CLEAN AND GREEN RESIDENTS REVIEW - PARKS DEVELOPMENT

Report by the Residents Review Team

January 2016

Contents

Foreword - Why do parks still matter?

The first municipal park was laid out in Birkenhead in 1845. It was created "to promote the health and comfort of the inhabitants" for those experiencing difficult living and working conditions in highly built up areas. Parks have evolved since then to provide the variety of facilities that we find today, with increased emphasis on formal play areas and recreation. There was a serious decline in the care and maintenance of parks in the UK after the 1980s though standards have risen again until the present day. However, many local authorities and other agencies now anticipate that the finance to develop and maintain parks is coming under increasing pressure as other priorities compete for reduced funding.

It is now clear that parks can offer lasting social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits. They still offer outdoor space for relaxation for those living in built-up areas where homes have no or very little associated garden area. In addition, public spaces are open to all, regardless of ethnicity, age or gender, and as such they offer a place to meet and socialise freely. Access to good-quality, well-maintained public spaces can help to improve physical and mental health by encouraging us to walk more, to play sport, or simply to enjoy a green and natural environment; many parks provide a space for dog-walking. Young children learn physical and socials skill through play and this can be encouraged through the provision of appropriate facilities in an out-door setting; and parks offer a space for teenagers to "hang out" in a relatively safe environment.

Parks offer connectivity between areas within communities, both physical (walking to work) and natural (providing green havens and links for wildlife). They also enhance property values in the immediate neighbourhood, benefitting local householders and creating greater returns to the local authority.

Within East Lothian it is anticipated that the numbers of both young and old will increase significantly over the coming years, and to improve health it is recommended that everyone should take at least some exercise on a regular basis. Parks provide facilities for all, and should become increasingly important elements in the fabric of life.

Residents Review Team

Summary

This review was carried out as part of East Lothian Council's wider approach to community engagement. The Review Team comprised eight residents of East Lothian, including four employed by the Council, together with support and guidance from the Corporate Policy and Improvement Team.

The overall area of investigation was set as "Clean and Green" but the Team elected, after discussion with Stuart Pryde, Principal Amenity Officer, to concentrate on parks and their future development. Brief research showed that parks are considered to play an essential part in the recreational and social lives of communities but that across Britain they are perceived to be under pressure from reducing resources (including staff) as Councils themselves face financial strictures. However, increasing numbers of young and older members of the population, together with interest in the benefits of exercise for health, are likely to increase demand for their use. There is a significant challenge ahead to prevent the deterioration of parks, ensure capacity to cope with population growth and to try to find alternative funding models to supplement Council inputs. Although the parks visited in the course of the Review appeared to meet very high standards of both cleanliness and greenness, the underlying threat of reduced capacity to maintain these standards still applies. The recent allocation of funding from the Scottish Government underlines this point.

Visits to local parks by the Review Team demonstrated that they provide a variety of facilities, from very local use for relaxation or informal recreation, possibly with "play" facilities, to those with more formal recreational facilities (football, rugby, all-weather pitches, golf courses and putting greens, tennis and bowls) and some "destination" parks, e.g. with impressive bedding displays.

Data are not available to determine whether parks meet actual needs, although theoretical requirements of particular populations (e.g. a new housing estate) can be calculated. It became clear, however, that where local e.g. "Friends" groups had become involved, a future vision for each park was being developed, "wants" were being articulated and in some cases efforts had been made to raise funds to pay for, or supplement Council funding for, new uses or facilities[1]. A new spirit of "ownership" and "partnership" had followed. However, the majority of parks do not have such support groups, and it turned out that some of these groups had only been formed in response to a perceived threat to the local facility.

Readily available public information about East Lothian's parks was considered to be seriously lacking, and improvements in information provision and publicity are key elements in any attempt to encourage greater use of, and user involvement in, parks.

It is a strong recommendation of the Review Team that the Council adopts a clear Strategy for parks which includes pointing to threats and opportunities in the future, with specific consideration of how working in partnership with local groups could help support individual, or clusters of, parks. The challenge would seem to be to encourage the formation of more local support groups who could identify the main users and any specific needs for their park, and would work with the Council to

---

[1] There are currently 5 'In Bloom' groups – Cockenzie & Port Seton, North Berwick, Dunbar, East Linton and Haddington and 9 'Friends' groups – Winterfield, Ormiston, Cuthill and Neilson Parks, North Berwick Law, North Berwick Glen, Fisherrow Waterfront, Musselburgh Links and North Berwick Lodge grounds. A Friends group is also in the pipeline for Muirpark in Tranent.

meet these needs. One means of encouraging such working might be to adopt a policy of minimal maintenance for parks (litter cleaning, grass shrub and tree maintenance, weed control, dog wardens, path and hard facility maintenance) but not to improve or enhance parks without the involvement of local input.

Context and Procedure of the Review

This is the first Residents Review to be run by East Lothian Council and, as such, took the form of a pilot exercise. The introduction of the Residents Review initiative is part of wider activity undertaken by the Council to engage local people and communities in decision making.

The Council identified the topic "Clean and Green" (involving their Amenity Services) for the pilot project and recruited eight local residents to join the Review Team. In this instance, four of those members were also employees of East Lothian Council, although they represented themselves as residents rather than the Council. The Team was guided and supported by staff from the Council's Corporate Policy and Improvement Team.

After an initial discussion with Stuart Pryde, Principal Amenity Officer, the Team decided to concentrate their review on parks and park development. They visited a variety of parks in Dunbar, Port Seton and Prestonpans, and participated in a question-and-answer session with a panel of representatives with different interests in parks, both general and particular. An interview with the Service Manager for Sport, Countryside and Leisure also took place. They next met to discuss what they had learned about parks, their management and their future, and formulated a series of topics for inclusion in their report, both in relation to everyday operation and at a more strategic level. The report was written by the Review Team with support from the Policy Team. The Review Team then met with Stuart Pryde to present the draft report and discuss potential actions for the Service.

Initial feedback from the Service suggested that the process had been beneficial in terms of enabling the Service to access the views of a group of service users regarding existing and future provision. The Service also commended the approach taken in terms of the Review Team being able to identify a set of recommendations based on an understanding it had developed of some of the key challenges and opportunities faced by the Service. The Service suggested that the Residents Review 'will prove invaluable in developing service provision'

Details of the analysis and conclusions carried out by the Review Team are described below.

1. Overall service provided

1.1 Review Findings:

The Review Team was extremely positive about the service currently provided in relation to East Lothian parks. This was based on their own personal experience of parks and on observations made during the site visits to parks in Dunbar, Prestonpans and Port Seton.

The Team suggested that the parks visited during the site visits were 'clean, tidy and well kept' and that parks provision is a service that 'appears to be valued by the general population'. The pride and commitment of the Council staff that the Team met with was also noted.

1.2 Review Recommendations:

- Celebrate parks, tell 'good news stories' – boost publicity and promotion

1.3 Service Response:

- Positive comments about enthusiastic, committed, 'can do' staff are welcomed
- Agreed that more attention needs to be given to promoting parks

1.4 Agreed Actions:

1. Communicate details of the Residents Review process and its outcomes to the whole Service team
2. Carry out a review of existing communications relating to the Service, with a view to developing a 'Parks Communication Plan' (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8 below)

2. Resources

2.1 Review Findings:

The Review Team felt that reduced resources didn't appear to have had a visible impact on parks maintenance as yet. Concern was expressed, however, that any future reductions in staffing / budgets would begin to be reflected in the standard of maintenance.

It was felt that whilst current resource levels 'keep parks going', most of the developments or improvements the Team had heard about during the Review tended to have been generated by local community groups and much of the funding had come from external, non Council sources.

At the Q&A session the Review Team discussed the fact that Amenity Services were faced with a situation of having to 'deliver more with less' and agreed that communicating this to the public was important.

In discussing the importance of protecting resource levels for parks, the Review Team noted the range of social, environmental and health benefits parks bring, for example, in terms of encouraging physical activity and improving mental health. There was also discussion of the difficulty of assigning a 'value' to the benefits brought about by parks provision.

