

**Report of the Chief Officer Parks and Countryside**

**Report to North East Outer Area Committee**

**Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014**

**Subject: Annual Report – for the Parks and Countryside Service**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Harewood, Wetherby, Alwoodley		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

**Summary of main issues**

1. This report provides an area profile of key assets and services provided in the North East Outer area.
2. It highlights the current progress towards Leeds Quality Park (LQP) status for community parks in the area. It provides the costs of achieving and retaining LQP status in community parks up to the year 2020.
3. It details capital improvements in community parks, sport pitches and fixed play in the area for the last 12 months and planned improvements to be delivered in the next 12 months.
4. It gives a detailed breakdown of events and volunteering in the area.

**Recommendations**

5. The Area Committee is requested to note the content of the report and to communicate priorities for investment in community parks, playing pitches and fixed play facilities in light of the issues raised.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report seeks to further develop the relationship between the Parks and Countryside service and the North East Outer Area Committee, as agreed at Executive Board.
- 1.2 It provides an overview of the service and sets out some of the challenges faced along with key performance management initiatives. In addition it seeks to provide a positive way forward for delivering the extended role of the Area Committee.
- 1.3 In particular it sets out at an area level progress made in attaining Leeds Quality Park standard. It also sets out investment need to attain and sustain LQP standards.

## **2 Background information**

### **Service Description**

- 2.1 Leeds City Council has one of the largest fully inclusive local authority Parks and Countryside services, managing almost 4,000 hectares of parks and green space. This includes 7 major parks, 62 community parks and 95 recreation grounds and 391 local green spaces, which include 144 playgrounds and 500 sports facilities ranging from skateboard parks to golf courses, and which play host to 600 events annually. The service also manages a nursery which produces around 3 million bedding plants each year, 97 allotment sites, over 800km of Public Right of Way (PROW), and 156 nature conservation sites, as well as 23 cemeteries and 3 crematoria.

### **Description of Priority Advisory Function**

- 2.2 The priority advisory function for Area Committees relates to community park provision that have a wide range of facilities, including general recreation, sports pitches, play and formal and informal horticultural features.
- 2.3 Where developments are less significant or only impact on one site then ward members and community groups are informed and consulted using established procedures. It is important to note that good levels of engagement with ward members exist and this function seeks to enhance this engagement.
- 2.4 There are proposals currently being considered to increase the scope of this delegation to include development and horticultural maintenance of cemeteries, recreation grounds, natural areas and local green space in addition to community parks. These proposals would delegate investment decisions and the setting of resource priorities using the asset register as the basis of allocation to each area committee. Consultation and rollout is currently being directed by the Area Leaders team.

### 3 Main issues

#### **Area Profile of the Service**

3.1 The following table summarises community green space assets managed by Parks and Countryside in the North East Outer Area Committee:

<b>Asset</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Community parks	0
LQP Judged Parks	6
Playing Pitches:	
Football	10
Rugby League	1
Rugby Union	2
Bowling greens	1
Playgrounds	10
Multi-use games areas	1
Skate parks	1

3.2 Regarding bowling green provision, it should be noted that a report was considered by Executive Board in October 2013 that approved revised arrangements as follows:

- The introduction of a charge which would see the implementation of a season ticket at a cost of £25 in 2014/2015 rising to £31.50 in 2017/2018.
- The removal of 1 bowling green at 6 sites across the city with more than 1 bowling green. This does not include any bowling greens in the North East Outer Area Committee.
- That where feasible, appropriate arrangements are established in order for bowling clubs to meet the costs associated with their own direct use of gas and electricity by March 2014.

#### **Key Parks & Green Space**

3.3 The key parks and green space in the North East Outer area are as follows:

- Cranmer Bank.
- Scotland Wood.
- Lotherton Hall Estate.
- Moss Woods.
- The Harland Way.
- Wetherby Ings.

3.4 The current position on the quality of these sites is examined later in this report as is the investment need to attain or sustain the Leeds Quality Park standard.

