

## **WITHDRAWAL OF PARKS' MAINTENANCE**

### **Budget Saving £850k**

This report explains how the Council would cease to maintain over 100 sites, (the majority being smaller sites), all bowling greens except at Birkenhead Park and cease to maintain 16 beaches while continuing to maintain most major parks, sports pitches and golf courses.

### **RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS**

Wirral Council faces significant budget pressures and the Parks and Countryside Service have been asked to investigate options for significant financial savings.

The option set out in this report is to cease Wirral council's maintenance of the following sites: the non-golf and non-football pitch parts of Arrowe Park; 14 local parks, excluding recently installed play areas which would be retained on 3 of them; 32 natural and semi-natural green spaces; 44 amenity green spaces excluding recently installed play areas which would be retained on 3 of them; cleansing of beaches; all bowling greens except those in Birkenhead Park.

### **IMPACT**

Withdrawing maintenance from these sites within the short timescale is expected to result in the following:

- Some sites may become overgrown with vegetation and litter. The Council would work to actively encourage measures to enable some sites could be taken on and managed by community-based partner groups.
- Some sites could be reallocated for alternative land use, subject to other considerations and consents, for example local amenity, planning and biodiversity interest. Such uses might include: creating new allotments in areas with large waiting lists; sale of land for gardens or development; and woodland or wetland creation which would require additional capital funding.

Whilst we expect alternative partnership management arrangements can be put in place in many areas if this is not achieved the main potential impacts of the cessation and reduction of sites' maintenance set out in this report may be as follows:

- **Impacts on the health and wellbeing of communities** - Green and open spaces provide valuable health benefits and social opportunities for people, including those with mental health conditions. Reducing the number of accessible green spaces may have a particular effect on more vulnerable people and the socio-economically deprived communities which are set out in the EIA for this report. Fitness trails in Arrowe and Mersey Parks would not be installed.
- **Impacts on local people and the visitor economy** - due to loss of cleansing of beaches. Wirral Council's visitor research shows that its beaches are a major part

of the visitor economy which employs 4,000 people. Reduced standards of cleanliness on the 16 beaches could result in reduced visitor numbers and loss of some of these local jobs as well as a loss of quality of life for local people.

- **Impacts on bowling green users** - Over 2,000 people belong to bowling clubs who use the Council's bowling greens. Many of them are over 60 who benefit physically, mentally and socially through regularly enjoying bowling.
- **Impacts on communities** - due to the risks of not maintaining the sites attracting anti-social behaviour and vermin. There would be fewer opportunities for local people to volunteer and be part of the Friends of Parks network.
- **Potential increase in claims to the council** - from slips and trips of people using the sites when they are not maintained.
- **Capacity for local groups to manage sites** - If the Council, partner or external grant funding were not found for start-up costs then land use reallocation - for example creating new allotments or habitats - would not be possible. Partner groups such as friends or other community based groups may not have capacity for taking on the management of these sites.
- **Wirral Council Employees** - In terms of staffing, ceasing to maintain the parks and open space sites indicated in this report would result in loss of 28 maintenance staff jobs.
- **Legal advice** - Legal officer input would be required for a variety of site transfer or change of use options and when dealing with increased claims.
- **Biodiversity** -The Council has a statutory duty to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out its functions. The cessation of maintenance on natural and semi-natural green spaces would need to be managed to maximise positive biodiversity outcomes.

## MITIGATION

Some sites could be taken on and managed by community-based partner groups, however, significant staff input would be needed to manage the transition of sites from managed to no council management.