

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 20 March 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Denise Fox (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Mike Chaplin, Neale Gibson, Mark Jones, Abdul Khayum, Cate McDonald, Mohammed Mahroof, Robert Murphy, Moya O'Rourke, Paul Wood and Colin Ross (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lisa Banes and Martin Smith (with Councillor Colin Ross attending as his substitute).

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 In relation to Agenda Item 8 (Call-in of the Individual Cabinet Member Decision on Parking Fees and Charges), Councillor Neale Gibson declared a personal interest as Cabinet Advisor for Transport and Development.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30th January 2019, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 Mike Hodson, Secretary of the Carter Knowle & Millhouses Community Group, raised the following questions:-

(a) accepting that the Parks and Countryside Service, along with the rest of Sheffield City Council, has been very damaged by the large reduction in grant-income, and accepting therefore that the new Building Better Parks Strategy for seeking to increase income and retain the ability to maintain Sheffield's parks and green spaces is very welcome: nevertheless does the Scrutiny Committee feel able to whole-heartedly endorse the entire Strategy in the light of the apparent conflict between:

(i) the Strategy's proposal that implementation should include 'leases and sales of land and/or buildings for new homes or businesses', and could involve 'disposing

of low recreational value land or property to generate new income'; and

- (ii) the assertions by Councillor Mary Lea, Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks and Leisure, and by the Head of Parks & Countryside, that 'no parks will be sold under, or in the implementation of, this Strategy'?
- (b) Does the Committee feel that the proposal quoted above is also compatible with the aspirations quoted in the report, and/or in public, that the Council should 'maintain control of policy and assets', and 'maintain affordable public access under all circumstances'?
 - (c) Will the Scrutiny Committee recommend the withdrawal of the Strategy, and its rewriting, in the light of the issues raised above, and in the light of criticisms of the lack of due consultation?
- 5.2 In response, James Barnes (Parks and Countryside Service) confirmed that the Council was not proposing to sell any of its park land or buildings to raise income, and that any income raised as part of the Strategy would be re-invested into the Parks and Countryside Service.
- 5.3 Mr Barnes referred to the Assessment Criteria, set out in the report, highlighting the point that it would provide a formal process that would bring both accountability and guide the decision-making on the use and management of the Parks and Countryside Service's land and property portfolio. Furthermore, the decision-making process included consultation with all relevant stakeholders.
- 5.3 Councillor Mary Lea added that there had been a 30% reduction in the City's park's income, and that it was hoped that the proposals set out in the Strategy would address this.

6. BUILDING BETTER PARKS STRATEGY

- 6.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Place, on the Building Better Parks Strategy, which was intended to be used as a framework for decision-making to assist with maximising the benefits derived from the Council's Land and Property Portfolio, and which had been approved by the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 21st November 2018. A further paper setting out the Building Better Parks principles was circulated at the meeting.
- 6.2 In attendance for this item were Councillor Mary Lea (Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks and Leisure) and James Barnes (Parks and Countryside Service).

6.3 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- The Council would not be selling off any of its park land, but would be either providing a licence, concession or leasing the land and facilities to businesses or other groups or organisations who would operate them on behalf of the Council. This was current policy, and was seen as “business as usual”. Any such businesses or groups would be asked to submit their proposals, and decisions would be made based on the assessment criteria, set out in the report now submitted. It was deemed important for amenities, such as cafes and play equipment, to continue operating in parks as it would help to attract more people to visit the parks, which would not only benefit from a public health point of view, but would also help to improve community cohesion and make the areas safer for people to visit. There have been several examples where leasing land or facilities in the City’s parks to external organisations had proved very successful, such as the three FA Hub sites at Westfield, Graves Leisure Centre and Thorncliffe, which had not only brought in around £15 million investment into the City, but had also provided additional income and quality footballing facilities in the City.
- The estimated figure of £1 million additional revenue which would be generated over the next five years had been based on the current £1.8 million revenue income that the Parks and Countryside Service generated annually from a combination of sponsorship, leases, car parking income and fees and charges. The Council would be able to provide a clearer estimate as and when interested parties started submitting their business plans. Other Core Cities, including Leeds and Birmingham, had operated successfully, using this model, for a number of years, and had generated well in excess of £1 million additional revenue annually.
- There were no set limits in terms of the number of events held in parks, but assessments would be made, based on the agreed criteria, as regards the suitability of such events. This could involve looking at drainage capacity in respect of larger events, or whether such events would cause noise nuisance or any other problems for residents living within the vicinity of the parks. A common-sense approach would be adopted when deciding what events could be held in parks, with larger-scale events requiring approval from either the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member.
- The term ‘open space’ in the Strategy included a wide range of areas, including small parks, woodland, including ancient woodland, allotments, paths in open spaces and Sustainable

Drainage Systems (SUDS). It was not just a case of cafes within parks being leased and operated by external bodies.

