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## Report of The Director of City Development

**Meeting:** West Inner Area Committee

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2009

**Subject:** Annual Report – for Parks and Countryside Service in  
West Inner Area Committee

### Electoral Wards Affected:

Armley  
Bramley & Stanningley

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council  
Function

Delegated Executive  
Function available for Call  
In

Delegated Executive  
Function not available for  
Call In Details set out in the  
report

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## Executive Summary

This report examines the opportunities to develop the relationship between the Parks and Countryside service and the West Inner Area Committee.

It demonstrates how the service contributes to outcomes in the Leeds Strategic Plan.

It provides an area profile of key assets and sets out at an area level progress made in attaining Leeds Quality Park standard for community parks. It provides analysis for the area from the 2006 residents survey. It also sets out improvements needed for playing pitches and fixed play along with progress made in this regard.

It provides a perspective on actions contained in the area delivery plan as well as planned community engagement activities.

It sets out a programme of activities in 2009 including strategic developments, performance reporting, service planning and the forthcoming residents survey.

## **1.0 Purpose of this Report**

- 1.1. This report examines the opportunities to develop the relationship between the Parks and Countryside service and the West Inner Area Committee arising from the Area Committee Roles for 2008/09 report agreed at the July 2008 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 ensuring that the benefits of the revised roles are secured.
- 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 for playing pitches and fixed play along with progress made in this regard.

## **2.0 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.
- 2.2. This includes seven major parks, 167 community parks and recreation grounds and 383 acres of local green space, which include 144 playgrounds and 500 sports facilities ranging from skateboard parks to golf courses, and which play host to 600 events annually. We also manage a nursery which produces over 4 million bedding plants each year, 96 allotment sites, almost 800km of PROW, and 156 nature conservation sites, as well as 22 cemeteries and three crematoria.

### **Description of Delegated Function/Enhanced role**

- 2.3. The Executive Board report in July highlighted "a new proposed enhanced role for Area Committees in relation to ... community green space ... where they will have increased influencing, developmental and consultative responsibilities." The report defined community green space as follows:

*This covers 73 community parks vested with the Parks and Countryside Service. These include a wide variety of recreation facilities, sports pitches, play areas, formal and informal horticultural features. Area Committees will influence the development and use of community parks and be consulted about proposals for the development and use of them, for example proposals for refurbishment and installation of new play equipment.*

### **Role and Responsibilities of the Area Committee**

- 2.4. The appendix to the Executive Board report set out the practical arrangements for how the enhanced role for Area Committees would be fulfilled, and can be summarised as follows:
  - Area Committees would receive reports on significant issues affecting one or more community parks and continue to be updated on progress

- Area Committee involvement sought where matters impacting on community parks are of a more strategic nature
- 2.5. Where developments are less significant and only impact on a single site, then Ward Members and community groups will continue to be consulted on the proposals. It is important to note that briefings and meetings with 1 or often more ward members takes place on a routine basis to discuss individual schemes as well as issues in that ward. For example, if a facility is proposed on a site, consultation takes place with residents, community groups, members and other stakeholders about the detail of the proposal. There are no plans to replace these activities, indeed there may be scope to develop them further.

### **Contributing to Delivery of the Leeds Strategic Plan Targets and Outcomes**

- 2.6. The Parks and Countryside service contributes to many of the strategic outcomes. These are set out below along with the contribution made (in italics).
- **Culture** - Increased participation in cultural opportunities through engaging with all our communities:
    - *providing Local parks as venues for local events and sporting activities*
  - **Culture** - Enhanced cultural opportunities through encouraging investment and development of high quality facilities of national and international significance:
    - *Community Park improvements through Parks Renaissance*
    - *achieving and retaining 6 Green Flag awards*
    - *seeking to investigate the feasibility of developing a city centre park*
    - *entry to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show*
  - **Enterprise and the Economy** - Increased entrepreneurship and innovation through effective support to achieve the full potential of people, business and the economy. Increased international competitiveness through marketing and investment in high quality infrastructure and physical assets, particularly in the city centre.
    - *good quality green spaces can make an important contribution to regeneration and enhance the image of a neighbourhood*
    - *good quality green spaces help to raise property values and build business and community confidence*
    - *providing parks as major visitor attractions*
  - **Learning** - Enhance skills of the current and future workforce through fulfilling individual and economic potential and investing in learning facilities.
    - *RHS Chelsea Flower Show*
    - *Careerships for staff: enabling staff to climb the horticultural career ladder*
    - *Career changers programme: giving mature horticultural college students the opportunity to join the organisation on sandwich courses, part-time or summer work*

