
REPORT TO:	HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	8 th JUNE 2006	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CHRIS MASON 5794	DOC:
SUBJECT:	MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	GRESLEY	TERMS OF REFERENCE:HCS10

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the main actions identified in the Management Plan be approved by Members and the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee be authorised to sign the document to this effect on behalf of the Council

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To summarise the main actions in the management plan and to provide justification for the above recommendation

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 The capital works at Maurice Lea Memorial Park (MLMP) are now substantially complete. However, before the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) will formally sign off the project and release all the remainder of our grant funding, a Ten-Year Management Plan for the site has to be approved by the HLF. This is now virtually complete and in the near future will need to be signed by the Chair & Vice Chair of this Committee. The report highlights the main issues that have been considered together with suggested actions to resolve these problems. Some, particularly those concerned with staff resources, have already been put in place or will be progressed in the near future.

4.0 Detail

Background

- 4.1 In accepting the grant award from the HLF for the restoration of MLMP there was a requirement to produce a 10-year management plan for the site. From the HLF's viewpoint the main need for this is to protect the significant capital investment they've made. To achieve this, grant recipients are required to set out clearly how they're going to manage, maintain and develop the site and, just as importantly, how they're going to fund these requirements.

4.2 When Members formally accepted the award for MLMP at the meeting of 5th February 2004 the HLF had just introduced new guidelines for the production of management plans. They also allocated an element in their award for the use of consultants to assist in the production of this plan. Our plan is now substantially complete.

Process

4.3 Its production has involved, at various times, meetings with key stakeholders and evidence from public consultation exercises undertaken as the restoration project has been developed. From this the key overriding objective

'to increase use, appreciation and enjoyment of the Park, its history and facilities and facilities by local people' has been identified

4.4 The next part of the process was to identify what was needed to achieve this objective. For this the following issues were highlighted:

- Develop the audience for the Park in its widest sense
- Tackle the social problems the Park faces & address and address any conflicts that exist between users of the site.
- Address the financial resource issues that effect the Park
- Address the skill resource issues that effect the Park

Issues & their resolution

4.5 Having identified the main issues facing the Park further work was then undertaken to highlight what were the main tasks we needed to undertake to tackle these issues. These are summarised as follows:

Audience development

This is about encouraging more people to use the Park for as wide a range of activity as possible. The premise here is that the best deterrent to the social problems the Park faces is to increase the numbers of people who use the site for legitimate purposes. Retaining the quality of the Park and developing existing and new activities are key activities in achieving this. It is also essential that we closely monitor usage of the site (headcounts) and undertake regularly surveys of people who use the Park. This is something that has not happened in the past in any structured way.

Social problems faced by the Park

In common with some other areas of open space, MLMP is a significant gathering point for large numbers of young people, particularly on spring and summer weekend evenings. The impact of this is generally minor acts of vandalism such as damage to buildings, graffiti and litter problems, including broken bottles. Gatherings in the Park also have an impact on surrounding locations particularly when the group disperses. Other users of the Park generally perceive these gatherings and anti-social behaviour in the Park as a significant threat.

Conflicts between users

An area of conflict that is now perceived as having less significance is the conflict between irresponsible dog owners and other users of the Park. Again, the perception is that self-policing is making a major impact in this area.

Resource issues – financial

There were many examples on the site where a lack of investment in non-routine maintenance over a long period of time had a significant impact on the aesthetic value of the Park. These included the damaged bandstand, eroded footpaths and the fountain garden that had been left in a state of poor repair for long periods. Soft landscaping, such as the Park's tree cover and boundary planting had also been allowed to over mature to such an extent that major investment has been required to restore the site to the required standard.

Resource issues – skills

It is recognised that a number of factors have contributed to the de-skilling of park's maintenance. While the creation of a mobile gang to maintain Swadlincote's urban parks made the grounds operation more cost effective and able to compete with external contractors it did create a culture of 'lack of ownership' and an emphasis on quantity rather than quality. It also had other negative impacts in that investment in skill training was often viewed as an unnecessary overhead and managing trainees was often difficult. The introduction of appropriate management resources is also viewed as a key factor in ensuring the ongoing vitality of the Park. This is particularly applicable in the areas of encouraging community involvement at the site, audience development in its widest sense, liaison with other stakeholders, performance management and monitoring and the attraction of external finance to continue the redevelopment of the site.

- 4.6 Annexe A provides, in tabular form, an analysis in greater detail of the issues facing the Park and their suggested solutions. Annexe B provides details of the action plan for addressing these issues.
- 4.7 Restoration work at MLMP has always been viewed as a catalyst for improving, not only MLMP, but also the Council's other urban parks. Members will be aware of the review of the grounds maintenance service that was undertaken last year. One outcome of this was the appointment of senior groundsmen at both MLMP & Eureka Parks. Through this year's budget process Members have recognised the importance of re-skilling the park's workforce by funding the appointment of a Modern Apprentice to work alongside the senior groundsmen. It is also anticipated, that in this cycle of committees, Finance & Management will consider a report on year round park keeper cover being provided at both MLMP & Eureka Park.
- 4.8 These are all significant actions identified in the management plan that have been, or are in the process of being implemented, that will impact on the overall service. In a similar vein, the management plan is fairly specific about the need to provide the staff resources to address some of the other significant actions contained in the plan, particularly in the area of 'audience development'. At present options are being considered about how best this can be achieved and it is anticipated that a report will be presented to this Committee and Finance & Management, during the next cycle of meetings, that makes a case for the appointment of an open space development

officer.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 At this stage no additional revenue funding is being sought to implement the Management Plan. Since 2004/05, £24,000 per annum has been set-aside in the General Fund Revenue Account to fund additional work at the site. It is anticipated that this will still be sufficient to fund the majority of actions identified in the Management Plan

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 None specifically arising from this report.

7.0 Community Implications

7.1 The Council's public parks are much valued and appreciated community facilities. The management plan sets out how we intend to manage, develop and safeguard the significant investment that has been made in restoring MLMP

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 The capital works at MLMP are now substantially complete. The major challenge we face now is to ensure that we can manage the improved space in a structured way. To do this there is a need to set out clearly and concisely how we intend doing this. The Ten-Year Management Plan identifies the main problems / issues faced in managing the site and identifies actions for addressing these issues.

9.0 Background Papers

9.1 HLF Guidance on the production of Management Plans.