



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.00 p.m. - 7.00 p.m.

12 March 2009

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Watkins (Vice-Chair) (Not present for Site Visit), Bradford, Cannell, Fairbairn, Jeraj, Offord, Ramsay

Also Present: Councillor Linda Blakeway (Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development)
Paul Wade (Community Safety Officer)
Stefan Gurney (Norwich City Centre Partnerships Manager)
Simon Meek (Green Spaces Manager)
Jerry Massey (Director of Regeneration and Development)
Colin Penfold (Community Safety Manager)
George Ishmael (Landscape Planning and Strategy Officer)
Paul Nicholson (Children and Young People Officer)
Nathan Williamson -Notre Dame Safer Norwich Youth Partnership,
Robert Bradley and Marcus Green - Castle Mall Security, Sergeant
Pete Sharples-Norfolk Constabulary, PCSO's Graham Aldridge and
Mel Duckett -Norfolk Constabulary,
Julian Foster -Chair of Central Norwich Citizens Forum & Chair of
SNAP City Centre,
Victoria Caswell -Norfolk Youth Parliament, Nick Suddery- Crime
Analyst and 14 young people attended the meeting

Apologies: Councillors Blower, Driver, Fisher, Gihawi and Little (A)

1. CASTLE GARDENS

Site Visit to Castle Gardens – 4:00 p.m

A group comprising of members of the Committee, Council Officers, representatives from various external agencies (as listed above) and 20 young people attended the Castle Gardens. Paul Wade, the Council's Community Safety Officer, took the group on a walkabout to highlight some of the issues affecting the site.

The group visited the entrance, the Castle Gardens including the mound, the Whiffler theatre and Princess Diana Memorial Gardens and the Castle Green area. The damage to the area as a result of anti-social behaviour was highlighted and the group mixed with the young people to hear their views and opinions.

Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee – 5:00 p.m

The Chair welcomed the representatives from the external agencies and the 13 young people who had returned to City Hall for the meeting after the site visit. She introduced the Committee and described the role of the Scrutiny Committee.

The first part of the meeting would be to hear the views and opinions of the young people in regards to their use of the Castle Gardens.

The Chair and members asked the young people a series of questions and the main points that the young people expressed were as follows:-

- The Castle Gardens area was a convenient place for them to gather where they did not previously feel harassed and they liked the freedom of the area to skate and parkour.
- They travelled from all over Norfolk and even Suffolk (including as far away as Sheringham and Lowestoft). A lot of the young people attended City College so they met after college and on weekends.
- They did not have a lot of money so getting to other locations that were not central would be difficult. One young person lived in Mulbarton and walked to the city on a weekend.
- New rules had now been brought in and they were now not allowed to skate, run about or shout and felt that the rules were very “anti-kid”.
- They were unclear as to what acceptable volume levels were and said that at times they argued between themselves. They felt it was better to argue and clear the air in their own way rather than allowing tensions to build up between the group.
- They comprised of different groups of young people. Some went to the gardens to skate and others to socialise and have a laugh.
- In the winter, they spent a lot of time at the Forum which was more managed. They were aware of the noise restrictions there and they tried to quieten each other down if they became too noisy.
- They did not have a large problem with gangs and they did not have their own ‘tag’. However, they accepted that there were occasional issues between different gangs sometimes.
- Because of the way they dressed some felt that people looked at them differently, as if they were not “normal”. A friend recently had a baby and she was featured in the newspaper just because she was a young mum and hung around the moat at the gardens and dressed differently.
- They had been sworn at by people passing by just because they had long hair and piercings. If they accidentally bumped into someone and tried to apologise then they received offensive abuse. This also happened if someone bumped into them.

- They felt that they could not report these incidents to the police as they would not be taken seriously. It did not work both ways.

In response to this particular issue, Sergeant Pete Sharples said that the police did not try to treat the young people any differently from any other member of the public and that they would look at a complaint from the young people.

- One young person said that he has had his coca-cola checked for alcohol and felt that all young people did not necessarily want to get drunk.

The Chair said there was a problem in the gardens with people doing graffiti, drinking alcohol, taking drugs and using needles. She asked if the young people were aware of this, if they took part and did they notice the problem?

- The young people said that if seen, they asked the perpetrators to stop doing those things around them. If they found smashed glass then they tried to dispose of it as they did not want to be kicked out of the gardens. They felt that the gardens were a second home to them.
- A lot of the people who come to the gardens to drink were younger in age. Also, other groups drank there. Some other groups formed gangs and carried knives and there had been problems due to this. The young people at the meeting said that they only used their fists to fight and did not carry knives.
- The young people explained the dynamics of their group and that they were forced to physically protect each other if they were attacked by others.

