

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 30 June 2022
5.30 - 8.10 pm

Present: Councillors Pounds (Chair), Carling (Vice-Chair), S. Baigent, Copley, Divkovic, Hauk, Holloway, Payne and Swift

Executive Councillors: Collis (Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development) and Healy (Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Wellbeing)

Officers:

Director of Neighbourhoods and Communities: Jane Wilson

Head of Community Services: Debbie Kaye

Community Funding and Voluntary Sector Manager: Julie Cornwell

Community, Sport & Recreation Manager: Ian Ross

Development Manager, Streets & Open Spaces: Alistair Wilson

Strategy and Partnerships Manager: David Kidston

Nature Conservation Projects Officer: Guy Belcher

Committee Manager: Gary Clift

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

22/29/EnC Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Sweeney.

22/30/EnC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Copley	22/35/EnC	Personal- supported a resident Platinum Jubille Grant in the ward.

22/31/EnC Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 27 January and 24 March 2022 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

22/32/EnC Public Questions

The Chair advised questions submitted that could not be covered in the time allocated would be answered by email.

Antony Carpen:

Re item S106 Community Facilities Funding to The Junction, please could I ask executive councillor to provide an update on where The Junction is, given the decision around two years ago at <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=22613&Otp=0>

The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development stated that the project was put on hold due to the pandemic and was not progressed to RIBA stage 1 level. The Council took the decision to terminate the tender proposals late 2021 and the Junction were kept informed of this process. The pandemic meant that the project had been delayed for over a year, and a number of factors came into the discussion and have informed the decision process.

The Council is now developing a Recovery Strategy to outline the vision for the City in the future, and that, alongside the emerging Cultural Infrastructure Strategy, will provide the strategic framework for future cultural and creative needs. When the Council developed the project specification for the RIBA stage 1 designs, it was timed to be able to take advantage of the Arts Council England (ACE) major capital funding programme, and although there was no guaranteed funding to deliver it per se, this funding stream is now no longer open as ACE resources have had to be diverted to meet pandemic related requirements by the Arts Council. At this stage it seems unlikely that future ACE project funds will have a similar scale of capital investment available to them.

The Council also needs to consider its own activity and support across services in future, in the light of the financial constraints it faces post pandemic, and with changes in Government support. The Council will continue to work with The Cambridge Junction as a key stakeholder to inform and shape a wider city centre recovery plan particularly in regard to the cultural and creative sector needs, locations and development opportunities.

The Council is still keen to support the potential for additional development of the Cambridge Junction and continues to liaise closely with Cambridge Junction Board and inform them of any opportunities that arise where we can support future redevelopment, and the investment of Local S106 Community funds proposed in the report today, is an example of that continued relationship to provide a wider range of public facilities with partners around the City.

Martin Lucas-Smith:

During the Planning Committee meeting on 14th June 2022, it was revealed that the council has signed a 5-year contract with the operators of the observation wheel on Parker's Piece.

The siting of a wheel for almost half a year for five years cannot in any sense be considered 'temporary'. There is a clear public policy question here, as to whether green spaces, so valued by many, should have long-term distracting metal structures added to what are formally designated as open space.

Does the committee agree that this is a matter which would normally be subject to public consultation? There is significant public debate about the appropriateness of such a structure for such a long period of time.

Has there been any public consultation or publicly-attendable meeting about the principle of siting a wheel on Parker's Piece?

Was this decision to sign a contract taken by any committee, and if not, why not?

My questions are not about the planning process, and I would ask members of the committee not to try to muddy the water in commenting on that. The questions are specifically about the public policy vs commercial objectives of the council irrespective of any formal planning application.

Cllr Copley:

What was the decision making process on the signing of a contract for the Ferris wheel on Parker's piece and who was consulted, and what specifically they were consulted on?

A planning application to allow an observation wheel to be sited on Parker's Piece for the next four summers was approved at a planning committee by councillors at a Cambridge City Council planning meeting on Tuesday, June 14. Cambridge Independent reported that more than 80 objections were

received from members of the public, and two Market ward councillors (Cllr Bick and Cllr Porrer) also speaking against the proposal.

However, during the planning meeting, it came to light that a contract had already been signed by the City Council for a five year period “Mr Sherwood said there is a contractual agreement between the council and the applicant for a five-year operation”.

This question is not about the planning process, but about the decision making that resulted in the contract having already been signed for a five year period, ahead of this planning application being approved.

The timing means that the decision had already been made (as before subject to planning permission approval), for the wheel to be sited on Parker’s piece without any consultation with members of the public. Furthermore, although ward councillors were consulted on the observation in 2020, the email I have been sent a copy of detailed the duration of the wheel being proposed as follows: “We have had an offer of a Observation Wheel visit in 2021 for a few months”.

