

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF WHITTLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 FEBRUARY 2019

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Sandison (Chair), Bearne, Brader, Gillias, Leigh Hunt and Roberts

Officers:

Colin Horton (Green Spaces Officer), Claire Baldwin (Warden Supervisor), David Burrows (Regulatory Services Manager) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

External Consultees:

Nicola Boyd (Partnership Manager, GLL), (Jake Partridge, GLL), Sarah Simpson (Secretary, Rugby Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club), David Murley (Chairman, Rugby Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club) and Bernard Purdy (Rugby Sport for the Disabled Association)

19. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Douglas.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sandison declared a general non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a member for Eastlands Ward.

21. REVIEW OF PARKING AT THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE CENTRE

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 3) concerning the findings of a site meeting at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Centre (the leisure centre) and views of interested parties.

Copies of responses to the review received by email, photographs of the site, a briefing paper from the Sports and Recreation Manager, an email from the Green Spaces Officer and a list of draft recommendations proposed by the Chair were also circulated to the Committee.

A site visit style meeting held on 31 January 2019 was attended by Councillors Sandison (Chair), Bearne and Gillias and representatives from GLL, Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club and Rugby Sport for the Disabled Association.

The Chair reported that members from Eastlands Ward had carried out a further visit to the site on a Sunday when a martial arts festival was being held at the leisure centre and found that the car park was full and there were cars mis-parked

across the whole site blocking access points and on the verges alongside Bruce Williams Way.

This created a conflict of access for motorists, pedestrians and other users of the road and pathways. This could result in safety issues.

During discussion the following points were made:

Issues relating to access that had been received involved the grey drop down bollards that were difficult for people with sight problems to see.

There were no clear signs regarding access to the leisure centre.

The Committee identified the following areas where action could be taken to improve parking:

Cycle Racks

There were two cycles racks, one covered and one uncovered, that were poorly positioned. If these could be moved onto the paved area adjacent to the leisure centre this would create space for two or three more parking spaces. This would also help prevent theft of cycles as they would be nearer the building windows.

Trevor White Drive

The Committee considered the potential use of land alongside the access road as potential parking for staff or relief parking for organisers during large events. A suggestion was made that verge hardening could be used for this.

The access was situated at the end of Cromwell Road and was currently gated to prevent vehicle access, while retaining pedestrian access. It was currently used as access for maintenance vehicles and this maintenance access would need to be retained.

GLL commented that rights of access could be incorporated into a lease agreement and the gate could remain closed when needed. It would be possible to use the area when there were large events taking place.

Officers raised concerns that there may be a negative response from nearby residents as this would result in an increase of traffic. This was the original vehicle access to the leisure centre and congestion on Cromwell Road lead to the Memorial Gates being relocated and The Long Avenue promenade being converted to become Bruce Williams Way. Changing the access from Cromwell Road from a maintenance access to car park access would likely need approval from WCC, and the root zones of mature trees would require protection and reduce the extent of space available. The access is only single track and would likely need widening to a dual track while still retaining a pedestrian path with some form of physical separation, and care would be needed when considering pedestrians and space for vehicles turning meaning probably very few potential spaces.

Hardstanding adjacent to Rugby Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club (the indoor bowls club)

This area falls within the boundary of Whitehall Recreation Ground, and also within the Fields in Trust protected designation.

There was a height barrier in place to prevent high vehicles gaining access and a locked gate to prevent vehicles entering. The Committee were informed that the area will be used for a compound during the phased improvement works to Whitehall Recreation Ground and was used by large vehicles during events such as fairs and circuses. There were several phases to the improvements works which would be taking place over a long period.

Following the completion of the improvement works to the recreation ground the intention was to bring the area back into the park. This also provided the opportunity to improve health and safety by relocating the maintenance access to the park to this area helping to separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Currently vehicles drive along the main central footpath to gain access to the site. As well as the Fields in Trust protection scheme, it was also protected under the Open Spaces Strategy which forms part of the emerging Local Plan.

