

## GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 27 August 2024 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Richards (Chairman)  
Councillors: Elugwu, Hodgson, Tohill-Martin and Urwick.

Alternate  
Members: Councillor Harwood (for Councillor Strangwood).

Officers: Mark Hassall (Town Clerk & RFO)  
Paul Almond (Director of Environment)  
James Smith (Media & Communications Officer)

**GS.10/24 Apologies for Absence**  
Councillor Strangwood.

**GS.11/24 Declarations of Interest**  
None.

**GS.12/24 Minutes of the Last Meeting**  
**IT WAS RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 June 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**GS.13/24 Parks and Cemeteries Monitoring Report**  
The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment providing an update for Members on:

Parks & Cemeteries Team.  
4th Corner Landscape Contract.  
Wild Flower Creation.  
Ranger Service / Play Areas.  
Cleansing Service.  
Parks Lighting.  
Tennis Court – Peoples Park.  
PlayZone Schemes.

### Parks & Cemeteries Team

The team were up to date with the scheduled work. The Cricket preparation and maintenance at Hanwell Fields Sports Ground and the bowling green preparation at Horton View had gone well over the summer. The team had completed the hedge cutting at all sites. The annual bedding had been maintained and looked very good over the summer. The team had delivered a high standard of grounds maintenance in People's Park and the Cemeteries and burial duties in Cemeteries had been delivered in line with bookings.

### 4th Corner Landscape Contract

No problems were being experienced. The new contract manager had settled into the role well and was providing a good responsive level of service to work requests. The second weed treatment of roadside channels was due to be completed by the end of August. Football pitch preparations for the start of the season had been completed and additional reinstatement work on goal mouths had also been undertaken. All scheduled grounds maintenance operations had been delivered in line with the agreed schedules.

The Council's Landscape Officer continued to work closely with the contractor in addition to carrying out site inspections to monitor their performance.

#### Wild Flower Creation

The contractor was booked in to sow the yellow rattle seed at the start of September, in line with the best time recommended, mirroring the time seed was dropped naturally. The wild flower meadows would be created at:

- Spiceball Park
- Princess Diana Park
- Saffron Close
- Crouch Hill

#### Ranger Service / Play Area Update

The Park Ranger Team continued to keep up to date with the weekly Health & Safety inspections, formally recording items utilising the new mobile PSS Live software package. Repairs were undertaken on the basis of the findings recorded from those inspections. The Ranger team had assisted the events team in the preparation and attendance at the summer events programme.

#### Cleansing Service Update

Facility Cleaning had been undertaken satisfactorily with no problems to report. The cleaning of the toilets and the pavilion at Hanwell Fields had continued, and deep cleaning of pavilions prior to the start of the football season had been completed.

The Parks & Open Spaces Cleansing service provided by Cherwell District Council was being delivered in line with the Service Level Agreement, with no issues to report.

#### Parks Lighting Update

A purchase order had been issued for the replacement of all the remaining old light columns in People's Park. They would be replaced before the dark nights started drawing in. The condition survey of all our other columns in parks had been undertaken, and officers were awaiting the detailed report.

#### Tennis Courts – People's Park Update

The tennis court refurbishment at People's Park had been completed during the first week of August and looked great. Positive comments had been received by the Council from facility users. The Lawn Tennis Association booking system was now in place and being used by customers and the Council website had been updated and links to book added. The gate entry system installation was now fully operational.

#### PlayZone Scheme Update

Further to the previous report to this committee, the grant award letter had been received from the Football Foundation. Officers were awaiting the funding agreement from the legal team at Cherwell district Council. The next stage would be for the planning applications to be submitted for approval.

The timescales for construction of the PlayZones at Princess Diana Park and Chandos Recreation Ground were still on track for Spring of 2025.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

**GS.14/24 Income & Expenditure Report**

The Committee considered a report prepared by the Town Clerk & RFO comparing year-to-date income and expenditure with the projected annual budget for the financial year. The report showed all expenditure incurred up to 19 August 2024.

Officers responded to a range of questions from Members relating to various budget codes and financial procedures. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that overall the Committee's expenditure was within forecast versus the phased YTD budget.

