

Please read the Clerk's added note on page 3 of this draft agreement, relating to contribution costs.

**MAINTENANCE OF HIRST PARK, ASHINGTON (FOLLOWING
COMPLETION OF THE HIRST PARK REVIVAL PROJECT)
AND OCCUPANCY OF THE HIRST PARK GROWING ZONE**

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

between

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

and

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

This is an agreement between Northumberland County Council, hereinafter called NCC, and Ashington Town Council, hereinafter called ATC.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this MOU is to identify and cost the additional grounds maintenance roles involved at Hirst Park, Ashington following the completion of the Hirst Park Revival (HPR) Project, agree that additional costs will be met jointly by NCC and ATC, and to set out ATC's occupancy of the Growing Zone at Hirst Park. The agreement will commence in April 2022 and run until further notice, on the part of NCC or ATC.

II. BACKGROUND

On 30 June 2017 the County Council in partnership with Ashington Town Council and other local stakeholders was offered a grant of £2,295,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to undertake a complete refurbishment of Hirst Park, Ashington at a total cost of £2,728,910 over a five year period running from September 2017 until August 2022.

The capital improvement works at the park are now complete and include a significant number of new and enhanced features that entail a significant amount of additional maintenance activity throughout the year, but particularly during the summer months.

In the development of the HLF funding bid the additional costs associated with park upon completion of the capital works were estimated and an agreement in principle was reached between the two council's for Ashington Town Council to assist with these costs in the future (see Appendix 1).

III. ADDITIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT DUTIES FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF THE HIRST PARK REVIVAL PROJECT

Horticulture

Prior to the Hirst Park Revival (HPR) project, the Park featured little in respect of quality horticulture. Despite being locally and historically known as the Flower Park, the park's floral displays had declined in extent and ambition since its heyday in the early and mid-twentieth century. The HPR Project has seen the introduction of new areas of shrub, tree and herbaceous perennial flower planting across the park, as well as the retention of some areas of annual bedding plants. In addition, the 'Lost Garden' has been reinstated on a new site adjacent to the bowling greens and now offers a new formal garden setting that has been absent from the park for many years with low hedges, herbaceous planting, a central raised flower bed, climbing roses and seating.

While the design of the planting has sought to maximise the use of perennial plants (rather than annual bedding plants) in order to minimise maintenance and maximise sustainability, the increased extent of the planting around the park has inevitably increased the need for horticultural management. It is hoped that much of this need can be met through the use of apprentices, volunteers and trainees from Northumberland College, but there will nonetheless be some increase in the required capacity of the council's own work force to guide this work and fill in when other sources of labour are not available.

Play zone

Prior to the Hirst Park Revival project, the Park featured a small play area and some outdated fitness equipment. During consultation on the proposals for enhancement to this area, a strong desire for water play came forward from the community, as well as improvement of the conventional play facilities. Works are now complete and the park now hosts a very popular splash pad play feature which will operate on a daily basis throughout the summer (between May and September). The need to maintain and oversee the splash pad has introduced the need for more intensive and frequent safety inspections (several times each day) as well as the need to switch the feature on and off and troubleshoot any issues that arise during its operation. The increased size and popularity of the play area has also increased the need for basic grounds maintenance duties (grass cutting, bin emptying, litter collection etc), on a more regular basis, (7 days a week) during the summer period.

General Park Maintenance

Overall, the HPR project has already resulted in an increase in visitor numbers, and this is expected to increase further, once the new facilities (particularly the splash pad), become more widely known. Increased numbers of visitors generally lead to greater maintenance demands, and the ongoing issues of youth anti-social behaviour in the evenings and overnight demand daily attention to litter collection to ensure that the park is clean and safe to use each morning.

Public toilets

Although public toilets are available in the bowls pavilion, these have only been available on an intermittent basis over recent years. However, with the re-launch of the park following the completion of the HPR Project and the large number of additional visitors expected to the play area, there will be a requirement in future for the public toilets to be open on a daily basis hence introducing a new duty of supervision, cleansing and inspection for park staff.

The general duties of the park maintenance staff are outlined in more detail in Appendix 2.

IV. CURRENT AND FUTURE MAINTENANCE COSTS

Prior to the HPR project the park was managed by the local Neighbourhood Services NEAT team on an 'as and when necessary' basis, but with no dedicated staffing. The future management and maintenance regime will involve two full time park keepers during the summer months (April to October) covering 7 days a week, and one full time park keeper during the winter months (November to March), supplemented by weekend cleansing and safety checks undertaken by the local NEAT team.

The additional costs incurred in the management of the Park following the completion of the Hirst Park Revival project are detailed in Appendix 3 along with a breakdown of those costs on a 50:50 basis between Ashington Town Council and NCC as agreed.

For the 2022 calendar year the additional annual management cost will be:

Total additional annual park running costs	£43,997
Proposed ATC annual contribution to annual running costs	£23,680

VI. IT IS MUTUALLY UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED BY AND BETWEEN THE PARTIES THAT:

This agreement will be ongoing but subject to a review of activity and costs on a biennial basis.

VII. EFFECTIVE DATE AND SIGNATURE

This MOU shall be in effect upon the signature of both Party's authorised officials. It shall be in force from April 2022 until further notice.

In 2021/22 NCC Costs for Hirst Park were £51,587, but the contribution committed to by ATC was maintained at the same level as per the initial agreement (£23,680). It appears to be viewed by both sides more as a set contribution, rather than a 50:50 split of actual costs. In 2022/23 the costs are lower, but NCC is hopeful that ATC will maintain the £23,680 contribution held in the budget, rather than reducing to 50%.

