To: Estates & Facilities Committee

From: George Brooker - Parks & Open Spaces Manager

Date: 21st October 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

As the 2026 season approaches its conclusion, seasonal attractions across Swanley Park are beginning to close for the winter period. The Splash Pool and Plunge Waterslide finished operating at the end of September, while the boating lake and bouncy castle are scheduled to close on 1 November.

Responsibility for managing the car parks at Swanley Park passed to Total Car Parks Ltd on 13 March 2026. The handover was completed successfully, with the park experiencing a noticeable reduction in enquiries relating to Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs). This suggests that the new arrangements are helping to streamline the handling of parking-related queries.

The park's overall income is performing positively, currently standing 6.86% above the year-to-date position for 2025/2026. However, this comparison does not yet include car parking revenue for July, August and September, which is anticipated to be reflected in the October figures. The inclusion of this income will provide a more accurate assessment of the park's financial performance over the summer period.

The leisure pedalo attraction recorded a substantial uplift in income, with revenue 39.40% higher than the equivalent year-to-date period in 2025/2026. Contributing factors include a small adjustment to activity prices and the introduction of six additional pedalos, expanding the fleet and increasing the number available for public use. Favourable, predominantly dry summer conditions also supported demand. However, visitor numbers appear to fall when temperatures rise above 30°C, indicating that particularly hot weather may discourage utilisation despite otherwise favourable seasonal conditions.

The Splash Pool delivered particularly strong results, with income rising by 66.75% against the year-to-date figures for 2025/2026. The increase reflects a combination of slightly higher admission charges and the prolonged spell of hot, dry weather experienced over the summer. These conditions are likely to have encouraged more visitors to use the facility, contributing to the significant improvement in revenue compared with the previous year.

The current operators of IBL Catering, Ismet, Janan, Bulent and Gulen Levent announced their retirement following 15 years of operating the Café at Swanley Park. IBL Catering will continue to operate the Café under new stewardship, with Ismet and Tony providing support during the initial transition period. They have also kindly offered to remain available over the longer term to provide advice and assistance where required, helping to ensure the continued smooth and successful operation of the Park Café.

3.2 Maintenance

General Maintenance works continue to ensure the park is maintained to a high standard.

Quotes are currently being sourced to replace the brick wall at the entrance to the Swanley Park yard, which has come away from its footings, these monies have been allowed for in the year 3 maintenance projects.

A tender is currently being prepared for publication on Contracts Finder for the renewal of Swanley Park's main footpath, running from the New Barn Road car park to the level crossing at the top of the lower field. It is anticipated that the works will be completed before the end of March 2027, in preparation for the start of the 2027 season. The timing of the works will be planned to minimise disruption to park visitors and day-to-day operations as far as possible.

A quotation has been obtained for draining the lake to facilitate the removal of fish, together with the provision of Heras fencing to secure the area and ensure public safety throughout the process. The combined cost of these works is £10,000 plus VAT.

In addition, quotations are being sought for the installation of additional CCTV cameras to improve surveillance coverage around the perimeter of the lake. Both measures are intended to help tackle and reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) within the area, particularly incidents involving unauthorised fishing and the use of catapults. The proposed improvements aim to enhance public safety, protect the lake environment and deter further incidents.

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of Swanley New Barn Railway, plans are being developed for a new viewing and picnic area within the green space outside the main station. The proposed area will provide families and visitors with a dedicated space to relax, enjoy picnics and watch the trains arrive and depart. The development will also incorporate a series of informative boards, highlighting interesting facts about the railway and its history to enhance the visitor experience. In addition, plans include the installation of a new, larger battery-operated bike track adjoining to the area, providing an expanded recreational facility for younger visitors.

3.3 Events

At the end of August, Swanley Park hosted its annual 1812 event, with an innovative approach to the evening's entertainment. Due to government restrictions preventing the use of fireworks, this year's event featured a pyrotechnic display across the lake, accompanied by 100 drones flying overhead as the live orchestra performed the 1812 Overture.
Despite a light shower towards the end of the evening, the weather caused no disruption to the display, and the event attracted thousands of visitors to Swanley Park. Feedback from attendees was largely positive, with many visitors expressing their appreciation for the introduction of the drone display and pyrotechnics.
Following the success of this year's event, various options are now being explored for next year , with the aim of building on this year's experience and delivering an even more memorable event for visitors.

