

EASTFIELD PARK NORTHAMPTON

STATE OF THE PARK

(Footpaths, Facilities & Ground Conditions)

MAY, 2019



New Bench and Information Board

Eastfield Park Management Committee

Friends of Eastfield Park

V G F SMITH (JUNE, 2019)

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Preface

This is the fourth *State of the Park* report concerning footpaths, facilities and ground conditions, since the formation of the Eastfield Park Management Committee in June 2014. Previous reports were written in February 2016, February 2017, and February 2018, following inspections carried out in January/February each year. This 2019 report is based on an inspection carried out in May 2019 by Dr Vic Smith, Chair of the Eastfield Park Management Committee and the Friends of Eastfield Park, and Chris Stacey, the Park Ranger employed by Northampton Borough Council.

The February 2016 and February 2017 reports attempted to cover all aspects of the Park including water resources and vegetation. This report, like the February 2018 report, deals only with the Park's footpaths, facilities and ground conditions. It has little to say about other aspects of the Park unless they are relevant to these themes. However, a report produced in November 2018 dealt with water resources and vegetation and it is the intention to produce another report considering these aspects of the Park later in the year.

This report partly satisfies the last two of the Management Plan's six 'On-going Planning/Management Objectives' (numbered v and vi in the Plan):

- v. Report on number and condition of waste bins, benches, information boards and other park facilities. Review provision and condition of park facilities. Agree necessary actions.
- vi. Report on condition of pathways within the Park. Review situation and agree necessary actions for coming year.

Ground conditions are included in the report because of their relevance to access to the Park and movement within it, and hence to footpaths. Vegetation is only mentioned if it damages footpaths or other structures, restricts access or provides cover for vandals (who are responsible for much of the damage to facilities). The report does not deal with wider environmental concerns such as the maintenance of lakes, ponds, meadows, trees and woodlands. These concerns are the subject of the Action Plan's objectives i to iv and will be addressed in the later report.

It must be stressed that the report describes the facilities in the Park as they were during the May inspection. At the time of writing the report, some of the issues mentioned had been or were being addressed.

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STATE OF THE PARK - May, 2019

Introduction

Dr Vic Smith (Chair of the Friends of Eastfield Park and the Eastfield Park Management Committee) and Chris Stacey (NBC Park Ranger for Eastfield Park) carried out a detailed inspection of the facilities and equipment in Eastfield Park, Northampton, on 14th and 23rd May, 2019. Urgent issues were reported to NBC for immediate action; other, less important, issues and general information collected during the inspection are included in this report. The inspection broadly followed the same procedures as those carried out in previous years. The photographs illustrating the report were all taken on one of the inspection days in May or on 3rd June, 2019. Unlike in earlier reports, these photographs have been grouped together at the end of the document to avoid interrupting the text.

Ground Conditions

Previous *State of the Park* reports have generally drawn attention to the waterlogged nature of large sections of the Park in winter. This inspection, however, took place in May after a fairly dry period of weather and wet or waterlogged ground was not an issue. It should be noted, however, that there were a number of depressions, cracks and holes in the Park's surface some of which presented a hazard for park users.

In particular, cracks along many of the white lines on the football pitches appeared during the extremely dry weather in 2018 and were noted in the November, 2018, *State of the Park* Report. These cracks had not been filled in and still presented a hazard to park users, particularly those playing football on the pitches.

From time to time deep holes appear on the Park. Some of these are probably caused by animals, others by the illegal digging for buried artefacts (by metal detectorists). However, some seem to be caused by the collapse of underground chambers and these are the most hazardous for park users. One such hole was pointed out to Vic Smith immediately following the inspection on 23rd May (Fig 1). It requires urgent attention.

Shallow depressions may not be hazardous but may fill with water and mud in wet weather. They look unsightly and can cause an inconvenience to park users.

Pathways

Little has changed regarding pathways since the February 2018 *State of the Park* Report.

Greenside, running along the southern boundary of the Park, is a paved pathway. It has a number of broken or cracked paving slabs and areas replaced with tarmac. It is not in good condition but no worse than many of Northampton's pavements. The short spur from

Greenside to the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) is tarred and has a deep crack running along it. It requires careful monitoring to ensure it does not become dangerous.

