

Swanley Town Council

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ESTATES AND FACILITIES

MINUTES

Wednesday 19th July 2023

Present:

Members	Present	Apologies	Absent
Chair: Cllr L Dyball	✓		
Deputy Chair: Cllr C Barnes	✓		
Cllr P Darrington	✓		
Cllr S Durden	✓		
Cllr J Knight	✓		
Cllr C Prestedge	✓		
Cllr N Scott	✓		
Cllr R Wood	✓		

Officers: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Ryan Hayman
Executive Assistant – Tracey Bayliss
Parks & Open Spaces Manager – George Brooker
Venue Manager – Kerina Keir
Gateway Manager – Claire Cormack
Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) – Steve Innes

Also Present: Cllr P Brown, Cllr G Darrington, Cllr M Horwood, Cllr K Mitchell, Cllr C Morgan, Cllr L Taylor, Cllr E Uttley

Public: None present.

MEETING COMMENCED: 19:30

11998 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE NONE

11999 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr L Dyball declared that her grandson is a casual worker at Swanley Park. This has been entered on her Declaration of Interest form. She also declared that in her role as a Sevenoaks District Council, the West Kent Rural Fund is within her portfolio, although she is not on the panel.

12000 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

to approve as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2023.

APPROVED AND SIGNED

12001 GATEWAY MANAGER REPORT

To receive and comment on the report.

NOTED

Supplemental to the report, it was noted that work had taken place in the Post Office to install a dedicated banking desk for all banking needs. The Post Office has a new automated teller machine installed which has been performing very well and saves time. It was mentioned that there is a separate queue for the dedicated banking desk so public do not need to join the general Post Office Counter queue. It was asked if it residents would know the difference between a transaction which is a banking transaction and that which they can do at the Post Office. It was said that at this time there would be some confusion but would be about educating residents when they come to use the services. It was mentioned that there seemed to be some issues with customers joining the wrong queues and it didn't seem to be obvious which queue they should join. It was mentioned that new advertising is due to arrive and will help sign post the banking desk, although there is signage currently up directing customers to the banking desk or Post Office.

It was asked if SpecSavers Audio were using the Link because of overspill from SpecSaves in the town centre or were they just advertising their services. It was confirmed that they were performing hearing tests and wax removal. They used the Link as a temporary space until a room became available in their own branches.

It was mentioned that visitor numbers have increased approximately 1,500 per month from last year for June.

The Kent County Council Financial Hardship team are holding two events in the building, one in August and one in October for people that need help with their digital skills, cost of living, advice on water tariffs etc.

It was mentioned the Sevenoaks District Council had increased the cost of garden waste sacks to 80p which has now prevented the Link from providing a discount for bulk buying. The black refuse and clear recycling plastic bags remain at £1.50 and 50p respectively.

It was mentioned that the outside seating area for Picalilly's Café is now open and doing well.

It was mentioned how lovely the library was and the children's section particularly has a lovely diverse selection of books and activities available for the children. The Summer Reading Challenge for children has now started for Children. It was note that the Rhyme Time activity was closed for the school holidays. It was confirmed that it was run by SureStart and that they close for all school holidays. It was mentioned that it has become very popular and has increased from one to two sessions a week to four sessions a week.

12002 VENUES MANAGER REPORT

To receive and comment on the report.

NOTED

In addition to the information on the report it was mentioned that the school prom events have just finished for the season and there are already three returning bookings, and the proms generate lots of other bookings for various other events. They return a very large income. The venue hosted it's biggest prom ever with 220 guests.

The venue team are doing a fundraising walk-in aid of the Alzheimer's Society in October and also a quiz on 13th October. The Olympic is hosting a Mayor's Bowls charity match on 28th August in aid of Home-Start North West Kent.

It was asked what the Wedding Twilight Package was. It is a package that was created after the Covid lockdown where lots of couples did not want the traditional formal wedding. Couples can get married at 5pm and then head straight into the evening entertainment. It is more affordable than a traditional wedding and has proven to be very popular.

