

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

23 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Wallsgrove (Chair), Worne (Vice-Chair), Blanchard-Cooper, P. Bower, Brooks, Elkins, Greenway, Madeley, May, Warr and Wiltshire

Councillors Gunner, Lury, Pendleton, Stanley, Tandy, and Yeates were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

542. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Greenway declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 6 as a Member of Bersted Parish Council and a Member of Friends of Bersted Brooks.

Councillor Warr declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 6 as a resident of Bersted.

543. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 were approved by the Committee. These would be signed after the meeting.

One Member wished to discuss matters arising from the last meeting, however was advised by the Chair that the purpose of Item was to approve the accuracy of the minutes from the last meeting only, and any questions could be put in writing to Officers.

544. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent matters for this meeting.

545. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No public questions had been submitted for this meeting.

Environment Committee - 23.01.24

546. BERSTED BROOKS PARK PROJECT

[Councillor Greenway re-declared his Personal Interest during discussion of this Item]

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Principal Landscape Officer presented the report, which summarised the project background and provided an update on the Bersted Brooks Park project. This included a summary of the stakeholder engagement and public consultation, and it outlined proposals to be taken forward. The aims of the project were to enhance the open spaces in terms of biodiversity and accessibility for the public. It created the opportunity to mitigate the effects of climate change and flooding. The main messages taken from the consultation were that people were supportive of individual improvement proposals, but there were concerns about including areas of Bersted Park, which largely related to encouraging more people into the residential area and the impact this would have on parking locally. The main responses were summarised in Appendix 2. The principles of enhancing the open spaces were supported by the public, with results showing most people responded positively to the proposals presented. 86% of people wanted to see the creation of natural flood interventions, with 85% of people supporting the idea of wetland planting to improve flood resilience. The masterplan had been changed in response to the consultation feedback, and the new proposed areas were shown in Appendix 5. The benefits of the proposals included increasing accessibility to visitors, creating the opportunity for learning about the natural environment, enhanced wildlife habitats and mitigating the impact of future flooding.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Greenway and seconded by Councillor Bower.

Members then took part in a debate and the following points were raised:

- Page 27 mentioned 'Raised walkways / improved access'. It was asked that it be made clear this would improve access for people with disabilities. The Principal Landscape Officer confirmed Officers had taken note of this.
- Could it be confirmed that the 'Improved Parking' would make use of permeable surface? The Principal Landscape Officer confirmed Officers had taken note of this.
- Waymarking and signage – could this include a braille interpretation? The Principal Landscape Officer confirmed Officers had taken note of this.
- Natural Play – could this include sensory elements to ensure children would get the most out of this? The Principal Landscape Officer confirmed Officers had taken note of this.
- Clarification was sought regarding the budget for the project. This was provided by the Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer, and the detail of this was contained within the Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring Report.
- Support was offered for the masterplan and the positives the project would bring such as flood mitigation, learning opportunities for school children, and it was acknowledged the project was generally supported by the public.

- It was noted that this project was currently at masterplan stage, and changes could still be made.
- There was concern raised about the cost, and Officers were asked to obtain external funding from partners to assist with costs wherever possible.
- It was asked whether an update report could be brought back to the Committee. The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change confirmed Members would be updated on progress of the project.

A discussion took place around the name of the completed project and the Chair suggested this be changed to Bersted Brooks Local Nature Reserve and Park. The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change suggested an alternative of 'Bersted Brooks' which was supported by Members.

The Committee gave permission for non-Committee Members to speak. Support was offered for the project in general, however there was concern regarding the section towards the Bersted Park Community Centre, which was a distance from the main site and required people to cross a busy 50mph road. There was also concern people would park at the Bersted Park Community Centre and other locations that were unsuitable. It was felt this area along the South of the A259 did not need to be included, and it would be a concern for local residents. The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change explained that if this area was not included, it would limit what could be achieved in the rest of the project, and would mean these areas would be less accessible. Officers recognised there were concerns around parking, however confirmed there would be suitable locations for visitors to park. Visitors would not be encouraged to park in the Bersted Park housing development area, and signage would point people away from this. One of the reasons for the proposed new area of the project was to encourage people to park elsewhere at the other end of the site. If the area South of the A259 was included in the project, it may make obtaining funding from external agencies more achievable.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the revised area of the Bersted Brooks masterplan as shown in Appendix 5, be endorsed

547. COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2024/25 - ENVIRONMENT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report to Committee. He updated that there was a change to the Table in paragraph 4.5, page 93, which should say 'Do not recruit to vacant Parking Services Permit post', not the Parks Officer post. There was a difference in cost of around £6k, however he did not propose changing the Committee budget on that basis as the amount was immaterial. The overall revenue budget increase from 2023-24 was £90k as detailed in Table 4.4 on page 92. The savings of £543,000 identified in the

Environment Committee - 23.01.24

Financial Strategy paper were detailed in the Table in paragraph 4.5. The Environment Committee Capital Programme was detailed in Appendix B, this did not currently include slippage from programs like Bersted Brooks, but this would be included after 31 March once the slippage had been confirmed. The schemes had already been approved and no further Committee approval would be required as there was no additional expenditure.

