

Report Title: **Park Report**

Report of: **Mark Evison, Park Manager, Alexandra Park and Palace**

**1. Purpose**

1.1. This report provides updates on a number of Park issues including the Park Vision

**2. Recommendations**

**That the Board**

- (i) Note the report including the successes in the Green Flag and London in Bloom Award schemes and recognise the support of the Grounds Maintenance Contractors and Park Volunteers
- (ii) Notes the work undertaken to date on the Parks Vision
- (iii) Reviews the strategy and costs for moving the Graffiti Wall to a new location

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**3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1. The Park has been successful with a number of awards in 2015, including a Gold Award and category win in the London in Bloom Competition (Large Park over 25 acres)
- 3.2. The Park Vision project has progressed, however with the appointment of a new Chief Executive the work will now feed into the Strategic Vision work prior to progressing further
- 3.3. The procurement of a new Grounds Maintenance Contract is underway
- 3.4. The Friends of the Park continue to provide support and organise community events
- 3.5. Following discussions at the Joint Advisory and Consultative Committee the situation regarding the graffiti wall has been reviewed

**4. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)**

4.1. N/A

**5. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

5.1. N/A

## **Awards and Recognition**

The Park has had a number of successes in recent months. The Green Flag Award standard has been reached for the eighth year and Green Heritage Accreditation has been awarded for the fifth year. The organisers of the Green Flag Award scheme, Keep Britain Tidy hold a public vote for all Green Flag winning sites, *The People's Choice Award*. Alexandra Park appeared eighth in the vote this year.

The Green Flag scheme judges also awarded the Park a commendation in their new 'Bees Needs Award'. Winning sites are required to prove that they are making positive changes that encourage and increase pollinator-friendly habitats and food sources throughout the year. For example, the growth of wildflower meadows, shrubbery, wild patches of land, building of nest sites, and cutting grass less often.

There was also a very exciting result from the London in Bloom Awards this year. As well as achieving a Gold Award in the Large Park category for the first time, Alexandra Park was the **category winner**. The judge's comments included:

*"It is clearly a very well-used and well-loved park. An important resource for local people but also a real destination park"*

*"The management of the park for nature conservation is an extremely strong feature with good management of a wide range of habitats including acid grassland. The surveys, events and work with the Friends' group in this area is also very impressive."*

*"This is a great park, well managed on very limited resources with a high level of community ownership and buy-in. Everyone involved should be very proud of what has been achieved."*

## **Park Vision Update**

Following a number of consultations with stakeholders, the Park Manager has written a paper entitled "Towards a new Vision" which is attached at **Appendix 1**. This paper sets out the process for re-evaluating the Park and planning for the next ten years.

The Joint Consultative and Advisory Committee meeting considered the paper on 20<sup>th</sup> October and their feedback was largely supportive although a number of individual issues were raised. The issues will be incorporated into the development of the Park Vision document.

The new Chief Executive wishes to review the work done to date in the context of revisiting the Strategic Vision and Farrells Masterplan. The Parks Vision will continue in its development but within a wider project lead by the Chief Executive.

## **Grounds Maintenance Contract**

The Board will recall that the Grounds Maintenance Contract expires in April 2016. A new specification has been authored by the Park Manager with support from the existing grounds staff, and input from colleagues across the Palace. This specification now includes regular items of work that have been procured separately. Inserting these items into the contract is better value for money as the work is scheduled across the term of the contract and also frees up time for the Park Manager.

A suitable procurement pathway has been identified and it is hoped the Board will be asked to approve the new contract at the meeting in February 2016.

## **Friends of the Park**

The Friends of Alexandra Park continue to promote and support the Park on multiple fronts. They have carried out a number of work parties to clear bramble and encroaching scrub from the butterfly meadow and a tree strip adjacent to Redston Field. Their volunteers have staffed the Park Information Centre for almost a hundred hours this year meeting approximately 700 visitors.

The committee and membership took part in consultation on the Park Vision and provide constructive feedback on Park projects and event proposals

## **Graffiti Wall**

At the July Board of Trustees meeting an update was given on the concerns raised by the drift of paint spray from the graffiti wall.

This matter was reviewed in 2011 by the Trust's then Health and Safety Consultant, Sally Wearing. Her research into the COSHH statements of paint cans found that spraying should take place in a well ventilated area and as the wall is in the open air no further action was required.

Officers have undertaken a fresh review and considered new advice from the Health and Safety Executive attached as Appendix 14.4. This advice is primarily concerned with isocyanate-based paints which usually comprise a two-part mixture. The advice is for a minimum cordon of five meters, preferable ten.

The paints most commonly used on the wall are pre-packaged cans and are not isocyanate-based. So, although the spray drift may be unpleasant for Park users, it is not thought to pose a health risk.

New signage was put on the wall to request that graffiti artists consider the effect of spraying on Park users and requesting that they paint the far side of the wall when the play area is busy. However this signage was sprayed over within a few days of being on the wall.

The closest item of play equipment to the wall is a sand pit dating back to the tenure of the Greater London Council in the 1960-70s. The sand pit itself has been declared low risk by independent safety inspectors see Appendix 14.5, but the hard concrete design is not ideal. Following an incident in 2014 Officers have been considering adapting the design within budget constraints.

The Health and Safety Executive advise that a minimum cordon of five meters, preferably ten is put in place. The sandpit is 8m from the nearest point of the Graffiti Wall however the pathway is within the 5m cordon.

The suggestions which have been put forward are as follows:

- Ask Graffiti artists to come back at another time
- Ask Graffiti artists to use the far side of the wall
- Monitor the use of the wall at all times
- Erect signage asking Graffiti artists to use the far side of the wall when the sandpit is busy
- Move the sandpit or the Graffiti Wall or both

Asking Graffiti artists to come back at another time is not a viable option having reviewed

graffiti artist blogs some referring to the Alexandra Park wall it is clear that artists travel at times which are convenient to them. It also seems from anecdotal evidence that a number of them travel from outside of the borough and therefore are unlikely to go away to come back at a later time.

Our security team have asked without success artists to use the far side of the wall, we acknowledge that members of the CC have had discussions with artists who have stated they have not been spoken to, however we refute this. There is no resource to allocate a security guard to the graffiti wall during hours when the sandpit may be in use.

As discussed earlier in this report the signage was sprayed over and now can't be seen, so that has not had the desired effect.

Therefore the recommendation for approval is that the sandpit is closed and parents and children are asked to use the sandpit on the higher ground within the play area which is significantly further away from the Graffiti Wall. In consultation with the Graffiti Artists the wall (subject to planning consent and other required approvals) is moved to a new location which provides the required distance between non-users of the wall and artists. We have had some initial cost estimates submitted with the removal of the wall estimated at between £7,000 to £10,000 and building of a new wall between £25,000 to £30,000.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1. The Council's Assistant Director of Corporate Governance has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and has no comments save to say that whatever location is decided upon to either move the graffiti wall or to relocate users of the sandpit, care must be taken to ensure that the advice received from the Health and Safety Executive is adhered to.

## **7. Financial Implications**

The LBH Chief Financial Officer has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and notes that the additional cost of moving the graffiti wall and building a new wall needs to be considered in the context of the Health and Safety advice that has been provided and the impact on the parks budget from adopting this approach.

## **8. Use of Appendices**

- 8.1. Appendix 1: 'Towards a new Vision'