

## Report of the Chief Recreation Officer

### Outer South Leeds Area Committee

Date: Monday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008

### Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks

<p><b>Electoral Wards Affected:</b> Morley North Morley South</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ward members consulted (referred to in report)</p>	<p><b>Specific Implications For:</b></p> <p>Equality and Diversity <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Community Cohesion <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Narrowing the Gap <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>Council Function <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Delegated Executive Function available for Call In <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Delegated Executive Function not available for Call In Details set out in the report <input type="checkbox"/></p>

### Executive Summary

To consider a request for £28,410 revenue funding to support the continued provision of 3 sites based gardeners in Community Parks together with a request to consider extending this provision across the Outer South Area. All for a period of 6 months commencing 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008.

#### 1.0 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 Area and to seek approval for the associated revenue costs.

#### 2.0 Background Information

- 2.2 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, and 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 CABE Space ascertained 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%

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

by poor maintenance<sup>2</sup>. Presence Of on site gardeners have the potential to address these problems, and preliminary assessments of the 25 Community Parks in Leeds which currently have on site staff reinforce this belief.

### **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 CAFE Space is aware that the best parks are being developed through the efforts of a skilled modern team and on site park gardeners who are often multi-skilled and highly trained take a key role, not only as a point of liaison with the local community, but taking 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.
- 3.3 The success of the project can be seen from not only the comments received from users of the parks but by the reduction of complaints the service receives.
- 3.4 Further more each member of staff is able to build a rapport with the users, local residents, ward members along side developing a sense of ownership for the site and the activities which are undertaken there. Invariably site-based park gardeners associate better with their own sites of responsibility 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.
- 3.5 By reintroducing gardeners CAFE Space 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>. To that end the parks service are currently seeking external funding from Natural England to help with provide both revenue funding which if successful will enable the employment of a ranger for sites including Rothwell Country Park and capital funding which again if successful will enable the service to implement numerous improvements, including surfacing works, access controls, signage along side the formation of partnership working with other agencies in the area.
- 3.6 The gardeners would be based on site at each location and therefore would not be part of a mobile team. They would be responsible for the park, its facilities as well as the park users. The hours of work would be in accordance with the existing staff thus making them available during daylight hours.

### **4.0 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.

---

<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

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

Three members of staff were recruited to work at these sites, which from feed back from both ward members and residents has indicated that there has been a significant improvement in the level of maintenance at each site along with positive comments in respect of feelings of improved safety from the knowledge that there is a dedicated person on site to answer questions and react to incidents without delay. In order to continue with the current arrangement, continued funding of the posts will be necessary.

- 4.2 In addition following the successful implementation of this resource, the local ward members have enquired into the possibility of extending this service by providing a fourth site based gardener at Hembrigg Park. This additional staff member would be responsible for looking after both the new playground and facilities at Hembrigg along with undertaking work within the recreational spaces along wide lane.
- 4.3 The approximate cost to employ a Craft Gardener is currently £18,940 per annum. This figure includes employer on costs such as National Insurance, employer's pension contributions and provision of Personal Protective Clothing. Employing three full time staff requires £56,820 per annum.

## **5.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

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

## **6.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

- 6.1 The cost of retaining the 3 full time posts for a further six months, October 2008-March 2009 inclusive will be £28,410.

## **7.0 Conclusions**

- 7.1 The Outer South Area Committee, is asked to consider further extending the existing arrangement by providing funding for continued provision of 3 site based gardeners.
- 7.2 In addition the Area Committee are asked to consider the use and engagement of further site based gardeners following the overall success of the existing 3 site based gardeners. These posts could be based at convenient locations within the South Outer Area to maintain either a specific site or a number of smaller specific sites as outlined in "Provision of Recreational Facilities in the South Outer Area" report.
- 7.3 Site based gardeners will be :-

- Responsible for the park and its users
- Based on site, not part of an area based mobile team

- Contactable by users of the park when they are needed
- Available during daylight hours

## **8.0 Recommendations**

- 8.1 The Committee is asked to consider the allocation of £28,410 to fund the continuation of the 3 existing site gardeners for a further six months in support of the proposal, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008.
- 8.2 To consider the appointment of a further site based gardener for the Outer South area at an annual cost of £18,940.