

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

DEPARTMENT: STREET SCENE

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Cllr Mike Booth	Leisure	July to August 2011

PARKS AND GREENSPACES

Friends Forum

Friends of Park Groups are an important mechanism for local people to get involved in the management of their parks. There are several examples of excellent work done by these groups in Sefton and these are of great benefit to the parks themselves and to the Council. A further joint meeting of Sefton's 'Friends of Park' groups was organised by the Parks and Greenspace Service, and took place in April 2011. It was well attended by enthusiastic representatives from 12 groups. The Friends Forum is a good way for these different groups to share ideas and discuss common issues and problems.

Volunteer Park Rangers

The Park Ranger team has been extremely successful in reducing anti-social behaviour, encouraging volunteers, and working with the local community. However, due to over-stretched staff resources, the Park Rangers are unable to be present on-site as often as local people would like. One proposed solution to this is to encourage interested members of the community to become 'Volunteer Park Rangers', and assist the Ranger service in a wide range of activities to help manage and 'keep an eye' on the parks. A number of volunteers have already signed up for a pilot scheme, and a training programme has been devised which will enable them to carry out various tasks (of their choice). This training is due to take place in July, so that the new volunteers can begin to carry out their new roles in the summer. A Borough-wide scheme is planned for the autumn.

Parkwatch

A draft plan has been produced for the Park Ranger 'Parkwatch' project which aims to adapt the successful 'Homewatch' model. This is an attempt to further address problems of crime and antisocial behaviour in our parks. It aims to improve reporting of crime, and bring together all facets of the community into the scheme, including those who currently do not get involved. The scheme has been agreed in principle by Safer Stronger Communities and Merseyside Police. The next stage will be for the Park Rangers to take the scheme to the Borough's schools from September onwards. Schools will play a major role in spreading the word about Parkwatch. Through a satellite scheme of schools adopting their local park, it is hoped that the children involved will be the first to buy-in and then spread the word to family and friends.

'In Bloom' Competition

The main aim behind the Council's involvement in the 'In Bloom' competition is to encourage community participation and ownership in the management of their local environment, including highways, private land, parks and open spaces. The Parks and Greenspace Service has facilitated several 'In Bloom' bids this year in Sefton. This has been achieved through supporting and / or co-ordinating community Steering Groups to oversee 'In Bloom' bids from different areas (namely Southport, Crosby and Waterloo, and Maghull), and to encourage smaller organisations to put in their own 'Neighbourhood' entries. Despite the name, the competition looks at wider issues than just horticulture, including environmental responsibility (e.g. conservation, heritage, litter, graffiti, recycling etc) and community participation. This year, besides the three 'North West in Bloom' entries listed above, there have been 19 'It's Your Neighbourhood' entries. Southport has also been nominated for the prestigious national 'Britain in Bloom' competition. All the judging will take place in July and August, and results announced in the autumn.

Park Activities

Organised activities in Parks are a good way of attracting new audiences, and getting messages across to visitors about the benefits and responsible use of parks (and in some cases generate an income). Since the beginning of April, over 130 activities have been hosted in Sefton's parks. Many activities are organised 'in-house' by the Park Rangers, mainly focusing on promoting the responsible use of parks e.g. free micro chipping to promote 'Operation Collar' and responsible Dog Ownership. Educational activities, also run by the Park Rangers, include Wild Plant sessions and bug hunts around the Borough. Other major activities in the Parks (delivered by external partners) include Planet Circus, the first Circus to come to Bootle for a number of years, as well as a performance of Wind in the Willows in Derby Park (a joint project between the Parks Service, Hugh Baird College and the Friends of Derby Park). Other external activities held in the last few months include 'buggy-fit' sessions (exercise classes with young mums), football sessions in Ainsdale organised by the Community Association, and the 51st season of Brass Band Concerts in Botanic Gardens.

Summer Park Fun Days

Over the five weeks of summer, the parks host a regular series of activities called Summer Fun Days. This summer there are 26 Fun Days across the borough to help promote the parks, promote responsible use, consult with the public, and promote other activities e.g. Green Flag success, In Bloom and Volunteer Park Rangers.

Activities include a DJ, circus skills, acting, arts and crafts, sports coaching and natural play. At the time of writing, the first 8 events have attracted over 1400 children and approximately 1400 adults which is significantly more than last year.