Members commented that the area would make a useful overflow car park. It was a large area and could provide valuable additional spaces. There would be more spaces available if the area was unmarked compared to if it was marked out as bays.

The previous gate and barriers were also intended to prevent access by travellers, though there had been instances where they had gained access to the park by damaging the gate, but there were also instances where encampments had set up on the main car park then moved from the main car park to this location without any damage to the gate or locks occurring despite having been locked. Since then a different design of gate had been used.

A comment was made that if the area was used as a car park illegal encampments were less likely to occur.

It was acknowledged that travellers could arrive on site at any time or gain access by other means. Members were informed that the County Court injunction was working as a successful deterrent to travellers.

GLL had not taken up a past opportunity to lease this area due to the fact it was not properly marked out. If this should happen, GLL confirmed they would be happy to enter into a lease with the Council.

ANPR Parking Scheme

GLL circulated copies of statistics showing that the annual attendance for the leisure centre was 555,000 and commented that parking was a definite issue.

The Committee identified that non-leisure centre users were using up capacity. One of the solutions proposed by GLL was an ANPR parking scheme and it was agreed by Members this should be the first step to addressing the parking issue.

The Committee discussed the use of ANPR as a means of enforcement and were informed by GLL that:

- GLL used a company called Gemini Parking Solutions at some of its locations.
- The system would be camera based and barriers would not be required.
- On arrival the camera would record the vehicle registration number and drivers would have a 15-minute window to register on a tablet.
- Free parking could be made available for a set time limit - for example four hours, and this could be followed by a charge of £1 for 1-2 hours extra. These figures were not unusual for leisure centre car parks.
- GLL would decide on the terms and control the time limits and charges via a web-based portal. They would also be able to record registration numbers for permitted vehicles, such as vehicles owned by staff, to remain for longer periods without charge.
- Pay and display machines could also be installed.
- Fines would be set at £100 which would reduce to £60 if paid within a two-week period.
- Gemini would manage enforcement with no involvement from the leisure centre or the Council.
- The system was flexible, and charges could be disbanded as required - for example when events were taking place.

It was stressed this was a proposal and details would be decided at a later stage.

GLL had a national contract with Gemini Parking Solutions and would be responsible for all costs including cameras, tablets and pay machines. There would be an additional cost if further tablets were required, for example by the indoor bowls club or the athletics club. This could be in the region of £500-£600.

Other means of addressing parking levels and mix were discussed including:

- Road markings - hatched road markings on the emergency vehicles bay, the delivery zone and the coach parking bay would be more effective than double yellow lines. The addition of wording such as 'emergency vehicles only' may also help.
- Re-designation of spaces – there was potential for creating 'dual use' bays for both people with a disability and parent and child users.
- There were currently 17 parking spaces for people with a disability. The Council's own planning standards state that a new parking provision would require 4% of the total number of bays to be for disabled users. The view of GLL was that ten would be adequate.
- Parent and child spaces - if seven spaces were re-designated as parent and child spaces this would still not be enough to meet demand.
- The indoor bowls club requested that two spaces for people with a disability be moved nearer to the indoor bowls club. GLL had no objection to this. This would require re-marking of the bays.

During further discussion the following points were made:

An ANPR solution would act as a deterrent against students from local schools, or hospital staff taking up spaces for several hours.

The indoor bowls club raised concerns about how the system would work for all users of their club facilities. The club hosts many national and international events that attract large numbers of visitors' families, and the club room was also hired out as a venue. GLL would address these concerns at a separate external meeting.

GLL could partially disable the parking restrictions as needed. Some communication between site venues would be required.

The scheme should be operated within British Parking Association's Code of Practice and signage displayed accordingly to state that charges could be changed.

GLL would receive the revenue from the pay and display machines but Gemini would collect and retain any fines.

