

# Overview & Scrutiny Committee



## SCRUTINY PANEL Improving the towns parks

January 2014



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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## Foreword

The objective of this Scrutiny Panel was:

- To improve community engagement within the town's parks

The required outcomes being:

- To make recommendations for the improvement within the town's parks that better meet the needs of the community
- To ensure that every park and open space within the town achieves its potential
- To inform the terms of reference and membership of the Park Management Committees

The Scrutiny Panel was made up from Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Councillors David Palethorpe (vice-chair), Tony Ansell, Geraldine Davies, Jamie Lane, Phil Larratt, Matt Lynch, Sivaramen Subbarayan and myself, together with Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Racecourse, Nicola Hedges, Chair, Friends of Delapre Abbey, Anne Stevens, Secretary, Friends of Abington Park and Mavis Wilmshurst, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks who we co-opted onto the Scrutiny Panel.

A short sharp review took place between June and November 2013. A series of interviews with a number of expert advisors were held and a variety of community groups and organisations provided written information to inform the review. Representatives from the Panel attended various meetings of the Northampton Forums and received their responses to the core questions. The Scrutiny Panel undertook a number of site visits to various parks around the town. Desktop research was undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer, the findings of which informed the Review.

As part of its monitoring regime, Overview and Scrutiny will review this report six months after Cabinet has received it.

A great interest was shown by a large number of the public, organisations and forums, I would like to thank everyone who took part in this piece of work.



**Councillor Elizabeth Gowen**  
Chair, Scrutiny Panel 1

## **Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review: -**

- Councillors David Palethorpe (vice-chair), Tony Ansell, Geraldine Davies, Jamie Lane, Phil Larratt, Matt Lynch, Sivaramen Subbarayan and Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Racecourse, Nicola Hedges, Chair, Friends of Delapre Abbey, Anne Stevens, Secretary, Friends of Abington Park, and Mavis Wilmshurst, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks, who sat with me on this Review.
- Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member (Environment), Ruth Austen, Environmental Services Manager (Environmental Protection), and Jason Toyne, Park Ranger, Northampton Borough Council, Mick Tyrell, Partnership Manager, Partnership Unit, John Farrell, Assets Director and Kieron King, Operations Manager, Enterprise Management Services (EMS), for attending a meeting of the Panel and providing a response to the core questions.
- Northampton Friends' Forum, Northampton Federation of Residents Association, Northamptonshire Football Association and various Friends Groups for providing a written response to the Panel's core questions.
- The Northampton Community Forums for welcoming members of the Panel to their meetings and providing a response to the core questions of the Panel.
- Brian Hoare, David Huffadine-Smith and Max Lang for taking the time to address the Scrutiny Panel regarding the town's parks
- Various individuals for taking the time to complete the on-line survey regarding the town's parks.
- Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities, NBC, for her support to this Review.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to improve community engagement within the town's parks.

Following approval of its work programme for 2013/2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include a review of the town's parks in its work for 2013/2014. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 1 to undertake the review. A short, sharp review commenced in June 2013, concluding in November 2013.

A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Elizabeth Gowen (Chair); Councillor David Palethorpe (Vice Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Geraldine Davies, Brendan Glynane, Phil Larratt, Jamie Lane, Matt Lynch and Sivaramen Subbarayan. Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Race Course, Nicola Hedges, Chair, Friends of Delapre Abbey, Ann Stevens, Secretary, Friends of Abington Park and Mavis Wilmshurst, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks were co-opted to the review.

This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 2 – invest in safer, cleaner neighbourhoods and corporate priority 3 – celebrating our heritage and culture.

The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- Context:
  - Parks and Open Space Strategy for Northampton
- Evidence from the Cabinet Member for Environment
- Evidence from the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement
- Evidence from ward Councillors with key parks within their wards
- Evidence from Friends Groups/User Groups
- Evidence from the Park Rangers
- Evidence from Enterprise Management Services (EMS)
- Desktop research
- Best practice data
- Site visits

## CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Scrutiny Panel established that: -

### **Communication**

- 6.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted that Friends Groups consist of volunteers and communication is key. Communication could be enhanced by improved links with Northampton Borough Council's website and Friends Groups' websites, coupled with improved communications with Enterprise Management Services (EMS). The Scrutiny Panel noted and welcomed the good communication mechanisms that the Friends of West Hunsbury Parks had with EMS.
- 6.1.2 It was highlighted that the Friends of West Hunsbury Parks currently has excellent communication mechanisms with Northampton Borough Council and various local groups.
- 6.1.3 The Scrutiny Panel realised that the town's parks are not identifiable on Internet search engines, such as Google or on satellite navigation software. The usefulness of adding parks as points of interest was emphasised.
- 6.1.4 The work undertaken by the various Friends Groups is pivotal in the success in many of the Council's parks. The contribution from Friends Groups is also recognised with various different external funders which plays a key part in whether a park acquires funding from external Agencies.
- 6.1.5 The evidence gathered highlighted the need for the publicity of facilities available in the town's parks; together with a programme of community events.
- 6.1.6 The evidence gathered also emphasised the need for improved signage and visitor information in the town's parks; in particular the updating of the brown tourist signs.

### **Observations – Town's Parks**

- 6.1.7 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted that Northampton is proud of its parks, noting their diversity.

6.1.8 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that “one size does not fit all parks within Northampton” and initiatives and ideas from parks could be monitored in order for them to be mirrored in others.

6.1.9 The parks and open spaces detailed in the desktop research exercise are wide-ranging and comprise a number of facilities. A number being similar to those on offer at Northampton’s parks, including:

- Aviary
- Sensory Gardens
- Formal gardens
- Memorial gardens
- Historical features and interpretation boards
- Seating
- Bowling green, tennis, football, cricket
- Pitch and putt
- Play areas
- Tea rooms/ refreshments
- Car parking
- Ponds
- Adventure areas
- Nature reserves

6.1.10 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised that a lot of the town’s parks have a number of historical features, including one of the town’s parks with a registered battle field, one of only 44 in the country, and another with a registered ancient monument.

6.1.11 During its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Northampton Race Course looked pristine.

6.1.12 The Northampton Race Course is used by over 25 local football clubs. The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that the introduction of an on-line booking process for sports pitches would be a useful tool for Sports Clubs.

On a Saturday morning, in excess of 2,000 people use the facilities on the Race Course.

- 6.1.13 Perception of Northampton Race Course is that it is not safe. To alleviate such perceptions the need for well-maintained lighting and pathways was highlighted.
- 6.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel was delighted to hear that Delapre Park had been awarded Green Flag status in July 2013.
- 6.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that Bradlaugh Fields, a wildlife park, has won a high number of awards.
- 6.1.16 It was noted that Abington Park is the town's central "show" park.
- 6.1.17 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Victoria Park, a "through" park has a recently established Friends Group.
- 6.1.18 From the results of the on-line survey, the Scrutiny Panel recognised that the town's three key parks are used most frequently by respondents.
- 6.1.19 The majority of individuals and groups that provided evidence are aware of local play areas in their neighbourhood.
- 6.1.20 The Scrutiny Panel noted that it was felt that the lack of paths and the feeling of insecurity at Eastfield Park are important factors in limiting the use of the park. However, the Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that discussions are taking place with the Friends Group and Enterprise Management Services (EMS).
- 6.1.21 During its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel observed a wide range of parks and open spaces in Northampton, noting the tranquillity and prettiness of Delapre Abbey and its various features. The special features and attractiveness of the other Parks and open spaces visited was also noted.
- 6.1.22 It was agreed that the responsibility for maintenance of the bridle way that runs through West Hunsbury Country Park should be clarified.
- 6.1.23 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there is a need for funding for restoration and contingency of scheduled monuments, such as the Hill Fort.



### **Key facilities in the town's Parks**

6.1.24 Key facilities used by respondents to the Scrutiny Panel's core questions include:

- Cafés
- Museum
- Play areas
- Lakes within the town's parks
- Sports equipment
- Skate park at Beckett's Park
- Fitness Trail at Abington Park
- Model Engineers Railway
- Historic attractions
- Using parks for sport and walking

6.1.25 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that users of the town's park require refreshments or a social hub. It is realised that cafes and such facilities make a valued contribution to park life.

6.1.26 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that access and safety are important to park users. Toilets were also highlighted as a key facility. It was felt that a set standard for toilet facilities in the town's parks is required. The Scrutiny Panel noted that a Friends Group manages and maintains the toilets within its local park. However, there is currently some doubt as to whether this arrangement will continue in the future.

6.1.27 The Scrutiny Panel was disappointed that the gents' toilets located in the upper park, Abington Park are not currently open. It also noted that some of the fitness equipment, located in the lower park, requires maintenance work.

6.1.28 During its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel was disappointed to note the poor condition of the car park located at West Hunsbury Country Park.

### **Additional Facilities in the Town's Parks**

6.1.29 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that it would be an advantage to install picnic areas, such as those with a wooden roof, and brick barbeque areas in some of the town's parks. Brick barbeques (BBQs) could be used to house disposable BBQs. The installation of litter bins and measures to prevent fire and damage are seen as imperative if brick BBQs were put in.

- 6.1.30 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that disposable BBQs used in parks can create litter problems and felt that the introduction of a deposit scheme would act as a deterrent. Disposal BBQs that are used directly on the grass can often leave an unsightly black patch. The installation of permanent hard standings for BBQs in the town's parks was suggested.
- 6.1.31 The Scrutiny Panel felt that the provision of additional picnic areas in the town's parks would attract more visitors.
- 6.1.32 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned regarding lidless litter bins in some parks and the problems encountered during windy conditions. It highlighted the need for litter bins with lids in some parks, such as West Hunsbury Country Park, to prevent wildlife from accessing the contents of the bins. General litter and dog waste bins are placed throughout West Hunsbury Country Park, but not together. It was agreed that litter bins located near to the children's play areas are often too small.
- 6.1.33 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that it would be beneficial to users for litter and dog bins to be located next to each other in the town's parks.
- 6.1.34 It was concluded that the mowing schedule for West Hunsbury Country Park should clearly state that the whole area should not be mowed, only the informal walkways.
- 6.1.35 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for the Park Rangers to be easily accessible by the provision of either a central office located near to the park or the offer of regular surgeries. The need for their contact details to be widely published was also recognised. The Scrutiny Panel emphasised the need for the Park Rangers Team to be provided with suitable, adequate administrative support.
- 6.1.36 The Scrutiny Panel agreed that the pond in Ecton Brook Pocket Park needed to be cleaned out.
- 6.1.37 The Scrutiny Panel considered the hard standing tennis courts, located in Northampton Race Course, could warrant being refurbished.
- 6.1.38 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the responses received to its core questions, noting the suggestions regarding additional facilities and services that might bring people into the town that would not ordinarily use them, including:
- BBQ area / Picnic area
  - Improved Parking / Disabled parking facilities

- Cafes
- Additional seating
- Facilities for disabled people
- Additional sports facilities
- More facilities for older teenagers
- Additional appropriate play equipment
- Nature trails
- Presence of uniformed personnel, such as Police Officers
- Fountains / water features etc. Guided walks / orienteering trails / way-marked walks
- More events
- Improved access and facilities for people with disabilities, for example, walkways suitable for wheelchair use, appropriate changing facilities
- Indoor sports facilities
- Park Ranger's office located on site
- Additional bins and improved litter clearance
- Improved signage
- More toilet facilities, with set opening times

6.1.39 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged the perceived barriers that may deter people from using the town's parks, such as:

- Lack of parking and toilets in some parks
- Anti-social behaviour and not feeling safe
- Disabled access
- Insufficient benches/seating
- Maintenance of parks and littering
- Dog fouling and dog control

### **Role of Park Management Committees**

6.1.40 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that when a Friends Group is already in existence there is a danger that a Park Management Committee could duplicate its role. It also acknowledged that a Park Management Committee might be too big for some parks, such as the West Hunsbury Parks and smaller parks.

6.1.41 The Scrutiny Panel felt that the smaller parks and open spaces that do not warrant a Friends Group must not be forgotten.

6.1.42 The Scrutiny Panel supported the scheme called 'Dog Watch' that is organised by Northamptonshire Police recognising that promotion of this scheme would be useful to smaller parks and open spaces.

- 6.1.43 Co-option to Park Management Committees is supported.
- 6.1.44 The Scrutiny Panel noted the usefulness and benefit of an annual Park Forum.
- 6.1.45 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised that it is important that Park Management Committees are not lead by Northampton Borough Council and are of an appropriate size to enable decision making to take place. All members of the Park Management Committees should have a good understanding of their park.
- 6.1.46 It was considered that Terms of Reference for the Park Management Committees should be agreed from the outset.
- 6.1.47 From the evidence gathered, the Scrutiny Panel perceived that the key roles of the Park Management Committees should include:
- Producing, implementing and maintaining Management and Action Plans
  - Park management
  - Monitoring role
  - Organising events and activities
  - Oversee the maintenance of parks
  - Provide support to voluntary groups
  - To seek and maintain funding for the parks, where appropriate, work with Friends Groups in securing external funding
  - Promoting of the park and its facilities
  - Create Strategies for the local management of the parks, linking to the Council's wider policies and strategies
  - Debating issues, such as how volunteers in the town's park can work alongside the maintenance contract
  - A listening role
  - Intelligence gathering

### **Membership of Park Management Committees**

- 6.1.48 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to receive responses to its core questions in respect of suggestions for membership of the Park Management Committees:

- Friends Groups
- Ward Councillor(s)
- Park User Group representatives and individuals that manage areas of parks
- Park users
- Park personnel
- Young people representatives
- Representatives from Agencies
- Representative from Enterprise Management Services (EMS); for example, Manager/Team Leader
- Representative from Northampton Borough Council
- Representatives from Sports Clubs
- Residents' Associations

6.1.49 It was acknowledged that it is expected that Friends Groups will run alongside and link into Park Management Committees.

6.1.50 From the desktop research exercise, the Scrutiny Panel noted that Peterborough City Council and the London Borough of Haringey had undertaken surveys asking residents for their views on the city and borough's parks. Headlines are details at paragraphs 4.3.9 and 4.4.8. The results of the surveys informed the management plans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations: -

The purpose of this Scrutiny Panel was to improve community engagement within the town's parks.

Scrutiny Panel 1 recommends to Cabinet:

### **Communication**

7.1.1 Communication with Friends Groups is enhanced by improved links with Northampton Borough Council's webpage and Friends Groups' webpages, coupled with improved communications with Enterprise Management Services (EMS); such as the sharing of maintenance schedules for parks.

- 7.1.2 A programme of community events is produced in association with all stakeholders, published on the Council's webpage and promoted to the community.
- 7.1.3 Information relating to facilities available in the town's parks is accessible on the Council's webpage.
- 7.1.4 A uniform on-line booking process for sports pitches and events is introduced.
- 7.1.5 The town's parks are clearly identifiable on Internet search engines, such as Google, and highlighted as points of interest on satellite navigation software, such as Garmin and Tom Tom.
- 7.1.6 Obsolete signs, in place around the town's parks, are removed and all relevant signage and visitor information is in situ and is clearly visible.
- 7.1.7 The Highways Agency is asked to update its brown tourist signage that details points of interest across the town; specifically ensuring that signage for the town's parks is clear.
- 7.1.8 The Scheme "Dog Watch" organised by Northamptonshire Police is promoted.

### **Town's Parks**

- 7.1.9 Cabinet is asked to ensure that where appropriate, initiatives and ideas from parks are monitored in order for them to be mirrored in others.

### **Park Action Plans**

The following recommendations are indicative of the content of the Park Action Plans and the appropriate timescales should be assigned. However, the Scrutiny Panel acknowledges that a number of the recommendations are long term recommendations.

