

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



WHITBURN & BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

SERVICE UPDATE – NETS, LAND & COUNTRYSIDE

REPORT BY HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise members of the recent activity of the NETs Land & Countryside Services' teams for the period 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021.

B. RECOMMENDATION

The Local Area Committee is asked to:

1. Note the work carried out by the service within the local area.
2. Advise of any areas that require further information or investigation.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

| | | |
|-------------|--|---|
| I | Council Values | Focusing on our customers' needs; making best use of our resources; working in partnership |
| II | Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment) | None |
| III | Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers | None |
| IV | Impact on performance and performance Indicators | None |
| V | Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement | We make the most efficient and effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment |
| VI | Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property) | In line with available revenue and capital budgets |
| VII | Consideration at PDSP | None |
| VIII | Other consultations | None |

D1 TERMS OF REPORT

The report covers the activity for the period 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021.

D2 Grounds Maintenance Routine Works

The annual hedges and shrub bed maintenance was completed in early March.

Open space grass cutting in the ward started on Tuesday 6 April and presently on the third cycle.

Due to the weather our routine spraying has been put back to mid-May - four weeks behind.

With the schools requesting sports and athletic marking for their school curriculum along with the resumption of football matches, we are struggling to keep with demand for line marking.

Fly tipping and the lifting of refuse sacks generated by West Lothian Litter pickers are also putting pressure on our NETs Teams.

Grounds Maintenance Enquiries

In total there were 38 grounds maintenance related enquiries received and dealt with during this reporting period in 2021.

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| Ball Game Enquiries | 2 | 0 |
| Bench or Seat Enquiries | 2 | 0 |
| Burns or Watercourses | 0 | 1 |
| Complaint Grounds Maintenance | 3 | 0 |
| Drainage Flooding Grass Areas | 1 | 2 |
| Enforcement Officer Enquiries | 1 | 2 |
| Fencing Enquiries | 5 | 3 |
| GalaDay Public Event Enquiries | 1 | 0 |
| Grass Area Damaged | 2 | 1 |
| Grass Highway Verges | 1 | 0 |
| Ground Ownership Enquiries | 2 | 0 |
| Grounds Property Vandalised | 7 | 2 |
| Hedge Cutting Enquiries | 1 | 1 |
| Public Park Enquiries | 6 | 2 |
| School Grounds Enquiries | 0 | 1 |
| Shrub Bed Enquiries | 1 | 1 |
| Shrub Bed Overhanging Path | 2 | 1 |
| Weeds on Paths or Roads | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 38 | 17 |

D3 Garden Maintenance Routine Works

The Garden Maintenance Scheme started on the 6 April, and we are presently on the third cycle.

Garden Maintenance Enquiries

In total there were 16 garden maintenance related enquiries received and dealt with during this reporting period in 2021.

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|
| Complaint Garden Maintenance | 2 | 0 |
| Garden Maintenance Change of Address | 1 | 0 |
| Garden Maintenance General Enquiries | 7 | 1 |
| Garden Maintenance Grass Not Cut | 5 | 0 |
| Garden Maintenance Standard of Cut | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 16 | 1 |

D4 Cleaner Communities Routine Works

The Street Cleansing Teams have been reduced in size to comply with social distancing guidelines over the period 1 February – 30 April.

During this period staff have continued to empty street litter and dog waste bins on a regular basis and carry out routine works in the area. Also, litter picking footpaths/ open spaces and road verges and dealing with enquiries as they arise. The street orderly has also continued with their duties over the period clearing litter and emptying litter bins in and around the town centre.

The compact mechanical street sweeper has continued to sweep footpaths and kerb edges and we have two HGV sweepers that are used to clean roads and channels during this time.

Resources have been redirected when required during this period to deal with leaf fall.

We continue to have lots of volunteer's litter picking in the Ward and we have assisted with the uplift of bags and debris that have been collected.

Due to Covid-19 and Street Cleansing Staff assisting other Council Services during the pandemic, a tender had been awarded for a contractor to carry out road sweeping of A, B & C roads. This work was completed on 28 March 2021.

Cleaner Communities Enquiries

In total 222 cleaner communities related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period in 2021.