Apple Tree Walk, linking Kettering Road to the north-west corner of the Park, and its extension ('Cedar Walk') through the western margin of the Park to the Greenview Avenue entrance, are tarred pathways. Their surfaces are broken and crumbling in a number of places (Fig. 2). Ideally, they require remedial action in the near future.

The remedial tree work carried out along Apple Tree Walk early in 2019 has made the path safer and more pleasant to walk along, particularly in the evenings now the street lighting is more effective.

Mallard Walk, constructed in 2014, is the only all-weather cross-park pathway. It is surfaced with self-binding gravel. As previously reported, the section by the Lake was not constructed to the same high standard as the rest of the path and is in very poor condition. The exposed drain cover now presents a serious trip hazard and remedial action is urgently required.

The sections of the path leading to and from the lake are in much better condition but do have a number of potholes which are getting deeper with time. The southern section between the Eastfield Estate and the lake is in particular need of repair. The short spur to the new Junior Play Area is already badly eroded particularly near the gate into the play area, exposing the metal sill to the gate and causing a serious trip hazard. This has already been reported to NBC and remedial action has been carried out.

The numerous informal unsurfaced paths running through the wooded areas of the Park including Squire's Spinney, Lakeview Spinney, Booth Lane Spinney, the Buttermere Scrub and the Pond Area are maintained by the Friends of Eastfield Park. During 2018 and the first part of 2019, FoEP volunteers added a considerable quantity of wood chippings to the main pathways through Lakeview Spinney and the Pond Area. These pathways are also being kept open by cutting back encroaching vegetation. The FoEP has received a number of compliments from residents who particularly appreciate being able to use these pathways in wet weather. Work to improve the pathway through Booth Lane Spinney is still needed.

Facilities & Equipment

Assessment Procedure

Vic Smith and Chris Stacey assessed the state of equipment and facilities in the Park (see Map) using the same six point scale as employed in previous years (Table 1). The limits of each category, particularly between 3 & 4, are rather arbitrary and assessments were occasionally recorded as falling somewhere in a range between codes, e.g. '3/4'. The results of the assessments for this year and previous years are compared in Tables 2 to 7. Unsatisfactory scores are shown in red, brown or orange, satisfactory scores in green, blue and purple.

Care should be taken when interpreting the scores. Anomalies may stem from the subjective nature of some assessments or the way in which observations are recorded. An apparent improvement between years could be the result of repairs or cleaning but may simply result from a degree of observer bias.



Table 1: Criteria used for assessing equipment & facilities in Eastfield Park – 2016 to 2019.

Code	Description
0	Equipment missing!
1	Dangerous condition – needs repair or replacement immediately
2	Unsatisfactory condition – needs repair or replacement soon
3	Satisfactory condition – some damage but perfectly functional
4	Good condition – only cosmetic damage (e.g. scratches, small dents)
5	Pristine condition – no damage of any kind

Waste Bins (including dog and litter bins)

The 2019 assessments for waste bins are compared with previous years in Table 2. A summary of comments noted in 2019 is also included.

Table 2: Assessments for waste bins in 2019 compared with previous assessments. Refer to Map for location of bins.

Reference	Type	Comments (2019)	Assessment Scores			
			2016	2017	2018	2019
D1	Old red dog bin	Weeds around bin need cutting back	3/4	4	3	3
D2	Old red dog bin	Weeds around bin need cutting back	3/4	4	4	4
D3	Old red dog bin	-	4	3	3	4
D4	Old red dog bin	No pedal	3	3	3	3
D5	Old red dog bin	Rusted bottom	3/4	3	2/3	3
D6	Old red dog bin	No pedal	4	4	3	3
D7	Old red dog bin	Previously missing	2	2	0	0
D8	Old red dog bin	No pedal	2	2	3	3
D9	Old red dog bin	Broken pedal; some dents	3/4	3/4	3	3
D10	Old red dog bin	Previously missing	3	3	0	0
D11	Old red dog bin	Split lid	3	4	3/4	2
D12	Old red dog bin	No pedal	4	4	3	3
D13	Old red dog bin	Post bent over – needs renovating	3	3	2/3	2
D14	Old red dog bin	Previously missing	3/4	0	0	0
L1	Open waste basket	-	4/5	4	4	4
L2	Open waste bin	Needs resetting; otherwise OK	4	4	4	2
L3	Old type waste bin	-	4	3	3	4
L4	New style waste bin	Previously missing [In lake in 2016]	0	0	0	0
L5	Old type waste bin	Dented	3/4	3/4	3	3
L6	Open waste basket	-	4/5	4/5	5	3
W07	New waste bin	Installed in Jnr Play Area in 2016	-	4/5	5	4
W08	New waste bin	Rocks on base; monitor for movement	-	-	5	3
W09	New waste bin	Rocks on base; monitor for movement	-	-	5	3
W10	New waste bin	Rocks on base; monitor for movement	-	-	4	3
W11	New waste bin	Rocks on base; monitor for movement	-	-	5	3
W12	New waste bin	Rocks on base; monitor for movement	-	-	5	3
W13	New waste bin	Installed near ha-ha in 2018	-	-	-	5