- 7.1.10 Appropriate sources of funding are identified for the restoration and contingency of scheduled monuments.
- 7.1.11 Lighting and footpaths are well maintained in the town's parks and upgraded where necessary.
- 7.1.12 Footpaths are installed in the town's smaller parks to improve disabled access.

- 7.1.13 Responsibility for the bridle way that runs through West Hunsbury Country Park is clarified.
- 7.1.14 The mowing schedule for West Hunsbury Country Park and Cherry Orchard, Hardingstone, clearly states that the whole area is not be mowed, only the informal walkways.
- 7.1.15 The pond in Ecton Brook Pocket Park is cleaned out and the condition of other water features in the town's parks is assessed and appropriate action taken.
- 7.1.16 Where present in the town's parks, hard standing tennis courts are refurbished.
- 7.1.17 Where possible, litter and dog bins are located side by side in the town's parks.
- 7.1.18 Bins with lids/slots are installed in some parks, such as West Hunsbury Country Park, to prevent wildlife accessing the contents of the bins.
- 7.1.19 Picnic areas and permanent hard standings for BBQs are installed in some of the town's parks, together with litter bins and measures to prevent fire and damage.
- 7.1.20 A set standard for the provision of toilet facilities within the town's parks is introduced.
- 7.1.21 The opening times of the toilet facilities within the town's parks are advertised.
- 7.1.22 A funding pot is identified to be allocated to Community Groups that maintain toilets within their local park.
- 7.1.23 In order to make contact with the Park Rangers easier, a central office, located close to the town's Parks, or the provision of regular advertised surgeries in the park is provided.
- 7.1.24 Administrative support is provided for the Park Rangers to enable them to spend more time in the town's parks.
- 7.1.25 Contact details and a report of the activities of the Park Rangers are published on the Council's webpage and promoted to all stakeholders.
- 7.1.26 The role of the Park Ranger is clarified and details disseminated to all stakeholders.

## **Key roles of the Park Management Committees**

7.1.27 The key roles of the Park Management Committees includes:

- Producing, implementing and maintaining Management and Action Plans
- Park management
- Monitoring role
- Organising events and activities
- Oversee the maintenance of parks
- Provide support to voluntary groups
- To seek and maintain funding for the parks, where appropriate, work with Friends Groups in securing external funding
- Promoting of the park and its facilities
- Create Strategies for the local management of the parks, linking to the Council's wider policies and strategies
- Debating issues, such as how volunteers in the town's park can work alongside the maintenance contract
- A listening role
- Intelligence gathering

The Scrutiny Panel highlights the need for meaningful and outcome driven terms of reference for the Park Management Committees and has produced a draft terms of reference, as attached at Appendix (i) for Cabinet's consideration.

7.1.28 In addition to Park Management Committees, an annual Park Forum is held.

## **Membership of Park Management Committees**

7.1.29 Membership of the Park Management Committees consists of around ten members, typically drawn from representatives from:

- Friends Groups
- Ward Councillor(s)
- Parish Council representatives where appropriate
- Park User Group representatives and individuals that manage areas of parks
- Park users
- Park personnel
- Young people representatives
- Representatives from Agencies
- Representative from Enterprise Management Services (EMS); for example, Manager/Team Leader



- Representative from Northampton Borough Council
- Representatives from Sports Clubs
- Residents' Associations

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

7.1.30 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.

# NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Report of Scrutiny Panel 1 – Improving the Town’s Parks

#### **1 Purposes**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to improve community engagement within the town’s parks.
- 1.2 A copy of the scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

#### **2 Context and Background**

- 2.1 Following approval of its work programme for 2013/2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include a review of the town’s parks in its work for 2013/2014. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 1 to undertake the review. A short, sharp review commenced in June 2013, concluding in November 2013.
- 2.2 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Elizabeth Gowen (Chair); Councillor David Palethorpe (Vice Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Geraldine Davies, Brendan Glynane, Phil Larratt, Jamie Lane, Matt Lynch and Sivaramen Subbarayan. Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Race Course, Nicola Hedges, Chair, Friends of Delapre Abbey, Ann Stevens, Secretary, Friends of Abington Park and Mavis Wilmshurst, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks were co-opted to the review.
- 2.3 This review links to the Council’s corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 2 – invest in safer, cleaner neighbourhoods and corporate priority 3 – celebrating our heritage and culture.
- 2.4 The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council’s corporate priorities:
  - Context:
    - Parks and Open Space Strategy for Northampton
  - Evidence from:
    - Cabinet Member for Environment
    - Cabinet Member for Community Engagement
    - Ward Councillors with key parks within their wards

- Friends Groups/User Groups
- Park Rangers
- Enterprise Management Services (EMS)
- Desktop research
- Best practice data
- Site visits

2.5 Parks and open spaces are integral to the cultural life of Northampton; they provide breathing space and are crucial to the successful functioning of Northampton's communities. People pass by open space; walk through it on the way to work or the shops, or stop to enjoy it. Parks offer places to relax and enjoy the natural environment away from the stresses of everyday life, for children to play, and for sport and recreation. In addition they play host to a range of events, festivals and educational activities on both a small and large scale, which attract local and regional audiences.

2.6 The unique geography and historic development of Northampton has created a legacy of parks, open spaces and green areas. The natural and man-made corridors following the Nene Valley its tributaries and the Grand Union Canal is a valuable asset. These corridors together with the legacy of its historical landscapes of Abington Park, Delapre Park, Becketts Park, Hunsbury Hill Country Park and the Racecourse provide a diverse collection of superb green assets, which contribute to a sense of place, ever important in a changing town.

2.7 Northampton's open spaces include 20 identified Parks, 496 Amenity Green spaces, of which over 50 are larger than 1 hectare, 111 Natural or Semi Natural areas, over 100 children or young peoples equipped play spaces, 178 Outdoor Sports Facilities, 23 Allotment Sites and 45 cemeteries and churchyards. These make up over 1,670 hectares of green space. There is significant variation in distribution, quality and accessibility of green spaces, which this Strategy begins to address.

### **Green Flag Award Scheme**

2.8 The Green Flag Award Scheme began in 1996. The reported objective of the Green Flag Award Scheme is to encourage the provision of good quality public parks and green spaces that are managed in environmentally sustainable ways. It is further reported that the Green Flag Award helps to create public recognition of good quality green spaces and in doing so, aims to rebuild people's confidence in them.

- 2.9 Standards for the Green Flag Award are high. Each application is considered on its own merits. It is recognised that every green space has its own unique character and this is reflected in the assessment process. All sites receive a personal visit from highly experienced judges who assess suitability for an Award. Judging is conducted on a points system.
- 2.10 Each site must have a Management Plan for it to be entered into the Award Scheme.
- 2.11 The Green Flag Award Scheme comprises eight assessment criteria which are aimed to represent all aspects of good management within a park. They were developed in consultation with a wide range of organisations to show safer environmental qualities and management together with recognising the social value of a park or green space to its area:
- A Welcoming Place
  - Healthy, safe and secure
  - Clean and well maintained
  - Sustainability
  - Conservation and heritage
  - Community involvement
  - Marketing
- 2.12 Successful parks and green spaces are eligible to fly the 'Green Flag' for one year after which they have to re-apply to retain the Award. A park or green space must maintain and improve on previous standards to be guaranteed a subsequent Award.

### **3 Evidence Collection**

- 3.1 Evidence was collected from a variety of sources:

#### **Background data**

- 3.2 [Parks and Open Space Strategy](#)

#### **3.3 Core Questions**

- 3.3.1 The Scrutiny Panel devised a series of core questions that it put to its key witnesses over a cycle of meetings (Copy at Appendix B).

3.3.2 Key witnesses provided a response to these core questions at the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel held on 5 August, 4 September and 2 October 2013.

3.3.3 Salient points of evidence:

**Cabinet Member for Environment, Northampton Borough Council**

- Northampton has the second largest area of parks and open spaces outside London.
- The driver is continuous improvement within the town's parks.
- As part of "Bloom", a three year plan is worked to. Northampton's parks are a key part of Northampton's Bloom entries: international category of Bloom, which Northampton had entered this year and also the British and East Midlands categories, which the town enters annually. International Bloom judging took place in Northampton on Monday 5 August 2013.
- All of Northampton's parks are diverse.
- Delapre Park has been awarded Green Flag status.
- The Alive Concert took place at Delapre Abbey.
- Bradlaugh Fields, which is a wildlife park, has won a high number of awards.
- Abington Park is the town's central "show" park.
- Victoria Park is a "through" park. It has a recently established Friends Group.
- The Cabinet Member for Environment envisaged that Park Management Committees will consist of Friends Groups plus representatives from Agencies. It is hoped that when Park Management Committees are established and successful that due consideration will be given to devolving budgets to them.
- It is expected that Friends Groups will run alongside and link into Park Management Committees.
- Park Management Committees will be set up initially for the town's three key parks. It is intended to roll out the initiative further once Committees are established and successful. Consideration could also be given to trialing shadow arrangements for the other parks.

### 3.3.4

## Park Rangers' Service, Northampton Borough Council

Key points of evidence:

- Britain in Bloom suggested the benefit of introducing an orienting trail in Abington Park.
- Individual Rangers spend most time in their own parks
- (Abington, Delapre and Racecourse) but all know and enjoy all parks
- The facilities most used in the town's parks include:
  - Play areas
  - Lakes
  - All Sports equipment / pitches / exercise equipment / bowling greens /sports courts / MUGAs
  - Formal and informal garden areas
  - Café/Tea Rooms
  - Bandstand
  - Paths and marked walkways
  - Model Engineers Railway
  - Open areas for informal recreation / dog walking / exercise
  - Historic attractions (Delapre Abbey / Abington Museum / Hunsbury Hill Fort etc.)
  - Toilets (where available)
  - Car Parks
  - Use as a thoroughfare
- Facilities and services that might bring people into the town that would not ordinarily use them include:
  - BBQ area / Picnic area
  - Parking / Disabled parking
  - Additional sports facilities such as Basketball court at Abington
  - Additional appropriate play equipment, for example, at Delapre
  - Activities for the older youth / Youth Shelter
  - Fountains / water features etc. - somewhere children can splash about in
  - Guided walks / orienteering trails / way-marked walks
  - More events
  - Improved access and facilities for people with disabilities, for example, walkways suitable for wheelchair use, appropriate changing facilities

- Indoor sports facilities
- Ranger's office / room where they can be contacted and information displayed
- Additional bins and improved litter clearance
- More toilet facilities
- Barriers that could prevent people from using the town's parks:
  - Lack of parking
  - Anti- social behaviour (ASB) and fear of crime
  - Disabled access
  - Lack of toilets in some areas of parks
  - Poor access to public transport routes for some parks
  - Insufficient benches / seating areas
  - Concerns about ASB associated with disused buildings
- Services that park users want from the town's parks:
  - More activities for the youth especially older teenagers
  - Events
  - Disabled access on the play area, for example, swings and roundabouts which they can access and enjoy
  - More bins and benches
  - Picnic area
  - More toilets
  - Additional uniformed presence of Rangers / Wardens / PCSOs / Police to be seen to addressing anti-social behaviour
  - Events for particular groups
  - Improved maintenance of parks – sufficient experienced staff to provide
  - Good level of care to park
- Key representatives to the Park Management Committees could include:
  - Park Ranger
  - Friends of Groups
  - Local Councillor
  - Charge hand
  - Local children's Centre lead
  - Community groups lead
  - Park user group representatives e.g. pony club, model engineers, water ski club, angling club, sports clubs
  - People who manage areas of the park e.g. Angling club at Delapre, Cafe
  - owners / operators
  - Asset management (NBC)
  - Enterprise

- Key roles of the Park Management Committees:
  - Take people's views into account
  - Be objective
  - Key priority be the good of the park and the promotion of it's use
  - Listen to other views

### **3.3.5 Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection)**

Salient points of evidence:

- The Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection) visits Abington Park most frequently as it is one of the closest to her home and also makes visits to a number of other parks including Delapre Abbey, Northampton Racecourse, Victoria Park and Becketts. Most visits to the parks are on foot.
- Facilities that are most used in the town's parks:
  - Play areas
  - Lakes
  - All Sports equipment, pitches, exercise equipment, bowling greens, sports courts, MUGAs
  - Formal and informal garden areas
  - Café and tea rooms
  - Bandstand
  - Paths and marked walkways
  - Model Engineers Railway
  - Open areas for informal recreation, dog walking, exercise
  - Historic attractions (Delapre Abbey, Abington Museum, Hunsbury Hill Fort etc.)
  - Toilets (where available)
  - Car Parks
  - Use as a thoroughfare
- Facilities and services that might bring people into the town's parks that would not otherwise use them:
  - BBQ and picnic area
  - Parking and disabled parking
  - Additional sports facilities e.g. basketball court at Abington
  - Additional appropriate play equipment e.g. at Delapre
  - Activities for the older youth such as a Youth Shelter
  - Improved promotion and marketing of what is available
  - Guided walks / orienteering trails / way-marked walks
  - Bigger events /events



- Improved access and facilities for people with disabilities e.g. walkways suitable for wheelchair use, appropriate changing facilities
- Indoor sports facilities
- Ranger's office or room where they can be contacted and where information can be displayed
- Wider community use of facilities
- Improved signage
- Additional bins and improved litter clearance
- More toilet facilities
- Barriers that might stop people from using the town's parks:
  - Lack of parking
  - Anti- social behaviour (ASB) and fear of crime
  - Disabled access
  - Lack of toilets in some areas of parks
  - Poor access to public transport routes for some parks
  - Insufficient benches / seating areas
  - Concerns about ASB associated with disused buildings
- Services that Park users want from the parks include:
  - More activities for the youth especially older teenagers
  - Events
  - Disabled access on the play area e.g. swings and roundabouts which they can access and enjoy
  - More bins and benches
  - Picnic area
  - More toilets
  - Additional uniformed presence of Rangers ,Wardens, PCSOs and Police Officers to be seen to addressing ASB
  - Events for particular groups and active consultation to ensure that community needs are delivered
  - Improved maintenance of parks with sufficient experienced staff to provide good level of care to park
- Key representatives to the Park Management Committees should include:
  - Local Councillor
  - Charge hand
  - Local Children's Centre lead
  - Community groups lead
  - Park user group representatives e.g. pony club, model engineers, water ski club, angling club, sports clubs
  - People who manage areas of the park e.g. Angling club at Delapre Café - owners and operators
  - Asset management (NBC)

- Enterprise
  - It is envisaged that Park Management Committees will have the ability to co-opt as required. Park Management Committees should comprise a wide representation and membership, limited to around ten. It would be useful for an annual Park Forum to be held
  - It is very important that the groups are of the appropriate size to enable decisions to be made. The groups should not be dominated by NBC
  - NBC voting power should be limited so that it less than that of representative groups
  - In order to obtain wider representation an annual park users' forum should be held to consult on action plans and involve the full range of park users
  - It is important that both people who use the parks and people who have responsibility for the management of part of parks are represented on management committees
- The role of the Management Committees should include producing action plans and implemented them.
  - It is important for representatives to the Park Management Committees to have the authority to make decisions on behalf of the Groups that they were representing.
  - Appropriate Terms of Reference should be agreed from the outset.
  - It is important that all involved are prepared to take a fair share of responsibility
  - It is important that NBC provides on-going support to the groups
  - Park Management Committees should be objective and listen to other views
  - The key priority should be the good of the park and the promotion of its use.

