

**REPORT TO:** Town Council – 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024  
**REPORT ON:** Recommendations from Committees  
**REPORT BY:** Responsible Finance Officer  
**REPORT DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> August 2024

**Planning & Development Committee – 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

No recommendations.

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**Finance, Policy & Assets Committee – 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

**FP2407.4 POLICIES.**

<b>RECOMMENDED</b>	(i) Policy of funding and support as amended, be approved. (ii) Cemetery Regulations as amended, be approved. (iii) Councillor/Officer Relationships, be approved. (iv) Staff Handbook as amended, be approved.
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**FP2407.5 ALLOTMENTS.**

<b>RECOMMENDED</b>	That no price increase be implemented for 2025/26, with the price per pole remaining at £5.50 per pole for the allotment year 2025/26.
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**FP2407.7 OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE.**

<b>RECOMMENDED</b>	That 'The Hollow' be approved as the location for the new play/activity provision, and that the theme for the play/provision be a natural challenging theme which aims to enhance community interaction and promote healthy living that this is accessible for people of all ages. That play provision/equipment providers be invited to advise on options, location and costs.
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**Planning & Development Committee – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024**

No recommendations.

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**Finance, Policy & Assets Committee – 12<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

**FP2408.5 POLICIES.**

<b>RECOMMENDED</b>	(i) Mayoral Allowance as amended, be approved. (ii) Leave of Absence as amended, be approved.
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**FP2408.8 CONSULTATION – WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PARKS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.**

<b>RECOMMENDED</b>	That the draft Parks Development Strategy response be submitted to West Northamptonshire Council.
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**REPORT TO:** Finance, Policy & Assets Committee - 12<sup>th</sup> August 2024  
**REPORT ON:** West Northamptonshire Parks Development Strategy  
**REPORT BY:** Operations Officer  
**REPORT DATE:** 6<sup>th</sup> August 2024

## **Draft Response from the Town Council to Parks Development Strategy 2024-2044**

We have reviewed the Parks Development Strategy 2024-2044 and would like to provide feedback on behalf of the Town Council, particularly focusing on the financial and delivery plans, and their potential impact on inclusivity.

### **Overall Ambition**

The document outlines a comprehensive and ambitious plan for the future of parks and green spaces in West Northamptonshire. The ambition to transform these areas into places where people of all backgrounds can thrive through exercise, relaxation, community building, and supporting biodiversity is clearly articulated. The alignment with the Council's broader aspirations, such as the Corporate Plan and the "Live Your Best Life" initiative, reinforces the strategy's importance and relevance.

### **Vision and Objectives**

The vision is well-defined, aiming to make parks places for enjoyment, community building, and biodiversity. The six objectives (providing safe and accessible parks, creating spaces for health and wellbeing, preserving biodiversity, encouraging community engagement, securing investment, and making good use of public money) are clear and provide a strong framework for action.

However, the increase in commercial activity will severely impact the purpose and aim of a country park, which is for members of the public to enjoy and encourage nature and its environment to thrive.

### **Key Actions Related to Daventry**

The strategy's ambition is supported by detailed actions that specifically address the needs and opportunities in Daventry:

- **Daventry Country Park:** The plans to enhance Daventry Country Park, including extending it to the Grand Union Canal, introducing high rope activities, axe throwing, and boat hire, reflect a clear ambition to create a diverse and engaging environment for visitors. Additionally, developing an existing outbuilding to support the Outdoor Learning Service highlights the commitment to education and community engagement. However, it is crucial that these enhancements include facilities and amenities accessible to people of all abilities to ensure inclusivity both physical and financial.
- **Borough Hill Country Park:** The management of this historically significant park, with its limitations to protect ancient structures, demonstrates a careful balance between preservation and public enjoyment.
- **Legacy Strategy Actions:** The inclusion of actions from the Daventry District Council's Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy (2009) shows

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**REPORT ON:** West Northamptonshire Parks Development Strategy

**REPORT BY:** Operations Officer

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continuity and respect for previous commitments, ensuring that the strategy builds on existing foundations.

