

**Report of the Head of Parks & Countryside**

**Report to South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee**

**Date: Tues 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012**

**Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces**

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

**Summary of main issues**

To advise the area committee of the work that has been on going with the site based gardeners over the past 12 months and also to seek continual support for the scheme through the provision of area committee funding.

Parks and Countryside have provided costs for two options, costs to continue the scheme over a 12 month period and costs to deliver the scheme over a 6 months period.

**1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to firstly provide the Area Committee with a review of the site based gardeners scheme that was funded by the Area Committee Wellbeing Fund, up to the 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2011 and secondly to provide support for the new application for financial support to enable the scheme to continue throughout 2012.

**2 Background information**

- 2.1 The project has provided 3 gardeners (37 hours per person ) for 12 months.
- 2.2 This project allows for dedicated staff to managing a number of green spaces including Woodlesford Park, Driglington Park, Lewisham Park, Hembrig Park, Lowry Road and Magpie Lane, helping to encourage people to visit their local greenspace and to improve the environment where they live.

### **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 The scheme is a key factor in assisting the service in its quest to raise the standard of all its Parks and Open Spaces, through not only the Green Flag Scheme but also the Leeds Quality Standard, which uses the criteria of the Green Flag Scheme to judge each of the 167 community parks and recreation grounds against over a 3 year rolling period, with the scores and comments being used to help improve the quality and value of each park and recreation ground.
- 3.2 An analysis of the results has shown that since 2007 when the site based gardener scheme was first introduced more sites are performing better and that many of the community parks are generally of a high standard. Since the introduction of the site based gardeners in 2007, there has been a significant change in public opinion, furthermore complaints to both Ward Councillors and the Parks and Countryside Service have declined.
- 3.3 In addition, the service has observed an increase in the number of residents using parks and open spaces resulting in feedback from users being complimentary of the service rather than critical. Much of this information has been accrued through conversations with the site based gardeners.
- 3.4 However further analysis of the individual scores has shown that there are still some key areas of weakness for our parks one of which is the need for Site based gardeners
- 3.5 Research by CABI (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) Space, a central government body responsible for the strategic improvement of urban greenspace, has highlighted that by 1996 only a third of parks had dedicated park staff with 90% of local authorities experiencing vandalism in their Parks. Furthermore CABI Space linked the £1.3billion cumulative cut in revenue expenditure in Parks from 1981 to 2001 with the downward spiral towards greater vandalism, litter, neglect and visitor decline in use of our Parks<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.6 A telephone survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions revealed that 67% of women, 57% of 12-15 year olds, 50% of 16-19 year olds, 79% of 56-65 year olds, 63% of 76 year olds and 77% of disabled respondents felt that the presence of staff on site would make them feel safer visiting their particular greenspace<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.7 Each of the site based gardeners have built a rapport with users, local residents, Ward Members and local groups developing a sense of shared ownership for the site and the activities that are undertaken there. In addition, the gardeners develop a sense of responsibility and the attainment of a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the site and the people who use it. Certainly the rapport with the public often enables problems to be dealt with effectively and helps to reduce the pressure on the wider service in the area allowing issues to be resolved with little or no budget implications for Parks and Countryside.

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<sup>1</sup> Parks need Parkforce, CABI Space 2005

<sup>2</sup> Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Open spaces, The Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions 2002

### Drighlington

- 3.8 The Parish Council meet regularly with both the site based gardener and the area officer to discuss maintenance issues along side projects that they wish to undertake.

### Lowry Road

- 3.9 The gardener not only manages the shrub beds by undertaking litter collection and seasonal pruning, but also tends to the grass and paths, removing graffiti and over hanging branches, alongside engaging with members of the local community by being a constant visible presence on site during the day. Where once Lowry Road Public Open Space suffered from anti social behaviour, the site based gardener has managed through close working with Ward Members and residents, to improve the appearance of this public open space making it a more attractive and inviting space to visit.

### Lewisham Park

- 3.10 The site based gardener undertakes a variety of tasks from grass cutting to managing the artificial cricket wicket, keeping the surface clean and the wickets ready for use, along side maintaining the bowling green and seasonal bedding displays. Additional duties involve emptying of bins, community engagement, providing advice and tips on horticulture along with keeping the park well tended.
- 3.11 This site based gardener is also responsible for the green spaces along Wide Lane, Magpie Lane and Hembrigg Park undertaking gardening duties that range from litter collection and seasonal pruning through to grass cutting, marking out of sports pitches, inspecting the refurbished play areas and the newly installed youth hub on Magpie lane along side carrying out strimming work around obstacles and inspecting the sports pavilion.
- 3.12 Revenue funding made available by the Area Committee Wellbeing fund was to the value of £60,380 in 2008/09, £46,182.50 in 2009/10 and £34,591.50 in 2010/11. In order to continue this service the Parks and Countryside service continues to seek mainstream funding for increased staffing via the budget processes of the Council.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.1.1 The presence of an on site gardener can help identify area issues affecting different members of the community and identify problems which often lead to some members of a community failing to use the park and the amenities therefore a Site Based Gardener would help to resolve these issues thus engaging with the community as a whole.

### **4.2 Resources and value for money**

- 4.2.1 The Site Based Gardeners are paid at B3 grade and given their important role in building community confidence and dealing with issues on the arise this represents good value for money.

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

4.3.1 There are no legal implications associated with this scheme.

### **4.4 Risk Management**

4.4.1 Parks and Countryside are professional and diligent in their approach to health and safety management and any risks will be managed through Parks and Countryside's Health and Safety Policy.

## **5 Conclusions**

5.1 It is clear that the site based gardeners have proven to be extremely popular with local residents and a great asset to the service. Since their introduction the general condition of the sites have improved markedly. The funding required to continue the improvements at their present level is not from Parks and Countryside's base budget.

5.2 Site based gardener's act as a point of liaison with the local community, effect policing duties, deal with other routine park maintenance such as litter collection, and unlocking of park gates.

5.3 Therefore the main output of this scheme is to ensure the continuation of engagement with members of the public along with undertaking horticultural and maintenance tasks, thereby continuing to ensure that the service and the team play an important part in helping enhancing people's enjoyment of their parks and green spaces.

5.4 In addition site-based gardeners associate better with their own sites of responsibility and attain a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the site. The latter asset is in valuable in gaining a rapport with the public and dealing with site problems.

5.5 Dedicated park gardeners create a virtuous circle of improvement as their presence leads to better maintained parks which are no longer perceived as being un safe but are seen as being welcoming and a place for both active and passive recreation. This in turn helps to combat public fears and encourages more people to use their Park.

5.6 The main outputs will be the continuation of well maintained subject sites that are well used, along with increased public interaction between the site based gardener and site users

## **6. Recommendations**

6.1 This report seeks to show the importance of site based gardeners within the community and recommends that this dedicated service continues with the help of well being funding.

6.2 The continuation of the site based gardeners helps Leeds to contribute to PSA (Public Service Agreement) objectives that include crime reduction, reducing public fear of crime, increasing voluntary community engagement and the delivery of cleaner, safer and greener public spaces. Improvements in the above targets for our Parks show that Leeds City Council takes pride in its work and cares for local

residents. This has a knock on effect, since an amelioration in the 'street scene and the public realm' as well as 'staff responsiveness and accessibility' were identified by MORI<sup>3</sup> as a key to improving the reputation of a local council

- 6.3 That the Area Committee approve the attached funding bid to ensure the continuation of the site based gardener scheme during 2012/13.

### **Background documents <sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.