

BRIEFING PAPER

SCRUTINY REPORT – ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

DATE: 1ST JUNE 2020

TO CONSIDER AN UPDATE PROVIDED BY CLLR LUKE TAYLOR – CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEPUTY LEADER

Responsible Officers: Andrew Busby- Group Manager Corporate Property and Commercial Assets and Stuart Noyce – Group Manager for Street Scene and Open Spaces

Reason for Report: To receive an update from Property Services and Commercial Assets and Street Scene and Open Spaces

Corporate Property and Commercial Assets

Play Areas

MDDC have 94 play areas (including skate parks and BMX track) in its direct control. The number of Play Area leased to Parish and Town Council is 12, there are a further 5 pending and the lease-in of land for 3 further sites are to be taken over by the local Parish Council. There are 2 closed sites with no equipment. This will reduce the total to 86 during 19/20, as the process to transfer to Town and Parishes (and other organisations) continues.

The provision and the maintenance of play areas is underfunded which has led to some play areas being placed in managed decline across the District; resulting in equipment at the end of its useful life being removed and not being replaced. S106 funds are used wherever possible to replace end of life equipment and if the criteria of the s106 agreement permits this (for example the replacement slide at People's Park).

Under sections 3 and 4 of the Health and safety at Work Act 1974 there is a clear duty on playground providers to ensure so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of those who use the facility. Failure to comply with the duties under these sections of this act may result in legal enforcement action being taken. An improvement or prohibition notice could be served and/ or the appropriate enforcing authority could bring a prosecution.

A consultation exercise was completed during 2015 and on the 16th September 2015. Annual contributions are essential to MDDC to maintain the current play area provision in Tiverton.

At the Cabinet meeting on the 17th December 2015 and arising from a report of the Head of Housing and Property Services, the Managing the Environment Policy Development Group had recommended that:

- a) *The recommendations within Annex 2 (this listed the play areas that were recommended for managed decline and included Hawthorn Road, Halsbury Road, Priory Road, Coles Mead, Tricky Close) of the report be approved;*
- b) *The contributions from Town and Parish Councils towards the running and maintenance cost be noted;*
- c) *Any sites identified for managed decline or closure could be leased to the Parish/Town Councils by negotiation.*

Town Councillors will be aware of the recent budget survey, the results of which included questions on discretionary services and 69% said parks, play areas and open spaces is a service they would like to see protected.

Play Areas Inspections

Inspections on all of MDDC play areas are carried out by two qualified members of staff within Property Services. The FTE is 0.7 at a cost of £34,235 (excludes costs of a vehicle) for inspection of equipment and supervision and around 3000 inspections are undertaken annually.

Daily Routine Inspections are reduced to three-times weekly and exclude Saturday. Routine Inspections of higher risk play areas for safety defects will continue to be carried out on a Friday in advance of the weekend. All play areas contain signs advising of how to report damage should that be necessary at any time, at no time have safety defects other than litter (broken glass) been found during a Saturday inspection.

Paddling Pools – West Exe Rec and Crediton

Due to Covid-19 restrictions it is unlikely the Council will reopen the paddling pools this season.

The annual contribution from Tiverton Town Council continues to be gratefully received and is essential to maintain the current play area provision within Tiverton.

The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS)

Will provide a detailed assessment of playing pitch provision across the district, looking at a range of supply and demand issues. The assessment will inform a set of recommendations and an action plan that will help guide planning decisions (in particular strategic planning relating to Culm GV) and potentially broader management decisions relating to sports and pitch facilities.

We have set up a steering group which includes Sport England, the major national game boards (FA, RFU, ECB etc.) and others. We have appointed consultants who have begun collecting the data. This has included pitch audits and questionnaires to clubs, schools and parish councils. This work has been able to progress despite the impact of Covid19, although progress is a little slower than originally anticipated. Much of the 'winter' sports work has been done and it is hoped that the summer sports (cricket, tennis, bowls etc.) can be done this summer (ECB have indicated

they are happy for pitch inspections to take place). The consultant is aiming to be in a position to provide the assessment report this autumn.

Bereavement Services

Charges within the Bereavement service provision were necessary for the Council to reduce the estimated net subsidy. The focus remains on providing the best possible standards of service, which includes not only the maintenance of our two cemeteries but the ongoing aim of ensuring the long-term needs of burials are met.

Our two cemeteries provide places for quiet reflection where people are treated with dignity and respect at all stages of their lives and it is clear that these cemeteries have been very important to the public during the Covid-19 emergency.