## **Concerns about Financial and Delivery Plans**

While the strategy outlines a financial framework aimed at making the parks service self-sufficient, the Town Council has concerns about the potential impact on inclusivity:

- **Sustainability of Financial Plans:** The emphasis on reducing reliance on public funding and maximising income generation through private investment and other means may risk making the parks less accessible to all residents, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds.
- **Impact on Inclusivity:** If significant parts of the parks' services and amenities are commercialised or if access fees are introduced or increased, it could potentially exclude segments of the community who may not be able to afford these costs. Parks should remain inclusive spaces where everyone can enjoy the benefits of green spaces without financial barriers.

## **Inclusivity and Accessibility**

The strategy mentions the importance of making parks accessible to all. However, there seems to be a lack of specific reference to facilities that cater to all abilities within Daventry. Can WNC provide more detailed plans on how they intend to develop and maintain inclusive facilities in Daventry Country Park and other local parks? This includes ensuring pathways, play areas, and other amenities are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.

## **Daventry Specific Plans**

While there are mentions of improvements and new facilities in various parks, we would like more detailed information on the specific plans for Daventry. For instance, the introduction of high rope activity spaces, axe throwing, and boat hire at Daventry Country Park sounds promising, but we would like assurances that these will be designed with inclusivity in mind.

## **Recommendations**

To ensure that the financial and delivery plans do not compromise inclusivity, the Town Council recommends the following considerations:

1. **Balanced Approach to Funding:** While seeking financial self-sufficiency, ensure that essential amenities and access remain free or affordable for all residents.

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**REPORT DATE:** 6<sup>th</sup> August 2024

2. **Community Engagement in Financial Planning:** Involve local communities in discussions about funding and resource management to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish mechanisms to regularly assess the impact of financial strategies on park accessibility and inclusivity, making adjustments as necessary to prevent exclusion of any community segments.
4. **Accessibility for All Abilities:** Ensure that all enhancements and new facilities in Daventry Country Park, and other parks, are accessible to people of all abilities. This includes paths, recreational facilities, and amenities such as toilets and seating.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while the ambition of the Parks Development Strategy 2024-2044 is clear and well-supported by detailed objectives and actions, it is crucial to address the potential impact of financial self-sufficiency on inclusivity and the detrimental impact it will have on the natural environment.

By taking a balanced approach to funding and actively engaging with the community, the strategy can ensure that parks remain welcoming and accessible to all residents of West Northamptonshire, whilst still being a sanctuary for wildlife, flora and fauna.

## Section 3 – External Auditor’s Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of **Daventry Town Council – NH0068**

### 1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/>

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2024; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

### 2 External auditor’s limited assurance opinion 2023/24

On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

The Annual Internal Audit Report focuses on a series of internal control objectives covering an authority’s key financial and accounting systems and concludes whether, in all significant respects, the internal control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the authority. We note that the internal auditor has not provided an explanation where the response given is ‘Not covered’ to internal control objectives F and O. The Annual Internal Audit Report will inform the authority’s response to Assertions 2 and 6 in the annual governance statement. As a result, the authority must ensure that assurance that has not been provided via these control objectives has been sought elsewhere.

### 3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2024.

External Auditor Name

**PKF LITTLEJOHN LLP**

External Auditor Signature



Date

**31/07/2024**

**REPORT TO:** Town Council 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024

**REPORT ON:** Annual return for the year ended 31 March 2024 – Notice of Conclusion of Audit.

**REPORT BY:** Responsible Finance Officer, Sarah Fox

**REPORT DATE:** 8<sup>th</sup> August 2024

As part of the External Audit Report and Certificate it was highlighted that the Internal Auditor provided the response as 'Not covered' to internal control objectives F and O within the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2023/24 and that no explanation had been provided, explanation for this comment is below:

***Objective F: Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved, and VAT appropriately accounted for.***

*The Council does maintain a small amount of petty cash, yet it has not processed any transactions during the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Details of the councils Receipts and Payments summary for the petty cash account was provided to the External Auditors as part of the submission of the Annual Governance and Audit Report (AGAR).*

The External Auditor read the Internal Auditor's 'Not Covered' as that part of the Audit not being reviewed, the internal auditor has been advised of the comment and agreed to record 'Not applicable, as the Council have minimal petty cash and no transactions for the financial year 23/24.

