

Report to:	CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Lisa Arnold, Assistant Director for Community and Environmental Services (Community and Wellbeing Services)
Date of Meeting	5 July 2023

PARK AND GREEN ENVIRONMENT SERVICE UPDATE

1 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the service, work undertaken over the last twelve months, performance of the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service and future priorities.

2 Recommendation:

- 2.1 To scrutinise the work of the service and provide feedback on any relevant areas within the report.

3 Reasons for recommendation:

- 3.1 To ensure effective scrutiny of the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service
- 3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No
- 3.2 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes
- 3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:
- 3.4 Request Internal Audit to programme into the annual work plan.
Refer to external audit.

4 Council Priority:

- 4.1 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service contributes to both council priorities;
- Priority One 'The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool';
 - Priority Two 'Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience'

5 Report Information

- 5.1 The report provides an update on the work and performance of the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service with a financial overview and projected year-end position for 2022/23. The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service is responsible for the strategic direction and improvement of Blackpool's parks and open spaces to maximise the benefits green spaces can offer to social, economic and

environmental objectives.

6 Parks and Green Open Spaces Service Overview

The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service is responsible for:

- Collaboratively creating and delivering a programme of Park and Open Space improvements aiming to maximise the benefits of each park to the community and biodiversity where appropriate;
- Working collaboratively with ENVECO NW to ensure the maintenance and presentation of parks, green open spaces and tree population across the town meets the agreed standards;
- Sourcing external funding for improvement projects and schemes including playgrounds, buildings, park infrastructure and greening projects such as tree planting, green infrastructure and SuDs.
- Engaging and connecting the community with their local open space to encourage responsible usage and involvement in park, greening projects and environmental projects.
- Working in collaboration with Friends groups and the community to ensure each park is promoted and developed with the needs of the park users and establish new groups in areas where required;
- Delivery and coordination of the Park Ranger Service to promote parks and open spaces and engage the community with their open space, including the Early Years Park Ranger programme funded through Blackpool Better Start, whilst increasing their educational and environmental reach through forest and beach school;
- Coordinating partnerships and lead on the application of Green Flag awards across the town;
- Developing and co-ordinating a parks volunteering programme which provides volunteers with support and training required to enable positive management of green open spaces;
- Ensuring biodiversity is enhanced on open spaces and that specified ecological sites are undergoing positive management to increase wildlife;
- Supporting and promoting events on parks and opens spaces undertaken by external partners and Friends groups; and
- Playing a key role in the delivery of the Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy with partners and stakeholders.

6.1 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service contributes and plays an active part in supporting and leading on some of Blackpool's key strategies and plans, including:

- Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy;
- Tree Strategy;
- Local Plan;
- Active Lives Strategy;
- Open Spaces Assessment; and
- Climate change Action Plan;

6.2 The team comprises of approx. 15 members of staff, which sit under Lisa Arnold, Assistant Director for Community and Environmental Services (Community and Wellbeing Services).

Service Manager for Parks and Green Open Spaces;

Tree and Landscape Officer;

Community Engagement Officer;

Parks Volunteer Coordinator;

Park Ranger Supervisor;

Junior Park Ranger Coordinator;

Parks Administration Officer;

Parks Rangers x 3;

Assistant Park Rangers x dependent on the season.

Apprentices x 2

6.3 Two placements have continued as part of the apprenticeships. This has seen an apprentice ranger expand their skill base and be part of recording the required data, which is provided to Betterstart as part of the funded programme. Our horticultural apprentice continues to work at Revoe Park at the community garden, helping to support forest school activities, tend the garden and work with the volunteers.

7 Playground improvement schemes

7.1 Several play areas across the borough saw improvements, which included a new children's slide and climbing unit at Gynn Sunken Gardens, Improvements to the play area at East Pines Park and a new swing set at Anchorsholme Park.

7.2 Further play area improvements saw volunteers come together to paint play equipment on several parks which included Bispham recreational area and Louis Horrocks with further parks planned such

as Crossland Road Park. The painting was carried out in collaboration between Parks and Green Open Spaces Service volunteers and the Volunteer Academy.