In addition, the Council remains committed and continues to ensure that re-investment is made for various maintenance works across the Council's two Cemeteries. We are also about to finish planned extension works to the Tiverton cemetery to provide additional burial space for the years to come, this involved additional footpaths and roads, benches, water services. We also plan maintenance works to both chapels at Tiverton and Crediton.

Grounds Maintenance team maintain both locations to a good standard and there has been improvements carried out to the grounds including mound removal (with the grave owner's permission) to help maintain standards.

Flood Risk Management

The District continue to liaise and coordinate with Devon County Council – the Lead Local Flood Authority - and other Risk Management Authorities under the legislation. It should be remembered that the District has no direct responsibility for flood defence (other than for its own assets) and responsibility essentially lies with land and property owners. The liaison and coordination is to endeavour to consistently embed guidance, legislation and good practice and support those with responsibility in understanding that. The Lead Local Flood Authority reports on all significant flood events supported by the Risk Management Authorities. The data informs HCA and the promotion of flood defence projects which could be at property level (flood boards and similar low-cost household improvements via grant) to more significant infrastructure improvements. Also to ensure that opportunity is taken through new development to secure the implementation of improvements to reduce flood risk in areas of flooding.

Flood defence and land drainage

The District continue to maintain its own (and other in the absence of 'owner') flood defence assets and watercourses to minimise flood risk to others fulfilling its riparian responsibility under legislation. There is long standing project to deliver a flood defence scheme in Bampton in conjunction with the Environment Agency and Devon County Council but EA funding is diverted to other areas of the Country at greater risk. In the absence of EA support for the project likely to be available in the short term opportunity will be explored to deliver that in part without the EA. The District is also looking to support the promotion of a project in Hemyock and is liaising with EA in that regard.

Parks and Open Spaces In line with the Design Principles Project

Project team in place that includes Grounds Maintenance and Property Services.

The project will ensure tasks already started continue to their conclusion, including; 10 year plan for open spaces, land ownership within Mid Devon, accurate mapping of Grounds Maintenance verges/hedges for Housing, General Fund and 3rd parties. This project was started following the PDG report in November 2017 on Design Principles.

Project Objectives

(High level objectives, covering time, cost, quality, scope, risk and benefit performance goals)

- To clearly define ownership and responsibility for grass verges within the district
- To clearly define ownership and responsibility for hedges/shrub beds within the district
- To ensure the mapping is updated (ArcGIS/QGIS) to reflect the revised/reviewed ownership/responsibility of the above
- Maintain the bill of quantities for the Grounds Maintenance contract for the General Fund
- To understand the future requirements/demands for areas of open space and plan/implement any changes including the leisure centres, Old Park, CCA Fields, BMX track, Railway Walk and Amory Park
- Review the current landscape of parks within the district and implement a plan to reduce future maintenance whilst where practicable enhance the look of these spaces
- To undertake projects that may be linked to the 10 year plan including; Peoples Park and West Exe Park in Tiverton, Newcombes Park in Crediton and Linear Park/Cross Park Cullompton
- To source funding streams to facilitate projects – especially those related to the 10 year plan
- To undertake plans/projects linked to larger projects including EVLC tennis courts, EVLC front and bedding
- To calculate potential costs savings/efficiencies resulting from any change
- Establish status of Section 106 funding in order to plan for works and prepare a contingency plan if funding is not available

Project tasks completed

- Ownership and responsibility for grass verges has been established for General Fund, Housing and Highways
- Ownership and responsibility for hedges/shrub beds within the district has been established
- Future requirements/demands for areas of Open Space has been established for Old Park, Tiverton
- Bedding funding from Tiverton Town Council has been agreed. Tiverton Town Council will fund summer bedding with no reduction in beds (2K bedding and 6.6K for flower bed maintenance) – Has now been abandoned

for Summer 2020 due to Taunton being unable to provide bedding due to Covid-19 (Update 23.03.2020)

- Winter bedding will remain in place until it deteriorates

On Street Recycling Bin Project

- Following the successful trial of a twin-bin to allow waste to be separated for recycling 'on the go' it is proposed to roll this out on a larger scale across the major towns in the District.
- Where possible, s106 funds to provide and install the bins in our main Towns.
- Details of this project has been sent to Members who have replied positively and have supported this proposal to use s106 funds where possible, as soon as we have confirmation of the funds a project plan will be agreed with Stuart Noyce.

Clocks and monuments

- The only historic clock MDDC are now responsible for is the Pannier Market and that was worked on during the essential repairs to the clock tower a few years ago and is operational.
- Regarding Monuments we have the Boniface Statue and Well in Crediton.
- The Old fountain in Westex Rec Tiverton.
- Fountain in People's Park which Cllr Holdman has been raising funds for works on this asset to be done in stages. Allies Mid-Devon have raised £1.1k towards the £3,450 to go towards the rebalancing of the Statue and the cleaning.
- We are also responsible for the Burma Star monument on Phoenix Lane, Tiverton.

