutiny Support Officer
David Cosgrove, Principal Democratic Services Officer

26. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Steve Gibbon and John Marshall and Resident Representative Mary Power.

27. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

28. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 August 2006

Confirmed.

29. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

No items.

30. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

No items

31. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents – Portfolio Holders Response to the Partnerships Investigation (*Director of Regeneration and Planning Services / Liveability, Housing and Regeneration Portfolio Holder*)

The Director of Regeneration and Planning Services reported that Cabinet considered and accepted the final report of the Scrutiny Forum at its meeting on 29 August 2006. Details of each recommendation and the proposed action to be taken and the progress to date were set out in the appendix to the report. A further update report would be submitted in six months time.

The Chair commented that the investigation had been very detailed and the former Chair of the Scrutiny Forum was now the relevant Portfolio Holder on Cabinet. The next report would show how the issues had been progressed.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

32. Railway Approaches – Evidence from the Member of Parliament for Hartlepool, Mr Iain Wright

The Chair welcomed Iain Wright MP to the meeting and the Forum's investigation into the town's railway approaches.

Iain Wright thanked the Chair and the Forum for the invitation to the meeting and welcomed the chance to comment on this important strategic issue for Hartlepool. Recently Grand Central had announced that they were to start rail services between Sunderland and London, which would stop at Hartlepool. This was a very important new service for the town. Connectivity to the capital and the south was an important issue for inward investment and this service would put Hartlepool on the map. The rail services that Darlington had made a significant difference to inward investment and the business community. Mr Wright considered that the new Grand Central service could make a similar impact on Hartlepool. The new service would also play a great role in the Tall Ships event in 2010. Visitor numbers into the town had the potential to make the same kind of difference to Hartlepool as the Olympics would have for the

east end of London in 2012.

Presently one factor that did let the town down was its railway station. The Victorians used their railway stations to reflect their town's ambitions. Hartlepool's station had only had piecemeal improvements over the last decade while the rest of the town had made significant progress. A lot needed to be done to bring the station up to a standard that reflected the town's current ambitions.

Members commented that any support the MP could provide would be most welcome. While much needed to be done, there was a lot to build on, the approach to the town on the rail line from the north south of Hart Station let the town down badly. The derelict and abandoned 'Steetley' site was an eyesore and Members asked what kind of powers the authority had to pressure the owners into action. Other members indicated that some of the allotment sites alongside the rail line were also a cause for some concern. The Chair commented that if improving the approaches to the town could be addressed and had a positive effect on the views of visitors, then that could have a knock on effect with residents.

Mr Wright MP commented that he used the rail link on a regular basis and agreed that from the north the major concern was the former Steetley site, though he understood there was a potential housing redevelopment of the site in the pipeline. In relation to the railway station, Mr Wright commented that thought had to be given to what the station was for and who it would serve; leisure users or commuters. Each had different needs and these would have to be built into any design proposals for its improvement. Leisure users for instance had much more time and were likely to spend some of that time in the station. Visitor numbers are to increase over future years, peaking at 2010 for the Tall Ships event. The work on the approaches shows the town has ambition to improve its image and the station needed to be part of that. The approaches to the station itself for vehicles and foot passengers needed to be part of the scheme. A great benefit would be for leisure visitors to be able to walk directly from the station to the Marina.

Mr Wright MP was concerned that under the current franchise arrangements there was little incentive to improve railway stations. It was necessary that all concerned use the great boost that the new Grand Central services and the forthcoming Tall Ships event to bring all involved and whatever finance they had together to improve the station in a coordinated effort. Network Rail leased the station to the operators for the local regional services, Northern Rail. Mr Wright indicated that he had met representatives from Network Rail, Northern Rail and Grand Central and while each had their own economic situations to deal with, there was a commitment to improving the station. That commitment would be much stronger if the operators knew they had a greater length of involvement rather than the current franchise that ceased in 2011.

Mr Wright MP indicated his support for the comments made by the Audit Commission that the involvement of the voluntary sector was a key element in building pride in local services. Mr Wright stated that he was very supportive

of the introduction of a “Friends of” group for the station and encouraging the local business community to become involved as well.

Councillors indicated some concern at the potential for housing development of the former Steetley site. There had been serious concerns in that area due to coastal erosion. Members also expressed some concern in further works to the railway station. Members indicated that there had been public money spent twice in the last fifteen years to improve the station and now we were talking of spending more. If money was to be invested again in the station, it needed to be done wisely to make the improvements that were needed – significant expenditure was not needed.

A Resident Representative raised the issue of the toilets at the station, which were never open, and the Church Street smell, which regularly pervaded the area. The discussion moved on to the Church Street area in general. Mr Wright MP commented that the Church Street area was a valuable Victorian street scene that needed to be protected. It was visitors’ first impression of the town when leaving the station and therefore highly important. Visitors to the town needed to be impressed immediately on arrival. The station had a significant role to play in this. The MP highlighted his concerns relating to the station and, in his opinion, the inadequate staffing, poor lighting which didn’t instil a feeling of personal security, and the inadequate car parking provision. If the station had a role to play as a commuter station then car parking needed to be adequate for that role. Disabled access was also a concern that had been brought to the MP’s attention, particularly when the station wasn’t staffed.

The MP’s support for a “Friends of the Station” group was welcomed and groups such as that at Saltburn Station were highlighted as what could be achieved through local involvement. Mr Wright highlighted the tiled map feature at the station, which was an extremely valuable and historic installation. A similar feature was on show in York Railway Museum.

In relation to the new services to be introduced by Grand Central, Iain Wright MP commented in his conclusion that this was a very significant coup for Hartlepool. The MP for Selby, John Grogan, had commented that when Selby began to be shown on the destination boards at Kings Cross it was like the town being promoted to the premiership – its importance could not be underplayed. Mr Wright hoped that all sectors of the community would support and use the new services to make them a success. A significant amount of work had gone into getting this service despite concerted opposition from GNER. Mr Wright stated that people must use the service or lose it, it was that simple.

The Chair thanked Iain Wright MP for attending the meeting and showing his support for the investigation being undertaken by the Scrutiny Forum.

Recommended

That the comments of Iain Wright MP be welcomed and noted and that he be thanked for his attendance at the meeting.

33. Railway Approaches – Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Liveability and Housing

The Chair introduced the Mayor, Stuart Drummond, who was the Cabinet portfolio holder with specific responsibility for Regeneration, Liveability and Housing. The Mayor also congratulated the Forum for undertaking the investigation and agreed with the comments of Iain Wright MP on how important this was for the town.

The Mayor reported that he had recently met Kath O'Brien from Northern Rail and discussed the erection of a mural on the wall at the station which separates the station from the Marina. This would be a high quality installation that would involve the College of Art. Funding for this scheme was now being explored. The Mayor indicated that he was aware that there were local rail users and members of the public who were keen to become involved in a 'Friends of the Station' scheme and he felt certain that finance could be identified for flower beds and hanging baskets.

In relation to the Steeley/Britmag site, The Mayor understood that an application was being discussed with Planning Officers. This was, however, a privately owned site, so in many respects, the Council had very little influence or power. The Health and Safety Executive had been contacted but had stated that they could not become involved, as it was no longer a working site. A lot of the land next to the Britmag site belonged to Network Rail and the Mayor and Officers were trying to progress talks on that land.

The Mayor also reported that there was already an Officer Working Group looking at the issue of derelict buildings in the town. He had received an update report from that group and action was progressing on dealing with some of the worst sites in the town.

Reference was made to a previous art project for the station where children had been involved in designing tiles to be installed in the station building. This scheme had never been installed despite the tiles being made. The Mayor indicated he would try to find out what had happened to the project. Members supported the young people of the town being involved in any schemes to improve the station and the approaches. Members also highlighted that there were many volunteers that had indicated in the past that they would wish to be involved in schemes such as this to put something back into their community.

Some members were concerned at small schemes being implemented when a major revamp of the station backed by major finance was required. The Mayor indicated that the mural scheme would be quite a major scheme. The Mayor also commented that people had suggested the wall opposite the platform be demolished to open the view out. This would simply open a view to the rear of the cinema and it was unlikely that much of the marina site would be seen at all.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for attending the meeting and his valuable input and responses to questions from the Forum. The debate and the presentations by the Mayor and the Members of Parliament showed that there was much that could be done and the Mayor's 'over-arching' role could be key in the future.

Recommended

That the comments of The Mayor, Stuart Drummond, be welcomed and noted and that he be thanked for his attendance at the meeting.

