

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 31 January 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Jim Brown, David Cullen, Lizzy Kelly, Andy McGuinness, Sarah-Jane Potter and Simon Speller.

Also Present: Councillor John Gardner (Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration).

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.33pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matthew Hurst and Adam Mitchell, CC.

Councillor Simon Speller declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 3 – Reimagining Fairlands Valley Park, as he was a District Commissioner for Stevenage Scouts, who had an informal lease on The Canyon Activity and a lease for a premises in Shephall View, which were used as bases for the scouts using the facilities in the Park.

2 **MINUTES - 3 DECEMBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 3 December 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **REIMAGINING FAIRLANDS VALLEY PARK**

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager regarding the review of the strengths and weaknesses of the current offer in terms of both the quality and commercial viability of the services provided at Fairlands Valley Park, together with future opportunities for improving the offer.

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Environment & Regeneration to the meeting, and proceeded to provide the Committee with an overview of the history of the Park.

The Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager's presentation outlined the scope of the review; background; the current offer; finance; strengths and weaknesses; and future opportunities, including:

- There was sufficient space and suitable landscaping to create a co-ordinated outdoor activity offer that would complement the water sports activity and provide a sustainable, year round income stream for the site. This may include a more attractive high ropes facility with zip wires, climbing, archery, nature trails, team-building, woodland craft, bike and segway hire etc.;
- There was sufficient space and suitable landscaping to provide additional attractions that appealed to children and families and were supported by a strong business case e.g. adventure golf;
- There was an opportunity to combine these new income generating activities with improved free to access facilities, such as adventurous play areas, outdoor gym and picnic areas.
- There was an opportunity to explore development of a higher quality food and beverage offer which better met modern expectations and complemented activity on the site. This could even extend to a 'destination' restaurant offer which capitalised upon the attractive setting and drew visitors from a wider area
- There was an opportunity to explore development of additional, indoor activity, such as Clip and Climb, softplay etc., to provide a year round offer and additional income streams;
- There was an opportunity to explore development of conference and/or training facilities on the site, linked with team-building activities and possibly function space;
- There was an opportunity to optimise the ecological interest of the site through better interpretation/signage linked to nature trails and woodland walks;
- To improve access point signage to the various locations around the Park;
- Increasing usage and activity on the South Field; and
- An opportunity to promote more events linked to the cultural strategy.

In terms of short term opportunities, the Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager advised that these could include:

- Improve the external appearance of the building frontage;
- Clear up the compound and improve the appearance of the area;
- Continue to work with Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) to improve the pay and play offer and change opening hours to reflect user demand in the park;
- Work with Parks and Open Spaces to consider the Park as part of an overall parks strategy, linking to considerations around an overall leisure strategy for the town; and
- In light of the end of the leisure contract in 2023, review the best management options for the future delivery of services with the Park.

The Executive Member for Environment & Regeneration commented that Fairlands Valley Park was an important feature in the Borough, forming the town's largest area of green open space and woodland. He was supportive of any proposals to improve the facilities on offer in the Park, and suggested that a short term priority should be to consider ways to provide improved toilet facilities and times of opening for park

users.

The Chair read out the views of the Executive Member for Children, Young People & Leisure and a Member of the Committee, both of whom had been unable to attend the meeting, regarding the review.

The following comments were made by Select Committee Members regarding the presentation:

- Possible adaptations to allow users of the Park to be able to enjoy a continuous walk around the main lake would be welcomed;
- Some general housekeeping work was required in terms of the presentation of the Sailing Centre/Café building, communal area in front of the building and the compound;
- Officers should continue to work with SLL to provide a more accessible offer for pay and play and free activities which did not require pre-booking and specialist skills such as sailing courses;
- Some work would be required to resolve some of the existing issues relating to the Park before addressing aspirational opportunities;
- The review should be rolled out to community groups that used the Park, together with residents' groups that bordered the Park in Chells, Pin Green, Bedwell, Shephall and Broadwater;
- The opening hours of the café at the sailing centre were restrictive;
- The hours of operation of the toilet facilities at the sailing centre should be expanded (ie. they should not solely be available during hours when the café was open);
- It should be stressed to residents that the review was aimed at increasing the offer in the Park, and that it would not be considering any alternative uses for the land (eg) residential use;
- Increased signage in the Bedwell area, directing people to the Park, would be welcomed;
- The review needed to balance activities for which there were charges/fees payable against the informal use of the Park;
- The various restrictions in the Park made it difficult to put on community based events in the Park, such as fun runs etc.;
- Public Transport access to the Park was extremely limited;
- Lighting in certain areas of the Park could be improved;
- The dilapidated bandstand should be refurbished so that it can be used for small events;
- The condition of the car park on the south side of the Park should be improved;
- Consideration should be given to widening some of the paths/cycleways, with appropriate signage on path surfaces.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the comments of Members of the Select Committee be taken into consideration by officers in the ongoing work on the review, and that the theme be put forward as a potential review item for the Select Committee for 2019/20.

2. That wider consultation on the Fairlands Valley Park Review be carried out with users of the Park, including organised and non-organised groups, and with students in local schools.

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR