

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 9 March 2021
Cabinet Member: Councillor Gareth Thomas
Contact Officer: Sioned Williams
Contact Telephone Number: Ext 32547
Title of Item: Transfer of Lease and Management of Coed Helen Site, Caernarfon to Caernarfon Town Council

1 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

Gwynedd Council currently contributes £12,450 to the Byw'n Iach Company towards the annual running costs of Coed Helen Park. The Council's savings programme has identified a savings target of £155,000 for the Byw'n Iach company. Transferring the management of Coed Helen Park would mean an annual saving of £12,450 in terms of site management costs, which would contribute towards the above target.

2 THE DECISION SOUGHT

Lease and transfer the management of Coed Helen Park, Caernarfon to Caernarfon Town Council.

3 INTRODUCTION

In December 2014, Gwynedd Council approved its savings programme that included £1.05m of savings by the Leisure Service to be realised by 2018/19 through a series of changes to the service management arrangements. The Department has managed to realise these savings and as part of the process, a business case was developed to establish a Gwynedd Council controlled Company to undertake the future management of the Leisure Service. The scheme was adopted by the Full Council on 5 October 2017 and the Byw'n Iach Ltd. company became operational on 1 April 2019.

The business case was established on a service that included the running of 12 of the Council's Leisure Centres. But also for these centres, the Leisure Service was also responsible for five community resources, namely:

- Coed Helen Park, Caernarfon
- Waunfawr Synthetic Pitch
- Brynrefail Synthetic Pitch
- Safle'r Bwthyn, Deiniolen
- Strand Street Pitch, Bangor

Each one of these resources are used by local clubs and are key leisure resources within their communities. It was considered that transferring them to the control of the Byw'n Iach Company was not the most effective arrangement to ensure that local voices maintained the sites and made the most of the resources to benefit the community, but rather to work with local partners in order to identify alternative arrangements.

The Department's priority was to ensure a smooth transfer of the Service to the Byw'n Iach company in order to protect the interests of staff and service users. Within the transfer timetable, there was insufficient time to allow discussions with local partners regarding control of the community resources. It was resolved to transfer all of the resources as a temporary measure to the Company on the condition that the Economy and Community Department would commence discussions with the local partners to consider alternative arrangements for the future.

Over the past two years, the Economy and Community Department has held discussions with a number of community groups and entities e.g. Community Councils, local schools and enterprises as well as commercial enterprises, to see if there would be an interest and more effective arrangements to manage the resources. There has been good progress in a number of cases.

Positive discussions have been held between Gwynedd Council officers and the Caernarfon Town Council Executive Committee regarding the potential transfer of Coed Helen Park. The Park is an important resource for residents and visitors to Caernarfon. There is a number of facilities there, which include:

- Football, rugby and cricket pitches
- Bowling-green
- Small golf course
- Skate park
- Play equipment
- Parking spaces
- A building that includes toilets, changing rooms, office as well as a flat for the Caretaker.

At its meeting on 1 October 2019, the Town Council resolved to accept the transfer of the Park on a 99 year lease, and for a nominal sum. The lease would be subject to the extant lease for the benefit of the Bowling Club and a commitment from the Town Council to continue with the current licence arrangements in relation to the Cricket Club. The current post of the site caretaker would be abolished and the Byw'n Iach Ltd. company has commenced discussions in terms of the redundancy. The existing employment contract of the caretaker gives her the right to reside in the flat located on the site, and Caernarfon Town Council has committed to offer the caretaker a new lease for the flat, when the site is transferred.

The Town Council is happy to maintain the existing services for the community, while also seeking opportunities to improve the facilities for the future. Caernarfon Town Council will consider different management options, including charging a parking fee for long stay vehicles. Overnight parking is a problem on the site and it is considered that more income can be generated by providing resources for visitors to stay. The Town Council is not eager to charge parking fees on short stay park users, and Gwynedd Council will discuss the details of their plans over the coming months.