2.2 Review Recommendations:

- Protect resource levels for parks
- Support community involvement as a means of developing and improving parks (see section on Community Involvement)
- Communicate challenges and opportunities re parks provision to the public

2.3 Service Response:

- Effort is needed to establish what people regard as the most important elements of park provision – this would help guide how increasingly limited resources are deployed
- Some work is needed to promote the importance of parks for communities in terms of health and wellbeing (e.g. the role in parks in promoting physical activity and the mental health benefits of green spaces)
- The role of parks in relation to outcomes in the Council Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement should be highlighted more
- The Council needs to take a stronger 'Design with Maintenance in Mind' approach when carrying out developments to parks - for example, planting wildflowers

Agreed Actions:

3. Consider the development of a Parks specific public survey to establish the important elements of parks provision
4. Promote the importance of parks for health & wellbeing (as part of a Parks Communication Plan)
5. Publicise the challenges and opportunities re parks provision (as part of a Parks Communication Plan)
6. Identify the contribution that Parks make to the delivery of the Council Plan, East Lothian Plan and wider health agenda (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8 below)
7. Promote the Design with Maintenance in Mind ethos across all Council services and within the Local Development Plan

3. Strategy

3.1 Review Findings:

During the Q&A session the Review Team asked about the status of a draft Open Space Strategy that was available on the Council's website. The Service Manager identified that the Strategy had not yet been adopted by the Council for a number of reasons.

The Review Team suggested that a new Strategy should be developed to help in the future planning of parks provision. They identified that the development of such a Strategy should include:

- a 'mission statement' outlining what 'parks are there to do'

- a review of the current spread of parks across the County and how accessible they are to communities (i.e. how quick / easy are they to get to)
- an analysis of what people want / need from parks
- a framework for stimulating community involvement in the development of local parks

There was discussion at the Q&A session about the impact of additional housing planned for East Lothian in relation to the Local Development Plan. The development of a Parks Strategy was regarded as important in helping to ensure adequate parks provision as the population of East Lothian grows. It was suggested, therefore, that the Strategy should include a set of criteria to help inform the development of any new parks and that such criteria should take into account different user groups. The Review Team also suggested that it would useful to gather feedback from local people on what works well in relation to existing parks in order to help inform the development of new parks in new housing areas.

In the course of the Review, the Team identified a perceived lack of 'management data' in terms of complaints / comments data that could be easily analysed to identify key issues and any emergent trends. The team also felt that information on levels of customer satisfaction was also inadequate and suggested that the information that came from the Citizens' Panel did not provide enough detail. Citizens' Panel findings were also felt only to represent the views of a small number of people. Other ways of gathering customer satisfaction data were discussed.

3.2 Review Recommendations:

- Develop a Strategy for Parks – to include the following actions:
    - Agree on a 'mission statement' for parks
    - Carry out a review of the current geographical spread of parks across East Lothian in relation to where people live
    - Identify what people want / need from parks
    - Develop a framework for stimulating community involvement
- Look at how 'management data' could be used more effectively to help identify key issues and emergent trends
- Consider how to improve data on customer satisfaction using a range of methods
- Ensure that the Strategy includes criteria for the development of new parks

3.3 Service Response:

- There is a definite need for a strategy type document of some type, possibly a 'framework'
- It is requested that the Review Team drafts a mission statement for parks to reflect the learning from the Review process
- It would be good for the strategy to outline future aspirations for parks – e.g. what would be a 'gold standard'
- The Service Manager identified that the Council will be working in partnership with developers to ensure that the necessary open / green space is provided – a 'needs analysis' helps to inform this process

3.4 Agreed Actions:

8. Develop a Parks Strategy outlining the Service's approach to – the identification of local need / demand in relation to parks; community involvement in parks; communication and publicity in relation to parks; design standards; accessibility and the promotion of all year round use of parks

4. Community Involvement

4.1 Review Findings:

Community involvement in parks was highlighted throughout the Review process and representatives from Blooming Haddington, the East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel and Friends of Winterfield took part in the Q&A Panel.

The Review Team agreed that community involvement had a positive impact on parks, suggesting that where community groups are involved 'they clearly enhance parks'. Community involvement was identified as an important way of determining what local communities want or need from their local parks.

The Team noted instances when the involvement of community groups had brought new, innovative uses of parks, for example, giant kite flying and dog shows at Winterfield Park. It was suggested that this type of innovation helped attract 'new users' to parks.

