

TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 19 September 2024

Present:

Councillor I Lewis (Chair)

Councillors	A Ainsworth	J Johnson
	P Jobson	C Cooke
	G McManus	KJ Williams
	G Bennett	M Redfern
	C Macdonald Walsh	T Murphy (for K
	(for R Molyneux)	Stuart)

15 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed attendees and viewers to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was webcast and retained on the Council's website.

The Chair also requested that there be a change to the agenda for the meeting. He requested that agenda item 6, Floral Pavilion – Future Operational Model, be moved to the end of the agenda as there was an exempt appendix related to that item which was to be discussed at the end of the meeting. This was to allow for conversations to continue straight into the exempt item on the agenda.

16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ruth Molyneux and Kaitlin Stuart.

Councillors Craig MacDonald-Walsh and Tony Murphy attended as deputies.

17 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Ian Lewis declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 9, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was a Trustee of Wallasey Village Library & Community Centre.

18 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2024 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

The Chair asked the Assistant Director – Special Projects for an update in relation to minute item 5. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that he had had discussions with the public questioner. He confirmed they were in discussions on various assets relating to the public question, and an update would be brought to members at a future meeting.

19 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

20 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

One question from a member of the public was received in advance of the meeting.

Barbara Hardcastle, representing the Friends of Wallasey Central Library, asked the committee that in light of the Place Culture Report, the FOWCL want to be reassured that the existing purpose-built Wallasey Central Library was going to continue on its historically designated site, could the committee realistically provide this reassurance to the community,

The Chair responded that he could not give this assurance, as he could not for any Council building. Not every Council building was subject to a review. He said that at the last meeting of the committee, they had requested that a council officer contact the FOWCL, as they were aware that this was an ongoing issue. He asked Ms Hardcastle whether the FOWCL had been contacted by a council officer, to which she responded that they had not.

The Chair requested that an officer contact the FOWCL and arrange to meet with them. This meeting would also be open to the ward councillors, the Chair and Spokespersons of the committee, so they could discuss this issue. The Chair also gave assurances that any consultation would be discussed with the FOWCL. If the community would like to request any information prior to this meeting, he asked that they contact him directly.

20.1 **Statements and Petitions**

There had been no Statements or Petitions submitted to this meeting.

21 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

There had been no Questions by Members submitted to this meeting.

BIRKENHEAD PARK: WORLD HERITAGE PROJECT UPDATE AND FINANCIAL RESOURCING

The Director of Neighbourhood Services had submitted a report to the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee, to provide an update on progress and achievements regarding the Birkenhead Park World Heritage project; to set out the steps ahead for achieving the park's recognition as a World Heritage Site; and to seek approval for the allocation of additional funds to realise the site's successful nomination to UNESCO, and thereby bring about the associated wide-ranging benefits of such global recognition.

The Director of Neighbourhoods informed the committee that officers had submitted a late change to the recommendations within the report. The Director told the committee that in the last few weeks, the Director of Finance had instructed officers to avoid all unnecessary discretionary expenditure within the authority, thereby instigating a spending freeze. He asked that members be willing to consider changing recommendation 3, as at this time it was not realistic to ask the Policy and Resources Committee to ask Council to allocate a capital bid of £975,000 and a revenue bid of £580,000 to this project due to the difficult financial situation.

The proposed change read as follows:

Recommend to the Policy & Resources Committee that, in light of the council's current and continuing financial position, that the Director of Neighbourhood Services is authorised to proceed with the project as described subject to securing external funding. Should that fail, then the matter can be reconsidered by members in 2025/26 when the council's financial circumstances may be clearer.

He said that the report would ask members to recognise the importance of the Council's World Heritage Status bid, and to authorise officers to proceed with this project should they be able to secure external funding. He said he was optimistic that this could be secured.

The Head of Service for Parks and Countryside, and the Birkenhead Park General Manager, introduced the report. They explained that Birkenhead Park was refuted to be the world's first publicly-funded, municipal park, and was one of the UK's most significant parks, holding a Grade I Historic England status. It had a profound impact on parks worldwide, most famously on Central Park in New York.

Officers had been working for years to get recognition as a World Heritage site. Obtaining this would have a significant impact, building international awareness and a global reputation, and increasing opportunities within the visitor economy and for investment. It would also have an impact on the Birkenhead regeneration project, though it was not officially a part of the project. Officers stressed the impact of the World Heritage brand, and told the

committee that research into this had suggested that world heritage sites were significant contributors to the local economy, and were also usually successful in attracting external funding.

In April 2023, they had submitted an application and Birkenhead Park was accepted onto the UK's tentative list of potential future sites of nominations to UNESCO. This list was reviewed every 10 years, and Birkenhead Park was now one of five sites on this list. Whilst a place on the list was not a guarantee, it was a step in the right direction, and was a major achievement with the high standards required for sites.

