

Mark Elliott – Statement to B&NES Council Cabinet – 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address cabinet about the future for the Approach Golf Course.

My fundamental point here is a simple one. Last summer the residents were told by the cabinet member responsible that any move away from golf, on the 18 hole side of the Approach course at least, would not happen without proper consultation. The only bid the cabinet have in front of them is not for golf. Whatever the semantics of whether it can be described as "golf-derived", I think we can all agree, because the cabinet papers state it, it isn't traditional golf. I believe those two facts – that a commitment was given to properly consult if there was any move away from golf, and the fact that this is a move away from golf – means that the cabinet have no choice but to turn down this bid.

There are many other points that could be made, and I'm sure other speakers will expand on them:

- The fact that the procurement process only produced one bid, which is never a positive indicator for a procurement
- The fact that officers having to run a procurement process under very difficult circumstances the middle of a pandemic
- The fact that, anecdotally, golf has actually had a massive upsurge in interest over the summer due to the pandemic, and we don't know what the golf industry will look like post-pandemic
- The fact that the Approach course allows cheap, municipal access to a sport which is often seen as expensive and elitist

But ultimately, I think the fact that the cabinet member committed to proper consultation and engagement with the community on any change from golf, and this is a change from golf when such consultation hasn't occurred, is a strong enough argument on its own.

The LibDem manifesto in 2019 said we would "listen to residents and put them first". We committed to "opening up the council to make sure the people in charge hear your voice". "Letting residents make decisions to get better outcomes." And "making the council more transparent and responsible." I realise the world has changed a great deal since May 2019, but these should still be our fundamental, driving principles, and accepting this bid under these circumstances would fly in the face of those principles. I'm therefore confident the cabinet will not want to accept it.

Thank you.