34. Railway Approaches – Evidence from External Agencies

Ian Yeowart, Grand Central Railways

Mr Yeowart highlighted that while Grand Central didn't have ownership of the railway station the company was aware of the types of issues from their background in rail. Similar problems were experienced at the Scunthorpe rail station and those had been tackled by engaging with the local community and Network Rail and adopting best practices from the UK and USA. Schemes at stations in the USA where they had particular success when dealing with vandalism problems were copied to great effect. Essentially this meant perpetual repair after instances of vandalism until the vandals gave up. This scheme had been adopted at fifty-three stations where a twenty-four hour response to vandalism and damage reports was out in place to great effect.

Mr Yeowart indicated that Grand Central were happy to invest upfront and to assist any 'Friends of the Station' group. Whilst only a tenant, the company was happy to work with Network Rail to bring improvements to the stations it would be using on its routes. Grand Central was keen to see a boost to the image of the station before its services started. The company would have an expectation that services, such as toilets, would work at the station.

Mr Yeowart highlighted the great support they had received in their bid for this new service from Iain Wright MP.

Denise Thompson, Network Rail

Denise Thompson indicated that she was the Community Relations Manager for Network Rail covering the rail network on the eastern side of the country between Kings Cross and the North East. Mrs Thompson stated that she dealt with all the public issues from rail users, rail side residents, local authorities, and Members of Parliament. As well as trying to improve the network, Network Rail were also concerned with the 'softer' issues around stations; appearance and facilities.

Network Rail had a "No Messin'" programme that specifically involved children and young people. The aim of the scheme was to show that there was more to do than vandalising stations and trespassing on rail lines. Network Rail had

particular concerns with trespassing due to the safety issues. The company had concentrated this scheme in problem areas but would be happy to come to Hartlepool and several members suggested schools in the area that would be appropriate for involvement in such a programme.

Network Rail had a budget to improve stations and sidings and had been particularly proactive at Saltburn and made significant improvements. Network Rail had a twenty-four hour seven day a week helpline on which people could report problems with line fencing, fly-tipping, over-growing etc. Network Rail was very happy to become involved in schemes either major or small scale; it was simply a case of letting them know.

Kathryn O'Brien, Northern Rail

Mrs O'Brien indicated that she was the Client Stakeholder Manager with Northern Rail, the biggest rail operator in the UK. Mrs O'Brien indicated that her role was to work with external companies and groups to secure funding. While being the largest operator in the country, Northern Rail was very much still a community rail company. The company had a very active station adoption scheme and 98% of its stations had been 'adopted'. There were different levels of adoption from local people being involved in regularly inspecting rail stations and halts (usually unmanned) for vandalism and damage and reporting that to the company, through to those involved in maintaining flower beds and some small maintenance such as painting.

Kathryn O'Brien referred to the art project that The Mayor, Stuart Drummond had highlighted earlier in the meeting. This would be a very exciting high quality scheme that would be a great enhancement to the station. Northern Rail also paid particular attention to children and young people and worked with the British Transport Police and schools to promote safety and involvement. The company had great success recently with a website targeted at children and young people.

Northern Rail was very encouraged by this focus on improving the station and the rail environment around the town and would be very keen to work with the local authority, Grand Central and the community.

Martin Green, Durham Coastliners Rail Users Group

Mr Green indicated that at present there was a level 1 adoption of the station but considered that more people from the town needed to become involved and move towards a 'Friends of the Station' group or potentially a Station Partnership Scheme. Mr Green indicated that the group would like to contribute more to the next meeting.

Members welcomed the comments made by the rail companies but did feel that much was concentrated on the station. The approaches to the station

from both the north and the south needed attention. Members also welcomed the clarity of functions and responsibilities that speakers had brought to the issue and in particular the positive attitude towards making improvements.

The forum went on to discuss rail line security issues in certain areas and the involvement of the rail companies and the British Transport Police with schools in particular. Security at rail stations and halts, including CCTV was also an issue raised. It was highlighted that none of the stations and halts in this area had CCTV.

Mr Yeowart stated that station adoption schemes needed to be thought through carefully. They were very welcome on stations and halts that had no permanent staffing. In stations where there was staffing, consideration needed to be given to the moral of the staff working there. The Chair acknowledged this and stated that the authority would want to be sensitive.

In concluding the meeting, the Chair thanked all those present for their attendance and input into a very helpful and informative meeting.

Recommended

That the representatives from the various companies and groups be thanked for their attendance and input into the meeting.

STEPHEN WALLACE

CHAIRMAN

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

2 November 2006

Present:

Councillor: Stephen Wallace (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob W Cook, Shaun Cook, Steve Gibbon, Pauline Laffey, Frances London, Ann Marshall, Carl Richardson and Edna Wright

In accordance with Paragraph 4.2(ii) of the Council's Procedure Rules Councillor Sheila Griffin attended as a substitute for Councillor D Waller

Officers: Richard Waldmeyer, Principal Planning Officer (Policy Planning and Information)
Stuart Green, Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Development
Alistair Smith, Head of Technical Services
Geoff Thompson, Head of Regeneration
John Lewer, Public Transport Co-ordinator
Jonathan Wistow, Scrutiny Support Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Martin Green, Coastliners
Ray Priestman, Chair of the Economic Forum
Tracey Walker, Hartlepool Mail

35. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Waller and Resident Representative, Iris Ryder.

36. Declarations of interest by Members

None

37. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2006

Due to the unavailability of the minutes this item was deferred for consideration at the next meeting.

38. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

No items.

39. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

No items.

40. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

No items.

41. Railway Approaches – Evidence from the Economic Forum (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

The Chair welcomed Ray Priestman, Chair of the Economic Forum, who was in attendance at the meeting to provide a business perspective on the Forum's ongoing investigations into railway approaches.

The Chair of the Economic Forum highlighted the following main areas of concern from a business perspective:-

- (i) rail track route in and out of town
- (i) appearance of station
- (ii) road approaches and signage to the station

The Chair of the Economic Forum drew attention to inaccurate and inadequate directional highway signage to the station. There were also concerns with regard to the rail track approaches, particularly at the former CJC site. The vandalised and derelict buildings surrounding the CJC site created an adverse impression of the town to potential investors. The Chair of the Economic Forum acknowledged that it was common place for railway approaches to run through industrial areas, however, these unused and untidy industrial premises did create negative impressions. The station itself was in a state of disrepair with poor facilities.

Members expressed concern in relation to the problems surrounding the

former CJC site, the allotment sites, the Newcombe recycling plant and the number of properties which were boarded up. The poor appearance of the station, inadequate toilet facilities and the insufficient signage were also highlighted.

A Member advised that it was anticipated, subject to planning permission being obtained, that the former CJC site would be utilised for housing development which would partially address the problem. A Member queried what action the Chair of the Economic Forum recommended for the site in the event that the housing development did not proceed. It was suggested that a structure or a piece of art work may be appropriate to improve the area. Members felt that a suitable sports facility should also be considered.

Discussion ensued in relation to the process and responsibility of decontaminating the former CJC site should this prove necessary. The Forum considered that the owners of the site should be liable for maintenance and suggested that technical advice be obtained in this regard.

In conclusion, the Forum felt that the appearance problems surrounding the former CJC site be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Economic Forum for his attendance and supporting the investigation.

Decision

That the comments of Members and the Chair of the Economic Forum, be noted.

42. Railway Approaches – Evidence from Coastliners (Scrutiny Support Officer)

The Chair welcomed Martin Green from Coastliners who was in attendance at the meeting to provide information relating to the role of Coastliners and potential ways to make connections to the Scrutiny investigation, details of which were outlined in Appendix A to the report.

Mr Green advised that Coastliners main purpose was to improve the passenger experience, improve services and improve information displays.

Members were advised that some funding for improvements could be provided by Northern Rail as indicated by Kath O'Brien at a recent meeting and it was also important to establish Network Rail's intentions.

Newcombe recycling plant was identified as a site that should be screened by Mr Green. More generally Coastliners were keen to be involved in any longer term developments that resulted from the Forum's scrutiny investigation.

A discussion followed in which the following issues were raised:-

- (i) Would Coastliners be prepared to work with young offenders to pick up litter on the train lines as well as assist with the cleaning of the station as part of their rehabilitation programme? In response, M Green advised that due to limited resources, it would be difficult for Coastliners to facilitate this.
- (i) Could funding be obtained from the Neighbourhood Forum's minor works budget and all other possible funding sources be examined.
- (ii) A Member provided examples of automatic toilet facilities which could be considered as part of the refurbishment works programme and suggested that premises owners be approached to contribute to the cost of the works. A Member pointed out that portable toilets at York Road had been removed due to lack of use.

Following further discussion with regard to possible funding opportunities and methods to improve the station, the Head of Technical Services pointed out the importance of working with Northern Rail and Network Rail in accordance with the Local Transport Plan and Interchange. It was suggested that the infrastructure of the station be addressed to bring the station back to an acceptable standard prior to any cosmetic works being carried out.

