

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Questions to Portfolio Holders

Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 8 June 2022

Question received from Councillor Hoptruff

Q1. "Due to the recent wanton vandalism of the Leek Bus Station toilets and the unfortunate forced closure, we need to set up some form of security before we even contemplate carrying out expensive repair work and reopening to the public again. What progress has been made in providing some form of CCTV coverage around the area that was discussed at this panel's meeting on the 3rd November 2021?"

Response from Councillor Ward - Portfolio Holder for Communities:

Background

Unfortunately, the Smithfield WCs have been the focus of vandalism for some time now. In Spring 2020, a major capital refurbishment project was undertaken to improve accessibility and also included steel reinforcements to the doors as well as high-spec fittings to try and stem the impact of revenue costs of continuing to fix the toilets following bouts of vandalism. This was completed at a cost of almost £100k. Despite this there were repeated minor acts of vandalism through autumn and winter 2020.

In March 2021 an explosive device was set off in the ladies WCs in 2021 causing significant structural and fire damage. The WC had to be closed for an extended period whilst they were fixed at further cost of £20,000. The police were informed and a juvenile was arrested on another matter but admitted to setting fire to the WCs, but the matter did not proceed to court.

Since then there has been intermittent issues of vandalism. Most recently over past 6 weeks we have both ladies and gents being targeted more often. (Graffiti, fire damage, ripping off toilet roll holders, ripping of toilet doors, food being ground into walls and floors, littering, purposefully blocking toilets). The perpetrators have been doing this during the day and also at night time once the WCs are locked. Following the major capital project, auto-locks were added to automatically lock at 6pm. However, the doors were being repeatedly kicked in so hard that the locks have "dropped" allowing access. Therefore manual locking by Norse has also been tried to act as an additional deterrent. This also made little difference and therefore the decision was taken to close them for the time being. The disabled WCs can still be accessed by those who have possession of a radar key.

CCTV

It should be noted that placing CCTV inside the WCs is NOT an option due to these of the facility as a toilet. Therefore CCTV can only cover the entrances to the WCs. Therefore, unless any criminal activity happened outside of the WCs the best we can hope for is that it will capture those entering and exiting the WCs at a specific time. Although this may not stand up as evidence in a prosecution, we can hope that it will act as a deterrent to prevent the anti-social behaviour.

OpenView – our CCTV Contractor – have been commissioned to install an additional camera at Leek Bus Station in response to the repeated vandalism. The camera is due to

go-live by the end of the month when the CCTV network is switched over from analogue to digital.

Question received from Councillor Page: -

Q2. *“The Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities Investment Plan Report in agenda item 8 mentions no investment to Brough Park Bowling Club. Members and players of this facility have been let down for many years with the poor condition of the lawns and inadequate maintenance. What plans do SMDC have to improve this essential physical recreational facility for the community?”*

Response from Councillor Deaville - Deputy Leader of the Council:

Whilst the report being presented at tonight’s Panel focuses on Play and Outdoor Sports facilities investment, it doesn’t consider maintenance of our sports pitches which is when the bowling green would usually be considered.

We can confirm that officers have been having intermittent conversations with the chairman of Brough Park Bowls Club, supported by Cllr Lytton Page over a sustained period, mainly regarding the maintenance regime undertaken on the men’s bowling green, following an approach by them in 2019. These conversations spanned the various lockdowns enforced by the pandemic and included officers providing an itemised maintenance schedule of the work undertaken by Glendale on the green, which has an overall value of £15,000pa.

At the time, the club were considering whether they would be able to take on the maintenance either to undertake fully or partially themselves, which follows an approach the Alliance has taken before with bowling clubs in the High Peak. During April 2021, it was confirmed this was not deemed possible and the club wished to continue with the existing schedule of maintenance arrangements via Glendale. In March 2022, officers approved a programme of additional maintenance to the bowling green to help pre-season works, primarily involving selective weed killer and fertilization. This was well received by the club chairman and since this time, we have not received any further complaints regarding the condition of the green.

The condition of bowling greens, as with any fine turf pitches, can be greatly be affected by adverse weather conditions which are out of everyone’s control. Periods of very wet weather can have a negative effect on the green, as can periods of very dry weather and it is periods of dry weather which the club have raised as a concern due to the greens not having any built in irrigation system. The possibility of installing a retrofit irrigation system which utilises rainwater collection technology have been discussed previously, however with the estimated cost for installing of c.£10,000 a coordinated approach to securing these funds would be required. It is viewed that this type of system could be beneficial, but the use of it would need to be managed carefully to ensure it complements the maintenance provided by Glendale, as over watering or watering at the wrong time could have a negative impact, rather than a benefit.

In summary, the Council spends approximately £15,000pa on the current maintenance regime for this bowling green which is considerably more than any other single sports pitch in the Staffordshire Moorlands. Consideration as to whether the Council should fund a further and sustained increase must therefore be carefully considered, as should using more creative ways to enhance maintenance, via use of external grant funding or with support from club members.