

Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates – Cllr Derek Perry.

Annual Report.

Parks and Open Spaces

Park Improvements

We have invested in our parks over the past year to ensure these continue to be great places for residents to visit. Works included:

- The fountains in Vivary Park and Wellington Park have been repaired
- Footpath replacement programme was completed at Vivary park, Beech Grove, and Walkers Gate
- Replacement of benches and bins in various parks
- Replace the interpretation boards at Hankridge and Wellington basin
- Implementation of the Grass Management Strategy

Britain in Bloom and Green Flag Awards

Our in-house teams continued to show that our parks and open spaces are some of the best with external judging.

Green Flags were awarded to all the parks 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.

In the Britain in Bloom Awards, Taunton, Minehead and Wellington achieved Silver Gilt across each area improving the award for both Minehead and Wellington from the previous year.

Play Area Improvements

Work to complete the Council Play Area's improvement programme for 22/23 has been completed. These works are funded by a mixture of S106 funds and the Council's capital budget totalling £193k in investment. The following locations have had works completed.

Play Area	Investment	Date works completed
Walkers Gate Road, Wellington	£21,596	Oct 2022
Heavitree & Compton Close, Taunton	£57,664	Oct 2022
Greenway Rec, Leslie Avenue, Taunton (Gym Equipment)	£14,485	March 23
Greenway Rec, Lesley Avenue, Taunton (Play Area Equipment)	£34,499	April 23
Crofters Green, Taunton	£23,500	March 23
Humphreys Road, Wellington	£21,500	March 23
Cleeve road	£5,213	March 23
French Weir	£14,544	March 23

Leisure

Leisure Centres (Everyone Active)

SLM continues to perform well in delivering the operation of our leisure facilities. Membership numbers have generally been maintained for health and fitness in spite of new 'budget' facilities being opened on the Hankridge Business Park. Wellington in particular has seen a strong membership performance.

Swimming lesson numbers remain strong.

The rising cost of utilities remains the largest single challenge facing the industry. It has been widely reported that leisure centres and swimming pools across the UK are closing because of the unprecedented rise in utility costs. Staffing costs are also rising sharply and this is the context in which our leisure partner, SLM, are operating.

Some measures have been taken to mitigate the effect of rising utility costs – including reducing pool water temperatures and increasing temperatures in fitness facilities. The overall impact however is expected to be a cost of more than £250,000 above budget for utilities for 2022/23. This cost must be absorbed by the contractor under the terms of the contract.

The Council has partnered with SLM to instal LED lighting in the tennis centre at Blackbrook and the sports hall at Wellsprings to improve lux levels, reduce utility and maintenance costs and ultimately to reduce emissions. Further similar schemes may be undertaken in 2023.

Vivary golf course has enjoyed a good year in terms of usage, helped by the hot summer. The Council has worked in partnership to erect additional safety netting to prevent balls being struck into nearby properties/roads and has undertaken works to alleviate flooding issues on holes 5 & 6.

Leisure Projects

Tennis Court Refurbishment

It has been decided to accept a grant of £105,000 from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to upgrade the four tennis courts at Vivary Park and Cheddon Road.

The LTA are providing up to 90% of the project costs with SWT providing the remainder.

A contractor has been appointed and the works are expected to start in April 2023. The courts at Cheddon Road will be transferred with the rest of the Taunton Green Playing Field to Taunton Town Council in April 2023.

Both sets of courts will be subject to charges to play because of the works with access via a coded gate. Income will be used to offset future maintenance costs.

Taunton Green Pavilion

The refurbishment and compliance work at the Taunton Green Pavilion on Cheddon Road are complete and the Muskats Baseball Club will move from Victoria Park to Taunton Green and make the latter their 'home ground'.

The pavilion will be transferred to the new Taunton Town Council to manage from April 2023.

Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field

Work to create a new playing field with a football pitch, tennis court, car parking area and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Norton Fitzwarren has progressed significantly despite the cold weather in December and the usual winter rainfall and more recently snowfall.

The tennis courts, Multi Use Games Area and car park are substantially complete marking the end of Phase 1 of the project. Phase 2 will begin once the weather improves and will result in the creation of a full size football pitch complete with drainage.

It is expected that play will be possible on the new pitch from 2024. The new facilities will be managed by the Parish Council using a commuted sum transferred as part of the S106 agreement.

The project is fully funded by S106 funds from the nearby St Modwen development and is being managed by SWT staff with significant input from Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council and the local Playing Field Association.

Phosphates

Strategic Solution for Phosphates

As Members are aware, details of the Council's SWT Phosphate Credit Scheme were uploaded on the SWT website in December 2022. This is one of the first P-credit schemes in England. At the current time P-credits have been offered to approx. 50 planning applications. The next round of SWT P-credits will depend on the uptake of the current round of P credits and the progress of the Phosphate mitigation projects identified in the Interim Strategy. Further details, including the provisional list of planning applications eligible for the first round of SWT P credits is available at <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning/phosphates-on-the-somerset-levels-and-moors/>.

Further information about the Defra National Nutrient Mitigation Scheme, was received in November 2022 but it is still being developed. The Defra letter can be viewed on the Council's website and at present we understand that the Defra Mitigation Scheme is not in operation in any of the nutrient sensitive catchment areas.

Work with the other Somerset authorities to update the phosphate calculator is ongoing. A new Somerset Council phosphates webpage has been drafted and an officer phosphate guidance note has been prepared to ensure consistency in decision-making for the new Somerset authority. A Somerset wide update on phosphates and planning matters relating to the new Somerset authority was provided to the Agents and Developer Forum on 7th March 2023.

Cllr. Perry