

Report of the Head of Parks & Countryside

Report to South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: 3rd September 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 checked="" 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 South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee of the work that has been on going with the 3 site based gardeners funded by South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee Wellbeing Fund in 2012 at a cost of £34,937.41.

1 Purpose of this report

- The purpose of this report is to provide the Area Committee with a review of the site based gardener's scheme that is funded by the Area Committee Wellbeing Fund between May 1st – October 31st 2012.

2 Background information

Research by CABA (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) Space, highlighted that by 1996 only a third of parks nationally had dedicated park staff with 90% of local authorities experiencing vandalism in their Parks. Furthermore CABA 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 Parks¹.

¹ Parks need Parkforce, CABA Space 2005

- 2.1 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 greenspace².
- 2.2 This project has provided 3 gardeners (37 hours per person per week) for a period of 6 months, dedicated to managing a number of green spaces in the south outer area of Leeds. The site funded gardener's commenced work on 1st May 2012 and are funded until 31st October 2012.
- 2.3 It was agreed by the South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee that this additional staffing resource would provide dedicated front line support in the following 11 parks and greenspaces identified in the table below.

Sites/Group of sites with a site based gardener	Ward
Drighlington Park and Churwell Park	Morley North
Lewisham Park	Morley South
Lowry Road and Smithy Lane Recreation Ground	Ardsley Robin Hood
Wide Lane, Magpie Lane play areas and Hembrigg Park	Morley South
Woodlesford Park, Shayfield Recreation Ground and Carlton Village Green	Rothwell

- 2.4 Although the site based gardeners conduct lone working operations, they also at times work within the area maintenance teams in order to create marked improvements of the above sites. The table below provides an indication of how the funded site based gardeners operational hours are divided between the parks and greenspaces and the duties that they each carry out. The tasks undertaken are often cyclical, and the site based gardener provides a higher frequency of the tasks so that the areas look considerable better maintained for a longer time. However these staff must remain flexible and reactionary when non common issues arise within their respective areas.

Site Based Gardener (SBG)	Park / Greenspace Name	Hours worked per week	Main Duties
SBG1	Drighlington Park	14.8	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
SBG1	Churwell Park	14.8	
SBG1	Lewisham Park	7.4	
TOTAL		37	

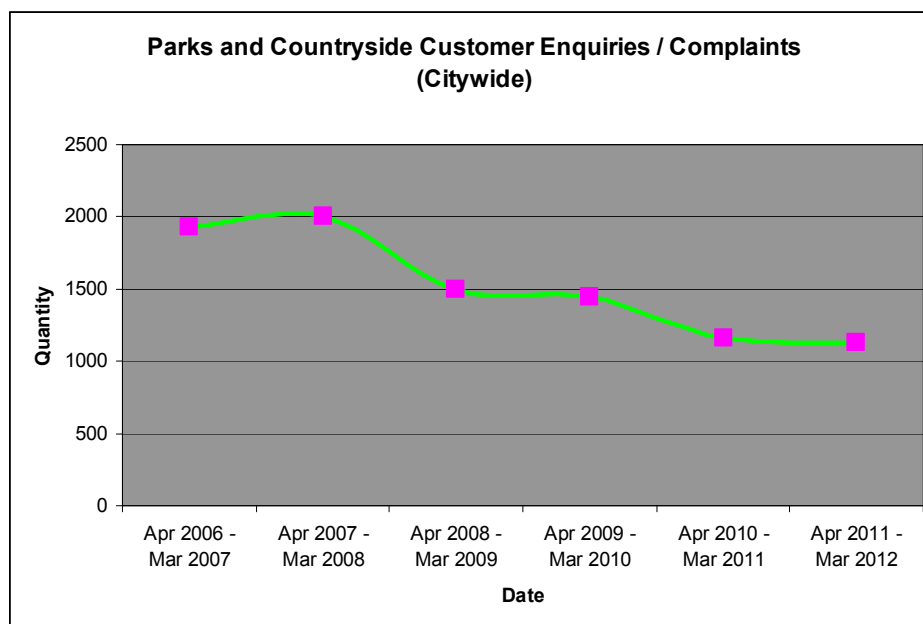
² Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Open spaces, The Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions 2002

			bedding displays. Additional duties involve emptying of bins, community engagement, providing advice and tips on horticulture along with keeping the park well tended
SBG2	Lowry Road	7.4	<p>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 in particular to the newly formed Friends of Lowry Road by being a regular 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 reduce the incidents of ASB and improve the appearance of this public open space making it a more attractive and inviting space to visit.</p> <p>This site based gardener is also responsible for the green spaces along Wide Lane, Magpie Lane and Hembrigg Park. The post undertakes a variety of horticultural duties that range from litter collection, seasonal pruning, 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.</p>
SBG2	Smithy Lane	7.4	
SBG2	Magpie Lane / Wide Lane	14.8	
SBG2	Hembrigg Park	7.4	
TOTAL		37	
SBG3	Woodlesford Park	22.2	<p>The gardener here has really made an impact in Woodlesford Park, Shayfield Recreation Ground and Carlton Village Green. Based at Woodlesford Park bowls pavilion the duties include maintenance of the bowling green, litter collection, inspection of the play area sweeping of paths and general amenity horticultural work.</p> <p>In addition Woodlesford Park is now the central hub of work undertaken by WOAG (Woodlesford and Oulton Action group) who have worked tirelessly with the support of the ward members to improve the park and have helped attract funding in the region of £45k. This has seen new benches, a sculpture a games area and signage installed. This work in partnership with the site based gardener is enhancing both visitor and residents experiences when using Woodlesford Park</p>
SBG3	Shayfield Recreation Ground	7.4	
SBG3	Carlton Village Green	7.4	
TOTAL		37	