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|
| Complaint Street Cleansing | 1 | 0 |
| Dead Animals | 3 | 9 |
| Dog Bin New Request for Bin | 1 | 1 |
| Dog Bin Overflowing | 0 | 1 |
| Dog Fouled Grass Open Space | 3 | 1 |
| Dog Fouling on Paths Roads | 15 | 9 |
| Dog No Fouling Sign Request | 0 | 1 |
| Fly Posting | 7 | 1 |
| Fly Tipping Dumping | 88 | 66 |
| Glass on Paths or Open Spaces | 3 | 2 |
| Graffiti Non-Offensive | 5 | 0 |
| Graffiti Racist or Offensive | 14 | 1 |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Litter Bin Burnt Damaged | 1 | 0 |
| Litter Bin New Request for Bin | 1 | 2 |
| Litter Bin Overflowing | 3 | 0 |
| Litter General Enquiries | 13 | 7 |
| Litter in Grass Open Space | 1 | 1 |
| Litter Paths Road Verges | 23 | 11 |
| Needles/Syringes Abandoned | 0 | 2 |
| Street Sweeping Enquiries | 14 | 3 |
| Trolleys Abandoned/Dumped | 4 | 0 |
| Vehicle Abandoned | 22 | 16 |
| Total | 222 | 134 |

Fly Tipping Enquiries (Full Year)

| | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Illegal Fly Tipping/Dumping | 261 | 316 | 375 | 276 | 184 |

Enforcement Community Action

The Education, Engagement and Enforcement team have continued to deal with enquiries as they are logged following COVID-19 guidance.

Officers continue to deal with enquiries relating to fly tipping, littering, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles and general enquiries. There have been 88 enquiries in relation to fly tipping for the period compared to 66 for the same period in 2020.

In dealing with abandoned vehicles, Officers have gained compliance from vehicle owners with said vehicles getting removed from the streets and where appropriate, requests have been sent to WLC contractors for removal.

Throughout West Lothian, Officers continue to engage with volunteering groups, attend regeneration group meetings and render the necessary assistance needed to encourage the exercise they currently perform.

There has been an increase in the amount of equipment supplied to facilitate litter picking volunteers, which has increased in line with activity.

There was one Fixed Penalty Notice issued in Ward 7 for the period of 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021. For the same period in 2020 there were two Fixed Penalty Notices issued within the Ward.

Costs for fly tipping for the period 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021

Fly tipping is covered by the NETs teams who also carry out other non-routine works for Grounds. We are unable to split costs over specific ward areas or from the other works they carry out, but can give the yearly cost for the NETs teams with an estimate of their time spent on fly tipping which we currently estimate as 80% of their time. For 2020 the estimate was 70% of their time.

Weights for fly tipping brought into the transfer station are provided as a weekly total Monday – Sunday.

Fly tipping costs:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021 | 105.46 tonnes |
| Cost of disposal including costs for NETs team/vehicles, October-December | £69,494.95 |
| Contractor removal of fly tipping | £0.00 |
| Removal of asbestos | £0.00 |
| TOTAL | £69,494.95 |

The number of enquiries received between 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021 for the Ward was 88 out of 881 enquiries for the whole of West Lothian equating to 10.0% of fly tipping enquiries relating to Ward 7.

Percentage wise this would equate to an approximate cost for the Ward of £6,941.51 for disposal of fly tipping between 1 February 2021 and 30 April 2021 including cost for Staff/vehicles. (This does not include the removal of asbestos by the Councils asbestos team).

Costs for fly tipping for the period 1 February 2020 – 30 April 2020

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1 February 2020 – 30 April 2020 | 56.14 tonne |
| Cost of disposal including estimated costs for NETs team/vehicles | £36,994.56 |
| Contractor removal of fly tipping | £0.00 |
| Removal of asbestos | £0.00 |
| TOTAL | £36,994.56 |

The number of enquiries received between 1 February 2020 – 30 April 2020 for the Ward was 66 out of 543 enquiries for the whole of West Lothian equating to 12.2% of fly tipping enquiries relating to Ward 7.

