

Appendix 1. Parks and Open Spaces Review

Alongside other service reviews, we are reviewing our maintenance of parks and open spaces, and looking to make savings of £100,000, equivalent to four staff. Some staff are retiring soon or taking voluntary redundancy and we are looking at changes we would have to make if we did not replace them.

Our parks, open spaces and cemeteries are important places in the Borough and we are seeking the views of our grounds maintenance staff, elected members and Friends of Parks groups on how we can make the savings we need to make. Tamzin Percival and Alison Wilkins lead a members briefing session on 9 July on the parks and open spaces review, and this is summarised below for those who were unable to attend.

A consultation session for local community groups who are active in our parks and open spaces, such as Friends of Parks Groups, Civic Pride, Bowling Clubs etc. will be held on 5 September. Reviewing our maintenance of parks and open spaces is also included in the on line questionnaire and citizens panel survey currently being undertaken.

There are currently 19 front line staff across parks and open spaces, supported by up to 4 extra seasonal gardeners in the summer.

What we deal with?

Grass Cutting
Trees
Parks maintenance
Weed control
Shrub beds
Cemeteries – grounds maintenance and burials
Closed churchyards Bowling greens
Allotments
Sports pitches
Seasonal displays
Assisting community groups
Christmas tree collection



A few facts and figures:

- 881,090m² grass to be cut = 7 – 8 million m² grass cut per year over the season
- Average area per ground maintenance team = 105,000m²
- Tractors cut 445,231m² grass
- 40 play areas, 4 cemeteries and numerous parks ranging from large parks e.g. Whitaker Park to smaller sites e.g. Hempsteads Memorial Gardens

- 8 bowling greens, 36 pitches, 1 cricket pitch
- 2012 – purchased and planted 40,000 bedding plants
- 2013 – reduced to 22,000 plus shrubs and perennials

Savings and service reductions have already been made in recent years – e.g. we have reduced the number of cuts per year. We hope to make further savings of £100,000 through ‘natural wastage’ and are currently looking at how we can make these savings both through changes to service delivery and having a different team structure.

As well as savings, there are a few other factors to consider:

- Impact of 5 days unpaid leave – equivalent to 20 weeks work across the team
- Higher proportion of high priority sites remain on the schedule as low priority sites are removed first
- Potential reduction of funding from LCC for highways work
- Increasing service requests for other aspects of work e.g. Japanese knotweed removal
- Equipment downtime as wear on equipment increases
- Staff absence through sickness and holidays
- Weather
- Higher ‘claim culture’
- Staff morale and public expectation
- Ecological guidance—opportunity to adopt more ecologically sound and sustainable land management techniques

Staff are currently fairly stretched and reduced numbers will impact on service delivery. Considerations for changes to service delivery include all of the following, however this is not an exhaustive list and we are interested if you have any other ideas:

Grass cutting:

- Remove areas from grass cutting schedule completely
- Reduce frequency of grass cutting
- Reduce area to be cut – e.g. 1m wide strip
- Vary amount of maintenance within each park



Planting:

- Reduce number or size of formal displays
- Change planting type in formal displays
- Reduce or cease winter bedding
- Reduce numbers of planters and troughs
- Further reduce maintenance required to planters by changing to shrubs, trees, perennials etc.



Other Suggestions:

- Closed churchyards – change to natural planting schemes – pilot in Goodshaw and Deardengate
- Stop Christmas tree collection / drop off points
- Reduce / cease assistance for community groups
- Seek further support from community groups – ‘adopt a planter’ etc.
- Self management of allotments, bowling greens etc.

