

Leisure & Culture Policy Development Advisory Group
24 NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors: Roger Noel (Chairman), Tony Bevis, Martin Boffey, Ruth Fletcher, Bob Platt, Josh Potts, Kate Rowbottom and James Wright

Apologies: Councillors: Billy Greening

Absent: Councillors: Liz Kitchen, Jack Saheid and Ian Stannard

16 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 22 September were received.

17 **ARBORICULTURE CONTRACT**

The Head of Leisure and Culture briefed the group on the new Arboriculture contract. A report had been published to Cabinet with the recommendation to approve the contract to the highest scoring bidder set out in the recommended terms.

The existing contract was due to expire in March 2022 and to ensure a smooth transition, the new contract would be in place for April 2022. A procurement process had been undertaken and several bids had been received.

The aim of the new contract was to effectively deliver the Council's statutory arboriculture duties to include inspections and maintenance of tree stock whilst ensuring value for money, supporting the Wilder Horsham District initiative and to contribute towards the council's sustainability and carbon-reduction ambitions.

It was reported that the contract will be in place for seven years with the ability to extend up to a maximum of a further seven years.

The contract would manage the Council owned tree stock throughout the District including trees within the urban landscape, parks, open spaces, hedgerows and areas of ancient woodland. The contract would include tree inspections and reporting, routine maintenance, emergency response and Ash-dieback disease management.

Councillors questioned the timescale of the contract and the Head of Leisure and Culture advised that prior to advertising the contract for tender a market engagement day had been held to gauge interest and gather information to assist in developing the specifications. A contract of 5-7 years was considered

an absolute minimum to ensure value for money to the council and to encourage competitive tenders whilst also allowing for depreciation of vehicles and machinery.

Discussion also considered how decisions were made for internal or external contractors. It was reported that the council always strived for better value and consideration as to whether services remained in-house or delivered by external contractors was given on a case by case basis.

The group agreed that this report should be presented and carried to cabinet.

18 **HORSHAM PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The Head of Leisure and Culture presented an update on the Horsham Park Management Plan.

The previous update to the group was prior to the pandemic, the previous management plan (2008-2017) provided substantial investment in the park and there was subsequent ongoing investments and improvements too.

Currently procurement is taking place for improvements to the skate park with installation planned for Spring/Summer 2022; clearing and opening up of the pond has taken place with some further work planned; the play area had received substantial improvements last year; new recycling bins had been provided; improved site security; station entrance replanting was about to start and the Community Safety team are upgrading CCTV and improving security in the park and at the underpass.

In 2018 a comprehensive Horsham Park consultation took place with focus groups, Neighbourhood Councils, key stakeholders and visitors. Trip Adviser feedback was also considered with overwhelmingly positive feedback. The results showed that visitors really enjoy and value the park. Key issues highlighted were a wish to improve toilet facilities, manage litter (more bins now provided) and manage rats which is tightly managed by Pest Control.

The park has received Green flag status in 2020 and 2021 and supported greatly by volunteers, Denne Neighbourhood Council and Friends of Horsham Park.

The draft New Plan had four guiding principles:

- Infrastructure and planting would evolve to become more climate resilient. With wetter winters football pitch drainage would be considered as well as maintenance of pathways.
- The value of the park must be recognised for the residents (especially since the Pandemic) for well being and a vital social space.
- To look at improving the wildlife value of the site and to ensure good ecological practice. Areas of consideration would be reducing peat and chemical spray usage, varying mowing regimes and reducing perennial and shrub beds.

- Widening involvement in the park through volunteering as well as hosting events; recognising that it is a sensitive balance for different users of the park.

Within the management plan, stakeholder aspirations have also been included from Friends of Horsham Park and Denne Neighbourhood Council. It was recognised that budget provision was not yet available for this but gives focus for future discussions. Suggested items for future consideration were widening and improving the perimeter access to make it an all weather park, providing a separate toilet block and repeating the satisfaction survey in 2023.

The Head of Leisure and Culture advised the group that the plan was an important 'live' document and action plan and reviewed annually. Close work would continue with stakeholders and it would continue to be a collaborative process.

Members requested to be involved in any future consultations to be part of the review process. It was requested that as part of the CCTV improvements consideration would be given to cameras at the front of the Pavilions as a number of bike thefts had taken place in this area. Councillors agreed that dedicated toilets should be prioritised as a future aspiration. It was also requested that casual tennis court use be considered in the future.

19 **ATHLETICS TRACK UPDATE**

The group were updated regarding the athletics track.

After the regular two-year inspection in 2019 it was identified that the track needed replacing to become compliant in two years' time, and if not compliant, insurance would be invalid and athletics meetings could not take place. In 2021 the hammer cage was also removed as it was deemed non-complaint due to industry body changes to the regulations.

UK Athletics undertook an independent condition survey and acknowledged the effects of the pandemic on athletics and limited funding available for improvements.

They confirmed that the current track could continue to be used until 2026 with annual remedial work being undertaken. The hammer cage would still need replacing to meet new standards.

By 2026 the track would need resurfacing and other options could be considered for the site. A review of charges was taking place and comparisons considered with other athletic tracks in the area.

Councillors agreed that this was positive for the District and enabled time to investigate future options.

The Leisure Manager advised the group of the popularity of Wheels for All which operates on the track weekly and offers use of bikes and cycling for disability groups, parents and carers. Developed by the Council's Sports Development Team it is extremely popular and well supported. Councillors expressed an interest in visiting one of the sessions over the next few months.

The group discussed the importance of monitoring track usage. Usage and income data had been captured and improvement to tracking data was being considered alongside the pricing review.

The Leisure Manager reported that the running club had a new recruitment campaign and numbers were increasing and current usage was similar to before the pandemic. It was felt that once the remedial work had taken place it would be important to promote the facility and encourage as many schools as possible to use it.

20 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE LEISURE AND CULTURE PORTFOLIO**

The Chairman advised that the procurement of the Arboriculture contract would be taken to Cabinet.

21 **LEISURE CONTRACT UPDATE**

It was reported that the Leisure Centres are being used well, at around 90% of pre pandemic levels. Usage levels were being monitored closely and regular update meetings taking place with Places Leisure. It is hoped that the contact will be back to normal with a revenue return from April 2022.

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm having commenced at 6.00 pm

CHAIRMAN