			<p>Following a significant amount of investment in Shayfield Rec over several years this small recreation ground is now a well used local amenity space. Issues of anti social behaviour have significantly reduced following the refurbishment work undertaken. Thanks to the site based gardener whose time is split between here and the village green local residents have a contact point to report issues and problems. A regular and routine visit is helping keep both areas clean tidy and well used along with reducing problems of joy riders and litter</p> <p>Carlton Village Green is a small recreational space in the heart of the village that was transformed several years ago from a derelict piece of waste land into a tranquil area for local's residents. The regular visit by the site based gardener ensures this site is well maintained and cared for throughout the year and a familiar face ensures residents know who to speak to about any problems.</p>
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- 2.5 Since 2007 when the site based gardener scheme was first introduced the funded site based gardeners have helped make marked improvements to a number of maintenance tasks in these parks and greenspaces that in the past were of concern. There have been vast improvements to the horticultural maintenance of these parks and greenspaces as well as a reduction in litter and dog faeces. Known fly tipping areas are now dealt with more efficiently and effectively. As a result, Parks and Countryside have observed an increase in the number of residents using parks and open spaces.
- 2.6 Since the introduction of the site based gardeners there has been a significant change in public opinion which has subsequently reduced complaints to both Ward Councillors and the Parks and Countryside Service. As the site based gardeners have a regular working pattern per site, it means that users / members of the public can arrange to meet and engage with the gardeners to discuss any issues and concerns that they may have. This can assist in reducing the time it takes to resolve complaints and issues which in turn creates greater customer satisfaction.

2.7 The table below illustrates the number of customer enquiries / complaints that Parks and Countryside has received between financial years 2006/7 – 2011/12.



The collated data is citywide and covers all issues that were raised.*

* This data is compiled from enquiries that have been received from P&C's central administrative system and does not include direct contact with individual officers.

2.8 It is evident that the number of enquiries / complaints have decreased in recent years which could be directly attributed to the presence of site based staff both in the south of the city and citywide. Due to the nature of P&C's customer enquiry system it is very difficult to extrapolate data by site. Therefore in conjunction with Parks and Countryside's 2012 Residents Survey and subject to a successful funding application in 2013 P&C propose, with the help of the 3 site based gardeners to conduct a more localised, face to face survey with visitors, users and interested bodies within the above parks and greenspaces to further gauge local customer satisfaction. The results of this survey will be included in the end of term evaluation and reported back to the Area Committee.

2.9 The Service has been complimented on a number of improvements of these parks by members of the public, local Councillors (both city and parish), sports clubs and associations and also voluntary organisations such as 'Friends of' groups. Much of this can be attributed to the dialogue between customers and site based gardeners.

2.10 As well as increasing customer satisfaction, the provision of this extra resource also plays a key factor in assisting the Parks and Countryside Service in its strategic objective to raise the standard of all its Parks and Opens Spaces and have all of the cities community Parks up to Leeds Quality Parks (LQP) standard by 2020.

3 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 3.1 The presence of an on site gardener can help identify 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. Site based gardeners help to resolve these issues thus providing community cohesion and inclusion.

4 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.1 The site based gardeners help 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.
- 4.2 This resource also assists the Council's Parks and Greenspace Strategy objectives.

5 Resources and value for money

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

6 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this scheme.

7 Risk Management

- 7.1 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.

8 Conclusions

- 8.1 It is clear that the site based gardeners have proven to be extremely popular with local residents and a great asset to the Service and the Area Committee. Since their introduction in 2007 the general condition of the sites in which they concentrate their efforts has improved.
- 8.2 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 and other parks facilities.
- 8.3 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 invaluable in gaining a rapport with the public and dealing with site specific problems.
- 8.4 Dedicated park gardeners create a virtuous circle of improvement as their presence leads to better maintained parks and greenspaces which are no longer perceived as being unsafe but are respected and seen as being welcoming and a

place for both active and passive recreation. This in turn helps to combat public fears, increases public confidence and encourages more people to use their park.

- 8.5 In Conclusion, the main outputs of this scheme is to ensure the continuation of increased public confidence, engagement and interaction along with undertaking additional horticultural and maintenance tasks. This ensures that the Service, team and the Area Committee play an important part in helping enhancing people's enjoyment of their parks and green spaces.

9 Recommendations

- 9.6 This report seeks to demonstrate the importance of the 3 site based gardeners within the community, funded by South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee Wellbeing Fund in 2012.
- 9.7 That the South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee notes the contents of this report.

Background Papers ¹

Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces report to South (Outer) Area Committee March 2011

Parks need Parkforce, CABE Space 2005

Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Open spaces, The Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions 2002

¹ 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.