

22th June 2015

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Sports and Parks - Councillor A Khan

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of Place

Ward(s) affected:

Earlsdon

Title: Petition Report – “Withdrawal of Council Services from Spencer Park – Request that the Council keep the Pavilion open for at least part of each week in the 2015 season and to re-open the tennis courts and the flat green.”

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report relates to an e-petition sponsored by Councillor Ken Taylor, an Earlsdon Ward Councillor, signed by 559 individuals who live in the vicinity of Spencer Park.

The petition reads:

“At a time when the number of people using Spencer Park is increasing, the City Council is planning to close its unique historic Pavilion, which celebrates its centenary this August. If unused, it will be a prime target for vandalism. The flat bowling green will also be closed and the tennis courts will not be open to the general public.”

Spencer Park is a relatively small but popular park situated in Earlsdon Ward in the Southern part of the City and covers an area of approximately 3.98 acres. The park was opened in 1883 and its formal layout includes a number of recreational opportunities and features including tennis and bowling facilities, a pavilion, seating, informal grassed areas, shrub planting and seasonal bedding. The park has a well-established and very active Friends Group.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Sports and Parks is recommended to:

1. Request that officers continue to engage with the Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground regarding the future management and maintenance of the park.
2. Note the substantial reduction to the parks operational budget and the ensuing implications on future service delivery and standards.

3. Note that adequate tennis and bowling provision is afforded by The War Memorial Park within 1 mile of Spencer Park.
4. Agree that the Council continue to maintain the crown bowling green only.
5. Agree that the tennis courts continue to be used by Schools / clubs, and that options are explored with local groups for wider public access.
6. That a further update report is presented to the Cabinet Member in six months on the progress made with the Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground on the local management of the park and its facilities.

List of Appendices included:

N/A

Other useful background papers:

Report to Council on savings

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel, or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Spencer Park is located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the South-West of Coventry City Centre. It is one of the Neighbourhood Parks for the South of the City and is approximately 3.98 acres in size. It is bordered by hedging on Spencer Avenue, Dalton Rd and Broadway and by gardens on the fourth side. The Park's facilities are complemented by the adjacent Spencer Recreation Ground and whilst often over-shadowed by its proximity to the War Memorial Park it offers a valued green space experience for local people.
- 1.2 The land that was to become Spencer Park was gifted to the City by Mr David Spencer and the Park itself opened in 1883. By 1911 the demand for public tennis facilities had reached such a level that it was decided to lay out twenty tennis courts. Two bowling greens were also constructed and in 1915 the existing pavilion was constructed. At a later point in the Park's history, Spencer Ave was joined to Spencer Rd splitting the Park into two sections, the larger open area becoming known as Spencer Recreation Ground.
- 1.3 The park is under the control of the Parks Service within the Place Directorate. Present facilities include a pavilion (as mentioned above). The building layout is limited and includes for two changing rooms, reception area, toilet facilities and a rear staff area. There are two bowling green facilities consisting of one crown green and one flat green, four enclosed tennis courts as well as ornamental lawn areas and horticultural features which include trees, rose gardens, hedging and seasonal bedding.
- 1.4 This is a popular and well-used park particularly with dog walkers. It also has a very active Friend's organisation attached to it known as the Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground who were established in 2012. This constituted group aims to "facilitate and take a lead in the development of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground and their facilities, in order to widen participation and multiple use across the age ranges of all residents". The group holds regular gardening/environmental improvement activities and community events within the park. These include creation of the Bug Hotel, The Big Lunch, Earlsdon Festival, Tennis Ladder, Bird Feeder production and Children's activities. They work with Council officers on these activities.
- 1.5 In December 2014 and following a level of local consultation the Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground applied for and were granted £42,000 of funding through WREN to put a new play area in at Spencer Park. It was originally intended to locate the proposed play facility on a disused hardstanding area previously occupied by tennis courts. However this location has been deemed prohibitive due to the presence of contaminants within the base material and the resultant high installation costs. Council Officers proposed to re-locate the play area onto one of the grassed areas within the park which has been accepted by the group. The cost of installing the equipment has been estimated at £35,600 and will be met by the Greenspace Service. The service is presently exploring options for sealing the disused hard surface and repairing the supporting walls. Costs are likely to be in the region of £35,000.
- 1.6 There are a number of other groups which have an interest in Spencer Park. North Earlsdon Neighbourhood Association (NENA) was established in 2009 and their constituted aim is 'To protect and enhance our environment and promote a strong sense of community across our neighbourhood.' Their membership now stands at over 400 households out of a potential 600 homes. This is over two thirds of the residents in the North Earlsdon area. Interestingly in May 2015 NENA expressed concern regarding the installation of the proposed play area, particularly the lack of consultation and the potential impact the play facility will have on dog walkers who use the park. South Earlsdon Neighbourhood

