

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



LINLITHGOW 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 NET's, Land & Countryside Services teams for the period 1 July 2021 – 30 September 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	Relates to items 9 - We live our lives free from crime, disorder and danger & 12 – We value and enjoy our built environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations
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 July 2021 – 30 September 2021.

D2 Grounds Maintenance Routine Works

Grounds staff have completed 10 grass cycles up to 30 September 2021 and will complete one further cut in October before the end of the cutting season.

Weed Spraying will cease mid-October with 2 cycles having been successfully completed within the ward.

One off cuts and garden tidy ups for Housing Services are on course to be completed.

Enquiries and Councillors request are being dealt with on a daily basis.

We have recently recruited three new Apprentices Horticulturists/Gardeners on a three-year contract.

Burgh Beautiful

Officers would like to congratulate Burgh Beautiful on their fantastic achievement of receiving the Gold Award in this year's Britain in Bloom competition. The council continued to provide support to the group and town this year despite facing challenges due to reduced financial resources and staff shortages resulting in the suspension of the Grounds Maintenance service for a period due to the impact of COVID.

Grounds Maintenance Enquiries

In total 57 grounds maintenance related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2021	2020
Ball Game Enquiries	2	0
Bench or Seat Enquiries	1	3
Burns or Watercourses	0	1
Complaint Grounds Maintenance	2	2
Drainage Flooding Grass Areas	0	1
Emergency Tree Out of Hours	0	1
Fencing Enquiries	1	0
Flower Bed or Bulb Displays	1	1
Grass Area Damaged	0	2
Grass Cutting Enquiries	6	6
Grass Cutting Missed Not Cut	1	1
Grass Highway Verges	9	2
Grass Left On Paths or Roads	1	0
Ground Ownership Enquiries	1	2
Grounds Planning Applications	1	0
Grounds Property Vandalised	1	1

Hedge Cutting Enquiries	2	4
Illegal Adverts Estate Signs	1	0
Neighbourhood Env. Teams	0	1
Public Park Enquiries	1	3
Shrub Bed Enquiries	2	1
Shrub Bed Overhanging Path	12	12
Shrub Beds Not Maintained	1	0
Shrub/ Vegetation Sight Lines	4	0
Sports Facility Enquiries	0	1
Weeds General Enquiries	3	3
Weeds on Paths or Roads	4	1
Total	57	49

D3 Garden Maintenance Routine Works

The Garden Maintenance Scheme will meet their target of eleven cuts.

Garden Maintenance Enquiries

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

	2021	2020
Complaint Garden Maintenance	0	1
Garden Maintenance General Enquiries	4	5
Garden Maintenance Grass Not Cut	1	8
Garden Maintenance Standard of Cut	0	2
Total	5	16

D4 Cleaner Communities Routine Works

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.

Solar Compactor Litter Bin Pilot Scheme

West Lothian Council has approved £150k of additional funding for the procurement of new smart compactor litter bins. A trial of various supplier's bins is being used to determine the preferred bin model and manufacturer. A working group has been setup to look at quantities required, locations (mapping), bin sizes/weights, manual handling requirements for emptying, procurement and community engagement, as well as overseeing the implementation of the Litter Bin Plan.

10 solar compactor bins have been ordered from four different suppliers for an eight-week trial, with delivery expected at the end October/start November (installation by West Lothian Council to follow soon after). Each supplier/product will be assessed on set criteria (e.g. spec/cost/quality/after sales/software/accuracy of notifications).

Suppliers for the trial are: British Bins; Egbert Taylor; PEL; Wybone.

The proposed locations for the trial are: - Linlithgow Loch, Hillview Car Park near Bathgate, Eliburn Park, Bankton Mains Park, Murieston South Train Car Park and Beecraigs Visitor Centre.

Following completion of the pilot and once a preferred supplier has been identified, the roll out of further bins will take place and will include further community engagement.

Cleaner Communities Enquiries

In total 76 cleaner communities related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2021	2020
Complaint Street Cleansing	1	1
Dead Animals	6	7
Dog Fouled Grass Open Space	0	1
Dog Fouling on Path Roads	3	4
Fly Posting	1	1
Fly Tipping Dumping	32	58
Glass on Paths or Open Spaces	1	1
Graffiti Non-Offensive	3	0
Graffiti Racist or Offensive	6	1
Litter Bin Burnt Damaged	0	1
Litter Bin New Request for Bin	2	1
Litter Bin Overflowing	1	4
Litter Paths Roads Verges	2	1
Street Sweeping Enquiries	8	7
Vehicle Abandoned	10	3
Total	76	91

Fly Tipping Enquiries (January - December)

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Illegal Fly Tipping/Dumping	168	97	75	55	76

Environmental Community Action

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

The team engaged with members of the public within the area as they assisted with Community participation survey for Grounds maintenance.

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 has been no Fixed Penalty Notices issued in Ward 1 for the period of 1 July 2021 – 30 September 2021. For the same period in 2020, there were also no Fixed Penalty Notices issued within the Ward.

