



ARMADALE & BLACKRIDGE 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 January 2023 – 31 March 2023.

B. RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

1. Note the work carried out to date and future planned work.
2. Advise of any areas that require further investigation or inclusion in future work plans.

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

The report covers the activity for the period 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023.

D2 Grounds Maintenance Routine Works

Grounds Maintenance have been carrying out winter shrub bed maintenance, with this completed on Thursday 6 April 2023. Staff were also involved in winter maintenance tasks, gritting of footpaths, education sites and the replenishing of grit bins.

The NETs Teams have been dealing with various enquiries on a daily basis and were also utilised during periods of inclement weather.

Grass cutting and weed management will start on 11 April 2023.

Grounds Maintenance Enquiries

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

	2023	2022
Ball Game Enquiries	0	1
Bench or Seat Enquiries	0	1
Bonfire Enquiries	1	0
Emergency Tree Out Of Hours	0	1
Fencing Enquiries	2	2
Grass Area Damaged	2	0
Ground Ownership Enquiries	0	1
Grounds Property Vandalised	2	2
Hedge Cutting Enquiries	0	1
Public Park Enquiries	1	1
Shrub Bed Enquiries	0	3
Shrub Bed Overhanging Path	1	2
Sports Facility Enquiries	0	1
Total	9	16

D3 Garden Maintenance Scheme

The recruitment for seasonal staff required for our Garden Maintenance Scheme was undertaken and completed in preparation for the programme starting on 11 April 2023.

Garden Maintenance Enquiries

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

	2023	2022
Garden Maintenance General Enquiries	2	3
Total	2	3

Staff are continuing to deal with enquiries and carry out routine works of emptying litter/dog waste bins, litter picking on footpaths, roads and open spaces as well as sweeping of paths and road channels throughout the Ward. The NETs team have been dealing with fly tipping enquiries and removing fly tipping waste from Council ground.

Over the period of the report resources continue to be directed towards dealing with leaf fall throughout West Lothian and when required Street Cleansing staff assisted Roads with winter maintenance. During these periods the Street Cleansing service would be reduced.

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

Cleaner Communities Enquiries

In total 93 cleaner communities related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2023	2022
Complaint Street Cleansing	1	0
Dead Animals	3	4
Dog Bin New Request For Bin	0	3
Dog Fouled Grass Open Space	1	1
Dog Fouling on Paths Roads	9	6
Fly Tipping Dumping	33	18
Glass on Paths or Open Spaces	3	0
Graffiti Racist or Offensive	3	1
Litter Bin New Request For Bin	0	2
Litter Bin Overflowing	1	0
Litter General Enquiries	4	2
Litter Grass Open Space	1	1
Litter Paths Roads Verges	17	1
Street Sweeping Enquiries	3	3
Trolleys Abandoned/ Dumped	0	1
Vehicle Abandoned	14	12
Total	93	55

Fly Tipping Enquiries (Full Year)

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Illegal Fly Tipping/Dumping	89	125	164	127	136

Environmental Community Action

Officers continue to deal with enquiries relating to fly tipping, littering, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles and general enquiries. There were 33 enquiries relating to fly tipping for the period compared to 18 for the same period in 2022.

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 no (0) Fixed Penalty Notice issued in Armadale & Blackridge for fly tipping for the period of 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, for the same period in 2022, there was also no (0) Fixed Penalty Notice issued for fly tipping.

Costs for fly tipping for the period 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023

Wards	Number of Fly Tipping Enquiries	% of enquiries relating to Ward	Total Tonnage all wards	Cost of disposal including costs for NETs team/vehicles	Contractor removal of Fly Tipping	Removal of Asbestos
1	33	5.73	76.32	£2,883.07		
2	66	11.50	76.32	£5,786.30		
3	71	12.33	76.32	£6,203.90		
4	111	19.27	76.32	£9,695.80		
5	126	21.88	76.32	£11,009.03		
6	36	6.25	76.32	£3,144.72		
7	49	8.51	76.32	£4,281.85		
8	51	8.85	76.32	£4,452.92		
9	33	5.73	76.32	£2,883.07		
TOTAL	576			£50,340.66		

Costs for fly tipping for the period 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022

Wards	Number of Fly Tipping Enquiries	% of enquiries relating to Ward	Total Tonnage all wards	Cost of disposal including costs for NETs team/vehicles	Contractor removal of Fly Tipping	Removal of Asbestos
1	27	5.57	77.64	£2,850.90		
2	57	11.75	77.64	£6,018.60		
3	67	13.81	77.64	£7,074.45		
4	85	17.53	77.64	£8,975.05		
5	105	21.65	77.64	£11,086.82		
6	35	7.23	77.64	£3,695.61		
7	53	10.93	77.64	£5,596.21		
8	38	7.84	77.64	£4,012.37		
9	18	3.71	77.64	£1,900.60		
TOTAL	485			£51,210.61		

In total there were nine Parks and Woodland related enquiry received during this reporting period.

	2023	2022
Tree Advice or Consultations	1	2
Tree Branches Overhanging	1	0
Tree Broken Damaged or Dead	1	0
Tree Dangerous or Unsafe	0	3
Tree Enquiries General	3	5
Tree Leaves Causing Problems	0	1
Tree Felling Work Unauthorised	3	0
Total	9	11

	2023	2022
Access Rights Way Core Paths	0	2
Ranger Service Beecraigs	0	1
Total	0	3

Ash Dieback

Ash dieback felling work continues across the county with several stretches of roadside sites successfully completed. This included the A706 undertaken from 2 April to 7 April which saw the road closed over the week period. We also took the opportunity to safely undertake gully cleaning, sign and sight line tree pruning, and the replacement planting of 130 trees.

