

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
28 OCTOBER 2021
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor Ramage

To Executive Member for Economic Regeneration and Finance

Vacant and derelict sites can affect our communities. There are £50 million pounds available from Scottish Government to transform these sites. Have SBC made any applications to this fund?

Response from Councillor Rowley

The simple answer is, not yet, and this is because of requirements in the grant application guidance.

The Planning Policy Team, who manage the Council's Vacant & Derelict Land Survey, have updated the survey this year. The survey identifies that the Scottish Borders has 72 hectares of land classified as vacant and derelict.

The team have also undertaken some initial research to examine potential options for funding bids, focussing in the first instance on sites that are in the Council's ownership.

The fund application guidance stipulates that a feasibility study of the options must be undertaken before applying for grant aid (guidance 4.1), and in 4.3 states we need to "...bring forward project proposals that have been developed with the involvement and support of relevant communities, as well as third sector, private and public sector partners as appropriate." It will therefore require more detailed work before we are in a position to make credible bids and as a result, we will not be submitting a bid for the fund by the current deadline of 12 November 2021.

Officers have been in discussion with Scottish Government officials and it is anticipated that a further round of funding bids is likely to be available in March 2022.

The emerging joint approach to Placemaking and the associated work to develop Local Place Plans will provide the mechanism for communities and a range of partners to engage in and guide the development of options for future bids. It is hoped that the appointment of the various community engagement officers will be completed in the coming weeks and that they will provide capacity to support the necessary work to develop bids for next year's funding round.

The Council is keen to take advantage of available funding to maximise investment in the Borders, and this is demonstrated by the significant amount of work that has gone into developing bids for the Community Renewal Fund and work underway in respect of the Levelling up Fund.

We will take that time to carry out the necessary work to ensure that future bids are robust and credible and have the best chance of being successful.

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage asked if she could see the updated register. Councillor Rowley advised that it currently contained about 70 sites but was constantly being reviewed and updated. This was an ongoing piece of work but he was confident that the work being done would benefit bids for all funding applications.

Question from Councillor McAteer

To Executive Member for Wellbeing, Sport and Culture

There is growing evidence that a number of Borders sporting clubs and organisations are facing a very uncertain future with for example the demise of a number of old established junior rugby clubs in Hawick and many local cricket clubs struggling to fulfil fixtures. While the Covid pandemic has

influenced the situation there is a wider more profound concern that young people in particular are not progressing their chosen sport beyond High School. Much of this I understand is because they don't feel supported or motivated to participate in some team based sports. In 2011 this authority in its joint physical activity, sport and physical education strategy said there has never been a more important time or need for the development of physical activity, sport and physical education. In addition we pronounced that 'we are fortunate in Scottish Borders to have a proud sporting heritage as well as a unique landscape to play in and take part in activity'. Can the executive member explain what action Scottish Borders Council has underway to help our young sportspeople and the various sporting clubs and organisations to ensure we can maintain our proud sporting heritage. In addition can he explain what agreed plans are in place to update and reinvigorate the current strategy given these worrying challenges?

Response from Councillor Jardine

There is national and local evidence that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on some sports clubs who have not returned to pre pandemic levels.

Live Borders continues to invest in the local Clubsport Network, offering grants for clubs and individuals to train, perform, upgrade facilities, develop new initiatives and improve the quality and quantity of coaches and volunteers in the area. The Live Borders partnership with the Clubsport network to offer a specific Covid recovery grant scheme has also benefited Borders clubs in returning from long periods of inactivity.

The Active Schools network and Sports Development services of Live Borders continue to provide the first fundamental involvements in structured sport and physical activity. The links forged between Live Borders education and local clubs has ensured that children and young people are more aware than ever of how to take those positive first experiences and transition into the community in a way that reinforces the mind-set of lifelong participation.

Sport and participation in teams is an important wellbeing opportunity for all of our young people and is one which is strongly encouraged across all of our schools.

In primary school, core and extra-curricular activities are celebrated through participation in festivals and inter-school competition. Live Borders Active schools co-ordinators in each locality foster strong links with local clubs and societies to offer taster sessions and pro-actively promote pathways into activities at club level.

Secondary schools offer a wide range of team competition through extra-curricular activities which are run by staff and in many cases by local clubs. PE staff identify opportunities for young people to access clubs and sports club are again actively promoted through high school communication channels.

Some clubs have developed very strong partnerships with the school curricular offering to provide a clear pathway through the sport, an example of this is that between Melrose Rugby Club and Earlston High School and associated Primary Schools.

As a critical strategy for the Borders I have requested and agreed with officers a strategy for physical activity, sport and physical education is urgently required and is being commissioned which will be brought before council by Spring 2022.

Question from Councillor Bell

To Executive Member for Economic Regeneration and Finance

As private business on 17th June 2021 this Council agreed a short list of project bids to be submitted to the UK Community Renewal Fund. Councillors were told at that time of urgency occasioned by the fact that spending on successful projects would require to be made by the end of March 2022. Councillors were also told that a decision on funding for successful applications would be made "by the end of July 2021". It is now the end of October. What has happened?

Response from Councillor Rowley

We have not yet been advised of the outcome of these applications and whether they have been successful. The Council has been in regular contact with the UK Government's Scotland Office to receive updates and it is our current understanding that a decision by the UK Government on the applications is expected soon. The Council has maintained contacts with applicants throughout this period to make them aware of the situation and of course as soon as we are made aware we will share the details.

Supplementary

Councillor Bell commented that the delay could impact some projects and asked if Councillor Rowley would write to the relevant Secretary of State to ask for flexibility around the completion dates for projects to take account of the 3 months lost. Councillor Rowley confirmed he shared this concern and was happy to pursue an extension if required.