### **3.3.6 Partnership Manager, Partnership Unit**

Key point of evidence:

- Northampton Borough Council sets the standard required and Enterprise Management Services allocate resources

## **Grounds Maintenance Contract**

- Three elements to the grounds maintenance contract:
  - Grass cutting
  - Shrub/flower bed maintenance
  - Tree maintenance
- These operations are carried out in all parks and open spaces throughout the borough

### **Grass cutting**

- Grass cutting normally takes place between the months of April and October, although weather may influence the start and finish of the mowing season
- All grass areas are litter picked before mowing takes place
- Target frequency for cuts is every four weeks
- All mowing carried out by large mowers is backed up by small pedestrian mowers and strimming, where necessary
- On completion of the mowing, all grass is blown or swept from the footpaths onto the grassed areas

### **Shrub and flower bed maintenance**

- All shrubs are maintained to the same specification
- Shrub beds are visited on an annual basis as part of the winter works programme and receive full containment pruning operations
- The main period of shrub and shrub bed maintenance takes place between October/November until the end of March/April
- Shrub bed maintenance includes the removal of litter and weeds. Weed control includes a combination of chemical treatment and manual removal
- Shrub beds are litter picked every six to nine weeks
- Shrub maintenance includes the removal of self-set trees and shrubs from grassed areas and around the curtilage of NBC owned properties
- During the growing season, shrubs are maintained to ensure that they do not cause obstruction or damage, or present health and safety implications
- All flower beds are planted with spring and summer bedding plants

- In the autumn, all flower beds are dug, weeded, topped up with soil and manured
- Spring preparation involves digging and weeding prior to planting

### **Tree maintenance**

- All trees are maintained to the same standards
- The standards/policies and inspection regimes relating to the trees are those which were in place prior to Enterprise Management Service (EMS) taking over the services
- Continuity is achieved by two officers at EMS who manage the trees, being the same officers that previously managed the trees on behalf of NBC
- EMS has internally allocated the same level of budgets to tree maintenance as those allocated when NBC managed the trees
- The contract deals with the general maintenance of the existing trees, which are the responsibility of NBC or maintained on behalf of NCC
- Any maintenance requested to be carried out that would not be deemed to be general maintenance would be outside the scope of the contract

### **Tree maintenance - NBC trees**

- All arboriculture works is carried out in accordance with recognised good arboriculture practice
- Tree maintenance will only be undertaken where there is a requirement to do so
- A programme of inspections and surveys is in place
- A Tree Officer, EMS, is on call 24 hours
- There are some time restrictions on when maintenance work can be carried out, due to nesting birds and protected species
- Any complaints from residents about individual trees will be investigated by the Tree Officers and the resident informed of their findings

### **Tree maintenance - NCC trees (Highways)**

- Highways trees on strategic and main distributor roads are inspected and work undertaken on safety grounds and to ensure visibility and prevent obstructions
- Only reactive and emergency work will be carried out on trees on other roads

## **Other maintenance**

### **Play Equipment**

- Equipment is inspected weekly, and includes an inspection of the equipment, plus a wider environmental inspection of the area immediately around the equipment
- Inspections include checking that all fixings and fastenings are in place, correctly fitted and tightened, lubricated as per the manufacturer's instructions and where necessary replaced where missing, damaged or worn
- Playgrounds and their surrounds are cleansed of all litter and debris including special attention being paid to dog fouling and glass

### **Sports Pitches**

- All sports pitches are maintained to the particular governing body's standards

### **Aviaries**

- Aviaries are maintained to the national animal welfare standards for aviaries
- Birds are fed daily with appropriate food
- Water receptacles are cleaned out daily and refilled with fresh water
- Food containers are cleaned out on a daily basis
- Daily inspections are carried out on the birds and the aviary structure
- Twice yearly inspections are carried out by a Veterinary Surgeon

### **3.3.7 Assets Director and Operations Manager, Enterprise Management Services (EMS)**

- Abington Park is perceived the most used park within Northampton. The park offers a wide variety of attractions which ensures that a broad spectrum of the community utilise the park. Contrasting environments within the park make the site somewhat unique and a pleasurable experience for visitors.
- Facilities that are provided in the town's parks that are used the most:
  - Children's play areas

- The skate park at Becketts Park is particularly popular with teenagers
  - Fitness trail at Abington Park
- Facilities and services that would bring people into parks that might otherwise not use them:
  - Good toilet provision
  - Adequate parking
  - Adult gym equipment
  - Refreshment stands
  - Reduction in anti-social behaviour
- Barriers that might stop people from using the town's parks:
  - Anti-social behaviour
  - Lack of facilities e.g. toilets
  - Out of date and unattractive play equipment
  - Lack of parking provision can be a barrier to families with young children, the elderly or disabled people
- Services that park users want from the town's parks:
  - Public events, shows, fairs and public entertainment
- All major stakeholders should be represented on the Park Management Committees including Sports Clubs
- Key roles of the Park Management Committees:
  - Forge strategies for the local management of the parks linking to the Authority's broader policies and strategies
  - Form an important "eyes and ears on the ground" method of intelligence gathering for Officers and contractors
- The maintenance of the parks is based on a quality specification rather than a traditional set number of visits identified by the Council. The principle behind the maintenance regimes is to deploy resource as and when it is required in order to meet the desired standard. Conditions for the maintenance of the parks is attached at Appendix C
- The grass cutting schedule is flexible
- The schedule for emptying litter bins in the town's parks is once a week for the outer parks. More frequently for busier parks

- Play equipment is robust by its nature however, newer, state of the art, adventure equipment comes onto the market. The cost associated with such equipment was appreciated

### **3.3.8 Northampton Friends' Group Forum**

3.3.8.1 Representatives from the Northampton Friends' Group Forum provided responses to the Panel's core questions. Key points:

- The responses received, in the main, made reference to the specific parks – Delapre Abbey, Eastfield Park and West Hunsbury Parks.
- General comments received regarding the town's parks referred to the fact that some parks have a number of facilities and others just a few. The importance of access and safety was highlighted.
- The need for more public toilets was suggested but it was recognised there would be a need for set opening hours. Litter bins, picnic areas and nature trails were also suggested.
- More community based events, keep fit, exercise courses, additional litter bins and seating were suggested as other services that park users would like. Respondents are aware of local play areas and felt that they are well used but, on occasions, there can be problems with vandalism and abuse of the equipment.
- Local Councillors, Council Officers, contractors responsible for maintaining the parks, Friends Groups and park users, along with different interest Groups should make up the membership of the Park Management Committees.
- All members of Park Management Committees should have a good understanding of their park.
- Friends Groups are successful. It is important that Park Management Committees do not duplicate the work of the Friends Groups. The work of the Friends Groups should be promoted.
- The role of the Park Management Committees should include the production of short, medium and long-term park-specific management plans. Progress against the plans should be monitored and revised annually.
- Park Management Committees should work closely with Friends Groups in securing external funding and should ensure that an ethos is established which is supportive and achievable.

## **Individuals**

3.3.8.2 Individuals addressed the Scrutiny Panel regarding their views and observations regarding the management of parks within Northampton. .  
Key points:

- Friends Groups have no formal recognition of their role in the parks; where appropriate the active Friends Group in a park should have their role formally acknowledged by the Council.
- Closer co-operation with the Council and Enterprise Management Services (EMS) is welcome and a number of groups are already coming to local arrangements, most groups are reluctant to formalise the structure into a 'Committee'. They instead prefer to be part of a 'Park Liaison Group', with the composition and other matters being agreed between the Council and Friends.
- Parks comes under the remit of Environment and Culture but other departments also have an interest and degree of control. An "Oversight" Panel would be useful, with representatives of Friends Groups making up the membership of Panel. The Panel should have responsibility for developing individual parks management within the borough.
- Smaller parks and open spaces that do not warrant a Friends Group must not be forgotten. Northamptonshire Police runs a scheme called 'Dog Watch' which encourages people to look out for problems whilst out walking. A recruitment drive related to this Scheme could be considered to sign up interested members of the public to keep an eye on their open spaces and report problems appropriately.
- A Parks Forum comprising Councillors, Officers, Friends Groups, Residents Associations and other interested parties, meeting twice a year would be useful.

## **Friends of Northampton Race Course**

3.3.8.3 The Friends of Northampton Race Course provided written evidence to the Scrutiny Panel. Key points:

- The Friends Group would like to review the master plan early in 2014 to enable it to agree a clear route with all stakeholders to achieve many of the original aspirations contained within it. The support of Northampton Borough Council was requested.



- The Friends Group has devised issues regarding Northampton Race Course in relation to :
  - Maintenance
  - Aesthetics
  - Parking
  - Security (MAPS)
  
- **Maintenance** poor state of the Racecourse Pavilion and various outbuildings
  - “Patchy” maintenance on the play equipment
  - Vandalism to a number of the trees
  - Damage to some of the playing pitches due to parking on them
  - Cleaning of signage
  - Graffiti
  - Derelict toilets
  
- **Aesthetics** Poor state of the Racecourse Pavilion and various outbuilding
  - Lack of common identity around the park
  - Fencing protects the Bowling Green but also acts as a barrier to access the Pavilion and car park
  - Lighting
  - More flowers need around the key entrances
  - Co-ordination over location of facilities
  
- **Parking** Unauthorised parking on the park is damaging grassed areas
  - Pavilion car park is inadequate and poorly organised
  
- **Security** Perception is that the Racecourse is unsafe
  - A need for well-maintained lighting and clear pathways
  - Drinking of alcohol and anti-social behaviour in the Racecourse is a concern
  - Facilities that are used most in the Racecourse include:
    - Running/Jogging and general fitness
    - Football pitches
    - Bowling Greens
    - Rugby (practice) pitch, cricket pitches and tennis courts
    - Table tennis

- Additional facilities and services that would bring people into the park that might not otherwise use them:
  - Improving facilities to a higher standard
  - Updating signage and visitor information
  - Clearer fitness trails
  - Cafes
  - Clearer use of cycling and demarcation with pedestrian routes
  - Additional seating and planted areas
  - Re-instating organised cricket
- Potential barriers:
  - Lack of publicity of facilities available
  - Clearer signage at access points
  - Perception that the area is unsafe
  - Lack of co-ordination of events taking place on the park
- Other services that park users want from the town's parks:
  - More information about what is available
  - Public toilets and cafes
  - Programme of community events
- The Friends of Northampton Racecourse facilitated the creation of the Dragon Mounds and Adventure Play areas on the Racecourse. Both are well used and a real asset to the park. They appeal to different age ranges and are different from standard play areas.
- Key representatives to the new Park Management Committees:
  - Football and sport clubs users
  - Friends of Northampton Racecourses
  - Umbrella Fair Organisation
  - Local Schools
  - University of Northampton and Bosworth College
- Two key roles of the Park Management Committees:
  - Day to day management of issues such as MAPS
  - Update, maintain and progress the Racecourse Master plan
- The Park Management Committees could lead to the end of some Friends Groups

- Support needs to be provided to voluntary groups if they are contributing to Park Management Committees
- Council services need to be better co-ordinated
- New capital funded projects need to have on-going funding available for maintenance

### **West Hunsbury Parish Council**

3.3.8.4 West Hunsbury Parish Council provided written evidence. Key points:

- Ladybridge/Wootton Brook Open Spaces have been improved recently; with the addition of new play equipment and two footpaths which have replaced the old oak bridges. The improvements to the open spaces have attracted people from a wider area. The lake and its beach are considered to be a popular area.
- Further suggested improvements include:
  - More sport facilities
  - Improvements to the car park
- The improvements to Hunsbury Hill Country Park, such as newly installed play equipment and the café are recognised. The park is more widely used, with around 50% visiting from outside the area.
- The panoramic view of the town from the old trig point, West Hunsbury Country Park, is obscured by an overgrown hedgerow.
- There is a need for more maintenance work to be undertaken in the park and the replacement of broken benches.
- The Iron Age Hill Fort, located in the centre of West Hunsbury Country Park, is currently on the Ancient Monument at Risk Register. More could be done with the Fort Hill, there is the potential to turn the park into an educational resource.
- West Hunsbury Parish Council commended the work of the Friends Group, highlighting the improvements that it has made to the Country Park.
- Should the trials of Park Management Committees be successful, the initiative should be extended to include Hunsbury Hill Country Park; so that its potential as a recreation and education resource can be promoted. West Hunsbury

Parish Council proposed that it is a member of that Park Management Committee should it be established.

### **3.3.9 Variety of User Groups**

3.3.9.1 A variety of community groups and organised were invited to provide a response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel. Additionally, an on-line survey was produced via Survey Monkey using similar core questions to that that had been distributed to various expert witnesses and community groups. The link to survey was sent to the Residents' Panel, Parish Councils, a number of primary schools and a variety of Community Groups and organisations. The survey was promoted on the Overview and Scrutiny [webpage](#). A press release was issued regarding the on-line survey. The survey ran from 15 July 2013 to 12 September 2013. 88 individual responses to the survey were received.

Key findings:

- The town's three key parks are used most frequently by respondents. A number of the town's other parks are used regularly too, including Becketts park, Bradlaugh Fields, Dallington park, Grangewood park, Hunsbury park and the park at Hardingstone. 5% of respondents frequent parks outside the borough.
- The main facilities available in the town's parks that are used by respondents include:
  - Café
  - The museum
  - Play areas
  - Walking around the park
  - Sports
- 13% of respondents did not use facilities in the town's parks.
- Respondents felt that the main potential barriers that stop people using the town's parks are:
  - Anti-social behaviour and not feeling safe
  - Lack of toilet facilities
  - Park maintenance
  - Littering
  - Dog fouling and lack of dog control

- The majority of respondents are aware of a local play area in their neighbourhood. A number of responses referred to the good provision of equipment and children's activities provided. The area is clean and safe.
- Respondents felt that the membership of the Park Management Committees should include:
  - Local people and park users
  - Friends Groups
  - Ward Councillors
  - Park personnel
  - Police, Neighbourhood Wardens and other professionals/experts
  - Residents' Associations
  - Young people representatives
  - Representatives from sports organisations, such as football
- Respondents perceived the role of the Park Management Committees to include:
  - Park management
  - Improvements to the town's parks
  - Promoting the town's parks
  - Organising events and activities
  - Monitoring role
  - Overseeing the maintenance of parks
  - To seek and maintain funding
  - To ensure that the town's parks cater for all sections of the community
  - A listening role
- General comments received regarding the town's parks include:
  - Northampton Race Course is used by over 25 local football clubs.
  - The pavilion at Northampton Race Course (NRC) was supported by the county Football Association (FA) for Football Foundation funding.
  - Pitches at NRC are used every weekend during the season and on Wednesday afternoons.

- The Northamptonshire Football Association suggested the introduction of an on-line booking process for sports pitches that includes the provision of paying by credit and debit cards.
- Problems with litter are often associated with unaffiliated football matches. Park wardens would discourage users from littering.
- The car park at NRC could warrant some maintenance work.

### **3.3.10 Northampton Community Forums**

3.3.10.1 Members of the Scrutiny Panel attended various meetings of the Northampton Community Forums and asked attendees for their responses to the core questions. Key points:

- The work of the various Friends Groups was commended.
- The introduction of Park Management Committees for the town's larger parks was welcomed, but it was felt they were not required for the smaller parks.
- There should be more organised activities in the town's parks.
- The needs of disabled users to the town's parks should be recognised.
- The opening hours of toilet facilities in the parks should be extended and details of the opening times advertised.
- The need for improved lighting and footpaths was highlighted.
- The need for improved parking facilities was suggested.
- The need for facilities for disabled people was emphasised.
- More S106 monies should be spent on the town's parks.
- More play equipment, sporting facilities and designated youth meeting points was suggested.
- Visible presence of Park Rangers and the promotion of their roles.

### **3.4 Site Visits**

3.4.1 Six site visits took place to a selection of parks and open spaces in Northampton; the purpose of which was to assess the park and open space and the facilities available.