The role of community groups in developing or improving sports facilities was also noted - for example, Friends of Winterfield's work to improve sports facilities and introduce a 'Trim Trail' and Friends of Neilson Park's involvement in developing improved tennis courts.

The East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel representative at the Q&A session gave some good examples of the involvement of tenants groups in developing local parks and pointed to some successes that tenants groups have had in attracting external funding for park development.

The Review Team described community group involvement in parks as a 'win-win situation' for the Council in that community groups have 'the vision', are willing to put in time and effort and can potentially bring in external funding. Encouraging more community groups to get involved in parks provision was identified as both a key challenge and opportunity for the Council going forward.

In terms of motivating community involvement, it was suggested that the Council should communicate the fact that it generally only has the resources to maintain parks provision at the current level but where community groups identify opportunities for developing or improving parks it can provide support to help them do this.

4.2 Review Recommendations:

- Develop a formal policy re community involvement in parks development, identifying what help / support is available (potentially as part of a wider Strategy).
- Develop a handbook / guidance for community groups interested in being involved in their local park – how to set up, etc (e.g. how to establish a 'Friends' group).

- Look at the development of an award or accreditation scheme for 'Friends' groups.
- Help develop and support a network for 'Friends' groups to help facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience between 'Friends' groups.
- Consider an explicit Council policy of minimal park maintenance but with any enhancement being developed in partnership with community groups
- Consider creating a temporary post to develop community involvement in parks, providing support to fledgling and existing community groups

4.3 Service Response:

- Community groups play an increasingly important role in parks, they do, however, require staff support and this already presents a capacity issue for Amenity Services – if more groups are set up it may be hard to provide them with the support they require
- Area Partnerships, Community Councils and Tenants and Residents groups could be involved in helping to promote community participation in parks development
- Park audits could be carried out by groups of local people; any development would then be based on the audit findings. Audits could include coverage of street signage relating to the park. There is potential for Area Partnerships to be involved in this.

4.4 Agreed Actions:

9. Develop the Council's approach to community involvement in parks (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8 above)
10. Review the capacity of the Management Structure with due regard to supporting the existing Area Partnerships / TRAs / Community Council's and consider how / if development of further Friends Groups is sustainable
11. Subject to the outcome of action 10, consider if opportunity exists to secure funding to appoint an Intern to bring forward the broader recommendations of the Community Involvement section of the Strategy

5. Parks 'fit for purpose'

5.1 Review Findings:

The Review Team visited a range of parks with different characteristics – it was felt that they appeared to be 'fit for purpose', particularly where there had been community involvement. The Team, however, did not have the opportunity to apply any methodical approach to establishing actual or potential park user needs, and whether or not those needs were met by the facilities provided.

The Team highlighted the allotments on the edge of Pine Street Park as a good example of use of space and regarded this as beneficial in terms of getting people involved in and increasing a sense of ownership of that particular green space.

Promoting 'all year round' usage of parks was suggested as a potential opportunity to increase user numbers, although no specific suggestions were made as to how to achieve this.

5.2 Review Recommendations:

- Support community involvement to help ensure that parks meet the needs and aspirations of local communities (see section on Community Involvement -)
- Consider ways to encourage all year round usage of parks
- Consider the use of parks by disabled people in terms of facilities available and access Look at other opportunities to locate allotments on the periphery of parks where appropriate

5.3 Service Response:

- Many of East Lothian's parks have evolved over time, with facilities developing to reflect changes to communities as well as wider social change. Some parks are, however, no longer 'fit for purpose' and what they offer needs to be reviewed - this review could be part of the process of developing a Parks Strategy, although a system or methodology would have to be established
- The involvement of local people should be a key part of any effort to determine what is needed in relation to specific parks
- Consideration of access to and facilities in parks to meet the needs of disabled people is already covered due to the Council's statutory responsibilities under disability discrimination legislation
- Further development of allotment provision is currently being considered by the Council. Providing allotment spaces around parks may be appropriate in some locations. The benefits of allocating land to individuals for allotments needs, however, to be balanced against the benefits of keeping the land for wider community use

5.4 Agreed Actions:

12. Develop a Parks Strategy outlining the Service's approach to the identification of local need / demand in relation to parks and community involvement in parks (see also action 8)

6. Park facilities

6.1 Review Findings:

The Review Team made a number of observations on the range of facilities available in the parks they visited.