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer understood there would be some elements of the budget that Members would not ideally choose, however Members were aware that the budget needed to be reduced. He explained if amendments were made to the budget that increased the total spend for the Committee, it would effectively increase the draw down the Council would have to make on its usable revenue reserves, which would increase financial pressure on the Council.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor May and seconded by Councillor Blanchard-Cooper.

Members (and non-Committee Members given permission to speak) then took part in a question-and-answer session and the following points were made:

- Further information was requested around the reduction of seasonal foreshores staff hours. Officers explained they were looking at how this could be done in a way to limit the impact on the public, which may mean shorter hours at the beginning and end of the season.
- How would the additional income from cemetery fees be achieved? Officers were looking at the range of fees, but were trying to reduce the impact on the lower cost fees.
- Where would the savings in event management come from? This had not yet been decided, but Officers were trying to limit the impact to the public on this.
- Clarification was sought on the updated budget for play areas in Appendix B. The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained this included slippage from previous years, which was why there appeared to be a sharp rise.
- It was asked whether details could be provided to Members around the savings as and when they became available.
- Concern was expressed by several Members as it was felt not enough detail had been provided in advance of the meeting, particularly around consequences of the savings, and not enough consultation had taken place.
- There was concern around cemetery fees and it was thought Members should have input into these. The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer pointed to Part 6, Section 3, paragraph 5.2 of the Constitution and explained Officers were responsible for raising money through fees and charges.
- It was asked that the budget process not be carried out in this way again, and more consultation be conducted with Members next year. It was felt Members should be included in the process earlier on. The Chair asked Officers to take these comments on board for next year.
- It was felt there were gaps in additional information that had been provided to Members the previous day.

- Other Members thanked Officers for their work, and appreciated Officers had worked hard.
- It was recognised that all Councils across the country were having to make cuts that they would otherwise choose not to.
- It was asked whether the performance of departments would be considered in relation to budget, an example given was Building Control as it appeared to have a greater budget this year than last, however the performance was lower than target. Specific detail could not be provided by Officers as the question had not been submitted prior to the meeting. The Group Head of Technical Services explained the Building Control budget figures for last year showing in the report was the actual budgeted figure and appeared lower as they had been carrying vacancies, and had generated more income than expected. The original budget for last year had been much higher.
- Clarification was sought around the difference between the original budget and the updated budget. This was provided by Officers.

During the above debate, the Chair reminded Members that detailed questions should be sent in advance of the meeting, to enable Officers to provide answers for Members.

The Interim Chief Executive Officer and Director of Growth explained the budget process had taken a considerable amount of time. It had taken time to generate ideas and then to explore these further, and he said this had been brought to Members at the earliest opportunity. He believed Members had received a significant amount of additional information during this process compared to previous years, however Officers could take on board the comments from Members around this.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- (a) It agrees the 2024/25 Revenue Budget as illustrated in Appendix A of this report;
- (b) It agrees the 2024/25 Capital Programme as illustrated in Appendix B of this report; and

RECOMMENDS TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE that

- (c) the Revenue Budget for this Committee be included in the overall General Fund Budget when the Policy and Finance Committee considers the Council's budgets at its meeting on 8 February 2024.

Environment Committee - 23.01.24

548. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 31 DECEMBER 2023

[Councillor Brooks declared a Personal Interest during this Item as Ward Member for Marine (relating to beach access)]

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report to Committee. He highlighted Table 1 on paragraph 4.1 (page 100), which indicated a revenue budget underspend of £339k, a positive change of £284k from quarter 2. This was largely due to an increase in parking income. The parking charges were introduced in January last year, however they had not been built into that year's budget. There was slippage in areas such as Bersted Brooks and Play Areas, so the budgets had not been lost, but carried over.

The following points were raised by Members (and a non-Committee Member given permission to speak):

- It was felt that installing the free ticket machines at Felpham and Middleton was a cost that should have been avoided.
- There was currently no budget for beach access, which was felt important. It was suggested that Officers reach out and obtain funding for this.

The Committee noted the report.

549. Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S) WHICH FORM PART OF THE COUNCIL'S VISION 2022-2026.

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Technical Services introduced the report, the purpose of which was to update the Committee with the Quarter 3 Performance Outturn for the Key Performance indicators for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

The Chair invited questions and the subject of household waste was discussed by Members. It was asked what could be done to improve the recycling rates. The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change explained that the Government had now mandated that a separate food waste collection be delivered by authorities, and a report on this would be presented to Committee in March. The previous Food Waste trials had a positive impact on recycling rates and achieved 60%, and it was anticipated this would help to meet targets. Residents feedback was 90% positive regarding these trials. West Sussex County Council were also carrying out work to educate people on waste and recycling, including visiting schools. One Member suggested that the Waste Partnership be invited to more community events.

The Committee noted the report.

550. OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no Outside Bodies reports.

551. WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was introduced by the Group Head of Environment and Climate Change. It was asked whether a scrutiny report for cleansing could be added to the Work Programme.

There were questions around the Flood Forum and when this would take place. Officers advised that the first meeting would take place on 26 February 2024, and further information regarding this would soon be distributed to Members.

The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change explained that Officers were currently reviewing Items to be included on the Work Programme for the next municipal year, including regular report updates to Committee.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 7.37 pm)