

Council – 6th September 2022

Portfolio Holder Report of Councillor Derek Perry – Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates

Parks and Open Spaces

Britain in Bloom and Green Flag Awards

The Taunton, Minehead and Wellington judging for Southwest in Bloom took place in August and this went well, we are awaiting results which will be announced in September.

The Green Flag results were announced in August. I am very happy to report SWT have been awarded all the Green Flags applied for. These were: French Weir; Victoria Park; Vivary Park and Blenheim Gardens. We were re-awarded a Heritage award for Wellington Park, one of only two in the Southwest. Somerset West and Taunton also received 2 x Community Green Flags for Comeytrove Park, Taunton and Swains Lane Nature Reserve, Wellington.

Play Areas

The installation of new Play Equipment for Walkers Gate Wellington has been planned for September.

Leisure

Leisure Centres (Everyone Active)

SLM provided their bi-annual report to Scrutiny on 27th July. In general terms the outlook was a bright one with memberships and swimming lesson numbers higher than pre-covid levels and a growing events programme at Wellsprings. The golf course usage has continued to perform strongly with the course 'holding up' reasonably well to the high temperatures and lack of rainfall.

The latest traveller incursion at Blackbrook was extremely disruptive but the site has now been cleaned up and resecured.

The biggest issues for SLM are the availability of qualified staff (as lifeguard and swim teacher courses were cancelled during covid lockdowns) and the ever-increasing cost of utilities which will have a significant financial impact on the operator this year. SLM are doing all they can to mitigate costs and overachieve on income to reduce the effect where possible.

Taunton Pool will close to the public for 10 days at the end of August to enable essential pool maintenance work to take place.

A new Building Management System (BMS) will shortly be installed at Wellington Sports Centre to enable better control of the poolside and background temperatures. This is to enable the ageing plant at the site to continue to operate whilst we continue to explore the decarbonisation project at Wellington.

Leisure Projects

Tennis Court Refurbishment – discussions continue to be held with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to agree a funding package to upgrade the tennis courts at Vivary Park and Cheddon Road. This may be aligned to the reinstatement of 'mini tennis' facilities at Cheddon Road on the 3rd court.

Taunton Green Pavilion – costs are being finalised for the refurbishment of the Taunton Green sports pavilion before deciding on the most appropriate way forward for a building that has fallen into a state of disrepair.

Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field – the work to create a new playing field, tennis courts, car parking area and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Norton Fitzwarren has been covered in the Cllr Sully report but as a reminder this will be created using S106 funding and be delivered (pending planning permission) in late autumn 2022 or spring 2023.

Phosphates

Strategic Solution for Phosphates

As Members are aware, on 5 October 2021, Full Council approved an Interim Strategy of mitigation measures. A Planning Phosphates Sub-Committee has been set up to oversee this programme. This Sub Committee has considered a number of officer reports on various matters and updates on the interim programme.

A briefing and engagement event with the development industry and key stakeholders took place on the 5 July 2022. Officers also gave a presentation on how SWT has been affected by the requirement for nutrient neutral development to Members of the Royal Town Planning Institute on the 7 July 2022.

On the 21 July 2022 the Phosphate Planning Sub Committee considered and approved a programme of interim measures which created phosphate (P) Credits through

- Utilising Council Assets e.g. retrofitting water saving measures on Council owned properties;
- Land Use Measures (e.g. wetland, woodlands) and working with a private developer (fallowing land).

In total the interim phosphate mitigation projects should generate a minimum phosphate offset of 65.3kg/year and will unlock between 150 and 780 homes within the River Tone sub catchment. In order to progress this work officers will be writing to affected applicants in the priority categories (as agreed by the Phosphate Planning Sub Committee in February to register expressions of interest for P credits in order to gauge interest.

The Sub Committee also considered a report setting out advice on the use of Package Treatment Plants (PTP's) and Septic Tanks as phosphate mitigation which has been produced in conjunction with the other Somerset authorities, Natural England and the Environment Agency. This will be published on our website together with the report agreed by the Sub Committee which sets out how this will be applied in SWT. The next Phosphate Planning Sub Committee is due to meet on 13 October 2022.

There were a number of recent government announcements. The Ministerial Statement on 20 July 2022 announced:

- that there would be a new legal duty on water companies in England to upgrade wastewater treatment works by 2030 in nutrient neutrality areas to the highest achievable technological levels
- DLUHC will revise planning guidance to reflect that sites affected by nutrient pollution forming part of housing land supply calculations are capable of being considered deliverable
- Habitat Regulations Assessment provisions apply to any consent, permission, or other authorisation and may include post permission approvals, reserved matters and discharge of conditions

In addition a Defra Nutrient Mitigation Scheme was announced on 20 July 2022. There are no details but it is understood that funding will be made available to support mitigation scheme delivery and more details including bidding guidance will be available in the Autumn. These statements can be found on the Council's website at:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning/phosphates-on-the-somerset-levels-and-moors/>

Further work is being undertaken with the other Somerset authorities to update the phosphate calculator and develop a catchment action plan as required by the recent Government funding of £100,000 given to support the work in the Somerset Levels and Moors. SWT is acting as the lead authority. A countywide workshop is being planned.

Cllr. Perry