

WARDS: Lye and Wollescote

AGENDA ITEM NO.

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE – 15TH SEPTEMBER, 2003

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

STEVENS PARK WOLLESCOTE

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update members on community safety issues at Stevens Park Wollescote.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the last meeting of this committee there were concerns raised about a recent outbreak of vandalism on the park when benches and trees had been vandalised. This incident is not untypical of the level of vandalism and abusive behaviour which occurs from time to time in many parks and green spaces throughout the Borough and is in fact a reflection of the national situation. In this case the Park Keeper was on site at the time of the incident and the police attended.
- 2.2 Since this incident the police have increased patrols within the park and there have been no further outbreaks of vandalism. This level of support cannot be guaranteed because resources are limited and other issues may have to take priority. However Police Community Support Officers will be in post for the Lye and Wollescote area in September and their responsibilities will include this park. In addition the Cyberbus will be scheduled to visit Wollescote Park when possible, but the success of this initiative does mean that it is very much in demand.
- 2.3 Stevens Park Wollescote and Mary Stevens Park Stourbridge both have on-site staff that are on duty during the day, 7 days a week. The working hours vary depending upon the time of year as follows: July 10:45am – 9.00pm, August 10:45am –8:30pm, from September the end time reduces down to 6:00pm. The other 3 parks are only staffed 5 days a week, but historically the two Stourbridge Parks have always received a 7 day service. Park Keepers are responsible for patrolling the site, collection of litter, collection of money for games and providing information and assistance to park visitors. The Park Keepers' Service employs 6 full time and one seasonal park keeper to cover 5 parks. With such limited staffing levels it is not always possible to provide cover for sickness and holidays

or address the problems of vandalism. Because of numerous incidents when some Park Staff have been assaulted and verbally abused our lone working policy does not recommend that staff tackle offenders on their own but report the incident to the police and wait for backup. Due to issues in relation to resources the police are not always able to respond to such reports.

- 2.4 Additional site staff, to provide two staff on duty at each park during opening hours, would help to deter vandalism but would not stop it occurring completely. In order to provide this level of staffing throughout the year on all the staffed parks it would be necessary to increase the number of staff employed by 8 full time equivalents which would entail approximately an additional £150,000 revenue funding for this service.
- 2.5 The Council has used a number of tactics to address vandalism and abusive behaviour in the past on this and other parks, for example additional security patrols, mobile CCTV, lighting, barriers, fences and diversionary activities, but none of these have provided a long-term effective solution. It is now clear that such issues cannot be addressed by a single agency and the Crime and disorder Reduction Partnership has organised a multi-agency strategic planning meeting to look at borough-wide anti-social behaviour issues. This meeting was held on the 1 August 2003.
- 2.6 CCTV and security lighting were employed on this park after the restoration of the Hall without success: the lighting facilitated use of the bowling green for night time football and the cameras were vandalised. The Community Safety team advise that the installation of static CCTV cameras to prevent vandalism in the park would not be feasible. It is their opinion that large numbers of cameras would have to be installed together with fencing, that the cost would be prohibitive and the effect not necessarily comprehensive.
- 2.7 Concerns were also raised at the last meeting, about the various footpaths leading onto the park and the safety of walkers on these routes. Of particular concern was the definitive footpath S119 leading off Carlton Avenue. A site inspection has revealed that there is a giant conifer hedge within the eastern boundary of one of the properties on Carlton Avenue which has been allowed to spread virtually across the public footpath. This visual domination of the path, closing off any evening light, is detrimental to the safety of the users of the adjacent path. It also denies some surveillance from adjacent properties towards the park. The removal or reduction of these trees and other vegetation would assist with the visual opening of the path, thereby reducing the ability of individuals to commit unseen anti-social behaviour. The removal of old debris at the base would also help prevent arson attacks. The cost of removal of this vegetation would, of course, lie with the landowners of these properties, who have been contacted by the Highways Department.
- 2.8 Adjacent to the other footpath, bushes at the rear of Hob Green Farm House have been the subject of fire attacks. Again, apart from the rear window of this property this area has very poor natural surveillance. It is suggested that the hedge should be removed or considerably lowered, and the trees managed in this location to bring this section of path visually into the park. The Green Care Team has been asked to carryout this work.

2.9 The footpath off Carlton Avenue is not a candidate for closure under the Government Guidance to new powers: primarily, it is too well used and there is no logical alternative route. In addition it cannot be demonstrated that proactive measures have been taken to mitigate any proven problems.

2.10 In addition to the measures outlined above, path S119 could be lit. However the cost of installation and on-going maintenance could not be accommodated within existing resources.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 That Committee note the report

4.0 FINANCE

4.1 Although there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, the cost of the various measures outlined in the report are not provided for within current budgets.

5.0 LAW

5.1 Under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions and the need to do all it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 This report does not contravene the Council's Equal Opportunities policies.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That the proposal outlined in paragraph 3.1 above be supported.

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Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-

None

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