

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



EAST LIVINGSTON AND EAST CALDER 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 February 2022 to 30 April 2022.

B. RECOMMENDATION

The Local Area Committee is asked to:

1. Note the work carried out by the service within the local area.
2. Advise on 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 February 2022 to 30 April 2022.

D2 Grounds Maintenance Routine Works

Shrub bed maintenance was started in mid-December and was completed for the end of March.

Staff were involved with Winter Maintenance duties until 31 March 2022. Grounds Maintenance staff also covered at Waste Services for a short period of time.

Open Space summer works including grass cutting and weed control started on Monday 4 April 2022.

Enquiries are being dealt with on a daily basis.

Grounds Maintenance Enquiries

In total 19 grounds maintenance related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2022	2021
Ball Game Enquiries	1	2
Bench or Seat Enquiries	1	0
Bonfire Enquiries	0	1
Complaint Grounds Maintenance	1	4
Drainage Flooding Grass Areas	1	1
Emergency Tree Out of Hours	1	0
Enforcement Officer Enquiries	0	1
Fencing Enquiries	0	2
Grass Area Damaged	2	0
Grass Cutting Enquiries	0	3
Grass Highway Verges	0	1
Ground Ownership Enquiries	2	3
Grounds Property Vandalised	2	6
Hedge Cutting Enquiries	1	2
Neighbourhood Env. Teams	1	0
Public Park Enquiries	0	8
Shrub Bed Enquiries	2	2
Shrub Bed Overhanging Path	2	5
Shrub Beds Not Maintained	1	0
Weeds General Enquiries	1	0
Total	19	41

D3 Garden Maintenance Routine Works

Recruitment for Garden Maintenance Scheme seasonal staff is still ongoing. Grass cutting for the scheme commenced on 11 April 2022.

Garden Maintenance Enquiries

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

	2022	2021
Garden Maintenance General Enquiries	8	10
Garden Maintenance Grass Not Cut	0	3
Garden Maintenance Hedge Cutting	0	1
Garden Maintenance No Longer Required	0	1
Garden Maintenance Standard of Cut	0	1
Total	8	16

D4 Cleaner Communities Routine Works

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/ sweeping of footpaths/ open spaces and road verges and dealing with enquiries as they arise.

Officers continue to work with volunteer's litter picking within the Ward and have assisted with the uplift of bags and debris that they have collected by the NETs team.

The NETs team have also been dealing with fly tipping enquiries and removing fly tipping from Council ground.

Cleaner Communities Enquiries

In total 132 cleaner communities related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2022	2021
Complaint Street Cleansing	1	2
Dead Animals	4	7
Dog Bin New Request for Bin	1	5
Dog Bin Overflowing	2	1
Dog Fouled Grass Open Space	3	2
Dog Fouled Kids Play Area	0	1
Dog Fouling on Paths Roads	12	29
Dog No Fouling Sign Request	1	0
Fly Posting	0	2
Fly Tipping Dumping	54	229
Glass on Paths or Open Spaces	1	3
Graffiti Non-Offensive	1	1
Graffiti Racist or Offensive	2	3
Litter Bin Burnt Damaged	1	1
Litter Bin New Request for Bin	2	4
Litter Bin Overflowing	1	3
Litter General Enquiries	3	10
Litter Paths Roads Verges	19	39
Street Sweeping Enquiries	11	11
Trolleys Abandoned/Dumped	1	10
Trolleys Dumped in Livingston	0	1
Vehicle Abandoned	12	20
Total	132	384

Fly Tipping Enquiries (January-December)

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Illegal Fly Tipping/Dumping	634	448	364	352	254

Enforcement Community Action

Officers continue to deal with enquiries relating to fly tipping, littering, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles and general enquiries. There were 54 enquiries in relation to fly tipping for this period compared to 229 for the same period in 2021.

In dealing with abandoned vehicles, Officers have gained compliance from vehicle owners with said vehicles getting removed from public highways or getting taxed in most cases. Where appropriate, requests have been sent to WLC contractors for removal. However, there are instances where vehicle owners are not compliant and result to moving their vehicles between streets. When presented with such tactics, officers have resulted to contacting the DVLA and VOSA for support. Officers have also had to educate members of the public that their vehicles with a SORN marker needs to be off public roads and kept in a private drive or inside a garage. This is a scenario that has occurred quite frequently of late.

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 was one Fixed Penalty Notice issued in Ward 5 for the period of 1 February 2022 – 30 April 2022. For the same period in 2021 there was also one Fixed Penalty Notice issued within the Ward.

Costs for fly tipping for the period 1 February 2022 – 30 April 2022

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 45% of their time. For 2021 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 February 2022 – 30 April 2022	76.7 tonnes
Cost of disposal including costs for NETs team/vehicles, February - April	£50,542.99
Contractor removal of fly tipping	£0.00
Removal of asbestos	£0.00
TOTAL cost for all 9 wards	£50,542.99

The number of enquiries received between 1 February 2022 – 30 April 2022 for the Ward was 54 out of 337 enquiries for the whole of West Lothian equating to 16.02% of fly tipping enquiries relating to Ward 5.