 The 'lack of clean, modern toilet facilities' in parks was regarded as an issue by the Review Team. Toilet facilities were felt to be particularly important due to the high usage of parks by young children and older people. The Team noted that where toilet facilities were available these were provided as part of another facility (in the cafe at Lauderdale Park, in the tennis club at Winterfield Park and in the Community Centre at Port Seton) and access to them was limited as a result of restricted opening hours. The Team also felt that where parks provided significant sports / recreation facilities (e.g. grass and all-weather sports pitches and courts) changing rooms and toilets should be available.

The provision of a range of different play areas in the parks visited was highlighted as being very positive. The Review Team was particularly impressed by the relatively new play area that had been developed in Cuthill Park. The Cuthill Park play area consists of attractive, natural timber play equipment with some more unusual designs, catering for a range of ages.

Discussion took place during the Review of litter bin provision, with the Service Manager highlighting the resources involved in servicing litter bins once they are in place. The Review Team felt that the parks visited had 'litter bins sufficient for need'.

The Review Team considered parking to be satisfactory at the parks visited, noting that parking provision varied greatly between parks, depending on the type of park. Discussion took place regarding the need to provide parking at parks where visitors often arrive by car, for example, bigger parks with sports and other facilities. It was suggested that people should be encouraged to walk or cycle to smaller local parks, parking provision for disabled people should be considered.

There was some discussion of whether commercial ventures could be encouraged in parks in order to help provide additional facilities at no cost to the Council (for example, cafes with toilets).

6.2 Review Recommendations:

- Look at further opportunities to provide toilet facilities in partnership with sports clubs, cafes, etc
- Where 'partners' give access to their toilets consider having donations boxes
- Look at opportunities for community groups to apply for funding to develop toilet facilities
- Consider introducing self maintaining 'superloos' at some locations
- Ensure that car parking provision matches the requirements at each park, and be aware of the needs of people with mobility issues (although encouraging travel to parks on foot, bike and bus should be emphasised)
- Consider 'star rating' for parks (i.e. similar to hotels) reflecting level of facilities and quality of provision
- Take into account teenagers' needs when designing park facilities

6.3 Service Response:

- Staff with more flexible roles could carry out basic servicing of toilets whilst on site for other activities (for example, cleaning toilets and emptying bins)
- New designs for public toilets 'design out' some of the maintenance – 'low maintenance' toilets would require less staff resource
- Further development of the role of community organisations in parks may help with the provision of facilities

6.4 Agreed Actions:

13. Further investigate wider Job Outlines for 'Infrastructure Operatives' - staff to deliver the range of daily tasks required to maintain parks and destination sites

14. Consider opportunities for staff who are subject to enforced redeployment to undertake some of the roles above, specifically local enforcement of Dog and Litter Legislation
15. Further develop community involvement approach to support local groups improve and develop park facilities (as part of wider Parks Strategy- see action 8)

7. Publicity and promotion

7.1 Review Findings:

The Review Team suggested that it was generally quite difficult to find out about parks in East Lothian.

Several of the Team carried out internet searches and identified that there is currently very little online information in relation to East Lothian parks. No specific parks information was found on the East Lothian Council website and only a small amount of information was available on the 'Visit East Lothian' website. Glasgow City Council and Harrogate Borough Council websites were identified as good examples of online parks information (see Appendix 3 for web-links)

Physical street signage to parks in towns was also noted as being inadequate – it was suggested that if you arrived in a town as a visitor it would be difficult to know where to go to find a park.

The Review Team liked the notice board in Cuthill Park and the information it provided on 'what's on' in the park and how people can get involved.

