

**Report of the Director of Environment and Housing**

**Report to West Inner Area Committee**

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013**

**Subject: Annual Report – for the Parks and Countryside Service**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Armley, Bramley & Stanningley		
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?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

**Summary of main issues**

1. This report provides an area profile of key assets and services provided in the West Inner area.
2. It highlights the current progress towards Leeds Quality Park (LQP) status for community parks in the area. It provides the costs of achieving and retaining LQP status in community parks up to the year 2020.
3. It details capital improvements in community parks, sport pitches and fixed play in the area for the last 12 months and planned improvements to be delivered in the next 12 months.
4. It gives a detailed breakdown of events and volunteering in the area.
5. It gives an overview of the streetscene grounds maintenance contract along with a schedule of assets maintained and frequency of operations with information on performance during 2013.

**Recommendations**

6. The Area Committee is requested to note the content of the report and to communicate priorities for investment in community parks, playing pitches and fixed play facilities in light of the issues raised.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report seeks to further develop the relationship between the Parks and Countryside service and the West Inner Area Committee, as agreed at Executive Board.
- 1.2 It provides an overview of the service and sets out some of the challenges faced along with key performance management initiatives. In addition it seeks to provide a positive way forward for delivering the extended role of the Area Committee.
- 1.3 In particular it sets out at an area level progress made in attaining Leeds Quality Park standard. It also sets out investment need to attain and sustain LQP standards.

## **2 Background information**

### **Service Description**

- 2.1 Leeds City Council has one of the largest fully inclusive local authority Parks and Countryside services, managing almost 4,000 hectares of parks and green space. This includes 7 major parks, 62 community parks and 95 recreation grounds and 391 local green spaces, which include 144 playgrounds and 500 sports facilities ranging from skateboard parks to golf courses, and which play host to 600 events annually. The service also manages a nursery which produces around 3 million bedding plants each year, 97 allotment sites, over 800km of Public Right of Way (PROW), and 156 nature conservation sites, as well as 23 cemeteries and 3 crematoria.

### **Description of Priority Advisory Function**

- 2.2 The priority advisory function for Area Committees relates to community park provision that have a wide range of facilities, including general recreation, sports pitches, play and formal and informal horticultural features.
- 2.3 Where developments are less significant or only impact on one site then ward members and community groups are informed and consulted using established procedures. It is important to note that good levels of engagement with ward members exist and this function seeks to enhance this engagement.
- 2.4 There are proposals currently being considered to increase the scope of this delegation to include development and horticultural maintenance of cemeteries, recreation grounds, natural areas and local green space in addition to community parks. These proposals would delegate investment decisions and the setting of resource priorities using the asset register as the basis of allocation to each area committee. Consultation and rollout is currently being directed by the Area Leaders team.

### 3 Main issues

#### Area Profile of the Service

3.1 The following table summarises community green space assets managed by Parks and Countryside in the West Inner Area Committee:

Asset	Quantity
Community parks	6
Playing Pitches:	
Football	17
Rugby League	6
Rugby Union	1
Bowling greens	4
Playgrounds	7
Multi-use games areas	3
Skate parks	1

3.2 Regarding bowling green provision, it should be noted that a report was considered by Executive Board in October 2013 that approved revised arrangements as follows:

- The introduction of a charge which would see the implementation of a season ticket at a cost of £25 in 2014/2015 rising to £31.50 in 2017/2018.
- The removal of 1 bowling green at 6 sites across the city with more than 1 bowling green. This does not include any bowling greens in the West Inner Area Committee.
- That where feasible, appropriate arrangements are established in order for bowling clubs to meet the costs associated with their own direct use of gas and electricity by March 2014.

#### **Community Parks**

3.3 The community parks in the West Inner area are as follows:

- Armley Park
- Bramley Falls Wood Park
- Bramley Park
- Gotts Park
- Rodley Park
- Stanningley Park

3.4 The current position on the quality of these sites is examined later in this report as is the investment need to attain or sustain the Leeds Quality Park standard.

