



Report of the Director of Development

Executive Board

Date: 8 October 2008

Subject: Response to the deputation regarding the provision of Park Wardens and other issues on Woodhouse Moor Park

Electoral Wards Affected:

Hyde Park & Woodhouse

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The meeting of The Council on 2nd July 2008 received a deputation regarding a number of issues on Woodhouse Moor, particularly budget levels, anti-social behaviour, requests for additional park wardens and the use of barbecues.

The report considers the Council's management of more than 4,000 hectares of public open space and in particular the area based approach to the operation.

Woodhouse Moor has received £416k funding but still does not meet the national Green Flag standard. There is a potential to use £245k of S106 match funding to lever a Heritage Lottery funded project of £1 million to improve recreational and heritage infrastructure of the park.

Over the last two years, a Woodhouse Moor Park multi-agency forum has been meeting to discuss various issues and proposals that affect the management of the Park, including anti-social behaviour. This has resulted in targeted enforcement action. It is felt that the cost and provision of two park wardens is not the most efficient use of resources.

Public opinion is divided on identifying sites for barbecues at Woodhouse Moor park. It is intended to put proposals to identify a site for authorised use to the Woodhouse Moor multi-agency forum and conduct further consultation.

Executive Board are recommended to note the contents of the report and support the approach identified.

1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. This report seeks to respond to the issues raised in the deputation made by the Friends of Woodhouse Moor to Full Council in July 2008 and make recommendations regarding future capital investment at Woodhouse Moor. It also seeks to set out the current revenue situation, measures being taken to combat anti-social behaviour and resolve the issues regarding barbecues.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1. At the meeting of Full Council on the 2nd July 2008 a deputation was received regarding a number of issues concerning Woodhouse Moor Park. A copy of the deputation is attached at Appendix 1 of which the main concerns can be summarised as follows:

- the provision of individual budgets for parks and existing resource levels
- anti-social behaviour and a request for additional park wardens
- the use of barbecues on Woodhouse Moor

- 2.2. Each issue will be addressed in turn below.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1. Revenue and Resource levels

- 3.1.1. The deputation requested that the Council increase overall spending on parks to match that of the other major English cities and that budgets are produced for each of the city's parks with resources allocated based on usage and the needs of the surrounding area.

- 3.1.2. The Parks and Countryside Service involves the management of some 4,000 hectares of public land with a net revenue budget of some £12.9m. It is acknowledged that the Council could always spend more resources on its parks and open spaces, however, any such proposal needs to be considered in the context of public satisfaction with the existing service, consideration of both revenue and capital investment and the efficiency of the working practices that are in place. In considering this information, it is important to note that:

- the national satisfaction survey, as part of the BV119 performance indicator reported in 2007, was very positive for Parks in Leeds. This showed that for satisfaction with parks and open spaces, Leeds achieved a rating of 79%, the second highest of the core cities.
- the Council has invested significantly in its Parks in recent years through the Parks Renaissance Programme. In total, the Council has invested £3.7m of capital monies into its Parks. This investment has made significant improvement to the quality of a number of Parks and, as capital money, is over and above the revenue funding reflected in the CIPFA comparison.

- 3.1.3. In terms of the request to produce budgets for each of the City's parks, it is important to note that the efficient delivery of the service is largely dependent on the use of mobile area teams working across a number of parks in a particular part of the City. Woodhouse Moor is one of 73 community parks in the city and is one of 32 community parks that retain a site-based gardener. To supplement the gardener, additional resources are brought into the park to assist with seasonal peaks in work levels such as floral bedding, and large plant operations such as tractor grass mowing. These resources are located in area based teams spread throughout the Leeds boundary. For example Woodhouse Moor is part of the responsibilities of the team that are based in Burley Park who maintain all the parks and green spaces

including Social Service homes and schools within the Meanwood, Burley, Hyde Park and Little London area. This provides the most efficient use of resources in terms of economies of scale. Therefore, given the area based nature of maintaining our parks and green spaces, it is not feasible to provide budgets and allocate resources for individual community parks.

3.2. Capital and Infrastructure improvements

- 3.2.1. Issues raised in the deputation included the condition of paths, tennis courts and graffiti on the skate park.
- 3.2.2. Over the past five years Woodhouse Moor has received £416k of capital to refurbish and improve the recreational facilities of the park. The improvements are detailed below and were funded through a combination of City Council capital, Single Regeneration Budget and grants from Green Leeds Ltd.

