

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 2ND FEBRUARY, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, K Brooks, A Khan,
S Lay, A Maloney, T Smith, J Tudor,
P Wadsworth and E Thomson

54 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal.

55 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

56 Late Items

There were no formal late items.

57 Declaration of Interests

No interests were made.

58 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies of absence were received on behalf of Councillors E Carlisle, P Grahame, and R Finnigan.

59 Minutes - 5 January 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held Thursday, 5th January 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

Matters arising

Minute No. 50 – Initial Budget Proposals. The composite budget statement has been shared with members and will be discussed at the upcoming Executive Board meeting on 8th February 23. Additionally, it was noted that proposals relating to new car parking charges have been withdrawn.

Minute No. 51 – Performance Monitoring. Issues raised are being picked up in an upcoming meeting and will be reported back to the Scrutiny Board.

60 Parks and Green Spaces Strategy

The report of the Chief Officer (Parks and Countryside) provided an update on the progress with delivering actions set out in in the Leeds Parks and Green

Spaces Strategy one year on from its publication, covering the period March – December 2022.

Appended to the submitted report was a copy of the strategy and a progress update on the actions contained within the strategy.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor S Arif, Executive Member for Public Health, and Active Lifestyles
- Sean Flesher, Chief Officer Parks, and Countryside
- Emma Trickett, Parks Technical Manager

The Executive Member for Public Health, and Active Lifestyles introduced the item, explaining that the report provides an update on progress made and sets out the authority's vision to provide the best parks and greenspaces in the UK.

Officers in attendance provided an update relating to the eight priorities as outlined in the submitted report. Those being:

- Quality – all city parks achieved the national Green Flag standard. An aspiration set out in the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) is for all community parks to reach the Leeds Quality Park (LQP) standard during the strategy.
- Climate and biodiversity – planting 50 hectares of trees each year. The KPI was met in 2021/22 and the service are on target for the current year. Seasonal bedding has been reduced by 50% in 2022 and replaced with pollinator friendly wildflower mixes.
- Access for all – the service partnered with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) on an externally funded 'Safer Streets' research project. Research will contribute to design guides to ensure park designs are female friendly.
- Culture – the service continues to progress on the cultural offer of the city. an indoor play-barn is being constructed at Temple Newsam Home Farm, a new flagship play area at Lotherton and plans for a natural history indoor play area at Tropical World.
- Child friendly – the service continues to invest in play facilities. In 2022, 530k of Section 106 monies was invested across 11 different sites.
- Working with communities – the service continues to work with a range of partners including Friends groups, Bloom groups, Sports clubs, and self-managed allotment sites.
- Financial sustainability - several different funding mechanisms continue to be used to improve greenspaces and parks across Leeds. Monies include S106, Town's Fund, unsuccessful bids to the Levelling Up Fund and work undertaken to create Plans on a Page for community parks.
- Health and wellbeing – developing sports facilities through partnerships and externally funding a multi-use games area (MUGA), as well as football pitch improvements.

Board members raised the following key areas for discussion:

- Volunteering opportunities and ways in which to raise capacity within communities, and whether Voluntary Action Leeds are involved in training.
- Clarity on how inflation has affected supply of materials necessary to deliver greenspace / park improvements.
- The importance of providing play facilities in built-up areas and the safety provisions in place to keep children safe from harm and busy roads.
- A suggestion to increase litter and dog fouling bins across community parks.
- Clarity on the assessment for community parks to reach the LQP standard.
- The importance of embedding a tree management policy in light of increased tree planting and the process for assessing the success of tree planting in relation to the Council's targets.
- Accessibility issues for disabled residents accessing parks and greenspaces, including the difficulty of enabling access for those on motorised scooters while also restricting access for vehicles that can cause anti-social behaviour such as quad bikes.
- Concern regarding public toilets not being in use / available to the public at specific locations such as Yeadon Tarn and conflicting information regarding opening hours being published online.
- Considerations around provision for older children and girls at public parks.
- Being considerate and mindful of relaxed mowing in areas such as graveyards and sheltered accommodation.
- Concerns regarding CIL monies replacing S106.
- A suggestion was made that a document is produced to keep members up to date on projects, and to show what is outstanding in a particular area.
- Member involvement in terms of the Plan on a Page for communities.

In response to the concerns raised, the following information was relayed to members:

- Volunteering – there are several rangers who support volunteer groups and officers, allowing them to become more independent by offering partnership agreements and insurance. The service is seeking funding to support additional community engagement. The Parks Forum is made up of partners who meet periodically, typically 2 meetings on an afternoon and 2 in the evening. The Leeds Parks Forum website¹ provides information on how people can form their own group and includes key information. It was also noted that tree planting programmes are oversubscribed with volunteers.
- Green burials – whilst the service does not currently offer this as an option, this is being explored.

