

## **DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

#### **HELD VIRTUALLY ON MICROSOFT TEAMS AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE AND CRIME PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETINGS) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020**

#### **ON MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Present: Councillors Peter Hollick (Town Mayor), Gloria Martin (Deputy Town Mayor), Liz Jones (Chairman), Lisa Bird (Vice-Chairman), Matthew Brennan, Philip Crawley, Greg George, Pamela Ghent, and Kenson Gurney

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Councillor Gladys Sanders, David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), John Crawley (Head of Grounds and Environmental Services), Mary Dobbs (Cemetery Manager), Ian Swinnerton (Grounds Operations Manager), Lisa Vincent (Acting Sports and Leisure facilities Manager) and Ian Reed (Democratic Services Manager)

Public: None

**At the request of the Chairman the Committee held a minute of silence in memory of former Councillor and Town Mayor Mike Mullany who had sadly died recently**

#### **95 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of Grounds and Environmental Services Committee held on 9 March and 18 May were approved as a correct record and it was agreed that they be signed by the Chairman shortly.

#### **96 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no specific declarations of interest.

#### **97 PLANS-SUB COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** that the Minutes of the meetings of Plans Sub-Committee held on 10 March, 21 April, 12 May, 2 June, 23 June, 14 July, 4 August and 25 August 2020 be received.

#### **98 GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON PLANNING ISSUES**

The Committee was invited to discuss a report that detailed the Government consultation on planning issues. On 6 August 2020, the Government published the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper which had a 12-week consultation period. The White Paper sought views on proposals for major reforms to speed up and modernise

the planning system in England and meet the Governments' aspiration 'to get the country building.' The proposals, based on 3 main issues, were summarised for the Committee. A further consultation document, 'Changes to the current planning system', was also published on 6 August which proposed four short term measures to improve the immediate effectiveness of the current system. These comprised:

- Changes to the standard method for assessing local housing need.
- Securing of First Homes, sold at a market discount price for first time buyers, including key workers, through developer contributions in the short term until the new Infrastructure Levy system is in place.
- Temporarily lifting the small sites threshold below which affordable housing does not need to be provided up to 40 or 50 units.
- Extending the current Permission in Principle to major developments to fast track the securing of principle of development for housing without having to work up detailed plans first.

The consultation paper 'Transparency and Competition – a call for evidence on data on land' was also published on 6 August and proposed options for improving the data held on contractual arrangements used to control land.

A number of other matters were discussed in the White Paper:

- Making better use of surplus public sector land through regeneration of town and city centres and accommodating Government office estate in strategic hubs in city centres and secondary towns and cities.
- How the disposal of publicly owned land could support small developers (SME's) and self-build sectors.
- Consideration of more flexible development corporation models.
- Resources in planning departments and the consultation indicated that there would be further consideration as to how resource could be maximised and refocused through a new streamlined approach to decision making, good access to technical expertise and transformed systems using the latest technology.
- Greater responsiveness by the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees

**RESOLVED:** that the following comments be submitted to the National Association of Local Council's as this Council's response to the planning consultations

Whilst the Council supports proposals for a more streamlined and speedier planning system that promotes appropriate and sustainable development; they have the following concerns on the detail of the Governments proposals:

- The Council's main concern was that the Governments proposals would further erode local influence and scrutiny of plans that will affect their electorates living environment and communities
- Members were concerned that there will be greater imposition of development on local communities
- Members were concerned that the new proposals would undermine the potential for valuable investment in local communities through the erosion of Section 106 contributions
- Members did not welcome the perceived transfer of greater direct planning decision making to the Secretary of State

- Members were concerned that the Governments proposals would result in limiting access to the social market for those most in need and would reduce the amount of affordable housing available through the lifting of relevant thresholds
- Members were concerned that local influence on the development of Local Plans would be further undermined
- Members were concerned that the lifting of environmental requirements on new builds would have a negative impact on carbon reduction and environmental targets

## 99 CREASEY PARK COMMUNITY FOOTBALL CENTRE AND SPLASH PARK UPDATE

The Committee was supplied with a summary account of performance to date. The Committee welcomed the news that the centre was nearly back to full operating times with all football anticipated to be back by the end of September.

The ATP was currently being hired every evening and weekends except Fridays by AFC Dunstable, Dunstable Town FC and other local clubs for training and games. The winter block booking re-starts on the 14 September. All users have rehired their existing slots from last season.

AFC and Dunstable Town FC have now hosted a couple of games with spectators, they are both currently allowed 30% capacity according to their league status. This means currently DTFC can hold 300 and AFC Dunstable can hold 400 spectators. AFC Dunstable and Dunstable Town FC respective leagues re-start within the next 2-3 weeks, youth football also returns mid-September.

Work on the new additional ATP had started 10 August although 9 days had been lost due to adverse weather. It was anticipated that the completion would be the end of November

There was currently a forecast for a £30k loss for grass pitches and ATP hire which was mainly due to the centre being closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic for the full first quarter. There had been no income forecast for the new additional ATP, so any income received would help the deficit.

Due to government guidelines the centre had cancelled all functions from March 2020 for the foreseeable future. This has had a substantial effect on income and currently there was a predicted loss of £12k on room hire and a £152k loss in bar & catering sales. The bar sales loss was made up from functions which were cancelled, football matches and tournaments, which were all cancelled. Until adult and youth weekend football returned it was noted that it was difficult to predict income.

