

## THE LOCKING OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- 1.1 Pursuant to Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 15(C) (2), the Chairman of the Review Committee has requested that the decision made by the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Leisure, Arts and Culture on the 21 March 2014 be called in for Scrutiny:-

‘To re-introduce daily locking/unlocking of Hall Road Cemetery, Rochford, Hockley Road Cemetery, Rayleigh and King George V Playing Fields, Ashingdon’

- 1.2 To assist Members, copies of the original report of the Head of Environmental Services and the decision by the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Leisure, Arts and Culture are appended.

Albert Bugeja

Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services

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### Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact Paul Gowers (Overview and Scrutiny Officer) on:-

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.

## **EXECUTIVE DECISION BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE**

### **SUBJECT: THE LOCKING OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES**

#### **1 DECISION MADE**

- 1.1 To re-introduce daily locking/unlocking of Hall Road Cemetery, Rochford, Hockley Road Cemetery, Rayleigh and King George V Playing Fields, Ashingdon.

#### **2 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT REFERENCE No: 1/14**

#### **3 REASON FOR DECISION**

- 3.1 Historically, the Council had arrangements in place to lock gates on a daily basis at the two cemeteries and at four of our open spaces. These arrangements ceased when the previous grounds maintenance contractor went into Administration, although ad-hoc arrangements were put in place during the summer of 2013 as a result of representations.
- 3.2 In April 2013, the Executive agreed to cease the daily locking/unlocking of all parks and open spaces in order to achieve budget savings. Subsequently, representations were received from three Town/Parish Councils about the potential for anti-social behaviour. Subsequently some issues have also emerged in respect of our own cemeteries.
- 3.3 Following an assessment of the incidents reported to the Police and the willingness of the various Town/Parish Councils to contribute towards the costs of reintroducing this service, it is considered that limited daily locking/unlocking should be re-introduced.

#### **4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 To take no action and leave all open spaces open 24 hours a day or to reintroduce the daily locking of all open spaces previously locked, namely KGV Ashingdon, Fairview Open Space, Brooklands Open Space and Clements Hall.

#### **5 NAME OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

- 5.1 Councillor K J Gordon.

#### **6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 6.1 None.

## **7 LEAD OFFICER**

### **7.1 Head of Environmental Services.**

I confirm that the above decision does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

Portfolio Holder Signature: Cllr K J Gordon

Date of Decision: 21 March 2014

**Note:** Please ensure that Member Services are provided with the original of the decision on the day it is taken (or by 10.00 am the following morning at the latest) to enable publication.

# **REPORT TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE**

## **REPORT FROM HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

### **SUBJECT: THE LOCKING OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES**

#### **1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 That daily locking/unlocking shall be re-introduced for Hall Road Cemetery, Rochford, Hockley Road Cemetery, Rayleigh and King George V Playing Fields, Ashingdon.

#### **2 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT REFERENCE No: 1/14**

#### **3 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 Historically, the Council had arrangements in place to lock gates on a daily basis at the two cemeteries and a four of open spaces. These arrangements ceased when the previous grounds maintenance contractor went into Administration, although ad-hoc arrangements were put in place during the summer of 2013 as a result of representations.
- 3.2 In April 2013, the Executive agreed to cease the daily locking/unlocking of all parks and open spaces in order to achieve budget savings. Subsequently, representations were received from three Town/Parish Councils about the potential for anti-social behaviour. Subsequently some issues have also emerged in respect of our own cemeteries.
- 3.3 Following an assessment of the incidents reported to the Police and the willingness of the various Town/Parish Councils to contribute towards the costs of reintroducing this service, it is considered that limited daily locking/unlocking should be re-introduced.

#### **4 SALIENT INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The representations referred to were made by Rayleigh Town Council, Ashingdon Parish Council and Hullbridge Parish Council and concerned the potential for anti-social behaviour in local parks during the hours of darkness.
- 4.2 Of the Councils consulted, only Ashingdon Parish Council was able to provide clear evidence of incidents that were reported to the Police and they were also the only Council offering a financial contribution. On this basis, it is therefore proposed to re-introduce the daily locking and unlocking of gates at the two cemeteries and at King George V playing fields in Ashingdon.

#### **5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 To take no action and leave all open spaces open 24 hours a day or to reintroduce the daily locking of all open spaces previously locked, namely KGV Ashingdon, Fairview Open Space, Brooklands Open Space and Clements Hall.

## **6 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There is considered to be a risk of anti-social behaviour and/or potential disturbance to local residents where individuals are able to gain access to parks and open spaces late in the evening.
- 6.2 The costs of engaging contractors to undertake the daily locking and unlocking of all parks and open spaces is disproportionately high, and the issue has, therefore, been approached on the basis of evidence of incidents lodged with the Police and the willingness of the appropriate Town or Parish Councils to contribute towards these costs.
- 6.3 It has been possible to reduce costs by integrating some of these activities into the existing public convenience cleansing contract, although this activity is undertaken relatively early in the evening when many of the open spaces are still in use. It is proposed to introduce appropriate warning notices for parks and open spaces in order to alert users of any changes to access arrangements.
- 6.4 There is a concern that individuals accessing the Council's cemeteries during the hours of darkness are at risk of personal injury and may, because of their secluded location, cause damage to our assets.

## **7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The daily locking and unlocking of the two cemeteries and King George V playing fields will result in annual expenditure of £7,776. Ashingdon Parish Council has committed to contribute £2,738, resulting in an annual cost to this Council of £5,038. This can be covered by the Open Spaces contingency budget.

## **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 14 March 2014

### **Background Papers:**

None.

For further information please contact Richard Evans (Head of Environmental Services) on:-

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