Officers were currently working towards a formal nomination, submitted by the government and UNESCO's World Heritage Committee would review this. Officers were working to a programme to see the park's potential inscription as a world heritage site as early as summer 2027. It would be the first site nominated from the UK's tentative list. Officers would have to satisfy a rigorous technical evaluation process, and following this submission were expecting a response by December 2024. The nomination process would follow the technical evaluation, and officers were currently working towards a draft nomination submission for September 2025, and a full submission in February 2026.

Preparatory work needed to be completed to support the nomination, including carrying out priority improvements to the site's historic assets and presentation. If the nomination was to be successful, additional capital and revenue funds were needed to support this nomination.

Members raised the following questions/points of clarification:

- Whether the delay in funding would have an impact on meeting timescales for improvements to the park
- The report stated that the park was visited by "nearly 2 million every year", were these numbers tracked by officers
- Options for external funding
- Improving disability access to the park
- Catering offerings within the park, ensuring the ethos of this could be consistent with that of the park
- Rates of antisocial behaviour within the park, particularly involving drug use
- Amending the recommendation to request for Policy and Resources Committee to allocate funding for staffing costs
- Health and safety concerns regarding restoration improvements being delayed
- Opportunities to 'twin' with other parks
- Options for community payback schemes to be involved with the park's improvement works
- Revenue generated by the park
- Projected revenue should the park be granted World Heritage status

- Sponsored run for the park

Members also thanked officers for their work on this project.

The Chair proposed that, along with the amended recommendation from officers, that recommendation one be amended to read as follows:

The Committee welcomed the progress made on the Birkenhead Park World Heritage Project, and thanked officers, the Friends of Birkenhead Park and members of the Birkenhead Park Advisory Committee for their work on this project.

Resolved - That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:

- 1. Welcomed the progress made on the Birkenhead Park World Heritage Project, and thanked officers, the Friends of Birkenhead Park and the members of the Birkenhead Park Advisory Committee for their work on this project;**
- 2. Endorsed its support for the nomination to UNESCO of Birkenhead Park as a World Heritage Site; and**
- 3. Recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee that, in light of the Council's current and continuing financial position, that the Director of Neighbourhood Services is authorised to proceed with the project as described, subject to securing external funding. Should that fail, then the matter can be considered by members in 2025/26 when the Council's financial circumstances may be clearer.**

23 UPDATE REGARDING THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL'S TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing members with an update regarding the work carried out by the Trading Standards Service and its performance in carrying out that work.

The Senior Manager for Trading Standards Operations introduced the report. She explained the functions of the service to the Committee, including its statutory and non-statutory functions. Specifically, it was an intelligence-led service, and worked in conjunction with partner agencies such as HMRC, Food Standards Agency, DEFRA, Office of Product Safety and Standards, Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service.

They also worked in partnership with the central government agency, Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline Service (CABx). In the last year, the service had received 2,178 enquiries referred by CABx, which were reviewed by the Trading Standards Team Leader. Over 600 enquiries were then allocated to officers within the service for further investigation and/or intervention.

The service had carried out several multi-agency operations, mainly with partner agencies. Details of these operations were given to the committee and were contained within Appendix 1 of the report.

The Senior Manager explained that the main challenge facing the service was the recruitment and retention of staff. At present, they had two fully qualified members of staff, with three officers enrolled to undertake the statutory qualifications, and the service had had to undertake contractors. Another challenge to the service was the increasing problem of vapes. The service was working with the community on the harm of these, as officers had been seizing a large number of non-compliant vapes. They hoped that the Tobacco and Vapes Bill in Parliament would bring increased powers to the service.

Members raised the following questions:

- Was the marketing of vapes to young people, including 'fun' flavours, causing a bigger challenge to the service
- What were the timescales for the three officers to become fully qualified
- Optimal staffing numbers
- Requests for poverty statistics in relation to Project Evolve to be circulated amongst members
- Work with schools on tackling vapes amongst children
- The workload split between investigations and enforcement interventions and how this would look like if the service had more staff

The Chair asked the Senior Manager to talk through the summary of cases which had had legal proceedings instigated against them. The details were found within Appendix 1 of the report.

The Vice-Chair recommended that a request be passed on to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee for additional assistance in supporting the service with their work in schools on tackling vapes.

Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee noted and endorsed the content of the report.

24 **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER UPDATE**

The Director of Finance submitted a report, following a request from the Chair of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee. The report

provided an update on the community asset transfers put into a programme by Members following budget decisions taken by the Council in the financial year 2022/23.

The Assistant Director – Special Projects introduced the report. He told members that officers had made good progress in transferring a number of assets within the programme.

Members raised the following questions:

- At para 4.1, which highlighted the difference remaining in terms of funding. Could this difference cease to be allocated and be returned to council funds?
- Requests for updates regarding the Hoylake Municipal Gold Course transfer to Royal and Ancient (RA) and Brackenwood Golf Course
- Request for a complete compiled list of all asset transfers, including historic items, to be circulated to the committee

In response to a question, the Assistant Director informed the committee that though the table at para 4.1 of the report set out the current financial position, members would have to disregard the proposed transfer of Irby Library to Friends of Irby Library (FOIL). He had hoped to bring a report to the next meeting of the committee on this transfer, however with the council's current financial position, this would no longer be possible. This decision would therefore need to be delayed. This would also mean that the difference remaining would improve the current financial position in terms of asset transfers, and that this balance could be returned to the budget.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for his work with the council and his support, as he was due to retire.

Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee noted the report.

25 **MEMBER CHAMPION FOR HERITAGE - UPDATE REPORT**

It had been agreed at the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee meeting on 24 July 2024 that a regular written report be provided from the Member Champion for Heritage to update the committee on topics relating to heritage in the borough.

The Member Champion for Heritage had submitted a report for this meeting. He highlighted the success of recent Heritage Open Days, and hoped that this would help to promote tourism within the Wirral.

Members raised the following questions/comments:

- An update as to the meeting with the Planning department over buildings at risk
- A request for a working party to be organised, following the upcoming Heritage Workshop for members, on how to bring heritage groups together and promote tourism within the borough.

Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee noted the report.

26 **TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Corporate Services which presented the Work Programme for the Committee.

Members suggested the following:

- To remove the report on the Irby Library asset transfer for the next meeting
- Add a report on the current review taking place into the subject of mass graves in the Wirral
- Update in regards to the Playing Pitch Strategy
- Clarification on the Customer Experience Strategy update

Resolved – That, subject to the amendment of the items noted at the meeting, the work programme be noted.

27 **FLORAL PAVILION – FUTURE OPERATIONAL MODEL**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report, providing Members with an update position and proposed next steps relating to the Floral Pavilion Theatre & Conference Centre in New Brighton. This followed the Committee's decision on 7 March 2024 to (in summary):

1. Continue to operate the Floral Pavilion as a Council asset for the 2024/5 financial year within a net operational budget of £500,000, whilst identifying & implementing any efficiency, operational savings or increased income opportunities
2. Implement immediate efficiency measures relating to internal catering model, improved programming and a reduction in agency workers.
3. Appoint an external consultant to carry out an options appraisal including any alternative operating model

The Chair requested that the Committee focus on the public report and present any questions to officers prior to moving into private session.

The Assistant Director – Leisure, Libraries and Engagement introduced the report. He explained that due to previous turbulent issues with the budget,

and pressures on operations, the Section 151 Officer had recast the budget for the theatre in January 2024. The operational net subsidy for 2024/25 had been set at £500k and there had been progress shown of the Floral working to achieve this target. Officers were reviewing opportunities for the venue. There had been internal efficiencies put into place, and officers had commissioned a consultant report, which would support officers with the development of an Outline Business Case. The consultant's report was included within appendix 1, which the Assistant Director explained had been made exempt due to private commercial information within the appendix. He asked that members note the progress to date to stay within the budget, and that this was being closely scrutinised by the venue team and the council's finance department. They would then move to the Outline Business Case stage.

Members raised the following questions/comments:

- Clarification as to whether this was not a Key Decision
- Concerns over the reliance on external consultants for guidance
- Request for officers to consider Option C as well as Option B, as set out at para 2.2 of the report.
- Whether the costs for the Floral are showing the charge bracket it has to pay to the Council are itemised separately
- Given the out of hours access being discussed, whether the Floral Pavilion could be designated as a book donation point to be re-circulated to other libraries within the borough whose opening hours are not accessible to the wider public

The Chair asked the Floral Pavilion – Theatre, Catering and Hospitality Manager and the Venue Manager, who were in attendance, whether they had any comments for the committee.

The officers told the committee that this was an exciting time for the venue. Officers were looking at other venues and how they were doing to potentially replicate their successes, and were investigating how officers were doing things currently with the Floral Pavilion. With their short-term plans, they had had a change in their programme and strategy two years ago and were starting to see some progress. Big events had been planned, including such events as Will Young, John Bishop, Swan Lake and other big-name comedians. Other shows were pencilled in, which the venue would normally have to fight with the other cities, but conversations were starting to open up. The venue had also made changes to the annual Folk Festival, which they had made a free event. Enough had been made on the secondary spend to pay artists, and had been cost neutral. A feedback form had been circulated following the three-day event. There had been 100 respondents from this, with positive feedback received.

Members raised further questions/comments:

- Members praised the work of officers in relation to the Folk Festival
- Whether any agency staff had been hired

Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:

1. **Noted and endorsed the findings and recommendations of the Place Culture Report consultant report; and**
2. **Authorised the Director of Neighbourhood Services to:**
 - a. **Present a finalised Outline Business Case to the Committee based on the four options outlines in the report in early 2025 for a decision on a preferred option**
 - b. **Establish the status of the Floral Pavilion in relation to its value, implications for the regeneration of New Brighton and the wider Wallasey area, and any impacts of the Council's implementation of the Corporate Landlord Model.**

28 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved - That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.

29 FLORAL PAVILION – FUTURE OPERATIONAL MODEL - EXEMPT APPENDIX

Members discussed the exempt appendix in private session and raised questions over the information included within the exempt appendix.