Members asked about the evidence to support the proposal. GLL responded that lack of parking was the biggest complaint of its users. The membership of the athletics club had grown considerably. The indoor bowls club commented that the club was also thriving and if it was successful in moving up to national level participation would increase further.

It was difficult to measure accurate data because it was not known how many users had been unable to park, or how many people had chosen not to become a member of the leisure centre because of lack of parking.

A question was raised about different user groups, including visitors to the park. There may be some instances when charging non-venue users for parking could be detrimental to attracting visitors to the recreation ground, such as park users and to the annual Spring Fair. GLL commented that if parking was open to all external groups there was a danger that it could be abused by the users that it was trying to deter.

It was acknowledged that there was no wish to deter users of the park. While GLL was not responsible for this it may be able to offer one hour of free parking and monitor the situation.

It was envisaged that the average venue user would stay for 4 hours.

Members asked about pricing and where informed by GLL that this was likely to be reviewed annually. The main priority was to create parking for leisure centre users.

A previous suggestion had been made by officers to consider creating additional spaces on an area of landscaping near the car park entrance. Those that attended the site visit reported that this had been discounted because it would only offer up two spaces and there would be a need to reverse a vehicle into traffic entering the site which could be dangerous, and it would spoil the aesthetics on entering the site.

There would be no regular enforcement of abuse of the spaces for people with a disability and blue badge holders, but Gemini do carry out some spot checks. The Council had no authority to carry out enforcement.

Officers suggested that the car park at the GEC Recreation Ground could be used as overflow parking during large events. The indoor bowls club commented that this

may be useful for users who are more able bodied, but it may be difficult for those less able, or where large amounts of equipment were being carried. GLL commented that alternative parking could be offered but the lack of parking enforcement still created a problem with mis-parking.

Officers were concerned about damage to the verges on Bruce Williams Way and to mature tree roots. The use of bollards may protect the area and help stop obstruction. The Council's Arboricultural Officer would be consulted on this.

Comments had been received about the paths to the leisure centre being in poor condition and not suitable for mobility scooters due to tree roots. The Green Spaces Officer reported that resurfacing existing paths in poor condition and new paths within Whitehall Rec would be created as part of the planned improvements to the recreation ground.

The Chair reported that the Head of Environment and Public Realm had indicated that he was open to discussing the transfer of responsibility for the land adjacent to the indoor bowls club with the Head of Growth and Investment.

Making improvements to parking availability would have a wider impact and encourage more users of the leisure centre through schemes such as social prescribing.

The Committee reviewed the proposed recommendations provided by the Chair. Some changes were made and a copy of the conclusions and recommendations to be incorporated in the review report is attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

The next stage would be for the Committee to consider a draft review report for submission to Cabinet on 1 April 2019.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the representatives from GLL, Rugby Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club and Rugby Sport for the Disabled Association were thanked for their involvement in the review and for attending the meeting; and
- (2) a draft review report be considered at the next meeting on 11 March 2019 to include the agreed conclusions and recommendations.

CHAIR

Review of Parking at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre – Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. With an average annual footfall of 550,000 service users of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre, and ancillary users at other onsite venues, this represents a significant contribution to the Rugby town centre local economy.
2. Current parking capacity at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre is inadequate for the average service users of 45,000 to 60,000 per month, in addition to visitors and users of Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club, Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club and the athletics track, and Sport for the Disabled events. This represents a higher visitor rate to the town centre than many other venues.
3. Failing to deal with parking problems inhibits other service users, like those with disabilities, pedestrians and cyclists gaining access to the venue because of onsite congestion.
4. The current parking mix does not encourage family friendly parking for those who also need space to load and unload children.
5. The current parking arrangements inhibit the safe use of the venue and its car park.
6. The Committee recognises a lack of capacity is detrimental to a venue being accessible to all.

Recommendations

1. Further negotiations between Heads of Service take place with GLL and other providers regarding utilising other land holdings.
2. The use of an ANPR parking system would assist in increasing the turnover of parking spaces at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre and other onsite venues.