In 2016, twenty waste bins were inspected. The majority of these (14) were the old-type red dog bins mounted on posts. By 2019, three of the dog bins had disappeared and two were deemed unsatisfactory. Dog bin D11 had a split lid (Fig. 3) and D13 was bent over at an angle making it difficult to use (Fig. 4). Both of these could easily be repaired.

One of the litter bins inspected in 2016 (L4) was a modern style waste bin installed in 2014 when Mallard Walk was constructed. By the time of the inspection it had already been tipped into the lake. It was eventually recovered and removed from the Park.

Another of the litter bins inspected in 2016 (L2) was deemed unsatisfactory in 2019. However, the bin itself is in fair condition; it simply requires resetting on its base.

Seven new waste bins have been provided since the 2016 inspection, one with the Junior Play Area in 2016 and another, recently, as part of the ha-ha project including a new bench and information board. The other five new bins were installed early in 2017. All of the new bins are in good condition but the five bins installed in 2017 rock on their bases and need further monitoring.

Dog walkers sometimes complain about an insufficient number of waste bins on the Park. The FoEP believe that an additional bin is needed adjacent to the seat by the football pitches (where a considerable amount of litter collects) and another close to Greenside to replace the missing dog bin (D10). Other waste bins should be provided as dog bins deteriorate and are removed, and also next to any new benches that may be installed. However, more needs to be done to ensure that all dog walkers are aware that bagged dogs' mess may be put into any waste bin. The FoEP should increase publicity about this and NBC should put appropriate stickers on all bins.

Benches

The 2019 assessments for benches are compared with previous years in Table 3 below. A summary of comments made in 2019 is also included.

Table 3: Assessments for benches in 2019 compared with previous assessments. Refer to Map for location of benches. (In the context of this table a 'seat' has a back to it.)

Reference	Type	Comments (2019)	Assessment Scores			
			2016	2017	2018	2019
S1	Metal seat	Needs repainting; cracked paving slab at front	4/5	3	3	4
S2	Metal seat	Footing exposed	3	3	3	4
S3	Wooden seat	[Fire damaged & removed in 2016]	4	0	0	0
S4	Simple wooden plank bench (no back)	Badly worn ground on both sides [No slab added in 2018]	-	3/4	4	3
S5	Metal seat	Footings exposed	4	3	4	3/4
S6	Metal seat in Jnr Play Area	Loose base slab	-	4/5	4/5	4
S7	Simple metal bench in Jnr Play Area	Exposed corners on slab base	-	4/5	4/5	4
S8	New metal seat by ha-ha	Bench scratched, loose base slab	-	-	-	4

Five benches were present in Eastfield Park at the time of the 2016 inspection although one, the simple wooden ‘plank bench’ near the ‘monster’ play mound, was overlooked in the survey. Only four of these remain today, the bench on Mallard Walk near the lake having been removed following fire damage in March 2016. Three benches have been added: two in the Junior Play Area in 2016 and one near the ha-ha in 2018.

Previous *State of the Park* reports drew attention to the hollows that had formed in front of all of the benches including the new ones in the Junior Play Area. These depressions filled with water during wet weather and remained muddy for long periods making it difficult to use the benches unless wearing boots. The bench installed in 2018 was the first to be placed on a full slab base to prevent such depressions from forming. Additionally, all the other benches (except the plank bench, S4) had the hollows filled and covered with slabs.

