

Minutes - Birkenhead Park Advisory Committee - 18 April 2007

Present	
Chair	George Davies
Councillors	JR Cocker , SA Holbrook , DE Roberts , PM Southwood
Members	Professor W Lee (Friends of Birkenhead Park) , Dr David Massey (University of Liverpool)
Council Officers	Graham Arnold (Conservation Officer) , Dave Cowling (Head of Parks & Open Spaces) , Lance Farlam (Parks and Open Spaces) , Bryan Gilbert (Principal Architect) , Ian Lowrie (Volume Property Crime Manager) , Martin McCoy (Birkenhead Park Manager)
Apologies	S L Clarke , Brian Kenny , Juggy Landay (Tourism and Marketing)

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Minute 71 - COUNCILLOR DAVID HUNT

The Chair referred to the death of Councillor David Hunt and members expressed their condolences to his wife and family.

Minute 72 - APOLOGIES

As above.

Minute 73 - MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 31 January, 2007 were accepted as a correct record.

Minute 74 - MINUTES - MATTERS ARISING

(a) Birkenhead Park Heritage Education and Community Involvement Project - Professor Lee introduced Karen Tucker, Education Outreach Officer, and Kate Karmy, Community Projects Officer. He reported that a large grant had been secured to fund these posts for at least the next 3 years to develop educational and volunteer programmes which would encourage community involvement in park activities, and thus contribute to its future sustainability.

(b) Cafe - Mr D Dooley, cafe operator, attended the meeting. He outlined the final schedule of works and arrangements that were being made for the opening of the cafe on 7 May. He reported that the cafe would be open in conjunction with the Pavilion core hours (11am to 4 pm each day).

It was noted that the potential for evening opening would be explored but in order to extend the Pavilion opening times, particularly during the summer months, current staffing arrangements would need to be reviewed.

(c) Park Station Improvements - The Chair reported that Merseytravel had agreed to a programme of improvement works which would now cost in the order of £200,000. M McCoy would arrange for the inclusion of appropriate public artwork as part of the improvements package to reflect the attractiveness of the Park.

(d) Community Event - M McCoy reported upon some of the ideas that were being explored with the Friends of Birkenhead Park for the special 3 day event starting on 29 June to celebrate the re-opening of the Park.

It was noted that, although the staging of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra would not be possible for financial reasons, contacts made with local bands indicated that an interesting programme could be devised for this family event.

(e) Drainage Problems - with regard to the problems identified at the last meeting, it was reported that G Rosser, Hilary Taylor Landscape Consultants, was mapping the problem areas. He reported that action had been taken in three main areas including: the Grand Entrance Lodge, the Boathouse, and some pathways.

Councillor Cocker asked if action could be taken to clear some gulleys which had been filled with debris.

(f) Park Security Night Time Access - following the survey of main Birkenhead Park stakeholder organisations, M McCoy reported that he had been involved in further consultations with officers from Wirral Community Safety Team and Merseyside Police regarding park security night time access. The current data on incidents in parks provided through the Safer Wirral Partnership and the consultations indicated that problems relating to anti social behaviour were expected to increase during the summer months.

Councillor Davies referred to complaints received from his constituents and his own recent observations, and highlighted the need for early police action to respond to the situation.

I Lowrie reported that arrangements would be made to raise this matter at Police Command level.

M McCoy reported that he would undertake a wider public consultation programme to seek views on night time closure from local residents and the wider community over the summer period.

It was agreed that the concerns of this Committee regarding night time security and the need to protect the investment in the Restoration Project be referred to the Culture, Tourism and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration, together with the results of the public consultation programme.

Minute 75 - BIRKENHEAD PARK - RESTORATION PLAN AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

M McCoy submitted a report outlining the progress of the Birkenhead Park Restoration Plan taken from individual contractor's progress reports, and advising members of the events, activities and issues since the last meeting. The report also provided an update on the operational management of the Park through the work of Park Manager, Gardener, Security and Ranger Teams.

L Farlam gave a verbal update on the progress of the final stages of the various elements of the Restoration Project.