I have seen no evidence that ward councillors, or residents of Cambridge were consulted on what is in practicing privatising part of Parker’s piece for much for the year for five consecutive years. The wheel is a large imposing structure, and due to its height and scale dissuades people from sitting near to it or in the shadow it casts, thus it has a direct impact on a much larger area of land than the specific footprint.

A freedom of information request has shown that the contract was then signed on 10th May 2021 with details specified in the attached documents (both these documents are in the public domain on whatdotheyknow website). The dates specified were: 8th May 2021 - 19th September 2021, and 2022 - 2025.

My questions are as follows:

a) Why did the council think it was justified to go ahead and sign this contract without any form of consultation with residents about whether they want their park to be partly-privatised?

(NB I am not asking about the planning application - I am asking about the contract signing which happened well before.)

b) Why does the council not think this decision deserved to be scrutinised (for example at an Environment and Community Scrutiny committee)?

c) Were Market Ward Councillors consulted ahead of the contract being signed, beyond the email I have seen which specified “for a few months”?

The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development replied:

The use of open spaces for increased income was agreed in the Budget Setting Report at Council February 2021 and the then Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces gave in principal approval to enter into a contract for the Wheel in March 2021 subject to the applicant obtaining the necessary approvals/permissions. Officers had delegated powers to issue a licence to use the Council's open spaces. Ward councillors had been consulted in December 2020 with no objections or comments received to the consultation. At all stages of the approval process the Council's Constitution had been followed.

Mr Lucas-Smith asked a supplementary concerning the consultation with ward councillors over the approval for the Wheel. Cllr Copley also queried if Ward Councillors had the opportunity to comment on a 5 year approval rather than what originally appeared as one year (16 week) use. Accepting that nothing can be undone, Cllr Copley asked the Executive Councillor to ensure that it is made much clearer to relevant stakeholders, including ward councillors, what the intentions and implications of such use of the Council's open spaces will be prior to such decisions being taken by an Executive Councillor or officers under delegated powers.

Jean Glasberg (asked by Wendy Blythe):

Re. Minutes of the meeting held on 24th March (Public Art Strategy) I am speaking again on behalf of both the Federation of Cambridge Residents Association (FeCRA) and Friends of the River Cam regarding the recommendation to allocate up to a further £150,000 to the 'To the River' project in addition to the £120,000 already spent. The focus on what would be a 'visitor attraction' seems misguided, and the concerns we raised at that meeting were about the environmental impact the proposed work would have on Sheeps Green, where the river and view are loved by many residents and visitors, and do not need 'enhancing'.

At the meeting it was stated that Public Art is particularly important for people from disadvantaged communities, yet this project is planned for what is already the most the most privileged part of the city.

It was also said that Public Art is inevitably controversial and divides public opinion, yet this does not seem to be the case here where the overwhelming majority are opposed to the proposals.

A survey in the Cambridge Independent found 84% against and only 16% in favour of the plan, and a petition asking that no more money should be spent on this project now has 538 signatures. It is clear from the comments that it is felt to be harmful to the river and nature reserve, and that people feel this section 106 money should be spent instead on something that would really be of benefit to Cambridge people, particularly in less prosperous areas.

Councillor Healy said that, 'This is for the public ultimately to decide' and Councillor Anna Smith assured us that 'The Council will absolutely honour the results of the consultation', so our question is:

In the interests of transparency and democracy will the results of that consultation and the views expressed be made public, will the deliberations of the Art Panel reviewing the project be open to residents, and will their recommendation be brought back to this committee so that there is scrutiny of a decision that involves spending so much public money?

The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development replied that:

The results of the consultation will be made public and a report on the project would come back to the scrutiny committee.

Wendy Blythe – referencing previous meeting minutes, is the vision for the Market Square civic or income generation, noting at a market liaison forum earlier in the week officers had mentioned work with a think tank.

The Director for Neighbourhoods and Communities replied that an internal paper had been produced by the council's cultural services team who lead on the council's arts and entertainment offer, to help inform thinking on proposals for the Market Square. The council was not working with the think tank referred to by the questioner.

Wendy Blythe asked a supplementary which the Chair requested be submitted by email and an answer would be provided.

22/33/EnC Single Equality Scheme Annual Report 2021/22

Matter for Decision

The current Single Equality Scheme (SES) covers the period from 2021 to 2024. The council produced the SES in order to set equality objectives and therefore to ensure transparency and assist in the performance of its Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010).

The Officer's report presented information to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty by providing an update on progress in delivering key actions set out in the SES for 2021/22. It also proposes some new actions.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Wellbeing

- i. Noted the progress in delivering equalities actions during 2021/22.
- ii. Approved the new actions proposed for delivery during 2022/23 (see point 3.5 in the Officer's report).

