

## Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 10 September 2014

### **Item 7 - Questions from members of the public**

One question had been submitted by a member of the public. As Councillor Fish has submitted his apologies for the meeting, the question was answered by the Leader of the Council.

#### **1. From Mr Martin Healy to Councillor Fish**

*Recognising the fact that we are where we are with disgracefully reducing levels of Government funding to local Government, what creative ways is the cabinet portfolio holder and his officers looking at to ensure that on our council owned sports grounds, grass is cut and council owned pitches rented to sports clubs are always maintained to an appropriate level to ensure we preserve the public health benefits of active participation in sport and outdoor healthy recreation in general?*

As Councillor Fish had submitted his apologies for the meeting, the question was answered by the Leader of the Council.

#### **Councillor Kent:**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Mr Mayor, the Council remains keen to ensure that people have access to a wide range of sport and other recreation activities. We have introduced a selection of outdoor gym equipment in some of our parks and open spaces. We have continued to work with sports clubs to provide access to good quality open air sports facilities and are currently in the process of installing two further full size football pitches and a mini soccer facility at Orsett Heath.

Of course the financial restrictions placed upon local authorities mean that we have to continually look to new and different ways to deliver our services. A simple example for the kind of services that Martin asked is to look at football pitches so whilst we will continue to cut and prepare pitches, they will not be prepared to the same standard that people are now used to. They will, of course be safe, the lines will be painted, the grass will be cut, but perhaps it won't be as short or as manicured as people have grown used to.

For other sports, we will work with clubs to help them move to self-management, particularly for those sports that need the most intensive maintenance, I'm thinking of things such as bowls and cricket. Very often clubs have the ability to access funding opportunities that are simply not available to Councils, and in these instances we want to be working with clubs to provide the support they need to be successful in bids for funding.

Mr Mayor, the coming budget round is undoubtedly the most difficult that the Council has ever faced, so we will continue to work with officers to ensure that our open spaces are maintained to the highest possible standards given the

very limited funding that we have available to us and in perusing this agenda, I'm very aware that there is a clear link between the general health of public and their ability to access good quality outdoor recreation facilities, and this understanding will help us to shape our future maintenance arrangements.

**Mayor:**

Thank you Councillor Kent. Mr Healy, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

**Mr Healy:**

I do Mr Mayor. Yes, I think it's the public health angle really Mr Mayor. I was, obviously I didn't attend the Cleaning & Greening Overview & Scrutiny on July 31<sup>st</sup>. I don't give succour to the worlds gone to hell on a handcart but actually when you look at some of the budget sheets and particularly the proposals put to that particular Overview & Scrutiny Committee seems to suggest that maintenance to sports grounds will stop all together.

I mean I have a very, you know a friend of mine, it's not in this borough, but in a neighbouring borough where an appropriately, supposedly safe ground would, you know he put his foot down a divot and broke his leg. Now I know injuries happen in sport, but I would just ask that members, all members would actually start to lobby and campaign for our sports clubs. Thank you Mr Mayor.

**Mayor:**

Is there a question?

**Mr Healy:**

The question was, notwithstanding the Central Governments cutting in finance, that sport and outdoor recreation activities and maintenance will be seen as a public health issue and would be loved and I would request that the Leader and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder would keep that in mind when planning the budget in the forthcoming year.

**Councillor Kent:**

Of course, Mr Mayor, I'm happy to give that assurance. Of course we keep public health very squarely in mind when it comes to looking at the way we deal with outdoor sports.

It's important, I think, to remember that Overview & Scrutiny Committees were playing the role of part of the consultation process, so the proposals that were seen were not this finished article, they were there for comment and of course we listen very carefully to the comments that are made not only by members sitting on Overview & Scrutiny Committees but the kind of feedback we get from sports clubs and from individuals and to that end I have to say that

Martin's contributions this evening is very useful and it will be weighed in the mix when we come to make the final decisions.

I do take the safety aspect of this really seriously. You will always get divots on football pitches no matter where they are, people will always fall down them you will always be hurt. We have to do everything we can to minimise that, but especially when it comes to things like cricket, you get a cricket square that is dangerous and somebody will be very, very badly hurt.

So of course we understand that safety is an absolute issue but people do have accidents, do get injuries even on the safest pitches. My own son at the moment is in plaster, having broken his leg on a perfectly good football pitch, but that because he's overstretching and trying to foul somebody in the last five minutes. Also I have to say Mr Mayor that in 4 years, I don't think Martin managed to ask me a question but it's good to see it's only taken him 3 months this time round.

**Mayor:**

Thank you Councillor Kent. Thank you Mr Healy.