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development stated that during the visit to the Castle Gardens that some young people told her that there was a problem with younger-aged people on a Saturday who do not respect the gardens and who they felt deliberately caused trouble. These were the stories that appeared in the local press.

- The young people added that some of the younger-aged people got drunk and acted up to them and ruined it for others and they felt that it was the minority spoiling it for the majority.

Members asked how people could tell the difference between young people who caused trouble and those who did not. How could the problems that occurred at weekends be rectified and did the young people have any ideas on how to improve the situation at the gardens?

- The young people responded to say that the Events Security at the Forum knew them and that they had become friendly with them which kept them in line. They saw different PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers) etc at the Castle Gardens and instead they would like to see familiar faces.
- They would also like to build a relationship with the Castle Mall Security and the Museum's Security so they had a rapport with them. This could have a similar effect as occurred at the Forum.

- They suggested that the Council could apply for some funding to provide event guards at the Castle Gardens which would make the area nicer.

In response to this last comment, Nathan Williamson, Notre Dame Safer Norwich Youth Partnership, said that the County Council was currently looking at funding towards a Youth Worker.

In response to a question regarding clarification of the age ranges of the younger people who caused trouble and if any older people caused any trouble, the young people said that:-

- The age range was mainly between 12 to 25 years old.
- The cause of trouble was a result of too much to drink. The young people attending explained that they looked after anybody in difficulty in the gardens and gave an example of a time when they had called an ambulance after a girl who had had too much to drink had fallen down the steps.
- They themselves used to also drink alcohol in the gardens but they had mainly stopped now and had "chilled out".
- The gardens were used by more people in the summer which usually saw an increase in problems. If the event guard/security could be arranged by then it would help mitigate this. The young people felt that they were unable to talk to young people who were a couple of years younger or older than themselves as they would not listen to them.

Responding to further questions from the Committee, the young people explained that:-

- They had not seen any people sleeping rough at the gardens and that they had not seen any discarded needles.
- They left the gardens anytime between 6pm and 11pm but that they sometimes also stayed there all night. It was nice to get away from home and see their friends, have a laugh and get away from it all.
- There were plans for the moat to have gates put around it but this did not happen. However, they would have climbed over the gates if they had been put in.
- They would like to be able to sit on the grassy area on the right hand side of the gardens where the evening sun was or the wall but they kept being moved on.
- They would like to be able to skateboard and parkour.

The Chair thanked the young people for attending the site visit and the meeting and thanked them for their views. The Chair said that members, council officers and the representatives from the external agencies would now further discuss the issues concerning the site and take into account the views raised in this part of the meeting.

Nathan Williamson said that monthly meetings took place where they consulted with the young people. The next one would be taking place in the Rotunda at Castle Gardens on Saturday 18 April and that all members and officers were invited to attend.

The young people left the meeting at 5:40 p.m.

The Chair continued the meeting and asked if the representatives from Castle Mall Security and the Norfolk Constabulary could comment on the views given by the young people.

Robert Bradley, Operations Manager at Castle Mall and Marcus Green, Head of Castle Mall Security, explained that the young people who had attended the meeting were not the cause of the trouble that occurred at Castle Gardens and confirmed that most of the trouble took place on a Saturday.

Robert Bradley said that the warning signs that had been put up applied to the moat area and not the Mall itself; however, they had put up their own signs in the food court area which was rented by 3 companies who paid service charges. The young people used the area to congregate and did not purchase any food or drink, or, they purchased one drink between 12, and subsequently they were asked to leave the area which caused conflict. However, they confirmed that none of the young people who had attended the meeting were amongst those people.

Sergeant Sharples said that although he appreciated the opinions of the young people, he did not feel that they were being totally honest about their actions whilst in the gardens. He said that the young people also did not realise the effect that their shouting and play-fighting had on the public who did not understand their behaviour or relationships with each other. Complaints had been received by the Castle Museum from visitors after they had been made to walk through a large amount of young people. He said that he understood that the young people felt safe in the gardens but that they needed it impressed upon them that they needed to consider other users of the area.

PCSO Mel Duckett said that she regularly dealt with some of the young people in relation to drinking alcohol, spitting, urinating and swearing. Since the area was made a SNAP (Safer Neighbourhood Action Partnership) Priority, she now visited the Castle Gardens on a daily basis.

Sergeant Sharples said that a previous consultation with the young people, they had been asked about how they could improve the behaviour problems. The way in which the Forum managed these issues was a good thing to aspire to as the young people did have a good relationship with Event Guard. However, the police were not able to patrol the Castle Gardens all of the time and the patrols by Castle Mall Security were limited. Sergeant Sharples said that he had also spoken to Barclay Todd, Operations Manager for Castle Museum about the problem who had said that he felt intimidated speaking to the young people.

Sergeant Sharples also agreed that some sort of permanent presence in the gardens would have a positive impact on reducing anti-social behaviour or nuisance related crime in the area. He said that throughout the week PCSO Duckett attended the area at least once a day at lunchtimes, after school hours and on warmer evenings depending on her shift. However, she also had two other SNAP Priority areas to attend as part of her duties.

In reference to a report that had been distributed by the Norfolk Constabulary at the site visit, that detailed the findings of the last monthly consultation meeting on 14 February 2009, more information was requested by members on the background of the monthly consultations. Sergeant Sharples said that the consultations were started as a result of the area becoming a SNAP priority. The consultations were attended by Chris Riley for Hereby Right which was organised by Youth Social Services, representatives from Youth Snap including Nathan Williamson from Notre Dame Safer Norwich Youth Partnership and Victoria Caswell from Norfolk Youth Parliament, Castle Mall staff and PCSO's. The meetings consulted with the young people and talked through any issues they wanted to bring up.

Members noted that the Castle Gardens was split into 3 areas of responsibility. Robert Bradley from the Castle Mall said that their interests lay in the gardens area but trouble did spill over to the moat below which was not in their jurisdiction. He said that their main concern was their own property and the impact that anti-social behaviour had on their business. It was felt that there should be consideration to a more flexible approach that enabled those with responsibility to share operation areas.

As a result of the Castle Gardens being made a SNAP priority, Sergeant Sharples explained that the police had more control over the area to deal with the problems. However, as they could not patrol the area all of the time he said that the problems started up again after they had left so there was a need to find a longer and sustainable solution. He said that PCSO Kirk was a familiar face in the gardens for the young people but a lot of them did not want to see her as they were drinking alcohol. PCSO Kirk added that an alcohol consumption in a public place order was in force in the City Centre.

Members wished to hear how the process would be taken forward, how decisions would be made and what involvement Councillors could have in the progress.

It was explained that a project team had yet to be set up for this although it would be arranged in the next couple of weeks. Scrutiny Committee members would be involved in the consultations about the area and they could also consult Sergeant Sharples.

Jerry Massey, the Council's Director of Regeneration and Development said that any outcomes from the Scrutiny Review could be referred to the project group for support but the funding arrangements were in very early stages. George Ishmael, the Council's Landscape Planning and Strategy Officer, added that when setting up the project team they would look at including representatives from different external groups and that the young people would continue to be consulted.

Paul Nicholson, the Council's Children and Young People Officer, said that through the Executive they had been awarded a Section 106 grant of £68,000 who had provided outline requirements for a capital improvement project for the King Street Area which was in close proximity to the Castle Gardens. This money would be available to use for informal recreation and for children's play space although that 'child' age went to up to 18 years and a proposal report would have to be submitted to the Capital Programme Board.

Julian Foster, Chair of Central Norwich Citizens Forum said that on this occasion he was attending the meeting in his capacity as the Chair of the SNAP for Norwich City Centre and that their own project team met fortnightly. He said that links had already been established to the Junior SNAP meetings of which Sergeant Sharples was the project manager and that discussions had been taking place for a year.

It was stated that a balance needed to be found by looking at the physical areas where the young people could meet and do what they wanted to do. Julian Foster suggested that the grass bank could be modified for them to be able to sit on it and also that a cover could be put over the seating area by the Whiffler Theatre. He referred to the stone seats at the entrance to the gardens and how it would not be possible to remove the graffiti from them due to the type of stone and suggested that they could be moved to the side which would allow pedestrians to walk through more easily. A member added that he had a long conversation with one of the young people at the site visit who said that it would be better to have benches at the side of the entrance.

Members were aware said that the young people had high expectations in relation to timescales and that their idea of long term was 6 months. It was important to keep the dialogue going with the young people and maintain communication as they were unaware of how long it may take to progress the situation.

Julian Foster said that the SNAP meetings were increasing awareness and that the articles in the local press sometimes only served to reflect the perceived problems and not the actual problems. He said that some of the young people had even written to the Evening News themselves to express their views as they had done at the meeting. The public were unaware that it was not just one large problem in the area but was split into the 3 separate areas. He referred to the problem of graffiti on the lift shaft which had been highlighted in the local press and as a result of this, 80 people had attended the 1st SNAP meeting for that area.

Simon Meek, the Council's Green Spaces Manager, said as a result of the SNAP meetings, an action plan had been formed. He described the work that had been done on the mound, how they had received delivery of the new bins that were bombproof and had stubbing plates, the replacement of the moat door, the re-planting of saplings and how the area had received a deep clean including the removal of graffiti and needle picks.