All the benches are in good condition although some, particularly S1, would benefit from a coat of paint. However, there have been a number of complaints about the standard of work done in filling hollows and adding slabs to prevent further erosion. A number of the slabs are loose and one (in front of Bench S1) is already cracked (Fig. 5). In some cases the corners of slabs are exposed creating a hazard (Fig. 6) and elsewhere the old concrete foundations of the benches are left exposed.

Park Entrances

The 2019 assessments for entrance welcome boards and notices are compared with previous years in Table 3 below. It should be noted that in previous years a single score was given for entrance signage whereas in 2019 separate scores have been allocated for different notices. A summary of comments made in 2019 is also included in the table.

Table 4: Assessments for entrance welcome boards and notices for 2019 compared with previous assessments for entrance signs. Refer to Map for location of entrances.

Entrance	Boards	Comments (2019)	Assessment Scores			
			2016	2017	2018	2019
A	Welcome Board	Slight damage – needs monitoring	4	4	3/4	3
	PSPO Notice	Slightly damaged				3
	Vehicle Notice	OK				5
B	Welcome Board	Slight damage – needs monitoring	4	4	3/4	3
	PSPO Notice	Slightly damaged				3
	Vehicle Notice	OK				5
C	Welcome Board	Some graffiti damage	4	4	4	4
	PSPO Notice	Little damage				4
D	Welcome Board	Cosmetic damage only	4	4	4	4
	PSPO Notice	Little damage				4
	Vehicle Notice	OK				4
E	Welcome Board	Cosmetic damage only	4	4	3/4	4
	PSPO Notice	Little damage				4

Most signage at the Park entrances is in reasonable or good condition. However, some of the PSPO notices have been damaged, probably as a deliberate act of vandalism. As reported last year, the two layers on some of the Welcome Boards are separating. All signs require on-going monitoring to check their condition. It was also mentioned last year that the information on the welcome boards is now out-of-date and consideration should be given to replacing them soon.

The 2019 assessments for entrance bollards and dragon’s teeth are compared with previous years in Table 5 below. However, in previous years the assessment referred mainly to the metal bollards or wooden posts across the approved vehicular access to the Park; the condition of posts to the side of the actual entrance may have been noted but did not form part of the numerical assessment. In 2019, greater attention was given to the over-all security of the entrances. For this reason, the Skiddaw Walk entrance was given a score of only two. The bollards across the entrance itself are in good condition but a wooden post to the side of the entrance is missing providing possible unauthorised entry to the Park. It is essential that all bollards and dragon’s teeth at entrances and around the Park’s perimeter are regularly monitored for damage.

Table 5: Assessments for entrance bollards and dragon’s teeth for 2019 compared with previous assessments for entrance bollards. Refer to Map for location of entrances.

Entrance	Security	Comments (2019)	Assessment Scores			
			2016	2017	2018	2019
A	Lockable metal bollards + fixed wooden dragon’s teeth	One wooden post needs replacing soon!	4	4	4	2
B	Lockable metal bollards + fixed wooden dragon’s teeth	New metal bollards (5) Old ones still in place (3)	3	3	3	5
C	Fixed wooden dragon’s teeth	Some decay: monitor	4	4	4	3
D	Lockable metal bollards +fixed wooden dragon’s teeth	Some decay: monitor	4	4/5	3	3
E	Fixed wooden dragon’s teeth	Secure	4	4	4	4

Play Equipment

In previous years, a single score was given to each piece of play equipment. In 2019, however, scores were allocated to various components of each item. So, for example, a single score was given to the zip wire in 2016, 2017 and 2018, but this year the supports, the platform, the cable & trolley (pulley), the seat and the ground surface were each scored separately. This provides more useful information and will facilitate better comparisons in the future. It does mean, though, that comparisons with the earlier years are almost meaningless and have therefore not been included in the tables relating to play equipment.

Play Equipment – Senior Play Area

The assessment scores and a summary of the comments made for each of the three pieces of equipment in the Senior Play Area are shown in Table 6. It should be noticed that there

are serious issues regarding two pieces of equipment (the Zip Wire and the Pyramid Climber) and some concern over the third (the Rocker). These have already been reported directly to NBC.