### Sports Pitches

3.5 Parks and Countryside provide annual pitch hire for sports teams. The table below shows the number of teams with current bookings playing on pitches in the area: *(note this excludes clubs who have a long term lease in place)*

Age Group	No of Teams
Open Age	3
Juniors	14

### Volunteering in the Parks and Countryside Service

3.6 The service continues to focus on increasing the number of volunteers and groups working in the area to achieve the following:

- To increase corporate volunteering working in partnership with Business in the Community and Leeds Ahead
- Continue to improve involvement with the many “in bloom” groups in Leeds.
- It is an ambition to have a volunteer group for every community park where there is a site based gardener.

3.7 It is estimated that volunteers across all groups contribute 9,000 days of voluntary work in the North East Outer area over a 12 month period. The tables below provide details of volunteering in the area since January 2013:

### Voluntary work supervised by Parks and Countryside staff:

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
Adel Moor	Leeds Wildlife Volunteers	Heathland conservation i.e. removal of tree seedlings, saplings and mature trees.	7.4
Adel Woods	Friends of Adel Woods	Birdsong Walk	5.4
		Digging up invading trees and shrubs, counting orchids	3.5
		Nature Quiz part of Annual Thankyou Event	33.5
		Nestbox survey, maintenance, adaptation or replacement.	5.3
		Newt survey (Part 1)	4.1
		Newt survey (Part 2)	3.8
		Pond Management	2.4
		Removing trees, shrubs, Bramble, Nettles and Bracken	4.3
		Survey of the bog to assess changes since management work was carried out	4.9
		Woodland Survey	6.1
Lotherton Hall Estate	Calderdale College	Bird Garden Tour and conservation talk	5.1
	Leeds Wildlife Volunteers	Tree planting	9.7

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
	Public	Book Worms Story Telling Club	5.5
	Public Event	Book Worms Story Telling	14.3
		Facilitator	283.8
Wigton Moor Woods	Friends of Wigton Moor Woods	Litter pick	11.9
		Wildlife survey and other activities provided to attract new members	13.0
<b>Total</b>			<b>424.1</b>

**Local business volunteers supervised by Parks and Countryside staff:**

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
Adel Moor	O2	Heathland conservation i.e. removal of tree seedlings, saplings and mature trees.	7.4
Adel Woods	British Gas	Path clearance, litter collection in hospice woodland	6.1
Eccup Whin	Ernst and Young	Building boardwalk, adding to what was already there in order to cover boggy path	5.7
<b>Total</b>			<b>19.2</b>

**Educational work within the North East Outer area:**

Site	School	Activity	Children Hours
Adel Woods	Adel Primary School	Environmental Education	800
		study habitats	60
	St. Paul's Catholic Primary School	Habitat Study	60
Lotherton Hall Estate	Bishop Burton College	Bird Garden Tour and conservation talk	345
	Calverley C of E Primary	Freaky Beaky KS2 and guided tour	320
	Cockburn High School	Extinction - Aghhh! & Tour	120
	Guiseley Infant and Nursery School	Freaky Beaky KS1 and guided tour	360
	Lapage Primary School, Bradford	Owls Seeing & Hearing	28
	Pinders Primary School, Wakefield	Freaky Beaky KS1 and guided tour	60
	St. Michaels C E Academy	Freaky Beaky KS1 and guided tour	480
	St. John the Evangelist Catholic Primary	Freaky Beaky KS1 and guided tour	60
	Windmill Primary School	Bird Garden Meet The Keeper	90
<b>Total</b>			<b>2783</b>

**Volunteer groups working independently in the North East Outer area:**

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Number of Volunteers</b>	<b>Estimated Volunteer Days</b>
Friends of Adel Woods	30	120
<b>Total</b>		<b>120</b>

**Existing in bloom groups within the North East Outer area:**

<b>In Bloom Group</b>	<b>Number of Volunteers</b>	<b>Award Won</b>	<b>Estimated Volunteer Days</b>
Aberford	3	N/A	80
Alwoodley	15	N/A	280
Barwick	25	Gold 'Britain in Bloom'	480
Boston Spa	70	N/A	1400
Bramham	30	Silver Gilt 'Yorkshire in Bloom'	600
Harewood	22	N/A	440
Scholes	12	Gold 'Yorkshire in Bloom'	240
Shadwell	15	Gold 'Yorkshire in Bloom'	280
Wetherby	100	N/A	2000
<b>Total</b>			<b>5800</b>

**Events**

- 3.8 The bookings and licensing team provides assistance in helping community and other groups organise events with particular emphasise on ensuring legal and safety requirements are met but do not deter groups and organisations from organising activities. The table below shows a list of events held in the Outer North East area in 2013:

<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Total</b>
Lotherton Hall	May	(14th - 20th) Garden Show	1
		Teddy Bear Trail	1
		Teddy Bears Picnic	1
	April	Mad Hatter's Tea Party	1
		Young Artists Recital	1
	June	Summer Bands	1
		Wartime Tea Party	1
		Young Artists Recital	1
	July	Edwardian Gala	1
		Summer Holiday Activities	1
		VJMC	1
	August	Porsche Rally	1
		RSPB Big Wild Sleep Out	1
		Summer Bands	1
		Summer Sixties Picnic	1
	October	Halloween Event	1
October	Textile Study Day	1	
	Spooky Scarecrow Trail	1	
December	Christmas at Lotherton	1	
September	Cars in the Park	1	

Site Name	Month	Event	Total
		Mint Festival	1
		Re-enactment Weekend	1
The Harland Way	October	Wetherby Lions - Harland Way 20th Anniversary	1
	September	Wetherby Run 10K & Mini Marathon	1
Wetherby Ings	May	Oona - Ink Films	1
		Paul Drinkwater triathlon	1
	November	Wetherby Community Bonfire	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>27</b>

### Leeds Quality Park Status

3.9 The Parks and Green Space Strategy approved at Executive Board in February 2009 sets out the vision and priorities to 2020. One of the key proposals contained in the strategy is the aspiration for all community parks to meet the Green Flag standard for field based assessment by 2020. The Green Flag Award Scheme represents the national standard for parks and green spaces. It has been developed around eight key criteria as follows;

- **A welcoming place** - how to create a sense that people are positively welcomed in the park
- **Healthy, safe & secure** - how best to ensure that the park is a safe & healthy environment for all users
- **Clean & well maintained** - what people can expect in terms of cleanliness, facilities & maintenance
- **Sustainability** - how a park can be managed in environmentally sensitive ways
- **Conservation & heritage** - the value of conservation & care of historical heritage
- **Community involvement** - ways of encouraging community participation and acknowledging the community's role in a park's success
- **Marketing** - methods of promoting a park successfully
- **Management** - how to reflect all of the above in a coherent & accessible management plan or strategy and ensure it is implemented.

3.10 The Parks and Countryside service reports annual performance against two local indicators based upon the Green Flag Award scheme;

- *The percentage of Parks and Countryside sites assessed that meet the Green Flag standard.*
- *The percentage of Parks and Countryside community parks which meet the Green Flag standard. Performance against these indicators is illustrated in section 3.22.*

3.11 The indicator includes an assessment of each community park which has particular relevance to Area Committee engagement. The scheme is known as the Leeds

Quality Park (LQP) standard. The following table provides a current profile of these assessments for the North East Outer Area Committee.

Site	Year Assessed	Welcoming Place	Healthy, Safe, Secure	Clean, Well Maintained	Sustainability	Conservation / Heritage	Community Involvement	Marketing	Meets Standard?
Scotland Wood	2011								No
The Harland Way	2012								Yes
Cranmer Bank	2011								No
Moss Woods	2011								No
Lotherton Hall Estate	2013								Yes
Wetherby Ings	2012								Yes

**Key:**

Meets Leeds Quality Park Standard on average for this key criteria	
Below Leeds Quality Park Standard on average for this key criteria	

3.12 From this table, there are 3 parks identified that meet the Leeds Quality Park, and overall, the position remains unchanged from the previous area committee report.

