

Minutes

**Petition Hearing - Cabinet Member for Finance,
Property and Business Services
Wednesday, 20 March 2019
Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge**



	<p>Members Present: Councillors Jonathan Bianco (Chairman)</p> <p>Officers Present: Paul Richards, Head of Green Spaces, Sport and Culture Stuart Hunt</p>
1.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
2.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE IN PUBLIC.</p> <p>It was confirmed that the business of the meeting would take place in public.</p>
3.	<p>TO CONSIDER THE REPORT OF THE OFFICERS ON THE FOLLOWING PETITIONS RECEIVED.</p>
4.	<p>STOCKLEY COUNTRY PARK - PETITION TO THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The Cabinet Member considered a petition from residents requesting improvements to Stockley Country Park and Kingston Playing Fields. The petitioners spoke of their concerns and suggestions including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Concerns regarding Stockley Country Park had originally been raised by petitioners in 1999 and a meeting had taken place at the time but the issues had not been resolved;</i>• <i>Residents had attempted to speak to Stockley Golf Club but had been met with abuse on a number of occasions;</i>• <i>The park gates were rarely closed and had been left open over the Christmas period;</i>• <i>It was difficult to get the grass cut - in 2018 residents had to wait until 30 April for this to be done;</i>• <i>In 2018 there had been a grass fire and the fire brigade had struggled to gain access as the gates were locked;</i>• <i>Since the Green Spaces Team had become involved, there had been a number of structural improvements but Stockley Golf Club were not listening to residents' concerns - attempts had been made to speak directly to representatives of the Golf Club in 2017 but there had been no direct response from them; they had only ever corresponded with Cllr Edwards;</i>• <i>Petitioners commented that Council officers needed to inspect Stockley Park</i>

themselves to gain a proper understanding of what was happening there;

- *Petitioners had contacted the Ombudsman who had been unable to help due to the legal action being taken at the time;*
- *A lot of money had been spent on Ruislip Lido but petitioners felt the Council needed to invest more in the south of the Borough.*

Councillor Simon Arnold attended the meeting and spoke as Ward Councillor in support of the petition. Councillor Arnold proffered apologies from Councillors Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana and Alan Deville who were unable to attend the hearing. He confirmed that all the Yiewsley Councillors had been aware of the problems in the area for some time. Councillor Arnold noted that the park gates were left either locked or unlocked for weeks on end when they should be locked and unlocked on a daily basis. All the Councillors supported the petition and requested action to address the problems in the area.

Paul Richards, Head of Green Spaces, informed the petitioners that the Green Spaces team was trying very hard to resolve the issues at Stockley Country Park. Legal action had been taken against the operator in the past which was communicated in the local press. It was confirmed that the operator was now attempting to put things right and there were signs of improvement. Council officers were committed to working closely with the operator to resolve the issues and there had been some positive dialogue with Avril Nevin (Director of Stockley Park Golf Club) to date. New infrastructure was already in place at the Park including solutions to address the problem of motorbikes gaining access. It was acknowledged that the football pitches at Chestnut Avenue were very bumpy and not fit for purpose - solutions to improve this situation were being explored in collaboration with the planning department.

With regards to the Park gates, it was confirmed that there had been some difficulties with travellers in 2018. It was reported that Avril Nevin and her colleagues at Stockley Park Golf Club had been subjected to antisocial behaviour and abuse when attempting to lock the gates and the police had been called. A working party with the police had been set up in an attempt to resolve these issues. It was acknowledged that there were still some problems with motorbikes accessing the Golf course but there had been some progress in this regard. One challenge was that, while the gates were helpful in keeping motorbikes out, they also restricted access to disabled people and those with pushchairs.

It was confirmed that the operator was contracted to run the Country Park and the Golf course and the Council worked with them to ensure they abided by the terms of the contract. Petitioners were assured that the two parties would work together to drive things forward and things would improve. A forum was to be set up; this would be an opportunity for dialogue and would enable all parties to raise their concerns and issues. The forum would be a platform for feelings to be aired and decisions made.