The Forum felt that Middlesbrough station provided a passenger friendly environment and details of the improvements carried out at Middlesbrough station should be examined.

Decision

That the comments of Mr Green together with those of the Forum, be noted and Mr Green be thanked for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

43. Railway Approaches – Submission of Written Evidence from the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) (Scrutiny Support Officer)

The Scrutiny Support Officer referred Members to Appendix A to a written submission from the Community and Voluntary Sector in relation to their potential involvement in developing improvements to the railway approaches.

Members were requested to consider the following:-

- (i) voluntary sector links to developing railway approaches
- (i) potential to involve young offenders
- (ii) the appropriate strategic approach
- (iv) the need to lobby for structural improvements

The Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Development advised that he would explore the potential for the Council's Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) project to be used to implement environmental improvements as well as the possible involvement of NACRO in relation to ex-offenders.

A Member suggested a clean up sweep to involve as many people as possible to which Martin Green advised that whilst this was a good idea, there were safety implications as volunteers would be required to undertake a Network Rail safety course prior to carrying out any works.

Decision

That the contents of the report and the comments of the Forum, be noted.

44. Railway Approaches – Feedback from Site Visit

(Scrutiny Support Officer)

On 16 October Members of the Forum undertook a site visit as part of the Railway approaches scrutiny inquiry. The visit included a journey north to Seaham and a return journey to Middlesbrough. The purpose of the visit was to gain a better understanding of the railway approaches into Hartlepool from both the north and the south. The site visit provided Members with the opportunity to compare the approaches in Hartlepool with those of neighbouring towns.

A brief summary of Members' comments during the site visit was attached at Appendix A to the report. The Principal Planning Officer provided a commentary of the video presentation of footage taken during the site visit for Members' consideration.

A discussion followed in which the following issues were raised:-

Members expressed concern that some sections of the railway approaches reflected a negative impression of the town and reference was made to the flytipping and allotment problems.

Members suggested that industrial site owners be approached with regard to a funding contribution to improve the railway approaches and to maintain their surrounding areas. The Scrutiny Support Officer advised that the Acting Head of Neighbourhood Management was further developing the list of unused buildings/derelict sites to be targeted in a new round of enforcement action by the Council. The Forum were requested to consider including sites on the list as a potential way forward for generating improvements to the 'problem spots' identified on the site visits. It was also considered that improvements to these sites could be achieved through future planning application conditions, where applicable.

With regard to funding, it was suggested that Pride in Hartlepool be approached to provide funding assistance.

Members recommended that screenings, bushes and advertising posters detailing the sites of Hartlepool be displayed on the approaches to the station.

What was the timescale for the transport interchange? The Head of Technical Services advised that legal aspects had delayed the commencement of work and it was envisaged that work would commence early in the new year.

Would the introduction of a park and ride facility to the train station be feasible? The Head of Technical Services advised that the proposed interchange would allow users to immediately change to an alternative form of transport. A park and ride system could only be considered if there was a demand for the facility and funding was available.

The Scrutiny Support Officer advised that an informal meeting was scheduled for 21 November at 10.00 am to discuss a position paper in readiness for further consideration at the next meeting of the Forum on 7 December to which Network Rail and Northern Rail would be invited to attend.

The Principal Planning Officer advised that during discussions with Newcombe recycling it was highlighted that they were experiencing operational problems which would be addressed within the next 6 weeks or so.

Decision

That the information given and the comments of the Forum, be noted.

STEPHEN WALLACE

CHAIRMAN

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM MINUTES

13 November 2006

Present:

Councillor: Stephen Wallace (In the Chair)

Councillors: Frances London, Ann Marshall and Carl Richardson

Also present Councillor Lilian Sutheran as substitute for Councillor Dennis Waller in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2

Resident Representatives:

John Lynch, Ted Jackson and Iris Ryder

Officers:

Stuart Green, Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Development
Alison Mawson, Head of Community Safety and Prevention
Peter Scott, Director of Regeneration and Planning Services
Jonathan Wistow, Scrutiny Support Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

45. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Rob Cook, Shaun Cook, Steve Gibbon, Pauline Laffey and Dennis Waller.

46. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

47. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

No items.

48. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

No items.

49. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

No items.

50. Regeneration and Planning Services Department: Budget and Policy Framework Initial Consultation Proposals 2007/08 (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

At Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 27th October 2006, it was agreed that the Executive's Initial Budget and Policy Framework consultation proposals for 2007/08 be considered on a departmental basis by the appropriate Scrutiny Forum. The Director of the Regeneration and Planning Services was in attendance and presented the departmental pressures and priorities, grant terminations and proposed savings which were attached by way of appendix.

Grant Terminations

The Director of Regeneration and Planning Services explained the roles of the two posts which may be effected by the termination of external grant aid, ie the Coastal Arc Co-ordinator and Anti-Social Behaviour Unit Admin Officer. The Forum noted the significance of those roles.

Budget Pressures

The Director of Regeneration and Planning Services informed Members that the pressures identified within Appendix B to the report were unavoidable pressures for the next financial year. Members felt that the Special Needs Housing Team pressure should be supported and that additional funding be sought to enhance the service further to the benefit of vulnerable individuals and communities.

Budget Priorities

The Director of Regeneration and Planning Services advised Members that top level priorities were identified as services that should be carried out, although not at the same level as a pressure. However, the priority identified was highlighted as high impact which may result in failure to comply with statutory duties if not fulfilled. With regard to the Landlord Registration Officer (LRO) second level priority, details of which were outlined in Appendix C to the report, Members suggested that this priority be met and additional funding

be identified for this scheme to enable the Council to fully utilise the enhanced powers available through the scheme.

Proposed Savings at 3, 4 and 5%

The Director of Regeneration and Planning Services gave details of proposed savings as outlined in Appendix D to the report.

Members discussed the proposed savings to the Economic Development marketing budget and considered that reductions should be avoided and not used for savings due to the importance of this activity to achieving inward investment, in-migration and tourism and the economic benefits this brought to the town.

With regard to a proposed saving in the Economic Development Business Grants budget, (which was identified as a 'Red Risk'), Members argued that this be avoided and not used for savings due to the importance of this to the economy and wellbeing of the town.

Discussion ensued in relation to potential proposed savings for Development Control, as a result of an increased target for fee income from the volume of planning applications processed. Members expressed concern that they did not wish to see any cuts in related services if the proposed increased fees could not be achieved.

The loss of staff as part of the potential proposed savings was not considered appropriate and was not supported.

In addition to the above mentioned comments, Members made a number of general comments for consideration by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee which included the following:-

- (i) Whilst some Members felt that one meeting to consider the budget proposals was not sufficient time, others were happy with the process and felt that the information provided had afforded a sufficiently in-depth discussion of budget priorities.
- (i) The size of text used in the savings table was considered to be too small.
- (ii) Members discussed the funding elements of the Hartbeat magazine and requested that this be considered more fully by Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee including the potential for additional funding through advertising and exploring the potential to reduce printing costs.
- (iv) Members expressed a need to explore the possibility of using the Council's Printing Services to contract-in investment to the Council.

Decision

The Budget and Policy Framework initial consultation proposals for 2007/08 were considered and the following proposals would be presented to Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 17th November 2006:

a) Budget Pressures

It was proposed to accept the budget pressures as identified within Appendix B and that additional funding be considered for the Special Needs Housing Team to enhance the service further to the benefit of vulnerable individuals and communities.

b) Budget Priorities

It was proposed to accept the budget priorities as identified within Appendix C and that additional funding be identified for the Landlord Registration Officer (LRO) Scheme to enable the Council to fully utilise the enhanced powers available through the scheme.

c) Savings – 3%, 4% and 5%

Members supported the savings as identified within Appendix D subject to the following:-

- (i) the proposed reduction in the Economic Development Business Grants budget be avoided and not be utilised for savings.
- (i) That, in the event that the proposed increase in target for Development Control fee income is not achieved, there should be no cuts for related services by way of compensation.
- (ii) the reductions in the Economic Development marketing budget be avoided and not utilised for savings.
- (iv) the reduction of staff, as part of potential savings, was not supported.

STEPHEN WALLACE

CHAIRMAN

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM REPORT

7 December 2006



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: RAILWAY APPROACHES – POSITION PAPER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the Members of the Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum with the draft findings of the Railway Approaches Investigation so far and to identify a number of areas for potential recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 16 June 2006 Members of this Forum selected the topic of Railway Approaches into Hartlepool to be its first Scrutiny Investigation for the 2006/07 municipal year.
- 2.2 Over the course of the investigation Members have considered evidence from a wide variety of sources, including:
- a) Hartlepool Borough Council Officers;
 - b) The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Liveability and Housing;
 - c) The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Transportation;
 - d) MP for Hartlepool
 - e) Network Rail;
 - f) Northern Rail;
 - g) Grand Central;
 - h) Chair of the Economic Forum;
 - i) Representative from 'Coastliners'; and
 - j) Written submission on behalf of the Community and Voluntary Sector
- 2.3 In light of the information gathered from these sources this paper seeks to summarise the views of the Forum thus far and to act as a basis for the Forum to agree potential recommendations to go forward into its Final Report.

3. OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 3.1 To examine the railway approaches into Hartlepool and develop suggestions for improvement.

4. SCRUTINY FINDINGS

- 4.1 This section of the report outlines the findings reached by the Forum in relation to the terms of reference agreed during the initial scoping of the investigation.

Key Government Policy

- 4.2 There is no single or unifying government policy in relation to Railway Approaches. Instead a fairly complex set of arrangements exist between private companies, national regulators and local government through which the responsibility for this issue is divided. A summary of the key responsibilities is provided below.
- 4.2 Following the privatisation of British Rail its functions were divided into two main elements. The first element consists of the national rail network (track, signaling, bridges, tunnels, stations and depots) and the second being the operating companies whose trains run on that network. In simple regulatory terms, the Office of Rail Regulators (ORR) is responsible for regulating the national rail network operator (Network Rail), while the Department for Transport looks after passenger and train-related matters. The focus of this Scrutiny investigation is concerned with the first element.
- 4.3 According to guidance from the ORR, Network Rail is a private sector monopoly owner and operator of a national asset of considerable public importance and as such is accountable to the public interest. It is, therefore, unable to operate, maintain and develop that asset according to purely commercial criteria, and is subject to regulation in a number of ways, primarily by the independent ORR. Consequently, ORR's principal function is to regulate Network Rail's stewardship of the national rail network. Representatives of the ORR were invited to attend the Scrutiny Investigation but felt it was more appropriate to provide guidance to the Scrutiny Support Officer for information gathering purposes.
- 4.4 The Local Authority has a role in relation to this issue through its responsibilities for Planning and Development Control. Indeed, the adopted Local Plan 2006, which forms part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework, has a number of policies that are relevant to this issue, which are outlined in the next sub-section.
- 4.5 A further role for the Local Authority in relation to this issue, under Government policy, stems from its community leadership role and well-being powers. Indeed, the topic selection and subsequent evidence gathering of

this Scrutiny Investigation have demonstrated enthusiasm amongst Members and officers to seek to drive this issue forward and foster partnerships in this respect. More recently the Local Government White Paper 2006 has identified a role for local authorities as 'place-shapers' through supporting and working with other agencies and services to solve local problems / issues.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in Hartlepool who have responsibility for the appearance of the railway approaches into the town.

- 4.6 The national rail network infrastructure (track, signalling, bridges, tunnels and stations) is owned and operated by Network Rail. As such, Network Rail is an important organisation in terms of the railway approaches into Hartlepool.
- 4.7 When Network Rail attended the Scrutiny Forum to provide evidence they indicated that they operated a 'No Messin' programme / event, which is geared towards young people and focuses on issues like trespassing, graffiti, and vandalism. The representative of Network Rail indicated that they would be willing to bring this event to Hartlepool. Subsequent discussions amongst Members of the Forum have suggested support for this.
- 4.8 Network Rail also has a 'graffiti budget' to improve visual views. Their representative at the meeting on 29 September 2006 indicated that they would be open to developing a proactive approach here with the Authority. Again Members of the Forum have been supportive of developing this proposal.
- 4.9 In addition, Network Rail have a 24 hour national helpline (tel: 08457 11 41 41) for people to call in relation to any issues they may have with the railway infrastructure. The representative from Network Rail indicated that if they do not know about particular problems then they cannot respond to them. Consequently, the Forum has expressed a desire to publicise this number through its final report and through other mechanisms such as Hartbeat.
- 4.10 More generally, Members of the Forum have identified a number of locations where they would like to see some form of screening of key 'problem spots' from the views from the railway. These locations are discussed in more detail below. However, it is necessary to recognise that Network Rail has strict safety guidelines for work carried out near railway lines and there are also restrictions on planting schemes that may encroach on the railway or lead to leaves falling on the track.
- 4.11 Whilst Network Rail owns all of the railway stations in the country, with the exception of a number of 'principal' stations, which it operates itself, it leases

the stations to whichever train operator is the principal user. The principal train operator in Hartlepool is Northern Rail.

- 4.12 During the evidence gathering session with Northern Rail they highlighted that they are a 'community railway' and as such they see themselves having a major role in working with local stakeholders including local authorities and were keen to engage in partnership. Northern Rail have a police and schools liaison officer who can become involved in initiatives geared towards preventing vandalism. Members of the Forum have indicated that such an arrangement should be extended to Hartlepool if possible.
- 4.13 The Council, through Objective C4 of the recently adopted Local Plan 2006, is committed to encouraging a high standard of design and the provision of a high quality environment in all developments and particularly those on prominent sites, including along the main rail corridors. Consequently, this commitment will relate to all new planning applications along the railway approaches. Network Rail is normally consulted on all planning applications in the vicinity of the railway line.
- 4.14 It is also emphasised in the Local Plan that it is important that a good first impression is given to potential investors and tourists and other visitors to the town traveling along the main roads and the railway. Consequently General Environmental Principles Policy GEP7 requires a particular high standard of design to improve the visual environment along, amongst other locations, the Middlesbrough to Newcastle Railway line.
- 4.15 The Local Plan also includes a number of policies relating to untidy sites and environmental improvements and the need to consider the visual appearance of the main approaches including the railway line. In addition, Hartlepool Railway Station is located within the Church Street Conservation Area which is subject to policies which seek to enhance the area (Policy HE1). Adjacent land parcels are subject to a variety of policies and land allocations. Some areas are subject to regulations to enforce planning conditions and other environmental controls. During the investigation the Forum has indicated that planning and development powers should be used proactively to enhance the railway approaches into the town.

To consider the impact of the railway approaches into Hartlepool on the town's image, particularly in terms of the ongoing regeneration of the town;

- 4.16 During the initial topic selection and scoping of the investigation Members of the Forum were particularly keen to explore the issue of 'Railway Approaches' from a regeneration perspective and from the impact of these approaches on the vision of the town. The (at that time) pending award of the 2010 Tall Ships event was an important factor motivating Members' interest in this issue. Indeed, on a number of occasions the award of the Tall Ships event has been likened to being Hartlepool's equivalent of the Olympics. The Tall Ships' Race will bring development opportunities to Hartlepool. The Newcastle/Gateshead event in 2005 brought 1.5 million

visitors and a reported £48 million in economic value. Furthermore, the recent award of the Grand Central contract to operate a direct rail link to London has also been highlighted as a significant development that enhances the potential for tourism and regeneration in the town. Consequently, maximising the impression that the Railway Approaches create of the town has been identified as particularly significant at this time.

- 4.17 The image and reputation of Hartlepool has changed radically over the last 15 years with the development of the Marina and associated visitor attractions, such as the Historic Quay, HMS Trincomalee and the Hartlepool Museum, and the ongoing regeneration of areas such as the town centre and the Headland.
- 4.18 Furthermore, Hartlepool's ongoing regeneration fits into a number of broader regional and sub-regional strategies such as:
 - (a) The Northern Way;
 - (b) The Regional Spatial Strategy;
 - (c) The Tees Valley Vision;
 - (d) Tees Valley City Region Business Case (TVCRBC); and
 - (e) City Region Development Programme (CRDP)
- 4.19 Through the Northern Way, Hartlepool is recognised as an integral part of the Tees Valley City Region and as an integral part of accelerating growth in the North of England. Under the Northern Way a Tees Valley City Region Business Case (TVCRBC) and City Region Development Programme (CRDP) are being developed, which are geared towards providing a coherent economic analysis of the City Region and identifying how the City Region can improve its economic performance and how the Government can help it to do so. The Northern Way Growth Strategy aims to reduce the output gap between the North and the rest of the UK by accelerating economic growth through a variety of investment priorities. Consequently, much of the implementation work around the above strategies is very much economic performance and job creation driven. However, a Green Infrastructure is currently being developed as part of the overall City Region policy and this focuses on improvements to the green infrastructure. Further details on this strategy are outlined in paragraph 4.22 below.
- 4.20 The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North East will complement the aims and objectives of the Northern Way Strategy. It will help the North East to focus on key issues for the region and how its potential can be realised. The RSS will replace the existing Regional Planning Guidance and will provide a broad framework for spatial planning. It will form part of the Development Plan for Hartlepool and will set levels for key land use issues such as housing and industrial development.
- 4.21 At the sub-regional level the Tees Valley Vision has been brought together by the Tees Valley Partnership in association with a wide number of organisations including the five Tees Valley Local Authorities. The vision aims to improve the economic performance of the Tees Valley and the quality

of life its people. It provides a case to justify public expenditure, setting a long term strategic vision and programme for development for the Tees Valley. Through this vision it is envisaged that by 2020 Hartlepool will be, “fully developed as a business and commercial centre, a major waterfront location and a focus for shared services centres and short holiday breaks.”

