

Brenchley Gardens

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Community Services
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Brenchley Gardens is located in High Street Ward

Executive Summary

Brenchley Gardens is a beautifully maintained public park located next to the Maidstone Museum in the Town Centre and is much valued by the local community. Following concerns raised about the misuse of the park by some sections of the community, officers have met to plan how best to address the community safety issues of concern and encourage a more positive use of the park for the better enjoyment of everyone. This report sets out the actions undertaken and planned to date and seeks the Committee's views on achieving that aim.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee endorses the approach set out in the body of the report to address community safety concerns and create a more positive environment at Brenchley Gardens.
2. The Committee directs the Head of Housing & Community Services to provide an update report to the November meeting of the CHE Committee.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
CHE Committee	31-08-2021
CHE Committee	30-11-2021

Brenchley Gardens

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the aims of a safe, clean and green place; together with a thriving place.</p>	Head of Housing & Community Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendations support the achievement of the cross-cutting objectives.</p>	Head of Housing & Community Services
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Financial	<p>The actions described in this report would be funded from a range of sources. The musical events in Brenchley Gardens described in paragraph 2.10 have been funded from the government's Welcome Back Fund. The cost of any new fencing would have to come from the Parks improvements capital programme, which amounts to £50,000 in 2021/22. General officer support for all initiatives would</p>	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

	be funded from within existing budgets.	
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Legal	<p>Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.</p> <p>The Council has a duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to consider the crime and disorder implications of their decisions and the responsibility to co-operate in the reduction of crime and disorder in the Borough.</p> <p>Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 states:</p> <p>"Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those function on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can prevent, crime and disorder in its area".</p>	Team Leader (Contentious)
Privacy and Data Protection	Accepting the recommendations will have no impact on the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Head of Housing & Community Services
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will have a positive impact on Crime and Disorder. The Community Protection Team have been consulted and mitigation has been proposed.	Head of Housing & Community Services

Procurement	Not applicable.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Biodiversity and Climate Change	<p>The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This aligns with action(s) (number and quote action) of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. 	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Brenchley Gardens has a rich history and the accolade of being Maidstone's first public park when completed in 1873. The park includes a wonderful example of a Victorian Bandstand and the cenotaph to the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment together with the more recent statue honouring the Royal Engineers and celebrating Maidstone's connection with the Gurkhas.
- 2.2 Brenchley Gardens throughout its history has been a source for enjoyment and pleasure for the many people that visit the park. However, it has also attracted an element that has misused this public facility. Fortunately, serious incidents are rare but do occur. More prevalent is low level anti-social behaviour that detracts from the wider community being able to fully enjoy the facilities that the park brings.
- 2.3 Throughout the day and evening the dynamics within the park change, as different groups congregate within the park at various times of the day. This can range from commuters accessing the park as part of their throughfare, families enjoying the surroundings, school children using the park as part of their journey to and from school, and others who use the park as a convenient point of congregation due to its close location near to the town centre.
- 2.4 Not all of this use is positive and some of the more negative activity ranges from noisy behaviour that can disturb other users of the park or be intimidating, through to low level and more serious criminal activity. Data held by the local Police team demonstrates that the majority of the minor incidents take place during the daytime to early evening and this is confirmed by the experience of our staff who maintain the park or are located nearby in the Museum.
- 2.5 In 2020, MBC's Community Protection Team set up monthly multi-agency meetings to develop a partnership approach to promoting a more positive use of Brenchley Gardens and develop a positive guardianship for this public space. Now that most of the Covid19 restrictions have been lifted actions to enhance use of the park can be implemented and further developed. Agencies involved in discussions include the Police Community

Safety Unit Team, KCC Social Services Youth Team and from MBC staff from Community Protection, Parks & Open Spaces, Museum, and Communication Teams. The objective has been to explore and develop a holistic approach which ensures that Brenchley Gardens is experienced as a pleasant environment free from crime and disorder. Activities include providing deck chairs for the public to come and sit in the park and various music events.

2.6 Recent analysis of criminality undertaken by Kent Police looked at reported incidents in Brenchley Gardens and the surrounding area. This included parts of Week Street, St Faiths Street and the Maidstone East Station. Amongst the key findings of the analysis of data which looked at the period issues between April and July 2021 identified:

- with over 100 crimes recorded in the area 16 Crime Reports referred specifically to Brenchley Gardens.
- across the wider area there were incidents which included anti-social behaviour including by young people, violence including domestic violence, drug dealing, drug taking, drunkenness and child sexual exploitation.
- assaults are the highest crime type recorded; they are committed across a number of different groups.
- temporal analysis found criminality in the area was more prevalent mid-afternoon through to approximately 10pm, with a significant peak between 20:00 – 21:00.

