

# Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 7 March 2023

## Response to motion by Councillor Hyslop – Safer Parks

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Routine All
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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Culture and Communities Committee notes this update on the actions being progressed to improve safety within the Council's parks.

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## Response to motion by Councillor Hyslop – Safer Parks

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report has been prepared in response to a motion by Councillor Hyslop from 22 September 2022. Committee is asked to note the actions which have already been implemented to improve safety within the Council's parks and to note the further work underway.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 The importance of parks and openspaces has always been recognised, their importance was further highlighted during COVID-19 with increasing usage over the period and, as lockdown restrictions have eased these increased usage levels have been at least maintained if not increased further (partially due to the restart of formal sporting activities).
- 3.2 However, the increases in usage have also highlighted other issues, in particular issues with irresponsible parking not only around the periphery of parks but in some cases parking within the boundary of the park.

#### **Safety in Parks**

- 3.3 There is also further work ongoing relating to safety in parks but unrelated to the specific points raised in the motion. The Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership have established a thematic Community Improvement Partnership which is focused on women's safety.
- 3.4 A public consultation was carried out across the summer of 2022 and asked residents to identify areas of the city where they felt safe and where they felt less safe and the initial analysis was presented to Policy and Sustainability Committee on [1 November 2022](#).
- 3.5 Further analysis is underway to identify specific areas of concern, and this includes the Council's parks and open spaces.

#### **Approved Amendment**

- 3.6 On 22 September 2022, the Council approved an adjusted amendment by Councillor Walker in response to a motion by Councillor Hyslop on Safer Parks. Within the approved amendment, the Council agreed:

- 3.6.1 To believe that our parks should be safe public spaces for all to enjoy, and that the presence of cars and large vehicles was not consistent with that
- 3.6.2 To note that Council waste teams often had cause to drive through parks with larger vehicles.
- 3.6.3 To note that many of Edinburgh's Parks had vehicle access points that were not locked by the Council.
- 3.6.4 To believe that the safety of park users should be of utmost importance.
- 3.6.5 To note instances across the city where park users and Friends of Parks groups had reported private cars driving along paths and green space through parks.
- 3.6.6 To request that the Council produce a report which outlined current vehicular access into all of the City's parks and examines how best where appropriate to prevent vehicular access to each of these spaces. This report should also include detail on the cost and feasibility of implementing the following:
  - 3.6.6.1 All park gates being padlocked where possible
  - 3.6.6.2 Collapsible bollards installed where necessary, accessible only by Council vehicles and agreed third parties; and
  - 3.6.6.3 The limited use of council vehicles over 1.3 tonnes where essential for the maintenance of our parks, such as tractors for grass cutting, tree team vehicles and street lighting access platforms.
- 3.6.7 Furthermore, to request that the council produce a report outlining existing powers and any available enforcement powers that could be used to act against the drivers or owners of vehicles that access our parks and green spaces and a strategy for enforcement which can be used to prevent and penalise unauthorised parking in public parks, this report should come to the Culture and Communities Committee within two cycles (December 2022).
- 3.6.8 To note that there were specific parks and areas within them where instance of unauthorised parking was especially high, and the corresponding dangers to safety and accessibility.
- 3.6.9 To request a further report including but not limited to, the following:
  - 3.6.9.1 What powers were available to the Council to enforce parking restrictions within parks
  - 3.6.9.2 What powers the Council currently used to enforce parking restrictions within parks
  - 3.6.9.3 What, if any, additional powers would the Council need to improve enforcement of parking restrictions within parks
  - 3.6.9.4 A strategy for the enforcement of existing parking restrictions, including tackling specific parks where the instance of unauthorised parking was particularly high

3.6.9.5 Outlining any options to alter existing restrictions in these high-pressure areas in order to better prevent unauthorised parking; and

3.6.9.6 Plans to engage with 'Friends of...' groups and/or relevant community groups in these high-pressure areas to develop the above options.

## 4. Main Report

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### Keeping Parks Safe

4.1 The Council already undertakes a range of activities in respect of keeping parks safe. These activities extend to, but are not limited to:

- Identifying opportunities for enhancements to parks (e.g. the development of Saughton Park);
- The development and implementation of parks management rules to encourage responsible access for park users. As previously reported to Committee, the current rules are in the process of being refreshed;
- Working with Police Scotland to combat anti-social behaviour in specific locations, locking of park gates and patrol of sites;
- Inspecting, repairing and maintaining parks infrastructure (including walls, playgrounds and cutting back overgrown vegetation). As Committee are aware, a capital investment programme has been approved for parks and there is a report on the agenda for Committee on investment in play parks; and
- Working with 'Friends Of' groups to help manage and enhance parks.

### Vehicular Access in Parks

4.2 In respect of the current arrangements within parks to minimise vehicular access, reminders have been issued to grounds maintenance and street cleansing staff to ensure bollards and gates are locked when exiting locations where these are in place.