The damage to the Rocker treads has been described in previous *State of the Park* reports but this is the first time it has been raised as an issue of particular concern, mainly because it is now believed that the exposed metal could injure a child falling against it (Fig 7).

It is also the first time that the zip wire and climbing pyramid have been considered to be in a dangerous condition although damage to these structures has been reported (and rectified) before.

Table 6: Assessments scores and a summary of comments made during the 2019 inspection for components of each piece of play equipment in the Senior Play Area.

Apparatus: Component	Comments	Score
Zip Wire: Supports	Needs painting to preserve structure; monitor for cracks in wood.	3
Zip Wire: Platform	Platform in good condition but exposed corners are dangerous (a ground issue).	4
Zip Wire: Cable & Trolley	Recently renewed	5
Zip Wire: Seat	Recently renewed	5
Zip Wire: Ground surface	Dangerous condition! Only a thin layer of protective surface over concrete. Wet Pour needs replacing. Ground needs to be made up around platform.	1
Rocker: Treads	Concern: Badly worn. Exposed metal forms a hazard	2
Rocker: Mechanism	Bush worn (Fig. 8) – needs to be monitored	3
Rocker: Ground surface	OK	4
Pyramid climber: Central pole	Dangerous condition! Movement in pole	1
Pyramid climber: Cables/Tension	Loose and rubbing against central pole (Fig. 9).	1
Pyramid climber: Anchor points	One metal plate completely exposed (Fig. 10) – needs covering; others need monitoring for damage	1
Pyramid climber: Ground surface	OK – apart from issues around anchor points	3

Play Equipment – Junior Play Area

The assessment scores and a summary of the comments made for the fence, gates and each pieces of play equipment in the Junior Play Area are shown in Table 7. (The two benches and the waste bin have already been considered above.)

The equipment is generally in a good or satisfactory condition but there are a number of points that need attention, the most serious of which is a finger trap hazard at the top of the ‘rope’ ladder on the Mordred Castle (Fig 11). There is also concern over the exposed kerb along part of the rim of the surface surrounding the Swirl Roundabout (Fig 12). This is a trip hazard but could also prove harmful if a child fell onto it.

Table 7: Assessments scores and a summary of comments made during the 2019 inspection for the fence, gates and components of each piece of play equipment in the Junior Play Area.

Apparatus: Component	Comments	Score
Fence	Bolt & nut, and 1 other nut missing; otherwise 5	3
Notices on fence	One damaged; one on ground – needs fixing.	2
Main gate	Trip hazard at entrance; repair in hand.	4
East gate	Trip hazard at entrance; gate not self-closing; repair in hand.	3
Double gate	OK	4
Sea-saw: structure	Loose/damaged bolts	3
See-saw: ground surface	Weeds growing – monitor for damage to surface.	3
Mordred Castle: structure	OK	4
Mordred Castle: ‘rope’ ladder	Core wire exposed in places; finger trap at top of ladder needs filling.	3
Mordred Castle: slide	OK	5
Mordred Castle: ground surface	Weeds!	3
Buddy Board: structure	OK	4
Buddy Board: ground surface	Some weeds!	4
Swings: structure	OK	4
Swings: chains	OK	4
Swings: seats	OK	4
Swings: ground surface	Wet pour badly worn and lifting under one of the seats – needs repair; some weeds	3
Swirl Roundabout: structure	Bolt missing on seat; otherwise OK.	3
Swirl Roundabout: ground surface	Good condition within circle (4). Concern over eroded ground exposing kerb edge hazard (3/2).	3
Alpine Crossing: structure	Small torn patch on mound; otherwise OK	3
Switchback Run: structure	OK	4
Crossing/Switchback: ground surface	OK	4
Bouncy Cockerel: structure	OK but slight movement in seat mounting	4
Bouncy Cockerel: ground surface	Weeds!	3
Miss Muffet: structure	Damage to slide – not serious	3/4
Miss Muffet: ground surface	Weeds!	3
Rock ‘n’ Bowl: structure	Some damage to casing; otherwise OK	3/4
Rock ‘n’ Bowl: ground surface	Some weeds.	4
Benches and Waste Bin considered elsewhere in report		

Play Equipment – The ‘Eastfield Monster’ Play Mound

Having been restored by volunteers in autumn, 2016, the mound itself is still in reasonably good condition and was given a score of ‘4’. At the time of the inspection it did, however, need strimming (Fig 13).