- Under the Council's decision-making process, any decisions made by the Cabinet Member or the Cabinet would be subject to scrutiny call-in, although it was considered that the majority of schemes would be small-scale, therefore would be unlikely to prompt this course of action.
- In terms of the distinction between parks and green spaces, it was confirmed that the Strategy would cover everything under the Parks and Countryside Service, but did not include incidental small spaces.
- The Council would ask the NHS to make a contribution, as it would any savings in terms of health benefits, but it was not expected that there would be a positive response.
- The figure of £1.2 billion (based on the contribution of parks to the asset value of residential property) had been determined as part of a capital accounting evaluation study undertaken by Vivid Economic in 2016, and was considered a reasonable estimate.
- It was hoped that the leasing proposals as part of the Strategy would help to bring in approximately £1 million additional revenue. If this figure was not realised, further consideration would have to be given to the Strategy, going forward.
- There were potentially 5 or 6 destination parks in the City.
- It was hoped that, by working with Friends groups and other local groups and organisations, sites such as Abbeyfield Park could be developed further.
- It was clearly set out in the assessment criteria that, in those cases where there was a charitable interest in the parks or land, of which there were approximately 25 such sites in the City, consultation with the Charity Commission would be required.
- Allotments were a statutory provision. There were no plans for the disposal of any Council-owned allotments in the City.
- As part of the Council's Green Open Space Strategy, regular audits were undertaken of small open green spaces, including pocket parks. If sufficient income was generated through the proposals in the Building Better Parks Strategy, this could be used to develop, or maintain such open green spaces.
- The Parks and Countryside Service was currently dedicating

sites (or parts of sites) with a War Memorial tree as Centenary Fields in Trust (FIT) in order to protect the trees in perpetuity, in commemorating the end of World War 1, in 2018. In addition, a request from Stocksbridge Town Council to dedicate the Clock Tower Memorial Garden has been granted, and this would be a centenary FIT. Granting a site FIT status protected the site, and ensured it must be used for recreation and leisure purposes in perpetuity. Anyone wishing to make changes to the site must seek authorisation from FIT, which was similar to the protection offered when sites were charitable. The site was not managed or leased to FIT, and remained in the ownership of the Council.

- The option of transferring the whole parks estate to FIT status had been explored in detail, and dismissed in 2016 as not being in the best interests of the City's green and open spaces. It had been stressed on many occasions by Councillor Mary Lea that the Council was the most appropriate custodian of the green estate. There were no plans to have this debate at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillor Mary Lea gave a clear commitment that there were no plans for the Parks and Countryside Service to sell any parkland.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) thanks Councillor Mary Lea and James Barnes for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised.

7. CALL-IN OF THE INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION ON PARKING FEES AND CHARGES

7.1 The Committee considered the following decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport made on 5th March 2019:-

- (i) No changes to the pay & display tariffs in the parking zones outside the city centre are made;*
- (ii) City Centre Zone Pay and Display tariffs are increased, as detailed in Appendix A of the report, and that these are implemented as soon as practicable;*
- (iii) Changes to the permit pricing structure, as detailed in Appendix B of the report be approved and be implemented from 1 April 2019;*

- (iv) *The changes to the type of vehicle that are eligible for a 'Green' permit, as detailed in Appendix C of the report, be approved and be implemented from 1 April 2019;*
- (v) *Changes to the dispensation and bay suspension charges, as detailed in the report, be approved and be implemented from 1 April 2019; and*
- (vi) *Authority be delegated to the Director of City Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, to make future changes to pay & display tariffs, where this supports effective management of demand for parking and contributes to wider traffic management objectives (provided they are not increased by an amount greater than the rate of Retail Price Index plus 1% from the date they were last increased).*

7.2 Signatories

The lead signatory to the call-in was Councillor Ian Auckland, and the other signatories were Councillors Penny Baker, Gail Smith, Vickie Priestley and Martin Smith.

7.3 Reasons for the Call-in

The signatories wanted to examine the predicted environmental, financial, commercial and retail impacts of the proposals in the report.

7.4 Attendees

- Councillor Lewis Dagnall (Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport)
- Tom Finnegan-Smith (Head of Strategic Transport and Infrastructure)
- Ben Brailsford (Parking Services Manager)

7.5 Councillor Ian Auckland, as Lead Signatory to the call-in, stated that he wanted to know how the proposals fitted in with the Council's overall transport strategy, specifically whether it would assist in terms of air quality, retail offer and events held in the City Centre. Councillor Auckland made reference to the recent move to relax parking charges on Sundays, which he believed had helped boost footfall in the City Centre, and stated that, in his opinion, free parking did not mean uncontrolled parking. He considered that, as well as a need for an integrated, reliable transport system for the City, there was also a requirement for a sensible parking strategy, and he considered that the control of car movements rarely commenced in neighbourhoods. Councillor Auckland stated that, in his opinion, the proposed increases represented an opportunity for money-making, which could ultimately

deter drivers from visiting the City Centre, thereby having an adverse effect on the commercial and retail offer in the City Centre. He referred to Sheffield's rankings in terms of its City Centre retail performance, indicating that it currently stood at 22nd, and with several other Core Cities having higher parking charges, he believed Sheffield's prices should be comparable to cities with a similar retail offer. He questioned whether any consideration had been given to introducing more flexibility in terms of parking charges, believing that there was the ability to do this with the new payment machines recently installed, referring to the possibility of offering the first hour of parking free. Councillor Auckland also made reference to the practice of offering all-day parking for commuters, at a lower rate, and questioned whether a review of residents' parking schemes had been considered, as part of the decision. He concluded by stating that there was a need to look into the reasons behind the decision in more detail.