There has been some savings due to the centre being closed in the first quarter. There was a predicted £7k saving on staff as currently only contracted staff were being used. There was a forecast £11k saving on cleaning, utilities and marketing due to the centre being closed for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter and £62k on bar and catering stock.

**Action** - All the team at Creasey Park be advised of the Committees' appreciation of their work during the year to date

**100 CEMETERY, ALLOTMENTS, RECREATION GROUNDS, TOWN CENTRE GARDENS AND RANGER SERVICE INFORMATION AND UPDATE REPORT**

The Cemetery Manager and the Grounds Operations Manager presented a detailed information report covering all areas of the Council's grounds maintenance responsibilities.

**a) Dunstable Cemetery**

Members received the burial figures for March to August 2020 along with the profiled income and expenditure figures. These indicated a positive variance of £24,321.

The Committee was advised that during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown the Cemetery had remained fully operational and staffed throughout, with a number of restrictions in place, in accordance with Government guidelines and requirements. The decision was taken to close the Cemetery for two weeks during March because of inappropriate behaviour and large gatherings taking place at evenings and weekends as well as uncertainty surrounding Government guidance. It was further noted that the Council had worked closely with Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and other Town and Parish Councils to coordinate burial activity in Bedfordshire and to ensure that adequate arrangements were in place to accommodate a spike in demand for burials. Specific operational plans were made to manage a significant increase in burial activity. Officers had also undertaken a groundwater protection risk assessment in accordance with Environment Agency (EA) legislation and best practice. As part of the risk assessment and collection of base line data three bore holes were created in the lawn section so that water samples can be taken on a 6-monthly basis.

Throughout the lockdown period the grass-cutting and grounds maintenance operations continued as normal with robust control measures in place to safeguard all staff. Also, following a risk assessment of the chapel it had been decided that the chapel could not be opened for use for the foreseeable future.

**b) Allotments**

Members noted that all allotment sites remained open and available for tenants to use during the lockdown period with guidance and restriction signage placed at all gated entrances. Inspections to check for cultivation were suspended during lockdown but recently 39 Notices to Cultivate had been issued. The Council took into account the circumstances for those tenants who have had to shield during lockdown.

The waiting list has grown significantly in the lockdown period and 236 people were currently on the waiting list. Since the last report 31 plots had been re let and 2 allotment tenants had decided not to renew their tenancy agreements.

**c) Recreation Grounds**

**Play Areas, Grove Skate Park and BMX**

Since the last report to this Committee there had been one incident of vandalism to play equipment. The incident occurred in mid-June at Mentmore Recreation Ground

when the platform deck and handrail on the Ixo bridge were damaged. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown all the Council's play areas were closed in line with the government requirements. The play areas reopened in early July when the Government lifted the restrictions. A risk assessment has been carried out and advisory signage has been placed on the fences and gates of the play area entrances to inform users of the control measures in place. Also, sanitisation of the play areas was being carried by spraying a seven-day active sanitiser on all equipment, fences and gates. Also, extra hours had been used to collect litter, bin emptying and sweeping up broken glass

### **Sports Pitches and General Grounds Maintenance**

Hedge cutting was currently being carried out around the recreation ground perimeters, cutting back growth to the fence lines. The football season commenced on 12 September for both senior and youth teams. The grounds team had marked out pitches and put up goals in preparation. The installation of the irrigation system at Creasey Park had helped to improve the renovation of the grass pitches this season. Luton Road Recreation Ground pavilion was broken into on 25 June. The cost of the repairs would largely be covered by the Council's insurance.

#### **d) Priory and Grove House Gardens and the Town Centre**

The lockdown period did not prevent the growing and installation of this year's summer floral displays. This year the Council tried a new form of matrix planting in the long border at Priory Gardens using open flowering plants to encourage bees and other pollinating insects. The variation of colours and scents have received good comments from members of the public who use Priory Gardens.

The grounds team have now taken on responsibility for the maintenance of the rain gardens and Urbis planters in the Town Centre and they have had some help from the Dunstable in Bloom volunteers who carried out pruning and dead heading of plants.

It was noted that the Head of Grounds and Environmental Services was working in partnership with the original designers of the Market Cross Clock Tower and the Grove House Gardens Performance Area to undertake much needed refurbishment and redecoration of the two structures. The works were currently out to tender and the plan was to complete these works by the end of the year.

#### **Dunstable in Bloom.**

Dunstable in Bloom had entered the 2020 Anglia in Bloom virtual competition submitting 6 photos and 50 words in each of 12 separate categories. Dunstable was awarded the winner of the Best Local Authority Planting category for its colourful bright floral displays and the community support to keep them in good condition through regular deadheading.

#### **e) Town Ranger Service**

The Rangers have resumed the cleaning of the toilets in Ashton Square, they are now working in line with the Covid-19 risk assessments regarding the cleaning which includes an increase in the number of cleans per day. Recently the Rangers had

cleaned the alley near the Oxfam shop. They had scheduled a list of tasks for September which includes removal of chewing gum and oil stains in Middle Row and High Street South.

**Action** - that a report be submitted to the Committee in six months' time about the ground water quality at the Cemetery

**Action** - that the cemetery staff, Town Rangers and grounds staff be congratulated on their works in face of extreme challenges since March of this year

**Action** - That the high levels of littering and dog fouling be noted as matters of concerns of the Committee for future discussion

## **101 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

CBC Development Management Committee:

The Chairman gave an update on the Health Hub development and Linden House housing site.

**The Meeting closed at 7.56 p.m.**