

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday, 5 October 2023

Venue: The Atrium - Perceval House

Attendees (in person): Councillors

Y Gordon (Chair), J Ball, P Driscoll, M Rice, C Anderson, H Haili, F Conti (Vice-Chair), R Baaklini, H Kaur Dheer, K Nagpal, S Padda, B Wesson, A Kelly, I Kingston and C Summers

Apologies:

C Tighe, M Hamidi and F Mohamed

Also present: Councillors

D Costigan, P Knewstub, C Hersch and J Gallant

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mohamed, Tighe and Hamidi.

Councillor Kelly substituted for Councillor Mohamed, Councillor Kingston substituted for Councillor Tighe, and Councillor Summers substituted for Councillor Hamidi.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Matters to be considered in private

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

4 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record of proceedings.

5 Call-in: creation of a regional park

Councillors Gallant and Hersch presented the reasons for call-in, which focused on resolution (VII) to agree in principle the closure of Perivale Park Golf Course in financial year 2023/24

- It appeared that cabinet had used inaccurate data in coming to its

decision. According to the data presented in the report, there were 10 unique users of the golf course per day on average. Members of the Perivale Park Club disagreed with this figure and believed it to be too low. Some of the data appeared to have been collected shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which would explain lower figures than what is usually the case.

- Cabinet had agreed in principle to close the golf course partly based on the environmental and public health benefits of the creation of a regional park. Due consideration had not been given to the environmental and public health benefits of the continued running of this golf course, particularly given golf was an active sport, courses were green spaces and they had wild areas. The course itself also had a wide appeal as a comparatively cheap course and attracted people of different backgrounds and ages.
- The other municipal golf course in Ealing, Brent Valley Golf Course, was not as flat as the Perivale Park course, which meant that it was less accessible for users who were older or who had disabilities. Brent Valley Golf Course was not a viable alternative for users of the Perivale Park Golf Course.
- The golf course was important to the local community. Dog walkers were able to walk around parts of the golf course and there was a café on the site.
- The decision had been announced at short notice. It was unclear why cabinet had agreed in principle to close the golf course prior to the consultation on the regional park.

Leslie Glancy, Club Captain of Perivale Golf Course, spoke on this item. Her speech included the following points:

- In the view of the golf club, there had been misrepresentations in the statement of case issued by the Council.
- The golf course was a green leisure facility which was affordable and used by a large and diverse population.
- The alternative courses noted by the Council were not acceptable. Many members of the Perivale Golf Club would not be able to afford the fees of private courses, and Brent Valley was a boggy course.

Henry Rzepa, representing Friends of Perivale Park, also spoke on this item. His speech included the following points:

- The Friends of Perivale Park supported the regional park proposals.
- It was important that the council gave assurances around the continued access and uses of Perivale Park, including its amenities like the café.

Councillor Costigan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Action, and Councillor Knewstub, Cabinet Member for Thriving Communities, responded to the call in. It was responded that:

- The proposals for a regional park were a radical step towards meeting the Council's climate action commitments and its efforts to tackle health inequalities.
- The decision to agree in principle to close Perivale Park Golf Course was made on balance of the benefits of the golf course and the action required in relation to the climate crisis and health inequalities.
- The council was looking at options to retain the café on the site.
- According to data collected by the operator of the course, there were 10 unique users of the course per day on average.
- Although cabinet members accepted that some of the golf course's strengths were in its affordability and accessibility, it was considered that Brent Valley Golf Course was a viable alternative to Perivale Golf Course. This was because it was similarly priced and was not too far away for Perivale club members. Although there was a hill at Brent Valley, the Council was exploring options to make it more accessible such as provision of golf buggies

The committee was invited to ask questions of the cabinet members. The following questions were asked:

- Given that the report set out that there were 30,000 users of the golf course a year, how was it possible for there only to be 10 unique users per day?
- How was the consultation going to be conducted and who was going to be running it?
- Why was it agreed in principle to close Perivale Golf Course before consulting on the proposal?
- After the consultation on the regional park, was a report going to be compiled and put to cabinet for a decision?
- Was there a way to create a regional park whilst retaining the golf course?
- Why was the existence of a golf course incompatible with the environmental aims of the regional park?
- Were the proposals financially viable?
- What were the details of the proposals for Brent Valley Golf Course to improve its accessibility and re-provision some of the key benefits of Perivale Park Golf Course?
- Were there aspirations to plant trees on the site?
- How long did winter rules apply comparatively from Perivale Golf Course and Brent Valley Golf Course?

