

Full Council Meeting – 7 December 2021

Report of Councillor Derek Perry – Deputy Leader and Sports, Parks and Leisure

Green Flag Awards

1. In my last update report the results of the Green Flag Awards were still awaited. Since then, as members will probably be aware, Somerset West and Taunton was successful in receiving Green Flag Awards for Blenheim, Wellington, Vivary, Victoria and French Weir and Comeytrove parks, as well as Swains Lane Nature Reserve. The gaining / retaining of these awards does not come lightly and the judges are rightly scrupulous and searching when making their assessments. Accordingly, to have retained such status is a credit to our parks an open spaces team but also to the various friends' groups, and indeed to other members of the community, who play such a vital role in keeping these parks and open spaces at a standard which merits such an award.

Britain in Bloom Awards

2. Following judging which took place in the summer for the Britain in Bloom awards we have been awarded a silver award for Minehead and Wellington, and Taunton was awarded a silver gilt. As with the green flag awards, credit is due to our team and to community groups and individuals who have made this happen.

Grounds maintenance and planting

3. The summer grounds maintenance programme having been completed, the winter programme of works is well underway. 70,000 winter bedding plants and 25,000 bulbs have been planted across parks, open spaces and housing land. The winter stream clearance works are underway started having started a few weeks earlier than in previous years.

Play Areas

3. All play area inspections have been completed to schedule. The replacement programme plan for 2021/22 has been started with the works to be completed in January.

Pathway Repairs

4. A series of pathway repairs in parks have been undertaken but with further work still to be carried out. As is the case in many sectors, supply issues have caused delays in some instances. However, after some further delay I am pleased to say that the resurfacing of Ash Meadows, which provides vehicular and pedestrian access to Vivary Park and which is been in a poor state for some time, has now taken place. Credit is of course due to the officers who were able to get this done but also to my predecessor in role Cllr Richard Lees and to Cllr Danny Wedderkopp who were pushing for this to be done not only before my becoming portfolio holder but before my election as a councillor.

Leisure (Everyone Active)

5. Clearly Covid-19 has had impact on the business. Like others within the leisure industry, the clear focus is for EA trade themselves out of the global pandemic as quickly and safely as possible. As regards Leisure centres, the primary areas of focus for this period and the remainder of 2021 will see the following strategies applied:

- Return 'Health & Fitness' memberships to pre-Covid levels (February 2020);
- Return swimming lessons to pre-Covid levels (February 2020)

Overall, the centres have received very positive feedback from customers since going through a phased reopening. Customer confidence remains high with the measures taken and we continue to build this confidence and retain members

6. The Golf Course was the first facility to resume business, with the golf course reopening for the first time on 29th March 2021. Golf has been the number one sport to have benefited from Covid-19; with a significant increase in participation, this coupled with customers on furlough, the country on 'staycation' mode, and the relatively dry weather, has seen this national trend flourish.
7. By way of sport development and community update, on the last Sunday in September, Blackbrook Leisure Centre & Spa also hosted the annual Taunton 10K event with seven hundred runners and hundreds of spectators and well-wishers arriving at the centre to watch a very well organised event. Great to see such events taking place and congratulations to all those who took part.
8. EA were very pleased to receive notification that they reached the national finals of the UK Active Community Awards for their Health Walk programme, as well as to attend the virtual presentation. This achievement really recognises

the dedication that the volunteer Walk Leaders put into the programme and how they go above and beyond for their local communities. We have also run virtual Health Walk Leader training throughout the lockdown period; this is something that EA will now continue as an option for those that are happy to do this in the more rural parts of our district.

Minehead Pool

9. Progression continues in relation to this important objective with a constructive meeting having recently taken place between senior officers and representatives of the Community Benefit Society and further discussion as to the potential site.