***Objective O: Trust Funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.***

*The Council is the Trustee of land belonging to the charity established by an indenture dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1980 Daventry Recreation Ground".*

*The Council keeps separate accounts for the charity to comply with all provisions of the Charities Act 2011 in the keeping and submitting of accounts.*

*The charity is registered with the Charity Commission which is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. The Annual Return for the for the reporting year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 have been submitted.*

*There are currently no funds held by the Trust.*

The External Auditor read the Internal Auditor's 'Not Covered' as that part of the Audit not being reviewed, the internal auditor has been advised of the comment and agreed to record 'Not applicable, as the Council do not have and never have had any bank accounts, investments or funds relating to this Trust.

#### **Additional information which is to be submitted as part of the External Audit**

That in the event the internal auditor's response given to any internal control objective is 'Not Covered' an explanation of when the most recent internal audit work was completed in that area and when it is next planned to be provided should be detailed, with rationale in the Annual Governance Statement.

**REPORT TO:** Town Council – 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024  
**REPORT ON:** Mayoral Chain and Pendant  
**REPORT BY:** Responsible Finance Officer  
**REPORT DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> August 2024

Further to the resolution of Council on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024 confirming the design of the new sterling silver gilt and enabled multi piece pendant and a single row chain of office on a black velvet backing which the council intends to purchase, members requested that further discussions be held to establish the possibility of engraving the past mayors' names onto the individual links and to advise of potential costs. It has been confirmed that the chain that the Council intends to purchase is engravable, however on looking at the condition of the names that are engraved on the current chain and the former chains that form part of the museum collection, the names have become very difficult to read over time.

There are number of engraving methods to consider should members resolve that they would like the names of the past Town Council Mayor's since 2003 engraved onto the links of the new chain, the first option would be machine engraving which is the method that has been used for the names that have been engraved on the current chain, at a cost of £0.67 per character. The other options would be for the names to be laser engraved, which is fast and precise but does have limitations or hand engraved which although slower can create more depth, either of these two methods would be at a cost of £2.97 per character.

Please find below the costings for options available for the 247 characters that would require engraving on 23 of the 26 links that the single chain would provide.

**Example for each Link: G Marrott  
2003**

Estimated cost for Machine Engraving = £247.67  
Estimated cost for the Laser or Hand Engraving = £733.59

The cost to purchase the pendant and engravable single row chain of office (which would provide a total of 26 links) on a black velvet backing is £6130.13, please see image of final design below.



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Should members decide that they wish to proceed with engraving the names of past, present and future Mayors, this would leave a total of 3 blank links remaining, there is an option to purchase a double row chain of office, which would provide a total of 47 links, and would negate the need to purchase a new chain of office within the next few years. The cost to purchase a pendant and double row chain of office on a black velvet backing is £9264.89, please find image of design below.



In order, to prevent damage to the chain and pendant, consideration should be given to purchasing a bespoke fitted case, which would accommodate either the single or double chain at an additional cost of £347.12.

The Council currently holds funds of £12,987 in earmarked reserves for civic regalia.

#### Options for consideration

- 1) Pendant and Single Row Chain of Office and case = £6477.25
- 2) Pendant and Single Row Chain of Office and case, plus machine engraving = £6724.92
- 3) Pendant and Single Row Chain of Office and case, plus laser/hand engraving = £7210.84
- 4) Pendant and Double Row Chain of Office and case, plus machine engraving = £9859.68
- 5) Pendant and Double Row Chain of Office and case, plus machine engraving = £10345.60

#### Future Budget Considerations

It is recommended that to ensure that the chain and pendant are kept in a good condition that every three to five years the pendant and chain of office are sent to be inspected and for them to be refinished and polished. Current estimated costs for this service for the single chain and pendant would be £800 and for the double chain and pendant would be £1200. Please note the estimated costs provided would not include any repair works that may be required.