Both Councillor Costigan and Councillor Knewstubb responded to the questions. In response to questions under her climate action portfolio, Councillor Costigan provided the following responses:

- Cabinet members were happy to look at options which would allow the café to remain open after the golf course was closed.
- This decision had not been taken lightly, it was one which was made on balance of the pressing environmental and public health crises

which were facing Ealing.

- The preference was to rewild the site using active and community methods as opposed to leaving the site to rewild through “abandonment”.
- Cabinet members were hoping to emulate regional parks such as the Leigh Valley Park and the Queen Elizabeth II Olympic Park. These parks had mixed uses, including sports and entertainment facilities, as well as large green spaces. These parks only served as inspiration and it was likely that there would be significant differences between the park and any future regional park in Ealing.
- The consultation was going to be the start of a co-design process for the regional park which would closely involve residents.
- This cabinet decision was the first step of the process for the creation of a regional park. This involved commissioning work to assess the financial viability of the proposals in detail and determining what support could be available from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and from Central Government.
- The council was committed to increased tree planting in borough, although the challenge it faced was finding space to plant the trees. The creation of a regional park would help to create space for more tree planting, with one aim being to take an “urban forest” approach to the park.

In response to questions under her thriving communities portfolio, Councillor Knewstub provided the following responses:

- There was not going to be a separate consultation for the closure of the golf course, with responses about the golf course to be included in the regional park consultation. Final decisions on the regional park would only be made once the consultation had concluded.
- There was not going to be another cabinet decision to make a decision on the basis of the consultation, with these decisions delegated to officers and cabinet members.
- Consultation would be conducted using a wide range of methods, including direct emails to key stakeholders (like the Perivale Golf Club), events for residents, through the Ealing website, through the community champions scheme and using outdoor adverts.
- The consultation would be led by a team in the Council.
- Cabinet members were open to the idea that golf could form a part of the regional park. However, Ealing had a higher than average number of golf courses and it was important that a balance was struck in the regional park between the different facilities available for different types of users.
- Although residents were able to walk around some of the edges of the golf course, making the course part of an open regional park would boost its accessibility.
- Cabinet was committed to easing the transition from Perivale Park Golf Course to other comparable facilities, particularly Brent Valley Golf Course, as much as it could.

The portfolio holders asked officers to clarify some points in response to questions. Chris Bunting, Assistant Director for Leisure, explained that the figure cited by attendees that there were, on average, 10 unique users per day at the golf course was obtained by dividing the average number of unique users per month into days. Mr Bunting updated the committee that, in the last month, there had been 468 unique users of the golf course. However, there were 30,000 rounds of golf played in the previous year at the Golf Course. The number of unique users who used the golf course was different from the number of rounds played. Many of the unique users were using the golf course multiple times, which explained the difference between the number of unique users and the number of rounds played. Mr Bunting then clarified the following points:

- Due to a recent contract extension, there was 2 years left on the contract with Everyone Active, the operator of the municipal golf courses in Ealing.
- Officers were working with Everyone Active to understand the options for reprovisioning the benefits of Perivale Park Golf Course at Brent Valley Golf Course. These included exploring the possibility of harmonising fees between the two courses and creating a 9 hole option at Brent Valley.
- Mr Bunting was happy to report back outside of the meeting to councillors about the difference in winter rules between the Perivale Park and Brent Valley Golf Courses after checking with the course operator.

Following the presentations, both cabinet members left the room. The committee debated the merits of the call-in.

Overall, the committee came to the decision that officers had clarified satisfactorily the statistics which were drawn upon in the cabinet decision. It was also reassured by the efforts which officers were making to ensure the key benefits of Perivale Park Golf Course were reprovisioned. Finally, it considered that the detailed discussion during the meeting about the consultation demonstrated that the consultation would be thorough, ensuring future decisions relating to the regional park would be reasoned ones.

After the debate, a vote was taken and it was

RESOLVED: that the Cabinet decision be upheld.