7.2 Review Recommendations:

- Develop better online information for parks (learning from good examples elsewhere)
- Have the following online information available for each park:
    o brief description of the main facilities available (e.g. open grassy areas, play areas, games pitches or courts, decorative beds, etc)
    o toilets
    o benches / seating
    o how to get there (including active / sustainable travel options)
    o 'what's on' in the park
    o include links to any 'Friends' or 'In Bloom' groups, etc
- Include a link to Trip Advisor on 'parks' web page (and encourage people to leave reviews) – for example, see Friends of Cuthill Park web page http://cuthillpark.blogspot.co.uk/
- Consider using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to promote parks
- Use 'low tech' options too – e.g. noticeboards in parks
- Carry out an audit of current street signage for parks and improve as necessary – include consideration signage directing people to parks as they enter the town

7.3 Service Response:

- Online information is currently poor and the web pages out of date – this is an area that should definitely be improved. Online information should be developed which includes details of what is available at each park (along the lines suggested above)
- 'Friends' groups could potentially apply for funding to provide noticeboards in parks - this could be covered in the guidance / support given to 'Friends' groups by the Council

7.4 Agreed Actions:

16. Develop a Parks Communication Plan (as part of a wider Strategy – see action 8)

8. Seating in Parks

8.1 Review Findings:

One of the observations made during the site visits was the inadequacy of seating in parks. It was felt that providing more seating would encourage use of parks, for example, by older people or by parents supervising younger children playing. It was suggested that having benches in parks 'gives a destination for visitors' – 'somewhere to sit and relax'.

Pine Street Park was identified as an example of where strategically located benches could encourage people to walk around the park (along with the introduction of a circular path).

Providing seating with shelter was also suggested as a way of encouraging park usage, particularly given the Scottish climate. One of the Team mentioned 'old style park shelters' that used to be provided in public parks.

Discussion at the Q&A Panel suggested that there was probably enough benches across the County, but that they were 'often in the wrong places' – this was due to benches being donated by members of the public who wanted them to be situated in specific spots.

Friends of Winterfield gave details of stone seating that had been involved in developing as an alternative to traditional benches. The stone seating was constructed by East Lothian Council and some of the stone used was donated by Lafarge.

8.2 Review Recommendations:

- Look at innovative ways of providing seating, including different types of seating (as well as the traditional 'park benches')
- Consider sustainable / natural options, for example, tree trunks as seats in natural areas
- Look at how sponsorship from local companies could help with the provision of seating
- Run 'design competitions' for seating – could be organised by community / 'friends of' groups – could include seating as 'public art'
- Involve park users in identifying the best places for seating (perhaps as part of a park 'audit' carried out by a group of local people).

8.3 Service Response:

- Seating provision is important in terms of encouraging park usage

8.4 Agreed Actions:

17. Bring forward the existing draft policy for Provision and Maintenance of Commemorative Seats
18. Consider alternative forms of seating that offer low cost, low maintenance options
19. Further develop community involvement approach to include involving local people in carrying out park 'audits' (as part of overall Parks Strategy)
20. Involve community groups in securing resources to deliver benches

9. Responsible Dog Ownership

9.1 Review Findings:

The issue of dog fouling in parks was raised throughout the Review. During the introductory session and at the Q&A Panel Council staff gave details of the range of activities taking place to address this issue. Discussions highlighted the fact that only a minority of dog owners were guilty of not taking responsibility for cleaning up after their dogs, but that this still had an impact in parks and attracted complaints from members of the public.

From the site visits it was noted that signage coverage re dog fouling varied between parks – in some examples the signs were out of date or contradictory.

The possibility of separating of dogs from children's play areas was discussed, but it was identified that this is not achievable under current legislation.

The Council's scheme for registering commercial dog walkers was noted as being positive.

9.2 Review Recommendations:

- Ensure adequate waste bin capacity at strategic locations at each park
- Look at ways to change the behaviour of dog owners other than just enforcement
- Consider constructive ways to involve dog owners in their local parks
- Have 'dog champions' – local people who help raise awareness
- Re-launch the Council's 'Dog Watch' campaign and ensure good coverage of Dog Watch signage in all parks
- Educate school pupils (who will also hopefully pass on the message to parents)

9.3 Service Response:

- One of the issues with dog fouling is that the Council 'can't be everywhere', giving communities the power and the tools to challenge dog owners who don't clean up after their dogs makes real sense. The Council's Dog Watch initiative is one tool communities can use.