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Strategy and Partnerships replied to questions from Members:

Work on period poverty in 2021 had led to sanitary products being available at all council community centres.

Face to face customer interaction at the customer service centre had reduced since re-opening compared to pre-pandemic numbers, the officer was still awaiting the full detail from officer colleagues and would provide it to the committee after the meeting.

A number of information questions will require clarification with officer colleagues following the meeting on consultation on female rough sleepers, Open Spaces Forum, Ask Angela.

The GRT accommodation needs assessment work is still at a research stage, and the work is led by South Cambridgeshire District Council and there is no date as yet for this to be presented to Members.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/34/EnC Anti-Poverty Strategy Annual Report 2022/23

Matter for Decision

The Officer's report provided an update on delivery of key actions in the Council's third Anti-Poverty Strategy, which covers the period 2020-2023. During 2021/22 the Council has delivered a range of planned actions to help address a range of issues associated with poverty, including low pay, debt, food poverty, fuel poverty, digital inclusion, skills, employment, housing affordability, homelessness, and poor health outcomes.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Wellbeing

- i. Noted the progress in delivering actions to reduce poverty in Cambridge during 2021/22.
- ii. Agreed to extend the end date of the existing Anti-Poverty Strategy from March 2023 to March 2024.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

In response to questions, the Strategy and Partnerships Manager stated that:

Although there was no proposal to adopt the socio-economic duty, the strategy was developing an on-going range of approaches to tackle the current cost of living emergency. The Council's equalities impact assessment is being adapted to take into account the socio-economic impact of the council's policies and actions.

There will be on-going updates for Members on the impact of the cost of living crisis including the heating/housing issues which will be faced this winter.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/35/EnC Community Grants Review

Matter for Decision

The Community Grants priorities are reviewed periodically to ensure they remain relevant and align with the Councils Corporate Plan and wider objectives. Similarly, the Grant procedures are reviewed annually as part of a continuous improvement process, taking into account feedback from applicants and the experience of the Grants Team.

As reported to Environment and Scrutiny Committee on 27th January 2022, the focus on the next Grants Review will be to ensure it aligns with the Council's future priorities and outcomes as identified through the 'Our Cambridge' transformation programme.

To enable the 'Our Cambridge' work to develop and conversations with community groups to begin, whilst at the same time allowing for continuous improvements as usual, a two-phase Grants Review is proposed.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Wellbeing

- i. Approved the changes to the Community Grants programme proposed in Phase 1 of the Community Grants Review, namely:

- a. The introduction of a 'light touch' small grants application process for awards of £2,000 and under as set out at point 4 of the Officer's report.
- ii. Noted the broader review work required in Phase 2 which will be developed alongside the 'Our Cambridge' transformation programme.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/36/EnC Biodiversity Strategy

Matter for Decision

In July 2021 the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Sustainable Food and Community Wellbeing approved use of a draft Biodiversity Strategy for public consultation.

The Biodiversity Strategy consultation, research and evaluations are now complete, and this report sets out the summary of the findings in relation to the draft Biodiversity Strategy.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development

- i. Noted the stated ambitions and approve the adoption of the Biodiversity Strategy (2022 – 2030) and accompanying Action Plan.

- ii. Allocated responsibility for delivery and monitoring of the Action Plan to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/37/EnC S106 Community Facilities Funding to the Junction

Matter for Decision

The Officer's report proposed to provide a grant to The Junction towards its £120,000 project (which is ready to implemented) to improve its community facilities for use by local groups and residents beyond its function as an arts and music venue. This would be funded primarily from specific S106 developer contributions (aimed at mitigating the impact of development) which already stipulate improvements to community facilities at The Junction as their purpose. The funding will provide a range of adaptations to the ground and first floors within the J2 building at the Junction to provide enhanced meeting areas, storage, and furniture suitable for a range of community use activities and public use within The Junction.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development

Allocate £113,185 of S106 community facilities funding (as detailed in financial implications in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3, subject to business case approval and a community use agreement), as a grant to The Junction towards its improvement project to provide enhanced and furnished meeting areas and associated storage space at its J2 building.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/38/EnC Review Update for Future Community Development Services and Community Centres Management

Matter for Decision

Following decisions made by the Executive Councillor for Communities in October 2021 and March 2022, this report sets out an updated direction of travel for the council's community development service, services for children and young people, and community centres. The reviews in each area are being undertaken as part of the council's Our Cambridge transformation programme.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development

- i. Noted the findings emerging from Community Services review work.
- ii. Approved the future direction of travel and approach for community development services including priority work with children, young people, and families, and for community centres management.
- iii. Agreed to proceed with the consultation with staff on proposals for a staffing restructure for community development, ChYPPS and community facilities, in accordance with the council's organisational change policy and, in so doing, seek to maximise opportunities for affected staff and minimise redundancies.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

CHAIR