

Brenchley Gardens- Follow up report

Final Decision-Maker	Community Housing and Environment
Lead Head of Service	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Community Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Martyn Jeynes Community Protection Officer
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, partners 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. Following the report of the 31 August 2021 this report provides options for Committee to consider in relation to safeguarding users of the park and to foster pride in the park.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee endorses the approach set out in Section 4 of the report to address community safety concerns.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
CHE Committee	30-11-2021

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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	The actions described in this report would be funded from a range of sources as detailed in the report. General officer support for all initiatives would be funded from within existing budgets.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing as detailed in the report	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: "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 currently propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment. An EqIA may need to be considered as the proposals are developed further.	Equalities & Communities Officer
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	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and there are no direct implications identified.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The report from the 31st August laid out the background and the steps taken to date by the Community Protection Team and partners in order to both reduce the incidence and harm caused by anti-social and criminal behaviour in the park and to change the narrative around the reputation of Brenchley Gardens.
- 2.2 Members endorsed the efforts made to date and asked that Officers pursue further and bring forward firm proposals and costings as to:
- Securing and locking the grounds at night
 - Additional CCTV coverage
 - Additional lighting at night and
 - Securing the bandstand
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- 2.3 Set out in section 4 are the findings of those efforts and officers' recommendations as part of a long-term strategy to safeguard users and challenge those responsible for the unwanted behaviour.
- 2.4 As detailed in the previous report, Maidstone Police secured their PCSO Task Force who have been operating in Brenchley Gardens and the surrounding area since August 2021. Provided in appendix 1 is a brief update summary of OP PAPA, the operation name for this investment of resources into the park.
- 2.5 Other initiatives, including summer music events and deck chairs for general public use have been warmly received, contributing to a reduction in unwanted behaviour and helping to improve the reputation of the park. However, a recent incident involving 3 young women and an alleged assault demonstrates how fragile the reputation of the park is.
- 2.6 As was detailed in the press articles published locally, in the comments from the Maidstone Borough Police Commander, incidents involving unacceptable behaviour in young people are not uncommon across the country, particularly post lockdown. Articles highlighting violence, criminal damage, as well as headlines about lack of respect and feral behaviour are unfortunately a growing phenomenon across the UK. Steps need to be taken to challenge those responsible. In Kent a Contextual Safeguarding approach is taken to address the behaviour of what remains a small minority of young people. This aligns with the strategy and policy adopted by the Kent Children's Safeguarding Board. How we work as a partnership to challenge this behaviour and support some of those young people, themselves often victims of crimes, will be demonstrated in greater detail at a Member's briefing session on the 6th December, with inputs from relevant partner agencies.
- 2.7 An introduction to Contextual Safeguarding is provided in this video <https://vimeo.com/269625673> for committee members to consider its importance in deciding what steps need to be taken going forward.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to endorse the approach set out in section 4 of the report as specifically laid out in 4.2.
 - 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 contained in this section will enable the Council to address the concerns that have been raised about the use of Brenchley Gardens, taking an evidence-based approach to ensure the preventative measures are appropriate, realistic and cost-effective.
- 4.2 The recommended actions, explained in detail in appendix 2, are summarised as follows:
 - 1. That the decision on the full closure of the park is postponed until after members receive their briefing on Contextual Safeguarding and to allow other steps outlined in points 2 to 5 to be fully explored and implemented and their impact measured.
 - 2. That works to reinstate a decorative frill on the bandstand is undertaken as part of planned works on the asset over the next 6 to 12 months
 - 3. That, subject to the identification of an appropriate budget, works are undertaken to increase
 - 4. The works are undertaken to increase the existing CCTV coverage in the park as detailed below.
 - 5. That officers work to identify an appropriate budget to fund two additional One Maidstone Ambassadors to provide a focused presence in North Week Street and Brenchley Gardens at core times.

Night Closure of the park and lighting.