General Services variances and points to note were principally:

- ◆ Staffing costs, which remained within budget, subject to central government annual salary increases agreed with trade unions.
- ◆ Planned roof repairs at Southam Road depot had been completed and fibreglass burial chambers purchased. Variances were offset by timing of headstone beam installation, annual BACS software license and tree works.
- ◆ Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works were impacted by timing of July invoice across Parks, including the second weed spray application to street edging. Replacement light columns had been installed in People Park, the beginning of a wider replacement programme across the estate.
- ◆ Tree works orders had largely been completed and with the final few days currently being undertaken, balancing available resources with recommendations from scheduled independent arboriculture inspections over an ongoing three-year timeframe.
- ◆ Hanwell View MUGA and Public Open Space (POS) had been transferred, along with S106 contribution, to be recognised over the next 15 years of maintenance.
- ◆ A Contract had been completed for a two-year lease of cricket pitch facilities at Hanwell Fields and associated additional investment in machinery has been undertaken.

**IT WAS RESOLVED** to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

**GS.15/24 Play Area Condition Report**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment providing an evaluation of the current play equipment across Banbury, considering its life expectancy, inclusivity, and play value. The report presented recommendations for future investments to ensure that the town's play areas met the needs of all residents and maintained high standards of quality and safety.

The Director of Environment reminded Members that Banbury was home to several play areas serving children and families from diverse backgrounds. Over the years, these play areas had been integral in promoting physical activity, social interaction, and overall well-being among children. However, with aging equipment and evolving community needs, a review was necessary to ensure that facilities remained safe, inclusive, and engaging. An audit of Banbury Town Council's play area facilities assessing Life Expectancy, Inclusivity and Play Value was appended to the committee report.

The Audit report covered the following key areas and findings:

Life Expectancy of Play Equipment

The life expectancy of play equipment typically ranged from 10 to 15 years, depending on materials, usage, and maintenance. With the exception of play areas that had been refurbished or had new items replaced and those transferred to the Council through new developments, the current inventory of play equipment in Banbury was installed between 2006 and 2014. This placed much of the equipment near or beyond its expected lifespan. Metal equipment generally lasted longer than wood or plastic, which might deteriorate faster due to weathering and wear. Regular maintenance had extended the life of some equipment; however, wear and tear were becoming increasingly evident on items of equipment. Equipment approaching the end of its life expectancy presented higher safety risks, such as structural instability, and might not comply with the latest safety standards.

Inclusivity of Ability

Inclusivity was a crucial aspect of modern play area design, ensuring that children of all abilities could participate and enjoy the facilities. While some play areas in Banbury offered accessible features, there was a lack of comprehensive inclusivity across all sites. Not all playgrounds were accessible to children with mobility impairments or sensory processing disorders. Inclusive Play Elements included ramps, accessible swings, sensory play panels, and ground-level play features. Customer feedback indicated that there was a requirement for more inclusive equipment, reflecting the needs of the community and the expectation to provide facilities for all abilities including children with disabilities.

Play Value and Quality

Play value referred to the opportunities provided by play equipment for physical, cognitive, social, and creative engagement. High play value equipment encouraged a wider range of play types, such as climbing, swinging, balancing, and imaginative play. Banbury's play areas currently offered a reasonable range of play opportunities, but with some equipment lacking in diversity and challenge, particularly for older children. Quality varied across sites, with newer installations offering higher play value and older equipment lacking in modern play features. High-quality, diverse play equipment contributed to the development of physical skills, social interaction, problem-solving, and creativity in children.

In conclusion, it was considered that the play areas in Banbury were a vital community asset, but they required timely investment to remain safe, inclusive, and engaging. By prioritizing life expectancy, inclusivity, and play value, the Council could ensure that its play areas continued to serve all children and families in Banbury effectively.

**IT WAS RESOLVED** that:

- (1) A phased replacement plan should be initiated, prioritizing the most worn and end of life equipment before they become unsafe, recognising that the budget allocation for annual inspections, repairs, maintenance and replacements will need to be maintained;
- (2) Future investments should factor in the installation of inclusive play equipment in all play areas, where possible, retrofitting existing playgrounds with accessible play equipment items as they come up for replacement, to include swings, ramps, and sensory play elements;

(3) In line with the audit of current play equipment, investments should focus on enhancing play diversity, particularly for older children, and ensuring all installations are of high quality, providing a wide range of play activities which offer children maximum developmental benefit opportunities.

(4) Consideration to be given to a major overhaul of play facilities in the Council's Central Destination Town Parks, People's Park and Spiceball Park, and Officers be instructed to provide options and estimated costs to a future committee.

The meeting ended at 7.55pm