Percentage wise this would equate to an approximate cost for the Ward of £8,098.88, for disposal of fly tipping between 1 February 2022 and 30 April 2022 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 2021 – 30 April 2021

1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021	105.46 tonnes
Cost of disposal including estimated costs for NETs team/vehicles	£69,494.98
Contractor removal of fly tipping	£0.00
Removal of asbestos	£0.00
TOTAL cost for all 9 wards	£69,494.98

The number of enquiries received between 1 February 2021 – 30 April 2021 for the Ward was 229 out of 878 enquiries for the whole of West Lothian equating to 26.1% of fly tipping enquiries relating to Ward 5.

Percentage wise this would equate to an approximate cost for the ward of £18,138.19 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). The removal of fly tipping by contractor was not within Ward 5.

D5 Parks and Woodland

In total 31 Parks and Woodland related enquiries were received during this reporting period.

	2022	2021
Tree Advice or Consultations	3	6
Tree Blocking Light	1	2
Tree Branches Overhanging	4	7
Tree Broken Damaged or Dead	3	1
Tree Dangerous or Unsafe	5	7
Tree Enquiries General	14	26
Tree Leaves Causing Problems	0	1
Tree Woodland Enquiries	1	0
Total	31	50

	2022	2021
Access Rights Way Core Paths	2	4
Complaint Country Parks/ Trees	0	1
Country Park General Enquiries	2	9
Total	4	14

Almondell and Calderwood Country Park

Over 4000 small trees have been planted in the felled areas of Larch Wood and along the South Drive at Almondell to replace the mainly Larch and Ash which were removed from these areas. Over 50 specimen trees were also planted in the more formal areas of the park to replace those which have been lost to decay and wind blow over the past decades. The areas around the planting have also been landscaped and some areas seeded with wildflower/grass mixes. This work was carried out by some very stalwart members of the Friends of Almondell & Calderwood, supported by members of the Parks & Woodland Team. A successful tree planting day was held with members of staff from M&G Insurance's Edinburgh Office. A grant of £23,000 was awarded for the overall tree planting project by the Tree Council, which in turn had been sponsored by M&G Insurance. Photos and further information can be found on the Friends of Almondell & Calderwood Facebook page.

There have been further delays in finishing off the path and car park works due to contractor capacity, but all is due to be completed prior to the school holidays.

A contract was awarded for the mechanised removal of trees affected by Ash Dieback Disease along roadsides and also in other areas. A number of sections of road throughout the council area have been selected and within these ash trees, showing significant signs of the disease, are being removed. As part of this project, a few large ash trees which hung over the Sustrans National Cycle Route and the canal feeder (an historic structure) between Almondell and Mid Calder were removed in March. Access to these areas and the logistics were very difficult and access permission was kindly agreed with the adjacent farmer. Some additional trees adjacent to the Powies' Path and other well used paths were also removed. Some trees had to be left until after summer due to wildlife constraints. Replacement planting will be undertaken and where practicable some ash trees will be pruned to create a "snag" or "monolith" rather than being completely felled. Further information on Ash Dieback Disease and the council's approach to dealing with this will be available in the Tree & Woodland section of the council's website shortly.

Ranger Service Update

No. Rights Of Way / Core Path / Patrols carried out (hours)	28
No. Access Enquiries	5
No. Conservation Surveys / Tasks	1
No. Volunteer hours	224

The Ranger Service have applied to NatureScot's Better Places Fund – Round 3 for seasonal Assistant Rangers and Assistant Operatives. If the funding is secured, successful applicants will start in early June and will help both the Ranger Team and the Operatives Team over the busy summer months. The job listings for these have gone live, in anticipation of a successful funding application.

Following successful partnership working with the Lyme Resource Centre, the 'tick trails' have been installed by the Ranger Service at five locations across the three Country Parks. The trails are due to stay up until the end of May and have been advertised on social media by the Lyme Resource Centre, and on the Council's Facebook page.

The Ranger Service received six new meadow scythes & rakes, from the Sustrans 'Love Your Network' grant. These are primarily to help maintain wildflower meadows close to NCR75 at Blackridge, but we expect to be able to use them for volunteer groups across the district.

Officers continue to work with the Council's Tree & Woodland Officer to collect, stack, and bag tree tubes for recycling. This process is still in its early stages, but it is the intention it will be used to recycle tubes from greenspaces across West Lothian.

The Ranger team are assisting Love to Ride (and by extension, the West Lothian Cycle Forum) to plan an event to promote cycling in West Lothian. This will be held at Almondell and Calderwood Country Park on Sunday 15 May.

The Ranger team have seen a recent increase in enquiries for the Ranger Service and their activities from many different community groups, schools, and businesses. At the moment, the service has not been able to resume the activities programme, and so the responses reflect this. However, officers are advising customers that they will be contacted once there is capacity to offer activities, which hopefully will happen once the Assistant Rangers are in post.