Refurbishment of skate park	£220k
Refurbishment of playground	£63k
New multi-use pavilion	£52k
Access controls	£31k
Landscaping and interpretation	£50k

- 3.2.3. All Community Parks are assessed against the Green Flag criteria, which is the national standard for parks and green spaces. This standard is used as a local performance indicator to assess the park from a visitor perspective and this indicator is published in the Leeds local area agreement. In 2007, 17% of parks and green spaces assessed met the standard in comparison to 10.8% in 2004/5. Whilst Woodhouse Moor Park was included in this assessment it unfortunately did not meet the standard. Areas for improvement identified were the condition of the infrastructure particularly paths, the tennis courts, and the area around the allotments.
- 3.2.4. In addition to the improvements already carried out, an initial assessment of costs to bring the park up to standard had been identified at an additional £650k. However, there is £245k of S106 funding resulting from the Leeds University Clarendon Road development available to re-furbish the existing tennis courts near the bowling greens, and convert the old tennis courts next to the skate park into a multi-use games area. This will address some of the issues raised in the deputation, but there will still remain a funding gap of over £400k to achieve the Green Flag standard.
- 3.2.5. It is acknowledged that Woodhouse Moor is Leeds' oldest public park being bought by the Leeds Corporation in 1857. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has a Parks for People Programme that potentially provides grants of between £250k and £5 million for restoration of public parks with a heritage focus. The park receives nearly 3 million visits each year and is a valuable recreational asset for the local community. The HLF grants require that at least 25% of the project costs are raised from other sources. There is a potential to use the £245k of S106 funding detailed in 3.2.4 above as match funding to lever an HLF funded project of circa £1 million to improve the parks recreational and heritage infrastructure. This would not affect the S106 agreement and would have no resource impact on the Council's mainline capital programme.

3.3. Anti-social behaviour and additional park wardens

- 3.3.1. The deputation stated that Woodhouse Moor should be provided with at least two permanent park wardens to maintain order and enforce bye-laws. In particular the deputation cited instances of under age drinking, drug dealing and acts of vandalism.

- 3.3.2. The Parks and Countryside service has a ParksWatch team of motorcycle rangers dedicated to patrolling the green spaces within Leeds. The aim of the ParksWatch service is to provide a safe environment for parks, open spaces and cemeteries. This includes play areas, sports pitches and other land used for recreation. The service is available from 10am to 10pm seven days a week. In 2005, additional revenue funding was made available to double the size of the service to 10 rangers. This means that each Area Committee wedge has at least one patrol ranger on duty at the times stated.
- 3.3.3. Any individuals engaging in anti-social behaviour that infringes any of the bye-laws can be removed under the Leeds City Council Bye-laws for Pleasure Grounds, Public Walks & Open Spaces 2006 Part 8 Miscellaneous, section 48:

Any person offending against any of these byelaws may be removed from the ground by an officer of the council or a constable.

This Byelaw is current with Byelaws reported to Executive Board on the 2nd September 2008.

- 3.3.4. The role of site-based staff and the ParksWatch team is to observe anti-social behaviour and intervene where appropriate. As a result of the increase in anti-social behaviour particularly with illegal parties and unauthorised bonfires, officers of the Parks and Countryside service have been working with the North West Area Committee to develop a multi-agency approach to resolve the on site issues. Over the last two years a Woodhouse Moor Park multi-agency forum has been meeting to discuss various issues and proposals that affect the management of the Park. Key discussion points take on board issues such as open fires, enforcement of byelaws and anti-social behaviour. The meetings are generally chaired by local ward members and have included the following: -

- South Headingley Community Association
- North Hyde Park Neighbourhood Association
- Friends of Woodhouse Moor
- Police
- Parks & Countryside
- North West Inner Area Management
- Local ward members
- Fire Service
- Environmental Enforcement
- University of Leeds security and support services

- 3.3.5. This multi-agency approach has resulted in targeted enforcement action bringing together PCSOs, the Police, and officers of the Council who have a variety of experience and powers to tackle loud music, littering and other aspects of anti-social behaviour identified by the deputation. In addition the Parks and Countryside service have deployed site-based gardeners on busy weekends throughout the summer months to provide an additional Council presence.
- 3.3.6. As a result of the above measures, levels of anti-social behaviour have already reduced. Given the advantages that a multi-agency approach can bring in terms of skills and enforcement powers, the request by the deputation that additional on site wardens are provided is felt not to be the best use of limited resources available in the budget. Rather, it is proposed that the Council continues to develop and implement a multi-agency approach to manage the issues faced at Woodhouse Moor

and to thereby ensure that the collective resources of all relevant agencies are employed to best effect.

3.4. Barbecues in the Park

- 3.4.1. Over the years the use of portable barbecue units on Woodhouse Moor has developed as a growing problem. Invariably their use has led to unsightly scorch marks on the grass, discarded litter and unused food left lying around.
- 3.4.2. There are bye-laws that apply to Woodhouse Moor that prohibit the use of unauthorised barbecues. The Leeds City Council Byelaws for Pleasure Grounds, Public Walks & Open Spaces 2006 Section 10 clause (1) states:

10(1) No person shall light a fire or place, throw or drop a lighted match or any other thing likely to cause a fire.

This Byelaw is current with Byelaws reported to Executive Board on the 2nd September 2008.

