

Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) Statement: Plans for Community Parks

Outcome of the meeting: 12 October 2023





Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board 2023/24



Cllr Barry Anderson



Cllr Javaid Akhtar



Cllr Stewart Golton
(Chair)



Cllr Pauleen Grahame



Cllr Abdul Hannan



Cllr Norma Harrington



Cllr Asghar Khan



Cllr Annie Maloney



Cllr Adrian McCluskey



Cllr Andy Rontree



Cllr Simon Seary



Cllr Penny Stables



Cllr John Tudor

Plans for Community Parks

Background: On [12 October 2023](#) the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) considered the current approach to developing a 'plan on a page' for each community park in Leeds, with particular focus on 'access for all' and the safety of women and girls.

Attendees: Alongside Scrutiny Board members, the following attendees were present:

- Cllr Mohammed Rafique (Executive Member Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Spaces)
- James Rogers (Director Communities, Housing and Environment)
- Polly Cook (Chief Officer, Climate, Energy and Green Spaces)
- Emma Trickett (Parks Technical Manager)
- Geoff Turnbull (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager)
- Dr Anna Barker (Associate Professor, University of Leeds)
- Helen Forman (Urban Design Manager, WYCA)

Recommendation: The Executive Board is asked to consider the conclusions of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) as set out in this report. In line with the Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules, the Executive is asked to provide a response to the Scrutiny Board indicating what action (if any) it proposes to take and to publish its response.

Key Conclusions

- 1 Ward members should be consulted about the classification of greenspaces within their respective areas to identify whether any designations need to be amended or updated.
- 2 Where formal neighbourhood plans have been adopted by localities in Leeds, further engagement should take place with neighbourhood planning colleagues to ensure that plans for community parks align with the relevant neighbourhood plan.
3 Consideration should be given as to how the city Council can work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils in future to support communities in delivering improvements to greenspaces potentially through the use of monies received via the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 4 Local influence over funding mechanisms should be an integral part of the community committee review— with members using the funding of greenspace improvements as an illustrative example of what that may look like in practice as they engage with the review.
- 5 Guidance about improving the safety of women and girls in parks and greenspaces should be shared with Parish and Town Councils to inform the development of greenspaces for which they have responsibility.
- 6 Where a policy of reduced maintenance of foliage or other natural features is proposed an equality impact assessment should be carried out, which involves users of each park affected. In addition, a commitment should be made to later review the original equality impact assessment to ensure this is updated to reflect the lived experience of local people using, or wishing to use, the park.
- 7 To accelerate the delivery of accessibility audits the Scrutiny Board recommends exploring options to enable community groups to conduct accessibility audits.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

The Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2022—2032 set out a commitment to produce a ‘plan on a page’ for each community park in Leeds over the lifetime of the strategy.

The vision for each of those community parks was to be developed in consultation with ward members and the local community, and would be informed by 8 overarching priorities including access for all.

Members of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) welcomed this approach to improving community parks and supported the proposed engagement with communities and ward members to develop each plan.

However, at the Scrutiny Board meeting on 12 October 2023, members sought to examine the following matters in more detail:

1. Ensuring access for all and the process for auditing the accessibility of community parks.
2. How to improve the safety of women and girls in parks and greenspaces.

The meeting at which these issues were discussed is available via the Council’s webcast—a link to the webcast and the published minutes can be found here: [Scrutiny Board \(Environment, Housing & Communities\) - 12 October 2023](#)

A brief summary of the main issues raised is also included below.

Parks Encompassed By the Project

The Scrutiny Board recommended that ward members are engaged in reviewing the classification of local greenspaces within the areas they represent to ensure that the right greenspaces are falling within the scope of the programme.

Accessibility Audits

Members sought and received assurance from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager that the process for accessibility audits is robust and that the service will continue to receive support as officers conduct audits for the remaining community parks. Consideration was also given to who should be tasked with carrying out the accessibility audits.

Members noted the limited capacity within the service to carry out all of the required access audits. To accelerate delivery of accessibility audits members recommended that officers explore options to expand capacity through enabling community groups to carry out the audits.

Neighbourhood Plans

Members welcomed the extent of the planned consultation process for developing plans on a page. However, assurance was sought about the way in which officers would ensure a plan for a community park aligns with the aspirations of any formally adopted neighbourhood plan. Board members recommended that for those localities that have adopted a neighbourhood plan, further engagement should take place with colleagues in neighbourhood planning teams.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

Safety of Women and Girls

The Scrutiny Board reiterated its support for the Council's engagement with the 2022 research project co-ordinated by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, which considered how to make parks feel safer for women and girls.

Members welcomed the fact that the guidance that emerged from that programme of research had informed the design of the accessibility audit for parks in Leeds.

The Scrutiny Board considered the Council's approach to the safety of women and girls in the context of three key themes set out in West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Safer Park's Guidance, namely:

- **Eyes on the Park:** reflects that the presence of others makes women and girls feel safer.
- **Awareness:** addresses design issues that can help women and girls feel more secure
- **Inclusion:** considers the importance of bringing a diverse range of women and girls into our parks and designing spaces with their input.

Members considered completing priorities in relation to lighting options, the impact of activities within parks, the visibility of staff and barriers to exit the park.

Members also sought to understand how the Council might learn from the methodology adopted by researchers to ensure the views of women and girls continue to be captured to inform the planning, design and use of parks in Leeds.

Equality Impact Assessments

Members were keen to establish at what point a formal equality impact assessment would be conducted as a plan on the page is developed. They were advised this would take place when formal decision making processes were initiated to release funding to deliver identified improvements.

The Board highlighted concern about potential unintended consequences of implementing new policies in some parks—for example, creating challenges regarding accessibility as a result of reducing the maintenance of foliage or vegetation. Members therefore recommended that equality impact assessments are carried out when changes in planned maintenance are proposed or new features introduced into parks. Members further recommend that a commitment is made to later revisit equality impact assessments to capture the 'lived experience' of those using, or wishing to use, community parks.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

Parish and Town Councils

Members of the Scrutiny Board acknowledged the significant financial pressures facing the Council and the limited resources available to deliver both plans on the page and the associated accessibility audits.

It was recognised that these constraints would prevent the Council extending the programme to deliver similar plans for those parks and greenspaces that fall within the responsibility of Parish and Town Councils.

However, the Scrutiny Board was keen to ensure that Parish and Town Councils could benefit from the learning that has informed the Council's approach to community parks. In response, officers confirmed that they would be happy to share their methodology and learning with any interested stakeholders to enable Parish and Town Councils to conduct a similar exercise in their own localities should they so wish.

Members further recommended that consideration be given as to whether future partnership working with Parish and Town Councils could allow the Council to support the delivery of improvements to other local greenspaces potentially utilising monies received by Parish and Town Councils via the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Community Committee Review

In exploring mechanisms through which localities could fund some of the work reflected in a 'plan on a page,' members recommended that local influence over funding should be an integral part of the current community committee review. It was agreed that members could use the funding of greenspace improvements as an illustrative example of the challenges and opportunities that may face members of community committees following the outcome of that review.

Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board
Focusing on services affecting the lives of citizens living and working in the council's neighbourhoods to monitor progress as a citizen focused city and prioritising environmental sustainability.

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