3.13 It is planned in 2014 that the process of inspection will change to ensure that all community parks are assessed annually, rather than every 3 years as at present. This will allow improvements that have been made to be reflected in the performance standards in a more immediate way.

3.14 Improvements to parks which took place during 2013 are as follows:

- Wetherby Ings – Access improvements e.g. to facilitate the Bonfire and other events for both vehicles and pedestrians.
- Aberford – access improvements to the multi-use games area and recreation ground.
- Lotherton Hall - Installation of bird hide and access path.



The following table provides a perspective on the minimum level of investment required to achieve the LQP standard for the five remaining parks. It also includes the level of reinvestment required across all the community parks in order to sustain the LQP pass up to 2020;

Site Name	Cost to Achieve (excluding fixed play)	Reinvestment (excluding fixed play)
Average cost per site	£52,000	
<b>Total to achieve LQP</b>	<b>£156,000</b>	
Average annual reinvestment		£24,047
<b>Total reinvestment to 2020</b>		<b>£168,329</b>
<b>Overall Total Investment to 2020</b>		<b>£324,329</b>

3.15 Reinvestment levels are estimated according to the expected lifespan of equipment and infrastructure as set out below:

Description	Timescale for Recurring Investment
Signage and interpretation	5 years
Fixed play (including MUGA's/skate parks)	10 years
Bins and benches	15 years
Paths and infrastructure	25 years
Landscaping	25 years

3.16 Planned and proposed improvements for the next 12 months are;

- Lotherton Hall – zip wire will be installed in the play area early 2014.
- Alwoodley – improvements to High Ash allotments; including layout of allotment site; fence alignment and access controls.
- King Lane - wild flower meadow installation will be repeated as part of the Urban Pollinator Project, (a National research project working in partnership with University of Leeds to understand how to improve the diversity and abundance of pollinator insects in urban areas). The project is funded under the UK Insect Pollinators Initiative and runs from 2011 until 2014.
- Wetherby – Completion of the design for new sculpture and planting scheme for the roundabout. Development of the sculpture installations are being done in partnership with Natural Stone with a theme of horses to tie in with the Wetherby's connection with horse racing.

3.17 In terms of fixed play, work has been undertaken to set out refurbishment requirements over a 10 year rolling programme in support of the outcomes of the Fixed Play Strategy. The average cost of a new playground is currently about £120k; Multi-use games areas and skate parks are slightly cheaper on average at about £90k each. The table below shows the capital investment required on an ongoing basis to fund the area committees existing fixed play sites:

Fixed Play Type	No.	Total Replacement Cost £'s	Required Average Annual Spend £'s

Play Areas	10	1,200,000	120,000
Multi Use games Areas	1	90,000	9,000
Skate Parks	1	90,000	9,000
<b>Totals</b>		<b>1,380,000</b>	<b>138,000</b>

### **Area Committee funding for additional site based gardeners**

- 3.18 A number of area committees provide additional funding for gardeners to increase site based presence at parks in the area.
- 3.19 Since the introduction of site based gardeners, analysis shows that complaints to both Ward Councillors and the Parks and Countryside Service have declined on sites with increased daily presence. In addition, the service has observed an increase in the number of residents using parks and open spaces.
- 3.20 The site based gardeners increase working relationships with users, local residents and community groups. These site based staff further increase users satisfaction and support the aspiration to increase volunteer groups working within parks.

### **Coordinated Working with Environmental Services**

- 3.21 The Parks and Countryside Service move to the Environments & Housing Directorate in 2012 has given opportunities to improve collaborative working. In particular improvements in horticultural land management, cleansing and more efficient use of resources in regard to:
- Co-ordination of weed spraying activities with the grounds maintenance contract with a consistent approach to monitoring.
  - Traffic Management arrangements co-ordinated to minimise costs and disruption of the highway.
  - Litter collection in the vicinity of community parks, and as part of normal operations site based gardeners undertake an initial litter pick of the park which is being expanded to include some areas outside the curtilage of the park. Conversely, street cleansing staff now assist with emptying litter bins in parks on a weekend when parks staff are not always present.
  - The Parks and Countryside service has a number of welfare facilities and yard space available in most community parks distributed throughout the city which has provided an opportunity for the locality based teams to use these facilities for staff welfare provision and as operational bases.