- 4.22 As part of the overall City Region policy development a Green Infrastructure Strategy is currently being developed through the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit. This strategy focuses on making improvements to the green infrastructure in the Tees Valley. The Government has acknowledged that the sub-region lags behind the national average in this respect and that this can be a barrier to economic development. Consequently, this strategy is being developed to enhance the appearance of the infrastructure in the Tees Valley. Members of the Forum have expressed a desire to link the sites identified in the Scrutiny Investigation, wherever possible, into the Green Infrastructure Strategy and its associated site specific schedules.
- 4.23 The Council is committed to taking an integrated and partnership based approach to maximise the social and economic benefits delivered through regeneration. Indeed the Council will drive forward existing and future regeneration schemes across the Borough in order to deliver the changes necessary to realise the Community Strategy Vision:

Our Vision is that Hartlepool will be a prosperous, caring, confident and outward looking community, in an attractive environment, realising its potential. We will therefore promote and improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the town, taking into account the needs of future generations.

- 4.24 The Community Strategy (which is currently under review) is in effect a ‘grand plan’ agreed by the Hartlepool Partnership, which is the town’s Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and brings together all of the town’s partnerships delivering local services. Through the Community Strategy process the Partnership looks at what local services and developments are needed, the best way of providing them and involving people further in the way services are delivered. The Railway Approaches investigation makes a number of contributions to the objectives in the Community Strategy, such as to *Jobs and the Economy* Priority Aim Objectives 1, 3 and 6:

- 1) To improve the local transport infrastructure to encourage business investment and productivity and enable local people to access employment opportunities;
- 3) To promote Hartlepool as a destination of choice for inward investors; and
- 6) To invest in environmental improvements in industrial and commercial areas that encourage additional private investment in infrastructure improvements.

- 4.25 Hartlepool Tourism Strategy is a thematic study that was undertaken in order to establish a strategic framework to stimulate regeneration economically, socially and physically. Consequently, the Tourism Strategy examines the intrinsic strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Hartlepool in terms of developing its visitor economy. This strategy identifies ways of supporting and enhancing the tourism infrastructure of Hartlepool, thus raising the profile and perceptions of Hartlepool as a visitor destination within and beyond the region. A key consideration of this Forum when selecting this topic was how do the railway approaches into the town contribute to this vision and how can they be improved.
- 4.26 The Tourism Strategy highlights the importance of the Marina to the town's economy and the concept of 'Hartlepool Quays' has emerged as central theme through which a collection of projects are being developed. Over time the combined Hartlepool Waterfront area will evolve to provide a single experience that will draw in new sources of demand and economic activity. Hartlepool Quays is a regional priority for regeneration and is the main regeneration zone in Hartlepool. It comprises the flagship Tees Valley Regeneration site of Victoria Harbour, the Marina, Hartlepool town centre, and the Historic Hartlepool Headland. Investment in the Quays will provide a regionally significant critical mass of facilities that will be catalyst to creating new demand and stimulating further investment to the benefit of Hartlepool and the Tees Valley City Region.
- 4.27 It has been highlighted above that Members of the Forum, in their Scrutiny topic selection and throughout the course of the inquiry, have been concerned with maximising the impact of the railway approaches into Hartlepool to further enhance the town's regeneration and growth. Consequently, the Forum's investigation can usefully encourage the Authority to make connections (particularly in light of such developments as the Tall Ships and a direct rail link to London), where appropriate, to the regional, sub-regional and local strategies described above, and seek funding to improve the rail corridors into Hartlepool.

Exploration of Railway Approaches

- 4.28 On 16 October 2006 Members of the Scrutiny Forum undertook a site visit to explore the railway approaches into Hartlepool. The visit was made possible by funding from Northern Rail. Members travelled between Hartlepool and Seaham (to the north) and from Seaham to Middlesbrough (in the south). The site visit also allowed Members to make comparisons with other towns and, in particular the condition of their approaches and their stations.
- 4.29 During the site visits Members discussed the following issues:
- (a) What are the key 'problem areas' Members identified during the visit?
 - (b) What impression did Members gain of the railway stations at Hartlepool and Seaton Carew?

(c) How did the railway approaches into Hartlepool compare with the approaches into the other towns passed through during the visit?

(d) What impression did the railway approaches create on the overall image of the town?

- 4.30 The findings from the site visit are attached at **Appendix A**. In addition, Members viewed a video presentation of the site visit at the meeting of the Forum on 2 November and held further discussions about the findings from the visit at this meeting. These findings have been disseminated throughout this Position Paper.

Key ‘problem spots’ and areas of good practice on the railway approaches.

- 4.31 It has been recognised during the site visit, and in the evidence provided by witnesses such as the Chair of the Economic Forum, that railway lines tend to go through industrial areas of towns. This largely relates to the historical development of railways and their connections to industry. Indeed, Hartlepool and the North East have a strong industrial heritage, which has been connected to railways. Given these factors it has been argued that comparatively the railway approaches into Hartlepool are not as bad as anticipated and with the exception of the Steetley site the northern approach was felt to be particularly striking during the site visit.

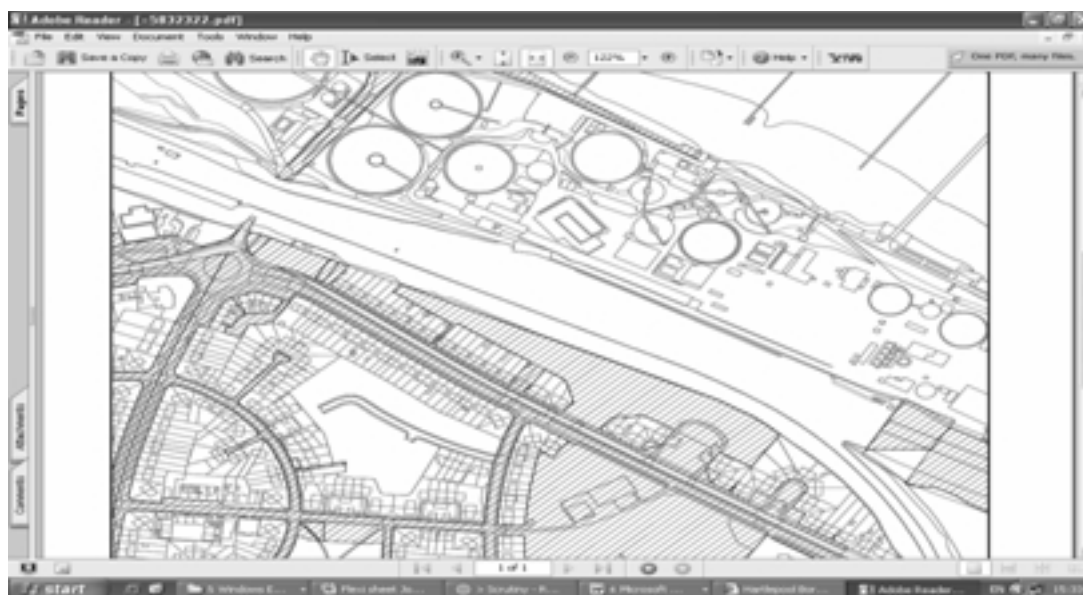
- 4.32 Nevertheless, the section above on the ‘image’ of Hartlepool has highlighted how the town is changing. Indeed, the issue of the ‘Railway Approaches’ into the town has arisen in response to maximising the potential for the regeneration of the town. Consequently, over the course of the Scrutiny investigation a number of ‘problem spots’ have been identified as giving particularly negative impressions of Hartlepool. During the site visit Members were able to explore the Railway Approaches at first hand and confirm / adapt their impressions of these. Following further discussion of the site visit and viewing a video presentation of footage taken during the site visit the following sites were identified as key ‘problem spots’:

- a) Steetley/BritMag (site and adjacent sidings);
- b) Allotments around Bruntoft Avenue;
- c) SWS in Stranton;
- d) Newcombe Recycling; and
- e) Niromax.

- 4.33 Members will be aware, following their evidence gathering session with the Mayor that a list of untidy / derelict land and buildings has been developed and action has been taken to make improvements to them. Consequently, Members of the Forum acknowledged that the ongoing improvements to untidy/derelict land and buildings could provide a potential way forward for making improvements to the key ‘problem spots’ identified through the Scrutiny Investigation. Consequently, it was considered during an informal

meeting of the Forum on 21 November 2006 that, where appropriate, the sites identified through this investigation should be incorporated onto this list.

