
REPORT TO:	Housing and Community services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 15
DATE OF MEETING:	17 November 2005	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Director of Community Services	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Karen Talbot Community Safety Officer (EXT 5858)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Urban Park Security	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Woodville, Swadlincote, Church Gresley, Stanton and Newhall	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS07

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 Members approve a policy to provide security cover in SDDC owned parks within the urban core to increase protection from acts of criminal damage and vandalism.
- 1.2 Members allow officers to consider funding possibilities for an appropriate level of cover.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise members of outcomes and recommendations following evaluation of urban park security pilot

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Historically incidents of anti social behaviour and criminal damage in summer months have resulted in long term damage to the play area at Swadlincote Woodlands.
- 3.2 In 2004 the children's play area had to be closed for two months following acts of criminal damage. In consequence residents were unable to enjoy this area, which has since had to be permanently altered due to costs to repair.
- 3.3 Throughout 2004/05 costs to repair Swadlincote Woodlands alone are estimated to be around £7,000. This cost does not include staff time.
- 3.4 It was also recognised that non-accidental damage has a negative effect on local residents relating to their perception of crime, how attractive they view these areas and the detrimental effect these incidents have on the morale of park keepers and wardens.
- 3.5 To try to overcome some of these problems an urban park security pilot was initiated by Safer South Derbyshire Partnership
- 3.6 The pilot involved two strands. Firstly a private security firm, Security Alert UK, provided a dog handler to patrol the four parks. The patrols were arranged for every

Thursday night from 9pm until midnight and every Friday and Saturday from 9pm until 2am the following morning. The start date of the patrols was chosen to coincide with the commencement of the school summer holidays.

- 3.7 Security Alert UK erected signs on all four parks to raise awareness of their presence. The Safer South Derbyshire Partnership also ran press releases in the Burton Mail, Derby Evening Telegraph, Radio Derby and Ram FM to reassure residents and to warn perpetrators of anti social behaviour that they were not welcome on our parks.
- 3.8 The second strand focused on increased data collection to enable us to have a clearer understanding of actual events on the parks leaving us better informed in the future. To achieve this, at the end of each security patrol, the dog handler telephoned Careline to report and log any incidents that he felt staff would need to know upon their return to work the following morning. He also notified Careline of any areas on the parks that would need urgent attention as a result of criminal damage or littering. In addition Security Alert UK provided a weekly patrol report to the Community Safety Officer.
- 3.9 Alongside this reporting procedure, park keepers and wardens began to keep detailed log sheets to record any incidents they witnessed, descriptions of perpetrators and physical evidence left behind. Staff were also instructed to report any incidents to the Police.
- 3.10 Throughout the six weeks of the security pilot there were eighteen nights of security guard cover. The following events were recorded on the urban parks;

Newhall Park

- 3.11 On Newhall Park, throughout these eighteen nights, only 2 incidents were logged. Both involved underage drinkers on the park. When asked to leave, they did so. As Newhall Park is the only one of the four parks that does not have a park keeper or warden there is no specifically recorded information for days and times other than within the hours of the security patrol.
- 3.12 Recorded Crime data shows that throughout July and August 2004 there were 6 recorded crimes on Newhall Park and 17 in the surrounding area. For the same period in 2005 there were 12 recorded crimes on the park and 26 in the surrounding area. Statistics show that weekend recorded crime has remained the same but there has been an increase in week day crimes (4 in 2004, 10 in 2005)

Eureka Park

- 3.13 On Eureka Park, throughout the eighteen nights of security cover, only 4 incidents were logged. All 4 involved nuisance youth behaviour. 3 out of the 4 involved underage drinking.
- 3.14 The park keeper logged 3 incidents. One involved a group of youths breaking into the cricket pavilion, another involved a group of youths starting small fire on the park and the last involved a nuisance motorbike. Two of these took place on weekdays.
- 3.15 Recorded Crime data shows that throughout July and August 2004 there was 1 recorded crime on Eureka Park and 118 in the surrounding area. For the same

period in 2005 there were 4 recorded crimes on the park and 119 in the surrounding area.