Street Scene and Open Spaces

I would like to start by thanking all the staff who have continued to deliver the excellent services within my portfolio during this unprecedented time. Staff have continued to work despite the risk and, even with a massive 25% increase in recycling tonnages during April compared to the previous year, all rounds were completed. Some staff have worked in different services to their normal role such as grounds maintenance and district officer staff working on refuse or leisure staff assisting with the cleaning of vehicle cabs to ensure the job gets done.

As with most Council services we are now trying to do more with less. The refuse service reached its savings target of a 25% reduction in the cost per household since 2015/16. This has been achieved through finding smarter more efficient ways of working and making difficult decisions. Not all the decisions will always be popular but without the over £0.5 million of savings and efficiencies found within my portfolio, the Council may have had to make even more difficult choices.

Waste and Recycling

2019/20 saw household recycling rates sustained at 53% and miss the 54% target partly due to the service disruption at the end of March. The target for the reduction in residual waste was met with a 19% reduction since 2015. Since the building of the transfer station at Carlu depot, in partnership with Devon County Council, all residual waste from Mid Devon now goes to the energy from waste plants. These improvements help protect our environment and work toward our ambitious carbon reduction targets.

The Council has increased the number of garden waste customers to over 10,000 for its collection service and kept missed collections below the 0.03% target. More businesses now use the Council's trade waste and recycling collection service with a £50,000 increase in its income. These figures show the public's support for the refuse service delivered by Mid Devon.

At this year's Recycle Devon Thank you Awards, seven Mid Devon residents were shortlisted. We are very lucky to have residents within Mid Devon who go that extra mile, from organising local drop-off points for Terra Cycle, to groups or individuals that organise litter picks across the district.

A successful bid will allow us to roll out over the summer the collection of small electronic equipment from the kerbside. This will mean items such as kettles and toasters can be recycled without the need for a trip to the recycling centres.

Street Scene

Following the move of the grounds maintenance service to Carlu depot a service review was undertaken during 2019/20. The aim was to merge the workings of the street cleansing services such as litter picking and mechanical sweeping with the grass cutting rounds to create a joined up way of working. This review was completed and will see this new way of working being rolled out during 2020 as well as generating savings.

The trial of split litter bins, which allows the public to recycle tins and plastic while out and about, has proved successful and will be expanded in the three large town centres. If other areas wish to replace existing bins with these we are happy to work with them to achieve this as Bampton will do by funding the replacement bins.

District Officers

The Environment PDG has spent time this year updating and reviewing our street scene enforcement policies. Most of these policies help our officers protect our local environment and give them the tools to deal with environmental crime. By setting the maximum fines for these offences it shows that the Council takes this kind of crime seriously. The aim of our compulsory recycling policy is to increase recycling rates, reduce service costs, reduce black sack waste (in particular waste in black sacks which can be recycled or composted) and minimise the impact on the environment. It is not aimed at those who are already putting their waste out correctly, but at those refusing to recycle or persistently failing to comply with our requirements.

In addition to the updated compulsory recycling policy, the PDG also agreed to adopt further new powers available to it and is updating its environmental policies surrounding littering from vehicles, fly tipping and dealing with abandoned vehicles which are on private land.

We are committed to protecting the Mid Devon environment and will use the powers we have to ensure our landscape is not blighted by a minority of people who act with disregard for their surroundings. Mid Devon District Council does not want to issue fines or take people to court, and we will always adopt an educational approach first, but we must ensure people act responsibly and dispose of their litter in the proper way. Failing to abide by the rules results in significant clear up costs to the Council, as well as impacting on those who live, work and visit the district.

Transport

In June, Mid Devon joined up with Exeter City Council and national provider Specialist Fleet Services Ltd (SFS) to secure a new contract for all its vehicles for the next seven years.

It is the first time the two authorities have worked together to provide the service with SFS and now means the Council no longer has to purchase its vehicles outright or face unpredictable maintenance costs.

Instead, the Council now has a seven year agreement which secures the provision and maintenance of around 210 vehicles and a better working partnership with a neighbouring authority.

The benefits to the Council include fixed maintenance costs, improved response times for vehicle breakdowns and an out-of-hours service which ensures more vehicles can stay on the road and be utilised by the crews. The contract with SFS is not only better value for money, but a better service. There are many additional advantages as a result of this increased harmonisation with Exeter City Council such as the ability to share equipment, carry out joint training and use each other's depots to park vehicles

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