Should the decision be made to engrave the names on the links, then it would be sensible for this to be completed when the chain and pendant are sent to be inspected, refinished and polished.

Consideration should be given to include these anticipated costs when reviewing the future budget requirements for the civic regalia.



**REPORT TO:** Town Council 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024  
**REPORT ON:** Disposal of Assets – Land adjacent to Admirals Way  
**REPORT BY:** Deborah Jewell, Chief Officer  
**REPORT DATE:** 16<sup>th</sup> August 2024



Following a complaint from a resident on the perceived lack of maintenance of land adjacent to his property, the property owner has highlighted that although the Town Council policy is to decline requests to purchase open space or amenity land, he suggests disposal of this piece of land would be in the public interest (policy attached).

Upon receiving the complaint relating to the lack of grounds maintenance, this area of land was identified, due to its gradient and difficulty to mow, as shrub and all shrub areas are maintained during the winter months.

On referring to our grounds' maintenance team, I have been advised that due to the gradient, this area of land cannot be included on the mowing schedule and maintenance is scheduled to be done, by hand, during the winter months. However, following a site visit the unusually wet weather this year had caused this area to become very overgrown and unsightly, so works were scheduled to cut back the vegetation and identify this area of land for regular maintenance rather than re-wilding.

On completion of the works, the resident was advised future maintenance would include strimming and the application of weed killer in this area. He was also advised that the council would not carry out works where cables from his property were on council land and that he would need to tidy these away, if he wanted these areas to also be maintained.

Although works had been carried out to the resident's satisfaction, he still wished to apply to purchase the land and the pathway behind for the following reasons:

1. Maintenance - The council fails to meet its requirement to maintain its land by keeping it tidy, trimmed and weed free. (Note we have weeds growing through our fence from this land)
2. Access - We have a fence running along this land and last year we worked to paint our fences to protect them from the weather and also just clean them up,

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**REPORT BY:** Deborah Jewell, Chief Officer

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- we however could not do this to the side of the fence facing that land due to the huge amount of overgrowth.
3. Potentially dangerous - I have not ever seen what's under the overgrowth in this area, but it is right next to a public path with no form of fencing (I would ideally like to see shin high wooden post style fencing). Additionally, there are green service boxes there, but they get swarmed with weeds making that a dangerous work environment should there be a need for emergency repairs.
  4. Neighbours Concern - I have had neighbours come up to be about the land asking me to request that weed killer be put down in that area as they are concerned the weeds will grow down to their property (there is a weed called horsetail that is running rampant). The weed is very difficult to get rid of due to it spreading out underground.
  5. Beautify the Town - The area currently looks forgotten and disregarded; we would simply like to take ownership so we can make the area look tidy and cared for to show anyone driving/walking past that the area we live looks as wonderful as it is to be in.

As per the policy, should members deem it in the public interest to dispose of this land, they may wish to consider the following:

1. The pathway is a right of way for all members of the public and it's a criminal offence to close, obstruct or divert a footpath used by residents, so I would advise against disposing of a pathway.
2. The land to the side of the property has two leases for two service units, and they have rights of access at all times, and it would be unusual for land used by 'Services' to be transferred to a private homeowner.
3. All land transferred to Daventry Town Council has to be offered back to West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) before any land can be disposed of and in view of this area being used by two services, WNC have indicated, informally they would not agree to the disposal of this land.

I have advised the resident, that should he wish to purchase the land he would need to seek legal advice and he would be liable for the legal costs of all parties, should WNC need to seek legal advice on the sale.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

In recognition by the Council of its negligence in maintaining the land, and assurances that this area will be maintained to a better standard, the Council acknowledges the resident's request to purchase but declines as the asset is more than just open space/amenity land as it comprises of a public path and facilitates two important utility service junction boxes, which require 24/7 access.

