

FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 24th May, 2021
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)		
Councillors:	Gillian Burnett Andrew Fear Tony Kearon	Mike Stubbs Paul Waring Amelia Rout	Graham Hutton David Grocott
Officers:	Roger Tait Denise French Sarah Wilkes Daniel Dickinson Simon McEneny	Head of Operations Democratic Services Team Leader Head of Finance / S151 Officer Head of Legal & Governance /Monitoring Officer Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth Property Manager	
Also in attendance:	Louise Beeby Councillor Stephen Sweeney Councillor Andrew Fox-Hewitt	Portfolio Holder – Finance, Town Centres and Growth Ward Councillor	

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah Pickup and Bert Proctor (substitute the Mayor, Councillor Ken Owen) and from Councillor Trevor Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th March be agreed as a correct record.

4. UPDATE FROM CABINET

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth, Councillor Stephen Sweeney, updated the Committee on the following issues raised at the previous meeting:

- High call volumes - the measures to address any possible future high call volumes would be brought to the next meeting as part of the regular quarterly review of finance and performance ;
- Disposal of public conveniences – there had not been any work done regarding valuation or disposal of any public conveniences at this stage;

- Covid update – Cabinet would be arranging for a detailed report looking at the overall response to the pandemic to be prepared for a future Scrutiny Committee.

Members were informed that the Chair had agreed to an urgent decision of Cabinet that had been made in accordance with the process as set out in the constitution. Members asked for further detail on this item particularly as it related to Kidsgrove Sports Centre and some Scrutiny Members were also members of the Cabinet Panel. The Committee was advised that the decision was needed to maintain progress with the programme to redevelop the Sports Centre. The Chair advised the Committee that it could choose to undertake scrutiny of Kidsgrove Sports Centre refurbishment as part of its work programme in future as it was within its remit.

Resolved: that the update be received.

5. **CONSULTATION RESULTS - PROPOSED EXTENSION TO NEWCASTLE CREMATORIUM GROUNDS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADJACENT LAND OFF CHATTERLEY CLOSE**

The Committee considered a report on the outcome of consultation on the proposed extension to Newcastle Crematorium grounds and development of adjacent land off Chatterley Close.

The Chair advised that the Committee was also requested to consider a petition that had been submitted to the Council with approximately 1700 signatories as follows:

“Newcastle Borough Council want to build on the only green space in Bradwell available for community use. Bradwell has approximately 6000 residents and an already full to bursting infrastructure.

The council wants to sell the land to a housing developer to expand the Crematorium and pocket a residual £1.2 million for the council.

This petition is to object this land being built upon and needs to be retained as a local community green space. Why build on green space in a time we are supposed to more environmentally friendly? Why not redevelop brown sites? This green space is well used by all age groups of the community.

There are also so many social and economic issues connected to this development, not just environmental. Bradwell is a densely populated area of Newcastle-under-Lyme with heavily congested roads, no medical facilities, poor public transport, social deprivation but they want to build more houses and take away the only green space there is.

The masterplans objectives are

- Provide an extension to the Crematorium grounds incorporating new access, parking and a burial ground
- Re-provide existing play elements
- Redevelop the remainder of the site for housing

The plan is a money making scheme for the council at the cost of the residents of Bradwell. If the Crematorium needs an expansion to include a burial ground maybe the council need to build another cemetery. The only expansion proposed is burial grounds and a car park. This is a front to sell this land to developers for the councils financial gain. Please sign and support.”

A local resident attended and addressed the Committee in support of the petition.

There had also been over 150 individual responses to the consultation.

In discussing the report and issues raised, the Committee discussed:

- requesting the highway authority to undertake a traffic survey to identify any measures to address and improve traffic issues in the area;
- requesting that Cabinet work with existing local groups and organisations to identify any possible areas of compromise for example whether there can be a reduction in the capital receipt so that it only generates sufficient funding to cover the crematorium extension and public open space provision;
- asking Cabinet to directly engage with residents on the issues raised through the consultation process in recognition of the difficulties in responding to a consultation during a pandemic;
- that confirmation be sought on the position regarding the existing 7 sites of green space mentioned during the consultation.

During the debate the Committee was advised that there were no plans for the 7 sites mentioned other than remaining as open space. It was also confirmed that the new MUGA would provide a range of facilities. The consultation process was outlined but the Committee was also reminded that consideration by this Committee was part of the ongoing process of consultation. The capital receipt would be used for the extension and development works as well as contributing to the 10 year Capital Programme approved earlier in the year at Council. Reference was made to the planning process and the safeguards that were built in as part of any development proposals.

RESOLVED: that the comments made at the meeting be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

(Note: with the permission of the Chair, Councillor Fox-Hewitt addressed the Committee as Ward Councillor.)

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme. It was noted that due to this meeting being brought forward the regular finance and performance review was not available but the next meeting in September would consider both the Quarter 4 review for 2020 – 21 and the Quarter 1 review for 2021 – 22. Members asked whether there could be a covering report that identified any trends. It was also requested that the Quarter 4 review be circulated by email in the interim prior to consideration at the September meeting.

Resolved: that the Work Programme be received and noted.

7. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The following questions had been received in advance of the meeting which the Chair read out:

- 1 What evidence does the council have to prove that the car park needs to be expanded at Bradwell Crematorium and what evidence is there for a

need to expand for burial plots? Bradwell Crematorium underwent major renovation in 2003 how can the council guarantee this expansion is sustainable?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth responded as follows:

The council has invested regularly over the last 20 years in providing cremated remains burial plots, which are very popular with bereaved families and sell out very quickly. The most recent phase was completed in 2020 and is already being booked up. There is very limited capacity for further expansion within the current site, and it is estimated that this will be exhausted within the next 3 – 5 years maximum. It is therefore necessary to seek to expand the grounds to accommodate further burial plots. The proposed extension would provide an estimated 30 years additional capacity, which is considered to represent a sustainable solution when compared to the alternative of having to seek an unconnected site elsewhere. The extension will be mainly green and open in nature, and provide memorial grounds with associated footpath access and parking to accommodate greater visitor numbers in the future, both for those attending funeral services, and those visiting graves or memorials within the grounds.

2 Nationally councils are committing to protecting green spaces such as Liverpool, in NULBC 2021 budget after public consultation residents felt that one of the top 5 priorities in Newcastle was parks, playgrounds and open spaces but this council seems set to sell multiple sites off for monetary gain why go against national strategy and what's important to local people?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth responded as follows:

The Council has an Open Space Strategy which has developed local standards for open space, based on community need. It is considered good practice to develop local standards, rather than adopt national standards, albeit the national standards are a basis upon which to compare. Newcastle Borough is well provided for in terms of the quantity of open space which is available for the community, across a range of typologies. The site at Chatterley Close was identified as being suitable for masterplanning as it was considered of sufficient size to accommodate other uses, as well as retaining a significant proportion as open space, including crematorium grounds.

The Head of Operations also advised that there were 7 other open or green spaces within a short walk from the site at Chatterley Close including the crematorium grounds and land north and adjacent to the site.

3 If the sale of land is and more houses are built then this is unsustainable development. Population growth has not sustained local services in the Bradwell and Porthill area, in fact those public services cannot cope with the current population. How does this council plan to expand public services/ facilities in line with a further increase in population?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth responded as follows:

The provision of infrastructure to support new residential development is an important consideration to the local authority. Through the new Borough Local

Plan which is currently being prepared, the Council will seek to ensure new housing is located in sustainable locations to support our local centres. The plan will also look to set measures for large scale developments to ensure new community facilities such as education facilities and open space are secured alongside new housing developments.

8. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.15 pm