- *Kinaesthetic Learning Programme (KLP): enabling school children a less academic and more practical route to education (now part of the national Vocational Learning Programme)*
- *Apprentice Programme – enabling (predominantly) young people to learn a craft e.g. foresters*
- *Providing operational training: to IIP and national technical standards*
- **Learning** - ...investing in learning facilities - Improve participation and early learning outcomes for children from the most deprived areas.
  - *‘The Magical Gardens Project’ has led to open spaces outside children’s centres being transformed into ‘wild worlds’ for children to explore*
  - *Parks and green spaces can provide outdoor classrooms and thus a valuable resource for education, covering many subjects for all ages and abilities*
- **Transport** - Increased accessibility and connectivity through investment in a high quality transport system and through influencing others and changing behaviours.
  - *Green gateways (e.g. Wykebeck Valley Way, The Limes, Kippax, Transpennine Trail, and Harland Way and development of the West Leeds Country Park)*
  - *Public Rights of Way (PROW) network (and links with cycling routes)*
- **Environment** - Reduced ecological footprint through responding to environmental and climate change and influencing others.
  - *The role of Parks and green spaces in adapting to Climate Change by reducing temperature in dense urban environments and reducing surface runoff of rain water*
  - *Minimising impact on the environment by green waste recycling*
  - *Promoting biodiversity by active management of local sites in line with national performance targets*
- **Health and Wellbeing** - Reduced health inequalities through the promotion of healthy life choices and improved access to services. Improved quality of life through maximising the potential of vulnerable people by promoting independence, dignity and respect.
  - *General benefits of parks and green spaces to health, fitness and wellbeing*
  - *Health walks*
  - *Ranger led activities*
  - *Outdoor recreation opportunities including fixed play, playing pitches, bowling greens and golf courses*
  - *Allotment provision*
- **Thriving Places** - Improved quality of life through mixed neighbourhoods offering good housing options and better access to services and activities.
  - *In the Leeds Annual Survey 2007, respondents ranked parks and open spaces as the 5th most important factor in making somewhere a good place to live*
- **Thriving Places** - Reduced crime and fear of crime through prevention, detection, offender management and changed behaviours.

- *Providing diversionary activities (BMX, skateparks, MUGAs, teenzones, etc.) for young people*
- *ParksWatch team with the aim of providing a safe parks and green space environment for the community to enjoy*
- **Harmonious Communities** - More inclusive, varied and vibrant communities through empowering people to contribute to decision making and delivering local services.
  - *Consultation through residents' surveys, multi-agency meetings, community forums, attendance at Area Committee meetings,*
  - *Consultation on specific projects and schemes (e.g. the Parks Renaissance Programme, Positive Activities for Young People, Water Safety, etc.)*
  - *involving volunteers and Friends of groups on the design for and physical implementation of a wide range of site improvements.*
- **Harmonious Communities** - Improved community cohesion and integration through meaningful involvement and valuing equality and diversity.
  - *Support for 'In Bloom' groups*
  - *Work with Friends of / tree wardens / other volunteers / etc*
  - *Promoting community cohesion through activities and events*

### 3.0 The Service at Area Committee Level

#### Area Profile of the Service

- 3.1. The following table summarises community green space assets managed by Parks and Countryside in the West Inner Area Committee:

<b>Asset</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Community park	7
Playing Pitches:	
Football	15
Rugby League	7
Rugby Union	1
Bowling greens	5
Playgrounds	6
Multi-use games areas	3
Skateparks	1

#### Area based Service Priorities and contributions to the Area Committee's Area Delivery Plan

##### **Context**

- 3.2. The 2006 Parks and Countryside survey showed that the service attracts almost 60 million visits each year from Leeds' residents alone, and that approximately 90% of these are regular park users. These range from anybody using a park for informal recreation (e.g. walking, observing nature) to people who take part in formal activities (e.g. football clubs, conservation volunteers or to attend events). The user surveys also evidenced that 8m visits are made to our green space by Young People (12-19) compared to

3.5m by Children (5-11), however, the majority of the 'play' facilities were provided for younger age groups. The Council is now seeking to address the imbalance between children's and youth facilities by investing in BMX tracks and skateparks.

- 3.3. The use of this information has been a key contributor to many successful funding bids, for example the service has made significant progress in implementing the Parks Urban Renaissance programme utilising £3.7m for improvements to 21 community parks during 2005/09. There are several outdoor recreation projects (mainly playing pitches) that are in development which have either secured the total amount of funding required for the delivery of the project or bids have been submitted or are being prepared to secure the match funding. £7.8 million has been secured, with £3.2 million which although not formally secured subject to the technical assessment of the bids submitted/under preparation have the potential to be successful. During the period 2004 – 2008, the service was successful in securing £2.6 million funding for fixed play improvements, and from 2009 – 2010, £1.6 million has been secured, including £800k through the Big Lottery Fund.

**Community Parks**

- 3.4. Analysis from the 2006 resident survey has been carried out relevant to community parks in the area (listed later in paragraph 3.12).