Costs for fly tipping for the period 1 July 2021 – 30 September 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 70% of their time. For 2020 the estimate was 80% of their time.

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

Fly tipping costs:

1 July 2021 – 30 September 2021	59.8 tonnes
Cost of disposal including costs for NETs team/vehicles	£39,406.41
Contractor removal of fly tipping	£0.00
Removal of asbestos	£0.00
TOTAL	£39,406.41

The number of enquiries received between 1 July 2021 – 30 September 2021 for the Ward was 32 out of 525 enquiries for the whole of West Lothian equating to 6.10% of fly tipping enquiries relating to Ward 1.

Percentage wise this would equate to an approximate cost for the Ward of £2,403.79 for disposal of fly tipping between 1 July 2021 and 30 September 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 July 2020 – 30 September 2020

1 July 2020 – 30 September 2020	83.88 tonne
Cost of disposal including estimated costs for NETs team/vehicles	£55,274.40
Contractor removal of fly tipping	£0.00
Removal of asbestos	£0.00
TOTAL	£55,274.40

The number of enquiries received between 1 July 2020 – 30 September 2020 for the Ward was 58 out of 613 enquiries for the whole of West Lothian equating to 9.5% of fly tipping enquiries relating to Ward 1.

Percentage wise this would equate to an approximate cost for the ward of £5,251.06 for disposal of fly tipping between 1 July 2020 and 30 September 2020 including cost for Staff/vehicles. (This does not include the removal of asbestos by the Councils asbestos team).

D5 Park and Woodland

Tree and Woodland Enquiries

In total 39 Parks and Woodland related enquiries were received during this reporting period.

	2021	2020
Tree Advice or Consultations	4	1
Tree Blocking Light	1	0
Tree Branches Overhanging	15	12
Tree Broken Damaged or Dead	1	5
Tree Conservation Areas	1	1
Tree Dangerous or Unsafe	3	5
Tree Enquiries General	14	20
Total	39	44

	2021	2020
Access Rights Way Core Paths	10	3
Complaint Country Parks/ Trees	0	1
Country Park General Enquiries	3	8
Ranger Service Beecraigs	4	1
Ranger Service Education	1	0
Ranger Service General Enquiry	1	1
Total	19	14

Ranger Service Update

No. Rights Of Way / Core Path / Patrols carried out (hours)	94.5
No. Access Enquiries	12
No. Conservation Surveys / Tasks	5
No. Volunteer hours	62

Beecraigs has been extremely busy this summer. With an attendant short, the ranger service has been undertaking attendant / caravan site duties as needed.

Two Assistant Rangers and two Assistant Operatives have been employed from 28 June 2021, funded by NatureScot as part of their Better Places Green Recovery Fund. The Assistant Rangers have carried out patrols in hotspot areas, run six pop-up events engaging the public on a range of access related issues, SOAC (Scottish Outdoor Access Code) and responsible dog walking behaviour. They have worked with Police, Fire and Rescue, and NFU Scotland at the West Lothian PARC (Partnership Against Rural Crime) event at Beecraigs, and ran a guided walk for local scouts on the subject of responsible access.

Duke of Edinburgh volunteers have continued their programme of work at Beecraigs, helping the rangers to: clear the main drainage ditch in the park of logs and other debris; de-berming (to prevent waterlogging) the mountain bike Skills Area; cutting back some of the overgrown grass paths at Hillhouse; constructing natural barriers between the mountain bike trail and Purple route at Beecraigs; and cutting back the summer growth from the narrower parts of the Purple route.

The Ranger Service have been gathering photo evidence and survey data to support the Parks & Woodlands application to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, for upgrading and modernising of the toilet facilities at Beecraigs (Balvornie and Lochside)

We had a virtual meeting with Yellow Book Ltd, at the recommendation of the Economic Development team, to provide information from an access and park capacity perspective for their report on the economic potential of the Bathgate Hills. We advised them to contact NFU (National Farmers Union) Scotland to canvass their opinion for their report.

We had a meeting with Beecraigs Farm to see about re-establishing the on-site chalk boards, to improve farm education and the overall visitor experience.

Forest management work started at Beecraigs on 23 August. This took up much of the rangers' time in August, meeting with the Tree & Woodland Officer, printing signage, producing on-site interpretation, compiling maps for diversions, liaising with Media and Comms to update the Council website and Facebook pages.

The Ranger Service had a second meeting with the Lyme Resource Centre, to discuss how we can collaborate on a Tick/Lyme Disease awareness-raising project in the new year, and to report back on progress so far. We have put the new tick awareness posters in every notice board in the three country parks, and the Assistant Rangers have incorporated tick awareness into their public engagement 'pop up' events across West Lothian. More than 300 people have been directly spoken to about ticks so far at these events. We've also spoken to Media about supporting the collaboration when we have something to share.