- There is a definite need to re-launch the Dog Watch and East Lothian Litter Initiative (ELLI) campaigns. At the moment signage is, in some instances, inconsistent and / or patchy in coverage. It would be beneficial to do further work on developing 'a brand' for easy recognition which uses the same colours, images and design for signage
- Area Partnerships provide a potential vehicle for taking forward responsible dog ownership activity locally

9.4 Agreed Actions:

21. Discuss re-launch of Dog Watch and ELLI with Area Managers

(See also action 14 – Consider opportunities for staff who are subject to enforced redeployment to undertake some of the roles above, specifically local enforcement of Dog and Litter Legislation)

10. Biodiversity

10.1 Review Findings:

The planting of wildflower areas in place of traditional flowerbeds and in areas of open grass was regarded very positively by the Review Team. Wildflower planting was felt to be attractive as well as being beneficial in terms of biodiversity.

10.2 Review Recommendations:

- Continue to plant wildflower areas
- Look at other ways to encourage biodiversity

10.3 Service Response:

- The delivery of the Local Development Plan provides an opportunity to further develop biodiversity both as part of parks development as well as more general consideration of access to open / green space

10.4 Agreed Actions:

22. Include biodiversity considerations when developing a Parks Strategy

11.   Accessibility

11.1 Review Findings:

The accessibility of parks was raised by the Review Team in terms of how quick / easy it was for people to get to their local park – Polson Park in Tranent was identified as an example of park provision that was not particularly quick / easy for much of the population of Tranent to get to.

The extent to which people could get to parks using active / sustainable travel options was also discussed. It was suggested that details of how to walk / cycle to parks should be included in any information developed.

The Review Team did not specifically discuss access issues for disabled people, but one of the Team identified this as an omission at the report writing stage - it is suggested that this be considered in any actions that emerge relating to access.

11.2 Review Recommendations:

- Consider accessibility of parks as part of an overall Strategy
- Include active / sustainable travel advice in any parks information / publicity produced

11.3 Service Response:

- Consideration of green corridors, active and sustainable travel, etc is part of the Local Development Plan

11.4 Agreed Actions:

23. Include accessibility considerations when developing a Parks Strategy

Appendix 1 – Action Table

Action	Timescale
1. Communicate details of the Residents Review process and its outcomes to the whole Service team	**January 2016**
2. Carry out a review of existing communications relating to the Service with a view to developing a Parks Communication Plan (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8 below)	**June 2016**
3. Consider the development of a Parks specific public survey to establish the important elements of provision	**June 2016**
4. Promote the importance of parks for health and wellbeing (as part of a Parks Communication Plan)	**June 2016**
5. Publicise the challenges and opportunities re parks provision (as part of a Parks Communication Plan)	**June 2016**
6. Identify the contribution that Parks make to the delivery of the Council Plan, East Lothian Plan and wider health agenda (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8 below)	**June 2016**
7. Promote the 'Design with Maintenance in Mind' ethos across all Council services and within the Local Development Plan	**June 2016**
8. Develop a Parks Strategy outlining the Service's approach to the identification of local need / demand in relation to parks and community involvement in parks	**June 2016**
9. Develop the Council's approach to community involvement in parks (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8 above)	**June 2016**
10. Review the capacity of the Management Structure with due regard to supporting the existing Area Partnerships / TRAs / Community Council's and consider how if development of further Friends Groups is sustainable.	**June 2016**
11. Subject to the outcome of action 10 above, consider if opportunity exists to secure funding to appoint an Intern to bring forward the broader recommendations of the Community Involvement section	**June 2016**
12. Develop a Parks Strategy outlining the Service's approach to the identification of local need / demand in relation to parks and community involvement in parks (see also action 8)	**June 2016**
13. Further investigate wider Job Outlines for 'Infrastructure Operatives' - staff to deliver the range of daily tasks required to maintain parks and destination sites	**June 2016**

