

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & OPERATIONS

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PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Strategic Director
of Environment & Operations
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Build happier, healthier and safer communities

ENVIRONMENT

Food Waste

The Council continues to highlight the need to reduce food waste within the borough, via its social media channels, and particularly the calendars and Christmas recycling leaflets which are delivered to every home in the borough. Unfortunately, food waste continues to account for over 40% of the contents of the burgundy bin. Of that food waste in the burgundy bin, half of it is still edible or in date. As a result, each household in the borough is wasting an average of £700 a year by throwing away food that could still be consumed.

Food waste is also impacting on climate change as according to the UN, food loss and waste generates around 8% of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions each year.

The government as part of their Simpler Recycling legislation, which was announced in the autumn of last year, requires waste collection authorities in England to arrange a weekly collection of food waste for recycling or composting from most households across England by 2026. Defra wrote to local authorities in England in January 2024, to provide details on the indicative capital funding for the delivery of weekly food waste collections (subject to Ministerial approval). The capital funding is to cover the cost of purchasing food bins (this includes internal kitchen caddies, external kerbside caddies and communal bins) and food waste collection vehicles. The estimated capital cost of purchasing these items is c.15% (£180k) more than the funds allocated by government. The government have not committed any revenue funding to cover the cost of staffing, replacement caddies and the comms required to ensure residents are aware of the roll out of food waste collections and when they will take place.

Plans are under way with the other local authorities in Lancashire to consider a joint procurement exercise to obtain the best prices for bins, caddies and vehicles. The collection methodology that is required by the government is to have small kitchen caddies, up to 7 litres in size in kitchens and a separate small food waste bin up to 25 litres in size, presented for collection each week. The kitchen caddies will have liners provided that can when nearly full, be tied and placed in the food waste bin. The food waste bin would be emptied by the Council's new food waste collection service and the bin returned. The food waste bins have a handle that can be lockable to stop waste spillages and to prevent the food waste from being tampered with by animals.

THE WITS PLAY AREA

Witton Country Park is the largest park in the borough, consisting of 480 acres of land, it is a destination park and attracts more visitors than any other park in the borough. People attend the park to play sport, take part in recreational activities, to attend an

event or to enjoy the many outdoor features of the country park including picnic spots, nature trails, riverside walks and woodlands.

'The Wits' adventure play area opened in 2010 and was one of the main attractions for families visiting the Country Park. 'The Wits' play equipment was manufactured primarily from timber and over the years, the condition of the timber had deteriorated to a point where some sections of the play area had to be removed for safety reasons. It was only a matter of time before the whole play area would need to be closed down for safety reasons.

The Council received £350,000 s106 funding as a contribution towards Green Infrastructure / Public Open Space and associated community facilities within the West Blackburn area from the redevelopment of a site at Brokenstone Road for up to 450 residential units. As Witton Country Park is located in the West Blackburn area, the Executive Board agreed that the £350,000 s106 funding should be invested in new play facilities at Witton Country Park to replace 'The Wits'.

The Play design is split into two parts, an adventure area which includes play features with an impressive bespoke 'Weavers' play tower measuring over 6m tall with four story's & three slides, and an inclusive play area consisting of play features, with a range of equipment and a design specification which takes into account children of all ages and abilities this includes standard swings & you & me seat, two together seat, & a swing seat, also a wheelchair accessible Carousel, with a cycleway theme. A new gate linked to the children's cycle path outside of the play area, a picnic area with tables that accommodate wheelchairs.

This is the largest investment in play equipment made by the Council and the funding has enabled the Council to provide the ultimate adventure play area with awe inspiring, innovative and challenging play facilities for children and young people of all ages and abilities to have fun, play independently and safely in a stimulating, exciting and attractive adventure play area. The new adventure play area was officially opened on Friday 1 March 2024.

CORPORATION PARK TENNIS COURTS

After a number of months discussion, agreement has been reached with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) for the redevelopment of 3 tennis courts at Corporation Park. The redeveloped courts will have state of the art surfacing and be secured with keycode access via the LTA booking system. Access to the courts will be managed via a system called 'Clubspark'. This approach has been piloted successfully for the past three years by the LTA, and the evidence from Council sites across the country is that installing gate access technology actually increases participation. Gate access technology allows people to book a court online in advance and have confidence that the court will be available when they arrive to play with friends and family.

The Council is also working with the LTA to find a suitable partner provider to support tennis lessons at the redeveloped courts. Work on the courts is expected, weather permitting, to be concluded by the end of May 2024, which is the usual opening time for the tennis courts.

PUBLIC PROTECTION

Litter from vehicles

Following a pilot which has run for 6 months, the Council has now mainstreamed a litter from vehicles enforcement regime. Legislation which allows a Penalty Charge Notice

(PCN) to be issued to the keeper of a vehicle which is used in a littering offence was introduced in 2018, but it is only recently that software has been available to make enforcement viable for the Council.

The advantage of this process over criminal action is that there is no need to prove who actually did the littering, as the PCN is issued to the registered owner of the vehicle. The PCN is a civil charge (currently at £75) which doubles if not paid within 28 days or appealed. The recipient of the PCN can make representations to the Council, and if they are still unhappy with the outcome, they can appeal to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

During the pilot, 47 PCNs were issued, of which 21 were paid and 2 were cancelled. The main sources of evidence was provided by Council Officers and Council CCTV. The function is now being managed by the Envirocrime Team, they will continue to refine the process and maximise use of Council CCTV assets to tackle littering hotspots.

PARKING SERVICES

Additional parking enforcement officers

Since the 15th January 2024, Parking Services have used the services of NSL to provide 2 full time parking enforcement officers. These officers work on a different rota to the Council's civil enforcement officers, with the majority of their hours being worked during the evenings and at weekends as well as assisting parking services when Blackburn Rovers have a home game. We are already starting to see a change to poor parking practices in some areas which had been identified as hotspots for illegal and dangerous parking.

The two new enforcement officers commenced work in the borough on the 15th January and had to complete a week's on the job training. The number of Penalty Charge Notices issued by the 2 additional staff is as follows:

- 15 – 31 January 2024 – 251 PCNs and 520 vehicle drive aways
- 1 – 26 February 2024 – 895 PCNs and 1281 vehicle drive aways