

**Report Title:** Park Activities Update

**Report of:** Mark Evison, Park Manager

**1. Purpose**

To update the Board on current matters relating to Alexandra Park.

**2. Recommendations**

2.1 That the Board note the contents of the report, and;

**Little Dinosaurs Lease**

2.2 (i) That the Board agrees to delegate approval of the final details of the lease to the Chief Executive subject to a satisfactory Charities Act report on the rental value, and;

(ii) That the London Borough of Haringey's Head of Legal Services be authorised by the Board as Trustees to seal the finalised Lease.

Report Authorised by: Louise Stewart, Chief Executive Officer, Alexandra Park and Palace

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**3. Executive Summary**

3.1 The report sets out current conditions in the Park, the estimated visitor numbers and updates on the Go Ape proposal, the fallow deer herd, the graffiti wall and proposals to improve the resilience of the Park to events.

3.2 The report also asks the Board to approve a lease extension proposal from the operator the Little Dinosaurs soft play centre.

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

N/A

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

N/A

**6. Park Conditions:** the Park is currently suffering as a result of very wet conditions since early-November. The surface water drains are old and many are suffering from blockages and collapsed sections. Contractors have been investigating the blocked drains and making repairs where possible. The current conditions highlight the importance of including a drainage review in the Park Vision work, including assessment of the options for installing Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) solutions to manage and attenuate the surface water flows.

**7. Visitor numbers for 2015 (calendar year):**

7.1 The Board will recall that there are electronic people counters at two Park entrances (The Avenue and Park Avenue North). These devices registered 678,000 people during 2015. This is an increase of 76,000 on 2014 (12%). The major spikes in the visitor numbers in 2015 were the Soap Box Derby (showing the large number of local customers at that event), the Fireworks Festival and New Year’s Eve.

7.2 A number of assumptions are used to convert these figures into the annual estimate of Park visitors. In 2015 this figure was 2.8 million, which excludes the majority of event visitors and people arriving by car or bus. It is recognised that the calculation is not perfect, but it does allow an assessment of trends – the figure of 2.8 million is 250,000 more than the 2.55 million estimated for 2014. The data show that beyond a core user group, most likely dog walkers and commuters, the largest influence on visitor numbers is the weather.

Table comparing 2014 and 2015 visitor numbers:

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Park Visitor numbers counted</b>	602,000	678,000	+12%
<b>Estimate of total Park Visitors (excluding most event visitors and car and bus passengers)</b>	2,550,000	2,900,000	+12%

**8. Go Ape Proposal:** The Go Ape proposals were validated by the Planning Authority in October 2015 and at the time of writing there have been over 90 comments, many of which are objections. The proposal is likely to be discussed at a Planning Committee and there will be a verbal update at the meeting.

**9. The Fallow Deer Herd:**

9.1 The fallow deer herd has been a feature of the Park for many years. Daily management of the herd is carried out by the Grounds Maintenance staff and an independent veterinary team provide management advice and monitor the health of the animals.

9.2 Over the past ten years there has been consistent concern from the veterinary team that the conditions of the enclosures were not ideal because they are too

small and the ground gets easily poached and over-grazed. The deer have consistent signs of stress, evidenced by shyness towards human contact, which is not typical of enclosed deer, and occasional fighting. These concerns have been managed by various means including improving the size and management of the enclosure by fertilising, harrowing and reseeded, enlarging the enclosures and reducing the herd size (culling).

- 9.3 The stress levels of the deer are likely to be increased for a number of reasons in the future, increasing visitor numbers to the Park (both ordinary Park visitors and Event visitors), the forthcoming development of the Anderton Court site where three houses and a block of flats have been granted planning permission. Repairs and construction work in neighbouring gardens is also believed to cause extra disturbance for the herd.
- 9.4 The longer-term options for the deer herd have been in consideration for some time. It is recognised that the Go Ape proposal is an additional stressor that requires the Trust to accelerate its decision making about the long term future of the herd.
- 9.5 In recent years we have engaged an independent vet to regularly monitor the deer. Unfortunately, the vet has concluded that the health of the herd is in slow decline as the Park – and its surrounding urban environment – is no longer suitable for keeping deer. In the best interests of the deer we assessed a number of options for relocating them to a more appropriate location, better catered to their needs, where they will thrive.
- 9.6 There were no suitable places in the Park that would have alleviated the issues that the deer have been contending with for many years. Several options were investigated where it could be guaranteed that the deer, which are used to being enclosed, would easily adjust, be safe and which would facilitate their wellbeing.
- 9.7 The vet fully supports the relocation and believes the herd's health will improve as a result of the move to a more rural location. The deer were therefore relocated on 27<sup>th</sup> January to two well-respected existing deer parks in Devon; in Blachford Manor and Tedburn St Mary. The two sites are both larger than the designated deer area in Alexandra Park.
- 9.8 The deer were relocated by a specialist deer management company that has vast experience and is responsible for moving deer herds across the country. They were transported in an approved agricultural vehicle and every precaution was taken to ensure that the deer were moved sensitively, with the minimum of stress.
- 9.9 The information boards and signage around the park has been updated to prevent visitors to the park being presented with out of date information. In the near future we will post updates showing Alexandra Park's deer enjoying their new homes in Devon on our website [www.alexandrapalace.com](http://www.alexandrapalace.com)

## **10. Graffiti Wall Update:**

- 10.1 Following previous discussions on this topic, an independent risk assessment has been conducted. The report is attached as exempt appendix 2 to the Chief Executive Officers report to the Board.
- 10.2 The report notes the risk of contamination of the sand pits without any reference to current management. To reassure the Board, the play area is subject to daily visual inspections and the sand is raked and sterilised on a weekly basis. The annual independent inspections score the sand pits as very low risk.

**11. Park Resilience:** The Park Manager has been working with the Head of Events to identify improvement works in the Park that will have a joint benefit of making the Park more resilient to outdoor events. Examples include improvements to drainage and strengthening pathways.

## **12. Little Dinosaurs Lease:**

- 12.1 The operator of the Little Dinosaurs soft play centre in the Grove has requested an extension to the lease. The Executive Team are recommending approval as it presents an opportunity to renegotiate the terms of the lease. The aim is to include reporting of performance indicators to show how the leaseholder is contributing to the Trust's objectives and to re-align the Tenant's rights to the needs of the events business.
- 12.2 The lease extension will be undertaken with professional advice from solicitors and property valuers. The Board are asked to delegate approval of the final details to the Chief Executive subject to a satisfactory Charities Act report on the rental value.

## **13. Legal Implications**

The Council's Assistant Director of Corporate Governance has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and has no comments.

## **14. Financial Implications**

The Council's Chief Financial Officer has been consulted on this report and been consulted in the preparation of this report and advises that professional advice should be taken on the legal, financial and property aspects of the lease extension before final approval.

## **15. Use of Appendices**

None.