Association was formed shortly after NENA and aims 'To build community spirit in the area; tackle and raise awareness of issues; organise events for the benefit of people living in the area and work with other residents associations on issues of mutual concern.' Other Interested Parties include: Albany Road, Newcombe Road and Westminster Road Residents Associations, Bowling and tennis club participants, King Henry VIII School and other local school pupils, staff and volunteers, and parents' groups, Boston Lodge users and users of the Gilbert Richards Centre

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Continuing to maintain both bowling facilities as operational greens and staff the pavilion and tennis courts has been considered, but this option has been rejected for the following reasons.
 - 2.1.1 The Council's Revenue budget for 2015/16 and which incorporates budgetary savings decisions for 2015/16 and future years: the Parks Service operational budget was reduced by £1m from 2015/16.
 - 2.1.2 As part of its financial strategy the service is reviewing the standards and frequency of maintenance undertaken in the parks and open spaces including grass cutting, litter collection, the weeding and pruning of horticultural features, etc. In addition the review will consider the levels of repair, maintenance, and improvement of infrastructural features such as fencing, paths, buildings, seats, and bins, and a rationalisation of some high maintenance facilities such as bowling greens.
 - 2.1.3 The Bowling Greens are maintained by a highly skilled fine turf team who also undertake golf course maintenance. Until November last year this team consisted of 3 full time staff who were supported by a temporary contract apprentices. During November one team member was granted early retirement / voluntary redundancy as part of the Council's programme and the post deleted. This has reduced the Services ability to maintain all the Bowling facilities. In addition the apprenticeship is due to finish in July this year.
 - 2.1.4 Until this year, summer time (April to September) on site supervision of Spencer Park facilities was undertaken by seasonal staff. That supervision includes opening and manning the pavilion and supervising the public use of the bowling and tennis facilities. The income received falls considerably short of the costs for staffing and maintaining these facilities. In view of this and as part of the Service's Financial strategy on-site supervision has been removed from April 2015.
- 2.2 The War Memorial Park is located less than a mile from Spencer Park and provides both bowls and tennis facilities. As part of its financial strategy the Service is keen to ensure that the community continues to enjoy access to these facilities at this site.
- 2.3 As mentioned above there are two bowling green facilities provided within Spencer Park (1 flat green and 1 crown green) and both were in use during the 2014 season. The flat green has now been withdrawn from use and the 2 clubs who had previously played on this green have now transferred to the flat green bowling facilities located at The War Memorial Park. The crown green continues to be maintained by the Service and used by Albany Bowls club. Although this facility is now not available for public use the club does offer free coaching sessions to the public. The club currently does not have access to the pavilion, other than the use of the toilets. Early conversations with the bowling community are exploring the option of greater self-service access to the pavilion for changing rooms, functions and events by the bowling club.

- 2.4 The tennis courts continue to be used by King Henry VIII School via a booking agreement and the Spencer Park Friends Group who run a tennis coaching course. These do not require on-site supervision.
- 2.5 Officers are in regular contact with The Friends group and have worked together last year and continue to do so this year. As there are no staff at the park this year, officers have worked with the group to allow access to the pavilion so that they can provide a public facility for events and have been selling ice creams from the facility generating income for the service.
- 2.6 Regular maintenance of the park horticultural features continues and there have been no reductions in the maintenance standards applied. Officers have worked closely with the Friends Group who also carry out some maintenance work to the shrubbed areas.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

Consultation on the council's budget was undertaken between November 2014 and February 2015; this has led to some early dialogue between the Friends and the City Council. Elected Members were made aware of the proposal effecting Spencer Park under the larger Savings plan which was also discussed at a public consultation meeting and at Ward Forums. The consultation process is still on going and Council Officers will be meeting representatives of the Spencer Park Friends Group to discuss the proposal in more detail and seek their views.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 To be agreed subject to approval of a recommendation within this report

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

Annual running costs for the maintenance of bowling green and tennis facilities are in the region of £30,000 which is only partly offset by income received of approx. £3,500, a net cost to the city council of £26,500 p.a. It is also noted that the tennis courts will require extensive repair and resurfacing within the next five years which will place significant pressure on the Parks budget.

In the light of the Parks Service savings target (c£1m) it is not considered to be feasible to continue to commit these sums on an on-going basis.

5.2 Legal implications

No legal implications associated with this matter.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

N/A

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Spencer Park is regularly inspected by Parks Officers to ensure that toilets are clean for bowls club and Friends of the Park use and that the building is in good condition. Regular Health and Safety checks of the building continue to be undertaken and repairs made when necessary.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

It is the Council's responsibility to ensure facilities are maintained in a safe condition.

6.4 Equalities / EIA Implications for (or impact on) the environment

The Service will continue to provide a level of provision which will ensure that all residents within the City have access to recreational facilities.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

Continued provision of safe, attractive and stimulating green environments.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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Appendices

None