## Sports Pitches

- 3.5 Parks and Countryside provide annual pitch hire for sports teams. The table below shows the number of teams with current bookings playing on pitches in the area: *(note this excludes clubs who have a long term lease in place)*

Age Group	No of Teams
Open Age	14
Juniors	26

## Volunteering in the Parks and Countryside Service

- 3.6 The service continues to focus on increasing the number of volunteers and groups working in the area to achieve the following:
- To increase corporate volunteering working in partnership with Business in the Community and Leeds Ahead
  - Continue to improve involvement with the many “in bloom” groups in Leeds.
  - It is an ambition to have a volunteer group for every community park where there is a site based gardener.
- 3.7 It is estimated that volunteers across all groups contribute 143 days of voluntary work in the West Inner area over a 12 month period. The tables below provide details of volunteering in the area since January 2013:

### Voluntary work supervised by Parks and Countryside staff:

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
Armley Park	General Public	Family nature event: trees, seeds and all things green	0.5
		Family nature event: WILD Art	1.9
	General Public	Family nature event: mini-beast hunting	4.3
		Family nature event: trees, seeds and all things green	5.4
		Family nature event: WILD Art	4.1
Leeds Wildlife Volunteers	Rhododendron bashing throughout wood, replaced 5 bench tops throughout site, coppiced laurel at entrance to woods	6.8	
Rodley Park Recreation Ground	Leeds Wildlife Volunteers	Tree planting	13.0
<b>Total</b>			<b>36</b>

**Local business volunteers supervised by Parks and Countryside staff:**

Site	Organisation	Task	Volunteer Days
Armley Park	Premier Farnell	Woodland path cutback and vegetation clearance	15.5
	Leeds City College	Woodland path cutback and vegetation clearance	7.0
		Woodland path renovation and litter clearance	9.5
Bramley Falls Wood Park	Corporate Group	Entrance improvement, tree pruning, litter clearance	10.8
Stanningley Park	Corporate Group	Playground painting	3.8
<b>Total</b>			<b>46.6</b>

**Volunteer groups working independently in the West Inner area:**

Group Name	Number of Volunteers	Estimated Volunteer Days
Armley Common Rights Trust	5	10
Bramley Fall Residents Association	10	20
Friends of Bramley Park	10	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>60</b>

**Events**

- 3.8 The bookings and licensing team provides assistance in helping community and other groups organise events with particular emphasise on ensuring legal and safety requirements are met but do not deter groups and organisations from organising activities. The table below shows a list of events held in the Inner West area in 2013:

Site Name	Month	Event	Total
Armley Park	July	Change for Life fun day - Jan Burkhart	1
Bramley Falls Wood Park	January	Northern Film School filming - Olivia Clarkson	1
Bramley Park	June	Bramley Music Festival	1
	July	Bramley Carnival	1
	October	Wild Pictures	1
	November	Pudsey & Bramley Athletic	1
	November	Bonfire	1
Raynville Crescent POS	August	Back Yard Breeze	2
<b>Total</b>			<b>9</b>

### Community Parks – Leeds Quality Park Status

3.9 The Parks and Green Space Strategy approved at Executive Board in February 2009 sets out the vision and priorities to 2020. One of the key proposals contained in the strategy is the aspiration for all community parks to meet the Green Flag standard for field based assessment by 2020. The Green Flag Award Scheme represents the national standard for parks and green spaces. It has been developed around eight key criteria as follows;

- **A welcoming place** - how to create a sense that people are positively welcomed in the park
- **Healthy, safe & secure** - how best to ensure that the park is a safe & healthy environment for all users
- **Clean & well maintained** - what people can expect in terms of cleanliness, facilities & maintenance
- **Sustainability** - how a park can be managed in environmentally sensitive ways
- **Conservation & heritage** - the value of conservation & care of historical heritage
- **Community involvement** - ways of encouraging community participation and acknowledging the community's role in a park's success
- **Marketing** - methods of promoting a park successfully
- **Management** - how to reflect all of the above in a coherent & accessible management plan or strategy and ensure it is implemented.

