

Hirst Park – Meeting held on Wednesday 25th May 2022**Background*****Agreement and works***

On 30th 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 were completed in January 2020. This included a significant number of new and enhanced features that require significant additional maintenance 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. Prior to the bid and works, the Park was managed by the local Neighbourhood Services NEAT team on an 'as and when necessary' basis, but with no dedicated staffing. Following the bid, and subsequent work the management and maintenance regime would 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.

Costs

The additional costs incurred in the management of the Park following the completion of the Hirst Park Revival Project are detailed below, the costs are agreed as capped at £23,680 and the agreement is ongoing and subject to review:

Additional staff cost from January 2020 onwards	
1 full time band 3 operative (operating on one weekend day between April and October)	£26,166
1 seasonal band 3 operative for 7 months of the year April to October (operating on four midweek days and one weekend day)	£15,864
Winter maintenance by NEAT, 3 hours a day on Sat and Sun during the winter (5 months, 40 days)	£2,303
Initial staff cost pre Hirst Park Revival (0.5 FTE Band 3)	£12,362
Additional staff cost from January 2020 onwards	£31,971
Other additional running costs, plant, fuel, tools, water play maintenance etc (see below)	£19,616
Total additional annual park running costs from January 2020 onwards	£51,587
Proposed ATC annual contribution to annual running costs at 50% of overall additional annual park running costs (capped at £23,680)	£23,680

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General Maintenance and Management Duties

Play area inspection and maintenance

- ✓ Inspect the splash pad twice/day
- ✓ Inspect the play equipment twice/week

Inspection & General Maintenance

- ✓ Operating the splash pad and dealing with any operating issues that arise
- ✓ Minor maintenance to play equipment as necessary, and cordon off any damaged equipment pending repair.
- ✓ Checking all street furniture (bins, and benches) for cleanliness and damage
- ✓ Where appropriate, maintaining street furniture, repair/paint
- ✓ Checking notice boards and interpretation panels for damage and clean when necessary
- ✓ Assisting with logistical aspects of public events as required

Cleansing

- ✓ Daily litter picking
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Maintain 'Lost Garden' 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 daily
- ✓ 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

Pre-season preparations

- ✓ Top the grass on a high cut (10-12mm), gradually reduce 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 to remove thatch and fibre
- ✓ Check and weed sand filled ditches

End of season renovations

- ✓ Mow the green with a cutting height at 6mm
- ✓ Spray green where required with a Selective Weedkiller/Moss killer 7 to 10 days after herbicide application.
- ✓ Scarify to remove any thatch and fibre
- ✓ Aerate each green by hollow tining. Hollow tining is used on a tri-annual basis.
- ✓ Overseed each green using a quality dwarf ryegrass grass seed mixture
- ✓ Apply 70/30 Top Dressing to each green.

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- ✓ 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 excess growth
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Current Situation

The Financial and General Services Committee of Ashington Town Council agreed to further commit to the annual contribution to Hirst Park Management and Maintenance for the 2022/23 financial year. This followed a break in the agreement during 2021/22.

It was agreed that a quarterly meeting should be held with NCC Officers from both Parks and Green Spaces, and Neighbourhood Services, along with the Clerk, Ward Cllrs and County Cllrs invited.

The first meeting was held on 25th May 2022 at Hirst Park Pavilion. As a first meeting this was informal, it is expected that future meetings will be called with an agenda and more formality. A note of the meeting is detailed below.

Note of Meeting held on 25th May 2022***Present***

Neil Dawson (NCC Countryside and Green Spaces), Jimmy Reith (NCC Parks and Green Spaces), Carla Thompson (NCC Parks Development Officer), Sarah Bredin-Kemp (NCC Hirst Park Revival Project Co-Ordinator), Peter Bowman (NCC Neighbourhood Services), Cllr Pauline Thompson (Town Cllr - Hirst Ward), County Cllr Ken Parry (County Cllr - Hirst Ward), Sarah Eden (ATC Clerk).

Discussion

Following introductions and an overview of why the meeting had been called, the following areas were discussed:

- All parties wish to work together for the betterment of the park for residents and visitors.
- The maintenance and management of the park, and the duties therein require significant workforce input. This is achievable with the two employees on site during the summer, providing end of the season work has been completed, and it is general, not significant maintenance. As was evident on the day in question, there was a team of NEAT operatives clearing shrubs and beds.
- The aim is to establish a 'Friends of Hirst Park Group.' The 'Friends of Ridley Park' operating in Blyth is a good example of how this works.
- There are a few informal litter picking groups that come into the park. Others operate around the town where it is felt there is less staff presence.
- Volunteers of Full Circle Food have come into the park on several occasions.
- Northumberland College was expecting to allocate Level 1 and 2 students to horticulture, 5 days/week, but the college underwent changes and Horticulture is now delivered from Kirkley.
- Carla and Sarah have been working on Action Days which would present opportunities for several groups, people, businesses, and stakeholders to come into the park to add value to the maintenance already being carried out, or to develop other schemes, not necessarily around maintenance.
- It was discussed that like the Litter Pick Days organised by ATC, both Councils involvement in these would display an increased positive presence in the park, which could have a positive impact more widely.

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- All agreed that regular visits to the park would give a fairer impression of maintenance. It was noted that Green Flag will attend on Wednesday 1st June and visits during or after that time would give a good overall impression of the expected standard of the park. An invite to meet the judges was extended to those present, however there is a clash with the Town Council's Funding Presentations.
- Bedding will not be planted in time for the Green Flag visit, but it will not reflect badly as the beds will be prepared for planting. There are some moves to lower maintenance, more sustainable plants in certain areas, but floral displays are felt essential at park entrances.

Actions

1. Sarah Eden to seek the Town Council's support for staff to be involved in Hirst Park Action Days, including promoting involvement to others (FGS Meeting 14/06/2022)
2. Town Council to direct those interested in volunteering, or groups looking for hands-on activities to Sarah Bredin-Kemp.
3. Carla Thompson and Sarah Bredin-Kemp to devise schedule of Action Days that the Town Council can promote and support.
4. Sarah Eden to advise Town Council of Green Flag visit (1st June) and suggest members may wish to visit the park to see the standards they aim to maintain.