- 4.34 It has been suggested by Members that advertising along the trackside could be developed as good practice on the Railway Approaches, in particular for screening the biggest 'problem spots'. This could be developed in three ways; firstly, to allow businesses to advertise and secondly, for the Council to advertise the town (through posters of key attractions). The latter point was felt to be especially significant in the build-up to the Tall Ships event. A third possibility would be to recommend a programme, in partnership with Network Rail, of tree planting to shield selected problem spots along the railway corridor. Given the varied ownership of the land and the responsibilities of the Council and Network Rail it has been suggested to the Forum that technical advice is sought on the most appropriate combination of these three approaches for screening 'problem spots' along the rail corridor.
- 4.35 Since attending the site visit the Neighbourhood Manager (North) has identified an area of unused land running parallel to the railway line (on the opposite side of the railway embankment to the old Steetley site) between Brus Tunnel and the Touchdown Pub. The land has previously undergone some demolition by Housing Hartlepool. Whilst the Authority proposes to clean-up the site it is felt that there is considerable potential to develop it further as a 'Community Forest' or 'Woodland Area'. The area could also act as a diversionary route away from traffic through linking this area into the Linear Park Strategy. Members discussed this development during an informal meeting of the Forum on 21 November 2006 and were keen to support and incorporate it in the findings of the investigation.



- 4.36 During the informal meeting of the Forum on 21 November 2006 there was further discussion of the North Hartlepool Linear Park Feasibility Study,

commissioned by the North Hartlepool Partnership and 'Pride in Hartlepool'. Members asked for further information on this development to be incorporated into the findings of the Railway Approaches Investigation. The study area covers the Headland and Central Estate, as far west as a line drawn from the BritMag works along the railway line to Victoria Harbour. The linear park will be a community-based project, through which community groups could develop and manage areas of green space within an overall agreed framework. By linking existing green spaces attractively and imaginatively the intention is to encourage greater use of them, make the area more attractive, exploit underused recreational and heritage potential, encourage more informal physical activity, and make them part of the local travel network for walking and cycling. Through integrating regeneration, tourism, transport, health and recreation objectives joined-up service delivery will be achieved across a range of policy agendas, as well as addressing local concerns and aspirations. Members present at the informal meeting on 21 November indicated that the scheme should be supported through the Forum's recommendations.

- 4.37 Since attending the site visit representatives of the Regeneration & Planning Services department have met with Tees Forest (North East Community Forests) to discuss a broad programme of planting to create green fingers of woodland extending into the urban area along the railway. The Local Plan has already identified a number of recreational sites in the south of the town stretching from Newburn Bridge to the former Greatham Station area which could be planted. The Tees Forest is supportive of the overall aim to link and enhance these sites as part of a comprehensive woodland scheme. The opportunity could also be taken to screen some of the uses at Newburn Bridge and Sandgate. During the informal meeting of the Forum on 21 November 2006 Members discussed this issue and indicated their support for it.
- 4.38 An assessment of all the sites (mentioned in paragraphs 4.35 – 4.37) is being made by the Council's ecologist to ensure that they are appropriate for woodland planting.
- 4.39 During discussions about the allotments at Bruntoft Avenue Members suggested that the Council needs an allotments policy. It was argued that allotments can, and should, add to the character of an area. Allotments that fall into disrepair not only create a poor impression of the railway approaches into town but have a negative impact on the more proactive allotment users. Members also argued that the Authority should consult with allotment users around the development of an allotments policy.

Condition of Hartlepool and Seaton Railway Stations

- 4.40 During the site visit Members compared the condition of Hartlepool and Seaton Station with those in neighbouring towns. It was argued that neither of these stations compared favourably with, for example, Stockton and Middlesbrough Stations in the case of Hartlepool Station and Seaham

Station in the case of Seaton Station. It was also argued that investment was needed to improve both of these stations.

- 4.41 A number of approaches to station improvements have been discussed by the Committee over the course of the investigation and these are outlined below.

Station Adoption

- 4.42 Currently Hartlepool Station has a Level One Station adoption scheme in place, which consists of one person helping to maintain the station. Given the interest in the inquiry from Members, rail user groups such as Coastliners and the CVS it has been suggested that Hartlepool seeks to extend its adoption scheme to the next level, which is to develop a 'Partners Scheme'. Indeed, Northern Rail suggested that they have some monies available to support an extended station adoption scheme. However, it was also suggested that enhanced adoption of the station may undermine the staff's ownership of the station. Nevertheless, the Forum has remained keen to pursue further (enhanced) adoption of Hartlepool Station and some adoption of Seaton Station. It has been stressed that the staff on the Hartlepool Station should be involved in this process, if they wish to be, and that pursuing this development is not a negative reflection on the job the station staff are doing. Furthermore, the Forum has suggested it would be beneficial to make connections to Pride in Hartlepool as part of any scheme seeking to improve the appearance of the stations.

Station Improvements

- 4.43 Again a number of matters have been discussed in relation to this issue. Firstly, it has been suggested that both Hartlepool and Seaton Stations should be improved cosmetically. Potential areas for improvement range from placing hanging baskets and flower tubs on the station to improving the signage and timetabling displays on the stations. A number of these improvements could be achieved through enhanced station adoption and involving interested parties such as the Community and Voluntary Sector in this. It has also been suggested during the investigation that it might be possible to make connections to English Heritage and Railway Trusts when seeking to make improvements to Hartlepool Station. Members have also indicated that it is important to retain the Victorian character of the station if any structural improvements are made as a result of this investigation.
- 4.44 It has also been argued that cosmetic work on the stations will only improve them so far and may, in fact, mask the need for larger structural improvements. It was, therefore, suggested to Members that the need for structural improvements to the stations was greater and that it would be prudent to use the opportunity that the Tall Ships event was providing to recommend that the Authority lobby the Department for Transport, Network Rail and Northern Rail to make structural improvements to Hartlepool and Seaton Stations, prior to improving the cosmetic appearance of these.

- 4.45 However the town's MP highlighted that the structure of rail franchise agreements are not necessarily conducive to securing station improvements. The length of franchises and companies being charged with making economies are, in particular, problematic. The government is not encouraging longer-term improvement programmes due to the structure of rail privatisation.
- 4.46 It has been suggested during the investigation that Hart station should be reopened as it would provide a good connection for the North of the town and also to tourism in Crimdon Dene. Council officers have been involved in lobbying for this station to reopen. However, this is likely to be a very costly undertaking, which has limited progress in the past. Indeed detailed scheme designs and costings were undertaken circa 2002 and the cost for reopening Hart station was estimated at more than £2 million. It is likely that the costs will have risen since then. Nevertheless, the Local Plan continues to allow for the future development of a station halt where the disused Hart station is located and the Forum has indicated that it would be desirable for the Authority to continue lobbying for Hart station to reopen.

To consider issues of accessibility, particularly in terms of pedestrian access to Hartlepool Station from the Marina;

- 4.47 Over the course of the Scrutiny investigation Members have focused on the issue of accessibility to Hartlepool Station on a number of occasions. The Town Centre Strategy has highlighted the need to address the physical linkages into the town centre and look at ways of making the area more permeable. Consequently, Members have discussed the need to improve pedestrian and vehicle signage around the stations and make connections to the town centre.
- 4.48 During the evidence gathering session with the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Transportation it was argued that adequate access to rail facilities is vital in terms of allowing growth in rail transport, and enabling modal shift. The Transport Interchange will bring a step improvement to the railway approaches in the area of Hartlepool Railway station. Spin off improvements at the station include new toilet facilities, retail units, improved access to the new bus facilities, improved parking and changes to the ticket hall layout and passenger waiting area. The interchange will bring significant improvements to public transport in Hartlepool, while regenerating an, at present, derelict area.
- 4.49 Furthermore, given the financial and legal constraints on extending access from Hartlepool Station to the Marina via a footbridge or underpass, accessibility between these areas can be improved through enhanced connections via Church Street. In particular, improved signage, the development of the Transport Interchange and the proposed development of a large piece of currently unused land between the Historic Quay and Hartlepool Station should enhance pedestrian access between the Marina and station via Church Street.