3.10 The Parks and Countryside service reports annual performance against two local indicators based upon the Green Flag Award scheme;

- *The percentage of Parks and Countryside sites assessed that meet the Green Flag standard.*
- *The percentage of Parks and Countryside community parks which meet the Green Flag standard. Performance against these indicators is illustrated in section 3.28.*

3.11 The indicator includes an assessment of each community park which has particular relevance to Area Committee engagement. The scheme is known as the Leeds Quality Park (LQP) standard. The following table provides a current profile of these assessments for the West Inner Area Committee.

Site	Year Assessed	Welcoming Place	Healthy, Safe, Secure	Clean, Well Maintained	Sustainability	Conservation / Heritage	Community Involvement	Marketing	Meets Standard?
Armley Park	2013								No
Bramley Falls Wood Park	2011								No
Bramley Park	2011								No
Gotts Park	2013								No
Rodley Park	2012								No
Stanningley Park	2013								No

**Key:**

Meets Leeds Quality Park Standard on average for this key criteria	
Below Leeds Quality Park Standard on average for this key criteria	

- 3.12 From this table, there are no parks identified that meet the Leeds Quality Park, and overall, the position remains unchanged compared to the previous Area Committee report. It should however be noted that since the last assessment of Bramley Park in 2011 investment of around £180k has been undertaken which should enable the park to achieve LQP standard when assessed in 2014.
- 3.13 It is planned in 2014 that the process of inspection will change to ensure that all community parks are assessed annually, rather than every 3 years as at present. This will allow improvements that have been made to be reflected in the performance standards in a more immediate way.
- 3.14 Improvements to community parks taking place during 2013 are as follows:
- Bramley Falls Wood Park – Item of play equipment (£10k)
  - Stanningley Park – Item of pay equipment (£10k)
  - Rodley Park – Landscaping, drainage, new infrastructure, interpretation and horticultural works (£77k) works underway
  - Bramley Park – Flood lighting scheme (£22k)

- 3.15 The following table provides a perspective on the minimum level of investment required to achieve the LQP standard for the five remaining parks. It also includes the level of reinvestment required across all the community parks in order to sustain the LQP pass up to 2020;

Site Name	Cost to Achieve (excluding fixed play)	Reinvestment (excluding fixed play)
Armley Park	£51,500	
Bramley Falls Wood Park	£93,000	
Gotts Park	£30,000	
Rodley Park	£29,000	
Stanningley Park	£157,479	
<b>Total to achieve LQP</b>	<b>£360,979</b>	
Average annual reinvestment		£20,868
<b>Total reinvestment to 2020</b>		<b>£146,076</b>
<b>Overall total investment to 2020</b>		<b>£507,055</b>

- 3.16 Reinvestment levels are estimated according to the expected lifespan of equipment and infrastructure as set out below:

Description	Timescale for Recurring Investment
Signage and interpretation	5 years
Fixed play (including MUGA's/skate parks)	10 years
Bins and benches	15 years
Paths and infrastructure	25 years
Landscaping	25 years

- 3.17 Planned and proposed improvements for the next 12 months are;

- Dunkirk Hill – tree works, paths, other infrastructure and interpretation (£91k).
- Armley and Gotts Park – tree works, paths, other infrastructure and interpretation (£73.5k).
- Armley Park – infrastructure improvements (£100k approx.).

- 3.18 In terms of fixed play, work has been undertaken to set out refurbishment requirements over a 10 year rolling programme in support of the outcomes of the Fixed Play Strategy. The average cost of a new playground is currently about £120k; Multi-use games areas and skate parks are slightly cheaper on average at about £90k each. The table below shows the capital investment required on an ongoing basis to fund the area committees existing fixed play sites:

Fixed Play Type	No.	Total Replacement Cost £'s	Required Average Annual Spend £'s
Play Areas	7	840,000	84,000
Multi Use games Areas	3	270,000	27,000
Skate Parks	1	90,000	9,000
<b>Totals</b>		<b>1,200,000</b>	<b>120,000</b>