## General Findings

- All of the town's parks have unique features.
- Effective signage is required, such as the tourist signs that identify points of interest
- The town's parks are not promoted on search engines or on satellite navigation software

## Delapre Abbey

3.4.2 Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited Delapre Abbey on 7 August 2013. Key findings:

- The Tea Rooms are open daily from 10am to 5pm.
- The walled gardens are used by a variety of groups including:
  - ECO kids
  - Richmond Retirement Village
  - St Andrews
  - Olympus Care Services
  - Pleydell Allotment Association has a mini allotment within the walled gardens.
- Various pieces of art work are located in the walled gardens:
  - The lovers
  - Lady with a fish
  - Lady with a cat
- One full time gardener and an apprentice cover Delapre Abbey.
- Toilet facilities are provided and these are maintained by Friends of Delapre Abbey.
- The water feature provides a tranquil area. The stream runs through the water garden.
- A location sign is in situ in grounds, along with a number of benches, litter and dog bins.
- 800 oak trees (Charter Wood) were planted in 1988 for the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Charter of Northampton.
- The grounds of Delapre Abbey are also home to a lake which is used by the Water Skiing Club and a local Anglers Club.

- A footpath runs all the way around the perimeter of the lake.
- The pathway from Avon to Hardingstone runs through the grounds of the Abbey.
- Cottages located in the grounds are occupied.

### **Ecton Brook Pocket Park**

3.4.3 Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited Ecton Brook Pocket Park on 7 August 2013. Key findings:

- Ecton Brook Pocket Park is one of 162 green spaces in Northampton. A stream runs alongside it.
- There are a number of trees and shrubs within the Pocket Park, along with a pond.
- A footpath runs along the length of the Pocket Park, which has a number of outdoor lights situated along it.

### **Northampton Race Course**

3.4.4 Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited Northampton Race Course on 13 August 2013. Key points:

- The car park was well used.
- Northampton Race Course comprises approximately 117 acres of land which is predominantly open space and sports areas:
  - Football pitches
  - Basketball courts
  - Cricket pitches
  - Bowls greens
  - Tennis courts
  - Table Tennis tables
- The Umbrella Fair Organisation is currently refurbishing the café area with anticipated opening over the next few months.
- A fun fair is held twice annually at the Race Course.
- There are two children’s play areas located at the Race Course and a “Dragon Mound” for imaginative play.
- The old Pavilion is now a restaurant.
- Domes detailing maps of the Race Course are placed in a few locations.
- Three gardeners cover Northampton Race Course.
- The Race Course is frequently used as a thoroughfare from the town centre to Kingsley and Kingsthorpe. The footpath is lit over-night.



- Benches litter and dog bins are placed in various locations. There is no seating near to the sports pitches.
- The toilets are not in use.
- Dog bins are widely used by dog walkers.

### **Abington Park**

3.4.5 Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited Abington Park on 13 August 2013. Key points:

- The Park is known as the upper and lower parks. The upper park is also referred to as the ornamental park which comprises the museum, aviaries, café and ornamental flower beds.
- Toilet facilities located in the upper park have been refurbished.
- Abington Park comprises approximately 47 hectares of land.
- Most cottages situated in the park are occupied. One is currently vacant.
- Two gardeners cover Abington Park.
- The Parish Church of Abington is located in the park.
- The museum is located in the upper park.
- A number of benches are placed throughout the park.
- The café located in the upper park is very well used.
- The upper park houses a band stand together with well-maintained bowls green, tennis courts, Memorial Rose garden, Sensory Garden and table tennis tables.
- The play area, located on the lower park, is very well used comprising a number of play equipment and two bouncy castles/slides.
- The lower park also has the provision of fitness trails. The lower park is an activity based park.
- ECO Kids Lottery Heritage Funding has been acquired for a project in Abington Park.
- Plans are being drawn up for the Entrance Plaza for the lower park.
- Plans are also being worked on to refurbish the old rose gardens into an open air theatre.
- A natural play area is located near to the lake. Mini beast events, such as pond dipping, are often organised.
- A number of sports groups and community groups use the park for regular organised events.
- The breadth of users at the park is vast.

### **West Hunsbury Country Park**

3.4.6 Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited West Hunsbury Country Park on 13 August 2013. Key points:

- A location map is situated on the entrance to the Park.
- The Park is well used.
- Located by the car park is a café, Drivers Return.
- Entrances to the Park have been secured, preventing vehicular access.
- The Park comprises a number of historical features, such as the Iron Age Hill Fort. The Fort is a designated Schedule Ancient Monument. Banbury Lane (an ancient Drover's Road) runs alongside the Fort and through the park.
- A panoramic view of the town can be seen during the late autumn/winter months when the trees have shed their leaves.
- Northampton Ironstone Railway Trust opens the old railway over bank holiday weekends. During these events, the crossing that is situated in the Park is manned.
- General litter and dog waste bins are placed throughout the park, but not together. The bins are emptied once a week.
- A local primary school uses the Park as part of the Forest Schools initiative. Students from Moulton College have assisted in the maintenance work of the bridge.
- There are two small play areas in the Park. A number of benches are situated close to the play areas.
- A nursery of trees was planted a number of years ago. The majority of the trees survived.

### **Bradlaugh Fields and Barn Community Wildlife Park**

3.4.7 Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited Bradlaugh Fields and Barn Community Wildlife Park on 2 September 2013. Key points:

- Bradlaugh Fields is a 60-hectare site.
- A third of the British butterfly species can be found in the Fields. The Fields is also a protected area for badgers.
- The Fields attracts a wide range of visitors each year from education groups to local community activities.
- A number of benches and seating areas are situated in the Fields.
- Litter and dog waste bins are located side by side.

- The Fields does not have parking facilities and can be accessed on foot via a number of accesses. One entrance can be accessed by vehicles.
- Natural walkways are mowed throughout the Fields.
- A well-used, lit, pathway runs through the Fields.
- A Sensory Garden is located within the Fields.
- The Fields is home to five ponds of varying size and shape. A water feature leading to one of the lakes is another attractive feature within the Fields.
- The Barn is open for refreshments on Saturdays and Sundays from 9.30am to 11.30am and Wednesdays from 1pm to 3pm. CCTV cameras are in situ on the Barn. A local nursery uses the Barn on Wednesdays, during term time.
- A lake is situated close to the Barn, with a wooden walkway around its perimeter.

### **Castle House**

3.4.8

Key points:

- Castle House is a vacant two storey office building fronting onto Marefair, adjacent to Doddridge Car Park.
- Northamptonshire County Council is leading on the potential acquisition of this property, to support the Heritage Gateway project.
- The building is relatively modern and consideration is being given to the potential demolition of the property, as part of the overall vision for the locality.

3.4.9

Appendix D provides comprehensive findings from the site visits.

## **4 Desktop Research**

4.1

As part of its evidence gathering process for this review, desktop research was undertaken regarding details of parks external to Northampton that have been noted as best practice. Comparable districts were also contacted regarding the provision of their parks.

Appendix E provides comprehensive findings from the desktop research exercise.

## **Comparable Districts**

4.2 Desktop research was undertaken and contact was made with the following regarding the provision of their parks:

- Peterborough City Council
- Norwich City Council
- Milton Keynes Council

## **4.3 Peterborough**

### **Central Park**

4.3.1 Central park holds a Green Flag award.

4.3.2 The following facilities are available:

- paddling pool
- sunken garden
- sensory garden
- aviary
- bowling greens
- putting green
- tennis (grass and synthetic)
- bowling
- children's play area
- picnic area
- paddling pool
- sandpit
- formal gardens
- Buttercross Tearooms (open all year-round)

4.3.3 A number of events take place in the Park.

4.3.4 There is a Park Ranger service for the Park.

### **Bretton Park**

4.3.5 Facilities provided include a large children's play area within the main part of the park, a smaller play area and a BMX track. There are tennis courts, football pitches and one cricket pitch. A number of benches are situated under trees. The annual Community Summer Festival takes place in Bretton Park

### **Itter Park**

- 4.3.6 Facilities at Itter Park include a refurbished play area, hard and grass tennis courts, a bowling green and a putting green, two football pitches, a sensory garden feature, table tennis tables and toilet facilities.

### **Nature Reserves and Wildlife areas**

- 4.3.7 There are nine nature reserves and wildlife areas in the Peterborough area.

### **Playgrounds**

- 4.3.8 There are more than 200 play areas in and around Peterborough. The equipment ranges from pre-school doorstep facilities to activity areas for young people. Initiatives to enhance play opportunities are undertaken through a programme of improvements and by providing new facilities within new housing developments. A number of Skate Parks, BMX tracks and Multi-use Games Areas (MUGA's) are provided.

### **Survey**

- 4.3.9 Officers at Peterborough undertook a survey in two of the Council's parks, Central Park and Itter Park. A precis of the findings is attached at Appendix F.

### **Norwich**

- 4.3.10 There are 23 formal parks in Norwich with over 40 open spaces. There are in excess of 40 natural areas, which includes Nature Reserves and more than 80 equipped play areas.

- 4.3.11 Examples of parks in Norwich:

### **Eaton Park**

- 4.3.12 Eaton Park is the largest of Norwich's historic parks which covers over 80 acres. The park comprises bowling and croquet greens, tennis courts and a miniature railway located near to the entrance. The park also has a Café, changing rooms and toilet facilities. There is a lily pond and model boating pond. A number of pitches are used for football, lacrosse and cricket. There is a children's play area and a cycle speedway track. The park is traffic free.

### **Chapelfield Gardens**

4.3.13 Chapelfield Gardens is situated in the city centre. The gardens consist of a toddler and juniors' play area, a place for teens to meet and areas for games of petanque, giant chess and draughts.

### **Mousehold Heath**

4.3.14 Mousehold Heath is a 184 acre area made up of heathland, woodland and recreational open space. It is the largest local nature reserve managed by Norwich City Council.

### **Milton Keynes**

4.3.15 Open space in Milton Keynes currently covers approximately 2,895 hectares over 20% of the total City area.

4.3.16 In Milton Keynes, there are:

- 565 play areas
- 1,200 hectares open space (Managed by Milton Keynes Council)
- 1,800 hectares open space (Managed by the Parks Trust)
- 250 hectares accessible woodland

### **The Parks Trust**

4.3.17 The Parks Trust is an independent charity that owns and cares for much of Milton Keynes parks and green space including river valleys, woodlands, lakesides, parks and landscaped areas alongside the main roads. This equates to around 25 per cent of the new city area. The Parks Trust is self-financing.

4.3.18 The range of open spaces and the areas they serve in Milton Keynes are reported:-

- Incidental open space
- Play Areas
- Local Parks
- District Parks
- Linear Parks
- Country Parks

4.3.19 Examples of parks in Milton Keynes:

#### **Chepstow Drive Local Park**

4.3.20 Chepstow Drive Local Park is a large informal area. It consists of around four hectares.

4.3.21 Features of the park include:

- Sufficient mown grassed area to provide for informal recreational use
- Contribution to landscape structure
- Allotments
- Equipped play provision
- Some youth provision including a youth shelter
- Pond feature
- Areas to promote wildlife

#### **Willen Lake South**

4.3.22 South Willen Lake attracts more than one million visitors each year to take part in water sports, golf, high ropes, special events, or to jog, picnic, walk, play, etc.

4.3.23 Facilities provided in the park include:

- Public toilets
- Trim trail
- Cycle hire
- Fishing
- Mini golf
- Miniature railway
- Aerial Extreme
- Picnic tables
- Seating
- Play area
- Refreshments

#### **Leon Recreation Ground**

4.3.24 Leon Recreational Ground is a large formal area of just over 4.5 hectares. The majority of the centre of the park is grassed. Pathways along the sides

of the area run through avenues of mature trees. Various recreational facilities are located in the northern half of the park. Facilities at the Recreation Ground include:

- Sufficient mown grassed area to provide for informal recreational use
- Equipped play provision including skate ramps
- Some youth provision
- Fitness Equipment
- Areas to promote wildlife
- Mature woodland trees

### **Examples of best practice**

4.4 The following Councils have been noted as best practice for their parks:

- London Borough of Haringey
- Chelmsford City Council
- Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale

### **London Borough of Haringey**

4.4.1 Haringey has more over 600 acres of parks, recreation grounds and open spaces. Fifteen of its parks have been awarded Green Flag status. There are 61 spaces in total, equating to 382.87 hectares, ranging from a regional park to small local parks and open spaces. The parks' Friends Groups have a key role in achieving and maintaining these high standards.

4.4.2 There are a number of conservation areas, local nature reserves and ancient woodland in the borough.

4.4.3 Haringey has a number of service standards that it works to which helps to monitor performance and maintain standards.

4.4.4 Two of Haringey's QEII parks have won prizes at the Fields in Trust Awards Ceremony at Lords Cricket Ground.

4.4.5 Haringey's parks have benefitted from various pots of funding that have been successfully awarded. A number of groups have worked together to improve the borough's parks. Playbuilder has enabled many existing play areas to be improved and new ones created.

4.4.6 Funding has been awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore three of the borough's parks and also providing modern day facilities.



### **Chestnuts Park**

4.4.7 Chestnuts Park has an avenue of plane trees marking out the western, southern and northern boundaries. An open playing field covers the majority of the western side of the Park with a café and picnic terrace overlooking the new playground for various ages. The eastern half of the park has newly refurbished tennis courts, basketball area, and a new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA). The Park's first Green Flag was awarded in July 2008.

### **Survey of the London Borough of Haringey's Parks**

4.4.8 Throughout January 2013 people were invited to tell Officers at the London Borough of Haringey what they thought of the borough's parks and open spaces. 833 responses were received, with over 80% of respondents telling the Council that they used a Haringey managed park, an increase of 10% since 2009. Headline results are reported at Appendix G.

### **Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale**

4.4.9 The Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale was shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle Award in 2012 under the award category most improved Council of the year. The Council has eight green flags for its parks and green spaces. In July 2013 the following parks were awarded Green Flag Status:

- The Memorial Gardens
- Broadfield Park and Packer Spout Gardens in the town centre
- Hare Hill Park and Milnrow Memorial Park in Pennines
- Heywood's Queen's Park and
- Middleton's Truffett Park
- Boarshaw Cemetery

4.4.10 Examples of parks in Rochdale:

#### **Hare Hill Park**

4.4.11 Hare Hill Park is a traditional Victorian Park that houses the town's library. A number of its original features offer a wide range of leisure facilities. The Park is located at the gateway to the Pennines and is regarded as the "Jewel in the Pennines crown". The Park has a well-established Friends Group.

4.4.12 Many original heritage features have been restored. The Park is reported to be well maintained and clean, offering recreational opportunities to a variety of groups and individuals.

4.4.13 The main features of the park include:

- Formal gardens
- Fixed play areas
- Skateboard park
- Toddlers play area
- Sports pitch area
- 2 bowling greens
- Historical features including a listed water wheel and the bandstand
- Town library and information centre (formerly Hare Hill House), where people can make general enquiries and access council services
- LEAP standard play area

#### **Middleton Truffet's Park**

4.4.14 Truffet Park achieved Green Flag status for the first time in 2009 after extensive improvements and ongoing maintenance. Truffet Park covers an area of 3.0 hectares. The Bowling Green is reported as a key feature of the Park and attracts a lot of local residents and visitors from further afield. The Park has a new circular footpath, which incorporates the new play area.

4.4.15 Other facilities include:

- Herbaceous beds
- Shrub areas
- Sensory Garden
- Wooded area
- Grassland areas
- Mini Arboretum
- LEAP standard play area
- Multi use events area
- Tennis courts
- Car park
- Wetland and wildlife areas
- Wildlife walk
- Floodlit crown green bowling greens and pavilion
- Toilets
- Circular footpath around the site

- Site based park warden
- Site based maintenance staff
- Secure fully fenced site

4.4.16 The Friends of Truffet Park are involved in helping to improve its facilities and set up events to attract the community to the area.

### **Chelmsford City Council**

4.4.17 The city of Chelmsford has been awarded ten Green Flag awards for its parks: Central Park, Hylands Estate, Coronation Park, Compass Gardens with Saltcoats Park, Chelmer Park, Boleyn Gardens in Beaulieu Park, Admirals Park/Tower Gardens (including West Park), and Melbourne Park with Chancellor Park and Brook End Gardens.

