

EASTFIELD PARK NORTHAMPTON

STATE OF THE PARK

January, 2016



Eastfield Park Management Committee

Friends of Eastfield Park

V G F SMITH (February, 2016)

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Introduction

Dr Vic Smith (Chair of the Friends of Eastfield Park and the Eastfield Park Management Committee) and Kevin Skerry (NBC Park Ranger for Eastfield Park) carried out detailed inspections of the facilities in Eastfield Park on 12th and 21st January, 2016. Dangerous and/or urgent issues were reported to Peter Hackett (Environmental Services Manager, NBC) immediately, but less important issues and the general information collected are included in this report about the state of the Park at the beginning of 2016.

Other observations included in the report were made during a site visit to the Park with Matt Johnson (Living Landscape Manager at the The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire) on 26th January. Unless otherwise indicated, the photographs included were taken during these visits or on other trips to the Park in January and early February, 2016.

State of the ground

Unsurprisingly, in view of the exceptionally wet weather experienced across the country this winter, much of the park was waterlogged in January and February with the puddles of standing water especially around the eastern end of the Lake. However, this situation is not unusual as Figures 1 and 2 show (one taken in February 2016 and the other in February 2013). (Figure 2 is taken looking in the opposite direction to figure 1 but shows the same area of the Park.)



Figure 1: Standing water to the east of the lake
– February, 2016



Figure 2: Standing water to the east of the lake
– February, 2013

With the presence of so much surface water, and soggy conditions elsewhere, people tend to make greater use of certain routes through the Park, wearing away grass and rendering these pathways themselves muddy and in some cases unusable (Fig. 3). The vehicles used by contractors collecting litter and dogs' mess from bins are unable to access much of the Park and a number of bins go unemptied. Where contractors use Mallard Walk to access the bins by the lake, the new pathway is deeply rutted and inconvenient for walkers (Fig. 4).



Figure 3: Muddy path in a drier part of Eastfield Park.



Figure 4: Mallard Walk (new 'all-weather' pathway) damaged by vehicles.

In the past the FoEP have called for improved drainage to the Park but NBC has argued that this would not bring sufficient public benefit for the cost involved. It must also be taken into consideration that Eastfield Park may be performing a valuable environmental service by holding water back, rather like a giant sponge, reducing the risk of surface water flooding in residential areas lower down the Walbeck basin. It seems possible that any improvement to the Park's drainage could increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. A soggy Park in winter may be something that has to be tolerated but the situation can be improved by the construction of additional all-weather paths as suggested by the FoEP.

The poor state of the new all-weather pathway (Mallard Walk) as it passes by the lake is at least partly due to the fact that, because the land here is generally firmer and drier than elsewhere along the path's route, it was not constructed to the same high standard.

Vegetation

Some residents made very favourable comments about the standard of grass cutting in 2015 and, despite good growing conditions late in 2015, the grass is still at an acceptable level. A difficulty is likely to arise in spring 2016, however, when the grass starts growing rapidly and the ground is likely to remain too wet for grass cutting vehicles to access much of the Park.

A number of trees have been damaged and some very large branches brought down by the severe winter storms of 2015-16 (Figs. 5&6).



Figure 5: Park Ranger, Kevin Skerry, inspects a fallen branch.



Figure 6: A very large branch brought down by a severe storm.

Storm damage to trees could, however, be reduced if trees received better maintenance throughout the year. In 2014, dead trees were marked for felling in 2015. In order to protect nesting birds, no work was carried out on the trees last spring. Later in the year weather conditions were unfavourable. The matter is now becoming urgent especially for people who have gardens bordering the Park. However, the FoEP do not want to see all dead trees cut down; some provide valuable nesting sites for birds and habitats for a variety of invertebrates. In the case of one particular tree, it has been agreed that, if possible, only the upper branches should be removed to make it safe, while keeping the trunk and lower branches available for nesting woodpeckers.

The herbaceous garden along the fence separating Eleonore House from the Park is now becoming overgrown with weeds and needs some attention. It should be possible to tidy and replant this garden with students from Northampton College in early spring. The wildflower garden also needs tidying but without damaging the biennial and perennial plants already there. It therefore needs more careful attention. The Crescent Rock Garden is looking quite good but could benefit from additional planting.

