

18 July 2024

AT A MEETING

of the

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on Thursday, 18 July 2024 at 6.30 pm
in the Council Chamber, Borough Hall, Bedford

This meeting was held in person. A video recording of the meeting can be found via a link on the virtual committee meeting webpage on the Council's website.

PRESENT: Councillor Abbott, Atkins (Chair), Frost, C Royden (Vice-chair), Simmons, Sira and Valentine (substitute for Cllr Sultan)

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Sultan

Also Present:

Gillan Kelly, Programme Manager, Greenwich Leisure Ltd

Officers Present

Chief Officer for Environment

Chief Officer for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth

Chief Officer for Regulatory Services and Culture

Senior Democratic Services Officer

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12. TO CONSIDER QUESTIONS (IF ANY) FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Question from member of the public Mr Copeland

Mr Copeland commented that he lived close to Bedford Park and had observed the damage caused to the Park as a result of the Winter Wonderland entertainment held in the Park earlier in 2024. He had also observed that, despite some remedial work, the grass still remained in poor condition in some areas and the area previously used for cricket was no longer fit to be used as such.

Response by the Chief Officer for Environment (COE)

The COE responded that grounds maintenance staff had been working in the Park during the current week carrying out repairs to grass following the recent summer concerts with the aim of carrying out remedial work both as quickly and as fully as possible. High volume and high frequency of rain throughout 2024 had resulted in a high water-table and waterlogged areas of grass. This had both delayed and then hampered repair work following the Winter Wonderland event. Work was continuing with the aim of ensuring full reinstatement of the grass and he would be inspecting the area personally on a regular basis. The COE invited Mr Copeland to meet with him during an inspection.

Further question by Mr Copeland

Mr Copeland remarked that he would continue to keep an eye on progress. He also asked what was to be done about the dying and dead herbaceous borders around the bandstand.

Response by the COE

The COE commented that he was aware of dying box hedges around the bandstand and elsewhere and there were plans to have these removed where necessary following scheduled renovation work to the bandstand.

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Question from Cllr Abbott

Cllr Abbott reported that his residents were unhappy that, with the transfer of the Pavenham bus service from Grant Palmer to Stagecoach, it appeared from the new service provider's website that there would no longer be a bus service from Pavenham into town after 2pm each day and asked why he, as Ward Member, had not been informed of this significant change.

Response by the COE

The COE remarked that the current provider had chosen to surrender the route from the end of July 2024. This had required the Council to carry out a procurement process and a new provider had been appointed. The COE asserted that there should be no change to the service and it had therefore not been seen as necessary to inform the Ward Member. The COE further commented that a review of all bus routes was currently underway and a report on the outcome of the review would be submitted to the Executive in October 2024.

It was noted that Grant Palmer and Stagecoach were to be invited to a future meeting of the Committee. Members asked to be kept informed of changes to services in order that they may quell any rumours within their communities.

Question from Cllr Abbott

Cllr Abbott enquired as to why several speed enforcement cameras appeared not to have operated for several months.

Response by the COE

The COE remarked that tendering was currently under way for work to upgrade and to repair certain cameras, with a cost in the region of £250K and, once work had been procured, residents would be informed. The COE further commented that, whilst the cost of installation and on-going maintenance of speed enforcement cameras was borne by the Council, any revenue generated by fines went to the Government and the Police. New cameras were planned for Wootton and supported by the Parish Council.

13. PREVIOUS MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 June 2024 be confirmed.

14. DISCLOSURE OF LOCAL AND/OR DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of a local or disclosable pecuniary interest.

15. LEISURE CONTRACT

The Committee received a briefing report of the Chief Officer for Regulatory Services and Culture (CORSC). Introducing this item the CORSC highlighted that the new provider, Greenwich Leisure Ltd. (GLL) had been appointed on 14 November 2023 to manage the eight Council-owned leisure sites. GLL had taken over 11 weeks later, on 1 February 2024, with a seamless continuation of service apart from a 2-day closure to enable staff training and deep cleaning of facilities.

The Committee then received an oral presentation from Mr Gillan Kelly, Partnership Manager for GLL in which he commented that:

- GLL was working closely with the Council's sports team and there had already been positive feedback from users.
- Initial priorities had included increasing participation, improving maintenance and cleanliness of facilities, and training staff.
- All of the 197 staff who had transferred to GLL had been retained and recruitment was under way to fill a further 20 posts.
- Since taking over management of the leisure services, participation had risen 14% amongst pre-paid members and 43% amongst pay-as-you-go members. Participation by ethnic minorities and by individuals over the age of 60 had both risen by 18% and the number of visits by females had risen by 52%.
- The GLL sports foundation had made financial awards totalling £10K to 16 Bedford athletes.
- Promotion of the facilities was being carried out via social media, the press and radio.
- New signage had been installed both internally and externally to create more welcoming environments.

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- Plans for the immediate future included improving the gymnasiums, increasing usage of the Oasis pool during the summer holidays, better programmes, and a revised concession-pricing scheme.

In response to questions from the Committee, the CORSC and Mr Kelly commented that:

- Participation data was not available from the previous provider and the participation figures quoted were based on data at the point when GLL took over.
- Copies of the monthly reports provided by GLL would be made available to the Committee.
- Taster sessions would be available for the public at a marquee and designated zones at the Bedford River Festival on 20 and 21 July 2024.
- The overall cost of running the service and revenue received could not be judged based only on the first few months but the cost was not anticipated to overspend during the current year.

The Chair and Members thanked the CORSC and GLL for the improvements made and asked that GLL return to speak to the Committee again after their first year of running the facilities.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

16. PREPARATIONS FOR FOOD WASTE COLLECTION

The Committee received the report of the Chief Officer for Environment (COE) which set out to inform the Committee on preparations to introduce food waste collections across the Borough. In presenting his report the COE highlighted a number of points, in particular that:

- The aim of introducing food waste collection was to recycle more and waste less.
- An assessment was currently being undertaken to review what vehicles, equipment and infrastructure would be required.
- An analysis of black-bin landfill waste carried out in 2022 had reported that each property in the Borough generated an average of 130Kg of non-recyclable waste each year.

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- Food waste collection would be rolled out to every property in the Borough.
- Around 20% of properties such as flats and terraced houses had insufficient space for external food-waste bins and the Council was looking to learn from other Authorities.
- The Government had set a target that collection from all domestic properties should be in place by April 2026 and from commercial properties by April 2025.
- The Council had secured funding of £1.5M from DEFRA to assist with initial implementation of domestic food waste collection.
- The Council was looking to identify a licensed food waste processor.

In response to questions from the Committee the COE commented that:

- Food waste generated methane which could potentially be utilised to power vehicles or to power turbines for generation of electricity.
- Collection would be rolled out in phases and the timetable was dependent on delivery dates for the additional vehicles which were required.
- It was anticipated that the capital funds provided by DEFRA would cover initial outlay and costs for the first two years. Beyond that the costs incurred would be due mostly to collection and treatment of waste. The final cost was dependent on many factors, however it was possible that the latter would be negligible if not zero and the scheme would be self-financing due to the savings in black-bag collection costs.
- The scheme would be fully promoted to ensure maximum participation by residents.
- The vehicles required would be smaller than current domestic waste collection vehicles. Recent trials of electric vehicles had not been successful and work was being carried out to assess whether hydrogen powered vehicles would be suitable in the future.
- Food waste would be collected weekly. The Council would provide a container for use inside the property and a larger caddy outside. Provision would also have to be made for shared bins for flats.
- Any spillages would be managed.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

17. KERBSIDE GLASS COLLECTION TRIAL

The Committee received the report of the COE which set out to provide the Committee with information relating to the current kerbside Glass Collection Trial. In presenting his report the COE highlighted a number of points, in particular that:

- The trial had commenced in May 2024 covering around 2,000 properties of different types including flats and houses in multiple occupation, in both urban and rural areas.
- The Government had released a previous restriction which had prevented the mingling of glass waste with other recyclable materials. Recent DEFRA guidelines allowed for a simpler recycling scheme and some comingling which would allow glass to be deposited in orange recycling bins.
- Around 75% of glass received in the trial had been separated out at the processing facility for recycling. Finer pieces of glass where they had been ground to small particles were sent for use in the construction industry.
- Initial results showed that between 32% and 42% of the weight of extra recycled materials in the trial was glass.
- The trial had revealed no problems with vehicles nor crews. Vehicles had been slightly modified with an internal skin to provide additional protection for machinery.

In response to questions from the Committee the COE commented that:

- Processing facilities were now able to separate glass by colour.
- A cost was incurred per tonne of material recycled but there was a rebate for glass and other materials such as paper which could be sold on. The rebate received from glass processed in this way would be less than that currently received from dedicated glass banks but the trial had not seen a reduction in glass deposited at glass banks so it appeared that additional glass was being recycled.
- It was aimed to roll out kerbside glass collection as soon as the outcomes of the current trial had been evaluated.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

18. UNIVERSAL STUDIOS UPDATE

The Committee received an oral update from the Chief Officer for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth (COPIEG) in relation to Universal Studios' plans for potential investment in the Borough. As part of the presentation the COPIEG highlighted that progress was being made with both sides working to reach a suitable deal. Universal Studios was also working with the new Minister and a decision was expected before the end of the current year. The COPIEG further commented that all six neighbouring Local Authorities in the area were positive about the potential plans.

RESOLVED

That the oral presentation of the COPIEG be noted.

19. WIXAMS STATION UPDATE

The Committee received the oral presentation of the COPIEG which set out to inform the Committee of progress in proposals for a railway station at Wixams. In making his presentation the COPIEG highlighted that the issue had been discussed at Full Council on 10 July 2024. Discussions with Network Rail (NR) were progressing to finalise the terms of the Implementation Agreement and it was anticipated that the Agreement would be signed on 24 July 2024. Once signed the Council would be contracted to construct a two-platform station. The contract contained a termination clause should Universal Studios require a four-platform station, in which case the contract would end and a new design for the station would be required.

In response to questions from the Committee, the COPIEG commented that it was a requirement that the contract be signed by the end of July 2024 and work would commence within two to three months. Should the contract be terminated, and a larger station be required, some work already carried out might become redundant but there were some works common to both scenarios and that work would be commenced first to minimise any potential losses.

RESOLVED

That the oral presentation of the COPIEG be noted.

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20. TO CONSIDER ANY "CALL-INS"

It was noted that there were no call-ins to consider.

21. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

- a) The Committee received a summary of decisions made by the Executive at its meeting on 19 June 2024 which fell within the remit of this Committee.
- b) The Committee received a summary of the individual Executive decisions made since the last meeting of this Committee which fell within the remit of this Committee.
- c) The Committee received a notification that no references had been either sent or received by this Committee since the last meeting of this Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) That the summary of decisions made by the Executive at its meeting on 19 June 2024 which fell within the Committee's remit be noted.
- 2) That the summary of the individual Executive decisions made since the Committee's last meeting which fell within the Committee's remit be noted.
- 3) That the absence of any references either sent or received by this Committee since the last meeting of this Committee be noted.
- 4) It was noted that items relating to tennis courts, Greyfriars site development and average speed cameras were already on the Work Programme.

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22. NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee received a summary of the items included in the Notice of Forthcoming Decisions for the period 1 August 2024 to 30 November 2024 which came within its remit.

RESOLVED

That the Notice of Forthcoming Decisions for the period 1 August 2024 to 30 November 2024 be received.

23. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the future Work Programme and reviewed items programmed for the next meeting of this Committee. It was agreed that:

- The Police and Crime Commissioner be briefed that the Committee will wish to discuss enforcement of the 20mph speed limit on the Embankment.
- That 'Condition of Bedford Park' be removed from the Work Programme for the meeting of 26 September 2024 as the matter had been covered.
- That representatives of BedsGOVET be invited to the meeting scheduled for 26 September 2024 in relation to the discussion on river water quality.
- That GLL be invited to the meeting scheduled for 16 January 2025 to report on their first year of managing the Leisure Contract.
- That copies of the monthly report submitted by GLL be made available to the Committee.
- That the briefing note relating to Tennis Courts be submitted to the meeting of 16 January 2025 to align with the 'Leisure Contract' item.
- That a briefing note providing an update on car parking be submitted to the meeting of 21 November 2024.
- That the consultant report on food waste be made available to the Committee.
- That a site visit be arranged to inspect a local waste processing facility.

The meeting closed at 8.24 pm

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