2.7 In response to this information the Kent Police Community Safety Unit have successfully bid for and secured the Kent PCSO Task Force. The PCSO Task Force, made up of 21 officers, will provide a high-visibility presence for 6 to 8 weeks from mid-August. Their focus area is dedicated to Brenchley Gardens and the immediate surrounding area but does extend to Whatman Park to cover for any displacement. The main objective is to tackle crime and disorder in Brenchley Gardens following a number of high-risk high harm crimes that have occurred there recently. The task force will accumulate information and intelligence which can then be used to ensure an evidence-based approach to identification of interventions to tackle crime and disorder occurring there. It is suggested that decisions with respect to future actions in the park are not made until the outputs from this work are available.

2.8 Recent Ward Cluster meetings, instigated by the CHE Committee, have enabled local ward councillors to have an input into the debate and discussion around improving the use and perception of Brenchley Gardens. This has included sharing their concerns about reported incidents in the media and perceived increases in ASB. Members have expressed a desire to ensure that measures are proportionate to the issues being experienced and well publicised to ensure that general users of the park are not unfairly prevented access to it. Suggestions made by ward members included preventing access at night and removing the defunct toilet block to create a hard standing for use/hire.

- 2.9 A number of initiatives have been explored with the aim of reducing anti-social behaviour and mitigating safeguarding risks relating to young persons. The model employed looks at 4 factors:
- Features of the Offender- opportunity to commit offences, presence of a victim, access to the location, risk of being caught.
 - Features of the Victim – access to the location, lack of guardianship, peer pressure, why have young people always congregated here.
 - Location- lighting, CCTV, access, proximity to other “attractors”, facilities, shelter.
 - Community – guardianship, alternative use of the location, atmosphere.
- 2.10 We are intending to build on the highly popular and successful events staged in the park earlier this year by the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership, with funding from Maidstone Borough Council. This included performances by the Maidstone Youth Music Society and BAE Systems Brass Band. Other initiatives to promote a broader use of the park include:
- An outreach event including BBQ hosted by Switch Café youth outreach and other voluntary groups.
 - Supervised deck chairs, to operate during August for 6 weeks.
 - Bandstand music events - 5 events planned in September.
 - Wine Festival – late summer.
- 2.11 These events are intended to encourage a broader and more positive usage of the park. Guardianship is also provided passively through CCTV. Currently there is a fixed operational camera within the park that has provided evidence and support to the police. Additional cameras could be considered but Brenchley Gardens is a relatively small park and any additional cameras would need to be justified in accordance with the CCTV policy guidance.
- 2.12 In terms of making facilities within the park more secure and to deter unwanted congregating around the Bandstand, costs have been sought to provide additional fencing in keeping with the original design and listed status.
- 2.13 Consideration could be given to making the park less accessible at night but any proposal would need to be weighed against the freedom of passage for residents who live at the bottom of the park, those using the park as part of their commute, the proportionality of the action in terms of both the amount of antisocial behaviour/crime it is intended to address and the cost and the effectiveness and cost of alternative interventions. This would also impact on the approach of having free and easy access to our public facilities and does not directly deal with the majority of incidents, which occur during the daytime. It is suggested that consideration of further interventions is made after the outcomes from the taskforce work, currently underway, are known.
- 2.14 **Appendix A** sets out a summary of actions taken, planned and for consideration in the future.

- 2.15 Through a combination of promoting an optimistic profile for the park together with providing opportunities for positive activities with a subtle but focused approach to tackling misuse, it is expected that Brenchley Gardens will once again enjoy the good reputation it deserves. It is proposed that a further report is provided to the CHE Committee later in the year to reflect upon the approach suggested in this report and its outcomes.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to endorse the approach set out in the body of the report and provide feedback.
- 3.2 Members could choose not to endorse the approach suggested but to do so would not address the concerns expressed by Members and staff about how the park is misused by a minority of the community.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is contained at paragraph 3.1, as this will enable the Council to address the concerns that have been raised about the use of Brenchley Gardens.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks are within the council's risk appetite and mitigating actions will be proposed if needed.
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 A communication strategy will be implemented to support the existing series of promotions intended to raise awareness of the park and to support the events to create a more community friendly use of the park.
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7. REPORT APPENDICES

Appendix A – Summary of actions taken and planned to improve Community Safety in Brenchley Gardens

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None