- 4.3 Brenchley Gardens is publicly accessible from four entrance points, three pedestrian only and one shared vehicular/pedestrian access. Consideration has been given to how the park might be secured, however there are considerable barriers to securing the park fully. These are both logistical and financial. The considerations listed below are described in greater detail in section 1 of Appendix 2:
- Restricting access at the three pedestrian access points could reduce ASB, but put the public at risk if they unwittingly access the park from the South entrance.
 - Restricting access would not have prevented the most serious of incidents nor will it prevent ASB and criminality alleged to happen throughout the day.
 - Restricting access will directly impact the residents of 88 apartments and undermine the original planning permission for the development in regards to access.
 - Replacing the vehicular access control point with a pedestrian gate is likely to be extremely costly, particularly if utilised to allow access to residents of McKenzie Court.
 - Securing the park from pedestrians provides a logistical challenge if there are users refusing to leave. Parks like Mote Park and Cobtree Manor are only closed to vehicles not pedestrians. Those closed to pedestrians have significantly less access points to manage. Locking the park, without a human security presence will present a challenge if there are already users in the park and may not ultimately prevent access from those who climb the fences.
- 4.4 Alongside the practical/logistical challenges highlighted in 4.3, appendix 2 outlines some of the financial costs associated with closing the park which are estimated to be in excess of £54,000. This does not include the cost of increasing the height of any existing fencing nor the ongoing cost of maintaining the access point from St Faiths street.
- 4.5 Our assessment, given the logistical/practical and financial information provided in appendix 2, is that closing the park would not prevent the levels of ASB and criminality sufficiently. Therefore a decision to close the park at this time would **not be appropriate, realistic or cost effective.**
- 4.6 Improvements to lighting as outlined in appendix 2 (1.6) could increase the safety in the park, but may also attract users after dark. The costs of increasing the lighting (c £35-37k) would need to be sourced and would also be subject to planning conditions where ecological challenges could be presented.
- 4.7 The recommendation is that a final decision on closing the park and improving the lighting, at a cost of approximately £90,000 plus officers time,

is postponed to allow the other measures contained within this report to be implemented. Officers will also brief members on the national "Contextual Safeguarding" model and provide an update on how, as a partnership, we will continue to challenge unwanted behaviour. The Member's briefing session will be hosted on 6th December, with inputs from relevant partner agencies.

Reinstating the Bandstand Frill

- 4.8 Brenchley Gardens benefits from still having the original bandstand in place. The Bandstand, which is constructed largely of wood and is tiled/clad in Kent ragstone has been a feature of the park since its construction in Victorian times. Appendix 3 provides pictures of the bandstand as it was originally constructed.
- 4.9 Although often used over the years for musical performances, it has, for many generations, become a focal point for young people to gather as it offers a place to sit and to be sheltered. As a result, anti-social behaviour and other risk-taking behaviours associated with young people are common and renowned within the community.
- 4.10 Section 2 of appendix 2 describes the recommendation to reinstate a frill, similar to that depicted in figure 2 of appendix 3, to act as a visual and physical barrier to some young people as part of ongoing structural work.

Upgrade to existing CCTV in the Park

- 4.11 CCTV in Brenchley Gardens already provides both static and active guardianship depending on whether the CCTV controllers are actively monitoring the park. This is achieved through a static Pan, Tilt, Zoom (PTZ) camera situated on a central column within the park. Brenchley Gardens is the only park with permanent CCTV in the borough.
- 4.12 The existing field of vision for this camera is limited to the direction the camera is facing. The camera, which can be moved remotely by a controller, rotates through 360° but has a field of vision of around 90°, therefore is only looking at approximately 25% of the park at any one time.
- 4.13 Section 3 of appendix 2 describes the recommendation to upgrade the existing CCTV to provide greater coverage as well as some passive and active features to help monitor the park in a more proactive way.
- 4.14 The cost of the proposed upgrade, which could be undertaken by the end of the year, is c£19,000. This covers all the equipment described in appendix 2, system improvements to allow the network to support the new cameras and labour costs. It has been identified that funding is available from the existing CCTV budget.
- 4.15 Members are asked to note that on 22nd November, as part of the monitoring agreement with One Maidstone, the CCTV control room was upgraded to improve monitoring capability across the whole of the static camera network. The upgrades were funded by One Maidstone and

represent a significant step in providing a cost-effective monitored CCTV system.

Increased "human" presence at key times in partnership with One Maidstone

- 4.16 The final recommendation is for officers to work to identify a budget to fund up to two additional One Maidstone Ambassadors (£30-60k). Section 4 of Appendix 2 sets out how, following very recent conversations, additional Ambassadors could be utilised to provide a cost-effective alternative to other measures because it will provide a human presence in the area. Building on the success of Op Papa as outlined in Appendix 1, additional ambassador(s) would help combat ASB and criminality and provide reassurance to an area that where residents and businesses often highlight their concerns. By engaging with young people within the park but also in North Week Street, where most issues in Brenchley Gardens often originate, there is an opportunity to proactively prevent issues from escalating. A human guardian will act as a deterrent, actively calm situations down and will also act as an extension of the local policing family. Funding for this would need to be identified but could be trialled for a shorter period or be focussed over the warmer months to maximise effectiveness.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The objective of this report is to reduce the risk of and extent of harm arising from ASB/criminality within Brenchely Gardens. The steps outlined in this report and appendix 2 highlight the theoretical benefits associated with the proposed interventions and where risks will need to be mitigated.
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 A communication strategy was implemented to support the ongoing work within the park in order to change the narrative. This will be utilised to promote new initiatives as they are implemented.
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7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Summary update report in relation to Op Papa
- Appendix 2: Options in relation to Brenchley Gardens
- Appendix 3: Photos of Brenchley Gardens Bandstand