

14th March 2012**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CITY SERVICES****COMMUNITY ACTION: REVIEWING PROGRESS AND AGREEING NEXT STEPS****EDEN VALE AND THORNHILL MINERAL LINE****1.0 Why has it come to Committee?**

- 1.1 Committee will recall from its last meeting in February, receiving a report detailing the progress of the 'Eden Vale and Thornhill Project Group'.
- 1.2 Contained within the report, was a proposal to allocate resources to reduce the height of the mineral line, which currently overlooks houses, remove walls and realign the path at Eden Vale Mineral Line. This proposal was one of a series of measures designed to alleviate anti social behaviour (ASB) in the area.
- 1.3 Committee agreed to defer the matter to the next meeting, to include relevant Scrutiny Chairs and Portfolio holders, and following discussion with a Portfolio Holder and the Chair and Vice Chair of committee, it was agreed to bring a further report to committee outlining the options available.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In March 2011, both Sunderland West and East Area Committees recognised that Eden Vale (West) and Thornhill (East) have been experiencing particular difficulties with anti social behaviour (ASB), exacerbated by a perceived lack of co-ordinated youth provision and community tensions. A number of initiatives were being delivered by numerous organisations within the area to tackle the problems, however it was recognised that they could benefit from greater co-ordination.
- 2.2 In May 2011, in order to move forward and maximise the impact of interventions and ensure clear prioritisation, a conference with key stakeholders involved in delivering services in the area was held. From this a draft action plan was produced.
- 2.3 In July 2011, both Area Committees agreed the action plan, and nominated Members from both Committees to establish a new cross boundary working group: the 'Eden Vale and Thornhill Project Group'. The Project group would monitor the quality and effectiveness of the services and improvements made, reporting directly back to both Area Committees.
- 2.4 Prior to last months report, the Project Group had reported to committee through updates to the Area Committee's work plan (Annex 1).

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 The Project Group's role is to ensure individual services add value to each other as a coherent whole and, to this end, has produced a comprehensive Action Plan and Communication Plan.

3.2 The Project Group's Action Plan, agreed at the last committee, focuses on four interlinked work streams:

- Youth and Children;
- Environment;
- Anti Social Behaviour (ASB);
- Community Cohesion.

3.3 Achievements to date include:

- Audit of young people's provision and suitable building resources;
- Agreed programme of young people's provision;
- Establishing an 8 – 12 year olds out of school centre at Richard Avenue Primary School (building work funded by West and East Area Committees);
- Thornhill School, Business and Enterprise College agreeing to join the Project Group;
- Progress on continued delivery of successful lunch time youth sessions at Thornhill School;
- Agreement in principle for evening youth access to Thornhill School's facilities;
- Continuation of Police led 'Operation Freedom' with scope to introduce further youth and family interventions;
- Organising an events programme with local residents' groups, themed on 'Love Where You Live', Sunderland 2012 and the Jubilee;
- Establishing a web page: www.sunderland.gov.uk/evtopportunities

3.4 The above achievements should be seen as a whole, multi service response to the identified difficulties of the area and it is within this context that the 'Environmental Improvements to Eden Vale Mineral Line' were developed.

4.0 Anti Social Behaviour

4.1 As reported at the last Committee, anti social behaviour (ASB) has reduced throughout the West by 35%. This has been replicated at Eden Vale, but the Police consider it, as reported at the last committee, a hotspot of ASB. Whilst ASB at Eden Vale has decreased by 34% from February 2011 to February 2012, compared to the previous 12 months, the last six months has seen an increase of 30% compared to the previous six months. The increase over the last six months across the West, in comparison, was 4.5%.

4.2 Whilst a range of interventions are being undertaken, the mineral line is seen as a major contributing factor to ASB at Eden Vale, due to its role as a gathering point for large groups of young people. The Police consider the entrance to it, on Eden House Road, and the adjacent highway area as the major gathering points for the large groups of youths who can cause major disturbances for local residents and is considered as one of the contributory factors in the recent rise in incidents of ASB.