John Muir Award for Pupils Working at Derby Park

The John Muir Award is an environmental accreditation scheme focused on outdoor space which encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment in a spirit of fun, adventure and exploration. In Feb/Mar 2011, year 5 pupils from Bedford Rd Primary visited Derby Park in Bootle and carried out over twenty hours of workshops (over a number of weeks) with the Linacre/Derby Park Ranger and the Wild about Plants

Officer from Plantlife. Children have since re-visited the park with parents to show them the work/activities they have carried out.

In June, 54 pupils from Bedford Primary received their John Muir Awards in a school assembly, where they showcased their activities to the rest of the school with a completely self produced presentation. These young people are the first ever in South Sefton to receive John Muir accreditation.

Rotten Row

The Parks and Greenspace Service has been working closely with Birkdale Civic Society to improve Rotten Row, a popular tourist attraction in Southport. This pro-active community involvement aims to ensure the sustainability of this key attraction in the future. Birkdale Civic Society has formed a "Friends of Rotten Row" group, and these volunteers are meeting on site for the first time in early July to decide on a programme for the future. Also, Farnborough Road School year 4 pupils have spent four sessions on site undertaking a range of activities including weeding, plant identification, potting plants and undertaking "bug hunts". The Civic Society were recently successful in acquiring a Heritage Lottery Grant of £50K for improvements to Rotten Row, and have been working with the Council to agree a programme of work on site, in time for the borders centenary in 2012.

Kings Gardens Community Engagement: Update

As part of the Stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid, a comprehensive community engagement programme is being carried out, lead by the HLF-funded Community Development Officer. The aim of this work is to

- determine current usage of the gardens,
- determine people's priorities,
- gauge their reaction to proposed developments
- explore what activities and events people would like to see/participate in
- further promote and encourage usage of the gardens
- identify volunteers to support in these developments

To support this consultation, a number of events are taking place in Kings Gardens and displays of the proposals are being taken into empty shops, farmers markets and other community events within Southport e.g. Veterans Carnival. Sefton's Young Advisors have been appointed to carry out vital research with young people who live in and around the Kings Gardens area. News letters and press releases are being used to keep people informed, and a webpage is up and running at www.sefton.gov.uk/kingsgardens through which an online consultation form is accessible.

Play Equipment for Disabled Children

The Parks and Greenspace Service has made considerable progress towards improving the inclusiveness and wider appeal of Sefton's playgrounds, thanks to funding from 'Aiming High for Disabled Children'. In order that children with disabilities are able to participate in play, new equipment has been installed which can be used by children with severe mobility requirements. Disabled access equipment has been installed at various

locations including Botanic Gardens, Hesketh Park and Crosby Coastal Park - three of the most popular sites for play in Sefton.

Outdoor Gyms

In addition to this, the Service has also worked with the Primary Care Trust to provide more 'outdoor gyms'. The PCT has committed over £80,000 over the past three years to install equipment into 8 of our parks, which helps both the PCT and the Council contribute to the wider 'health agenda'. The latest schemes are at Hesketh Park, Southport, and Victoria Park, Crosby, where the equipment has been laid out in a trail around the parks.

Play Builder Schemes 2011

The final round of 'Play Builder' schemes covers three new Council-run sites in Sefton. A range of new play equipment has been installed in Moorside Park in Crosby, and a football kick-about area and aerial runway have been installed at Crossens Community Park in Southport. The new facilities are already in use and have been well received by local youngsters. At Deansgate Lane in Formby, a wood sculptor has recently completed a design consultation process with Freshfields Junior School staff and these will be sculpted and installed as a play sculpture trail.

Quality in Parks

The Green Flag scheme is the main nationally recognised award for parks, and is a widely accepted way of benchmarking their quality. One of the main benefits of the scheme is in helping to drive up the quality of the parks, and focusing the attention of all partners and stakeholders.

In addition to the seven existing parks and crematoria which were awarded 'Green Flag' status last year, two new sites have been successful in 2011, bringing the total of award-winning sites to nine. The two new sites are Lord Street Gardens, Southport, and Hatton Hill Park, Litherland. A strategy will be developed to choose which new sites will be bid for in 2012, which will be shared in a future Cabinet Member report. It is also intended to enter all five cemeteries and crematoria sites into this quality-based award. This will be completed through entering Bootle Cemetery as a new site for 2012.

APSE Awards

Parks & Greenspaces have now been notified by APSE - Association for Public Service Excellence - that the section is once again a finalist for their Team of the Year Award for Parks, Horticulture & Grounds. This is the third time in three years that the section has made this stage of this prestigious Local Authority award ceremony. The awards ceremony takes place on the 8th September.