

Selkirk Victoria Park Action Group

Minutes of Meeting Held on Wednesday 8 November 2023

Apologies: L Douglas - Councillor, C Anderson - Community Representative,

In Attendance:

C Cochrane – Councillor

E Thornton-Nicol - Councillor

Joyce Wright, Chair

Martine Pow, David Deacon, G Easton – Community Representatives

Joyce gave a brief summary of recent correspondence with SOSE and SBC (see attached Appendix for details) and welcomed Kirsty Inkpen and John Robertson from Berwickshire Recreation Education Sports Trust (BREST) and thanked them attending the meeting to give an overview of their experience of developing a Trust to run Duns Swimming Pool.

The circumstances at Duns are slightly different in that SBC had announced that they were closing the Duns pool and the community only had three months to form a Trust to ensure the future of the pool. There was huge support within the community for this and BREST was formed.

SBC remain responsible for the external fabric of the building and the car park, which also serves the school. The TRUST run the pool successfully and receive a revenue grant from SBC which has just gone up to £90K per annum. Over the years they have also obtained a large number of grants from various sources, including Lottery funding.

Their main source of income is the swimming lessons held at the pool daily and they have private parties at the weekends. Through trial and error they have identified when it is most profitable to have the pool open. Their understanding of the running of the pool was greatly helped by the fact that Kirsty has been managing the pool for 36 years and knows it inside out.

Their advice, should a Trust be the preferred route, would be to ensure that there is the correct level of expertise on the Trust (e.g. solicitor and accountant) and that they are willing to provide services at low cost.

Kirsty and John then left the meeting.

Following further discussion, whilst the group felt that pursuing community interest led management of the campsite and swimming pool would ultimately be the most beneficial way of ensuring the future of both facilities, they recognised that such a course of action is beyond the capabilities of the VPAG but should be put forward to the Town Team, when this is formed, as a key project worthy of consideration.

Meanwhile, the VPAG will arrange a meeting with Live Borders to ascertain their intention for future investment and development of the campsite and swimming pool.

Site Usage Information for the season from 28th April (when the site eventually reopened following refurbishment to 30th September 2023) as provided by Live Borders noted below:

Booking Income

Online - £3,160

In-Person - £3,737

Total = £6,898

There were a total of 176 bookings made with July and August being the busiest, with each recording 47 bookings.

The number of nights people booked varied with the most popular stay being 1 – 2 nights. Across the season there were bookings every week, the only exception being Selkirk Common Riding week. The average across the season was circa 8 bookings per week.

The group felt that this information was reasonably positive given the lack of marketing the site has had. It was also questioned why the site was only open during the summer months and could not remain open throughout the winter as there is demand. Hawick's facility for Motorhomes stopovers remains open all year round.

Live Borders also advised that the two main areas of feedback received were in relation to the separate charging for electricity (£10 per night on top of pitch fee) and people's stay being disrupted by users of the car park.

Live Borders will explore options to reduce disturbance however state this is a public car park.

It was noted that there was a balance of approx. £10 - 15K unspent from the budget which has been ring fenced for restoration of the campsite when we last spoke to Live Borders. Councillor Thornton-Nicol will take this up with SBC and report back at the next meeting.

It is felt that there are quite a few ways in which the campsite can be made more attractive and the group hope that Live Borders will engage with them to continue with development of the site.

Date of Next Meeting: To Be Notified in Due Course

SOSE advised that they were not really in a position to provide guidance to the group until SBC indicated the type of management they would accept for the campsite and swimming pool, including a Community Interest run site. Joyce contacted Jenni Craig, Service Director – Customers and Communities at SBC for clarification and was subsequently advised that following conversations with colleagues at SBC and Live Borders, SBC were supportive in principle of exploring a community led model of provision. This would be subject to restrictions on the land/assets which their estates/legal department would need to advise on.

Clare Malster, Participation Officer, Communities and Partnerships Team, Resilient Communities at SBC subsequently contacted Joyce to discuss this in further detail. Clare outlined the key considerations which would need to be addressed should we decide to pursue a community interest ownership route.

Summary of Key Points:

- Group would have to be constituted correctly, assistance in this would be available (Borders Community Action *(Borders Community Action is one of a network of 32 [Third Sector Interfaces \(TSIs\)](#) operating in Scotland, with one for each local authority area. Formed by the Scottish Government, TSIs aid the development of voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and volunteering.* We would need to identify the type of organisation best placed to run the facilities e.g. Development Trust.
- As the land is owned by the Common Good Trust – we would have to ascertain if they would be amendable to any proposals and involve them in discussions.
- We would have to identify relevant statistics and info:
 - How much is required to run each element, i.e. camp site and the swimming pool.
 - Would we be able to cover the running costs and how would we do this?
 - Where would we raise funds?
 - Would they pay their way?

SBC and Live Borders will be able to provide this information

- We would need to ascertain if the community were behind the proposals, lots of consultation. Again, Borders Community Action be able to assist with this.
- Should we get the required support we would then need to identify what was required e.g. asset transfer process, put a Business Plan together, look at different funding options, put a financial plan together and make an application to SBC.

SOSE would help identify funding routes and SBC would assist also.

A long way down the line once all necessary info had been gathered and support gained, we would then have to make an asset transfer application to SBC and consult on the changes affecting the Common Good Fund.

Key thinking – purchase the site or happy to lease?

Selkirk Regeneration Company – could be a project put through or with them.

A good number of people required to see this through – won't be short term and will require years of commitment.

It is key to find out as much information as possible, including identifying the challenges that Live Borders are facing running these two amenities at present.