As we have now entered bird nesting season, staff onsite continue to be vigilant whilst undertaking these operations. Furthermore, ecological checks have been undertaken in house and where needed an ecologist will be onsite before work commences with appropriate mitigation adopted where necessary.

As areas are completed each area will be assessed individually for replanting or natural regeneration. Implementation measures will vary by site but could comprise of: single tree specimens replacing individual trees removed, new small groups/roundels comprising of trees and understory shrubs, replacement planting of pockets within wooded areas comprising of trees and/or smaller trees and shrubs.

Ranger Service Update

No. Rights Of Way / Core Path / Patrols carried out (hours)	8.5
No. Access enquiries	1
No. Volunteer Hours	12

The Rangers have welcomed a new Ranger to the team, who brings the main grade team back up to four. There are on a fixed term contract until the beginning of November. The induction process is now complete and they continue to patrol different Parks and sites managed by the Parks & Woodlands team to familiarise themselves with them.

The Ranger Service have applied to NatureScot's Better Places 4 Fund, for four Assistant Rangers. If successful, and depending on the recruitment process, the Assistant Rangers will work from May-October carrying out patrols of hotspot areas (including Blackmoss Nature Park), running small events and delivering a Scottish Outdoor Access Code school programme.

The Ranger team created a task plan for Blackmoss Nature Park and met with the Friends of Blackmoss group to discuss it, before carrying out a tool and task induction with the group for monthly tasks. There are also several Ranger-led volunteer sessions planned in for Blackmoss Nature Park this year.

The service has been trialling the use of Eventbrite as a booking system for volunteer sessions, advertising the monthly 'Friends' sessions for the three Parks and the Volunteer Ranger Service sessions. So far, this system is working well and the response to it has been good.

The Rangers will be patrolling all Core Paths and Rights of Way this year and scoring the condition of the Paths, which will help to form a list of priorities for path upgrades. The team are due to reassign Core Paths and areas to patrol to individual Rangers, and have led a training session on path scoring ahead of this.

The Ranger Service has met with the Community Learning and Development Youth Team to look at how the Rangers can support and work in partnership to deliver 'natural leader' pilot programme for young people.

Access

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

There were no formal access enquiries received during this time, but the Ranger Service have reported several woodland compartments in Blackmoss Nature Park to the Tree team, due to unauthorised felling and fire. The issues have been investigated by the Tree team and we are liaising with Police Scotland about this issue.

Ecology and Biodiversity

Ecology and Biodiversity Officers have led training with colleagues in Planning regarding new policies in National Planning Framework 4, which was adopted on 13 February 2023. This new Framework prioritises the climate and nature crises in all planning decisions. Planning applications for almost all new developments are now required to secure positive effects for biodiversity (Policy 3).

Guidance for local developments not requiring an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) has been provided by NatureScot and can be found online: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/developing-nature-guidance>. The Ecology and Biodiversity team assists the Planning team, to ensure that planning applications comply with legislation for the protection of wildlife, and that policies and processes to safeguard and to enhance the environment are followed.

Ecology and Biodiversity Officers have been assisting in Ash dieback surveys to inform contractors of potential ecological constraints associated with the Ash dieback works.

West Lothian Council Climate Emergency Fund Projects

- Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) – habitat assessment reports from the consultants, covering the whole of West Lothian, have been received. These are being analysed and will inform the core of the new LBAP, together with data from The Wildlife Information Centre.
- Tree-Time West Lothian - offers a way of commemorating a loved one's life, marking a child's birth, celebrating a special anniversary or just to show how much a person cares about trees and/or West Lothian as a place. The webpage can be found here: <https://www.tree-time.com/treetime-west-lothian/>

Nature Restoration Fund projects

- Black Moss - Officers are reviewing the existing management plan and preparing an action list and plan for the site including the Nature Park and surrounding woods in collaboration with the Ranger Service and Open Space officers. The plan will outline the intention for the site highlighting the constraints and potential challenges. The site is to be surveyed for a new baseline and assessment in Summer 2023. This assessment will inform future management operations and inform next stages. Surveys for the tree and woodland management plan will be completed 2023 with the intention to planning required works in winter 23/24 assuming licenses and permissions can be agreed.

D6 Open Space and Cemeteries**Watson Park Capital Project 2022/23**

Main landscaping works at Watson Park are now complete and open to the public. This includes repairs to the ball court, a new tar path and upgraded car park. These features will ensure the park is accessible and welcoming to all.

The graphics project is also complete. The design was put together with the help of the local community, and brings a disused area of hardstanding back to a positive use – as a cycle proficiency track and flexible play space.

Throughout the Spring, the rest of the works will progress, including new inclusive play, new seating, and repairs to the pump track.

Open Space Enquiries

There were no open space related enquiries were received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2023	2022
Childrens Play Enquiries	0	7
Total	0	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 48 cemetery related enquiries received and dealt with during this reporting period.

	2023	2022
Bench Donations	0	1
Cemeteries General Enquiries	4	3
Lair Enquiries	7	0
Memorial/ Headstone Works	6	3
New Interment Booking	16	7
Purchase of Interment Lair	14	2
War Memorial Enquiries	1	0
Total	48	16

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

Open Space Strategy

Capital Programme

Appendices/Attachments: none

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