4.4.18 The city has also received Green Heritage Awards for Oaklands Park, Hylands Park and for Admirals Park, Tower Gardens and West Park. In addition Green Flag Community Awards were given to Marconi Ponds and Chelmer Valley Local Nature Reserves.

4.4.19 Some of the parks and open spaces within Chelmsford:

### **Coronation Park**

4.4.20 This is reported to be a popular park specialising in sporting activities. This park regularly wins awards for the quality of its rugby and cricket pitches. It is also the home of:

- Chelmsford Rugby Club
- Springfield Cricket Club
- Springfield Striders Running Club

4.4.21 There is the provision of a new innovative play area for juniors up to 12 years old. There are also places to picnic. The Park recently received the nationally acclaimed a Green Flag Award award.

### **Admirals Park and Tower Garden**

4.4.22 Admirals Park leads to Tower Gardens and West Park. It is one of Chelmsford's most popular parks. The park has a wide range of attractions and facilities such as:

- Car park
- Children's play area
- Cricket and football pitches
- Tennis courts (hard surface)
- Changing rooms
- Small woodland area
- Ancient wooded track covered in wild violets in spring
- Picnic tables
- Home of Chelmsford Bowls Club

4.4.23 There is a network of footpaths and cycleways linking the parkland with surrounding areas. Visitors can walk along the River Can which travels through the park.

4.4.24 Research of the history of Admirals Park has recently been carried out. Information, images and contributions from local residents have been collected. These details have been used to design a number of interpretation boards which are located throughout the park.

### **Hylands Park**

4.4.25 Hylands Park comprises over 574 acres which includes ancient woodland, grassland, ponds, lakes, formal gardens and an Adventure Castle play area. Car parking is free. The main Adventure Castle has two large sections of castle wall, one of which is fully inclusive and suitable for wheelchairs. The Castle Hamlet, located by the main Castle area, is suitable for children aged 6. Castle Kiosk Café sells snacks, hot and cold drinks and ice creams. Toilets and changing rooms are available. Seating is located within the main play area along with a large picnic area, which includes some picnic tables suitable for use with wheelchairs.

## **5 Equality Impact Assessment**

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny ensures that it adheres to the Council's statutory duty to provide the public with access to Scrutiny reports, briefing notes, agendas, minutes and other such documentation. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Panels are widely publicised, i.e. on the Council's website, copies issued to the local media and paper copies are made available in the Council's One Stop Shop and local libraries.

- 5.2 The Scrutiny Panel was mindful of the eight protected characteristics when undertaking this scrutiny activity so that any recommendations that it made could identify potential positive and negative impacts on any particular sector of the community. This was borne in mind as the Scrutiny Panel progressed with the review and evidence gathered.
- 5.3 So that the Scrutiny Panel obtains a wide range of views, a number of key witnesses provided evidence as detailed in section 3 of this report.
- 5.4 Details of the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken can be located on the Overview and Scrutiny [webpage](#).

## 6 Conclusions and Key Findings

- 6.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

### **Communication**

- 6.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted that Friends Groups consist of volunteers and communication is key. Communication could be enhanced by improved links with Northampton Borough Council's website and Friends Groups' websites, coupled with improved communications with Enterprise Management Services (EMS). The Scrutiny Panel noted and welcomed the good communication mechanisms that the Friends of West Hunsbury Parks had with EMS.
- 6.1.2 It was highlighted that the Friends of West Hunsbury Parks currently has excellent communication mechanisms with Northampton Borough Council and various local groups.
- 6.1.3 The Scrutiny Panel realised that the town's parks are not identifiable on Internet search engines, such as Google or on satellite navigation software. The usefulness of adding parks as points of interest was emphasised.
- 6.1.4 The work undertaken by the various Friends Groups is pivotal in the success in many of the Council's parks. The contribution from Friends Groups is also recognised with various different external funders which plays a key part in whether a park acquires funding from external Agencies.

6.1.5 The evidence gathered highlighted the need for the publicity of facilities available in the town's parks; together with a programme of community events.

6.1.6 The evidence gathered also emphasised the need for improved signage and visitor information in the town's parks; in particular the updating of the brown tourist signs.

### **Observations – Town's Parks**

6.1.7 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted that Northampton is proud of its parks, noting their diversity.

6.1.8 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that "one size does not fit all parks within Northampton" and initiatives and ideas from parks could be monitored in order for them to be mirrored in others.

6.1.9 The parks and open spaces detailed in the desktop research exercise are wide-ranging and comprise a number of facilities. A number being similar to those on offer at Northampton's parks, including:

- Aviary
- Sensory Gardens
- Formal gardens
- Memorial gardens
- Historical features and interpretation boards
- Seating
- Bowling green, tennis, football, cricket
- Pitch and putt
- Play areas
- Tea rooms/ refreshments
- Car parking
- Ponds
- Adventure areas
- Nature reserves

6.1.10 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised that a lot of the town's parks have a number of historical features, including one of the town's parks with a

registered battle field, one of only 44 in the country, and another with a registered ancient monument.

- 6.1.11 During its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Northampton Race Course looked pristine.
- 6.1.12 The Northampton Race Course is used by over 25 local football clubs. The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that the introduction of an on-line booking process for sports pitches would be a useful tool for Sports Clubs. On a Saturday morning, in excess of 2,000 people use the facilities on the Race Course.
- 6.1.13 Perception of Northampton Race Course is that it is not safe. To alleviate such perceptions the need for well-maintained lighting and pathways was highlighted.
- 6.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel was delighted to hear that Delapre Park had been awarded Green Flag status in July 2013.
- 6.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that Bradlaugh Fields, a wildlife park, has won a high number of awards.
- 6.1.16 It was noted that Abington Park is the town's central "show" park.
- 6.1.17 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Victoria Park, a "through" park has a recently established Friends Group.
- 6.1.18 From the results of the on-line survey, the Scrutiny Panel recognised that the town's three key parks are used most frequently by respondents.
- 6.1.19 The majority of individuals and groups that provided evidence are aware of local play areas in their neighbourhood.
- 6.1.20 The Scrutiny Panel noted that it was felt that the lack of paths and the feeling of insecurity at Eastfield Park are important factors in limiting the use of the park. However, the Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that discussions are taking place with the Friends Group and Enterprise Management Services (EMS).

- 6.1.21 During its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel observed a wide range of parks and open spaces in Northampton, noting the tranquillity and prettiness of Delapre Abbey and its various features. The special features and attractiveness of the other Parks and open spaces visited was also noted.
- 6.1.22 It was agreed that the responsibility for maintenance of the bridle way that runs through West Hunsbury Country Park should be clarified.
- 6.1.23 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there is a need for funding for restoration and contingency of scheduled monuments, such as the Hill Fort.

#### **Key facilities in the town's Parks**

- 6.1.24 Key facilities used by respondents to the Scrutiny Panel's core questions include:
- Cafés
  - Museum
  - Play areas
  - Lakes within the town's parks
  - Sports equipment
  - Skate park at Beckett's Park
  - Fitness Trail at Abington Park
  - Model Engineers Railway
  - Historic attractions
  - Using parks for sport and walking
- 6.1.25 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that users of the town's park require refreshments or a social hub. It is realised that cafes and such facilities make a valued contribution to park life.
- 6.1.26 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that access and safety are important to park users. Toilets were also highlighted as a key facility. It was felt that a set standard for toilet facilities in the town's parks is required. The Scrutiny Panel noted that a Friends Group manages and maintains the toilets within its local park. However, there is currently some doubt as to whether this arrangement will continue in the future.
- 6.1.27 The Scrutiny Panel was disappointed that the gents' toilets located in the upper park, Abington Park are not currently open. It also noted that some



of the fitness equipment, located in the lower park, requires maintenance work.

- 6.1.28 During its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel was disappointed to note the poor condition of the car park located at West Hunsbury Country Park.

### **Additional Facilities in the Town's Parks**

- 6.1.29 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that it would be an advantage to install picnic areas, such as those with a wooden roof, and brick barbeque areas in some of the town's parks. Brick barbeques (BBQs) could be used to house disposable BBQs. The installation of litter bins and measures to prevent fire and damage are seen as imperative if brick BBQs were put in.
- 6.1.30 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that disposable BBQs used in parks can create litter problems and felt that the introduction of a deposit scheme would act as a deterrent. Disposal BBQs that are used directly on the grass can often leave an unsightly black patch. The installation of permanent hard standings for BBQs in the town's parks was suggested.
- 6.1.31 The Scrutiny Panel felt that the provision of additional picnic areas in the town's parks would attract more visitors.
- 6.1.32 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned regarding lidless litter bins in some parks and the problems encountered during windy conditions. It highlighted the need for litter bins with lids in some parks, such as West Hunsbury Country Park, to prevent wildlife from accessing the contents of the bins. General litter and dog waste bins are placed throughout West Hunsbury Country Park, but not together. It was agreed that litter bins located near to the children's play areas are often too small.
- 6.1.33 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that it would be beneficial to users for litter and dog bins to be located next to each other in the town's parks.
- 6.1.34 It was concluded that the mowing schedule for West Hunsbury Country Park should clearly state that the whole area should not be mowed, only the informal walkways.
- 6.1.35 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for the Park Rangers to be easily accessible by the provision of either a central office located near to the park or the offer of regular surgeries. The need for their contact details to

be widely published was also recognised. The Scrutiny Panel emphasised the need for the Park Rangers Team to be provided with suitable, adequate administrative support.

6.1.36 The Scrutiny Panel agreed that the pond in Ecton Brook Pocket Park needed to be cleaned out.

6.1.37 The Scrutiny Panel considered the hard standing tennis courts, located in Northampton Race Course, could warrant being refurbished.

6.1.38 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the responses received to its core questions, noting the suggestions regarding additional facilities and services that might bring people into the town that would not ordinarily use them, including:

- BBQ area / Picnic area
- Improved Parking / Disabled parking facilities
- Cafes
- Additional seating
- Facilities for disabled people
- Additional sports facilities
- More facilities for older teenagers
- Additional appropriate play equipment
- Nature trails
- Presence of uniformed personnel, such as Police Officers
- Fountains / water features etc. Guided walks / orienteering trails / way-marked walks
- More events
- Improved access and facilities for people with disabilities, for example, walkways suitable for wheelchair use, appropriate changing facilities
- Indoor sports facilities
- Park Ranger's office located on site
- Additional bins and improved litter clearance
- Improved signage
- More toilet facilities, with set opening times

6.1.39 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged the perceived barriers that may deter people from using the town's parks, such as:

- Lack of parking and toilets in some parks
- Anti-social behaviour and not feeling safe
- Disabled access

- Insufficient benches/seating
- Maintenance of parks and littering
- Dog fouling and dog control

### **Role of Park Management Committees**

- 6.1.40 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that when a Friends Group is already in existence there is a danger that a Park Management Committee could duplicate its role. It also acknowledged that a Park Management Committee might be too big for some parks, such as the West Hunsbury Parks and smaller parks.
- 6.1.41 The Scrutiny Panel felt that the smaller parks and open spaces that do not warrant a Friends Group must not be forgotten.
- 6.1.42 The Scrutiny Panel supported the scheme called 'Dog Watch' that is organised by Northamptonshire Police recognising that promotion of this scheme would be useful to smaller parks and open spaces.
- 6.1.43 Co-option to Park Management Committees is supported.
- 6.1.44 The Scrutiny Panel noted the usefulness and benefit of an annual Park Forum.
- 6.1.45 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised that it is important that Park Management Committees are not lead by Northampton Borough Council and are of an appropriate size to enable decision making to take place. All members of the Park Management Committees should have a good understanding of their park.
- 6.1.46 It was considered that Terms of Reference for the Park Management Committees should be agreed from the outset.
- 6.1.47 From the evidence gathered, the Scrutiny Panel perceived that the key roles of the Park Management Committees should include:

- Producing, implementing and maintaining Management and Action Plans
- Park management
- Monitoring role
- Organising events and activities
- Oversee the maintenance of parks
- Provide support to voluntary groups
- To seek and maintain funding for the parks, where appropriate, work with Friends Groups in securing external funding
- Promoting of the park and its facilities
- Create Strategies for the local management of the parks, linking to the Council's wider policies and strategies
- Debating issues, such as how volunteers in the town's park can work alongside the maintenance contract
- A listening role
- Intelligence gathering

### **Membership of Park Management Committees**

6.1.48 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to receive responses to its core questions in respect of suggestions for membership of the Park Management Committees:

- Friends Groups
- Ward Councillor(s)
- Park User Group representatives and individuals that manage areas of parks
- Park users
- Park personnel
- Young people representatives
- Representatives from Agencies
- Representative from Enterprise Management Services (EMS); for example, Manager/Team Leader
- Representative from Northampton Borough Council
- Representatives from Sports Clubs
- Residents' Associations

6.1.49 It was acknowledged that it is expected that Friends Groups will run alongside and link into Park Management Committees.

6.1.50 From the desktop research exercise, the Scrutiny Panel noted that Peterborough City Council and the London Borough of Haringey had undertaken surveys asking residents for their views on the city and borough's parks. Headlines are details at paragraphs 4.3.9 and 4.4.8. The results of the surveys informed the management plans.

## **7 Recommendations**

7.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to improve community engagement within the town's parks.

Scrutiny Panel 1 recommends to Cabinet that:

### **Communication**

7.1.1 Communication with Friends Groups is enhanced by improved links with Northampton Borough Council's webpage and Friends Groups' webpages, coupled with improved communications with Enterprise Management Services (EMS); such as the sharing of maintenance schedules for parks.

7.1.2 A programme of community events is produced in association with all stakeholders, published on the Council's webpage and promoted to the community.

7.1.3 Information relating to facilities available in the town's parks is accessible on the Council's webpage.

7.1.4 A uniform on-line booking process for sports pitches and events is introduced.

7.1.5 The town's parks are clearly identifiable on Internet search engines, such as Google, and highlighted as points of interest on satellite navigation software, such as Garmin and Tom Tom.

7.1.6 Obsolete signs, in place around the town's parks, are removed and all relevant signage and visitor information is in situ and is clearly visible.

7.1.7 The Highways Agency is asked to update its brown tourist signage that details points of interest across the town; specifically ensuring that signage for the town's parks is clear.

7.1.8 The Scheme "Dog Watch" organised by Northamptonshire Police is promoted.

## **Town's Parks**

- 7.1.9 Cabinet is asked to ensure that where appropriate, initiatives and ideas from parks are monitored in order for them to be mirrored in others.

### **Park Action Plans**

The following recommendations are indicative of the content of the Park Action Plans and the appropriate timescales should be assigned. However, the Scrutiny Panel acknowledges that a number of the recommendations are long term recommendations.

- 7.1.10 Appropriate sources of funding are identified for the restoration and contingency of scheduled monuments.
- 7.1.11 Lighting and footpaths are well maintained in the town's parks and upgraded where necessary.
- 7.1.12 Footpaths are installed in the town's smaller parks to improve disabled access.
- 7.1.13 Responsibility for the bridle way that runs through West Hunsbury Country Park is clarified.
- 7.1.14 The mowing schedule for West Hunsbury Country Park and Cherry Orchard, Hardingstone, clearly states that the whole area is not be mowed, only the informal walkways.
- 7.1.15 The pond in Ecton Brook Pocket Park is cleaned out and the condition of other water features in the town's parks is assessed and appropriate action taken.
- 7.1.16 Where present in the town's parks, hard standing tennis courts are refurbished.
- 7.1.17 Where possible, litter and dog bins are located side by side in the town's parks.
- 7.1.18 Bins with lids/slots are installed in some parks, such as West Hunsbury Country Park, to prevent wildlife accessing the contents of the bins.
- 7.1.19 Picnic areas and permanent hard standings for BBQs are installed in some of the town's parks, together with litter bins and measures to prevent fire and damage.

- 7.1.20 A set standard for the provision of toilet facilities within the town's parks is introduced.
- 7.1.21 The opening times of the toilet facilities within the town's parks are advertised.
- 7.1.22 A funding pot is identified to be allocated to Community Groups that maintain toilets within their local park.
- 7.1.23 In order to make contact with the Park Rangers easier, a central office, located close to the town's Parks, or the provision of regular advertised surgeries in the park is provided.
- 7.1.24 Administrative support is provided for the Park Rangers to enable them to spend more time in the town's parks.
- 7.1.25 Contact details and a report of the activities of the Park Rangers are published on the Council's webpage and promoted to all stakeholders.
- 7.1.26 The role of the Park Ranger is clarified and details disseminated to all stakeholders.

### **Key roles of the Park Management Committees**

- 7.1.27 The key roles of the Park Management Committees includes:
- Producing, implementing and maintaining Management and Action Plans
  - Park management
  - Monitoring role
  - Organising events and activities
  - Oversee the maintenance of parks
  - Provide support to voluntary groups
  - To seek and maintain funding for the parks, where appropriate, work with Friends Groups in securing external funding
  - Promoting of the park and its facilities
  - Create Strategies for the local management of the parks, linking to the Council's wider policies and strategies
  - Debating issues, such as how volunteers in the town's park can work alongside the maintenance contract
  - A listening role
  - Intelligence gathering

The Scrutiny Panel highlights the need for meaningful and outcome driven terms of reference for the Park Management Committees and has produced a

draft terms of reference, as attached at Appendix (i) for Cabinet's consideration.

7.1.28 In addition to Park Management Committees, an annual Park Forum is held.

### **Membership of Park Management Committees**

7.1.29 Membership of the Park Management Committees consists of around ten members, typically drawn from representatives from:

- Friends Groups
- Ward Councillor(s)
- Parish Council representatives where appropriate
- Park User Group representatives and individuals that manage areas of parks
- Park users
- Park personnel
- Young people representatives
- Representatives from Agencies
- Representative from Enterprise Management Services (EMS); for example, Manager/Team Leader
- Representative from Northampton Borough Council
- Representatives from Sports Clubs
- Residents' Associations

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

7.1.30 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.



**DRAFT PARK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE****1. Objectives**

- 1.1 To produce, maintain and oversee the implementation of a Park Management Plan for the relevant park.
- 1.2 To encourage the active participation of the local community and Park users, such as sports clubs and other local organisations, in the discussion of issues and the dissemination of information relating to the park.
- 1.3 To meet at least four times a year to discuss the issues that affect the Park.
- 1.4 To provide an active line of communication for local groups, organisations and sports clubs with an interest in the wellbeing and future enhancement of the Park.
- 1.5 To deal with issues of mutual interest to all users and not with specific issues between individuals or parties.
- 1.6 To create strategies for the local management of the Park, providing a listening role and gathering intelligence to link to the Council's wider policies and strategies.
- 1.7 To develop strategies for the integration of work of volunteers alongside others undertaking practical work in the Park
- 1.8 To identify and pursue sources of funding for parks, where appropriate completing appropriate funding applications

**2. Membership**

- 2.1 The Management Committee may involve some or all of the following, District Councillors representing local wards, Parish Councillors, Members of Friends of the Park Groups, representatives of park users groups, officers of Northampton Borough Council, in particular the Park Ranger for the relevant park, , a representative Enterprise. (no more than one representative from each group at any meeting).

**3 Chairmanship**

- 3.1 The Chairman will be elected from the voting membership and shall hold the role for one year.

**4 Voting**

- 4.1 Formal voting should not normally take place, the aim being to achieve a consensus view in developing and delivering Park Plans, Where voting is unavoidable elected councillors and one representative from each organisation shall be entitled to vote.

**5 Venue for Meetings**

- 5.1 Meetings will normally take place on site, if facilities are not suitable the Guildhall shall be used.

## **Appendices**



## Appendix A

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

#### SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – Improving the Town's Parks

##### 1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

- To improve community engagement within the town's parks

##### 2. Outcomes Required

- To make recommendations for the improvement within the town's parks that better meet the needs of the community
- To ensure that every park and open space within the town achieves its potential
- To inform the terms of reference and membership of the Park Management Committees

##### 3. Information Required

- Background data
- Background reports
- Best practice data
- Desktop research
- Evidence from expert internal witnesses
- Evidence from expert external witnesses
- Site visits

##### 4. Format of Information

- Background reports such as:

Improving Northampton's Parks and Open Spaces Report  
(Cabinet 12 June 2013)  
Parks and Open Space Strategy for Northampton

- Background data to inform the terms of reference and membership of the Park Management Committees
- Evidence from the Cabinet Member for Environment
- Evidence from the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement
- Evidence from ward Councillors with key parks within their wards

- Evidence from Friends Groups/User Groups
- Evidence from the Park Rangers
- Evidence from Enterprise Management Services (EMS)
- Desktop research identifying best practice elsewhere
- Site visits to the town's three key parks:

Abington Park  
Delapre Abbey  
Racecourse

## 5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of meetings
- Desktop research
- Site visits
- Officer reports
- Presentations
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Evidence:-

➤ Key witnesses as detailed in section 4 of this scope

## 6. Co-Options to the Review

- Nicola Hedges, Chair, Friends of Delapre Abbey, Brian Stevens, Chair, Friends of Abington Park, Mavis Wilmshurst, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks and Sean Silver, Chair, Friends of the Racecourse, to be approached suggesting that they are co-opted to this Review for its life.

## 7 Equality Impact Screening Assessment

- An Equality Impact Screening Assessment to be undertaken on the scope of the Review

## 8 Evidence gathering Timetable

June 2013 to November 2013

- |                 |                         |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| • 6 June 2013   | - Scoping meeting       |
| • 1 July 2013   | - Evidence gathering    |
| • 5 August 2013 | - Evidence gathering    |
| • 4 September   | - Evidence gathering    |
| • 2 October     | - Evidence gathering    |
| • 25 November   | - Approval final report |

Various site visits will be programmed during this period if required.

Meetings to commence at 6.00 pm

## **9. Responsible Officers**

Lead Officers            Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities  
                                 Steve Elsey, Head of Public Protection

Co-ordinator            Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

## **10. Resources and Budgets**

Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities, and Steve Elsey, Head of Public Protection, to provide internal advice.

## **11. Final report presented by:**

Completed by 25 November 2013. Presented by the Chair of the Panel to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

## **12. Monitoring procedure:**

Review the impact of the report after six months (June/July 2014)

## APPENDIX B

### SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – IMPROVING THE TOWN’S PARKS

#### CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a Review looking at improving the town’s parks and is focussing on improving community engagement within the town’s parks. A series of key questions have been put together to inform the Panel’s evidence base.

- Which park do you use most often and why?
- Which of the facilities provided in the town’s parks are used the most?
- What facilities and services do you feel would bring people into parks that might otherwise not use them?
- Do you feel there are any barriers that stop people from using the town’s parks?
- What other services do park users want from the town’s parks?
- Are you aware of, and do you use, a local play area in your neighbourhood? Do you know how well this is used and why do you think this is? Additional question to community groups/users

It is initially proposed that Park Management Committees are established in Abington Park, Delapre Abbey and the Racecourse, however it is suggested that this initiative is extended further if there is strong evidence of community support. It is proposed that membership of Park Management Committees will be drawn from elected Members, representatives from key community groups (including Friends Groups) and members of the public who are recognised as being active in each of the parks.

- Who should be a key representative on the new Park Management Committees and why?
- In your opinion, what should be the key roles of the Park Management Committees?

**Enterprise Management Services (EMS)**

**Maintenance of Parks - Conditions**

**Grass cutting**

Grass cutting shall be in line with the environmental strategy of the park

**Hedge maintenance**

Hedges are to be maintained in accordance with the management plan for hedges. And no work should be undertaken which affects the habitat or wildlife appropriate to the species of plant and hedge

**Maintenance of furniture**

Any unsafe Bench should be repaired or removed and the area made safe

**Notice boards**

Once during each month all notice and information boards should be inspected and all vandalism repaired and all graffiti removed. If prior to the inspection damage or graffiti is observed then remedial action will be taken and not wait for the inspection to take place

**Sweeping and litter collection**

All paths within the park should be swept on a weekly basis and kept free of all refuse and litter. The park should be inspected daily to remove all litter and refuse all litter and dog bins should be emptied within the park twice per week.

During leaf fall all leaves that fall on paths, roads and grassed areas will be removed.

**Play area management**

The surface of the play area to be kept clear of all litter and refuse

All pieces of play equipment will be inspected on a weekly basis



## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Appendix D**

## **SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – IMPROVING THE TOWN’S PARKS**

### **BRIEFING NOTE: SITE VISITS TO A VARIETY OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES IN NORTHAMPTON**

#### **1 SITE VISITS**

##### **1.1 DELAPRE ABBEY**

1.1.1 On Wednesday 7 August 2013, Councillor Tony Ansell, Councillor Phil Larratt, Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Race Course (co-optee), Ruth Austen, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection), Jason Toyne, Park Ranger, Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, and Max Lang representing Friends of Delapre Abbey visited Delapre Abbey.

1.1.2 The Site Visit convened at 10.30am in the main car park at Delapre Abbey. The car park was well used. At the entrance to the Abbey the model engineers is located. Delapre Abbey comprises approximately 240 hectares of land.

1.1.3 It was noted that phase one of refurbishing the Ha Ha is now complete. Plans are being worked up for phase two.

1.1.4 The Tea Rooms are open daily from 10am to 5pm. Friends of Delapre Abbey (FODA) run the tea rooms, which are located in the picturesque walled gardens. The Site Visit observed a number of visitors using the tea rooms.

1.1.5 The walled gardens are used by a variety of groups including:

- ECO kids
- Richmond Retirement Village
- St Andrews



- Olympus Care Services
- Pleydell Allotment Association has a mini allotment within the walled gardens and this was observed as part of Britain in Bloom judging 2013. The theme for 2013 was edible plants.



1.1.6 Various pieces of art work are located in the walled gardens:

- The lovers
- Lady with a fish
- Lady with a cat



1.1.7 FODA has raised funds to refurbish two of the greenhouses located in the walled gardens and is currently fundraising to refurbish the third one.

1.1.8 One full time gardener and an apprentice cover Delapre Abbey.

1.1.9 Toilet facilities are provided and these are maintained by FODA.

1.1.10 The water feature provides a tranquil area. The stream runs through the water garden. Water is recirculated and mains topped up. Improvement works has taken place in this area over the past three years. A Volunteer Task Group carries out a Pond Dipping Survey on the first Wednesday of every month.

1.1.11 A location sign is in situ in grounds, along with a number of benches, litter and dog bins.

- 1.1.12 800 oak trees (Charter Wood) were planted in 1988 for the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Charter of Northampton. Funding for the purchase of the trees had been one of the Mayor's charities during this period.



- 1.1.13 The grounds of Delapre Abbey are also home to a lake which is used by the Water Skiing Club and a local Anglers Club. Various fishing boards are located around the lake. Swimming is prohibited. A footpath runs all the way around the perimeter of the lake. The Site Visit noted areas BBQs had been placed, leaving the grass burnt.
- 1.1.14 The pathway from Avon to Hardingstone runs through the grounds of the Abbey.
- 1.1.15 Cottages located in the grounds are occupied.
- 1.1.16 An informal gathering of women exercising was observed, there were a number of people walking their dogs around the grounds, a family out on a bike ride was seen and a further group of women and children had put up a bouncy castle, goal posts and picnic equipment in the meadow part of grounds.

## 1.2 **ECTON BROOK POCKET PARK**

- 1.2.1 On Wednesday 7 August 2013, at approximately 12 noon, Councillor Tony Ansell, Councillor Phil Larratt, Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Race Course (co-optee), Ruth Austen, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection), Jason Toyne, Park Ranger and Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, visited Ecton Brook Pocket Park.



1.2.2 Ecton Brook Pocket Park is one of 162 green spaces in Northampton. A stream runs alongside it. There are a number of trees and shrubs within the Pocket Park, along with a pond which the Site Visit felt needed clearing out. A footpath runs along the length of the Pocket Park, which has a number of outdoor lights situated along it. A bench was observed near to the pond, along with a litter and a dog bin.

### 1.3 NORTHAMPTON RACE COURSE



1.3.1 On Tuesday, 13 August 2013, Councillor Tony Ansell, Anne Stevens, Secretary, Friends of Abington Park, Mavis Wilmshurt, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks, Ruth Austen, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection), Jason Toyne, Park Ranger and Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, visited Northampton Race Course.

1.3.2 The Site Visit convened in the car park at around 10.30am. The car park was well used. Northampton Race Course comprises approximately 117 acres of land which is predominantly open space and sports areas:

- Football pitches
- Basketball courts
- Cricket pitches
- Bowls greens
- Tennis courts
- Table Tennis tables

1.3.3 Table Tennis tables were installed as part of a Sport England Initiative.



- 1.3.4 The Site Visit noted that the Umbrella Fair Organisation is currently refurbishing the café area with anticipated opening over the next few months. The Umbrella Fair is scheduled to take place on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 August 2013, with a number of community events, live music and stalls. Northampton Borough Council will be manning a stall.
- 1.3.5 A fun fair is held twice annually at the Race Course.
- 1.3.6 There are two children's play areas located at the Race Course and a "Dragon Mound" for imaginative play.
- 1.3.7 The old Pavilion is now a restaurant.
- 1.3.8 Domes detailing maps of the Race Course are placed in a few locations.



- 1.3.9 Three gardeners cover Northampton Race Course.
- 1.3.10 The Race Course is frequently used as a thoroughfare from the town centre to Kingsley and Kingsthorpe. The footpath is lit over-night.
- 1.3.11 Benches, litter and dog bins are placed in various locations, there isn't any seating near to the sports pitches. The toilets are not in use. The Umbrella café will have toilet facilities which will be available for use during its opening hours. It is evident that the dog bins are widely used by dog walkers.
- 1.3.12 The Site Visit noted that the hard standing tennis courts could warrant being refurbished and that the trees had not been lopped this year. Areas of graffiti and damage to the railings were observed.



## **1.4 ABINGTON PARK**

1.4.1 On Tuesday 13 August 2013, at approximately 11:30am, Councillor Tony Ansell, Anne Stevens, Secretary, Friends of Abington Park, Mavis Wilmshurt, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks, Ruth Austen, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection), Jason Toyne, Park Ranger, Vikkie Maloney, Abington Park Ranger, and Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, together with Brian Hoare, Brian Stevens, John Taylor and Bill Crane, representing Friends of Abington Park, visited Abington Park.

1.4.2 The Park is known as the upper and lower parks. The upper park is also referred to as the ornamental park which comprises the museum, aviaries, café and ornamental flower beds. The toilet facilities located in the upper park have been refurbished.

1.4.3 Abington Park comprises approximately 47 hectares of land.

1.4.4 Most cottages situated in the park are occupied. One is currently vacant.

1.4.5 Two gardeners cover Abington Park.

1.4.6 The Parish Church of Abington is located in the park.

1.4.7 The museum is located in the upper park. It is open from Thursday to Sunday, 1pm to 5pm, during April to October.



1.4.8 There is a wide variety of species of trees and an abundance of flower beds which the Site Visit felt were very pretty this year.

- 1.4.9 A number of benches are placed throughout the park, some of which contain “in memory of” plaques.
- 1.4.10 The café located in the upper park is very well used and the Site Visit observed a number of families enjoying the aviaries.
- 1.4.11 The upper park houses a band stand together with well-maintained bowls green, tennis courts, Memorial Rose garden, Sensory Garden and table tennis tables, which are very well used.
- 1.4.12 Toilet facilities have been refurbished in the upper park. The Site Visit was disappointed that the gents’ toilets are not currently open.
- 1.4.13 The play area, located on the lower park, is very well used comprising a number of play equipment and two bouncy castles/slides. There is also a snack van. The lower park also has the provision of fitness trails. The lower park is an activity based park. The Site Visit noticed that some of the fitness equipment requires maintenance work.
- 1.4.14 ECO Kids Lottery Heritage Funding has been acquired for a project in Abington Park. Three tree trails are being put together and a ‘phone app. developed so that all trees can be identified. There will also be an historical trail which will identify, for example, the medieval housing platform and the old fishponds.
- 1.4.15 Plans are being drawn up for the Entrance Plaza for the lower park.
- 1.4.16 Plans are also being worked on to refurbish the old rose gardens into an open air theatre.



- 1.4.17 The Site Visit observed some ‘blank’ wooden plaques that should identify which Mayoress planted that tree. Plans are in place to refurbish some of the tarmac areas of the park.
- 1.4.18 Refurbishment of the lake area was completed in 2011/2012. The Site Visit was disappointed that the banks had not been tidied after the work had been completed. It was noted that Enterprise Management Services (EMS) had seeded the banks but the seeds had been eaten

by birds. Local Angler Groups frequently use the upper lake and the Model Boat Club uses the top small lake at weekends.



- 1.4.19 2,500 bulbs were planted by the Friends of Abington Park alongside the walkway to the lake which looked very picturesque over the spring months. There is a natural play area located near to the lake. Mini beast events, such as pond dipping, are often organised. Friends of Abington Park recently received an offer of free water lilies, together with free maintenance. Discussions regarding the offer are taking place. Since the site visit has taken place, it has been confirmed that the water lilies have now been installed.
- 1.4.20 Organised cross country events, such as runs hosted by the Heart Foundation, Race for Life, Race for Life for men are held at the Lower Park. A number of running groups also utilise the park for training.
- 1.4.21 Fifa Football Club uses the pitches regularly during the school holidays. Military Fitness groups take place five times a week, cricket and football is held during the season, a number of formal and informal groups and gatherings use the park on a regular basis, for activities such as buggy walks.
- 1.4.22 The breadth of users at the park is vast. A lot of parked cars were observed along the road to the entrance to the park, as were two ice cream vans.

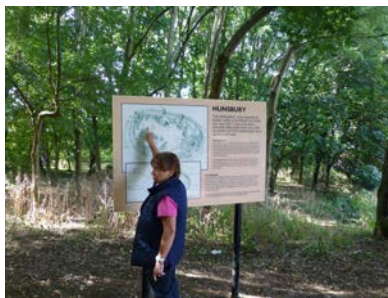
## **1.5 WEST HUNSBURY COUNTRY PARK**

- 1.5.1 On Monday 2 September 2013 Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Race Course, Mavis Wilmshurt, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks, Ruth Austen, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection), Jason Toyne, Park Ranger and Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, together with Anne Jones and Diana Timms, representing Friends of West Hunsbury Parks, visited West Hunsbury Country Park.

- 1.5.2 The Site Visit convened in the car park of the Country Park at 10.30am. The car park was well used but the Site Visit observed that the surface could make access difficult for those with limited mobility.



- 1.5.3 A location map is situated on the entrance to the Park.



- 1.5.4 The Park is well used, particularly by people walking their dogs.
- 1.5.5 Located by the car park is a café, Drovers Return, which had a number of customers using the outside seating.
- 1.5.6 Entrances to the Park have been secured, preventing vehicular access.
- 1.5.7 The Park comprises a number of historical features, such as the Iron Age Hill Fort. The Fort is a designated Schedule Ancient Monument. Banbury Lane (an ancient Drover's Road) runs alongside the Fort and through the park. A panoramic view of the town can be seen during the late autumn/winter months when the trees have shed their leaves. During the summer months the view is obscured by trees.



- 1.5.8 Northampton Ironstone Railway Trust opens the old railway over bank holiday weekends. During these events, the crossing that is situated in the Park is manned.





- 1.5.9 A nursery of trees was planted a number of years ago. The majority of the trees survived and the Site Visit observed that this area appeared rather crowded.



- 1.5.10 General litter and dog waste bins are placed throughout the park, but not together. The bins are emptied once a week. The Site Visit felt that the litter bins located near to the children's play area are too small. Litter bins with lids would be a useful feature in the Park to prevent wildlife from accessing the contents of the bins.
- 1.5.11 A local primary school uses the Park as part of the Forest Schools initiative.
- 1.5.12 Students from Moulton College have assisted in the maintenance work of the bridge.
- 1.5.13 Representatives of Friends of Hunsbury Parks confirmed that natural walkways were now mowed but previously the whole area had been mowed.



- 1.5.14 There are two small play areas in the Park and the Friends of Hunsbury Parks are seeking funding to install further play equipment. A number of benches are situated close to the play areas. The play areas were being used during the site visit.



- 1.5.15 The Site Visit confirmed that it felt that the responsibility for maintenance of the bridle way that runs through the park should be clarified.

## **1.6 BRADLAUGH FIELDS AND BARN COMMUNITY WILDLIFE PARK**

- 1.6.1 On Monday 2 September 2013, at approximately 12 noon, Alan Borrell, Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Race Course, Mavis Wilmschurt, Chair, Friends of West Hunsbury Parks, Ruth Austen, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection), Jason Toyne, Park Ranger and Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, visited Bradlaugh Fields and Barn Community Wildlife Park.
- 1.6.2 Developed from a former golf course, Bradlaugh Fields is a 60-hectare site. It opened in 1998 and was designed by the local community for the local community.
- 1.6.3 A third of the British butterfly species can be found in the Fields. The Fields are also a protected area for badgers.
- 1.6.4 The Site Visit found the Fields to be a tranquil area.
- 1.6.5 The Fields attracts a wide range of visitors each year from education groups to local community activities.
- 1.6.6 The Site Visit observed a number of people using the Fields, mainly walking or walking with dogs. A number of benches and seating areas are situated in the Fields.
- 1.6.7 Litter and dog waste bins are located side by side.
- 1.6.8 The Site Visit noted a number of signs to the entrances to the Fields, some of which had been vandalised.



1.6.9 The Fields does not have parking facilities and can be accessed on foot via a number of accesses. One entrance can be accessed by vehicles.

1.6.10 Natural walkways are mowed throughout the Fields.



1.6.11 A well-used pathway runs through the Fields. Lighting is situated along the pathway.

1.6.12 The Friends of Bradlaugh Fields installed a Sensory Garden which is a beautiful feature of the Fields.



1.6.13 The Fields is home to five ponds of varying size and shape. A water feature leading to one of the lakes is another attractive feature within the Fields.



- 1.6.14 The Barn is open for refreshments on Saturdays and Sundays from 9.30am to 11.30am and Wednesdays from 1pm to 3pm. CCTV cameras are in situ on the Barn. A lake is situated close to the Barn, with a wooden walkway around its perimeter. A local nursery uses the Barn on Wednesdays, during term time.



- 1.6.15 A striking view of the town can be seen from the Fields.



## 1.7 CASTLE HOUSE

- 1.7.1 Details were obtained from the relevant department regarding the status and future use of this area.
- 1.7.2 Castle House is a vacant two storey office building fronting onto Marefair, adjacent to Doddridge Car Park. Northamptonshire County Council is leading on the potential acquisition of this property, to support the Heritage Gateway project. The building is relatively modern and consideration is being given to the potential demolition of the property, as part of the overall vision for the locality.

Brief Author: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – IMPROVING THE TOWN’S PARKS**

**BRIEFING NOTE: DESKTOP RESEARCH  
EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

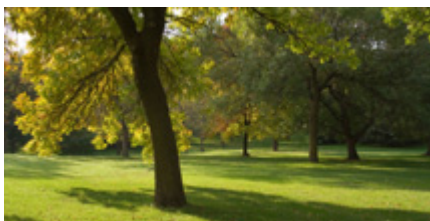
- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 1 (Improving the Town’s) agreed that it would receive details of parks external to Northampton that have been noted as best practice.
- 1.2 Comparable districts were also contacted regarding the provision of their parks.

**2 COMPARABLE DISTRICTS**

- 2.1 Desktop research was undertaken and contact was made with the following regarding the provision of their parks:
  - Peterborough City Council
  - Norwich City Council
  - Milton Keynes Council

**2.2 Peterborough**

**Central Park**



- 2.2.1 Central park holds a Green Flag award.
- 2.2.2 The following facilities are available:
  - paddling pool

- sunken garden
- sensory garden
- aviary
- bowling greens
- putting green
- tennis (grass and synthetic)
- bowling
- children's play area
- picnic area
- paddling pool
- sandpit
- formal gardens
- Buttercross Tearooms (open all year-round)

2.2.3 It is reported that a number of events take place in the park ranging from concerts, open air theatre productions, sports courses, teddy bears' picnics and fun days.

2.2.4 There is a Park Ranger service, whose community-based projects includes educational visits, wildflower planting, installation of school-built bat boxes, local sponsorship for the formal flower beds and continued development with the Friends of the Park Group.

### **Bretton Park**

2.2.5 Bretton Park is reported to be one of the Peterborough City Council's largest green open spaces. Facilities provided include a large children's play area within the main part of the park, a smaller play area and a BMX track which is found to be very popular with young people. There are tennis courts, football pitches and one cricket pitch which are all reported to be very well used all year round. A number of benches are situated in the shade of the trees. The annual Community Summer Festival takes place in Bretton Park which includes fairground rides, a number of stalls and music.

### **Itter Park**



2.2.6 Facilities at Itter Park include a refurbished play area, hard and grass tennis courts, a bowling green and a putting green. There are also two football pitches which are used by a local team in the winter season.

There is also a sensory garden feature, table tennis tables and toilet facilities.

### **Nature Reserves and Wildlife areas**

2.2.7 There are nine nature reserves and wildlife areas in the Peterborough area, an example being Cuckoo's Hollow:

#### **Cuckoo's Hollow**

2.2.8 In the late 1970's Cuckoo's Hollow was redesigned. A lake was created, the site shaped, trees and shrubs planted, footpaths constructed and bridges built. There is an island in the centre of the lake which is used by ducks, swans and other waterfowl. Bats frequent the area too.

2.2.9 The 'Friends of Cuckoo's Hollow' is reported to be a very pro-active local group.

3.2.10 The area can be accessed by cycle routes and footpaths. There is also the provision of a car park.

### **Playgrounds**

2.2.11 Peterborough City Council provides over 200 play areas in and around Peterborough. The equipment ranges from pre-school doorstep facilities to activity areas for young people. Initiatives to enhance play opportunities are undertaken through a programme of improvements and by providing new facilities within new housing developments. Many of the old play areas have been removed and replaced with new, modern play areas with sturdy equipment on soft surfacing. A number of Skate Parks, BMX tracks and Multi-use Games Areas (MUGA's) are provided.

### **Survey**

2.2.12 Officers at Peterborough undertook a survey in two of the Council's parks, Central Park and Itter Park. Although not extensive surveys, they offer some insight into these two public parks. A precis of the findings is detailed below:

2.2.13 Tennis and bowling remain popular facilities plus Central Park's paddling pool and Bretton Park's water parks. MUGAs are popular with young people and are flexible enough to suit them and meet their needs. Skateparks and play areas that offer real play value are popular.

2.2.14 The Neighbourhood and Events Co-Ordinator felt that a good café brings people into parks that would not usually use them and out of the ordinary attractions. Peterborough offers drive-in film shows that are proving popular. An Eid in the Park faith service is held Central Park.

2.2.15 Possible barriers that might deter people using the city's parks include green spaces that are poorly maintained and have little to offer. Dog fouling and anti-social behaviour. People often invest in their own gardens to create an enjoyable outdoor room on their property.

2.2.16 The Neighbourhood and Events Co-Ordinator advised that Friends Groups which are supported by the Local Authority, with a visible acknowledgement that their thoughts and opinions are valued, are very useful.

## **2.3 Norwich**

2.3.1 There are 23 formal parks in Norwich with over 40 open spaces. There are in excess of 40 natural areas, which includes Nature Reserves and more than 80 equipped play areas.

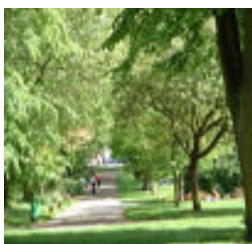
2.3.2 Examples of parks in Norwich are detailed below:

### **Eaton Park**



2.3.3 Eaton Park is the largest of Norwich's historic parks which covers over 80 acres. It is reported to be one of the City's finest green spaces with stunning trees and many facilities for use by the public. The park comprises bowling and croquet greens, tennis courts and a miniature railway located near to the entrance. The quadrant pavilions in the centre of the park enclose a rotunda surrounded by seating on a gravelled space. The park also has a Café, changing rooms and toilet facilities. There is a lily pond and model boating pond. A number of pitches are used for football, lacrosse and cricket. There is a children's play area and a cycle speedway track. A Community Centre is situated at the park; the rooms are often hired by several groups. It is located close to a pitch and putt course, skateboard/BMX park and netball court. The park is traffic free.

### **Chapelfield Gardens**





2.3.4 Chapelfield Gardens is situated in the city centre and is reported to be a popular meeting place. The gardens consist of a toddler and juniors' play area, a place for teens to meet and areas for games of petanque, giant chess and draughts. The gardens are used, particularly in the summer months, for different outdoor events hosted by Norwich City Council including bandstand concerts and an annual music festival and funfair.

### **Toddler and juniors' play area – Chapelfield Gardens**

2.3.5 It is reported that this play area is very popular with younger children and their families. It was refurbished in 2011-12. Examples of the equipment are pictured below:



### **Adventure area for older children and teens – Chapelfield Gardens**

2.3.6 The Adventure area was designed particularly to give teens an extra place to meet up and chat to friends. It has two pieces of equipment, a comet tail to climb and sit on and hang off, and a basket swing.



### **Mousehold Heath**



2.3.7 Mousehold Heath is a 184 acre area made up of heathland, woodland and recreational open space. It is the largest local nature reserve managed by Norwich City Council.

2.3.8 Officers at Norwich City Council feel that that Eaton park and Chapelfield Gardens are the most often used, Eaton because of its size and the variety of facilities on offer (basketball, skate park, cycle speedway, football, cricket, tennis, bowls, croquet, model boating, miniature railway, play area, pitch and putt, putting, bandstand, lily pond and water feature) and Chapelfield mainly because of its central location as well as the grassy areas and attractive trees and planting.

2.3.9 The skate park at Eaton is reported to be very popular, as well as the park run event. The splash park at Waterloo Park, the pitch and putt at Eaton Park and Mousehold Heath and football pitches are well used generally across the city. Chapelfield Gardens does not have so many facilities; Officers felt that city centre people are satisfied with grass and trees in a welcoming environment.

2.3.10 In response to the question regarding the facilities and services that would bring people into parks that might otherwise not use them, Officers advised that this depends on the type of park and the location, for example: a multi-use games area can be popular in some places but not so well used in others. Other ideas are: coaching sessions, fitness classes, community events such as summer playdays organised by the City Council or events organised by local organisations.

2.3.11 Barriers that might stop people from using the City's parks are reported to be around dog control, either too restrictive or not restrictive enough, lack of nearby parking, perceived fear of crime or anti-social behaviour.

2.3.12 Other facilities that people want from the City's parks include casual football goals (junior and adult), outdoor gym equipment, clean toilets, nice cafes, better dog enforcement, park keepers, improved security, wildlife friendly environments, clean and well maintained spaces.

2.3.13 The Parks and Open Spaces Officer advised that there is a well-run Friends group at Eaton Park who are an asset to the park raising funds and carrying out small maintenance tasks, organising small events and raising the profile of the park on Facebook and twitter.