7.6 Councillor Lewis Dagnall stated that, given some of Councillor Auckland's comments relating to the wider issues regarding the City's transport strategy, there was a need to focus specifically on the decision regarding parking fees and charges. He believed it represented only a modest increase in City Centre parking, and was the first such increase since 2013. Councillor Dagnall also referred to the other elements of the decision, namely the rise in the residents' parking permit fees, which represented the first such increase since 2012, the changes to the types of vehicle eligible for a 'green' permit, and free parking permits for carers. He stated that the decision had been taken based on evidence, and was not simply a 'money-making' exercise, and he believed it represented a good way to increase visitors to the City Centre.

7.7 Tom Finnegan-Smith referred to the Sunday parking charges, indicating that footfall in the City Centre on such days, when it was currently only £1 to park all day, was lower than on Saturdays, when charges were implemented. He stated that he did not believe the modest increases would have a detrimental effect on footfall in the City Centre.

7.8 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- It was raised that private companies were making money by leasing areas of land from the Council, constructing car parks and generating revenue from parking charges. A number of such sites had been declared as development sites, therefore the Council had not wanted to make any long-term commitments in terms of using the land as car parks. However, officers in Parking Services would work closely with colleagues in Property Services, who lease such areas of land, in connection with

possible renegotiations with regard to the leases. It was suggested, and agreed, that the details of such sites be forwarded to Councillor Lewis Dagnall, for him to discuss the issue with officers in Property Services.

- The delays in implementing the decision, following the call-in, was likely to result in costing the Council approximately £90,000 in lost revenue.
- It was expected that the proposed changes would have a beneficial effect on air quality, mainly as a result of the increasing turnover of parking spaces, in that it was expected that there would be a reduction in the number of drivers seeking spaces. Another reason for the decision was to try and increase the number of people driving more environmentally-friendly vehicles by improving the green permit offer.
- It was considered that the best way to provide adequate parking provision was by having a fair charging structure which would encourage people to park for a specific time, then move on, as opposed to having drivers driving around searching for a free parking space. At present, there was a standard hourly tariff, from Monday to Saturday, and £1 all day on Sunday. There would be a huge cost, both financially and in resources, in having different time-limited parking, rather than charges and tariffs. The Council would be regularly reviewing its parking tariffs in future in order to address the wider traffic-management issues, and ensure tariffs were appropriate for demand in different areas of the city centre.
- The charges for off-street parking were lower than those for on-street parking, with the aim being to attract a higher turnover for on-street parking spaces in order to benefit businesses and other facilities in the City Centre area.
- It was accepted that, due to the fact that there were more Residents' Parking Schemes in areas with a higher rate of BME residents, such communities could be adversely affected by the proposed rise in parking permit fees.
- There had been no increases in the residents' parking permit fees since 2012 and, in line with inflation, the price of permits had actually got cheaper in real terms over the last seven years. There would be no increases in the price of Green Permits and Residential Carers' Permits. The residents' parking schemes had been introduced primarily to help residents park as near to their homes as possible, and deter commuters from making this difficult for residents. The permit charge represented only a small percentage of the total cost of being a car owner.

- The Council was currently looking at proposed changes to existing Residents' Parking Schemes to improve demand issues, and would be submitting some detailed proposals hopefully in the next few months.
- Parking permits for Council staff were administered by Facilities Management, with the number of passes being capped, and policies and procedures in place to monitor the numbers.
- The costs associated with the administration, maintenance and enforcement of residents' parking permits was not currently met by income from the permit fees. It would be possible to calculate how much the City's parking fees and charges would need to increase to enable the Residents' Parking Schemes to be operated at no additional cost to the Council, but it would make sense to assess this as part of the forthcoming review of Residents' Parking Schemes.

7.9 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) agrees to take no action in relation to the called-in decision; and
- (c) in the light of the concerns raised regarding the funding of Residents' Parking Schemes in the City, requests the Parking Services Manager to send detailed costings in terms of the funding of the schemes to Members of the Committee.

(NOTE: The votes on the above resolution were ordered to be recorded, and were as follows:-

For the resolution (7) - Councillors Denise Fox, Mike Chaplin, Mark Jones, Abdul Khayum, Cate McDonald, Moya O'Rourke and Paul Wood

Against the resolution (4) - Councillors Ian Auckland, Mohammed Mahroof, Robert Murphy and Colin Ross)

8. CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

- 8.1 Councillor Paul Wood stated that this was the last meeting of the Municipal Year 2018/19.

8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee places on record its thanks and appreciation for the excellent work undertaken by Councillors Denise Fox (Chair) and Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair) during the Municipal Year 2018/19.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on a date to be arranged.