We have replaced all the chairs in the Olympic and are much easier for the staff to stack and move around the venue. The outside lights have been installed on the decking area; there has been a new ice machine installed and a new glass washer. The snooker is doing very well. The membership is growing very quickly. The tables have been recovered, kit has been replaced and scoreboard has been updated. It was asked if we would be replacing the table that was sold off. It was mentioned that they were keeping a lookout for a reasonably priced second-hand table. It was also mentioned that a dart board has been installed and that does overspill into the practice area of the snooker players. It was asked if a cost benefit analysis could be done to see how much extra income could be made providing the extra capacity with an additional table.

The Ecological site inspection for the Rugby took place on the 10th July. The initial report was returned stating that the site was too well maintained to have a proper survey completed. The CEO said that he communicated back to say that the site was being maintained in the way it would as a golf driving range and that this should not be held against the site. We have not received the net offsetting report back which is expected by the end of the month. A meeting took place with Sport England on 12th July which did not prove to be very fruitful. It was very clear that what was being proposed to them was not going to be enough. If the offsetting report can keep the offsetting to the Olympic site only then the Sport England objection falls away which was field opposite the Olympic being used as an eco offsetting area; then the planning application would go through. We are working towards very much downgrading the initial report on the acid grass which proved that there was acid grass across the site, which a lot of it was high quality performing, to downgrading it to poor quality which then means less off setting has to take place. Both Laura Trott MP and AFC Greencourt have written letters supporting our application and they were thanked for their support.

12003 PARKS AND OPEN SPACES MANAGER REPORT

To receive and comment on the report.

NOTED

It was mentioned that the results for the Green Flag Award have now been received and Swanley Park, Swanley Recreation Ground and Elephant Park all received the Green Flag Award. It was asked if any areas did not receive the award. It was confirmed that all areas that were entered won the award. Archer Way was not entered this year due to the criteria that was needed. It was asked what was being proposed for the future for Archer Way to be entered. It was confirmed that a five-year plan was going to be devised at the end of the year to go over all the parks and open spaces.

It was noted that the numbers were slightly down this year, due to the current cost of living crisis for some families and people are not doing as much as they used to at the park. It was asked how we are going to support this. It was noted that this years' figures are being compared to last years' figures which was an exceptional year with particularly good weather which helped with visitors to the park. The income has increased on the Pedalos and Soft Play for May and June. There are new promotions being offered to customers and more marketing is taking place to try and increase the visitors to the park. The car parking income looks a lot lower than last year; this is due to the change over of systems and the full amount has not yet been invoiced.

It was asked if there is a tree planting programme set for the autumn. It was confirmed that there was and there was a budget of £5,000. There will be two oak trees replenished which were previously paid for by residents. The agreement at the time was that if the trees were ever damaged or died, then they would be replaced by Swanley Town Council. In addition to those two there will be a number of trees replaced and added. It was asked if the trees were being sourced from the Woodland Trust. It was confirmed the trees would

be sourced from Provender Nurseries as older trees are required with a trunk girth of twelve to fourteen centimetres to help ensure they have a better chance of survival and do not get vandalised. The Woodland Trust would only supply saplings free of charge which would not be suitable for this project. It was mentioned that recently saplings that had been planted recently have been vandalised. These particular trees are on a five-year replenishment scheme which means that they will be maintained and replaced under that scheme.

It was asked if the incidents reported in the park took place in the evenings and if so, do park wardens patrol the park in the evening. It was confirmed that the staff present during the evenings are Park Rangers and the Parks and Open Spaces Manager. The issue is that the person causing the disturbance of offence are asked to leave the park, but often do not leave when requested to. It was asked if the Parks and Open Spaces Manager was there in the evenings. He confirmed that he was there most evenings.