To seek the views of the public in relation to the railway approaches into Hartlepool

- 4.50 Members of the public have been encouraged to take part in the Scrutiny process through a number of press releases throughout the investigation. In particular, the meeting of the Forum on 2 November 2006 was tailored towards gaining public involvement in the investigation. However, no members of the public attended this meeting. Nevertheless, 'Coastliners' a local rail users group have been active throughout the investigation, and a representative of which attended most of the meetings, including the site visit. Coastliners were given a more formal opportunity to feed their views on railway approaches into the Forum on 2 November (see **Appendix B**). Consequently, the Forum has indicated that 'Coastliners' should have a continuing involvement in implementing the outcomes of this investigation.
- 4.51 HVDA submitted a response to how the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) could become involved in improvements to the town's railway approaches, and its stations in particular. A number of potential options for involvement are outlined in **Appendix C**. The Forum has indicated on a number of occasions that the CVS has a number of contributions it can make in the actions flowing from this report. In particular,
- 4.52 During the Investigation a Member suggested it is very important to keep up the momentum generated through the Scrutiny process. It was suggested that a 'Railway Approaches Forum' could be established for this purpose. This forum could provide a valuable mechanism for furthering partnership working between the Authority, the rail operators, rail user groups, the CVS, and the disabled access group. The conduct and findings of this inquiry suggest that the latter should include both improvements to the railway corridors and stations. In addition, Members raised the possibility of including groups such as young offenders in improving railway approaches.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That Members note the contents of the draft position paper and use this as a basis for amending / agreeing the following recommendations to go forward into the Forum's final report:
- a) That the Authority seeks to develop a proactive approach with Network Rail around combating graffiti, and in particular through making connections to Network Rail's graffiti budget.
 - b) That Network Rail's 24 hour helpline number (08457 11 41 41) is publicised through the dissemination of the Forum's final report, associated press releases and through the Authority's Hartbeat magazine.

- c) That the Authority invites Network Rail to bring the 'No Messin' scheme to schools in Hartlepool in the interests of reducing trespassing, graffiti and vandalism around the railway lines.
- d) That the Authority invites Northern Rail's police and schools liaison officer to attend Hartlepool schools.
- e) That the Authority uses its Planning and Development Control powers proactively to enhance the Railway Approaches into the town.
- f) That the Authority seeks to maximise the regeneration benefits of the 2010 Tall Ships event, the development of 'Hartlepool Quays', and the direct rail link to London by linking, where appropriate, prospective improvements to Hartlepool's Railway Approaches into the regional, sub-regional and local strategies described in the main body of this report.
- g) That the 'key problem spots' sites identified in the Railway Approaches Scrutiny Investigation, are incorporated, wherever possible, into the Green Infrastructure Strategy and its associated site specific schedules.
- h) That the area of unused land identified in paragraph 4.35 of this report is developed as a 'Community Forest' or 'Woodland Area' and as a diversionary route away from traffic.
- i) That the Authority supports the development of the North Hartlepool Linear Park strategy.
- j) That discussions between representatives of the Regeneration and Planning Services Department and Tees Forest (North East Community Forests) around the development of a broad programme of planting to create 'green fingers' of woodland extending into the urban area along the railway corridor is supported.
- k) That the Authority develops an 'allotments policy' and consults allotment users in the development and implementation of this policy.
- l) That the 'key problem spots' identified during the Scrutiny Investigation are incorporated, where appropriate, into the list of Untidy / Derelict Land and Buildings.
- m) That the Authority develops a strategy geared towards screening the 'key problem spots' identified during the Scrutiny Investigation based on the approaches outlined in paragraph 4.34.
- n) That the Authority pursues enhanced adoption of Hartlepool Station to a 'Partners Scheme' in conjunction with Northern Rail and that involvement from the CVS, 'Coastliners' and Pride in Hartlepool is sought in this.
- o) That the Authority pursues the development of a station adoption scheme at Seaton Carew Station in conjunction with Northern Rail and that

involvement from the CVS, 'Coastliners' and Pride in Hartlepool is sought in this.

- p) That the Authority continues to lobby the Department for Transport, Network Rail and Northern Rail for a station halt to reopen at Hart Station.
- q) That pedestrian and vehicle signage around Hartlepool Station is improved, especially in relation to the town centre.
- r) That 'Coastliners' have a continuing involvement in implementing the outcomes of this investigation. In particular in improvements to Hartlepool and Seaton Carew Stations and in the development of a 'Railway Approaches Forum'.
- s) That the CVS has a number of specific contributions it can make to improvements to Railway Approaches, as outlined in Appendix C, and that the Authority considers how best the adoption of these options can be supported.
- t) That the Authority helps to establish a 'Railway Approaches Forum' in partnership with the CVS to ensure that the momentum for this issue is maintained around improvements to both the railway corridors and stations. In addition to the Authority and the CVS, the rail operators, rail user groups and the disabled access group should be involved in this forum.
- u) That the recommendations from this report are reflected, where appropriate, in actions contained in Departmental / Service Plans.

Contact Officers:- Jonathan Wistow – Scrutiny Support Officer
Chief Executive's Department - Corporate Strategy
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 523 647

Email: jonathan.wistow@hartlepool.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was used in preparation of this report-

- (a) Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool's 'Railway Approaches' – Scoping Report (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 13.07.06
- (b) Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum Minutes 13.07.06
- (c) Railway Approaches Departmental Presentations – Covering Report (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 17.08.06

- (d) Railway Approaches – Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Transportation (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 17.08.06
- (e) Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum Minutes 17.08.06
- (f) Railway Approaches – Evidence from the MP for Hartlepool – Covering Report (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 29.09.06
- (g) Railway Approaches – Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Liveability and Housing (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 29.09.06
- (h) Railway Approaches – Evidence From External Agencies – Covering Report (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 29.09.06
- (i) Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum Draft Minutes 29.09.06

Appendix A – Notes from Member Discussions during Railway Approaches Site Visit 16/10/06

Comments from discussions on Seaham Station

1. Having explored the northern approach into the town Members commented that the Steetley/Britmag site was the big issue on this approach. It was acknowledged by some Members that some improvements had been made here. The site is heavily polluted and there are problems with erosion from the sea. It would take millions of pounds to clear the site. A planning application is in process and it was argued that allowing market forces to clear the site was (through housing development) key to moving forward with this issue.
2. Members commented that Seaham Station compared very favourably to Seaton Station and they would like to see something similar at Seaton. In particular, the transparent shelters were popular with Members.
3. Members thought planting could be used to shield the view over the allotments.
4. The signage at Hartlepool Station was deemed to be poor. A sign on the main building (as opposed to either end of the platform) indicating that you had arrived in Hartlepool would be useful.

Comments from group discussions on Middlesbrough Station

- **Group 1 – Problem areas identified on the site visit.**

Key 'problem areas':

1. Former RHM site in Greatham – questions about pollution here.
2. Allotments generally and fly-tipping in adjacent areas.
3. It was felt that Network Rail's housekeeping can be poor in terms of contractors leaving scrap metals by the trackside and surrounding areas.
4. Fly-tipping around Lancaster Rd. area.
5. Allotment sites are a blight. Numerous plots are overgrown and/or have items dumped in them. The cabins in the allotments make them look like shanty towns.
6. Mansforth Terrace new builds – roads partly complete, weeds etc. poorly maintained areas. Also derelict walls near here.
7. Steetley, Niromax, and Newcombe recycling are key problem areas.

8. Hartlepool Station platform requires weeding and the brickwork is 'shabby', the structure is generally poor. It could do with a repaint and hiring out spaces for advertising hoardings. The signage is also poor.

- **Group 2 – Impressions of Hartlepool and Seaton railway stations.**

Hartlepool Station:

1. Poor signage to, and in, the station.
2. The infrastructure is disgusting e.g. the roof etc.
3. The toilets have poor facilities.
4. Investment is urgently needed.
5. There is a lack of seating and there are no floral displays.

Seaton:

1. The station looks old.
2. The station needs investment to bring it up to the standard of Seaham.

- **Group 3 – Comparisons with other towns on the visit.**

1. Strong feeling that the railway station/s need improving.
2. Stockton was cited as a good example of an attractively designed station.
3. Landscaping on Hartlepool station would be beneficial e.g. raised flower beds on the unused platform.
4. Over the course of the visit it was evident that the planting around the railway had matured and generally worked well.
5. Need to work with the community around planting schemes the Newcombe and Stranton SWS sites were cited as places where this could take place.
6. Comparing Hartlepool with the other towns that were passed through on the visit created a generally favourable impression.

- **Group 4 – impressions from the railway approaches on the overall image of the town**

1. It was commented that the houses/buildings facing the railway could be improved. However, it was also recognised that they tend to be the backs of buildings and (naturally) more attention is spent on the appearance at the front of these.
2. It was acknowledged by Members that railways tend to pass through industrial parts of towns. Consequently, they do not always go past the most attractive parts of towns.

