

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

**Subject: Open Parks Trial 2016-17**

**Date: 23 August 2019**

**To: Dawn Squires, Head of Parks, Estates & Open Spaces**

**From: Paul Martin, Parks Ranger and Unlawful Encampment Manager**

### **Background**

**Community Safety & Environment Scrutiny Panel, Thursday, 25 July 2019 at 7.00 pm**

The Chair, Councillor Adel Khaireh, requested that the Head of Parks, Estates & Open Spaces provide data to the corporate Governance Officer for forwarding to Members regarding the action taken and impact on reports of ASAB in respect of the trial opening of park gates 24/7 in 2016-17.

The majority (approximately 80) of the Royal Borough's Parks and Open Spaces are have open access with only 13 sites locked overnight.

During the summer of 2016 it was proposed as a service improvement to trial leaving 7 additional parks open overnight. The proposed benefits from the trial were:

- Respond to feedback from a number of residents for increased access to parks, early and late
- Reduce the level of Park Ranger resource needed at the end and start of each day and to reinvest that resource at peak park usage times when parks are busier and park visitors expect to see a uniformed staff presence.

Initially the 7 sites proposed for the trial included; Fairy Hill Park, Plumstead Gardens, Queenscroft Park, Rockcliffe Gardens, Southwood Road Park, St. Mary's Gardens and William Barefoot Gardens.

Consultation was undertaken prior to the implementation of the trial with Park Friends Groups, Members and senior officers. This resulted in some concerns regarding the potential for increased anti-social behaviour, particularly at Fairy Hill and Southwood Road Park, if these sites were left open overnight.

Following consultation and feedback a decision was taken to reduce the number of parks in the trial to 3, these included Queenscroft Park, Rockliffe Gardens and William Barefoot Gardens.

The open parks trial for Queenscroft Park, Rockliffe Gardens and William Barefoot Gardens went live on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Park gates were half locked to allow pedestrian access but preventing unauthorised vehicles from entering the sites.

Local Police SNT's were informed of the trial and were supportive of the initiative.

As part of the trial robust monitoring measures were introduced as follows:

- Each morning a member of staff visited the sites to check if any anti-social behaviour or other issues had occurred overnight,
- Check reports were taken during these visits and provided to Park Rangers management to allow for responsive cleansing or repairs to be organised if required and to gather information on whether any issues were repeatedly occurring.
- If it had been identified from the monitoring arrangements, feedback from residents or the SNT that significant/persistent anti-social behaviour was occurred overnight resulting from the open access then these parks would have been relocked.

It was found that during the first 3 months of the trial only 7 incidents were reported, these were either of a low level nature or upon investigation found to be unsubstantiated.

Reported incidents:

- 10/09/2016 - Queenscroft Park -moped in park at 18.20
- 23/09/2016 – Queenscroft Park - report of drug taking – no evidence found
- 27/09/2016 – Queenscroft Park - gate to play ground broken – normal wear and tear
- 29/09/2016 – Queenscroft Park - report of glass around play ground – no glass found
- 27/10/2016 – Queenscroft Park - glass found around mini gym – glass removed by Rangers
- 10/11/2016 – Queenscroft Park –Minor damage to railings at play ground – ranger team made safe – repair carried out.
- 14/11/2016 – Queenscroft Park - 2 motorbikes in park at 10.30pm

As Rockcliffe Gardens and William Barefoot Gardens had no reported issues in the 3-month monitoring period, the Open Park initiative for these 2 parks was implemented on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

It was agreed that the Park Rangers would continue to monitor Queenscroft Park for a further 1 month. During this extended monitoring period no issues were reported. The Open Park initiative was implemented at Queenscroft Park on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations**

The open park trial at Queenscroft Park, Rockcliffe Garden and William Barefoot Gardens was considered by officers to have been a success. The benefits proposed from the trial were achieved i.e. allowing local residents and park user's increased access to their local parks and amenities and enabling Park Ranger resources to be used more efficiently in peak park usage times.

There were a minimal increase in anti-social behaviour and marginal increase in litter at the three sites, which was to be expected with the increased access and usage of the parks. Only one case of ASB has been recorded on the Parks ASB database, since the three parks became permanently open: Rockcliffe Gardens-Plumstead-Criminal Damage-damage caused to grass by motorbike.

Part of the success of the trial was the close working relationship between the Park Rangers and local SNT.

The Park Rangers Management team have not explored extending the trial to any additional parks, in other Wards, as the recent reduction in Police Ward SNT numbers would impact the success of 'open parks' in locations with known ASB.