

Date: 16/11/16

Report of: Community Services – Active Communities

Title of Report: The Locking of Florence Park – Consultation Results

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the results from the consultation to consider the value of the daily unlocking and locking regime of Florence Park in Cowley

Report Approved by: [REDACTED]

Policy Framework:

Florence Park Management Plan 2013-2017

Oxford City Council's vision for Florence Park is: "To work with the community to create a world class, vibrant and safe city park that promotes biodiversity, health and learning, and is accessible to all."

Corporate Plan 2016-2020

A vibrant and Sustainable Economy

Strong and Active Communities

A Clean and Green Oxford

Recommendation(s):

Ideally a trial period of not locking the park is required to collect a true evidence based evaluation report, rather than basing conclusions on perceived risks.

However due to the weight of opinion to keep the park locked, and the perceived risks, this may not be acceptable.

Therefore the park should remain locked and alternative options to cover the service should be pursued such as a local volunteer scheme.

Background.

Florence Park is the only park owned by Oxford City Council which is locked at dusk and unlocked by 8am. A consultation to obtain the views of local people and stakeholders was carried out on whether the park should remain locked, open or open on a trial basis, because:

- There is a difference of opinion amongst local residents
- Cost implications with locking the park
- Lone working and conflict when clearing the park

Methodology

Consultation was from 14 June to 30 September 2016, with 222 responses.

Results

- 99% of respondents were park users, visiting 2-3 times a week.
- 25% of respondents said they would use the park more often if there was unrestricted access, 69% said they would not.
- 64% wanted to keep the park locked at night
- 30% wanted a trial
- 6% wanted to see it left unlocked
- Respondents top three reasons to keep the park locked:
 1. People drinking taking drugs (30)
 2. Security risks to property/gardens (28)
 3. Drug dealing / needles and sharps (23)
- Respondents top three reasons to keep the park unlocked:
 1. Limits park as a cut through for commuters (4)
 2. Locals use a hole in the fence anyway! (3)
 3. No evidence of problems in other OCC parks (3)
- A number of respondents supported a local volunteer scheme.

“I support the proposal at a recent community meeting to recruit a local person (paid or volunteer) to open early in the morning (earlier than now) to allow dog walkers more access.”
- The view of Thames Valley Police Cowley Neighbourhood Team is that the park should remain locked. [REDACTED], Oxford Cowley Neighbourhood Supervisor replied that

“The park being open at night in the view of the Police will affect the local community. The park’s crime attractors and generators would elevate the perceived neighbourhood crime and incivilities, and thereby increase the local community’s fear of crime.”
- A recent APSE enquiry asked members if there had been any effect when they stopped locking parks. The results varied from location to location as the example from York shows:

“Two years ago the City of York Council moved from locking 5 sites to only 1. On 2 sites there was no noticeable increase in anti-social behaviour, a third has persistent low levels of ASB. The forth site had enough levels of ASB, that the community decided to lock it themselves.”
- Friends of Florence held an open meeting on 16 August attended by approximately 25 local residents and Ward Councillors. The general view of the group was that the park should remain locked at night.

Other factors to take into account

Park toilets and litter bins

The toilets are locked/unlocked by the same member of staff that locks/unlocks the park. The litter bins are also emptied at this time. If this member of staff was no-longer available an alternative solution and resources would be required. For example: Hinksey and Bury Knowle Park's toilets are locked/unlocked and cleaned by Street Scene, Direct Services, as they are located on a street frontage. In Cutteslowe Park the toilets are opened by staff already in the park and are locked by San Remo's kiosk staff.

The evidence from other city council owned parks

South Park, Cutteslowe, Bury Knowle and John Allen Parks all have properties with gardens backing on to them and none of these sites are locked. There is a small amount of anti-social behaviour in the parks, but few complaints from residents.

Legal issues

It is not a legal obligation to lock the park.

Financial implications

The main cost is locking the park in the evenings, and opening and locking at weekends, as at other times it is covered by the on-site gardener. This cost is in the region of £11,221 for salary payments. This does not take into account the cost of a vehicle/fuel or holiday/sick cover.

Parks Direct Services receives £5,000 from Councillors to contribute towards the cost. However, this was a number of years ago, since then Parks have had to make considerable savings so this may well have been lost in the bigger budget now.

The City Council currently has a funding bid in with the LTA for £132k to improve the surface of the tennis courts and provide floodlighting (which has planning approval) to allow the courts to be used later in the evening during the darker months. If the nightly locking regime continues at dusk a separate access just for the tennis courts would need to be created, which is achievable but would cost circa £20k.

Conclusions

Whilst it remains the view of Officers that a trial period of leaving the park open should take place, the overwhelming view of local residents and TVP is that it should stay locked. Therefore based on these results the park should stay locked, until a time when it is acceptable to have a trial.

It would be worth pursuing the proposal for a volunteer group to open the park in the mornings and at the weekends to help reduce the on-going cost of the locking regime.

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