- 3.16 The majority of damage occurred after the park keeper had left.
- 3.17 The issues raised by the park keepers for Eureka Park were substance misuse whether that be drugs or alcohol consumption, and the littering that results.

Maurice Lea Memorial Park

- 3.18 Throughout this summer there have been significant improvement works underway on Maurice Lea Memorial Park.
- 3.19 Throughout the eighteen nights of security cover, there were 3 incidents logged by the dog handler. All 3 involved groups of apparently underage drinkers.
- 3.20 The park keeper logged 9 occasions where significant amounts of rubbish had to be cleared in the morning upon arrival. The litter always included empty beer cans and alcopop bottles. The litter also included chip shop wrappers and Chinese take away cartons. Most was discovered in or around the basketball area of the park.
- 3.21 The park keeper did not log any incidents of anti social behaviour or criminal damage occurring whilst he was on the park during that period from July 21st to the end of August.
- 3.22 Recorded Crime data shows that in July and August 2004 there were 14 recorded crimes on Maurice Lea Park and 8 in the surrounding area. For the same period in 2005 there were 7 recorded crimes on the park and 16 in the surrounding area.
- 3.23 The park keeper felt that the security pilot combined with other partnership actions; nuisance youth letters and warnings to perpetrators, increased involvement from Beat Officer, had significantly reduced anti social behaviour and criminal damage on Maurice Lea.
- 3.24 Another contributing factor is the improvement works on Maurice Lea Park. As well as the impact of restricted access due to work in progress, replacing the existing hedges with open metal fencing has increased visibility on the parks therefore making the area less attractive for illicit activities.
- 3.25 In addition, information from park keepers has enabled Trading Standards to send warning letters to a local shop advising them that we have reason to believe that they are responsible for alcohol sales to minors and warning them of the consequences of this action. This will undoubtedly reduce alcohol related anti social behaviour and criminal damage in the area.

Swadlincote Woodlands

- 3.26 On Swadlincote Woodlands, throughout the eighteen nights of security cover, there were 7 incidents logged by the dog handler. All were nuisance youth behaviour and mostly involved underage drinkers.
- 3.27 The wardens also recorded an occasion where they arrived at work to find that there had been significant fire damage. Refurbishment of this environmental education area has been estimated at around £10,000

- 3.28 Recorded Crime data shows that throughout July and August 2004 there was 1 recorded crime on Swadlincote Woodlands. For the same period in 2005 there were 3 recorded crimes.
- 3.29 Wardens reported that on the whole they had not experienced as much damage as previous years.
- 3.30 However they were concerned that the public expect them to tackle nuisance behaviour as and when it occurs. Wardens pointed out that enforcement was not part of their role and that all they could do was call the Police for assistance.

4.0 Evaluation of the security pilot

Anti Social Behaviour

- 4.1 The number of Police recorded calls for service has increased significantly across the county due to a change in the way they record these calls. This has had a major effect in increasing the number of rowdy / nuisance calls.
- 4.2 Throughout July and August 2004 there were 12 calls for Police service related to incidents of anti social behaviour.
- 4.3 In the same period of 2005 this increased to 26 calls for service related to anti social behaviour.

Recorded Crimes

- 4.4 Throughout the security pilot recorded crimes have increased on three out of the four parks. It is highly unlikely that this is a result of increased crime considering that wardens / keepers on Swadlincote Woodlands and Eureka Park report that this year has been significantly quieter than last.
- 4.5 It is more probable that recorded crimes have increased because someone has been there during weekend evenings to report events as they occur. In addition the use of publicity has raised awareness of surrounding residents and given them the impetus to report when they may not have done before.
- 4.6 Throughout the security pilot period, only Maurice Lea Park has seen a reduction in recorded crime (14 in 2004, 7 in 2005) on the park. However incidents in the surrounding area have doubled from last year.
- 4.7 The reduction on Maurice Lea appears attributable to a number of combined factors. The hedges that surround Maurice Lea are being replaced by fencing that can clearly be seen through from off the park.
- 4.8 The park keeper provided information early on in the summer that led to a number of nuisance youths being visited by the Police Beat Officer. Their parents assured that they apologised for their behaviour and they have used the park since but without incident.
- 4.9 The security guard also removed three groups of underage drinkers from the parks during his patrol. This may potentially have been three incidents that were avoided.