¹ <https://leedsparksforum.org/>

- Challenges with supply chains and inflation – during the Covid-19 pandemic, construction work was suspended. There are now supply chain issues, increased costs and difficulties in obtaining parts for play equipment.
- Investing in playgrounds – members determine how S106 is distributed across communities. Significant investment is required for such projects, are most require S106 monies. Surplus money gained from projects via the service, will be invested in some of the sites not benefitting from greenspaces funding. Additionally, a paper will be produced on how discretionary funding can be used. Members can be provided with details on the 11 sites where monies have been invested for play facilities.
- Keeping children safe – playgrounds are assessed on an individual basis and a risk assessment is undertaken to identify the appropriate mitigation. If there are high risk areas that require attention, members are asked to provide details to officers to review the site.
- The majority of the Leeds community parks meet the LQP standard.
- The service run an education scheme and provide sessions with young people across different parks. Young people are also consulted with on what they would like to see across parks in Leeds. Approximately 30k children are reached.
- Officers are reviewing comments received from members on a recent working group regarding the tree management plan and looking to review that policy. Members were also provided with clarity on the formation of a tree canopy.
- Disabled residents being unable to access sites - a detailed audit is being undertaken on accessibility.
- The service is keen to incorporate more relaxed mowing across sites, however, it is acknowledged that there are some sites where it is inappropriate and maintenance on those sites will continue. Officers welcome examples from members where relaxed mowing may be appropriate.
- Provision for girls and older children in parks and greenspaces – there is on-going research and work with partners to determine what teenage girls are interested in. Design guides will also acknowledge the importance of considering the needs of girls and young teenagers.
- Specific issues relating to toilet provisions can be picked up outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) Note the contents of the report and its appendices, including the comments raised during discussion of this item.
- b) Endorse the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and support the progress made at present.

61 Long Term Burial Plan

The report of the Chief Officer (Parks and Countryside) provided an update on the long-term burial plan for Leeds.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor S Arif, Executive Member for Public Health, and Active Lifestyles
- Sean Flesher, Chief Officer Parks, and Countryside

The Chief Officer (Parks and Countryside) introduced the report and provided an update on the position of supply in Leeds. Information relayed included:

- An overview of table 3, setting out the 2008 position on new graves available across the city. The table evidenced that East-northeast Leeds was under most pressure, particularly in Harehills. Proposals were therefore developed to construct new cemeteries at Whinmoor and Elmete.
- Cemeteries at Garforth and Kippax were also extended.
- South-southeast increasing provision. Further provision has been provided at Hunslet Cemetery along with Phase 1 of an extension at Cottingley Cemetery.
- There is a possibility to extend Cottingley Cemetery further subject to planning permission, adding an additional 7.1 years to the South-southeast.
- There is planning consent to extend Whinmoor Cemetery, with the possibility to add an additional 7,000 graves.
- An area of land has been identified in the east-northeast area, subject to further considerations and planning, and will provide a further 594 graves.
- The overall projected supply at the end of November 2022 stands at 14.2 years, however, with the potential new burial spaces being developed, the figure will stand at 34.3 years provision.

In responding to questions from members, the following information was confirmed:

- Provisions for faith groups across cemeteries. All of the council's cemeteries are multi-faith, there is adequate provision across all cemeteries and it is up to the individual where they would like to be buried. Further to this, a member queried whether it would be possible to dedicate sections of cemeteries to faith groups.
- The position on Cottingley Cemetery. The proposal to extend Cottingley Cemetery will not take up all of the available space of the playing pitch. The scheme currently has preliminary plans, but it was confirmed that as part of that proposal, there is an opportunity to improve recreational value.
- Clarity on cremation trends and different methods of burials. The council do not currently consider different methods of burials, due to the adequate provision of supply. There is a current trend of cremations increasing and specific requirements for faith groups also increasing.
- Types of commemorations within communities. Most local authorities will only have 1 crematorium. There is an offer for families to strew

remains in memorial gardens, and having the cremated remains buried in a small pot. There is also an option for a memorial tree.

- Clarity on the assessment of spaces required. The council review current demand and work out the number of new graves constructed over the last 6 years. Each year this is assessed to determine whether any new projects are required.

A member suggested that officers liaise with planning colleagues in terms of identifying sites prior for provision and as part of the Site Allocations Plan process.

The Chair thanked those for attending, and in particular, the Board paid thanks to Sean Flesher for his last 40 years of service and commitment in his work to improve parks and greenspaces across the city and wished him well in his retirement.

RESOLVED – To note the contents of the report and update on the long-term supply for burial spaces in Leeds.

62 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided the Board's work schedule for the 2022/23 municipal year, and as attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

Members were reminded of a remote working group focusing on the Air Quality Action Plan. A remote meeting has been scheduled for Monday, 27th February 2023 at 2 p.m.

RESOLVED – To note the report and the Board's work schedule for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

63 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday, 2nd March 2023 at 10:30 a.m. There will be a pre-meeting for Board members at 10:00 a.m.

The meeting concluded at 12:15 p.m.