### Area Committee funding for additional site based gardeners

- 3.19 A number of area committees provide additional funding for gardeners to increase site based presence at parks in the area.
- 3.20 Since the introduction of site based gardeners, analysis shows that complaints to both Ward Councillors and the Parks and Countryside Service have declined on sites with increased daily presence. In addition, the service has observed an increase in the number of residents using parks and open spaces.
- 3.21 The site based gardeners increase working relationships with users, local residents and community groups. These site based staff further increase users satisfaction and support the aspiration to increase volunteer groups working within parks.

### Streetscene Grounds Maintenance

- 3.22 Following a procurement exercise the streetscene grounds maintenance contract was awarded to Continental Landscapes Ltd (CLL) with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012. The management of the contract became the responsibility of Parks and Countryside with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 soon after the service transferred directorates. This enabled improvements to the management of the contract by integrating staff into an existing team which already had considerable knowledge and expertise of horticultural maintenance as well as the management and delivery of grounds maintenance contracts. From April 2013 the service took over budget management responsibility from the former ALMOs and highways along with undertaking monitoring activity and responding to customer enquiries and complaints.
- 3.23 The contract includes highway verges and incidental land around social housing. The specification requires the contractor to undertake litter removal from sites as part of horticultural management operations supporting the council's wider efforts to maintain clean streets. The table below shows the asset breakdown of contract items for the West Inner area committee:

Asset Type	Annual Visits	Unit	Total Quantity
Amenity grass	14	M <sup>2</sup>	514,291
Premium grass	28	M <sup>2</sup>	25,952
Arterial routes	6	M <sup>2</sup>	273
Rough grass area	3	M <sup>2</sup>	7,852
Linear and sight line grass	3	M	615
Shrub and rose beds	4	M <sup>2</sup>	14,549
Hedges	3	M	154

- 3.24 Following an assessment of performance during the first year of operation, the frequency was increased during 2013 from 2 to 4 visits on shrub and rose beds. These changes aim to address concerns with the levels of weed growth and litter evident between visits. The following tables provide a summary of contract performance from March to the end of October 2013 to reflect the grass cutting season:

**Percentage of scheduled operations completed for each type of asset March to October 2013:**

<b>Asset Type</b>	<b>%</b>
Amenity grass	100%
Premium grass	100%
Arterial routes	100%
Rough grass area	60%
Linear and sight line grass	67%
Shrub and rose beds	98%
Hedges	100%

- 3.25 It should be noted that approximately 1 cut was missed on rough grass areas and linear grass in the areas due to equipment failure.

**Customer Enquiries and Complaints March to October:**

<b>Type of enquiry or complaint</b>	<b>Number 2012</b>	<b>Number 2013</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Quality issues relating to operation undertaken	77	75	-2.6%
Streetscene land not maintained by the contract	30	32	6.7%
Advice on related horticultural issues	12	21	75.0%
Health and safety incidents and accidents	8	4	-50.0%

**Scrutiny**

- 3.26 An update report was considered by the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board during October 2013 that identified progress against recommendations made including the increased frequency of operations, established consultation with members on shrub bed removal, additional works being delivered by the contractor improving skill retention, and improved arrangements for contract management. It was agreed that a further update would be considered in autumn 2014.

**Coordinated Working with Environmental Services**

- 3.27 The Parks and Countryside Service move to the Environments & Housing Directorate in 2012 has given opportunities to improve collaborative working. In particular improvements in horticultural land management, cleansing and more efficient use of resources in regard to:
- Co-ordination of weed spraying activities with the grounds maintenance contract with a consistent approach to monitoring.
  - Traffic Management arrangements co-ordinated to minimise costs and disruption of the highway.
  - Litter collection in the vicinity of community parks, and as part of normal operations site based gardeners undertake an initial litter pick of the park which is being expanded to include some areas outside the curtilage of the park.

Conversely, street cleansing staff now assist with emptying litter bins in parks on a weekend when parks staff are not always present.