Percentage wise this would equate to an approximate cost for the ward of £4,496.58 for disposal of fly tipping between 1 February 2020 and 30 April 2020 including cost for Staff/vehicles. (This does not include the removal of asbestos by the Councils asbestos team). The removal of fly tipping by contractor was not within Ward 7

D5 Parks and Woodland

Tree & Woodland Enquiries

In total 22 Parks and Woodland related enquiries were received during this reporting period.

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Tree Advice or Consultations | 3 | 0 |
| Tree Affecting Public Utility | 1 | 0 |
| Tree Blocking Light | 1 | 0 |
| Tree Branches Overhanging | 4 | 0 |
| Tree Broken/Damaged or Dead | 0 | 2 |
| Tree Dangerous or Unsafe | 0 | 3 |
| Tree Enquiries General | 13 | 8 |
| Tree Planting Requests | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 22 | 15 |

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| Access Rights Way Core Paths | 7 | 1 |
| Complaint Country Parks/ Trees | 2 | 0 |
| Country Park General Enquiries | 1 | 0 |
| Country Park Golf Enquiries | 0 | 1 |
| Ranger Service Polkemmet | 2 | 0 |
| Total | 12 | 2 |

Ranger Service Update

| | |
|---|----|
| No. Rights Of Way / Core Path / Patrols carried out (hours) | 62 |
| No. Access Enquiries | 16 |

The West Lothian planning portal is being monitored weekly to identify applications that have an access or biodiversity impact. A number of planning applications have been commented on regarding access and biodiversity including windfarm applications, housing developments at East Calder, Clappertonhall and Pumpherston and development at Seafeld.

The Parks & Woodland team had a meeting with Police Scotland's Rural Crime and Community Liaison Officers to look at closer working relationships and how we can work together to solve some of the anti-social and criminal issues affecting the country parks and wider countryside.

The Ranger Service is getting the first tentative enquiries from schools in regards to a resumption of outdoor education sessions. But given the current surge in access work/enquiries and the doubling of visitor numbers to Parks & Woodlands sites since Covid, (especially the country parks), we don't expect to be able to offer such visits this side of the summer holidays. The Ranger Service met with some school representatives from the Skills Centre and Connolly School to advise on how to better integrate outdoor education into their day-to-day learning.

The Country Parks have been very busy, with car parks filling up by mid-morning on the nicer weekends. Rangers had to log a call to Police Scotland about the irresponsible parking at Balvormie (Beecraigs).

Covid restrictions eased on 26 April, and visitor centres and other facilities at the country parks all reopened. Rangers have been inspecting facilities prior to reopening at the three parks, and assisting with duties at Beecraigs reception and caravan & camping site.

The Ranger Service put out two 'Responsible Access' posts on the Council Facebook page in advance of the good weather weekends, and both were well received, with a massive online reach of around 60,000 users per post. Educational posters encouraging responsible access in West Lothian to help avoid conflict with land management operations, have been completed in partnership with local landowners/residents.

Rangers have applied to Nature Scots "Better Places Green Recovery Fund 2" for four assistant rangers and two assistant operatives to help deal with the increased visitor numbers expected over the next few months at the Country Parks and other hotspots around the county.

Ranger Service received the go-ahead from WLC Regeneration Team to spend surplus from Greenrigg Community Council Town Centre Fund on replacement bench for Greenrigg play area. Orders placed and awaiting delivery / installation.

Access

An application was made and has since been awarded to improve Core Paths WL19 East Whitburn to Stoneyburn in partnership with various Community groups. The Ranger Service have met with the Woodland Trust (who own a section of this route) to coordinate works on Foulshiels Bing. Quotes have been received and the projects have been awarded to a contractor and works started on 15 April to upgrade core path WL19 from East Whitburn to Mid Seat Cottage (Hen's Nest Road). We haven't made it all the way through to Stoneyburn just now but we are still planning to return before the end of August to finish the remaining section. This is because we still need to resolve a couple of land owner issues which have pushed timescales slightly. Unfortunately, in the short time the path has been completed a horse rider has cantered down a section which will now need remedial work done. Posts have been put out on social media to say that although horse riders are allowed to use the route but we would ask that they let the path bed in for a few weeks and also that they keep their speed down to a walk or trot – not just for the sake of the path but also for the safety of other users. The Ranger Service will also put up some signs short term to hopefully prevent this occurring again.