8 Park Ranger Service Update

- 8.1 The BetterStart Park ranger scheme has continued to deliver high quality nature-based activities and events to families with young children. Since April 2022 there have been 2550 individual 0-4s and primary school children attending sessions with many repeat visits on top of this. The Park Ranger Service is OFSTED registered allowing for full day programmes throughout the school holidays to be delivered; this has continued to improve participation levels and provided an outdoor learning environment.
- 8.2 Funding has been maintained at 100% from BetterStart, which was due to reduce over the years of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. However, due to the rangers continuing success of outdoor activities and now branching out in to beach school, the rangers continue to provide a vital service to the young children of Blackpool with the support of Betterstart. This has also seen a further development of a ranger at Anchorsholme Park funded by Catering with an activity programme being developed and is highlighted in the Park Development Plan at Appendix 1.

9 Community Involvement

- 9.1 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service continues to promote community engagement, with links solidified with friends of groups and volunteers, who helped to plant trees at Highfield Park, Revoe Park and Bridge Farm green space. The work the friends of groups and volunteers have put in was fundamental and helped to achieve the specific funding requirements, which is based on volunteer involvement.
- 9.2 Partnerships continue to provide positive community involvement with the volunteers at Marton Mere helping to work towards the new management plan, the Windmill Group continue to help manage the bridle path whilst teaching young adults new skills as part of the Prince's Trust. The volunteers at Revoe Community Garden have vastly improved the area by re-organising the planting beds, creating Hugelculture beds, helped to install a butterfly polytunnel and tend to the bees.
- 9.3 Our volunteer numbers continue to increase and on a weekly basis, we have 60 volunteers to help maintain our parks and green spaces.
- 9.4 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service continue to work with the friends of groups around Blackpool and collaborate on the Parks Development Plans; friends of Anchorsholme, Devonshire Rock Garden and Watson Road Park have actively been involved with contributing towards the plans with further friends of groups identified. These documents are used to identify projects, which will improve and benefit the parks, whilst meeting the requirements of the Green Flag Awards, discussed at 13.2. Further collaborative projects have seen the friends of groups providing financial contributions to help improve the parks and sits at 25k in 2022/2023.

10 Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Tree Strategy

- 10.1 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service have planted 3575 trees during the planting season of 2022/2023. This includes new street trees, trees in parks, memorial trees and trees in collaboration

with 13 schools within Blackpool. Working in partnership with Trees for Cities, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and local Cllrs, locations such as Highfield Park, East Pines Park, Crossland Road Park, Bridge Farm, Revoe Park and Anchorsholme Lane East have seen 140 large trees planted with the remaining trees planted as whips and feathered whips.

- 10.2 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service have continued to lead on the installation of green infrastructure by being heavily involved in the planning process for tree retention and green infrastructure mitigation measures, further enhanced by the addition of a Tree and Landscape Officer. The tree planting pits designed by Parks and Green Open Spaces have been utilised to plant the trees at Anchorsholme Lane East and which will see the continuing success replicated at further locations.
- 10.3 This has also seen the development of an online mapping system created from the completed borough wide tree survey, ensuring our trees are managed in accordance with best practice and remedial actions are recorded, with further functions planned such as a record of newly planted trees, protected trees and numerous other benefits. These actions highlighted within the Tree Strategy 2021 – 2031, have been achieved along with many other actions in 2022/2023.
- 10.4 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service are part of the woodland accelerator fund collaborating with Groundwork, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Blackburn and Darwin Council and Lancashire County Council. We have been actively involved in helping LCC recruit staff to push the project forward, which will see an increase in funding for green infrastructure.

11 Events and Promotion

- 11.1 Parks have seen a considerable increase in events over the period of 2022/2023 with football tournaments, fairs, Friends of group events, ranger events and the HAF programme over the summer period.

The service have also set up their new Parks and Green Open Space Service's website. The pages provide details and information regarding our parks, volunteering, the park rangers and greening projects. The website will be developed further and will be continually reviewed to ensure all the information is up to date.

12.0 Parks Development Service (other)

- 12.1 Sadly, highly pathogenic Avian influenza H5N1 continues to be present at Stanly Park lake resulting in 8 swans dying. The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service were able to quickly react and work with colleagues in ENVECO and Environmental Protection to close the lake and ensure communication messages were disseminated.
- 12.2 As expected, the transition of the parks operational team to ENVECO in September 2021 has taken some time to bed in and is working well. Regular relationship meetings take place between the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service and ENVECO to agree longer term work plans and focuses and opportunities to work together to improve the green spaces across the town. An example of a joint partnership is the planting of the trees throughout the planting season in which ENVECO, with help from the volunteers planted the larger trees.

