



Report of the Chief Recreation Officer

Outer South Area Committee

Date: 25th September 2006

Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks

Electoral Wards Affected: 	Specific Implications For: Ethnic minorities <input type="checkbox"/> Women <input type="checkbox"/> Disabled people <input type="checkbox"/>	
Council Function <input type="checkbox"/>	Delegated Executive Function available for Call In <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Delegated Executive Function not available for Call In Details set out in the report <input type="checkbox"/>

Executive Summary

To consider a request for £43,400 annual revenue funding to support the provision of site based gardeners in Community Parks within Outer South Area.

1. Purpose Of This Report

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

2. Background Information

- 2.1. There are 7 major parks in Leeds, namely:- Otley Chevin Country Park, Kirkstall Abbey Estate, Middleton Park, Golden Acre Park, Roundhay Park, Temple Newsam Estate and Lotherton Hall Estate. In addition, there are 75 community parks, 94 recreation grounds and 383 acres of local green space. A further 156 nature conservation sites and around 170 woodlands and plantations are also managed by the service.
- 2.2. The Green Flag Award scheme provides for a national standard for parks and green spaces across England and Wales. The award is managed by The Civic Trust on behalf of CABI Space, and it has backing in England from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, English Heritage, The Countryside Agency and English Nature. In 2005 the Parks and Countryside service entered four parks: Golden Acre Park, Pudsey Park, Lotherton Hall Estate and Temple Newsam Estate for the award, all of which are now confirmed as successfully achieving the award.

- 2.3. Around 30 trained staff within Parks and Countryside judged 46 sites against the Green Flag field assessment criteria during the summer of 2004. Judging sheets have been completed for each site assessed outlining strengths and recommendations as well as a score for each relevant criteria.
- 2.4. This work is the basis for a new performance indicator, namely 'the percentage of annual sites assessed that meet the field based assessment for the Green Flag standard.' The target for 2004/2005 was 10%.
- 2.5. An analysis of the results shows that the major City and Country Parks are generally of a high standard. There is however a significant gap between the average overall score for City/Countryside Parks and the score for Community Parks which is lower. By considering the individual criteria more closely the results show that the key areas of weakness for Community Parks are:-
- Signage
 - The provision of appropriate interpretation and educational information
 - Infrastructure maintenance particularly fencing and paths
 - Horticultural features
 - Site based gardeners
- 2.6. The £500,000 funding awarded in 2005/06 for Phase 1 to improve 12 Community Parks has been a significant step forward in beginning to address some of these issues. The challenge for the service is to ensure that gardeners are based in Community Parks in order to sustain the improvements being made. The service currently has 25 Community Parks with permanent site based gardening staff.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1. 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 Parks¹.
- 3.2. A telephone survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions revealed that 67% of women, 57% of 12-15 year olds, 50% of 16-19 year olds, 79% of 56-65 year olds, 63% of 76 year olds and 77% of disabled respondents felt that the presence of staff on site would make them feel safer visiting their particular greenspace².
- 3.3. With regard to people who rarely visit or use the Parks a national survey conducted for CABA Space ascertained 68% alienated by dog fouling, 57% by vandalism and

¹ Parks need Parkforce, CABA Space 2005

² Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Open spaces, The Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions 2002

graffiti and 44% by poor maintenance³. Presence of on site gardeners has the potential to address these problems.

- 3.4. CABI Space is aware that the best parks are being developed through the efforts of a skilled modern team which includes on site park gardeners who are often multi-skilled and highly trained. In addition it is quite likely that the gardener will also act as a point of liaison with the local community, effect policing duties, deal with other routine park maintenance such as litter collection, electric scooter bookings and unlocking of park gates.
- 3.5. 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 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.
- 3.6. By reintroducing gardeners CABI 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 Park⁴. Dedicated park gardeners create a virtuous circle of improvement since their presence leads to better maintained parks which are perceived as safe and are better used and in turn this helps to combat public fears and encourages even more people to use their Park.
- 3.7. Reinstating park gardeners will help Leeds to contribute to PSA (Public Service Agreement) objectives that include crime reduction, reducing public fear of crime, increasing voluntary community engagement and the delivery of cleaner, safer and greener public spaces. Improvements in the above targets for our Parks will show that Leeds City Council takes pride in its work and cares for local residents. This will have a knock on effect, since an amelioration in the 'street scene and the public realm' as well as 'staff responsiveness and accessibility' were identified by MORI⁵ as a key to improving the reputation of a local council.

4. Implications For Council Policy And Governance

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

5. Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1. The cost for employing a Craft Gardener is £17,800 including National Insurance, Superannuation and Personal Protective Clothing.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. As detailed above there are strong arguments for introducing site based gardening staff in Community Parks. There are 75 Community Parks, 25 of which already have site based gardeners. The proposals are to have site based gardeners in a further 29 Community Parks which are large enough to warrant a permanent gardener.

³ Dunnett, N., Swanwick, C. & Woolley, H. Improving urban parks, play areas and green space, 2002, University of Sheffield

⁴ Parks need Parkforce, CABI Space 2005

⁵ Local Government Association 'Reputations' initiative, 2005

6.2. For South Outer Area it is recommended that there is the following additional provision of site based gardeners:

Site Name	Inner/Outer Wedge	Current full-time gardener present	Proposed full-time gardener
Drighlington Park / Woodlesford Park	South Outer		Y
Lewisham Park	South Outer		Y
Lowry Road	South Outer		Y

6.3. The cost of appointing the 3 full time gardeners outlined above would be £53,400. However, £10,000 partnership funding has been obtained from Morley Town Council, leaving a shortfall of £43,400.

6.4. Park gardeners will be : -

- Responsible for the park and its users
- Based on site, not area based
- Contactable by users of the park when they are needed
- Available during daylight hours

7. Recommendations

7.1. The Committee is asked to consider the allocation of £43,400 per annum in support of the proposal.