Two separate public enquiries have been received from Easter Breich, on core path WL37. One concern was about two new very large and deep drainage ditches close to the path, and the other concern was the boardwalk area just up from the Seafield bridge over the Almond (being impassable to horses). The Ranger service met local resident on site to investigate, with a view to following up the various access issues with the relevant landowner.

We provided additional advice to Easter Breich Wood Community Group in regards to path maintenance along core path WL40, and possible funding options in the future, and patrolled the length of WL37 while we were there to assess maintenance requirements.

We continue to monitor the drainage situation along core path WL37 at Easter Breich / Seafield, with site visits every couple of weeks. A site visit was undertaken on 8 April, when it was noted that pipes were on site ready for work to commence. We received an enquiry on 21 April, which said pipes had been installed but appeared to be draining the field into the wet area at the boardwalk. We made a further site visit on 27 April – the pipe was dry and is possibly draining into the field. So, we are following this up with the landowner to confirm.

Access problems reported on ROW LW52 between Five Sisters bing and Cleughbrae. Ranger attended site to inspect. Found ROW in fairly poor condition due to drainage and erosion. Following up with local landowner and re-scored the path against other West Lothian access priorities.

A number of enquiries have been received regarding Peatland Restoration work at Easter Inch Moss. The work has included peat inversion and plastic dam installation. The peat inversion looks particularly shocking as it removes existing trees and vegetation, but is necessary for the improvement of the peatland habitat. All work has been overseen by an officer from NatureScot as well as a dedicated Ecologist to make sure the project is having as small an impact as possible on existing flora and fauna, and that appropriate mitigation is in place. The contractor is now off site and the area should recover fairly quickly as we move through Spring/Summer.

Polkemmet Country Park

An enquiry came in regarding Polkemmet Country Park about litter and bins overflowing in the Play Area. The enquirer had helpfully picked up the litter and left the bags next to a bin. Staff were due to attend the same day to remove the collected litter when emptying the bins.

Work has started on the road bridge at Polkemmet Country Park. This work is due to be completed by early June. The Park, facilities and businesses are all running as usual throughout the work except for 2-4 June where resurfacing works will require the bridge to be closed to all traffic. During this time, there will be no vehicular access across the river to the Visitor Centre, toilets, golf/driving range, play area, Owl Centre, Courtyard Café or Polkemmet Nursery. The south car park will still be available during this time.

D6 Open Space and Cemeteries

Open Space Capital Programme

Polkemmet Country Park Play Area, Whitburn. Works to install additional drainage measures are complete. Play area will be refurbished and upgraded in Summer/Autumn 2021. This will include replacing the sand play area, replacing swings, and replacing park furniture. New inclusive toddler play equipment will also be added (Town Centre Fund).

Seafield Green Play Area, Seafield. The cableway has been replaced (Town Centre Fund).

Open Space Enquiries

There were three Open Space enquiries for this reporting period in 2021.

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|--------------------------|------|------|
| Childrens Play Enquiries | 3 | 0 |
| Total | 3 | 0 |

Cemeteries Routine Works

Whitburn Cemeteries

Routine grass cutting and weed control tasks have been completed. Seasonal maintenance works and lair reinstatement and burial duties are ongoing across the cemetery estates.

Cemeteries Enquiries

There were 102 Cemeteries enquiries for this reporting period in 2021.

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| Cemeteries General Enquiries | 8 | 3 |
| Cemetery Property Vandalised | 1 | 0 |
| Complaint Cemeteries & Burials | 1 | 0 |
| Lair Enquiries | 2 | 4 |
| Memorial/ Headstone Works | 32 | 4 |
| New Interment Booking | 37 | 26 |
| Purchase of Interment Lair | 21 | 6 |
| Total | 102 | 43 |

E. CONCLUSION

The Education, Engagement and Enforcement team have continued to deal with enquiries as they are logged following COVID-19 guidance.

The Open Space Capital Programme is progressing as scheduled.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Open Space Strategy

Capital Programme

Appendices/Attachments: None

Contact Persons: Eirwen Hopwood, Parks and Woodland Manager, 01506 284500

Eirwen.Hopwood@westlothian.gov.uk

Jim Jack
Head of Operational Services
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