14. Consider opportunities for staff who are subject to enforced redeployment to undertake some of the roles above, specifically local enforcement of Dog and Litter Legislation	**June 2016**
15. Further develop community involvement approach to support local groups improve and develop park facilities (as part of wider Parks Strategy – see action 8)	**June 2016**
16. Develop a Parks Communication Plan (as part of a wider Parks Strategy – see action 8)	**June 2016**
17. Bring forward the existing draft policy for Provision and Maintenance of Commemorative Seats	**June 2016**
18. Consider alternative forms of seating that offer low cost, low maintenance options	**June 2016**
19. Further develop community involvement approach to include involving local people in carrying out park 'audits' (as part of overall Parks Strategy)	**June 2016**
20. Involve community groups in securing resources to deliver benches	**June 2016**
21. Discuss re-launch of Dog Watch and ELLI with Area Managers	**June 2016**
22. Include biodiversity considerations when developing a Parks Strategy	**June 2016**
23. Include accessibility considerations when developing a Parks Strategy	**June 2016**

Appendix 2 – Websites for Inspiration

Rethinking Parks (Nesta)

Nesta, The Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund are supporting a small number of pioneering innovations, with a focus on finding the new business models that will enable parks to thrive for the next century – this website gives details of funded projects:

http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks

My Park Scotland

This website provides information on parks in Edinburgh and Glasgow and is described as 'your first port of call if you're looking to find your local park'. It gives details of facilities and events in each park:

http://www.mypark.scot/

Burnley Volunteering in Parks

Website giving details of a parks volunteering programme launched by Burnley Council in partnership with 'Newground' social enterprise and a number of local 'friends of' groups:

http://www.burnley.gov.uk/news/volunteer-parks-programme

Greenspace Scotland

Greenspace Scotland is a social enterprise working on improving the quality of life for people living in urban Scotland through the development of greenspaces:

http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/

Glasgow City Council parks info

Glasgow City Council website contains 'clickable' map showing park locations and individual pages for parks giving details of facilities, opening times, history, community involvement, etc:

https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3350

Friends of Cuthill Park blog spot

Friends of Cuthill share information on the park via this blog:

http://cuthillpark.blogspot.co.uk/

Appendix 3 - Self Assessment Questions

The Review Team was also asked to address a number of specific questions relating to the Council's self evaluation process – the Team's response to these questions is summarised below

Q1 How satisfied are service users and communities?

The Review Team made the following observations:

- There is a lack of quality / quantity when it comes to customer satisfaction data - the citizens' panel is not sufficient to answer this question definitively
- The limited data that is available does, however, suggest a high level of satisfaction with parks
- It appears to be difficult to use complaints / feedback data in any 'macro' sense
- Additional ways to gather customer satisfaction data should be developed
- Feedback should be gathered from a range of user groups and not just current park users
- Community groups could play a valuable role in finding out what people think / want / need
- The management of complaints / feedback data could be improved to make it easier to interrogate by issue and area to help identify any emergent trends

Q2 Can service users access the services and information they need?

The following observations were made:

- An assumption was made by the Review Team that most communities will have access to a park in their immediate locale
- Car parking facilities are available, but these vary between locations
- Information on where to find parks and what they offer was identified as inadequate
- When developing information on parks include details of the range of travel options, including information on bus routes, car parking, cycling routes / cycle parking and footpaths

Q3 How well are community and voluntary groups engaged in the activities being delivered by the service?

The following observations were made:

- There is involvement in parks but more publicity / promotion is needed to help get more people / groups involved
- The information board at Cuthill Park was noted as a good way of getting people involved in their local park
- Work could be done by the Council to make it easier for community groups to establish themselves
- A network for 'park related' community groups could help to provide mutual support and encourage the sharing of knowledge and expertise

Acknowledgements

The Review Team appreciate the opportunity provided by East Lothian Council to be have been able to participate in this review and welcome the principle of inclusion of resident's views in their decision-making process.

They are grateful to Stuart Pryde for the breadth of information he provided and the help and guidance given in discussion and on the site visits. They are also grateful to all those who accepted invitations to be on the discussion panel, and especially to those who gave up their own time to do so. Their inputs were particularly helpful.

Finally, the Team wish to express their appreciation to other members of East Lothian Council who contributed to the review, and especially to Claire Goodwin for her support, patience and courtesy throughout.

The Residents Review Team

Lizbeth Crawford

Ron Goldie

Terry Hegarty

Donald Hay

Garry Inglis

Archie MacDonald

Rodger Powell

Pamela Strang

Deborah Wright