

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED: Citywide

**ARTS, LEISURE & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

19TH October 2005

PARKS AND GREEN SPACES – CRIME AND SAFETY ISSUES

Report of the Service Director – Cultural Services

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Arts, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to consider and comment on actions undertaken and proposals directed at addressing issues concerning Crime and Safety within Parks and Green spaces.

2. Summary

2.1 Community safety and the fear of crime is always a top issue in Leicester's Park User Surveys and was a priority for Park users and non users consulted as part of the Best Value Review of Local Environmental Services undertaken in 2002 as well as MORI Residents Surveys and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) reviews.

2.2 Recorded crime statistics show a different picture to that of the perceived level of crime within Parks and Green spaces, the challenge is to address this perception to improve the attendance levels and diversity of Park users and to sustain actions intended to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

2.3 Appendix 1 illustrates the outcomes of recent vegetation thinning works undertaken on Abbey Park and Victoria Park to reduce the opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour. Works are evidenced based and reflect Parks and Greenspace Services commitment towards developing a close working relationship with Local Policing Units, Community Safety team, Anti Social Behaviour project team and the Crime and Disorder Partnership together with promoting the ongoing development and input of local Parks Friends and User Groups.

3 Recommendations

3.1 Arts, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny are invited to comment on the actions undertaken and the proposed works targeted at reducing opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour in Parks and Green spaces.

4 Financial & Legal Implications

4.1 4.1 The costs will be contained within existing resources.

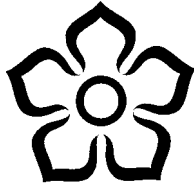
Sally Upton
Accountant – Cultural Services
3rd October 2005

4.2 *Legal Implications*

Legal info author and date

5 Report Author

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Report

1. Background

- 1.1 Leicester's Community Plan has 6 main themes, 'Community Safety' being one key priority arising from extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders including the public, private and voluntary sectors in addition to local citizens.
- 1.2 One of the Community Safety Plan statements is 'reduce the number of incidents of anti-social behaviour across the City by providing stimulating and relevant leisure and cultural activities and by taking action to reduce crime and fear of crime in respect of Parks and Green spaces.
- 1.3 The ODPM Best Value Performance public survey undertaken in September 2003 identified the highest indicator under 'quality of life, most important' as low levels of crime given by 52% of Leicester respondents.
- 1.4 A key objective of the newly formed Parks and Green space Service, established in April 2004 as an outcome of the Best Value Review of Local Environmental Services has been to target evidenced sites of crime and anti social behaviour within Parks and Green spaces.
- 1.5 Key issues and areas of concern in respect to crime and anti social behaviour can be broadly categorised as follows: -
 - Fear of crime within Parks and Green spaces (including Cemeteries)
 - Vandalism to buildings, flower beds etc
 - Physical attacks and fear of attacks, reported sexual assaults
 - Robbery
 - Unauthorised use of motorbikes, Quad bikes etc
 - Arson and abandoned vehicles
 - Cottaging and prostitution
 - Underage drinking
 - Noise and Anti Social Behaviour
- 1.6 Partnership working has been established with the Leicestershire Constabulary and Leicestershire Fire and Rescue (Arson Task Group) and New Futures

(Sexual Health) team on identifying crime or potential crime hot spots and joint working in the organisation of Environmental Days and Community Crime and Disorder Event days along with vegetation clearance works on key sites which were undertaken earlier this year (Appendix 1).

- 1.7 Grassland fires and burnt out abandoned vehicles are main issues for deliberate arson within Parks and Green spaces and are being addressed in partnership with Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service.
- 1.8 Parks and Green spaces are represented on the Leicester Together Action Group and local Joint Action Groups, initiatives promoted by the Home Office to tackle crime and Anti Social Behaviour and the Service has been successful in being awarded funding to support the delivery of projects to address crime and anti social behaviour within Parks and Green spaces.
- 1.9 Key sites identified in Leicester are Abbey Park, Victoria Park, Braunstone Park, Beaumont Park, Prebend Gardens and Castle Gardens. Resources supported by a proportion of the additional Parks Revenue reinvestment budget were targeted at implementing a programme of vegetation removal at key locations to improve natural site surveillance. The programme has been very successful as illustrated in the following table. The works have received positive media publicity with Park users commenting that the improvements are making the Parks more open and accessible. Cottaging websites have reported on how the vegetation removal has prevented sexual activity being undertaken. In addition the Outreach Workers working with Parks and Green spaces staff have noted a reduction in drug related litter on Parks.
- 1.10 Crime Reduction Surveys undertaken by the Leicestershire Constabulary Crime Reduction Officer, have clearly documented the major impact that Natural Surveillance of areas blighted by crime and anti-social behaviour has allowed members of the public to observe car parks, children's areas and isolated toilet blocks, which previously were obscured by overgrown vegetation. It has been shown that where Natural Surveillance has improved, criminals are no longer able to hide behind these features and fear being seen and identified. This has the effect of reducing crime and fear of crime in areas, which previously had been over grown.