The CEO mentioned that he has been working on the solar farm project at Pedham Farm with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC). It has now reached strategic board level as SDC and is going to be discussed in the coming weeks with papers being produced on Monday. It is very much early days and what is going to be approved is whether they can fund an initial study and survey into the feasibility of the scheme. SDC are going to produce a proposal to see a. if it is feasible and b. if we would like to work with them on the project. It was asked if it was something we would welcome and what the benefit would be for Swanley. It was confirmed we would, the plot is under utilised, there is minimal rent received from it and our 2030 Carbon Pledge would be completed with it as it is such a big scheme with the amount of energy it would produce. We would look to fund the project with SDC rather than let it out to a company as jointly we would have the expertise, and we would receive the income.

The CEO also mentioned that Bright Horizons Nursery in Sidcup was closing which has a number of children of families from Swanley attending. Dawn to Dusk is going to be able to increase it's capacity slightly to hopefully plug the gap. In the coming years there will be unlimited free childcare support from the Government and there are not nearly enough childcare nurseries in the country at the moment, let alone to cope with the future demand. The Dawn to Dusk build project is currently on schedule, however there may be an issue with the Thames Water connection into the building.

The grounds team are going to install bollards on the corner of London Road opposite Howdens industrial estate where cars park on the verge. This will be grant funded by Kent County Council. The grounds team had to undertake some training which is the reason it has been held up. Bollards will also be installed at Pinks Hill to secure the site from future incursion and at the Recreation Ground behind the current barrier as a second defence against future encampment entry.

With regards to the London Road installation there has been discussion by KCC about installing double yellow lines where the bollard installation would be. The bollards will still be installed as there may be some issues with the installation of the double yellow lines. This will be discussed further with the Development Control Committee who will submit a formal response.

It was asked if there was an update on the sewage connection from the park to the main waste system. It was reported that we are currently applying for a West Kent Rural Grant for up to £25,000 and for CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding. An updated quote received today for the work is £121,000 which would mean we would remove 137 lorries a year removing waste from the park, but there would be a saving of £28,000 at the park.

12004 KENT COMMUNITY WARDEN

To discuss the forthcoming Community Warden review.

It was explained that KCC was holding a consultation regarding the Kent Community Wardens and was reducing the amount of Community Wardens from 64 to 32 across Kent. They said that they are going to re-organise those 32 Wardens and they will be ward based. There are a very large number of wards across Kent and one Warden will be looking after a huge number of wards. KCC are stating that to help meet the financial challenge they are facing; the Community Warden service has been asked to reduce its annual budget by £1 million by 2024/25. To achieve this level of saving they need to redesign the service. The Community Warden service was established in 2002. They have 70 wardens including six team leaders, two area managers, one volunteer and apprenticeship scheme manager and one business coordinator. The service currently costs £2.4 million.

Our current Community Warden, Paul Sharrad, is based in Swanley Link and provides huge support to many people. He goes over and above his remit because he cares about people. He was instrumental in setting up Swanley's Shed at the park. He has delivered food parcels from Swanley Food Bank and Elm Church. He looks out for furniture for people on Facebook Marketplace, he looks after homeless and rough sleepers handing out tents and sleeping bags if they refuse to go into temporary accommodation. Paul makes sure that they are as comfortable and as safe as they possibly can be and liaises with other agencies such as Porchlight. Paul has built up a wealth of knowledge about the different communities he works with in the area. The thought that Swanley could lose Paul is quite devastating for a lot of our residents who do rely on Paul a huge amount for support and guidance. Councillors are asked to complete the response to the Consultation. Officers have also been asked to complete the questionnaire personally and there will also be a STC generic response. You can complete the questionnaire online at www.kent.gov.uk/communitywardenreview The review closes on 3rd October 2023.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 18th October 2023

MEETING CLOSED AT: 20:34

SIGNED:

18/10/2023

Cllr C Barnes
Chair of Estates and Facilities