- The Parks and Countryside service has a number of welfare facilities and yard space available in most community parks distributed throughout the city which has provided an opportunity for the locality based teams to use these facilities for staff welfare provision and as operational bases.

### **Parks and Countryside Key Performance Indicators**

3.28 The following table highlights key performance indicators relevant to the service;

PI Code	Description	2010/11 Actual	2011/12 Actual	2012/13 Actual	2013/14 Target
LKI-GFI / CP-PC50 / EM38	The percentage of parks and countryside sites assessed internally that meet the Green Flag criteria	23% Target: 23%	26.2% Target: 26.2%	30.8% Target: 29.4%	32.6%
New	The percentage of parks and countryside community parks which meet LQP status	33.9%	38.7% Target: 40%	42% Target: 47.5%	55.0%

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 Close liaison with community and ward members is already in existence, utilising a variety of mechanisms, for example through residents' surveys, multi-agency meetings and community forums. In addition volunteers, Friends of groups and local residents are regularly consulted on local projects with input on design and physical implementation of a wide range of site improvements.

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

4.2.1 This report does not have any identified impact on equality and diversity arrangements.

### **4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 The contents of this report set out how the Executive Board requirements can be met by taking a proactive approach to involve and engage Area Committees in matters relating to community parks.

4.3.2 The information within the report contributes significantly to the sustainable economy and culture city priority plan.

#### **4.4 Resources and Value for Money**

- 4.4.1 As part of the wider impact on local government and the Council in particular, the Parks and Countryside service has seen a £2 million budget reduction from 2011/12 to 2012/13 and a further reduction of £0.6 million in 2013/14, with a likelihood of a minimum further 16% reduction in the next few years. In meeting these challenging budget targets the service has already undertaken a number of steps, including reducing the number of managers and back office staff as well as price increases – including removing subsidy for bereavement services and allotment provision. As previously mentioned, outdoor bowls has also been recently reviewed working with representatives from the relevant associations resulting in revised arrangements in 2014.
- 4.4.2 The service has also sought to be enterprising and innovative including working in partnership to develop a conservatory at Golden Acre café, Tropical World refurbishment, sponsorship, nursery trading and increasing the level of volunteers. Agreement has been reached in principle with the Trade Unions to adopt seasonal working hours from January 2014 resulting in a saving of £140k by reducing the number of seasonal staff recruited each year whilst retaining permanent gardening staff and enabling the introduction of 6 further horticultural apprentices.
- 4.4.3 The service undertakes to sustain and develop the services provided to the public and has traditionally used a number of sources of financial support to achieve developments. These include grants from bodies such as Green Leeds Ltd, Sustrans, Natural England, National Lottery funding and developer contributions via section 106 (S106) funds.

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

- 4.5.1 This report has no legal implications and is not subject to call in. There is no information which is confidential or exempt.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 There are no significant risk management issues contained within the report, its conclusions and recommendations.

### **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 Community green space contributes in many ways to the delivery of the Corporate Priority Plan. They provide places for relaxation, escape, exercise and recreation. They bring communities together and make a positive contribution to the local economy, education, improve public health and well-being, and generally make a better place to live, work and visit.
- 5.2 Improvements to community parks, fixed play and playing pitches remain a priority, and there already has been investment made to deliver improvements along with further schemes identified. Issues are being addressed through the Parks and Green Space Strategy along with implementation of the Fixed Play Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy.

- 5.3 Community engagement remains a key activity for the service with regular correspondence, attendance at meetings and briefings, along with more localised consultation where required.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 The Area Committee is requested to note the content of the report and to communicate priorities for investment in community parks, playing pitches and fixed play facilities in light of the issues raised.

## **7 Background documents**

- 7.1 Area Committee Roles, Outer West Area Committee, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011.
- 7.2 Annual Report for Parks and Countryside Service in West Inner Area Committee, West Inner Area Committee, 2012.
- 7.3 Parks and Green Space Strategy, Executive Board, February 2009.