

CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING (Children, Schools, Families and Leisure) – FEBRUARY 2013

PARKS AND GREENSPACES

King's Gardens, Southport

The largest Heritage Lottery Fund park project currently in UK has now started on site. The contractors, Casey's, have previous experience of working on HLF projects and working with the local community. At present the main compound is being constructed and major works are due to start on site 18th February.

Initial shrub clearance was carried out during December and January around the Gardens. Views from the upper promenade to lower have now been opened up, helping to recreate the original layout of the gardens, and improving natural surveillance and the perception of safety.

The HLF project also funds a Community Development Officer who works alongside the Community Parks Officers to bring life to the park, and make it more sustainable in the long-term. Some examples of the successful community work to date include:

- Forming and supporting the Friends of King's Gardens. This group has been meeting for around eighteen months and are a fully constituted group. The Friends play an integral part in the project and their input and passion to see the gardens transformed is fantastic. They recently presented prizes to the winners of a photography competition which they organised; prizes were kindly donated by Jessops. The Friends have set up a facebook page and twitter account to chart the restoration of the Gardens.
- Working with a local environmental group, the Green Machine, who have adopted King's Gardens to help support in gardening activities and other projects. This year the group are going to be designing a leaflet for the gardens which members of the public can use. It is hoped the group will help in the planting of the bedding on the promenade this Spring.
- Links have also been forged with HMP Kennet who are growing herbaceous plants for King's Gardens. Negotiations are taking place to enable offenders to volunteer to carry out gardening activities on site.

This illustrates the importance of pro-actively encouraging and facilitating the local community, in order to help with managing our parks and to protect the investment which has been made in them.

Street Trees

The Tree and Woodland Team manage street trees on behalf of Highways. Work is prioritised to deal with critical Health and Safety issues first (e.g. structurally unsound trees or trees that are causing a hazard by obstructing the road/pavement).

Due to budget pressures, only this high priority work can be done currently, and this has to be phased according to need and budget; unfortunately, the allocated budget does not allow for dealing with residents' requests for tree pruning to alleviate problems like overhang, shading, etc.

Mazes

In April 2012, the Landscape Services Department secured funding from NHS Sefton for the provision of mazes in two parks across the borough. The aim of this scheme is to promote the benefit of creative outdoor solutions as an innovative remedy for stress, anxiety and depression. The mazes will comprise low-level, geometric patterns on the ground, as research has shown this to be beneficial for mental health.

To the North of the borough, Hesketh Park in Southport was selected due to its ornamental nature and positive links with the community, including The Hesketh Centre, which provides mental well being across the borough. In the South of the borough, Marian Gardens in Nethererton was selected due to its close proximity to the Feelgood Factory, which also provide many mental well being services to the community.

As part of the project, Landscape Services have engaged with the Creative Alternatives Team. The scheme is scheduled to be completed in the spring.

Green Flag

This year's Green Flag management plans have been submitted for all the following sites: Botanic Gardens / Hesketh Park / Lord Street Gardens / Coronation Park / Hatton Hill Park / North Park and Derby Park. The management plans are important documents as they detail how we are going to manage the site in the coming year and the main Actions / areas of activity that need to take place.

The plans have been re-written to address the significant changes in maintenance of the parks, due to the savings within the Service. Although every effort is being made to keep the parks at an acceptable standard, this may affect the outcome of the Green Flag process.

Officers work pro-actively with Friends of Groups on these sites; these groups help to influence the management plans and help to address some of the impacts of the savings.