

COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2023

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Questions to Portfolio Holders

(A) Question from Mr Jim Borchers

“It is good to see that residents are moving into the new development at Kenilworth Close.

Can you give an update on when the ‘**four new retail units and enhanced community spaces**’ will be available for the current and future residents of Bragbury End to access?”

Answer (Cllr Jeannette Thomas – Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development):

I am pleased with progress of the regeneration of Kenilworth Close which includes new homes for local people, and attractive spaces to be used by the local community. My team of officers have been working closely with potential commercial operators and the Local Planning Authority over recent months. I am pleased to confirm that the scheme will provide for five new retail shops, in addition to a café and hairdressers that will be located close to the new independent living scheme.

To date, officers have received offers from grocery, hot food and hairdressing operators. It is envisaged that following fit out and legal agreement, the shops should open to the community during February or March of next year. This combination of new community space and shops will provide a wonderful and much improved offer for the community.

(B) Question from Jennifer Huygen

“Having recently moved to Stevenage and having done so particularly because I enjoy going out in nature and cycling, I was disappointed to realise there are barely any streetlights. This makes me uncomfortable going out after work by myself, particularly in Fairlands Valley Park.

I understand that street lighting is the remit of Hertfordshire County Council, but I would like to ask you very specifically about Fairlands Valley Park which has long sections without lighting and falls under the responsibility of Stevenage Borough Council. It is exceptionally dark, even early in the evening. This creates an unsafe environment, especially for women who are already disadvantaged when it comes to leading active lifestyles. Research from Sport England shows that the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis have had a disproportionate impact on women. Meaning that women have less to spend on weekly budgets and less time to spend on themselves. As a result, their activity levels have fallen and show little sign of recovery. 2.4 million fewer women than men strongly agree that they enjoy getting active. Sport England calls this the enjoyment gap and their research shows that 1 in 5 women say they worry about their safety whilst working out.

Given that wildlife friendly solutions to park lighting exist, can Stevenage Borough Council explain its plan to install lighting along paths across Fairlands Valley Park to ensure everyone can enjoy this park and lead more active lifestyles, even after sunset?"

Answer (Cllr Simon Speller – Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance):

Thank you for your question and sharing your experiences too. We are aware from what you and others have told us that women in particular can feel vulnerable exercising in our parks, and especially if it's dark and when decent lighting really matters. I am committed to finding ways to help all residents enjoy the Town and exercise in safety and confidence.

I therefore invite you and other residents to help us in our strategic review of getting the best out of all our parks, in all seasons, and where sensible, at all times. I believe that users should have the opportunity to share their views and experiences up front, right at the start of reviews. We have set up important user engagement groups for sustainable travel (named the ATLEE group), and Cllr Rossati (Executive Portfolio Holder for Leisure) and I will do the same for our review of parks.

To help improve facilities and services to Stevenage, the Council has recently awarded a new leisure contract to Everyone Active to manage our leisure facilities, which have an annual footfall of 720,000 visits per year. An integral part of the contract is to provide an 'Active Communities' outreach programme to provide leisure and sports activity within the community, and there will be sessions specifically aimed at encouraging and supporting women back into sport and leisure.

Whilst it is a new contract, there are particular services aimed at helping women access sport and leisure such as women only swimming sessions and a weekly studio programme of 75 classes at Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre. To help encourage exercise in the open air, I am pleased that we also have 14 licensed operators providing 39 fitness sessions per week in eight parks, including Fairlands Valley Park (FVP). More information can be found on our website:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/leisure-culture-and-wellbeing>

As part of the recent changes to how we operate leisure facilities, the Council has recently taken over the running of the facilities within Fairlands Valley Park and we will be reviewing the opportunities this might present. In terms of current lighting, at present there is street lighting along the lane going east to west across the bridge and to the access road from the entrance. But as I've surmised, as part of the review we will listen to ideas and suggestions from park users. In a very difficult funding environment for local Councils, our review will also need to engage with other partners, from the Police and Crime Commissioner, community groups, health organisations and funding bodies to look at creative sources of funding that might be available.

(C) Question from Mr Teun van Leeuwen

"Towns that increased their bike usage have shown that success hinges on periodic inclusive cycling policy audits that ensure policy matches with needs, not just infrastructure-focussed audits. How will Stevenage Borough Council audit its policy: through inviting experts from the Dutch Cycling Embassy, by employing the Bypad method — proven effective in the UK and towns and cities worldwide — or using a

different recognised participatory cycle policy auditing framework that uses best practices and taps into the experiences of Stevenage residents?"

Answer (Cllr Lloyd Briscoe – Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy & Transport):

As Stevenage is fortunate to have an extensive network of cycle routes across the borough, it is important that we prioritise increasing the usability and usage of them. We work extensively with Cycle UK Stevenage and Sustrans to listen to their views and experiences as users and peer groups, and to secure their input and views on different policies and the provision we have in the town. Our residents are most welcome to join any of these quarterly cycling meetings, to share their views and experiences.