

Burntwood Parks

Cllr David Leytham; Cabinet Member for Operational Services, Leisure and Waste

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Key Decision? NO

Local Ward

Members

Chase Terrace; Sue Woodward, Eric Drinkwater

Boney Hay & Central; Diane Evans, Natasha Pullen, Richard Bamborough.

Chasetown; Sharon Banevicius, Beth Fisher.

Summerfield and All Saints; Heather Tranter, Brenda Constable



Leisure, Parks & Waste Management (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with a general overview of the decision to cease the locking of four parks in Burntwood.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Report to be noted

3. Background

- 3.1 The District Council currently has 15 main parks / play sites and a significant number of open spaces including churchyards, woodlands and biodiversity areas that it has responsibility to maintain. There are nine parks in Lichfield, five in Burntwood (excluding Prince's Park) and one in Armitage.
- 3.2 The general maintenance specification for all the parks and open spaces throughout the District is relatively the same: 16 grass cuts per season; flower beds maintained monthly and planted twice a year; hedges cut either once or twice per year depending on being native or ornamental; sports pitches marked weekly; litter picking and bin emptying as needed.
- 3.3 In the mid-1990s, the District Council took control of Burntwood Leisure Centre and a significant number of parks and open spaces along with operational staff from Burntwood Town Council. The transfer included the general grounds maintenance of the areas and also included daily locking of (Chasetown Memorial Park and Chase Terrace Park / Mineral Line). Following a significant number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues in and around the Burntwood area that also included vandalism to Council assets, a further two parks (Redwood Park and Elder Lane Park) were fenced, gated and added to the park locking scheme.
- 3.4 At the time the locking of these parks did help to reduce the number of incidents relating to vandalism of Council assets and also helped to reduce the number of ASB issues that the police has to deal with within the Burntwood Parks.
- 3.5 In 2016, all departments within the Council were asked to identify savings to contribute to the Council's funding gap. These savings needed to be additional savings over and above the savings already identified from Fit for the Future Phase 1. Service managers within the Leisure and Parks

Directorate were asked to identify where potential additional savings could be identified. Several suggestions were made including an option to cease the locking of the Burntwood Parks.

- 3.6 The rationale behind the suggestion to cease the locking of the Burntwood Parks was as follows:
1. The ongoing ASB within the Burntwood area had significantly reduced.
 2. None of the other parks owned and managed by the District Council were being locked.
 3. A significant proportion of the Parks' budget was being used to provide the park locking service. In 2017/18 the cost for the security company to undertake the service was £10,585.
 4. Operational staff had been questioned on several occasions as to why the parks had to be locked over night as it restricted certain members of the public from using the parks when it suited them and also restricted access across the parks. (Chase Terrace and Elder Lane).
- 3.7 The decision to cease the locking of the parks and offer up the savings was approved in 2016 by the then Director of Leisure and Parks in conjunction with the Cabinet Member.
- 3.8 In 2016, the District Council was also in discussion with Burntwood Town Council with a view to transferring the Parks and Open Spaces in Burntwood back to the Town Council. A date for the transfer was initially set for 1 April 2017. With this in mind, a decision was made to delay the removal of the park locking provision until after 1 April 2017. At this point it would have been a decision for Burntwood Town Council if they wanted to continue with or to cease the park locking service.
- 3.9 Just prior to 1 April 2017, the District Council was informed that the Town Council had reviewed the option of the parks transfer and they had decided they were not in a position to take back the Parks and Open Spaces at that time.
- 3.10 As the cost for the park locking had already been offered up and removed from the Parks' budgets in 2016, the Head of Leisure and Operational Services instructed that the locking of the Burntwood Parks would have to cease and a date of 1 April 2018 was agreed.
- 3.11 Since the park locking ceased a few issues were brought to the Council's attention:
1. Groups were congregating in vehicles in the evenings and later at night on the car park at Redwood Park creating noise and there were allegations of possible drug taking.

An agreement has been put in place in conjunction with local residents from Aspen Grove whereby the vehicular gates are locked overnight to restrict vehicular access to the park.

The Police were made aware of the allegations of drug taking and residents asked to inform the Police as soon as possible if they were concerned that this activity continued.
 2. Complaints were received from local people about not being able to access Redwood Car Park during the day.

Initially the vehicular gates were locked and only opened for events or by the community church who use the pavilion. This has now changed and the gates are open throughout the day following the agreement with residents of Aspen Grove.
 3. Reports were received from local residents and via local Councillors of alleged ASB by way of motorbikes scrambling around Chase Terrace Park, groups gathering and noise nuisance late at night.

As ASB is a Police matter, all incidents of ASB should be reported to the Police as soon as possible. Residents who report ASB to the council are advised to call 101 and report this to the Police.

Chase Terrace Park was inspected following the allegation of motorbikes scrambling and no evidence or damage to the area was identified.
- 3.12 Reports of ASB that were received by the Police relating to Burntwood Parks.

2017:

2 incidents reported in Burntwood Park / Elder Lane

3 incidents reported in Redwood Park

4 Incidents reported in Chase Terrace Park

2018:

5 incidents reported in Burntwood Park / Elder Lane

2 incidents reported in Redwood Park

3 Incidents reported in Chase Terrace Park

2019 January-March:

1 incident reported in Burntwood Park / Elder Lane

2 Incidents reported in Chase Terrace Park

To put this into perspective, 27 incidents were reported for the same period in Beacon Park Lichfield.

The Police have confirmed as of March 2019 that there has not been an increase in ASB within Burntwood Parks since the gates have been left unlocked. It was suggested by the Police that if the vehicular access at Redwood Park had been left open permanently then ASB in this location is likely to have risen.

Alternative Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transfer of the Parks and Open Spaces back to Burntwood Town Council and allow the Town Council to determine the future of the park locking provision. 2. Continue with the park locking and increase the funding gap. 3. Continue with the park locking and reduce other services to prevent an increase to the funding gap.
Consultation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consultation was carried out between the Head of Leisure and Operational Services and Burntwood Town Council. 2. Consultation and discussion was carried out within the Leisure and Operational Services team and with the Cabinet Member.
Financial Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A payment of £10,585 was made to the security company for the park locking service during 2017/18. 2. A financial pressure was created in the 2016/17 and 2017/18 Parks' budget as the ceasing of the park locking was initially due to be implemented in 2016.
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ceasing of the park locking contributed to the Strategic Plan by helping to reduce the Council's expenditure budget and help to make a Council that is Fit for the Future

Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	1. All the parks owned and maintained by the Council are now open for all members of the public to enjoy 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
Crime & Safety Issues	1. The Police have confirmed as of March 2019 that there has not been an increase in ASB within Burntwood Parks since the gates have been left unlocked. It was suggested by the Police that if the vehicular access at Redwood Park had been left open permanently then ASB in this location is likely to have risen. However, as it stands there has been no increase.
GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment	1. N/A

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	Increase in ASB and vandalism within the parks.	Ensure the Police are informed about any ASB issues as soon as possible. Work in conjunction with friends and community groups. Monitoring of areas and quick rectification of damage.	Green (tolerable) The ceasing of the park locking has been in place almost 12 months. There has not been any significant evidence to identify that ASB has increased during this time. This has also been supported by data supplied by the Police.
B	ASB and vandalism to Council assets increased to a point that the locking of the parks needed to be re-instated causing an ongoing budget pressure.	Additional budget to cover the locking provision would have to be applied for and approved by the Cabinet.	Yellow (financial).
C			
D			
E			

Background documents

Relevant web links