Some of the wooden posts are in very poor condition. They were either rotten at the base or loose in their sockets and received a score of only ‘2’. Of particular concern is the fact that if these posts are removed by vandals the hole left behind is a serious hazard (Fig 14). Ideally, the damaged posts need replacing or resetting. A less satisfactory solution, as has sometimes been done in the past, is for the posts to be removed completely and the resulting holes firmly filled.

Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)

The MUGA has hardly changed in the past year. It is in reasonably good condition (Fig 15) but the fence (given a score of ‘3’) needs painting. The playing surface is in reasonably good condition and was scored ‘4’ but there is a pothole outside the area (Fig. 18) that needs filling.

New equipment

Early in 2019, a **new notice board** (see Page 12) was installed in the Park near the Junior Play Area and an **information board** (see Cover) by the new bench close to the ha-ha. Both were scored as ‘Pristine’ (‘5’). The notice board is already being used but a permanent display still needs to be prepared for the information board.

Conclusions & Recommendations

1. The surface of Park needs to be further inspected for dangerous holes. Known holes should be filled in. Shallow holes may be filled in by volunteers but deeper holes should be filled professionally, particularly if it is suspected that there could be hidden chambers or obstacles beneath the surface.
2. Potholes on Mallard Walk should be filled professionally and other remedial work carried out to the pathway as it passes by the Lake.
3. The FoEP will continue to open up and improve informal pathways through the wooded parts of the Park, particularly by adding wood chippings to path surfaces.
4. The Park now has a reasonable number of waste bins but would benefit from another two: one by the bench near the football pitches and one near the middle of Greenside to replace a missing dog bin. The possibility of installing two renovated bins at these locations has not yet materialised but, hopefully, this project can be revitalised.

5. Two dog bins need repair or replacing and all bins require signs saying that they can be used for the disposal of bagged dogs' mess. Any new benches in the Park should be provided with waste bins nearby.
6. The FoEP should continue to seek funding for additional park benches. (An application for funding for a bench along Cedar Walk is still being considered by Tesco 'Bags of Help'.) The possible provision of a new bench by the Lake should be reviewed periodically.
7. The depressions in front of existing benches have been partly filled and paving stones placed over areas most subject to wear. However, the work was not carried out to the highest standards and some slabs are already rocking or damaged. Remedial work needs to be carried out.
8. The repair or replacement of damaged bollards and dragon's teeth near entrances should be a priority. (The inspection did not include examination of dragon's teeth at other locations around the Park but they should be checked again in the very near future.)
9. All items of equipment in the Senior Play Area (but particularly the Zip Wire and the Climbing Pyramid) urgently need professional attention. Work should be carried out to make them safe and secure as soon as possible.
10. Work needs to be carried out to remove trip hazards in and around the Junior Play Area. Work on the entrances has been carried out but the rim of the Swirl Roundabout is still hazardous. The finger trap hazard on the Mordred Castle needs filling.
11. Rotten or loose posts on the 'Monster' play mound need repair, replacement, or removal and the holes filled. The whole area needs regular strimming.
12. The MUGA fence would benefit from a coat of paint and one pothole, outside the games area, should be filled.



ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1: Hazardous hole in Park surface.



Fig. 2: Broken surface of Cedar Walk.



Fig. 3: Damaged lid to Bin D11.



Fig. 4: Damage to Bin D13.



Fig. 5: Cracked slab in front of Bench S1.



Fig. 6: Exposed corner of slab in Play Area.



Fig. 7: Damaged tread on Rocker.



Fig. 8: Worn bush on Rocker.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 9: Loose cables & pole on Pyramid.



Fig. 10: Exposed anchor plate on Pyramid.



Fig. 11: Finger trap on Mordred Castle.



Fig. 12: Hazardous kerb on Roundabout.



Fig. 13: Weeds around posts on 'Monster'.



Fig. 14: Hazardous post hole on 'Monster'.



Fig. 15: MUGA in reasonable condition.



Fig. 18: Small pothole outside MUGA.