### **Parks and Countryside Key Performance Indicators**

- 3.22 The following table highlights key performance indicators relevant to the service;

PI Code	Description	2010/11 Actual	2011/12 Actual	2012/13 Actual	2013/14 Target
LKI-GFI / CP-PC50 /	The percentage of parks and countryside sites	23%	26.2%	30.8%	32.6%

EM38	assessed internally that meet the Green Flag criteria	Target: 23%	Target: 26.2%	Target: 29.4%	
New	The percentage of parks and countryside community parks which meet LQP status	33.9%	38.7% Target: 40%	42% Target: 47.5%	55.0%

## 4 Corporate Considerations

### 4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 Close liaison with community and ward members is already in existence, utilising a variety of mechanisms, for example through residents' surveys, multi-agency meetings and community forums. In addition volunteers, Friends of groups and local residents are regularly consulted on local projects with input on design and physical implementation of a wide range of site improvements.

### 4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 This report does not have any identified impact on equality and diversity arrangements.

### 4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The contents of this report set out how the Executive Board requirements can be met by taking a proactive approach to involve and engage Area Committees in matters relating to community parks.

4.3.2 The information within the report contributes significantly to the sustainable economy and culture city priority plan.

### 4.4 Resources and Value for Money

4.4.1 As part of the wider impact on local government and the Council in particular, the Parks and Countryside service has seen a £2 million budget reduction from 2011/12 to 2012/13 and a further reduction of £0.6 million in 2013/14, with a likelihood of a minimum further 16% reduction in the next few years. In meeting these challenging budget targets the service has already undertaken a number of steps, including reducing the number of managers and back office staff as well as price increases – including removing subsidy for bereavement services and allotment provision. As previously mentioned, outdoor bowls has also been recently reviewed working with representatives from the relevant associations resulting in revised arrangements in 2014.

4.4.2 The service has also sought to be enterprising and innovative including working in partnership to develop a conservatory at Golden Acre café, Tropical World refurbishment, sponsorship, nursery trading and increasing the level of volunteers. Agreement has been reached in principle with the Trade Unions to adopt seasonal working hours from January 2014 resulting in a saving of £140k by reducing the number of seasonal staff recruited each year whilst retaining permanent gardening staff and enabling the introduction of 6 further horticultural apprentices.

4.4.3 The service undertakes to sustain and develop the services provided to the public and has traditionally used a number of sources of financial support to achieve developments. These include grants from bodies such as Green Leeds Ltd, Sustrans, Natural England, National Lottery funding and developer contributions via section 106 (S106) funds.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 This report has no legal implications and is not subject to call in. There is no information which is confidential or exempt.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

4.6.1 There are no significant risk management issues contained within the report, its conclusions and recommendations.

### **5 Conclusions**

5.1 Community green space contributes in many ways to the delivery of the Corporate Priority Plan. They provide places for relaxation, escape, exercise and recreation. They bring communities together and make a positive contribution to the local economy, education, improve public health and well-being, and generally make a better place to live, work and visit.

5.2 Improvements to community parks, fixed play and playing pitches remain a priority, and there already has been investment made to deliver improvements along with further schemes identified. Issues are being addressed through the Parks and Green Space Strategy along with implementation of the Fixed Play Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy.

5.3 Community engagement remains a key activity for the service with regular correspondence, attendance at meetings and briefings, along with more localised consultation where required.

### **6 Recommendations**

6.1 The Area Committee is requested to note the content of the report and to communicate priorities for investment in community parks, playing pitches and fixed play facilities in light of the issues raised.

### **7 Background Documents**

7.1 Area Committee Roles, Outer North East Area Committee, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

7.2 Annual Report for Parks and Countryside Service in North East Outer Area Committee, North East Outer Area Committee, 2013.

7.3 Parks and Green Space Strategy, Executive Board, February 2009.