Community feedback

- 4.10 At the end of the pilot, questionnaires were sent to appropriate 'Friends of' groups to establish their opinion of anti social behaviour on the parks and how well they thought security patrols had worked.
- 4.11 Members of the 'Friends of' groups reported that they have in the past witnessed incidents of the use of foul and abusive language, littering including breaking glass, drug usage, urinating in public view, fighting and motorbikes riding through the parks. Five out of the seven respondents have directly witnessed underage drinking within park grounds.
- 4.12 6 out of 7 respondents felt that the security patrol had a positive impact on the parks noting an improvement in levels of vandalism, littering and anti social behaviour in general. All expressed their opinion that the security patrols should continue.

5.0 Way Forward

- 5.1 The security pilot has demonstrated to park staff and residents that as a district council we will respond to their concerns and address their fear of crime. In addition the security pilot has undoubtedly made a contribution to the reduction of damage to our parks over this summer.
- 5.2 In conjunction with the increase of information we have collated this summer about actual events on our parks we are better prepared to produce park specific action plans to address issues of anti social behaviour, criminal damage and grounds maintenance in general.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 Throughout the security pilot Safer South Derbyshire Partnership provided 3 security shifts per week. This provided one dog handler to patrol 4 urban parks on Thursday 9pm until midnight, Friday and Saturday nights 9pm until 2am. This service came at a cost of £175.50 per week.
- 6.2 Since the end of the pilot period we have continued to fund security cover for two nights per week up to and including Saturday 29th October. As nights began to get dark earlier we amended the hours to begin at 7.30pm and end at midnight.
- 6.3 To provide effective security cover next year we need to evaluate the crime statistics to ascertain whether anti social behaviour is seasonal or if there is a need for cover of some sort throughout the year. At the least we need to repeat the two months cover over the summer. Two months of three nights per week will cost approximately £1,600. The Partnership Support Team will be seeking funds to cover this cost.
- 6.4 In addition the partnership would also consider deploying PCSOs and the CCTV vans to hot spot areas.

7.0 Corporate Implications

- 7.1 The Council's vision stated within the corporate plan is to 'promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental well being of the community through the provision of cost effective, customer focused services.'

- 7.2 Within the key aim of 'Caring for the Environment' a planned outcome for March 2007 is to have more attractive public spaces. This will not be possible if we do not protect the resources we already have on our parks and within our Woodland.
- 7.3 Within that key aim, the Council also intends to have more effective and 'joined up' enforcement services in place by March 2007. Provision of security across our urban parks will contribute to a larger action plan to protect our assets.
- 7.4 Within the key aim of 'Economic Development' there is a planned outcome to increase the number of visitors to South Derbyshire. Swadlincote Woodlands is a large and significant attraction within the area.
- 7.5 Within the key aim of 'Crime and Disorder' the Council has made a commitment to reduce crime and disorder and to reduce fear of crime amongst local people. There is also a commitment to mainstream community safety by doing all we reasonably can within our everyday activities to promote reductions in crime and disorder.
- 7.6 Within the key aim of 'Leisure Activities' the Council has made a commitment to develop a planned approach to the provision and maintenance of leisure and recreational facilities.
- 7.7 Another planned outcome within this key aim is to restore Maurice Lea Memorial. This substantial work is underway and should be protected.

8.0 Community Implications

- 8.1 The Community Strategy for South Derbyshire 2005-2010 aims to deliver a cleaner, greener and high quality environment.
- 8.2 The strategy recognises that we need to deal with anti social behaviour at the local level to have a positive effect on the way that people feel about living in their area.
- 8.3 The strategy identifies tackling the causes and effects of anti social behaviour through partnership working and involving communities as well as reducing fear of crime as priorities for action.

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 The security pilot has provided a clearer picture of actual events on our parks. This information will enable us to contribute to Grounds and Facilities' management plans for our parks to deal with a range of issues.
- 9.2 Provision of security guards has been a valuable part of this pilot, not only to gather information but to deter actual incidents by having a visible presence to move on wrongdoers and provide reassurance to members of the public who want to enjoy the parks.