

Report of the Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Report to South Outer Area Committee

Date: Monday 31st March 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): Morley North Morley South Ardsley & Robin Hood Rothwell		
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 South 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 South (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 South Outer Area Committee:

Asset	Quantity
Community parks	9
Playing Pitches:	
Cricket	1
Football	39
Rugby League	6
Bowling greens	10
Playgrounds	24
Multi-use games areas	1
Skate parks	4

- 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 South 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.

Community Parks

- 3.3 The community parks in the South Outer area are as follows:

- Churwell Park
- Dartmouth Park
- Drighlington Park
- Lewisham Park
- Rothwell Country Park
- Scarth Gardens
- Scatcherd Park
- Springhead Park
- Woodlesford Park

- 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	16
Juniors	28

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 3,070 days of voluntary work in the South 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
Dartmouth Park	Friends of Dartmouth Park	Study of wildlife value of site	2.4
Rothwell Country Park	Friends of Rothwell Country Park	Balsam Bash, litter pick, cut back vegetation	14.3
		Hedge management	13.4
		Hedgelaying	14.4
		Maintain Ditch, strim, litter pick, footpath cutback	8.9
		Rake meadow	10.4
		Trim trail launch event	23.5
	Leeds Wildlife Volunteers	Rabbit fence removal	8.9
Total			96.3

Local business volunteers supervised by Parks and Countryside staff:

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
Rothwell Country Park	Corporate Group	Balsam Bash, litter pick, cut back vegetation	3.0
		Maintain Entrance	8.1

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
	Direct Line	Balsam Bash, litter pick, cut back vegetation	14.8
Springhead Park	corporate Group	footpath cutback and litter pick	8.2
Total			34.1

Educational work within the South Outer area:

Site	School	Activity	No of Child Hours
Dartmouth Park	Fountains Primary School, Morley	Site Visits: Mini-beasts and Trees	180
Total			180

Volunteer groups working independently in the South Outer area:

Group Name	Number of Volunteers	Estimated Volunteer Days
Churwell Action Group	5	30
Friends of Dartmouth Park	5	10
Friends of Rothwell Country Park	10	120
Total		160

Existing in bloom groups within the South Outer area:

In Bloom Group	Number of Volunteers	Award Won (Yorkshire in Bloom)	Estimated Volunteer Days
Carlton	7		120
East Ardsley	10		100
Gildersome	5		80
John O'Gaunts	4		80
Lowry Road	25		600
Meadows (Robin Hood)	10		200
Morley	12		240
Oulton	8		160
Rothwell	25		480
Thorpe	6		100
West Ardsley	8		160
Woodlesford	14		280
Total	134		2600

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 South area in 2013:

Site Name	Month	Event	Total
Adwalton Moor	June	Drighlington Football Gala	1
	July	Drighlington Parish Fun Day	1
Copley Lane	December	Robin Hood Residents Xmas Lights	1
Dartmouth Park	June	Friends of Dartmouth Park - Dog Show	1
		Summer Bands	2
	July	Summer Bands	1
	August	Summer Bands	2
	September	Tennis Coaching	1
East Ardsley Rec	July	East Ardsley Gala	1
	August	Mini Breeze Event	1
Glen Road	July	Glen Rd Jr's Football Gala	1
John 'O' Gaunts Rec	August	John O Gaunts Fun Day	1
		John O Gaunts Sports Day	1
		John O Gaunts Tag Rugby	1
Rothwell Country Park	May	Rothwell Ride Out	1
	February	Rothwell Ride Out	1
	October	Wild Boar Challenge - Rothwell District Lions Club	1
	December	Rothwell Ride Out	1
Scatcherd Park	August	Back Yard Breeze	1
Springhead Park	June	Summer Bands	1
	July	Rothwell Carnival	1
Total			23

Community Parks – 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 3.233.

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 South Outer Area Committee.

Site	Year Assessed	Welcoming Place	Healthy, Safe, Secure	Clean, Well Maintained	Sustainability	Conservation / Heritage	Community Involvement	Marketing	Meets Standard?
Churwell Park	2013								No
Dartmouth Park	2013								No
Drighlington Moor Park	2011								Yes
Lewisham Park	2013								No
Rothwell Country Park	2011								No
Scarth Gardens	2013								No
Scatcherd Park	2011								Yes
Springhead Park	2011								Yes
Woodlesford Park	2013								No

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 is a reduction of 1 compared to 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 community parks which took place during 2013 are as follows:

- Springhead Park – Floodlights on tennis courts and infrastructure improvements.
- Rothwell Country Park – Trim trail
- Dolphin Lane Allotments – New hard standing and boundary fence
- Hopefield Estate – Tree planting

3.15 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)
Churwell Park	£4,000	
Dartmouth Park	£286,589	
Rothwell Country Park	£18,500	
Scarth Gardens	£61,815	
Woodlesford Park	£6,000	
Total to achieve LQP	£376,904	
Average annual reinvestment		£28,586
Total reinvestment to 2020		£200,102
Overall Total Investment to 2020		£577,006

3.16 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

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

- Carlton Village Green – Landscaping and new seating
- Wood Lane – Improvements to play area (subject to funding)
- Shayfield Rec – Improvements to play area (subject to funding)
- Smithy Lane – Relocation of ball wall

- Copley Lane Community Garden – Storage, water butts, picnic tables, benches and notice board installation
- Ramsgate POS – General green space improvements
- Lofthouse Rec – Installation of new slide

3.18 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	24	2,880,000	288,000
Multi Use games Areas	1	90,000	9,000
Skate Parks	4	360,000	36,000
Totals		3,330,000	333,000

Area Committee funding for additional site based gardeners

3.19 South Outer Area Committee provide additional funding for gardeners to increase site based presence at parks in the area. For 2013-14 this funding totalled £35,654.01 for 3 gardeners over a 6 month period. The gardeners were present at the following sites; Lowry Road, Lewisham Park, Hembrigg Park, Magpie Lane, Drighlington Park and Woodlesford Recreation Ground.

3.20 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.

3.21 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

3.22 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

3.23 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 / EM38	The percentage of parks and countryside sites assessed internally that meet the Green Flag criteria	23% Target: 23%	26.2% Target: 26.2%	30.8% Target: 29.4%	32.6%
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 There are no background documents associated with this report.