

Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 4 December 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Finn, in the Chair.

Councillor Blight, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allison, Dingle, Goslin, Hendy, P.Nicholson, Poyser and Reilly.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Stevens.

Also in attendance: Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change), Mike Artherton (Group Manager for Parking Marine Garage), Kathryn Deeney (Head of Environmental Planning), Ross Jago (Head of Governance Performance and Risk), Amanda Pannell (Petition Author) and, Philip Robinson (Service Director for Street Services).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 3.33 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

17. **Declarations of Interest**

Name	Item	Reason	Interest
Councillor Ian Poyser	6	Member of the Chartered Institute of Waste Management	Private

18. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held 16 October 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

19. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

20. **Central Park Petition - Response Report**

Councillor Finn introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- a) The Ponds Project was the most recent project to come forward as part of the Central Park Improvement Plan;

- b) The Project was the third phase of the original Central Park Project;
- c) The business case for the project was approved on 21 January 2022 and the aim was to transform water from a problem, to a resource;
- d) The project involved re-landscaping the area of the park to provide a nature-based solution to flooding using sustainable drainage systems and to manage surface water and provide space for wildlife and the public;
- e) The petition submitted, which ran from 16 July 2024 to 31 August 2024, raised four key issues.

Amanda Pannell (petition author) added:

- f) The petition came about due to Plymouth City Council's (PCC) failure to communicate effectively and consider the needs of their residents;
- g) Over 3000 park users and residents signed the 'Fix Our Park' petition, and this would have been more but some members of the public were not comfortable with sharing their personal details;
- h) Regardless of Council Officers opinions and justifications for the way they had communicated, 3000 people felt misinformed and ignored;
- i) The public disputed some claims within the report, including that the Ponds Project had featured a significant level of public engagement before plans were finalised, and that a film was created to ensure the public could visualise the final scheme;
- j) Only two of the 3000 members of the public who signed the petition stated they had input on the plans, and that was due to their membership to the now defunct 'Friends of Central Park' group;
- k) The film that was created to ensure the public could see what the site would look like after the work was finished was not true to what the park now looked like;
- l) There was genuine anger from members of the public about the lack of information, and some blamed themselves for not taking the time to investigate and challenge the plans before they took place;
- m) From November 2022 to December 2023, park users were blocked from using large areas of the park whilst witnessing felled trees, enduring the noise from generators and heavy machinery and experiencing detours through muddy, unlit diversions;
- n) Incorrect information was given regarding when paths would open up again;

- o) From January 2024 no work was carried out for eight months, which created stagnant water, fly tipping, unwelcoming signs and overgrown paths;
- p) Members of the public lodged complaints online, over the phone and spoke to both local Councillors and MPs;
- q) The public felt the petition was the only way to gain the Council's attention and create accountability for the work done in the park;
- r) The petition authors had appreciated meeting with Council officers within the park;
- s) Resurfacing of paths at Barn Park had started without public warning which created confusion to regular users who could not utilise their normal route to work or school;
- t) Members of the public would like to see recommendations from the Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Panel to improve PCC communication on the Pond Project.

Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) added:

- u) The Central Park Improvement Project had been running since 2017 and was an example of cross party collaborative working, delivering on a key proposal in the Joint Local Plan;
- v) The aim of the project was to re-landscape an area of Central Park to provide a nature-based solution to flooding by using sustainable urban drainage systems;
- w) It was fully accepted that at the time of the petition, the project was not in a good state for various reasons, including the contractors withdrawing from the site due to wet weather over the winter and contractual issues meaning they did not return;
- x) Since the petition had been submitted, the situation in park had significantly improved and although the project was not finished, the look and feel of the park was better;
- y) Fenced off areas had been removed as much as was possible whilst the works continued;
- z) The coming months would include the completion of pitch works, reinstatement the fields, further tree planting and landscaping works;
- aa) PCC accepted and apologised for delays in the scheme, and could understand why the petition was launched;

bb) Public safety was at the forefront of PCC's responsibilities, however they could not agree that an independent review would be advantageous or a good use of public money as the progress of the project had improved significantly since the petition was started.

