

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2020

PRESENT: Councillors Julian Sharpe, Chris Targowski (Chair), Leo Walters (Vice-Chairman) and Simon Werner and Geoff Hill

Also in attendance: Councillors Jon Davey, Helen Taylor, Phil Haseler, Andrew Johnson and Samantha Rayner

Officers: Mark Beeley, Russell O'Keefe and Duncan Sharkey

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jones, Councillor Hill attended as a substitute.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CALL IN - MAIDENHEAD UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB - REQUEST FOR RELOCATION

The Chairman informed members that the Panel would first hear from the councillors who had called in the decision, followed by the CEO of Maidenhead United, Jon Adams, who would explain the club's plans. The issue would then be debated before the Panel came to an agreement on what option to take.

The four options available to the Panel were;

- To take no further action.
- To refer the issue back to Cabinet for reconsideration.
- To refer the issue to full Council.
- To create a sub-group of the Panel which would report back within 14 days.

Councillor Hill addressed the Panel and explained why the decision was taken to proceed with a call in. He said that the original report went to Cabinet and was therefore not properly scrutinised. The nuisance and distribution that the move to Braywick Park was not fully considered in the report, while the impact the move would have on the existing athletics club and rugby club needed to be carefully considered. The land at Braywick was going to be given to Maidenhead United Football Club (MUFC) despite the fact the club counted as a private entity.

There was also concern that in future, the club could sell the land for a housing development which would lose the original purpose of Braywick Park, keeping it as a green space for the use of residents. Parking was another concern, particularly on match days where the number of parking bays may not be sufficient for demand, and the need to marshal the car park and traffic flow effectively. There was no public consultation about the plans, despite the approval from Cabinet. Councillor Hill concluded by suggesting the most appropriate course of action would be to refer the matter to full Council.

The CEO of MUFC informed the Panel of the context to the club's plans. MUFC were currently playing in the National League, which was the fifth tier of English football, and wanted to ensure that facilities were up to standard should the club be promoted to the Football League. The plans for the new stadium were to increase capacity from the current 4,000 to 5,000 while

increasing the number of seats from around 500 at York Road to 2,000 at Braywick Park. Other challenges the club was facing at York Road was the level of facilities and limited access. It was important to note that York Road was not owned by MUFC, it was owned by the Trust for the benefit of Maidenhead, therefore all money would be reinvested back into community.

Maidenhead United had done a significant amount for the local community, with over 10,500 children receiving coaching in sports and other activities. An autism football programme had been successful in Dedworth while there was a total of 44 different MUFC junior teams.

MUFC had started over nine months ago at a new location and wanted to have direct engagement with stakeholders at Braywick. This included the athletics club, the rugby club and SportsAble. There were proposals for a 5-a-side football pitch to be created which would be suitable for wheelchair sports, while there was no net loss to the rugby pitches. Some training space would be repositioned on the site but would not be lost. Jon Adams concluded by reiterating to the Panel that the land would be held in a Trust for the benefit of the town and would come back to the local authority if the football club decided to move on in future.

Kathy Alison, from Maidenhead Athletics Club, gave the Panel some context and what the proposals might mean for them. The athletics club had been based at Braywick since the 1960s and currently had around 600 members, with a waiting list of around 200. The track in its present form has not upgraded at all, lacked throwing facilities and was often not safe for those with disabilities to use. Working with MUFC, there was an opportunity to upgrade the track and this would be vital for the club being able to improve and grow. Kathy Alison told Members that they were grateful that the football club had made them aware of the plans at an early stage.

Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council, said that it was right thing to do, to allow both clubs to grow for the benefit of the town. Any concerns about the proposal would be met through the planning process, and any initial concerns could have been addressed at Cabinet.

Councillor Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Council, and Lead Member for Resident and Leisure Services, HR, IT, Legal, Performance Management and Windsor, said that it was important to encourage sport in the borough. For the future of the athletics club the plan was important and she was confident that measures would be taken to protect the land.

Councillor Werner said that the council should have ensured it had the support of all users at Braywick before it accepted the report. He explained that land always has a value and should not be given away, while planning do not have the power to make sure the community is involved and consulted fairly. Concern was also raised for bats in the area and the effective floodlights at the new stadium would have on them.

Russell O'Keefe, Executive Director (Place), said the recommendation in the report was to delegate authority to himself subject to bringing back a section 123 report to Cabinet which is a formal external valuation. In terms of the size of the site, MUFC would take up around 3.7 hectares which would leave over 13 hectares of parkland for residents to use. There was a significant amount of parking at Braywick and there were no major concerns about this.

The Chairman said that the S123 report was designed to stop the council from giving away land and the report would be going to Cabinet in due course. He suggested to the Panel that the report could be brought to O&S before it goes to Cabinet.

Councillor Hill said that the land needed to be protected, particularly looking ahead into the future when it may be used for different purposes. Braywick also needed to be protected to ensure that it remained a public park for the benefit and use of residents. He raised concerns about the parking at the site and believed that at peak times there would not be enough space.

Councillor Sharpe said that he thought having a 'sports hub' at Braywick Park would be a good idea and that sport was important for everyone in the borough.

Councillor Taylor said that it was going to change the look of the park and questioned whether it was good practise to move ahead with the proposals without a proper public consultation.

Councillor Werner wanted to see some control outside of planning and that the proposals would have the backing of all at Braywick Park.

Councillor Sharpe made the point that having all the sports club running on the same day may cause issues, particularly in conjunction with a MUFC matchday.

The Leader of the Council agreed with this and said that clubs may have to coordinate to minimise disruption and congestion.

The Chairman concluded the Part I section of the meeting by proposing that no further action be taken, but the next report that was due to go to Cabinet will be part of the Work Programme for the Panel.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel:

- i) Agreed to take no further action on the call in on MUFC – Request for Relocation.**
- ii) Requested that the next Cabinet report on MUFC's request for relocation comes to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel to be scrutinised.**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMIOUSLY; That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.05 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....