

Full Council Meeting – 27 July 2021

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

1. It gives me pleasure to present this first Portfolio Holder report since taking over the Sports, Parks and Leisure portfolio.

A swimming pool for Minehead

2. On taking over the portfolio I was keen to continue and to press ahead with work towards provision of a public swimming pool in Minehead. In my view, a town of the size of Minehead, along with its neighbouring conurbations and rural communities, ought, if possible, to have a public swimming pool. Aside from the general health, leisure and tourism benefits that a public pool would bring, can it really be right that a child growing up in or around Minehead can only learn to swim by being taken to private facilities or travelling all the way to Taunton? Perhaps the answer to that question provides the strongest justification for the case for a new pool. There are many who lament the decision to demolish the old indoor pool, but this is about looking ahead.
3. I have worked with officers to explore the options in order to deliver a pool. There is more than one way of achieving it and work continues to weigh up the options. I, along with Cllrs Kravis and Bolton have met with representatives of a community benefit society in order to understand how they feel that a pool could be delivered.
4. I am not so naïve as to think that a pool in Minehead can suddenly be delivered when that has not occurred over a number of years. Practical and economic realities have to be borne in mind. Members can, however, be assured that this intuitive is being taken seriously, that work is being done and that there is a will that it be done.

Rainbow Path

5. Many members will be aware of the recently opened Rainbow path in Goodland's Gardens, Taunton. Around the world a number of pedestrian crossings and some paths have been painted in rainbow colours in recognition and celebration of equality and diversity. But, at 60m long, it is believed that Taunton's path is the longest in the country.



6. The idea was developed and proposed by Go Create and I am very grateful to Jenny and Liz for the work they did to make this project a reality. There is no doubt that it is they who deserve the majority of the credit for this although Town Centre Manager Craig Stone also played an instrumental role. They sought financial support from the Taunton Town Centre Emergency Recovery Group (on which I, along with Cllrs Smith and Hunt, and local business representatives, sit) and their application was approved. The costs of the project, which the recovery fund met, was £5900. It is anticipated that without vehicular traffic passing over it that path should last at least 15 years. My role as portfolio holder was effectively to authorise that the path could be painted on our land, but I was happy to do so and am very glad that I did.
7. The benefits of such a simple thing are multiple. First and foremost, it sends clear and visible messages that Taunton is an inclusive town in which it is OK to be whoever you are and that you will be accepted and welcomed as such. The benefit of such a statement cannot be quantified in financial terms. But the path will mean different things to different people. The timing of its opening is such that some may interpret it as a celebration of the NHS and key workers over the last year or so. For children, it is simply a colourful rainbow to run and scoot along and that in itself is great to see. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that the path has actually drawn people into Taunton and that some economic

benefit will have and will continue to flow from it. In fact, even before it was finished, I went down to see how it was getting on and spoke with two young women who told me that they had seen it on Instagram and come to Taunton to see it for themselves. I'm sure they are not the only ones.

8. Of course, there are some who have not, for a variety of stated reasons, not welcomed the path. People are entitled to their views and, as I have stated elsewhere, I am more than happy to speak with anyone who wishes to make contact as to why I am so supportive of this. I will not deride or dismiss anyone who takes the trouble to enter into sensible discussion on the subject, although I have no intention of doing that on social media!

Taunton Green

9. The state of the facilities and underutilisation of the sports pitches at Taunton Green is a source of sadness for those who remember it in its heyday. Recent vandalising has brought the issue into stark relief. Although matters are at an early stage I have had initial discussions with some councillors and there will be further discussions in the near future. In general terms, I am keen that we explore options to improve what Taunton green has to offer as a true community facility. I hope to be able to provide some further detail by the next full council.

Nursery, planting and open spaces activity

10. 300,000 plants have been grown in the Council's nursery for our summer open spaces and external contract work, including supplying plants for Falmouth, where the press and communications were based for the G7 summit. 65,000 of these plants have been planted out in in our parks for the summer season.