<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	32
Female	68

<b>Age Profile</b>	<b>%</b>
20-39	42
40-59	35
60+	23

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>%</b>
White	98
BME	2

- 3.5. The gender profile is in line with results for the whole of the city and generally consistent with previous surveys that show a greater number of female visitors. There is a lower proportion of people in the sample from black and minority ethnic communities.
- 3.6. The total number of visits to community parks in the area is 4 million each year from residents, and 81% either walk or cycle to the park. The average across the city is 60%, so this represents a higher proportion who adopt healthy means to get to the park. The top 5 reasons for visiting are as follows:
- Get some fresh air (55%)
  - For a walk (50%)
  - Enjoy the beauty of the surroundings (33%)
  - Enjoy flowers / trees (31%)

- See birds and wildlife (26%)
- 3.7. Respondents were also given opportunity to give their views on the overall impression of the park. 51% were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied', with 15% dissatisfied. Issues will be addressed through implementation of the Parks and Green Space Strategy.
- 3.8. The residents survey is being repeated in 2009, and more detailed analysis for the area will be presented when available.
- 3.9. The Parks and Green Space Strategy was approved at Executive Board in February 2009 and 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. A local key indicator has been included in the Leeds Local Area Agreement in order to 'improve the quality and sustainability of the built and natural environment', namely the percentage of Parks and Countryside sites assessed that meet the Green Flag Standard. This is a key measure of progress for the Parks and Green Space Strategy. Progress for this indicator is set out in more detail in section 4.0.
- 3.11. This indicator includes an assessment of each community park which is of particular relevance to engaging more effectively with Area Committees. The assessments are undertaken by officers who have received training in the Green Flag Award from the scheme managers the Civic Trust. In Leeds we have developed this process as the 'Leeds Quality Parks' scheme.

3.12. The following table provides a summary of community parks assessed in the West Inner Area Committee:

Site	Year Assessed	Welcoming Place	Healthy, Safe, Secure	Clean, Well Maintained	Sustainability	Conservation / Heritage	Community Involvement	Marketing	Meets Standard?
Armley Park	2007								Yes
Bramley Falls Wood Park	2005								No
Bramley Park	2005								No
Gotts Park	2007								No
Ley Lane	2005								No
Rodley Park Recreation Ground	2006								No
Stanningley Park	2007								No

**Notes**

**Key:**

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

3.13. From this table, there is 1 park identified that meets the Leeds Quality Park Standard in the area. There are 6 parks that therefore do not meet the standard. The table also indicates the 'year assessed', which in some cases was 2005. It is therefore worth noting the improvements to community parks during the intervening period as follows:

- Bramley Fall Wood Park has seen signage installed along with a relocated and improved play area as well as the creation of a bridleway route
- Bramley Park play area has been improved along with the installation of benches and fencing
- The general landscaping at Gotts Park has been improved through fresh planting
- Stanningley Park rose garden has been refurbished alongside drainage improvements
- Rodley Park will see a scheme of improvements to drainage during 2009

**Playing Pitches**

3.14. The resident survey in 2006 allowed respondents to rate sport facilities in parks. The results show that 28% rate facilities as either 'very good', or 'good', with 8% rating them as 'very poor'.



- 3.15. Work has been undertaken to set out aspirations within the area that support the outcomes of the Playing Pitch Strategy as follows:

Site	Current position	Timescale	Comments
Bramley Park	6 grass pitches, changing rooms	2010-13	Pitches changing rooms extension and refurbishment
Stanningley Park	5 grass pitches and changing rooms	2010-13	Pitches require urgent drainage and changing rooms require extension and refurbishment
Bramley Falls	4 grass football pitches, and changing rooms	2010-13	Recent drainage works undertaken. Changing rooms require refurbishment.
West Leeds Rugby League	1 rugby pitch	2013 +	
Armley Park	2 grass football pitches	2013 +	Pitches in reasonable condition
Coal Hill Lane	5 grass pitches		Leased to club. Pitch drainage

- 3.16. In addition, a bid has been submitted for pitch improvements at Moorfield Recreation Ground with a total project value of £125k.

***Fixed Play***

- 3.17. The resident survey in 2006 allowed respondents to rate facilities for children and their parents. The results show that 30% rate facilities as either 'very good', or 'good', with 12% rating them as 'very poor'.
- 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 skateparks are slightly cheaper on average at about £90k each.

***Links to Area Delivery Plan***

- 3.19. The following table summarises actions identified in the Area Delivery Plan and a commentary from a service perspective.