6 Call in: new lido facility in the borough

Councillor Gallant presented the reasons for call-in:

- The proposal for a lido in Ealing did not appear financially viable given that there would be few users of an outdoor pool in the winter months.
- It appeared that the proposals were not serious, with the long list setting out potential sites which seemed to have little prospect of being

chosen.

- Given the proposals did not appear to be serious, it was considered that the funding allocated to feasibility studies was excessive.
- It was likely that the lido was going to be built on an open space in the borough, with the potential effect of reducing green space and biodiversity.
- There was no mention of parking in the cabinet report.
- There was a concern that the proposals were distracting from issues relating to the replacement of Gurnell Leisure Centre.

Councillor Knewstub responded to the call-in as follows:

- Given this was the initial stage of the project, cabinet's decision was to allocate funds for a feasibility study, the purpose of which was to decide on the financial viability of the project.
- It was too early to know details of the project, like the provision of parking, its impact on biodiversity and the technical options for heating the lido using data centres.
- Outdoor lidos in other parts of London showed that people used them all year round.
- There was a need for a new swimming pool in Ealing. West London was under-provisioned in swimming pools, and there were significant public benefits to swimming, particularly outdoor swimming.
- The replacement of Gurnell Leisure Centre project was progressing and on track to meet its targets. The Council fully intended to replace Gurnell Leisure Centre as well as provide an outdoor swimming facility.

Following the cabinet member's presentation, the committee asked the following questions:

- Had consideration been given to the competition the lido might face from other swimming centres in London?
- Were other publicly run lidos profitable?
- Why were there so many locations on the list of potential sites published with the cabinet report?
- What environmental risks would the lido pose?

To the questions raised, Councillor Knewstub provided the following responses:

- West London was underserved for lidos, which meant there was likely to be sufficient demand for a lido in Ealing to ensure its proper use and profitability.
- Although a full analysis of the viability of the project was yet to be completed, lidos in other boroughs did appear to be profitable.
- In general, outdoor lidos were comparatively low maintenance in comparison to indoor leisure centres.
- The cabinet would decide whether to move forward with the creation of a lido once a detailed viability assessment had been completed.

- The long list was published to provoke interest and debate around the proposals. The viability study would provide a shortlist of sites that were considered viable.

After the presentations and questions, Councillor Knewstub left the room. The committee debated the merits of the call-in. In view of the fact that the decision of cabinet was to commence the early stages of the project, and these stages were going to include financial viability assessments, the Committee agreed that the financial concerns raised in the call-in were not strong enough to merit sending the decision back to cabinet for it to reconsider. It did not consider that the points raised relating to Gurnell Leisure Centre were relevant to cabinet decision. At the conclusion of the debate, a vote was taken and it was

RESOLVED: That the decision be upheld.

7 2022-23 Scrutiny Panels 2, 3 and 4 Final Panel Reports

The Chairs of the 2022 – 23 scrutiny panels 2, 3 and 4 each presented their final panel reports, highlighting the key areas the panels explored and their final recommendations. Councillor Ball presented scrutiny panel 2's report on the recovery from the pandemic, Councillor Rice presented scrutiny panel 3's report on the topic "regrow, rewild and recycle", and Councillor Summers presented scrutiny panel 4's report on genuinely affordable homes.

There were no questions on the reports. On consideration of the reports, the committee

RESOLVED:

That the final reports were agreed.

8 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Chair introduced the item and referred the committee to its work programme for the coming meetings. The next meeting was going to be focused on budget scrutiny.

Sam Bailey, Head of Democratic Services, explained that the next meeting was going to be a private meeting for the committee to receive training on how best to scrutinise annual budgets. The ambition was for scrutiny to play a more active role in budget review, and for it to have sight of the budget from earlier in the municipal year than it had done in previous years.

The committee welcomed the proposals and made comments. It was noted that in other local authorities budget scrutiny was a year-round topic. It was hoped that the direction of travel for scrutiny was for it consider the budget more often.

The committee considered the work programme and it was

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme set out at appendix 1 of the report was agreed.

Meeting commenced: 7.00 pm

Meeting finished: 10.04 pm

Signed:

Dated:

Y Gordon (Chair)