Crimes reported in & around Abbey Park	No. reported Apr 03 – Mar 04	No. reported Apr 04 – Mar 05
Robbery	29	13
Theft from vehicle	91	55
Other theft	55	40
Total crimes reported in and around park	260	183

Comments from Dave Trantom, Crime and Reduction Officer, reference Abbey Park (06.01.05):

- Car Park B and footpath Abbey Park Rd. This particular car park has long since suffered from cars being broken into and on occasions stolen, the removal of overgrown shrubs in this area and along the perimeter fence has greatly improved the views from the road of the car park and also opened a view towards the Band Stand. Traditionally workers and students have driven to the park in their lunch hour for a game of football

they are now able to see their cars parked which had previously been obscured by shrubs and bushes in turn reducing their fear of crime.

- Perimeter fence Abbey Park. The removal of overgrown shrubbery along the boundary fence has opened views into the park, which in turn has increased natural surveillance and helped reduce the fear of crime.
- Park Interior. The clearing of shrubbery from underneath trees planted within the park has had a most marked effect of improving the natural surveillance within the park, this work should help to reduce the fear of crime and reduce the incidents of crime and anti social behaviour.
- The Pastures Car Park For many years this car park has been used as a meeting point for the gay community, this has led to a number of robberies, homophobic attacks and other anti-social behaviour. The removal of low shrubbery around this area has already had a marked effect, as I understand from speaking to the Police Race Hate Crimes Officer, that the gay community are reassessing their behaviour in this area following the work that you have carried out.
- I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate both you and your staff on the work that has already been carried out on the Park, I know you have more work planned for the future which I am sure will greatly reduce any fear of crime that Park users might have.

1.11 It is proposed to continue with the programme of vegetation thinning works during this winter with the objective of improving both the internal and external natural surveillance of sites thereby deterring crime and anti-social behaviour while reducing visitor concerns and increasing their access to opportunities within Parks and Green spaces. Sites proposed for 2005/06 include:-

- Abbey Park gas bank
- Astill Lodge Park
- Beaumont Park pathways
- Braunstone Park around the Hall
- Castle Gardens – Mott area
- Castle Hill Country Park – various
- Fosse Recreation Ground
- Monks Rest Gardens
- Ralley Park – around adventure play area
- Rancliffe Gardens
- Stokeswood park
- Watermead Country Park
- Western Park – woodland areas
- Willowbrook Park – along main road
- Windmill Park – Keyham Lane side

It is also intended to continue with the programme of Community Safety Awareness Days.

A programme of potential additional works within Parks and Green spaces has been submitted to the Anti Social Behaviour Project Team for their consideration.

1.12 Parks and Green space Services in partnership with Leicestershire Constabulary have developed a Community Safety Accreditation Scheme with the objective of empowering staff to undertake specified enforcement actions in response to evidenced acts of crime and anti-social behaviour on Parks and Green spaces. Thirteen members of the Parks Services having voluntarily expressed a willingness to participate in the scheme subsequently successfully completed a period of full time specialist training supported by Leicestershire Constabulary. In summary these staff are now accredited by the Police with the following powers:-

- To request the name and address of a person acting in an anti social manner
- To request the name and address for Fixed Penalty offences and offences that cause injury, alarm and distress to another person or damage or loss of another persons property
- To issue Fixed Penalty Notices for dog fouling, littering and riding a bicycle on a footpath
- To confiscate cigarettes and tobacco products for young people
- To issue a Fixed Penalty Notice for graffiti and fly-posting
- To stop cyclists if they are suspected of having committed the offence of riding on a footway

Staff will be presented with their accreditation documents by Chief Superintendent Stripp at a presentation to be held at Abbey Park Visitor Centre on 13th October.

It is understood that Leicester is likely to be the first Local Authority in the UK to have taken this initiative. Following a presentation given by the Head of Parks and Green spaces at the recent Institute of Leisure and Amenity Parks, Countryside and Open Spaces Conference regarding Leicester's work in addressing Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour in Parks and Green spaces , representations have been made by Birmingham City Council and Coventry City Council asking if they can visit Leicester to discuss our achievements.

2. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

2.1

2.2 Legal Implications

2.3 Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	PARAGRAPH REFERENCES WITHIN SUPPORTING PAPERS
Equal Opportunities	NO	
Policy	NO	
Sustainable and Environmental	NO	
Crime and Disorder	YES	Whole Report

Human Rights Act	NO	
Older People on Low Income	NO	

2.4 Risk Assessment Matrix

	Risk	Likelihood L/M/H	Severity Impact L/M/H	Control Actions (if necessary/or appropriate)
1	Increase incidences of crime and Anti-Social behaviour in Parks	M	H	Continue programme of vegetation works etc.
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

L - Low

M - Medium

H - High

L - Low

M - Medium

H - High

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Victoria Park.

This area of the park is a popular cut through from student accommodation to the University. Crimes such as mobile phone thefts, muggings and an alleged rape have been reported in this location. As part of the works undertaken this Winter the University has funded improved lighting and CCTV and vegetation removal from previously unmanaged woodland plantations have opened up the area. This has been welcomed by the University, parks users and the Victoria Park the User Group.

Before:



After:



Victoria Park.

Before:



After:



Abbey Park.

Unmanaged borders enclosed the Park restricting views and potential acts of crime and ASB.

Before:



After:



Abbey Park.

This area of the park dates back to 1613 and the walls have been slowly obliterated by ivy, clearance works has made the area brighter and given an open impression removing the fear of crime.

Before:



After:



Abbey Park Car Park:

The car park has been opened up with views from outside and inside the park, allowing Natural Surveillance of vehicles.

Before:



After:

