

Report of the Head of Parks & Countryside

Report to South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: Monday 4th February 2013

Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	Yes Ardsley & Robin Hood, Morley North Morley South Rothwell	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" 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 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.

Recommendations

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.

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 MORI₃ as a key to improving the reputation of a local council.

That the Area Committee consider the options in 1.2 and approve a funding bid to ensure the continuation of the site based gardener scheme during 2012/13.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 This report seeks to ensure the continuation of the very successful project within the South Outer area, being the provision of on site gardeners dedicated to the management and maintenance of parks and open spaces.

1.2 The report provides two options for Area Committee Consideration:

Six month scheme £35,654.01

- The project seeks to provide 3 gardeners (37 hours per person) for 6 months of the year from 1st April to 30th Sept 2013 dedicated to managing a number of Parks and green spaces including Woodlesford Park, Drighlington Park, Lewisham Park, Hembrigg Rec, Lowry Road POS and Magpie Lane POS.

Twelve month scheme £71,308.02

- The project seeks to provide 3 gardeners (37 hours per person) for 12 months of the year from 1st April 2013 to 31st Mar 2014 dedicated to managing a number of green spaces including Woodlesford Park, Drighlington Park, Lewisham Park, Hembrigg Rec, Lowry Road and Magpie Lane.

1.3 Outputs of this project are:

- Continuation of well maintained parks and open spaces
- Continuation in engagement with local residents and the wider community
- Continuation in the reduction of anti social behaviour
- Increased use of parks and open spaces
- Continuation in the reduction of complaints
- Continuation in the improvement of the local environment

2 Background information

2.1 The project has provided 3 gardeners (37 hours per person) for 6 months for the last two years.

2.2 This project allows for dedicated staff to manage and maintain a number of green spaces including Woodlesford Park, Drighlington Park, Lewisham Park, Hembrigg Rec, Lowry Road and Magpie Lane, helping to encourage people to visit their local greenspace and to improve the environment where they live.

2.3 Reinstating park 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 as key to improving the reputation of a local council.

- 2.4 All residents and visitors to Ardsley and Robin Hood, Morley and Rothwell sites will benefit from the presence of site based staff and consequently the traders and other businesses within the town will see the economic benefits of well maintained local greenspaces.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Leeds is host to a number of major Parks which include :- Otley Chevin Country Park, Kirkstall Abbey Estate, Middleton Park, Golden Acre Park, Roundhay Park, Temple Newsam Estate and Lotherton Hall Estate. In addition to 167 community parks and recreation grounds along with 383 acres of local green space. With a further 156 nature conservation sites and around 170 woodlands and plantations also managed by the service.
- 3.2 The Green Flag Award scheme provides for a national standard for parks and green spaces across Great Britain and overseas. The award which is managed by Keep Britain Tidy plus consortium on behalf of Community’s and Local Government (CLG) and has backing in England from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), English Heritage, and Natural England. In 2011 the Parks and Countryside service entered seven parks Golden Acre Park, Pudsey Park, Lotherton Hall Estate, Roundhay Park, Kirkstall Abbey Estate, Otley Chevin and Temple Newsam Estate, for the award, all of which were confirmed as successfully achieving the award.
- 3.3 The Parks and Countryside service has over 30 trained Green Flag judges who judged in 2011, 47 Leeds sites against the Green Flag field assessment criteria. We refer to this scheme as ‘Leeds Quality Parks’.
- 3.4 Judging sheets are completed for each site and these assess outlining strengths and recommendations as well as providing a score for each relevant criteria.
- 3.5 This work is the basis for a local performance indicator, namely ‘the percentage of annual sites assessed that meet the field based assessment for the Green Flag standard.’
- 3.6 An analysis of the results shows that the major City and Country Parks are generally of a high standard. There is however a significant gap between the average overall score for City/Countryside Parks and the scores for Community Parks which are lower. By considering the individual criteria more closely the results show that the key areas of weakness for Community Parks are:-
- Signage
 - The provision of appropriate interpretation and educational information
 - Infrastructure maintenance particularly fencing and paths
 - Horticultural features
 - Site based gardeners

- 3.7 The Parks Renaissance Capital Programme in Community Parks has been a significant step forward in beginning to address some of these issues. The challenge for the service is to ensure that gardeners are based in Community Parks in order to sustain the improvements being made. The service currently has over 25 Community Parks with permanent site based gardening staff.
- 3.8 Research by CABE (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 CABE 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.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 With regard to people who rarely visit or use the Parks a national survey conducted for CABE Space ascertained 68% were alienated by dog fouling, 57% by vandalism and graffiti and 44% by poor maintenance. The presence of on site gardeners has the potential to address these problems.

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 as they arise, this represents good value for money.

4.3 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.3.1 All decisions taken by the Area Committee in relation to the delegated functions from Executive Board are not eligible for Call In. There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

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 cannot be found 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 invaluable in gaining a rapport with the public and dealing with site issues.
- 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 unsafe 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 as a key to improving the reputation of a local council

6.3 That the Area Committee consider the options in 1.2 above and approve a funding bid to ensure the continuation of the site based gardener scheme during 2013/14.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 There are no background documents associated with this paper.

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.