

AYCLIFFE BUSINESS PARK COMMUNITY 'SHAPING THE FUTURE' PROJECT REPORT FOR GANP

Background

During 2012 a small group of business leaders from across Aycliffe Business Park were gathered together by Business Durham to discuss the current and future needs of Aycliffe Business Park. These initial informal discussions resulted in a business led initiative being launched in January 2013. With over 100 businesses represented at the event, Aycliffe Business Park Community (ABPC) was officially launched. Run by a steering group of business leaders from the Park, the initial aims were to create a coherent business community which would be a vehicle for communication between businesses and outside agencies. Regular news and networking events were held exclusively for Aycliffe Business Park residents, with average attendance around 50 people representing approx 150 companies, this gave a strong foundation to the Community. A website was launched in 2013 dedicated solely to Aycliffe Business Park and provided a 'shop window' for business of all sizes and sectors to present and promote themselves, as well as a place for news to be shared including job vacancies and training opportunities. Business residents engagement in ABPC continues to grow with new and potential businesses using ABPC to learn and get involved in the Park community.

Project Outline

Prompted by the County Durham Master Plan document, Business Durham approached ABPC to request input from businesses on how Aycliffe Business Park should look and function going forward, from a residents perspective. With administrative support offered from Sunderland University, the Shaping the Future project was launched in early 2014. The project was based on 5 key areas identified through open forum discussions at ABPC meetings. Each area had a volunteer task force made up of Business Park residents and a clear scope to explore and report.

Group	Scope
PROMOTION	Identify how to raise awareness of Aycliffe Business Park by promoting it as a locations of choice for both employers and employees. Investigate how to improve the image and prestige of the Park to reflect the values of the businesses who operate here. Identify ways to improve the image of the Park for visiting customers and suppliers to provide an improved sense of well being and pride in the area. Support the activity of ABPC by promoting it's benefits to businesses on the Park.
PEOPLE	Research and identify current and future skill requirements for business needs. Identify skills gaps that might constraint growth. Identify funding streams to help employers. How ABPC can best support the UTC development. Look at how school/business partnerships can be developed and strengthened.
BUSINESS	Look at what options and interest there is for: - local trading - supply chain development - inward investment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collaborative purchasing - knowledge bank - access to finance
UTILITIES	Research and identify the quality and capacity of utilities (power, water, sewage, gas and broadband) needed to meet the forecast future demand.
PLACE	Identify environmental improvements needed, including highways, to enable businesses to operate more effectively and profitably. Look at the range and quality of services that should be available to meet the current and future needs of businesses and employees located on the Park.

Work Undertaken

Task groups meet throughout 2014 and early 2015. Each worked within their scope and where this led to an overlap with another groups scope, there was a joint meeting to investigate the area. As well as gathering information from businesses based on the Park, task groups engaged with several outside agencies, including but not limited to: M7 properties, Durham County Council, Great Aycliffe Town Council, Probation Service, Utilities providers, Merchant Place Developments and Vine property services. Each task group reported back to the steering group on progress and outcomes.

Outcomes

Clear feedback came from the groups and the collated priorities identified that would be relevant to the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan are:

SIGNAGE

Reported back by both the Place and Promotion group, this was a clear issue currently and businesses felt strongly that it should be addressed before any further development of the Park. Current signage was deemed to be confusing as even the name of the Park differed on signs. The various ones identified included; Aycliffe Business Park, Aycliffe Industrial Park, Aycliffe Industrial Estate.

Current maps at the entrances to the Park are outdated although it was acknowledged that it would be virtually impossible to maintain these with the current turnover of smaller businesses in particular.

Proposed actions:

- 1 agree that Aycliffe Business Park is now the site name
- 2 remove outdated signage maps and replace with possible QR code link to ABP website directory and map
- 3 investigate 'zone' options to help section the park and replace signage to reflect this
- 4 any future development to have signage plan included

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

With some link to the signage issue already reported, there was also a need identified for improved pedestrian pathways and cycle paths throughout the Park. With employers being encouraged to promote healthy lifestyles to employees and the Cycle to Work initiative, it was felt the Park needed to then reflect these priorities.

Proposed actions:

- 1 Cycleways to be extended throughout the main routes of the Park
- 2 Pedestrian pathways to be improved and extended throughout the Park, to include jogging routes

ANCILLARY SERVICES

Aycliffe Business Park has approximately 8000 employees based here. Many work in SMEs that have limited onsite facilities. Currently on Aycliffe Business Park there are a limited number of small food outlets and virtually no retail options other than a small post office. Current business residents have expressed support for an increased retail offering on the Park. Employers feedback was that the more the Park could look after it's residents, the better it was for them. This has been demonstrated in the high numbers of Park employees making regular use of the various fitness and activity centres that have recently opened on the Park.

Businesses were not concerned about increased domestic traffic to any retail space, on the basis that any planned development would have clear signage and accessibility. It was noted that any retail development should not be at the expense of, or limit, any potential commercial/manufacturing development, but should also be considered on it's merits based on job creation and sustainability.

Proposed actions	1	ABPC to support inward investment for improved retail offering on the Park
	2	DCC planners to be made aware of Business support and ABPC to monitor planning portal and offer support to incoming business proposals where appropriate

Report compiled in March 2016 for Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan research purposes, based on collated information from ABPC Shaping the Future project.

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