Officers attended the quarterly West Lothian Cycle Forum, updating from an access perspective on district-wide issues.

Officers attended Forth & Borders Ranger meet up (virtual) to discuss Rangering during Covid and our recovery plans, the challenges land managers and ranger services are facing, and different ways of tackling issues seen on sites across the wider countryside.

Officers have been gathering photo evidence and survey data to support the Parks & Woodlands application to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, for upgrading and modernising the toilet facilities at Beecraigs Country Park.

Officers have also been assisting Green Action Trust (GAT) by reviewing their map of potential 'missing link' habitat sites across the district and providing additional biodiversity / access information.

Hannah Crow left the Ranger Service at the end of September to work in one of the new Biodiversity and Ecology Officer posts within West Lothian Council. Her ranger position will be advertised in late October but until it is filled, the service will be reduced from four rangers to three, with Hannah's responsibilities and outstanding projects distributed around the remaining team.

Access

Unauthorised mountain bike trails were dismantled from Rosemount Park as they are being built on an active badger sett. As this is the second time this has happened, signage has been put up regularly to explain that this is an offence under the Scottish Badgers Act. Both Police Scotland and Scottish Badgers have been informed.

The Ranger Service helped coordinate the fire service response to a smouldering abandoned campfire at Beecraigs, and damped it down afterwards. A second campfire (and abandoned camping gear) was subsequently found smouldering near the Refuge Stone at Witchcraig. Three rangers walked buckets of water up from the Korean War Memorial car park to douse, and walked out with abandoned camping gear. We put a post out on the council's Facebook page about the high fire risk, which was seen by 21,000 people, with active engagement from 1,300 people.

A new fire site was reported at Hillhouse. Assistant Rangers cleared it away and patrolled the area on subsequent evening patrols.

Officers patrolled and inspected the southern half of core path WL07 (Fisher's Brae) after public enquiry about path being overgrown and flanked by giant hogweed. No giant hogweed found (though plenty of common hogweed), but the overgrown section is in Falkirk so we passed this over to their access officer.

An enquiry was received about the use of electric bikes within Beecraigs and the speeds used on multiuser paths. It was explained that E-bikes are considered non-motorised so have access rights, but responsible access still applies. Travelling at speed either where it could cause injury or alarm to other users is not responsible access.

Unwelcoming 'STOP' signage was reported. The ranger service liaised with Hopetoun Estates, who helped resolve the issue and asked for advice on the legality of such signage.

Advice was sought by Hopetoun Estates with regards to practical application of access legislation. We met with the factor on site to explain in context.

Guidance slabs for visually impaired people in the Beecraigs Visitor Centre car park, had adjacent surfacing raised so that there was no trip hazard. This was after a member of the public reported to the ranger service that they were causing them problems.

Officers received a public enquiry about core path WL12 between Threemiletown and Union Canal being impassable due to overgrowth. Hopetoun Estates cut this path back recently so we will need to get back to take another look.

The Ranger Service met with contractors to discuss the upgrade of two paths at Beecraigs – on the Green waymarked trail – involving the upgrade of paths to Cockleroy and replacement of the old wooden boardwalk. The path from the Caravan & Camping site down to Lochside car park will follow later in the autumn.

Ecology and Biodiversity

A new team has been developed to address growing biodiversity and climate change issues across West Lothian. Becky Plunkett and Hannah Crow have recently been appointed as Ecology and Biodiversity Officers, with a third person to be recruited this autumn.

More information on the officers' roles and responsibilities will follow, and updates will be regularly provided in the local area committee reports.

D6 Open Space and Cemeteries

Open Space Routine Works

Linlithgow Loch District Park, Linlithgow. Upgrade of Lady Park footpath pending. Compulsory Purchase Order application is being progressed by Property Services in discussion with Legal Services. There is a high risk of legal challenges and public inquiry. This may delay any subsequent construction beyond Spring/Summer 2022.

Justinhaugh Drive Green, Linlithgow. The play area refurbishment is ongoing. Existing equipment will be repaired and additional swings and toddler equipment will be added.

Dovecot Park/Springalong Play Area, Linlithgow. The play area refurbishment is ongoing. Existing equipment will be replaced and additional swings will be added. Furniture will be replaced. Stone access steps will be repaired. Surfaces will be upgraded and additional footpaths will be added to allow wheeled access to new swing area and toddler/junior play area.

Open Space Enquiries

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

	2021	2020
Childrens Play Enquiries	7	6
Play Area Property Vandalised	0	1
Total	7	7

Cemeteries Routine Works

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 60 Cemeteries enquiries for this reporting period in 2021.

	2021	2020
Bench Donations	1	0
Cemeteries General Enquiries	7	4
Lair Enquiries	6	6
Lair Sunken or Uneven	2	6
Memorial/ Headstone Works	15	20
New Interment Booking	20	14
Purchase of Interment Lair	9	14
Total	60	64

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

Appendices/Attachments: None

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Jim Jack

Head of Operational Services

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