In principle, Gwynedd Council has agreed to contribute towards maintaining the play equipment for up to three years after the transfer.

4 THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

Gwynedd Council has transferred all its leisure service management resources to the Byw'n lach Company. There is an agreement in place between Gwynedd Council and the Company to provide the service, but in 2019 Gwynedd Council resolved to reduce the cost of the £155,000 agreement in the long term as part of its Savings Programme. This target is very challenging and the Company will consider different measures to introduce in 2021/22 onwards in order to meet the funding gap.

The purpose and vision of the Byw'n lach Company is:

'Offer sustainable leisure and fitness services, of the highest quality to our communities, in order to improve everyone's health, well-being, fitness, and skills.

Every resident a customer - every family improving their health and well-being - every community benefiting.'

Although it collaborates with a wide range of clubs and partners across Gwynedd to achieve this vision, the Byw'n lach Company does not manage leisure parks that are similar to Coed Helen Park in any other community in Gwynedd. It is considered that running an urban leisure park in Caernarfon is not a priority for the company and that it can divert its efforts to achieve the purpose across the county.

Transferring the resource would generate a financial saving of up to £12,450 and it is recommended that this budget is used in 2021/22 to fund any redundancy costs and investment costs in the Park. Gwynedd Council's agreement with the Byw'n lach company will need to be reviewed in order to reflect the change but it will be possible to use the saving as a contribution towards the income target for the future.

The Department has considered different options to manage the Park in future, including the management of a commercial partner. However, it became apparent that the proposed development was unlikely to take place and it is not considered that another private company would invest in the leisure resources.

When considering the existing use of the Park and future opportunities, the Economy and Community Department is of the opinion that collaborating with Caernarfon Town Council would be the best arrangement to safeguard the use of the site for the local community in future.

Transferring to the Town Council would not change the use of the Park for local residents in the short term or the visitor experience. With the support of the Community Support Service, Gwynedd Council would be able to assist Caernarfon Town Council to invest in the site in future in order to reflect local wishes.

The Council is statutorily required to ensure best value for its assets in accordance with Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972. There is no intention to transfer for less than the market value. In accordance with the requirements of Section 123 (2A) of the Act and as the site was open public land the proposal had to be advertised before a decision was made on disposal. This was done in accordance with the Act and no objections were received within the advertising period.

It should be noted that the proposal involves leasing the property, and should the lease for the Town Council be wound up in future, the site would remain in the ownership of Gwynedd Council.

There is an objection from a local Councillor for Gwynedd Council to transfer the management of the site to Caernarfon Town Council. In accordance with the constitution of Gwynedd Council, in such a situation, the matter is referred to the attention of the Council Cabinet for a decision.

6 NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

If the Gwynedd Council Cabinet supports the proposal to transfer Coed Helen Park, a lease will be prepared to transfer the site to Caernarfon Town Council during 2021/22.

7 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

Chief Finance Officer's Comments

I confirm that Gwynedd Council, as part of this agreement with Byw'n Iach, contributes an annual sum of £12,450 towards the annual running costs of Coed Helen Park. Once the responsibility for the Park is transferred to the Town Council, we would then expect the first call on the savings to contribute towards any unavoidable transitional costs, such as redundancy costs; with the permanent savings then contributing towards the Council's savings programme, which has identified a target of £155,000 for the Byw'n Iach company.

I note the opinion of the Economy and Community Department that transferring the Park to the Town Council is the best arrangement in order to secure the future of the Park, by investing and fulfilling the wishes of local residents. As Caernarfon Town Council is willing to take responsibility for the Park, which will lead to savings for Gwynedd Council, I support the recommendation.

The Monitoring Officer's Comments

The report contains appropriate recommendations and has addresses the requirement in relation to the transfer of such properties. I also confirm that the reason for presenting the matter to the Cabinet is in accordance with the Constitution.