Signature:	Signature:
Print Name:	Print Name:
Date:	Date:
For and on behalf of Ashington Town Council	For & on behalf of Northumberland County Council

Appendix 1: ATC Letter of agreement to a future maintenance contribution



Ashington Town Council
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Mike Jeffrey
Countryside and Green Spaces Manager
Neighbourhood Services
Local Services
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2FF

Our Ref: MS/HPark
21 February 2017

Dear Mike,

Hirst Park Revival Project.

Further to our recent discussion, I am writing to confirm the details of Ashington Town Council's full support and commitment to the Hirst Park Revival Project.

At the Town Council meeting held on 14 February 2017, it was unanimously resolved that:

- (i) The Town Council confirm full support for the Hirst Park Revival Project and recognise and accept the role as a long-term partner to the project,*
- (ii) The Town Council agrees to a capital contribution of £40,000 towards the Hirst Park Revival Project in 2018/19; and that*
- (iii) Subject to the success of the Heritage Lottery Fund Bid, the Town Council annual contribution towards the revenue cost of Hirst Park be agreed as £23,680, commencing in the financial year 2019/20.*

The Town Council is very much aware that Hirst Park is historically a significant and much valued asset to the town and local community. The Council is fully committed to the project as a major partner and look forward to working with other partners to revive the park and deliver a positive outcome to this exciting and key project.

Yours sincerely,

M. Slaughter

Mike Slaughter
Clerk to Ashington Town Council

Appendix 2: General duties of the park maintenance staff

Play area inspection and maintenance

- Inspect the splash pad twice daily as per agreed program of work.
- Inspect the play equipment twice weekly as per agreed program of work.

Inspection & General Maintenance

- Switching the splash pad on and off at agreed times during the agreed operating period and dealing with any operating issues that arise during the day
- Undertake minor maintenance to play equipment as necessary, and cordon off any damaged equipment pending repair.
- Check all street furniture (bins, and benches) for cleanliness and damage to agreed schedule
- Where appropriate, maintain street furniture, repair/paint
- Check notice boards and interpretation panels for damage and clean when necessary.
- Assist with logistical aspects of public events as required

Cleansing

- Daily litter picking throughout the park
- Empty litter bins as and when necessary
- Daily clean down of the splash pad during the operating period
- Removal of graffiti as necessary
- Clean and wash litter bins/benches when needed

Gardening

- Maintain (and repair where necessary) floral displays. Weed, water and provide feed when necessary.
- Weed and keep tidy flower and shrub beds throughout the summer period (including use of herbicide where necessary to control invasive weeds)
- Remove weeds from around street furniture and gullies
- Mow and strim grass across the park according to the agreed programme of maintenance.
- Lost Garden. Maintain to agreed standards.

Public toilets

- Check public toilets twice a day and undertake cleansing and re-stocking as required
- Open and close the public toilets on a daily basis
- Report problems to the council's Property maintenance team.

Bowling Greens

- Maintain the bowling greens, including mowing, top dressing, weeding etc according to the agreed bowling green maintenance schedule throughout the year (see Appendix 4)

Appendix 3: Additional costs incurred in the management of the Park following the completion of the Hirst Park Revival Project

1 full time band 3 operative (5 week-days)	£26,554
1 seasonal band 3 operative for 7 months of the year April to October (operating on three midweek days and two weekend days)	£14,346
Winter maintenance by NEAT, 1.5 hours a day on Sat and Sun during the winter (5 months, 40 days)	£1,237
Initial staff cost pre Hirst Park Revival (0.5 FTE Band 3)	£13,277
Additional staff cost from April 2022 onwards	£28,860
Other additional running costs, plant, fuel, tools, water play maintenance etc (see below)	£15,137
Total additional annual park running costs	£43,997
Proposed ATC annual contribution to annual running costs	£23,680

Other additional annual costs

Grass cutting machinery	£4,800.00
Additional water supply and disposal costs	£2,000.00
Splash pad annual winterisation cost	£2,835.00
Splash pad annual spring recommission cost	£3,502.00
Additional materials/fuel/ tools/equip	£2,000.00
Total	£15,137.00

Appendix 4: Hirst Park bowling greens maintenance programme

HIRST PARK BOWLING GREENS MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER OPERATIONS – end of season renovations

- Mow the green with a cutting height at 6mm this will clean and prepare the green for the renovation operations.
- Spray green where required with a Selective Weedkiller/Moss killer.
- 7 to 10 days after herbicide application. Scarify each green to remove any thatch and fibre which has accumulated over the playing season.
- Aerate each green by hollow tining. Hollow tining is generally used on a tri-annual basis.
- Overseed each green using a quality dwarf ryegrass grass seed mixture this will produce a fine sward but with the ability to withstand wear.
- Apply 70/30 Top Dressing to each green. This will rectify any low spots on the greens, improve the rootzone and help provide better drainage.

We will aim to begin these works asap after last games of the season.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER OPERATIONS

- Watch out for Fusarium. Consider a preventative fungicide application if required?
- Remove any leaf litter build up and check for excessive worm casting
- Top the grass on a high cut (10-12mm) when necessary to prevent any excessive growth taking place.

MARCH/APRIL OPERATIONS - pre season preparations

- Top the grass on a high cut (10-12mm) when necessary to prevent any excessive growth taking place, gradually reduce height to 5mm over successive weeks leading to start of playing season.
- Spray green where required with a Selective Weedkiller/Moss killer.
- Apply feed if required.
- Scarify each green to remove any thatch and fibre which has accumulated over winter.
- Check and weed sand filled ditches.