Tickets for this year's Santa Special at Swanley Park are now on sale, with over 41% of available tickets already sold. In response to the positive feedback received following last year's event, the team will be looking to further enhance the visitor experience and introduce additional value to this year's offering. To meet anticipated demand and provide greater opportunities for visitors to attend, the event has been expanded from four to eight days this year.



3.4 Swanley New Barn Railway – 40th Anniversary Update

July marked the 40th anniversary of Swanley New Barn Railway (SNBR), celebrated with a three-day event from Friday 17th to Sunday 19th July.

Friday 17th July was a quieter opening day, primarily intended for railway members to enjoy the celebrations. Services began with trains operating on the original section of the line before progressing to use the full railway in an out-and-back formation. Normal operations resumed later in the day.

Saturday 18th July marked the official opening of the anniversary gala, which was attended by the Mayor. A limited-edition book commemorating the railway's 40-year history was presented to the Mayor. Only 100 copies were produced, with the books proving popular among members and visitors, alongside other commemorative SNBR memorabilia created and sold by a railway member. Free colouring sheets featuring six of the railway's favourite locomotives were also distributed, an initiative that has continued throughout the year.

The event also featured 40 charity and craft stalls, a children's funfair, miniature traction engines and an impressive collection of visiting locomotives operating on the railway.

Sunday 19th July continued the celebrations, with locomotives rotated throughout the day to provide a varied experience for visitors attending across the weekend.

Overall, the anniversary celebrations were highly successful, attracting large numbers of visitors to Swanley Park and creating a positive atmosphere throughout the event.

Summer Operations and Railway Developments

The summer holidays saw exceptionally favourable weather, with only one wet day recorded. This enabled the railway to open on all but one day throughout the holiday period, representing a significant achievement for the railway.

During the summer, the railway also welcomed its 40th-anniversary gift, a steam locomotive named *Ruby*. The locomotive arrived requiring maintenance and remedial work, which is now nearing completion. Following successful initial steam trials on 10th October, the team is working through a small number of outstanding items, with the aim of having *Ruby* operating passenger services during the Santa Specials, subject to completion of the necessary work and checks.

The diesel locomotive *Kestrel* also underwent a full repaint and is now looking particularly impressive. Another locomotive experienced a diesel engine failure, requiring a complete replacement engine to be purchased and installed. Thanks to the considerable efforts of railway members, the locomotive was returned to service within a matter of days, ensuring its availability during the busy summer period.

The railway also welcomed two visiting locomotives, *Rachael* and *Cygnus*, during the six-week summer period. Both made valuable contributions to operations, and their visits were enjoyed by the railway team and visitors alike.

As part of the 40th-anniversary celebrations, vintage-style station lighting was trialled for 1812 Night, complementing a series of heritage-inspired improvements at the main station. These included replica 1920s-style advertisements featuring businesses and companies named after railway members, alongside new history boards and locomotive information displays. Collectively, these additions have significantly enhanced the appearance and visitor experience of the station.

Diesel Gala – July

On 12th and 13th July, the railway hosted a Diesel Gala as part of its 40th-anniversary programme. The event welcomed visiting diesel locomotives from Essex, providing visitors with the opportunity to experience a wider variety of railway operations.

Static and operational displays of miniature “pop-pop” engines were also featured near the signal box, adding further interest to the event.

Supporting Other Heritage Railways

Following the Diesel Gala, SNBR supported the Spa Valley Railway in Tunbridge Wells during its model railway weekend. The railway’s steam locomotive *Tigerlily*, accompanied by two coaches and supported by Grace Little Railway, travelled to the event to operate a portable railway within the yard of the full-size heritage railway.

This provided an opportunity to support another railway organisation, promote miniature railway operations and strengthen links within the wider heritage railway community.

October Locomotive Changes

October saw the departure of *Yeo*, a green steam locomotive privately owned by two railway members, which had been based at SNBR for the previous three years. Its final operating day at Swanley Park was 11th October, following the owners’ decision to sell the locomotive.

A similar privately owned locomotive, *Taw*, has since joined the railway. Previously based at Eastleigh Lakeside Steam Railway, *Taw* is now operating regularly at SNBR, helping to maintain the variety of locomotives available to visitors.