11. Signs have been erected in Council-owned open spaces advising the public of areas of grass that we will be leaving to grow longer. The signs include a QR code that points directly to a page on the Council's website, with further information on the Council's approach to longer grass and the benefits that it has for wildlife.

Green Flag Awards

12. The judging for this year's Green Flags will be taking place over the next few months in the following Blenheim, Wellington, Vivary, Victoria and French Weir and Comeytrowe parks, as well as Swains Lane Nature Reserve.

Play Areas

13. All play area inspections have been completed. The replacement programme plan for 2021/22 has been completed. The next stage will be to consult with parish/town Councils and ward members on the programme for play areas in their area.

Leisure (Everyone Active)

14. All leisure facilities have reopened, operating under the social distancing guidelines. Following the government announcement to delay their step four

roadmap, at the time of writing current measures within the centres continue to remain in place. It may well be that by the date of full council that all restrictions will have been lifted meaning increased gym, swim, and exercise class space. The booking system for users has been extremely successful, allowing SLM to ensure the correct number of customers within their activity areas. Exercise classes have proved popular with users being able to select classes and monitor their fitness/exercise profile online. The figures for memberships following reopening are encouraging and show steady increases and almost back to pre covid levels.

15. Sport England announced the launch of a £100 million National Leisure Recovery Fund to support eligible public sector leisure centres to reopen to the public, giving the sport and physical activity sector the best chance of recovery to a position of sustainable operation over the medium term. SWT submitted its application with SLM to receive funding to support our leisure provider, in respect to its health and fitness suites, studios, swimming pools and sports halls; Golfing and high ropes are not applicable activities to apply for this funding. SWT were successful in its bid and has received its full request of funding. This grant is being used to support SLM (Everyone Active) to recover business activities due to the Covid pandemic.

A Skate park for Galmington?

16. Members will recall that a young resident of Galmington previously asked the council to consider creating a skate park in his area. Full council requested that an update be provided as to this. To that end, a briefing note is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Briefing Note: Full Council 27 July 2021

Galmington Skate Ramp

Background:

A young resident of Galmington, aged 12 years, approached the Council's portfolio holder with a petition requesting a skate ramp local to his home. The then portfolio holder, Cllr Richard Lees, on behalf of Full Council agreed to investigate the possibility with officers and report back to Full Council. The portfolio is now held by Cllr Perry.

Recommendation: Comeytrove Parish Council is approached to establish potential support and lead on scheme.

Aim: (from the petition) *'to create a safe environment for people to skate and somewhere young people can come together without annoying other residents.'* Cllr Lees in conjunction with officers agreed to break the 'skate ramp' project down into 4 strands before considering matters further.

1. Confirm estimate of costs
2. Funding – Identify possible funding opportunities
3. Locate appropriate site.
4. Consultations. 1. User Consultation. 2. Community Consultation

In late February, officers spoke with the petitioner, outlining the four steps to be taken. He advised he would like to see a 'mini ramp' much like the one in situ at Hudson Way, Taunton. This was installed and paid for using S106 monies in 2017/2018.

G – Ramp, who installed the mini ramp at Hudson Way provided a quotation of £48,000 plus VAT for an identical mini ramp.

In addition, a further quotation in the sum of £18,000 was provided by Parsons Landscapes for the construction of the base for the mini ramp. This figure was based on the same dimensions laid down at the Hudson Way site.

Having established costs of £64,000 plus VAT (nearly £80,000 in total), officers again spoke with the petitioner in April to outline the likely costs.

Funding opportunities exist with *Youth Sport Trust, Sport England, Idverde, The National Lottery* etc. but are most appropriately sourced through community groups such as the Parish Council. SWT Council is ineligible to apply for some. SWT Council has no applicable S106 funds at its disposal for this project.

Next steps:

There is very limited capacity and project management experience to bring this project forward. There is limited community buy in to the project at this stage. The most appropriate route forward would be for the Parish Council to consider the possibility of siting a skate park on their land e.g. Penny's Field and to make the applications for funding. It is possible for officers to act as a point of liaison between the Parish Council and the petitioner to explore if this is a feasible project.

Claire Thackray & Scott Weetch, July 2021