4.3 Where locations are gated, Park Rangers will also install signs on gates directing the public to make officers aware if gates are open outside of parks opening hours.

4.4 However, as noted in the approved amendment, some Council vehicles routinely require access to the city's parks and open spaces for maintenance purposes. These vehicles generally include ride on and larger tractors, 3.5 tonne to 7.5 tonne vehicles (for general maintenance activities such as grass cutting and pitch lining) and cleansing vehicles for litter picking and litter bin collections.

### Limiting Vehicle Weight

4.5 It would not be feasible from an operational perspective to limit the use of Council vehicles over 1.3 tonnes. This is because, although Council officers routinely review new vehicle technology, there are currently no vehicles available that are under 1.3

tonnes and are operationally suitable for the tasks required. This also extends to the development of electric vehicles.

- 4.6 There is however a programme underway to review the specification of operational greenspace vehicles with the aim of limiting the gross weight of vehicles to a maximum of 4.2 tonne, with the likelihood that the majority will be around 3.5 tonnes. This will remove the need for 7.5 tonne vehicles within the operational greenspace fleet.
- 4.7 In some of the larger park locations consideration is being given to a realignment of operational resources which would create some consistent on-site presence. This may offer the opportunity of using smaller, electric vehicles for the majority of tasks but would not wholly remove the need for larger vehicles, such as forestry platforms, periodically needing to access these locations.
- 4.8 In addition to the points above, Council officers have been undertaking a programme to relocate standard litter bins from within the boundary of some parks to the entrance and exit points. This removes the need for heavy vehicles to access parks and in turn reduces any potential for pedestrian/vehicle conflict, particularly at peak times of park usage when litter bins may require to be emptied more often. To date, these changes have been implemented in the following parks. Further locations are being reviewed:
- Leith Links
  - Gyle Park
  - Victoria Park
  - Montgomery Park

### **Parking Restrictions within Parks**

- 4.9 As noted earlier in the report, there have been issues with irresponsible parking by park users where they have been parking outside of designated parking areas.
- 4.10 The Council has limited existing powers to deal with these issues.
- 4.11 Should the Council wish to implement formal enforcement action, there must first be a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in place which would then enable enforcement action to be taken. The TRO should set out clearly the restrictions which apply in each location (for example double yellow lines). Without an appropriate TRO in place, there is no opportunity for enforcement action to be taken.
- 4.12 Council officers are also investigating the potential for enforcement through the use of off-street TRO's. Whilst this may offer the potential for parking restrictions and enforcement on roads or pathways in parks, it would not extend to vehicles parking on grassed areas. Without a significant legislative change, the only meaningful way of reducing issues around parking on grass is to physically restrict the opportunity to do so through the use of fencing and/or bollards.

- 4.13 Work will continue to identify locations where irresponsible parking is problematic with a view to developing a priority list which will then enable further investigation of the enforcement options available, and the actions required. Colleagues in Legal Services are continuing to work on this.
- 4.14 Once priority areas are identified, officers will work with 'Friends of' and other community groups to understand their views on the challenges/impacts of the current arrangements and what, if any, action they would like to see implemented.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 A quarterly forum has been set up, with the first meeting due to take place following committee, for Council officers to look at the priority locations for irresponsible parking and develop options appraisals for improved enforcement, the introduction of traffic restrictions or investment in physical barriers to prevent it.
- 5.2 Should it be appropriate to introduce a TRO, this would be subject to the necessary statutory process. If six or more objections are received, this will be reported to the Licensing Sub-Committee for consideration. Alongside the statutory Order, a strategy for enforcement would also be developed.
- 5.3 Committee will be kept updated on progress on the priority locations and proposed actions.
- 5.4 The Park Management Rules are due to be reviewed and reported back to Culture and Communities Committee later in 2023. Within the refreshed rules, the specific arrangements for responsible parking can be better defined. Further, if there are locations where enforcement action can currently be taken, these will be defined.
- 5.5 A report on lighting in parks is being prepared for Culture and Communities Committee in May 2023.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 As reported to Committee in [December 2022](#), the current capital allocation for parks and greenspaces is being utilised to prioritise required (priority 1) health and safety infrastructure works.
- 6.2 As part of the on-going work by officers to identify areas for improvement in parks and to address inconsiderate parking, officers will also consider if there are any opportunities to generate income from parking enforcement arrangements.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 Council officers regularly engage with 'Friends of' groups and other community groups on how to maintain and enhance the city's parks and open spaces.
- 7.2 A Greenspace Forum is routinely held with Friends of Parks groups and other stakeholders. It is proposed that the next Forum focuses on issues around safety in parks, particularly from the experience of users.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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8.1 None

## 9. **Appendices**

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9.1 None