To: Estates & Facilities Committee

From: George Brooker - Parks & Open Spaces Manager

Date: 21st January 2026

Subject: Estates & Facilities Update

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To inform the committee of any new projects, bookings, or changes to operations.

2. Recommendations

2.1 To accept the update report and note any new bookings/changes to operations.

3. Swanley Park background and information

3.1 Operations

All seasonal items are packed away for winter storage. The bouncy castles will be prepared for use ahead of the February half term, during which both the boating lake and bouncy castles will be open throughout the half term and on subsequent weekends until 1st April, after which they will operate daily. The splash pool, along with the inflatable water slide, is scheduled to open for the season on 1st May.

Options are currently being explored to transform the Barn Yard from its existing soft play centre into a role-play village. This proposed redevelopment aims to refresh the space, broaden its appeal, and provide the venue with a renewed sense of purpose and long-term sustainability.

3.2 Maintenance

Routine maintenance activities are continuing to ensure the park is presented and maintained to a consistently high standard.

Preparatory works are currently underway at the splash pad area to facilitate the installation of two new aquatic play structures and the laying of a new wet-pour surface.

The pergola was installed to provide partial shelter throughout the year, with three picnic benches positioned underneath. Funding for the project was provided by Every Step Counts, Friends of Swanley Park, and the Swanley Park budget.



3.3 Events

At the end of 2025, Santa returned to Swanley Park for a four-day weekend event, with all available tickets sold in advance. A number of operational changes were introduced compared to the previous year to improve crowd management and visitor flow, and these changes proved largely effective in delivering a smoother overall experience.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many commenting on the high quality of the experience and praising Santa and his helpers for their engagement and enthusiasm. Some delays to allocated time slots were reported; however, these were managed on the day and did not significantly detract from the overall success of the event.

Planning for the 2026 Santa Experience is already underway. It is proposed that the event will be expanded to include two additional railway operating days, increasing the total to six. There is also potential to introduce a further two non-railway event days, offered at a reduced ticket price, to increase capacity and accessibility.

In total, 476 families attended the 2025 event, which generated a profit in excess of £1,000. This demonstrates the continued popularity and financial viability of the Santa Experience at Swanley Park.

Special thanks are extended to the Swanley New Barn Railway, Paul Sharrad, Lily Smith, and the Swanley Park team. Their dedication, cooperation, and hard work were instrumental in ensuring the event ran successfully and provided an enjoyable experience for all visitors.



3.4 Swanley New Barn Railway

2026 marks our Ruby Anniversary (40 years), and we are planning a programme of events to make it a year to remember. The first of four events was our annual charity day on 1 January 2026, which raised over £1,200 for the Spa Valley Railway's £400k bridge replacement appeal. With more than 10% of our members also supporting Spa Valley Railway, it was a fitting cause, and the railway also attended with a successful sales stall.

The remaining 2026 events include a Home Fleet Gala showcasing all operational SNBR locomotives, our 40th Anniversary Birthday Gala, and a Diesel Engine Gala.

To mark the anniversary, a special commemorative logo has been introduced, alongside a new "History Train" highlighting the railway's first 40 years. Work is also underway on new display signage for our home fleet. Our main gala is expected to feature up to eight visiting locomotives from across the country, over 40 craft stalls, miniature traction engines, and additional attractions.

In December 2025, the railway supported the council's Santa Experience, operating a steam-only Santa service every five minutes and extending services when delays required later running.

Winter works are focused on replacing signal box–to–points wiring, with new sleepers already installed and new ducting and cabling underway. This includes laying over 200 metres of wiring, completing approximately 1,000 new connections, renewing track edging, and carrying out routine maintenance of coaches and locomotives.



4. Open Spaces background and Information

4.1 Grounds Maintenance

The Estates Department has completed their scheduled hedge-cutting programme across all sites. The team will commence the next phase of planned maintenance works, with tree management operations scheduled to begin the 12th January. These works form part of the ongoing programme to ensure the grounds are maintained safely, responsibly, and to a high standard throughout the year.

4.2 Awards

Management plans for Swanley Park, Swanley Recreational Ground, and Elephant Park are currently being reviewed, updated, and rewritten in preparation for submission to the Green Flag Award, which closes at the end of January. Feedback received from previous assessments has been carefully considered and incorporated into the revised plans to ensure that the Green Flag criteria are addressed as comprehensively as possible.

4.3 Maintenance

General repair works have continued to be carried out in-house across all Council owned buildings.

Proposals for the renewal of the playgrounds at both Swanley Recreation Ground and Elephant Park are currently being received, with the submission deadline set for 16th January. Once all proposals have been reviewed and evaluated against the agreed weighting criteria, officers will present their recommendations to Full Council on 4th February.

The Estates Team has completed the installation of fencing around the dog training area at the Olympic site. The planting of a native hedge is scheduled for early spring and will be carried out in full accordance with the approved planning conditions.

5. Conclusions

5.1 As highlighted in this report, we continue to aim to maximise the use of our facilities, whilst also generating additional income for the Council.

George Brooker - Parks & Open Spaces Manager