In response to questions, it was explained:

cc) The wider benefits of the project had been lost in the coverage of the scheme due to the understandable concerns raised;

dd) The realities of climate change had increased extreme rainfall and storm events, and the project was an opportunity to improve flooding resilience in that part of Plymouth;

ee) This scheme, and other similar schemes, would have a positive impact on the water quality in Plymouth Sound and there were bio-diversity benefits that came with creating a wetland habitat;

ff) Southwest Water had recognised there was an issue with drainage at Home Park Park and Ride whereby water drained downhill and ended in the park;

gg) Following the Water Quality Select Committee a Memorandum of Understanding with Southwest Water had been created to enhance future planning for the Home Park area. This meant that Central Park was flagged as a key area to ensure additional water didn't flow there;

hh) One of the main issues the public had raised was a lack of communication from the Council, and it was suggested that monthly updates on the project would be a valuable solution;

ii) An online FAQ page had been set up and would be better publicised;

jj) Summer 2025 was the proposed end date to the project;

kk) There were measures in place to address the communication issues surrounding the project;

ll) The key aspects to finish the project included land drainage on the pitch field, including the field being topped and seeded, and the main risk to this was the weather.

The Panel agreed to the following:

1. To recommend developing a comprehensive communication plan to enhance communication for the park works project. This plan should include regular (at least monthly) updates via multiple channels, clear signage in affected areas, and an outline of the project plan so residents can understand the scheduled works and timelines;

2. The project will be added to the Panel's work programme for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

21. **Household Waste and Recycling**

Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) The year to date recycling rate was 37.5% which was lower than the national average;
- b) The recycling rate at the two recycling centres in Plymouth averaged at 63%;
- c) The Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) had a target for most of Plymouth's waste to be recycled by 2030;
- d) Although recycling was important, PCC aimed to create awareness of reducing and reusing. This had resulted in several collaborations with local organisations including Little Camden Market, Cafco and the Devon and Cornwall Furniture Reuse Project;
- e) PCC had been running a recycling engagement campaign over the past 12 months;
- f) Work had been done around Green Community Hubs, including a partnership project with Generous Earth for community composting;
- g) A Councillor had been appointed as the Zero Waste Champion;
- h) An Executive Decision for £2 million had been approved to procure vehicles and bins ready to introduce food waste collection in Plymouth. This was mainly grant funded;
- i) There would be a push on recycling engagement over the 2024/25 festive period;
- j) The Street Services team had been restructured, and Recycling Officers would be introduced to work on provoking behavioural change and public engagement with regards to recycling;
- k) Work had been undertaken to understand the waste compositional analysis of residual waste containers.

In response to questions, it was explained:

- l) The benchmark for national recycling rates included food waste, which Plymouth did not yet have;
- m) MVV Energie had a Community Engagement team working to actively encourage members of the public to recycle;

- n) The initial capital investment for food waste collections was funded primarily by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to procure vehicles and caddies;
- o) Only 0.12% of waste collections were reported as missing;
- p) Although health and safety was not included in the report, a briefing note could be given to Members with this information;
- q) The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme would change the way packaging was developed, making it easier to recycle;
- r) Food waste would be processed through anaerobic digestion which would create compost material and renewable energy.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

22. **City Centre Car Parks**

Philip Robinson (Service Director for Street Services) introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) There were inherent challenges with car parking capacity in the city centre.

Mike Artherton (Group Manager for Parking Marine Garage) added:

- b) The report was a snapshot of the parking in the city centre and outlined how the parking was used, what the current challenges were and what next steps would be to mitigate these challenges;

In response to questions, it was explained:

- c) Interdepartmental discussions were taking place to mitigate parking issues related to housing in the city centre;
- d) Electric vehicle charging ports were being introduced throughout car parks in Plymouth in a way that considered the weight of electric vehicles in multi-storey car parks;
- e) Work had been carried out which gave PCC a baseline on current parking, how it was used and how it would change over the years;
- f) There would always be challenges both with car parking and real estate in the city centre.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

23. **Homelessness Position 2024, including Families, Statutory Homeless Single People and those Rough Sleeping**

The Panel agreed to note the update and to receive a full briefing in February 2025.

24. **Work Programme**

During discussion the following requests were made:

- a) Bus Shelter Contract.

The Panel agreed to note its Work Programme.

25. **Tracking Decisions**

The Panel agreed to note its Tracking Decisions.

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