Access

The service continues to review all West Lothian planning applications for access implications, and submit comments to Planning Services.

The Ranger Service received five new access enquiries for Ward 5 from February-April, three of which are still ongoing. Issues include path closures, restricted access to a quarry used for fishing, and forestry operations damaging and denying access to a Right of Way.

The Ranger Service received an enquiry about access issues on the Core Path linking East Calder Main Street to Langton Road, where a diversion path has been installed around a new Persimmon housing development. This was investigated by the team and there is a further diversion planned, which utilises the new tarmac path by East Calder Sports Centre.

Officers carried out a second site visit to the housing development in East Calder, where access to the quarry pond has been cut off due to construction works. A Ranger met with the customer who logged the enquiry and explained that this was more of a Planning issue. Planning have been contacted about this issue, and the customer is grateful for the effort made by the team.

The Ranger Service undertook a further site inspection of the right of way at Linnhouse and found it to have many drainage issues, resulting in extremely wet and muddy conditions. The landowner has been contacted to ask if there are any further drainage works planned in for the reinstatement of the Right of Way. Planning Enforcement were contacted about the installation of a deer fence which was restricting access and have sent a formal letter stating that the complaint will not be taken any further as the fence meets the requirements for a permitted development.

Almondell and Calderwood Country Park

Through the coordination of the Tree Council, M&G Insurance donated £23,000 towards tree planting projects in Almondell & Calderwood Country Park, as part of M&G's sustainability plan. This money covered the cost of 3000 whips and 40 half-standard specimen trees. A corporate tree planting event was organised by the Ranger team in partnership with the Council's Tree & Woodland Officer and the Countryside Operative team, and 12 M&G employees helped to plant over 300 trees on Friday 1 April, in an area clear-felled of Larch which was affected by tree disease *Phytophthora Ramorum*.

Almondell continues to be popular with visitors, particularly over the Easter holidays and during the spells of nice weather in April.

The Friends of Almondell continue to meet on Saturdays and carry out practical volunteering tasks, and have recently been working with the Parks & Woodlands staff on the tree planting programme. Other tasks include drain clearing, developing the Community Heritage Trail as part of the Historic Wall Project, and conservation work at Calderwood fen, which will help to improve the SSSI condition and biodiversity.

Volunteers from 'Reuse and Thrive' in East Calder have helped to improve the southern entrance to the park by painting and planting flower boxes.

New half-standard trees have been planted along the South Drive, to replace those that were snapped and damaged due to vandalism.

Ecology and Biodiversity

Calderwood has been included as part of the Queen's Green Canopy of 70 ancient woods which are dedicated to Her Majesty in celebration of the Platinum Jubilee. The submission for the site was a joint effort involving Ecology & Biodiversity, Tree & Woodland and Ranger staff.

House Martins at Calderwood – Following reports of damage to house martin nests on houses in Calderwood last year (a criminal offence carrying a potential jail sentence) leaflets were delivered through letterboxes to all houses in Rowan Place, Rowan Walk and Badger Walk, highlighting the importance of house martins and their legal protection. The Ecology and Biodiversity team will work with Police Scotland to monitor the nests around the area this year and hope that the educational leaflets will have inspired some enthusiasm for the species.

Greening of the Shale Trail, Drumshoreland - Specialist ecology consultants are being employed to produce a report on the current status and potential enhancements of the Great Crested Newt breeding ponds at Drumshoreland, which is now an internationally significant site and adjacent to the Shale Trail. Following this report, habitat enhancements will be made. The Ecology and Biodiversity team also hope to trial amphibian ladders in road gullies near this site in the near future.

Tree planting at Langton Park, East Calder and Cunnigar Park, Mid Calder – As part of the park improvements to both parks, 31 trees have been planted in Cunnigar Park and 11 trees in Langton Park. These will provide interest, colour and improve biodiversity in both parks.

D6 Open Space and Cemeteries

Open Space Capital Programme

East Calder Park Play Area. The 'carousel' swing will be replaced in Autumn 2022. A swing frame including a basket swing and two flat swing seats will be installed.

Covid Recovery Funding Projects – Ash Grove Planters and Craigshill "Welcome" sign meetings have now been arranged with West Lothian Youth Action Project. This is to discuss the group making and the designing of the features respectively.

Open Space Enquiries

In total there were four open space related enquiries received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2022	2021
Children Play Enquiries	4	1
Play Area Property Vandalised	0	0
Safety Issues In Play Areas	0	1
Total	4	2

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

In total there were 20 cemeteries related enquiries received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2022	2021
Cemeteries General Enquiries	1	2
Complaint Cemeteries & Burials	0	1
Lair Enquiries	3	5
Memorial/ Headstone Works	5	9
New Interment Booking	6	12
Purchase of Interment Lair	5	8
War Memorial Enquiries	0	1
Total	20	38

E. CONCLUSION

Officers continue to deal with enquiries relating to fly tipping, littering, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles and general enquiries.

The Open Space Capital Programme is progressing as scheduled.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments: None

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