## **2.4 Milton Keynes**

2.4.1 Open space in Milton Keynes currently covers approximately 2,895 hectares over 20% of the total City area, which is reported to place it among the highest local authorities in terms of open space per resident.

2.4.2 In Milton Keynes, there are:

- 565 play areas
- 1,200 hectares open space (Managed by Milton Keynes Council)
- 1,800 hectares open space (Managed by the Parks Trust)

- 250 hectares accessible woodland

### **The Parks Trust**

2.4.3 The Parks Trust is an independent charity that owns and cares for much of Milton Keynes parks and green space including river valleys, woodlands, lakesides, parks and landscaped areas alongside the main roads. This equates to around 25 per cent of the new city area.

2.4.4 It is reported that the city's founders wanted to be sure that such a unique green landscape would be managed and protected forever, without having to compete for funds with other council priorities. Therefore, the Parks Trust was created in 1992 to care for most of the city's green space and was endowed with a substantial property and investment portfolio. The income from this portfolio pays for the vital work of nurturing and enhancing the landscape. The Parks Trust is self-financing.

2.4.5 The range of open spaces and the areas they serve in Milton Keynes are reported:-

- Incidental open space
- Play Areas
- Local Parks
- District Parks
- Linear Parks
- Country Parks

2.4.6 Chepstow Drive Local Park was first awarded its Green Flag award in 2007, New Bradwell Park achieve Green Flag status in 2008 and Eaglestone Local Park in 2009. Leon Recreation Ground achieved Green Flag accreditation in 2011.

2.4.7 Examples of parks in Milton Keynes are detailed below:

#### **Chepstow Drive Local Park**



2.4.8 Chepstow Drive Local Park is a large informal area. It consists of around 4 hectares.

#### 2.4.9 Features of the park include:

- Sufficient mown grassed area to provide for informal recreational use
- Contribution to landscape structure
- Allotments
- Equipped play provision
- Some youth provision including a youth shelter
- Pond feature
- Areas to promote wildlife

#### **Willen Lake South**



2.4.10 South Willen Lake is reported to be the busiest park in the region, attracting more than one million visitors each year to take part in water sports, golf, high ropes, special events, or to jog, picnic, walk, play, etc.

2.4.11 A new attraction, Aerial Extreme, has been installed in the park. It comprises adventure rope courses for all ages.

2.4.12 A miniature railway operates at summer weekends and some school holidays.

2.4.13 South Willen Lake is part of an orienteering course used by a local club.

2.4.14 A variety of events are held in the park including the dragon boat festival and the Santa jog.

2.4.15 The Park is reported to be home to a variety of birdlife.

2.4.16 Facilities provided in the park include:

- Public toilets
- Trim trail
- Cycle hire
- Fishing
- Mini golf
- Picnic tables
- Seating
- Play area
- Refreshments

## **Leon Recreation Ground**

- 2.4.17 Leon Recreational Ground is a large formal area of just over 4.5 hectares.
- 2.4.18 The majority of the centre of the park is grassed. Pathways along the sides of the area run through avenues of mature trees.
- 2.4.19 Various recreational facilities are located in the northern half of the park.
- 2.4.20 Facilities at the Recreation Ground include:
- A contribution to landscape structure
  - Sufficient mown grassed area to provide for informal recreational use
  - Equipped play provision including skate ramps
  - Some youth provision
  - Fitness Equipment
  - Areas to promote wildlife
  - Mature woodland trees
- 2.4.21 A wildflower meadow is located in Leon Recreation Ground.



## **EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE**

- 3.1 The following Councils have been noted for their best practice parks:
- London Borough of Haringey
  - Chelmsford City Council
  - Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale

### **3.2 London Borough of Haringey**

- 3.2.1 Haringey has more over 600 acres of parks, recreation grounds and open spaces. Fifteen of its parks have been awarded Green Flag status. There are 61 spaces in total, equating to 382.87 hectares, ranging from a regional park to small local parks and open spaces.
- 3.2.2 It is reported that the parks' Friends Groups have a key role in achieving and maintaining these high standards.

- 3.2.3 There are a number of conservation areas, local nature reserves and ancient woodland in the borough.
- 3.2.4 Haringey has a number of service standards that it works to which helps to monitor performance and maintain standards. Dog Control Orders were introduced in April 2013 with the aim of encouraging responsible dog ownership.
- 3.2.5 Two of Haringey's QEII parks won prizes at the Fields in Trust Awards Ceremony at Lords Cricket Ground recently. Albert Road Recreation Ground won the 'Getting Active' park award and was joint runner up in the 'Most Loved Park' category. Lordship Recreation Ground was joint runner up for 'Most Improved' Park.
- 3.2.6 The Getting Active Award, supported by Sport England, rewards a QEII Field showing a marked increase in participation in outdoor activity.
- 3.2.7 Albert Road Recreation Ground was rewarded for its extensive programme of activities planned to include as much of the diverse local community as possible. The activities include toddler tennis, Aussie Rules football, tennis, football, basketball on award winning courts and an annual family sports day.
- 3.2.8 Lordship Recreation Ground, which won QEII status in 2012, was awarded Most Improved Park after a £4 million Heritage Lottery Grant, managed by Haringey Council and the Lordship Recreation Ground Users' Forum, brought major renovation to the park. The improvements included a new course for the River Moselle, an orchard and wildlife, a state of the art bike track, a model traffic area, landscaping and new children's play areas.
- 3.2.9 It is reported that Haringey parks have benefitted from various pots of funding that have been successfully awarded and have had many groups working together to improve the borough's parks. Playbuilder has enabled many existing play areas to be improved and new ones created.
- 3.2.10 Funding has been awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore three of the borough's parks and also providing modern day facilities.



## **Chestnuts Park**

- 3.2.11 Chestnuts Park has an avenue of plane trees marking out the western, southern and northern boundaries. An open playing field covers the majority of the western side of the Park with a café and picnic terrace overlooking the new playground for various ages.
- 3.2.12 The eastern half of the park has newly refurbished tennis courts, basketball area, and a new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA).
- 3.2.13 Ark Pavilion is home to Chestnuts pre-school playgroup and play centre. The community centre is also located in the Park.
- 3.2.14 The Park's first Green Flag was awarded in July 2008.
- 3.2.15 During the autumn of 2008, consultation was carried out to find out how local people would like to see Chestnuts Park improved further. A masterplan was produced and Haringey Council, in partnership with the Friends of Chestnuts Park, is currently looking for funding to carry out these changes. This is a long term plan for the park.

## **Survey of the London Borough of Haringey's Parks**

- 3.2.16 Throughout January 2013 people were invited to tell Officers at Haringey what they thought of the borough's parks and open spaces.
- 3.2.17 833 responses were received, with over 80% of respondents telling the Council that they used a Haringey managed park, an increase of 10% since 2009.
- 3.2.18 Headline results revealed:
- 70% of respondents felt the condition of their local park was either the same or better than it was before the budget reductions happened in 2011
  - 88% of respondents either feel safe or very safe when they use their local park
  - Finsbury Park was the park that received the most responses followed equally by Downhill's Park, Priory Park and Albert Road Recreation Ground
  - People are using the parks less to relax and more for family outings, playing with friends and to observe wildlife
  - four times as many people said they were volunteering on projects in parks
  - The frequency and time when people used the park remained broadly the same
  - People felt that the facilities within the park were either Good or Fair

3.2.19 Individual park results were then fed into management plans to inform any future improvements.

### **3.3 Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale**

3.3.1 The Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale was shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle Award in 2012 under the award category most improved Council of the year. The Council has eight green flags for its parks and green spaces. In July 2013 the following parks were awarded Green Flag Status:

- The Memorial Gardens
- Broadfield Park and Packer Spout Gardens in the town centre
- Hare Hill Park and Milnrow Memorial Park in Pennines
- Heywood's Queen's Park and
- Middleton's Truffett Park
- Boarshaw Cemetery

3.3.2 Detailed below are examples of parks in Rochdale:

#### **Memorial Gardens**

3.3.3 It is reported that the Memorial Gardens are a key feature of the town centre landscape.

3.3.4 The consequences of time has meant that the gardens fell into a state of decline. This decline is currently being reversed through the re-introduction of quality horticultural features, flowerbeds, sensory garden, wildlife planting areas, improvements to paved surfaces, benches, litter bins and lighting.

3.3.5 A play area has also been created, designed to fit in with the original purpose and layout.



3.3.6 Facilities provided include gardens, a play area and seating.

3.3.7 Bird and animal life within the gardens is wide-ranging, many species being common garden birds. Squirrels frequent the gardens. Bats are often seen in the tree areas in the early evening. Butterflies and moths are also present.



## Hare Hill Park



3.3.8 Hare Hill Park is reported as a traditional Victorian Park that houses the town's library. A number of its original features offer a wide range of leisure facilities.

3.3.9 The Park is located at the gateway to the Pennines and is regarded as the "Jewel in the Pennines crown".

3.3.10 The Park has a well-established Friends Group. It is noted that the Friends Group has been instrumental in restoring the Park and has attracted over £250,000 for its renovation.

3.3.11 Many original heritage features have been restored. The Park is reported to be well maintained and clean, offering recreational opportunities to a variety of groups and individuals making it once again a safe and inviting place which is used and valued by the local community.

3.3.12 The main features of the park include:

- Formal gardens
- Fixed play areas
- Skateboard park
- Toddlers play area
- Sports pitch area
- 2 bowling greens
- Historical features including a listed water wheel and the bandstand
- Town library and information centre (formerly Hare Hill House), where people can make general enquiries and access council services
- LEAP standard play area

3.3.13 It is reported that plans are being worked up to restore the water wheel and new facilities for young people, such as a skateboard park. A new toddlers play area has been built.

## Middleton Truffet's Park



3.3.14 Truffet Park achieved Green Flag status for the first time in 2009 after investment paved the way for extensive improvements and ongoing maintenance. The Park first opened in 1966 and features a number of recent improvements and provides a community focal point for leisure, recreation and relaxation.

3.3.15 Truffet Park covers an area of 3.0 hectares.

3.3.16 The Bowling Green is reported as a key feature of the Park and attracts a lot of local residents and visitors from further afield to take part in bowling for both pleasure and competition.

3.3.17 The Park has a new circular footpath, which incorporates the new play area.

3.3.18 The newly refurbished events area provides a site for organised events and sport. There are also areas of trees and grassland, in addition to the more formal and planted areas.

3.3.19 Other facilities include:

- Herbaceous beds
- Shrub areas
- Sensory Garden
- Wooded area
- Grassland areas
- Mini Arboretum
- LEAP standard play area
- Multi use events area
- Tennis courts
- Car park
- Wetland and wildlife areas
- Wildlife walk
- Floodlit crown green bowling greens and pavilion
- Toilets
- Circular footpath around the site
- Site based park warden
- Site based maintenance staff

- Secure fully fenced site

3.3.20 The Friends of Truffet Park are involved in helping to improve its facilities and set up events to attract the community to the area.

### **3.4 Chelmsford City Council**

3.4.1 The city of Chelmsford has been awarded ten Green Flag awards for its parks: Central Park, Hylands Estate, Coronation Park, Compass Gardens with Saltcoats Park, Chelmer Park, Boleyn Gardens in Beaulieu Park, Admirals Park/Tower Gardens (including West Park), and Melbourne Park with Chancellor Park and Brook End Gardens.

3.4.2 The city has also received Green Heritage Awards for Oaklands Park, Hylands Park and for Admirals Park, Tower Gardens and West Park. In addition Green Flag Community Awards were given to Marconi Ponds and Chelmer Valley Local Nature Reserves.

3.4.3 Provided below are details of some of the parks and open spaces within Chelmsford:

#### **Coronation Park**

3.4.4 Coronation Park is home to Springfield Cricket Club and Chelmsford Rugby Club. This is reported to be a popular park specialising in sporting activities.

3.4.5 It is further reported that this park regularly wins awards for the quality of its rugby and cricket pitches. It is also the home of:

- Chelmsford Rugby Club
- Springfield Cricket Club
- Springfield Striders Running Club

3.4.6 There is the provision of a new innovative play area for juniors up to 12 years old. There are also places to picnic.



3.4.7 The Park recently received the nationally acclaimed a Green Flag Award award.



### **Admirals Park and Tower Garden**



3.4.8 Admirals Park leads to Tower Gardens and West Park. It is reported that Admirals is one of Chelmsford's most popular parks where visitors can experience many different features, from landscaped garden areas to more natural spaces that encourage wildlife.

3.4.9 The park has a wide range of attractions and facilities such as:

- Car park
- Children's play area
- Cricket and football pitches
- Tennis courts (hard surface)
- Changing rooms
- Small woodland area
- Ancient wooded track covered in wild violets in spring
- Picnic tables
- Home of Chelmsford Bowls Club

3.4.10 There is a network of footpaths and cycleways linking the parkland with surrounding areas. Visitors can walk along the River Can which travels through the park.

3.4.11 Essex Boot Camp runs an exercise programme in the park on several days each week.

3.4.12 Research of the history of Admirals Park has recently been carried out. Information, images and contributions from local residents have been collected. These details have been used to design a number of interpretation boards which are located throughout the park.

### **Hylands Park**

3.4.13 Hylands Park comprises over 574 acres which includes an ancient woodland, grassland, ponds, lakes, formal gardens and an Adventure Castle play area.



3.4.14 Car parking is free, including disabled spaces.



3.4.15 The main Adventure Castle has two large sections of castle wall, one of which is fully inclusive and suitable for wheelchairs. There are ladders, scramble nets and boards with lots of opportunity to climb and run around the ramparts. There are also three slides at varying heights, sensory equipment, a musical wall and spinning games discs. The main Castle area is reported to be suitable for children aged 6 years and older.

3.4.16 The Castle Hamlet, located by the main Castle area, is suitable for children aged 6 and under and has a lookout tower, wobble bridge and climbing net. There is a cradle swing, a living willow tunnel and three bears' houses to play in.

3.4.17 Castle Kiosk Café sells snacks, hot and cold drinks and ice creams. Toilets and changing rooms are available.

3.4.18 Seating is located within the main play area along with a large picnic area, which includes some picnic tables suitable for use with wheelchairs.

3.4.19 Picnic tables are located outside the fence for use by dog owners as all Council play areas are dog free zones.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Elizabeth Gowen, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 1 – Improving the town's parks

### **Precis of the findings of the survey undertaken regarding the Parks in Peterborough**

Tennis and bowling remain popular facilities plus Central Park's paddling pool and Bretton Park's water parks. MUGAs are popular with young people and are flexible enough to suit them and meet their needs. Skateparks and play areas that offer real play value are popular.

The Neighbourhood and Events Co-Ordinator felt that a good café brings people into parks that would not usually use them and out of the ordinary attractions. Peterborough offers drive-in film shows that are proving popular. An Eid in the Park faith service is held Central Park.

Possible barriers that might deter people using the city's parks include green spaces that are poorly maintained and have little to offer. Dog fouling and anti-social behaviour. People often invest in their own gardens to create an enjoyable outdoor room on their property.

The Neighbourhood and Events Co-Ordinator advised that Friends Groups which are supported by the Local Authority, with a visible acknowledgement that their thoughts and opinions are valued, are very useful.

**Headline Results from the Survey regarding Haringey's Parks**

Headline results revealed:

- 70% of respondents felt the condition of their local park was either the same or better than it was before the budget reductions happened in 2011
- 88% of respondents either feel safe or very safe when they use their local park
- Finsbury Park was the park that received the most responses followed equally by Downhill's Park, Priory Park and Albert Road Recreation Ground
- People are using the parks less to relax and more for family outings, playing with friends and to observe wildlife
- four times as many people said they were volunteering on projects in parks
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Individual park results were then fed into management plans to inform any future improvements.