3. It was felt that hedging could be used to cover unattractive places like the recycling / scrapyard in the south of the town.
4. Members felt that the northern approach to the town was generally pleasant and a good approach into town. With the exception of the Britmag site.
5. The area between Hartlepool and Seaton station was deemed to be particularly nasty. However, there was some optimism that this area would improve between now and 2010 through the conditional use of planning permission, which would require landscaping improvements.
6. The west side of the southern railway approach, in particular, could be easily 'shielded' through landscaping/planting.
7. It was also commented that a combination of the features of Stockton and Middlesbrough stations would provide a good model for Hartlepool station.
8. It was also felt that it would be possible, and beneficial, to create a community feeling on Seaton station, and, therefore, it would police itself around vandalism etc. in the future.

COASTLINERS - *a voice for rail users*

Sunderland – Seaham – Hartlepool – Seaton Carew – Billingham – Stockton – Thornaby – Middlesbrough

Who are we

“Coastliners” is the name of the Rail Users Group representing passengers who use the railway between Sunderland & Middlesbrough – the Durham Coast Line. It is an informal group with links to Transport 2000, but is recognised by the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) (eg Northern Rail & Grand Central,) and Passenger Focus, the national body representing rail passenger interests.

It currently consists of a relatively small number of active members and meets around six times per year – usually in Hartlepool, as the mid [point on the line.

What do we do

Coastliners has primarily been a campaigning group. Its main objective has been, and remains, to ensure a satisfactory service along the Durham Coast, with adequate and convenient links to the rest of the rail network.

We have campaigned for the following:

a) On a local line level:

- To restore the half hourly service between Hartlepool & Newcastle
- **To provide an early morning commuter train from Hartlepool to Newcastle
- **To adjust the timetable to make better connections at Thornaby
- To improve the format of the Durham Coast passenger timetable leaflet
- For later evening trains (the last train from Newcastle is now 30 minutes later, but we would like to see trains until 10 or 1030pm)

b) On a national level to benefit the Region by improved travel opportunities to & from the Durham Coast & the rest of Britain

- Restoration of through services between the Durham Coast & York (since the split between Northern Rail and Trans Pennine Express)
- **Support for Grand Central trains between Sunderland and Kings Cross

- Input to the Cross Country Franchise negotiations to get :
 - a) some Cross Country trains diverted from Northallerton via the Coast Line
 - b) Trains from the North East to the South Coast and South West maintained as through trains and not curtailed at Birmingham or Reading as proposed by the Department for Transport (DfT.)

We have had some successes (**) but we continue to campaign on the other fronts. This is primarily through correspondence and meetings with the TOCs, the DfT, the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) and Passenger Focus.

Improving the Passengers Lot

Other areas in which we have interests include:

- a) Improvement in publicly displayed information at all stations
- b) Improvement in passenger facilities
- c) Improved rolling stock, ie:
 - New or refurbished trains
 - Condition of trains

Where do we fit with the present Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) Initiative

Apart from the obvious need for a coat (or several coats) of paint at Hartlepool, we have been very interested in a variety of improvements not only at Hartlepool Station, but also at Seaton Carew & Billingham. Though we cannot offer masses of manpower, we can offer a variety of suggestions, and have already done so in many cases – not always with any success,

Many of our ideas need co-operation from Northern Rail and/or Network Rail, and may only be achieved with support from initiatives such as that currently being taken by HBC.

Uppermost of these is to investigate further the formation of Station Adoption Groups. Under existing schemes, Northern Rail will often supply materials if groups supply manpower. It was in fact a Coastliners suggestion that a large Tall Ships mural be painted on the facing wall at Hartlepool Station – an initiative now taken up by the Mayor, the College of Art and Network Rail.

In conclusion we would like to work with and support the present HBC initiative.

Hartlepool Railway Approaches – Potential of Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) Involvement

In relation to 'The condition of Hartlepool Station given its role as part of the new Transport Interchange.'

There are a number of ways the Voluntary and Community Sector could potentially impact on the work for the improvement of the Hartlepool Railway Station.

a) Working with established Groups:

- Civic Society
- Greatham in Bloom
- Hartlepool Local History Group
- Railway Users Group
- Possibly members of the 50+ Forum

('Soundings' have been made with the above groups and they have expressed an interest)

It may be possible to explore with these groups the idea/s of forming a consortium group/committee to work up an action plan/funding strategy working in partnership with statutory organisations such as those below:

- Environmental Partnership – Built and Natural Environment Sub-group
- HBC
- Network Rail
- Grand Central

HVDA Project Development Worker could provide assistance in 'working up' this project.

b) Establishing a new Friends of Group:

This will be just as time consuming as working with the established groups but again is possible with the assistance of the HVDA project development worker.

c) Establishing a Heritage group;

As above but perhaps involving Museum services Heritage development worker.

Possibilities could also be explored around the engagement of a 'labour force' either through the HBC ILM Initiative or through working with OFCA through the VIP project or Kirklevington project.

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM REPORT

7 December 2006



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: RAILWAY APPROACHES – EVIDENCE FROM
EXTERNAL AGENCIES – COVERING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Forum that representatives from Network Rail and Northern Rail (subject to confirmation) will be in attendance at today's meeting.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of this Forum on 29 September 2006, representatives of these two external agencies gave evidence in accordance with the original Terms of Reference and Potential Areas of Inquiry/Sources of Evidence approved by the Forum for this scrutiny investigation.
- 2.2 Following further evidence gathering over the course of the investigation some Members of the Forum have indicated that they would like a further opportunity to question Network Rail and Northern Rail about their roles in 'Railway Approaches'.
- 2.3 In order to assist Members in their questioning of these bodies a brief background to their responsibilities has been reproduced and a number of references to the Position Paper, attached at Item 7.1 of today's agenda, have also been included below.

Network Rail

- 2.3 Network Rail will be in attendance at today's meeting to provide verbal evidence in relation to their role in terms of Railway Approaches. The national rail network infrastructure (track, signalling, bridges, tunnels and stations) is owned and operated by Network Rail. As such, Network Rail is a key organisation in terms of the railway approaches into Hartlepool. Members may want to question representatives from Network Rail in relation to their responsibilities for these areas. In particular, recommendations a), b), c), m), p), and t) of the Position Paper have some relevance to Network Rail and, therefore, Members may want to question the representative of Network Rail in relation to these.

Northern Rail

- 2.4 Whilst Network Rail owns all of the railway stations in the country, with the exception of a number of 'principal' stations, which it operates itself, Network Rail leases the stations to whichever train operator is the principal user. The principal train operator in Hartlepool is Northern Rail. The Forum may want to question Northern Rail about its responsibilities in relation to this issue. In particular, recommendations d), n), o), p), and t) of the Position Paper have some relevance to Northern Rail and, therefore, Members may want to question the representative of Northern Rail in relation to these.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum consider the views of the external agencies and question them accordingly.

CONTACT OFFICER

Jonathan Wistow – Scrutiny Support Officer
Chief Executive's Department- Corporate Strategy
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 523 647
Email: jonathan.wistow@hartlepool.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was used in preparation of this report:-

- (a) Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool's 'Railway Approaches' – Scoping Report (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 13.07.06
- (b) Railway Approaches – Position Paper (Scrutiny Support Officer) – 7.12.06

REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM REPORT

7th December 2006



Report of: Director of Neighbourhood Services

Subject: RAILWAY APPROACHES – ACCESS FOR ALL
SMALL SCHEMES FUNDING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a background to a presentation on the Council's successful application Department for Transport's Access for All Small Schemes Funding.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members of the Forum will be aware, through their information gathering during the ongoing Railway Approaches Investigation, that the Hartlepool Interchange Project will bring a step improvement to the town's Railway Approaches.
- 2.2 In October 2006 the DfT confirmed that Hartlepool had been awarded £150k towards a total project cost of £300k. This funding is for internal changes to the waiting room and ticket office facilities as an integral part of the £2.5 million Hartlepool Transport Interchange project. Consequently, Members of the Forum may want to consider the information in this report within the context of their findings from the Railway Approaches investigation.
- 2.3 The project will improve accessibility of the station by providing new accessible toilet facilities, suitable lighting, seating and surfaces, installation of new automatic external doors, low-height ticket counter, new customer information screens and upgrading of external/internal signage, audible communication system and counter loop system. A new pedestrian walkway will provide level access between the rail platform and bus station facility. External works at the curtilage of the railway station building, to be delivered as part of the Hartlepool Transport Interchange project, include dropped kerbs, tactile surfaces and disabled parking facilities. A presentation will be made at today's meeting providing further information in relation to this project.

- 2.4 An application has also recently been made (November 2006) for improvements to Seaton Carew Station. This entails a bid of £15,000 for small scale improvements to the Station including: pedestrian handrails, non-slip surfacing, lighting, and signage. Further information will be included during the presentation at today's meeting.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members note the content of the report.

CONTACT OFFICER

Ian Jopling – Transportation Team Leader
Neighbourhood Services Department
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 284140
Email: ian.jopling@hartlepool.gov.uk