



## Report of the Chief Recreation Officer

### Outer South Area Committee

Date: Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007

### Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks

**Electoral Wards Affected:**

**Specific Implications For:**

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Council Function

Delegated Executive Function available for Call In

Delegated Executive Function not available for Call In Details set out in the report

### Executive Summary

To present a summary of the work carried out by the site based gardeners commissioned by the Area Committee in September 2006 and to consider extending the project for a further year at a cost of £45,000.

#### 1. Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out the benefits of the continued provision of site based gardeners in Community Parks within the Outer South are and the associated revenue costs.

#### 2. Background Information

- 2.1. Research by CABA (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 CABA 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<sup>1</sup>. With specific regard to people who rarely visit or use Parks, a national survey conducted on behalf of CABA Space ascertained

<sup>1</sup> Parks need Parkforce, CABA Space 2005

that 68% cited dog fouling as their reason for not using their local park, whilst 57% did not visit due to vandalism and graffiti and 44% by poor maintenance<sup>2</sup>.

- 2.2. The presence of on site gardeners has the potential to address these problems, and preliminary assessments of the 25 Community Parks in Leeds which have on site staff reinforced this belief.

### 3. Main Issues

- 3.1. CAFE Space is aware that the best parks are being developed through the efforts of a skilled modern team of on site based park gardeners who are often multi-skilled and highly trained. These staff not only provide a point of liaison with the local community, but take responsibility for other issues which may not be routinely dealt with by a visiting maintenance team.
- 3.2. Our current site based gardeners engage with the public rather than just carrying out horticultural and maintenance tasks and thereby play a part in helping to enhance people's enjoyment of their Parks and greenspaces. Invariably site-based park gardeners associate better with their own sites and attain a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the site. The latter asset is valuable in gaining a rapport with the public and dealing with site problems.
- 3.3. By reintroducing site based gardeners research has shown additional benefits that include a reduction in cultural and racial tensions, diminution in anti-social behaviour and increased community involvement in the Park<sup>3</sup>.

### 4. Proposal

- 4.1. As detailed above there are strong arguments in favour of site based gardening staff in Community Parks. The following parks within the South Outer Area were identified as priority sites for provision of site based staff.

Site Name	Wedge
Drighlington Park	South Outer
Lewisham Park / Woodlesford Recreation Ground	South Outer
Lowry Road	South Outer

- 4.2. After securing initial funding in October 2006, three staff were recruited to work at these sites. Since staff became established on site, the number of maintenance related enquiries for these sites recorded in the Parks & Countryside customer enquiry database for the final quarter of 2006 was half that of those recorded for the same quarter of 2005.
- 4.3. Drighlington Park and Lewisham Park were assessed against the Leeds Quality Park (LQP) standard in 2005, and both failed to meet the standard at that time. An interim assessment carried out in May 2007 suggests that both are now close to achieving the score required to reach LQP status when the next round of judging takes place later in the year.

<sup>2</sup> Dunnett, N., Swanwick, C. & Woolley, H. Improving urban parks, play areas and green space, 2002, University of Sheffield

<sup>3</sup> Parks need Parkforce, CAFE Space 2005

4.4. Specific targeted improvements made to date at each site are:

<b>Site</b>	<b>Improvements to June 2007</b>
Drighlington Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional flower beds created adjacent to the play area</li> <li>• Improvements to bowling green maintenance and surrounding areas</li> <li>• Enhanced maintenance of shrub borders</li> <li>• New perimeter fence being installed around play area</li> <li>• Play equipment repainted</li> <li>• Construction of a new Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)</li> </ul>
Lewisham Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two new shrub borders created near Lewisham Street entrance</li> <li>• Four new flower beds created</li> <li>• Six additional benches and two new litter bins installed</li> <li>• Pedestrian access gates installed</li> <li>• Encroaching vegetation cleared along footpaths</li> </ul>
Woodlesford Recreation Ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowling green maintenance improved</li> <li>• Enhanced delittering of play area and skate park</li> <li>• Increased grass cutting frequency</li> <li>• Overgrown beds cleared and maintenance regime improved</li> <li>• Proposed replanting of berberis hedge around bowling green during winter months, in partnership with the Woodlesford in Bloom group</li> </ul>
Lowry Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All walking routes cleared of extraneous vegetation</li> <li>• Enhanced maintenance and delittering programme implemented</li> <li>• Two new litter bins installed</li> <li>• New access controls/motorcycle access control</li> <li>• New fencing at 8 of the access points</li> <li>• Creation of wildlife habitats throughout the site</li> <li>• Preliminary discussions with Ward Members with view to creation of a Friends Of group, based upon requests from the community following the improvements</li> <li>• Planned woodland improvements brought forward and are now 50% complete, with a view to completing the remainder after the 2007 bird nesting season</li> </ul>

- 4.5. The improvements arising from permanent site based staff have resulted in positive local press coverage and an increase in both verbal and written compliments being received by Parks & Countryside, which is the result of enhanced maintenance regimes implemented due the additional resources deployed.
- 4.6. Parks & Countryside have made a significant investment in additional machinery in order to dedicate staff to specific sites (over £1million throughout the city, with approximately £300k spent in the South). However, in order to continue with the current arrangement in the Outer South Area, continued funding of the 3 posts is necessary.
- 4.7. The approximate cost to employ a Craft Gardener is currently £18,333 per annum. This figure includes employer oncosts such as National Insurance, employer's pension contributions and provision of Personal Protective Clothing. Employing three full time staff would therefore require £55,000 per annum.

## **5. Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 5.1. There are no implications for Council Policy and Governance.

## **6. Legal And Resource Implications**

- 6.1. The cost of retaining the 3 full time posts would be £55,000. However, £10,000 partnership funding has been obtained from Morley Town Council, leaving a shortfall of £45,000.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1. The current funding of additional posts has proved a catalyst for capital improvements which may not have otherwise been possible without the labour provided by this additional funding.
- 7.2. For South Outer Area Committee, it is recommended that an extension of the existing arrangement is implemented, providing funding for continued provision of 3 site based gardeners as detailed in paragraph 4.1

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1. The Committee is asked to consider the allocation of £45,000 in support of the proposal, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007.