

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**Council Meeting – 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018**

### **Question 1 from Councillor Aylen to the Executive Councillor for Culture, Tourism and The Economy**

#### **Question**

At a recent meeting of Belfairs parks key people, all agreed that belfairs park and its wonderful golf course is one of the gems of southend. However if the same reasons that made priory park 100 years old in the 125 year celebration of the borough, Belfairs park was also 100 years old. Priory park had celebrations but Belfairs park was refused and dismissed.

Would the cabinet holder explain why they appear to actively avoid supporting Belfairs park and its wonderful facilities or is there plans that I am unaware of?

#### **Answer**

The Council recognises that Belfairs Park is a wonderful asset to the Town. It is a great place to visit and a haven for nature. The Park has benefited from significant investment in recent times and developed through the partnership with Essex Wildlife Trust.

While the park is undoubtedly wonderful, it is still to reach its 100<sup>th</sup> year, a fact I provided in a similar enquiry from Cllr Aylen last year. The freehold was not acquired by the Council until August 1922 and officially opened as a public golf course in 1926.

I look forward to celebrating the park's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday when we get there.

### **Question 2 from Councillor Aylen to the Leader of the Council**

#### **Question**

Could the Leader explain, with the desperate need to stop money wastage, why there is not a cost saving working party?

#### **Answer**

I do not consider that a working party is required. Reducing costs is mainstreamed in Council business.

### **Question 3 from Councillor Terry to the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Community Support**

#### **Question**

With Reference to the Members register of Interests and recent media comments referring to my alleged membership of a political party, can the Portfolio Holder please confirm to all Members of the Council that the Members register of interests shows that I am not registered as a Member of any political party and that I am therefore standing before this Council as an Independent Member?

#### **Answer**

Your registered interests are a matter of public record and do not record that you are a member of a political party. However, you are a member of the Independent Group on the Council as far as I am aware.

I do not know in what capacity you will be standing in the forthcoming elections.

### **Question 4 from Councillor Ayling to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Waste and Regulatory Services**

#### **Question**

The reader's letters in the Echo Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February sum up completely visitors frustration and annoyance with the parking availability and charging across Southend. If 2G networks are subject to failure then a stand-by system should be in operation. We have had 125 years to organise a decent system and still visitors have problems. Southend is a tourist destination but I fear we are driving our visitors away. Will the Portfolio holder announce a solution to the problem, that works and advise if the Parking Strategy, promised some 18 months ago, will be released before the May 2018 elections?

#### **Answer**

We have two new machines in Fairheads Green car park. These machines were installed in December 2017 and old machines are bagged off awaiting removal. We have recently purchased 84 new pay and display machines, 53 of these machines are for the seafront area from Leigh on Sea to Shoeburyness and feature better network capability which will decrease the time taken for card transactions to be processed.

All the machines will accept coins and cards with contactless payment being a further option. These new solar powered machines will be delivered and installed during March and April with the old machines being disconnected from the electrical supply and removed shortly after the installation of the new machines.

The Council is able to monitor malfunctioning machines and over the weekend of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018, Car Park Inspectors only attended the Fairheads Green machines once and that was to replace the machine tickets. There were no faults reported.

Both machines were operating and taking both cash and cards throughout the day. Over the weekend, 1,100 transactions were recorded as having taken place.

The Access and Parking Strategy is currently being drafted and the Council will consult with stakeholders. Once the draft has been finalised, the Access and Parking Strategy will then go through the Council's usual decision-making process. The Parking Strategy was prepared to inform the Council's preparation of the Southend Central Area Action Plan (SCAAP) and was published and made available on the Council's website as part of that process.

**Question 5 from Councillor Ayling to the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Community Services**

**Question**

In the Examination Report of the government inspector (Mike Fox) on the SCAAP, 12 Dec 17, the inspector makes the following statement;

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93. The Council states that anchor tenants for a multiscreen cinema, hotel and restaurant have already been secured and that a critical path towards scheme implementation has been identified. The site is already in Council ownership.'

Would the Portfolio holder please identify who made the statement to the Inspector and why, when no evidence was available?

## **Answer**

The Statement is made in a joint statement by the Council and Turnstone as set out in Hearing Statement Matter 6 SBC (3) paragraph 6.4.21 and re-iterated by Turnstone at the Examination in Public as part of the presentation of the scheme given to the hearing.

This coincided with a press release by Turnstone which the Echo published on 23 May 2017 and which included a statement from the Empire Cinemas Chief Executive, Justin Ribbons about the firm's commitment to the scheme.

## **Question 6 from Councillor J Garston to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Waste and Regulatory Services**

### **Question**

Following agreement to implement Residents parking permits in the Westcliff Parade area when will the scheme go live between Wilson Road and the Cliffs Pavillon?

### **Answer**

As Cllr Garston rightly says, the Westcliff Parade Residents Parking Permit scheme was approved by the Traffic & Parking, the Cabinet Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

In responding to questions regarding the timescale for implementation of the pay & display parking bays at the Cliffs Pavilion, I gave an undertaking to expedite the proposal to include San Remo Parade within the Cliffs Pavilion Permit Parking Area where possible, and, subject to the outcome of the statutory advertisement, with a view to implement both schemes at the same time.

The proposals for San Remo Parade were advertised on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The advertisement concluded on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018 and no objections have been received. As such, the Traffic Regulation Order will be confirmed by 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018 and the scheme will be implemented thereafter.

## **Question 7 from Councillor Bright to the Executive Councillor for Culture, Tourism and The Economy**

### **Question**

Does the Executive Councillor share my concern for the number of empty shops that we are currently experiencing on our High Street in the town centre and does she agree with me that more needs to be done to make the High Street an attractive and vibrant place to visit and shop once again?

### **Answer**

Retail trends are changing as we all know from the way in which we shop and see others shop, and it is having an impact on high streets nationally. In Southend we have a vacancy rate of 12.9% which is above the national average of 8.9%. However if just the High Street is looked at without the shopping centres the rate drops to 7.35% which is below the national average. The Southend Central Area Action Plan, as the strategic planning framework for central Southend, seeks to support the vitality of the High Street. Policy DS1 sets out a number of principles in support of the High Street including use of upper floors for residential, leisure and other complementary uses which help to maintain or enhance the character and vitality of the centre, and ensuring that the proportion of retail does not decrease below 60% to create a rich mix of activities in the town centre. The SCAAP also recognises the benefit of additional residential development within the central area in generating footfall and supporting the vibrancy of the High Street which will be one of the benefits of the Queensway regeneration.

Central Southend benefits from having a Business Improvement District (BID) which covers the primary shopping area and central seafront. The BID has recently secured its second term, voted for by businesses on the basis of the positive impact they have made over the last 5 years. Over its first term the BID has been able to lever £2.3m, funding which the Council would not be able to secure, in support of the High Street area.

The Council and the BID are working closely together with recent activity including:

- the recent Purple Flag re-accreditation;
- ballot bins which were introduced earlier this year and, as a result of which, some of the team were invited to speak at the House of Commons in December; and
- pitching to attract new national occupiers to the High Street.

The Council has also secured Local Growth Fund funding from the LEP and Horizon 2020 to improve access to, and the environment of, the eastern end of London Road where it meets the High Street to create more reasons and space to dwell in and around the high street, and hopefully tomorrow we will secure £6m from the LEP to co-fund the second stage of the Forum which will generate greater footfall and activity in the area.

That said nationally the High Street environment continues to be challenging, and this is also the case for Southend. With frameworks like the SCAAP, partnerships like the BID, and investment from external sources there is much underway in support of the High Street, however it will require ongoing work with the private sector to meet emerging challenges.