Professor Lee referred to the need for remedial works to the surfaced area in front of the Pavilion and reported that this was an important issue involving substantial expense. It was assumed that that this work would not be accepted until the problems had been remedied.

In response to a question from Professor Lee regarding arrangements for the future management of the newly refurbished tennis courts, M McCoy reported that he would pursue this matter with any interested bodies. In the meantime, the courts would receive a daily inspection.

M McCoy gave an update on operational management.

Since the last meeting a number of key appointments had been made. The Assistant Manager was appointed with the remit of ensuring the delivery of an enhanced grounds maintenance standard across the park through the existing park teams. The Ranger Team had been consolidated with the appointment of two permanent Rangers and two externally funded posts had also joined the teams at Birkenhead Park as part of the Friend's of Birkenhead Park's, Heritage Education and Community Involvement Project.

In addition to the work of the site based teams, a programme of volunteer activity days had been developed with volunteers undertaking a variety of practical tasks in the park on a monthly basis.

In preparation for visits from Green Flag Award judges, maintenance operations were under review by the Assistant Manager. Areas for improvement have been identified, and it was hoped that with the improved access on site, following the completion of the contract works, and the new depot facilities, significant improvements in maintenance across the site would be visible in the coming season.

Routine maintenance for the first period of the annual work programme included grass mowing, fine turf operations, herbicide application (non-residual), litter picking, removal of waste, routine maintenance of sports facilities and minor repairs. Maintenance for all newly planted areas across the park is the responsibility of the main contractor, Balfour Beatty and their subcontracted landscape staff.

M McCoy also reported upon the progress of a number of projects involving key stakeholder groups in the delivery of visitor services in the park:-

(a) The Friends of Birkenhead Park's, 'Heritage Education and Community Involvement Project', was progressing well with the appointment of two staff members and the delivery of the first series of dramatic performances in the park by Active Drama.

(b) The Association of Wirral Angling Clubs Bailiff Team would be starting regular patrols of the park lakes, alongside Park Rangers and Security staff, in April and the group was currently recruiting prospective coaches to run training and coaching sessions for young people in the summer months.

(c) A number of exhibitions had been held in the Pavilion gallery:

- Schools Flowers Exhibition – artwork inspired by the work of Georgia O'Keefe
- Jean Wayles – conceptual artwork from a local artist

- Birkenhead Park Photographic Exhibition – Jean and Tony Silcock
- The Journey – artwork by pupils of Upton Hall school

In addition to this project based work and the annual programme of events, activities and exhibitions, further promotion of the park for the period included:

- Weekly Restoration Update walks being run every Wednesday
- Weekly 'surgery' held every Wednesday – opportunity for public to discuss issues and concerns about park restoration with Park Manager
- Restoration Information for Visitors notice boards installed throughout park
- Park Management Team facilitating a monthly workshop with the Association of Wirral Angling Clubs to formulate future management policy for the park lakes
- Park Manager regularly meeting Birkenhead Park Crown Green Bowls Forum to develop facilities in partnership with local clubs.
- Attendance at Friends of Birkenhead Park meetings
- Parks and Countryside Service visit to Royal Parks to further discuss opportunities for park twinning project.

A summary of events was attached to the report (Appendix 1).

In response to a question from Councillor Cocker regarding the removal of general debris from the lake, M McCoy referred to arrangements that were made for regular clean ups of this area. He also reported that consideration was being given to a model for lake management used by the London Parks which included water resting and monitoring of vegetation.

Councillor Cocker asked for further information regarding steps that were being taken to prevent swimming in the lake.

M McCoy reported that the preventative measures included warning notices, staff patrols, and training for staff in basic lifesaving (Emergency Response/Open Water) and monitoring by approved assessors.

In response to a question from Dr Massey regarding the progress of the Green Flag Award, M McCoy reported that preparations were being made for visits from Green Flag Award judges in mid May.

Dr Massey highlighted the need to ensure that the completion of the Park Restoration Project, events programme and exhibitions, are well publicised and included within wider marketing campaigns for both Wirral and Capital of Culture.

Minute Decision :

Resolved - That the report be noted.

Minute 76 - DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

To be arranged.