

Summary of Q&As from Annual Public Meeting



Questions were answered by David Foster, Chief Executive of The Parks Trust

Q1. Can you clarify the number of trees that were planted this year?

As part of our general maintenance work we have planted 687 trees this year at a cost of around £90,000. That figure doesn't include the trees planted in the new parkland areas as these are laid out by the developers prior to being handed over to the Trust.

Q2. There is block paving to be reinstated at Willen Lake where the pergola was removed, can you complete this please?

We were planning to do it as part of the next phase of improvement works but we will look at it and see if it might be better to do it sooner.

Q3. There have been a lot of illicit encampments of travellers this year and thank you for your efforts in getting them moved on but what can be done to resolve the problem?

This is a national problem, not just a problem here in Milton Keynes, and there really are no easy answers. There is inadequate provision for gypsies and travellers across the country. We're working in partnership with the council to manage the issue and between us we're doing everything we can. We are going to put in some more defences using funds provided by the Council; we are spending a lot of money on bailiffs and clearing up quickly after each eviction.

Q4. While there has been an improvement on last year there is still a lack of directional information about how to get to parks and events for those who don't drive. I would ask for more attention to be paid here – it looks like you are discriminating against those who don't have cars.

We certainly don't want to discriminate against people who don't have cars and want to help more people get out into the parks. We have recently launched a new website that includes maps of the parkland and green space in Milton Keynes. This is a new feature and the map section is still being worked on. We also have links to

the city's Get Smarter Travel website so people can access information there. We will look at this and see what more we can do.

Q5. You alluded to the development linked to East-West Rail which is going to be a big feature of the expansion of the city in the coming years. Will this be a big financial challenge for you?

We don't think there should be a big financial challenge for us or for the local authority provided a mechanism is put in place to capture the increase in value of the land when planning permission is given for development. There should be more than enough money to fund new green infrastructure, and to provide for its long-term management. This is what happened when Milton Keynes was built and how The Parks Trust was able to be established with an endowment.

Q6. Will The Parks Trust be competing with other community and social enterprises in the city for that money?

Well of course there is always a limited pot of money available so funding for the green infrastructure will inevitably have to be weight up against other demands. The way the tariff arrangement currently works is that all the infrastructure costs associated with the major developments have been agreed with the developers and they pay a sum for every dwelling they build into a pot that is administered by the council. This system has been working well for the last ten years or so.

Q7. Your map covers the urban area of Milton Keynes – what about the rural areas, particularly to the north? Are The Parks Trust getting involved in rural areas, particularly with respect to liaising with parish councils?

We are very happy to speak to parish councils about the possibility of taking on the management of parks outside the new city boundaries so as long as it is within Milton Keynes and its environs. We were at one point going to be offered Emberton Park by the Council and we still hope this may come over to us at some point in the future.

Q8. Why have you decided to build such a big café building and adventure golf course at Furzton Lake that we think will be noisy?

We carry out biennial surveys with the public and each time people ask us for more toilets, cafes and activities for children which this scheme addresses. Furzton Lake really needs public toilets and one way to provide them and ensure they are maintained is to link them to such a development. It will provide a lot of fun and enjoyment and we do not think the adventure golf will cause disturbance.

Q9. Could you explore putting attractions like those planned for Furzton in more isolated places rather than where people live?

It would be inappropriate to place attractions such as this in the quieter areas of our park network and the demand for additional facilities is at Furzton Lake.

Q10. I live near Willen North Lake and have seen information about wild goats on the island. What happened to them?

We did have goats on the island a few years ago with the aim that they would eat the vegetation and prevent it from scrubbing over so the ground nesting birds would have more habitat but it didn't really work as they couldn't eat fast enough plus it became quite costly as we had to send someone across to check on their health more or less weekly, so we found them a new home.

Q11. Many people are worried about climate change and The Parks Trust has a big opportunity to draw down carbon. What year are you aiming to be zero carbon?

We don't have a target for becoming carbon neutral but maybe we should. We did have a study done by Cranfield University who worked out the quantity of carbon already locked up in our trees and plants and the soil across our estate and if we counted this we could probably say we are zero carbon already. We will review our carbon footprint and report back to our next public meeting.

Q12. The site sand and gravel extraction in New Bradwell was meant to have finished around Easter but this has now been extended for another year and consequently the restoration is delayed for another year. Why is that and is there going to be any recompense for the residents who are going to be disturbed for another year?

The reasons for this delay are Hanson found more gravel than they expected to be extracted; also, they found more archaeology and have had to do extra archaeological assessments and they had a lot of flooding which held them up. It is only going to add a year or two to the project, and we will take it over as soon as possible.

Q13. Litter is everywhere as we know –should the Trust have a zero-tolerance policy to it?

We agree with you – it's a massive problem for us. Last year clearing up litter cost us around £350,000 and the amount is going up year on year; as is the amount of litter we pick up. We are pretty good at clearing it up, but we can't say we have a zero tolerance to litter as we have very little power to deal with the people who drop it. If we could partner with the council and their enforcement team, and maybe the parish councils, we could get some more prosecutions. We are often asked why we don't have more bins. By introducing more bins people who would otherwise take the litter away with them will instead use them which, we estimate, would significantly increase our costs in managing this issue.

Q14. You've talked about the skills of trustees, the one that seems to be lacking is that of design; there's no landscape designer or architect on the board. The Trust owns so much of the city and it could be leading on design and setting an example for others to follow. I think it's an important role you are missing; how do you see the issue of design?

Where and when we need design input we bring in appropriate skills, it is horses for courses. For example, for the café in Campbell Park we went through a competitive process and brought in nationally recognised architects, Stanton Williams. We'll always do the best we can on design, but our job is look after the parks and provide facilities and environmental education not to be a champion of design for the city.

Q15. Talking about buildings as objects in isolation, that's where the point is being missed – its about the relationship between the open space and the built environment. That's where the expertise is needed, that level of sensitivity. I think there's a role here in terms of the exemplar you represent, you've already alluded to that in terms of how you are seen and perceived nationally and

internationally and as you go forward there is that opportunity with the Cambridge-Oxford corridor and that does bring in this question of design and design skills.

We agree the landscape is just as important as the buildings and that's why at Campbell Park, we employed Chris Blanford Associates, one of the top landscape architect firms in the country to design the whole area around the proposed new café. At Willen Lake we brought in the landscape architects who designed the Olympic Park, LDA, to do our masterplan.

Q16. There are absolutely no recycling facilities in any of the parks, all of it looks like its going to landfill – what is The Parks Trust going to be doing about it?

Maybe we should consider having segregated bins but I'm not sure how well they work. Most of the litter we collect is taken by Cawleys, who have a recycling process at their waste plant that separates out all the recyclable materials.

Q17. Do you have any influence over landscapes at new developments?

We have some but not as much as we would like. We are hopeful though that we may be able to have more contact with developers in future as the Council seem much keener to get us involved in the planning process at an earlier stage which we think should be good for everyone, including the developers.

Ends.