Simon Meek said that at the present time litter was picked daily which was a cost to the Council of £3,000 per year but that it would not be possible within that budget to pick litter more frequently. Members and Simon Meek discussed the current arrangements for the litter picking and the specifications of the current contract. Simon Meek said that realistically the litter was picked as a general sweep but that the Council did not have the resources to be able to check the work. He said that it would cost £6,500 to increase the frequency of the litter picks but that would mean money would have to be sourced from another green space which could then suffer.

In response to a suggestion by the Chair as to ways that areas of the Castle Gardens could be used to attract more visitors, Simon Meek said that events were planned for the summer months and that a coffee cart was proposed for installation under the bridge which could discourage bad behaviour. This could attract a different clientele and could also provide extra eyes and ears for us. The Council's Property Services Department were currently speaking to possible vendors who were on the

Norwich Market waiting list and it was hoped that subject to planning consent, that the coffee cart would be installed in time for the summer months.

The Chair summarised the main issues that had been raised at the meeting and said that the recommendations to be looked at would have to come back to the Committee to be able monitor the progress. She said that the physical nature of the Capital Programme needed to be looked at and asked if progress should be carried out by the Capital Programme or by other means. She also asked what should happen to the grass banks on the mound including the option of planting prickly plants to deter people from sitting on them.

Members, officers and representatives from the external agencies commented on the meeting and made the following suggestions:-

- To ask Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council and Castle Mall to become a formal group to work together. This meant that they would be able to cross each other's boundaries if they were working together as a joint management group.
- The cost of a deep clean to the stone benches could equal the cost of removing them and installing benches instead. Also if a plastic shield was to be placed around the lift shaft then it would be easier to clean.
- To consider the future possibility of an alternative location for the young people to go in the City Centre area (the new 'Open' Youth Facility which was aimed at 13 to 25 year olds was due for opening in June/July but this would be an indoor venue and was also perceived as being a religious based movement; something the young people were not keen on).
- To try to change how the media portrayed young people.
- The only budget available was through the Section 106 funding and that partnership funding should be considered. It was important not to raise expectations.
- That the project team formed as a result of the Section 106 funding involve as many organisations as possible and that maintaining communications was vital between all parties including the young people.
- Try to find a way to try to maintain the cleanliness of the area and to look at ways of trying to avoid graffiti. A volunteer programme could be instigated for the removal of the existing graffiti and then the areas could be painted or screens erected. It was understood that the current Citycare contract had budget constraints and stipulations but was something that could possibly be looked at as part of the new contract to commence in 2010.
- To encourage more events in the gardens to try to encourage different types of behaviour.

Members, officers and representatives from the external agencies discussed the current provision for CCTV coverage in the area. Simon Meek said that the camera that was opposite the lift shaft was the property of the Castle Museum and that

Barclay Todd, Operations Manager for Norwich Museum had said that a new system would be installed quite soon. Simon Meek said that the foliage around that camera would be pruned which would help pick up the Castle Mall area and he said that he was disappointed that a representative from the Norwich Museum had not attended the meeting.

Nick Suddery, Crime Analyst outlined the current CCTV provision and its varied capability.

In response to a question from the Chair, Colin Penfold, the Council's Community Safety Manager, said that in the past CCTV cameras had been funded by the Council's Capital Programme and in particular areas of the City, by the CDRP (Crime and Disorder Responsible Partnership). However the best option may be to make recommendations to the County Council and ask them to change the specifications of their existing cameras to increase coverage and effectiveness.

Simon Meek said that there were approximately 6 cameras on the green owned by the Castle Mall and Nick Suddery said the cameras were not state of the art and that it was not possible to get facial recognition from them. All of the cameras installed in the area needed to be of a certain standard and quality. Sergeant Sharples said that improved CCTV would assist the police when they were investigating incidents and that it may also be a deterrent and a calming influence as at present there was only one fixed camera to oversee the Castle Mall.

It was understood that the Norwich Museums had an insurance led system which did not loop into the Council's CCTV system. Simon Meek added that the Museum were required under their insurance to employ live guards in the evening.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) support the Castle Mall and the Castle Museum Security Teams approach in liaising and building an understanding with young users of the site.
- (2) encourage the Council and its partners to investigate the possibility of applying for any available funding schemes towards making improvements to the site.
- (3) support the County Council's consideration of Youth Worker provision to work with the young people in the Castle Gardens.
- (4) request that the Council's Event's Team use the site as fully as possible in the organisation of events in the Gardens.
- (5) that some members of the Scrutiny Committee attend the next consultation with the young people to be held on Saturday 18 April 2009 in the Rotunda at the Castle Gardens.
- (6) towards monitoring to continued dialogue and communication outcomes between all parties, including the young people, the Scrutiny Committee revisit this issue to assess progress in six months time.

- (7) write to the County Council and ask them to consider upgrading the current provisions for CCTV coverage in the Norwich Castle Museum area including the possibility of a 'pan and tilt' camera.

CHAIR