Ref.	Action	Comments
A2	Support the delivery of the summer Bands concerts.	The programme of summer band concerts continues to receive resources support from Parks and Countryside
E8	To work towards 'Green Flag' or similar status for a park in Inner West Leeds.	Armley park has attained and held its Leeds Quality Park status. This award is based upon the Green Flag Award criteria

### **Customer and community engagement**

- 3.20. Close liaison with community and ward members is already in existence, utilising a variety of mechanisms, e.g. consultation through residents' surveys, multi-agency meetings, community forums, attendance at Area Committee meetings, consultation on specific projects and schemes (e.g. the Parks Renaissance Programme, Positive Activities for Young People, Water Safety, etc.), as well as involving volunteers and Friends of groups on the design for and physical implementation of a wide range of site improvements.
- 3.21. There is also a residents survey planned for Spring 2009 using a national methodology to 35,000 households, including adults, children and young people. The results of this will be reported at area committees.

## **4.0 Performance Management and Reporting**

### **Baseline Position and key targets for the Service**

- 4.1. The following table highlights key performance indicators relevant to the service.

PI Code	Description	2007/08 Actual	2008/09 Target	2009/10 Target	2010/11 Target
LKI-GFI / CP-PC50 / EM38	The percentage of parks and countryside sites assessed internally that meet the Green Flag criteria (amended for 2007-08)	17%	19%	21%	23%
LKI-PCP 22	Overall user satisfaction with Parks and Countryside (from the user survey)	N/A	N/A	7	
NI 197	Improved local biodiversity – active management of local sites	N/A – <i>new indicator</i>	N/A – <i>new indicator</i>	N/A – <i>new indicator</i>	N/A – <i>new indicator</i>

## 5.0 Programme of Activities for 2009

5.1. This section sets out planned activities during 2009 for which the Area Committee is proposed to be included.

Description	Inform	Consult	Influence	Timescale
<b>Parks and Green Space Strategy:</b> There are issues arising from implementing the strategy and undertaking actions identified.	✓	✓	✓	Quarter 1 2009
<b>Fixed play review:</b> an assessment of refurbishment costs over a 10 year basis has recently been undertaken and Area Committees will help to establish priorities for location and investment.	✓		✓	Quarter 2 2009
<b>Outdoor Bowls Strategy:</b> a 'towards an outdoor bowls strategy' document has been drafted that seeks to address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of supply and demand</li> <li>• Management arrangements</li> <li>• Financially sustainable provision</li> <li>• Promoting access</li> </ul>		✓	✓	Consultation process to commence early in 2009.
<b>Service plan:</b> this will be published in March 2009 and provides important links to addressing strategic outcomes. There is opportunity for Area Committees to be involved in helping address key issues and challenges identified	✓		✓	Quarter 1 2009
<b>Performance reporting:</b> principally relating to Leeds Quality Parks and the results from the 2008 assessments. These can be reported relevant to each Area Committee, and there is opportunity to help prioritise investment action in community parks to achieve the standard.	✓		✓	Quarter 1 2009
<b>Residents survey:</b> this will be conducted in 2009 to 35,000 households including adults, young people and children. Analysis of the results can be presented at an area level and inform discussion at Area Committee.	✓			Quarter 3 2009
<b>Playing Pitch Strategy review:</b> there is currently a £19 million programme in development to improve playing pitches and facilities.	✓		✓	Quarter 2 2009
<b>Rights of way improvement plan:</b> this is relevant in that the rights of way network provides important links to community green space and promotion of outdoor recreation activities.	✓			

## **6.0 Equality Considerations**

- 6.1. The Parks and Countryside service has recently been assessed as meeting level 4 of the Equality Standard. Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken as part of the service planning portfolio adopted by the service.

## **7.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance**

- 7.1. The proposals set out how the Executive Board requirements can be met by taking a more proactive approach to involve and engage Area Committees in matters relating to community parks

## **8.0 Legal and Resource Implications**

- 8.1. The body of the report identifies resource implications with particular reference to community parks, playing pitches and fixed play facilities in the area.

## **9.0 Conclusions**

- 9.1. Community green space contributes in many ways to the delivery of the Leeds Strategy 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.
- 9.2. 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.
- 9.3. Community engagement remains a key activity for the service with regular correspondence, attendance at meetings and briefings, along with more formal consultation principally through the residents survey to 35,000 households to take place again in 2009.
- 9.4. A programme of activities is planned for which updates and reports can be provided to the area committee to help inform, consult and influence community green space management.

## **10.0 Recommendations**

- 10.1. That the Area Committee communicate their priorities for community green space improvements.

## Background Reports

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Area Committee Roles for 2008/09</b>	<b>Executive Board, July 2008</b>
<b>Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-11</b>	<b>Full Council, July 2008</b>
<b>Leeds Annual Survey 2007</b>	
<b>Parks and Greenspace Strategy</b>	<b>Executive Board, February 2009</b>
<b>Fixed Play Strategy</b>	<b>Executive Board, September 2002</b>
<b>Local Area Agreement</b>	<b>Full Council, July 2008</b>
<b>Playing Pitch Strategy</b>	<b>Executive Board, October 2003</b>