

Agenda Item 5

For information - An update on the town's parks and green spaces

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This report provides a summary of what's happening in the town's parks and green spaces.

It's a list-based update for the committee and the town; something that's concise and that's quick to read and reference.

The first part of the report focuses on projects and discrete pieces of work (meaning work with clearly identifiable end points).

This work is split into three categories:

- Recently completed
- Ongoing
- Coming soon

Projects and work listed in the **Coming soon** category are expected to be completed between Council Matters meetings. The weather and tricky ground conditions can get in the way of this, of course; and the pandemic and the lockdown continue to impact our work.

The second part of the report notes the day to day work that is being completed at the present time; and the essential maintenance and upkeep that happens whatever the weather. This is mentioned for completeness, but also for context; naturally and necessarily, we balance how much time we spend on upkeep with time spent on improvements.



Recently completed

- The Rangers have finished the landscaping improvements at Chateau-Gontier Walk; and we'll be looking to plant the area in the spring
- We've resumed our work with the Discovery Rangers, who cleaned and tidied Zion Path on their first Monday back
- And we're hoping to resume work with the Critchill Rangers, too
- There have been lots of bulbs planted around the town for next spring, including along the riverside path between Welshmill and the town centre
- We're in the process of appointing a new member of staff to clean and check the toilets in Victoria Park at the weekends (and Bank Holidays)
- We've been responding to the immediate outcomes of a spate of vandalism across the town's parks and green spaces; repairing things; tidying up; and ensuring that none of the damage left any dangerous hazards

Ongoing

- The Rangers have started hedge cutting across the town. Welshmill allotments and Victoria Park were first on the list
- The damaged spinning disc from the Showfield play area is being refurbished ahead of being re-fitted
- We've also had to remove the basket swing from the Showfield after the timber supports failed an independent safety check. Rather than immediately replacing this on a like-for-like basis, we're going to review options for the play area as part of the upcoming Play Strategy
- In conjunction with the residents' group, we're drawing up plans for the Packsaddle play area and the space off Chapmans Close. These include proposals for tree planting, hedge planting, new seats, and the possibility of a boules court
- We're now finalising the schedules for our winter tree works
- We've had a very encouraging meeting with MDC about their green spaces around Stonebridge; and we'll be going out to talk to residents in this part of the town to ask for their views and their ideas about these spaces; and to discuss possible opportunities



Coming soon

- The town's Remembrance service on Sunday 7 November; much changed to reflect the current situation
- Further consultation on tree planting in Rodden Meadow

Day to day

- Park checks and play checks
- The Market Place fountain
- Hedge cutting and leaf clearance
- Discovery Ranger sessions (and Critchill Ranger sessions)

Recent vandalism



As mentioned earlier in the report, we're also finding that we're having to be very responsive to a spate of vandalism across the town's parks and green spaces.



In the last fortnight or so, this has included:

- Damage to the wall near the pump track; on four separate occasions now
- The Showfield Share box being burnt out and the Victoria Park box being damaged
- The community noticeboard in Rodden Meadow being smashed
- One of the waymarking signs in Rodden Meadow being damaged
- Damage to the Roundhouse roof; and the nearby timber steps and ramps
- Damage to the toilets and the bandstand in Victoria Park

The Lead Ranger has estimated the direct cost of the various parts and materials for the subsequent repairs at between £250 and £300 at the present time.

These figures may not immediately seem that much; but please note that these sums do not include the cost of repairing and re-building the wall at Welshmill. This is because this work is likely to be completed by a stonemason (and we will be submitting a claim to our insurance company to cover the costs)

There is arguably a greater cost in the Rangers' time, however.

So: in responding to the vandalism over the last fortnight, it's taken the equivalent of 9 to 10 days' work for a single Ranger.

There is also the added complication of the Rangers having to adjust their rotas and planned work, sometimes at very short notice.

Separate to this - so not included in this estimate of the time taken - other members of staff have also had to be involved in the Council's overall response to the vandalism.

This has included time taken drafting and editing press releases; time on social media; and time liaising with the Police and other interested organisations.

The September update was accidently missed on the last Council Matters agenda (23 September) and can be [viewed here](#).