1812 Night

The railway was pleased with the success of Swanley Park's annual 1812 Night event. Members particularly welcomed the opportunity to hear the speech recognising the railway and the innovative drone display.

The railway also praised the Park team for its flexibility and the speed with which alternative arrangements were developed and delivered following restrictions on fireworks. The resulting show was well received and demonstrated the team's ability to adapt event plans while maintaining a high-quality visitor experience.

Winter Preparations and Future Plans

With the Santa Specials approaching, the railway is exploring the introduction of a dedicated "Santa Parcel" train to complement the existing Christmas services and provide an additional attraction for visitors.

The winter maintenance programme will include the railway's usual extensive track replacement works, alongside planned fencing replacements, particularly in the area surrounding the signal box. These works will support the continued safe operation and maintenance of the railway.

Overall Summary

The railway's 40th-anniversary year has been particularly successful, with a wide range of events, visiting locomotives and improvements to the station and visitor experience. At the time of writing, 35 different locomotives have operated on the track during the anniversary year, representing a record for the railway.

The success of the celebrations reflects the commitment and enthusiasm of current and former railway members, alongside the continued support of Swanley Park staff. The positive response to the anniversary events demonstrates the railway's importance as a visitor attraction and its contribution to the overall experience offered at Swanley Park.





4. Open Spaces background and Information

4.1 Grounds Maintenance

The Estates Team has completed its annual grass-cutting programme, undertaking a total of eight cutting rounds throughout the year. The team will now focus on seasonal hedge and tree maintenance alongside its usual operational duties.

Following recent staff turnover within the Estates Department, a departmental restructure is currently underway to maximise available resources and establish clearer roles and responsibilities for staff. Recruitment is also in progress for a Maintenance Officer, who will be dedicated to carrying out maintenance tasks across all Council-owned sites. This appointment is intended to strengthen the department's maintenance provision and improve the allocation of resources across the Council's estate.

4.2 Awards

Swanley Park, Swanley Recreation Ground and Elephant Park all successfully retained their Green Flag Awards for the 2026/2027 period, recognising the continued quality and high standards of the Council's parks and open spaces.

The results of the South and Southeast in Bloom (SSEIB) awards have also been announced. Swanley Park and Swanley Wildlife & Nature Group were both awarded Gold, while Swanley Town and Swanley Recreation Ground received Silver-Gilt awards. Both Silver-Gilt entries narrowly missed out on achieving Gold, with Swanley Recreation Ground falling just one mark short and Swanley Town missing out by three marks.

These achievements reflect the continued commitment to maintaining and enhancing the Council's green spaces, promoting biodiversity and encouraging community involvement. Congratulations and sincere thanks are extended to all staff and volunteers whose hard work, dedication and ongoing contributions have helped secure these excellent results**.** Their efforts play a vital role in maintaining these valued spaces for the benefit and enjoyment of the local community.

4.3 Maintenance

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

Following the tree survey undertaken in February, tree maintenance works are continuing across Council-owned sites, with an external contractor appointed on a day-rate basis. The contractor is working alongside the Estates Team to ensure works are carried out efficiently and costs are kept to a minimum. Works are being prioritised and scheduled using a risk-based approach, with completion anticipated by February 2027. In addition, the Council intends to develop a formal Tree Policy in the coming months, drawing on advice and guidance obtained through a recent webinar. The policy will provide a framework for the future management and maintenance of the Council's tree stock.

Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICRs) are currently being undertaken across all Council-owned buildings to ensure that electrical infrastructure is maintained to a safe and compliant standard. This programme of inspections is scheduled for completion by the end of the financial year.

The refurbishment of both Cherry Avenue and Hilda May playgrounds has now been completed, with the two projects costing a combined total of £123,510.11. Funding was provided by Swanley Town Council, Sevenoaks District Council and The National Lottery. The completion of these projects marks the conclusion of the current phase of playground refurbishments across Swanley at sites owned by Swanley Town Council and Sevenoaks District Council, with the exception of the main playground at Swanley Park. Work is ongoing to develop designs and secure funding for the Swanley Park playground redevelopment, with a provisional start date of winter 2027/2028. The proposed project will form the next major phase of investment in the provision of play facilities.



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