The petitioners responded to Paul Richards' comments stating that:

- *Similar promises had been heard before but little had changed;*
- *It was difficult to contact Council officers and get them to respond to enquiries;*
- *It was vital that Ward Councillors were involved in local issues and had a*

presence at the planned forum to represent local residents;

- *In the past, when it was managed by the Council, there had been no issues at the Park. Since Stockley Park Golf Club had assumed responsibility, the situation had deteriorated rapidly. There were problems with drugs, antisocial behaviour, rubbish everywhere, bins which were not emptied, broken bottles, abandoned motorbikes etc. The area needed be cleaned up regularly;*
- *The footpaths in the Park were dangerous in places;*
- *A Ward Councillor had been invited to walk around the Park and had been appalled by its condition;*
- *There were no public waste bins in the Park;*
- *Trees were blocking the paths, the lake was empty of water and the bridle paths were unusable.*

Councillor Bianco, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services, listened to the concerns of petitioners and the Ward Councillor and responded to the points raised. He confirmed that the Council had a contractual relationship with the operator - the Council owned the land and let it to Stockley Park Golf Club. As part of their rent, the operator had a duty to look after the Park. It was apparent that this was not happening at present therefore the Council was looking at ways of ensuring the situation improved in the future. The Council had taken the operator to Court in the past but hoped to be able to make progress without the need for this. Residents were advised to raise their concerns with the Council directly (via the Contact Centre); Council officers would then speak to the operator. Residents were informed that Ward Councillors were also available to assist them and could be contacted directly.

Councillor Bianco commented that the forum idea was a good one but there could be no quick fix. It was acknowledged that the situation was unique as the Council did not manage the site directly. It was confirmed that the lease still had a number of years to run. The best option at this juncture was to work with the operator and put pressure on them as necessary. If this approach failed, the Council would be forced to take the operator to Court again. It was confirmed that the Council could in theory take the lease back but had to be prudent given that it was in receipt of an income from Stockley.

Stuart Hunt, Green Spaces Manager, commented that, with regards to rubbish in the Park, the Council was responsible for emptying the dog waste bins, while Stockley was responsible for clearing all the other litter. No litter bins were provided in Country Parks. It was suggested that visitors to the Park should be encouraged to take their litter away with them; the provision of bins would not necessarily solve the problem. The petitioners were informed that Stockley Park Golf Club had agreed to participate in the planned forum and Council officers were confident that this was a positive development. It was suggested that it would be a good idea to set up a residents' association or 'Friends of Stockley Park' community group. An individual could then be elected to represent residents thereby ensuring that their views were heard. It was confirmed that Ward Councillors could assist with this process. The forum would consist of a representative from the Council and from Stockley Park Golf Course, together with a Ward Councillor. Petitioners would also be represented if they opted to form a coherent group. Councillor Bianco confirmed that he would attend the first meeting of the forum. Stuart Hunt and Paul Richards agreed to progress the forum idea and keep petitioners and Ward Councillors apprised of developments.

With regards to the issue of the Park gates, Stuart Hunt advised residents to keep a log of incidences of the gates being left locked / unlocked at inappropriate times; this information could then be fed back to the operator.

Councillor Bianco acknowledged that the current situation could not be allowed to continue endlessly. This conciliatory approach would have to be the final push in an attempt to reach a satisfactory outcome. If it were to fail, a stronger approach would need to be taken.

Petitioners requested a timeframe for action to be taken; Councillor Bianco commented that he aimed to see significant improvements this year which would be replicated going forward. It was confirmed that the Council would monitor and review the situation on an ongoing basis. If no improvements were evident by autumn 2019, an additional meeting would be arranged.

Petitioners hoped that Stockley Country Park could attain a Green Flag status within five years.

RESOLVED That:

Meeting with petitioners, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services:

1. Noted the petition received;
2. Instructed officers to continue to work with the operators Stockley Park Golf to ensure that the level of maintenance was in line with country parks maintained and managed by the Council directly;
3. Instructed officers to continue to work with external agencies to prevent and manage anti-social behaviour;
4. Recommended that residents set up a residents' association or 'Friends of Stockley Park' community group to ensure their views were heard at the forum. Ward Councillors would assist with this process.