

Committee: Open Spaces

Date: 7th June 2022

Title: Countryside Managers Report

Purpose of Report

To inform Members of activities that have been undertaken by the Open Spaces team since the last report

.Report:

1. The Recreation Ground

- 1.1 The grass cutting season is well underway and we have got the grass down to the target height in all areas of the recreation ground. We have had some comments on the type of grass that has been used to re-seed the mound and areas adjacent to Orchard Vale after the works carried out on the play park, it's more of a field grass and grows at twice the rate of our already existing species. We will keep an eye on the areas to ensure it doesn't become an eyesore and re-seed where necessary.
- 1.2 The toilet block external ceiling has been painted with Sandtex which so far has served its purpose and appears to have put off the vandals from punching holes in the ceiling. There are some minor repairs we need to make to the guttering around the toilet block as well as a general tidy up which we will undertake in the coming weeks
- 1.3 The Easter Egg hunt was a great success though there were far more people searching for the eggs than entered the competition. Everyone I had seen out on the rec during the period commented on how much their kids enjoyed it, which is a real inspiration to plan and put on a similar event next Easter
- 1.4 The youth shelter has been completed and is being utilised judging by the litter we find there each morning. Now it is up and useable we have removed the bench where the water bottle filler will be going on the toilet block. This could also be a factor for the reduced vandalism on the toilet block

2. Herne Hill

- 2.1. We have now entered the quieter period of management activities on the hill. The main work activities will include keeping the paths open from undergrowth and ensuring branches and overgrowth don't cause a hazard
- 2.2. Over the coming months we will get our tree surgeon in to undertake some of the tree works highlighted in the tree safety survey that haven't been able to be completed due to not being able to get machinery up there in the wet conditions.
- 2.3. We will be undertaking a Decision Node Survey to identify places where waymarker posts have fallen which would normally aid people finding their way around the woods. Once completed, I will put a report together for Members.
- 2.4. We will continue to improve areas of surfacing if we get the chance between grass cutting to ensure we get the worst areas sorted before winter.

3. New Road cemetery

- 3.1. We have now started grass cutting at the cemetery which is off to a good start but we still have plenty of room for improvement which I am working on with the team to find the most efficient way to get the grass cut and looking great.
- 3.2. In the coming weeks, we will start to undertake the edging of paths and spraying of the gravel path areas to get them back up to an acceptable standard.
- 3.3. The two flower beds will be weeded and possible options for a more appropriate planting theme will be explored.
- 3.4. I've been working on a rough management and maintenance plan for the cemetery and feel in due course a site visit with Members would be extremely beneficial to establish priorities that can then be fed into the plan.

4. Churchyard

- 4.1. The grass at the churchyard is now down to an acceptable height and is cutting well.
- 4.2. We have started to clear some of the moss/algae from the path surfaces using the pressure washer which has made an amazing difference both visually and to walk on.

4.3. In the coming weeks we will be edging the pathways around the church and spraying the weeds.

5. West Crescent Meadow

5.1. The first cut of the meadow went well. We did have a certain level of interest from the public, some good and some bad on why we weren't using the gang mowers to cut the area but largely we had a really positive response.

5.2. When the next cut is due I will work with the office team to ensure we put some information out on Facebook to explain what's going on and keep members of the public informed.

6. Volunteers

6.1. We have continued to hold monthly volunteer days. This month we recorded ash trees which will help form the basis for future surveys and ultimately help us in our response to ash dieback. On the day we managed to log just under 100 trees.

7. Staff Training

7.1. Kane has recently been on a brush cutter and strimmer course at Blake training which he enjoyed and is now putting his new skills into use.

7.2. Nick recently went on Chapter 8 training, now called Traffic Management for Community Events (TMCE), which was also attended by Councillor Shearman,

7.3. Kane has one more course booked as part of his Kickstart scheme, which will be chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting. All of his training, PPE and uniform costs have been covered by the Kickstart Scheme funds.

8. Hedge along Canal Way

8.1. Several members of the public have come forward to staff and councillors with concerns for safety when leaving the recreation ground through the hedge line along Canal Way as cyclists on the cycle lane travel at some speed and walkers can not get a good view when exiting the recreation ground.

8.2. The hedge is well overdue a good hard cut back and restoration works need to be carried out. There are a few options we can look at though as the works required

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are pretty “hard” with regards to how much we take the hedge back. It is not recommended to undertake these works until the hedge is dormant in the winter months otherwise, we risk shocking and potentially killing the hedge

8.3. To address the issue in the short term, we will cut back a reasonable amount to try and improve the view using hand tools until winter and signs will be erected as a caution to people exiting the recreation ground.

8.4. We will then reduce the size of the hedge to improve visibility coming out and ultimately its height. To do this correctly it's a three-year process. First of all reducing and tapering the outer side, followed by a similar process on the inner side and finally in the third year a reduction to the desired height which prevents the hedge from dying of shock.

9. Other comments

9.1. Now we have taken the cemetery back, our time is pretty tied up watering plants, emptying bins and cutting grass. There's three of us until August when the Kickstart Scheme finishes, however, the vacant post for a new Recreation Manager will hopefully be filled by then. Therefore, general maintenance tasks may take a little longer to get to, though as always, we will prioritise any issues that could be a risk to health and safety.