4.3 The mineral line, at this point, has an extensive walled area, which is a natural seating and gathering point. This wall and path, at this point, rise to overlook residents' houses which, coupled with the ASB reported in 4.1, has been a major cause of tension between residents and the young people.

4.4 It is the 'role' of this part of the mineral line as a gathering point and a consequent flashpoint, which has seen the development of proposals, within the Eden Vale Action Plan, to address the issues the embankment lends itself to.

5.0 Environmental Improvement Options

5.1 The Eden Vale and Thornhill Project Group has looked into a number of possible options to reduce the attractiveness of the mineral line as a gathering point, which contributes to ASB.

5.2 Four options are presented to committee. A video will be shown to provide location and context:

- Do nothing;
- Removal of the wall at the Eden House Road end of the mineral line;
- This is a new option, which is, as above and excavate the raised land, lower the path and grade the embankment;
- Full removal of the mineral line embankment.

In addition, a further proposal was considered, which was to open up the embankment to vehicles, by removing a bollard to enable police cars to access the mineral line. This was not progressed on engineering and safety grounds in that the path is not designed or wide enough to carry vehicles, there is no turning area, little lighting and there would likely be considerable damage to the embankment and grassed areas. In addition, it could have served to attract vehicles on to it.

5.3 Do nothing.

This would incur no capital costs.

Outcome.

The embankment is likely to remain a major attraction for large gatherings of young people, which will maintain the likelihood of area remaining a hotspot of ASB and the problems this has brought for local residents.

5.4 Removal of the wall.

This would cost £7,277 and would involve the removal of those parts of the wall that currently act as seating and which adds to the area's attraction as a gathering point and would involve minor alterations to the Eden House Road end of the mineral line. This would be undertaken by demolishing a 5 metre section of the external wall against the Beachville Street back lane. An additional 5 metres of internal wall would also be demolished as this too is used for seating. A small section of embankment to the path would be graded to 1:3.

Appendix 3 illustrates this option.

Outcome

It is uncertain whether this will make the area less attractive as a gathering point, as whilst two five metre sections of wall would be demolished, there would be the need for a retaining wall, which would provide seating. The path and the land on the other side of it would remain overlooking the houses, with the path entrance directly adjacent to the highway area.

5.5 Excavate and lower the level of the path

This is a new option and will cost £21,790, including planning fees and contaminated land study. This option focuses on the embankment entrance and the immediate incline, rather than the proposals to the last committee, which had, in addition, further proposed excavations further to the east of this plan. This new option will involve demolition of the walls, as above, but, instead of grading the bank from the wall to the path, the land would be lowered, from its apex and graded down to the back lane. In addition, to the east of the embankment entrance, from its high point, the land would be graded in a westerly direction. This would require a new path, which would be 1.5 metres below its current height. The path entrance would be moved, in the direction of the A690. Appendix 4 illustrates this option.

Outcome

This is likely to have a greater affect on the area as a gathering point as the seating area would be totally removed. However, in addition, the grading of the land in two directions and the steepness of the land with the new path leading east, is likely to mitigate against its attraction as a gathering point, which has helped to foster ASB. This area of the embankment is that which the Police feel is the main gathering point of large numbers of youths and the point at which most ASB originates and it would no longer overlook the houses on Beachville Street at this point. Further, this scheme would not, in itself, prevent youths from congregating further up the embankment, beyond the area of this scheme, but it is felt there is less to attract them there and the proposed changes may help to discourage this.

5.6 Full removal of the mineral line

This would cost £360,000 and involve the full removal of the raised mineral line from Eden House Road to Chester Road. This is a minimum estimate and takes no account of any additional costs associated with contamination.

Outcome

Whilst this may not prevent any large scale gatherings of young people, it is likely to have a major effect. No houses would be overlooked and there would be no seating area.

6.0 Options

6.1 Committee is asked to agree one of the options outlined in section 5.

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