- 3.4.3. Public opinion is clearly divided on for the suitability and appropriateness of barbecues at Woodhouse Moor Park. At present the view of the Friends of Woodhouse Moor is that such activities should not be allowed in view of the damage and mess that results. Nevertheless there is clearly a desire by some members of the public to allow this activity. In particular, many residents in the local area do not have a garden of their own and will be looking for a suitable public park/green space for this activity. This pressure is greater in urban areas with terraced housing such as in Woodhouse, Headingley and Burley.
- 3.4.4. The Friends of Woodhouse Moor have expressed concerns that barbeque smoke contains dangerous toxins that can affect park users and residents living nearby. However, in considering this point it should be noted that barbecues on Woodhouse Moor are not being conducted in a closed environment and weather conditions, such as a slight breeze, are further likely to dissipate any smoke.
- 3.4.5. Although Parks and Countryside have consistently maintained a policy of not allowing barbecues on Woodhouse Moor Park the difficulty of enforcing what, on some occasions, is a popular activity has led the service to suggest the provision of a suitable area on the park for barbecues. In addition, the bye-laws applicable to Woodhouse Moor can allow barbecues in certain circumstances. The Leeds City Council Byelaws for Pleasure Grounds, Public Walks & Open Spaces 2006 Section 10 clause (2) states:

10(2) Byelaw 10(1) shall not apply to any event at which the Council has given permission that fires may be lit; the use in a designated area for camping of a properly constructed camping stove or barbecue in such a manner as to safeguard against damage to the ground or danger to any person.

This Byelaw is current with Byelaws reported to Executive Board on the 2nd September 2008.

- 3.4.6. The management plan for the park has identified an action that shows proposed areas where barbecues could be considered (see Plan 1). It is proposed that the preferred solution is the installation of small concrete slabs that are flush with the ground surface. This technique ensures a more aesthetic appearance, avoidance of grass burn marks and does not impede grassland maintenance as mowers can

simply run over the top of the barbecue spots. The location of the barbecue sites would be away from residential areas, and leave the majority of the park free from barbecue smoke. In addition, the provision of special bins at the barbecue sites to accept portable barbecue units and their hot coals will reduce the risk of bin fires. All other waste is to be taken home or put in the existing waste bins in the park.

- 3.4.7. The enforcement emphasis would change from trying to stop barbecues, to request that the activity is conducted in the designated barbecue sites with an explanation of the facilities. By adopting this approach the Council may be better able to manage the existing desire to hold barbecues on Woodhouse Moor in a controlled way.
- 3.4.8. Subject to Executive Board approval, it is proposed that the Council consults on the principle of designated barbecue sites to inform any final plans that are developed.

4.0 Legal and Resource Implications

- 4.1. There are no additional legal implications over and above the Byelaw issues covered in the main body of the report. Potentially, should the consultation on the use of barbecues agree that special provision is made, then the cost of this would be funded from the existing Parks and Countryside revenue budget.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1. The average spend per hectare for managing and maintaining parks and green space in Leeds is just under half that of the other core cities. Methods of operation adjust to use resources in the most efficient manner by deploying area based teams to supplement the site based gardener. Therefore, it is not feasible to provide budgets and allocate resources for individual community parks. Satisfaction levels do however remain high in comparison with other core cities.
- 5.2. Woodhouse Moor has received £416k of capital to refurbish and improve the recreational facilities of the park. However the park does not meet the national Green Flag standard. The costs to bring the park up to standard have been identified as an additional £650k. There is a potential to use £245k of S106 match funding to lever a Heritage Lottery funded project of £1 million to improve the parks recreational and heritage infrastructure.
- 5.3. In 2005 additional revenue funding was made available to double the size of the ParksWatch team to 10 rangers. This means that each Area Committee wedge has at least one patrol ranger on duty at the times stated. Over the last two years a Woodhouse Moor Park multi-agency forum has been meeting to discuss various issues and proposals that affect the management of the Park, including anti-social behaviour. This has resulted in targeted enforcement action. Given the Parks and Countryside's budget position and the advantages that a multi-agency approach can bring in terms of skills and enforcement powers, it is felt that the cost and provision of an additional two park wardens is not the most efficient use of resources.
- 5.4. Over the years the use of portable barbecue units on Woodhouse Moor has been a growing problem. There are bye-laws for Woodhouse Moor that prohibit the use of unauthorised barbecues. However, there are community members that consider barbecues very much as a traditional pastime and therefore public opinion is divided on identifying sites for barbecues at Woodhouse Moor. It is, therefore proposed, that the preferred solution is the installation of small concrete slabs that are flush with the ground surface away from areas where smoke could present a nuisance. It is intended to put these proposals to the Woodhouse Moor multi-agency forum and conduct further consultation within the local community.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1. Executive Board are requested to note the contents of the report and in particular:

- to approve the development of a fully funded bid to the HLF Parks For People Programme and request that it is brought back to Executive Board for approval prior to submission.
- the work of the Woodhouse Moor Multi-Agency Forum approach to tackle anti-social behaviour in the park
- The proposal to consult on the potential for a barbecue area in the park prior to any actions being implemented.

Background Papers

Leeds City Council Byelaws for Pleasure Grounds, Public Walks & Open Spaces 2006
Woodhouse Moor Management Plan 2004