- 12.3 Over the last 5 months the service has had several vacancies. In particular our Administration Officer along with a new payment system being implemented corporately, it has resulted in several projects, particularly around play area improvements not being progressed as far as the service had hoped.
- 12.4 A review of the tree and bench memorial scheme (Stanley Park only) and application process has been completed, with the application process eventually moving online to the new website, making it more user friendly and streamlined. The review included assessing tree species, which would further benefit the parks and provide biodiversity, with a new species list in place. The benches have been changed to ensure we create sustainable practices with all benches now being made from recycled plastic and cast aluminum, reducing maintenance. However, the scheme still needs to be reviewed on several other parks before the applications can be opened, this will be a focus for 2023/2024.

13 Key Future Priorities

- 13.1 A Stanley Park Masterplan is currently being developed to identify areas requiring significant refurbishment and areas that present opportunities for investment to increase footfall and potentially attract new target markets to the park. The masterplan will be developed with key stakeholders including the Friends of Stanley Park, ENVECO, park concessionaires, local Councillors as well as consultation with the local community including users and non-users of the park. Additional renovations works are already moving forward and include the renovation of the toilets, fountain, the stone work around the base of the clock tower and trellis around the Italian Gardens.
- 13.2 Blackpool's Open Spaces Assessment, which highlights the current condition of all Blackpool Parks and open spaces, has directed future priorities and is contributing to creating Park Development Plans. These will be used to create targeted site improvements with the view to obtaining Green Flag where possible. The Park Development Plans will shape the future management of the spaces by the grounds maintenance team to ensure a consistent approach and quality of open spaces across Blackpool. Three parks (Anchorsholme, Devonshire Rock Garden and Watson Road Park) have completed park development plans with a further three progressing well (Crossland Road Park, Kingscote Park and Highfield Park). All 6 parks have had an initial assessment by the Green Flag Assessors and we are awaiting on the results to action their feedback. A copy of the Park Development Plan for Anchorsholme Park is provided at Appendix 1, to provide the committee with an understanding of the areas covered.
- 13.3 Funding has been confirmed for several play areas and the installations are to be booked in. This includes new play areas at Boundary Park and Carr Road, with further improvements at Crossland Road Park. Other projects moving forward are the installation of solar lights, the installation of SuDs to collect rainwater and increase biodiversity, and ecological projects will move forward at Marton Mere and Lawson's Field with 10-year habitat enhancement plans.
- 13.4 Further procedures are to be implemented to establish the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service and will include providing clarity and enhancement in our working partnership with Enveco, existing services and stakeholders. The establishment of the parks development plans is key to provide direction, improve practices and plan future projects, whilst been available as a shared resource. This will direct future projects allowing time and resources to be allocated, whilst providing consultations to take place and valuable feedback to be highlighted. Therefore, these will be a priority going forward.

- 13.5 Further collaborative projects are being planned which will see improvements to several parks and green spaces and include Stanley Park, Pond Trail and Lawson's Field. Further tree planting projects are being prepared working with Highways and external partners. The service was successful in receiving the parks levelling up fund, which is to be used to improve Fisher's Field with the works planned to commence August 2023.

14 Budget Information

- 14.1 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service has an annual expenditure of £1,564,692 and annual income target of £335,982 with the net overall cost of the service being £724,849. For 2022/23, the service has exceeded its income target through securing of additional external funds, predominantly for capital expenditure, improvement works and greening projects. This additional income will be invested back into the parks and green spaces in line with the relevant funding criteria.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

15.0 List of Appendices:

- 15.1 Appendix 6(a): Parks Development Plan for Anchorsholme Park.
Appendix 6(b): Images of the tree mapping software.

16.0 Legal considerations

- 16.1 None

17.0 Human Resources considerations

- 17.1 The Park and Green Open Spaces Service employs approx. 15 staff.

18.0 Equalities considerations

- 18.1 The aim of the Parks and Green Environment Service is to ensure accessibility for all interests and abilities.

19.0 Financial considerations

- 19.1 Revenue savings and investment in the Parks and Green Environment have been considerable.

- 19.2 See Appendix 6(a) and Appendix 6(b).

20.0 Risk management considerations

- 20.1 The Park and Green Open Spaces Service operates within a robust risk assessment framework

21.0 Ethical considerations

- 21.1 The Park and Green Open Spaces Service adhere to the Ethical policy of the Council in ensuring appropriate use of the town's parks and open spaces.

22.0 Internal/External Consultation undertaken

22.1 None

23.0 Background papers

23.1 None