Equipment & Facilities

Vic Smith and Kevin Skerry assessed the state of equipment and facilities (Fig 7) in the Park on a six point scale using the criteria shown in Table 1. Since the limits of each category are rather arbitrary, assessments were often recorded as falling somewhere in a range between codes: e.g. '3/4' somewhere between satisfactory and good. The results of the assessments are shown in Table 2 where unsatisfactory situations are shown in red, brown or orange

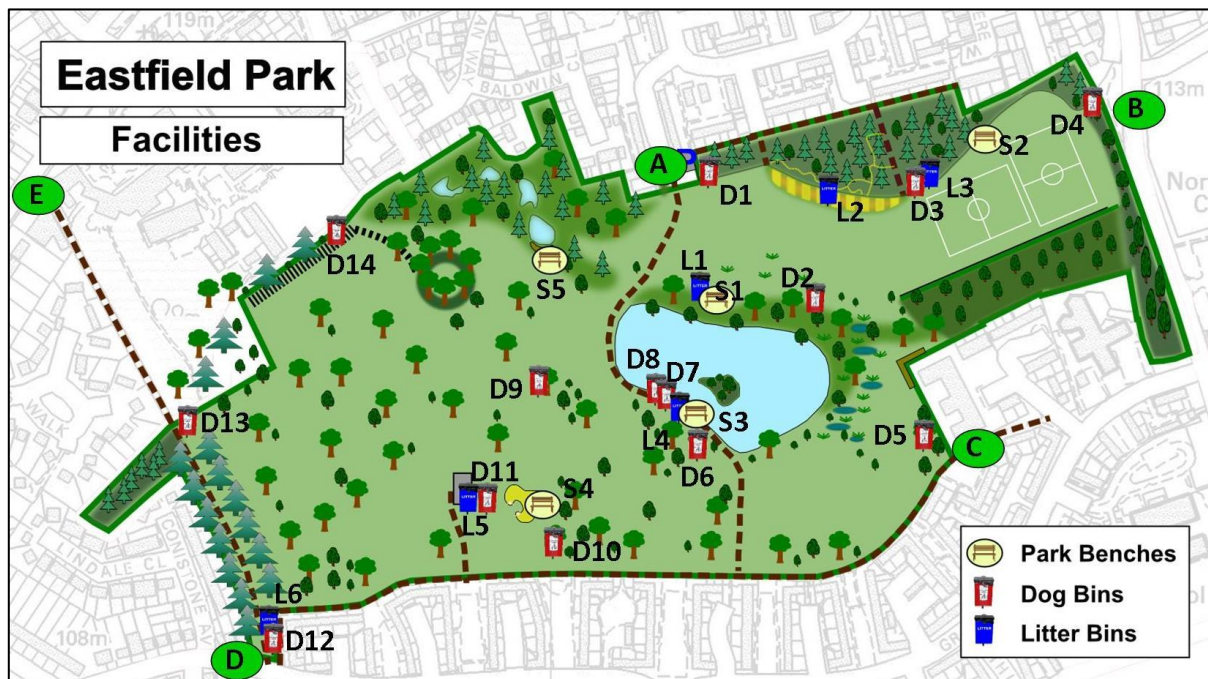


Figure 7: Equipment and facilities in Eastfield Park. A: Skiddaw Walk entrance, B: Booth Lane entrance, C: Eleonore House entrance, D: Greenfield Avenue entrance, E: Kettering Road entrance, D1 to D14: Dog bins, L1 to L6: Litter bins, S1 to S5: Park benches.

Table 1: Criteria used for assessing equipment & facilities in Eastfield Park - January, 2016.

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
G	G added to the code indicates graffiti; GG, indecent or offensive graffiti

Table 2: Results of the assessments – January, 2016

Litter Bins	Condition		Dog Bins	Condition
L1	4/5		D1	3/4
L2	4		D2	3/4
L3	4G		D3	4
L4	0 (in lake!)		D4	3G
L5	3/4		D5	3/4G
L6	4/5		D6	4
			D7	2 – no lid
Seats			D8	2 – no bottom
S1	4/5		D9	3/4
S2	3GG – also see text		D10	3
S3	4		D11	3
S4	-		D12	4
S5	4 - but see text		D13	3
			D14	3/4
Entrances	Boards	Bollards		
A	4G	4	MONSTER: Wood	3/4
B	4G	3	Grass	3
C	4G	4	MUGA: Fences	4
D	4G	4	Surfaces	4
E	4	4	Electric Box	4
Zip Wire	3G		PATHS: Greenside	see text
Rocker	3G		Mallard Walk	see text
Climbing Pyramid	3G – but see text		Apple Tree Walk	see text
Mini Trail	3 – but needs weeding		Path to MUGA	see text

There is a certain amount of fair wear and tear to facilities within the Park (e.g. Fig. 8) but most of the damage to structures is caused by deliberate anti-social acts, ranging from minor incidents of scrawls and scribbles on seats to the deliberate destruction of facilities such as dog and litter bins. Last year the seat by the lake outfall was tipped into the water and this year the same has been done to the adjacent litter bin (Fig. 9). One of the near-by dog bins has had the lid completely destroyed by vandals (Fig. 10) and a new sign prohibiting swimming and boating erected by NBC was damaged within a week (Fig. 11).



Figure 8: Dog bin suffering from reasonable wear and tear.



Figure 9: Litter bin uprooted and dumped into lake (near lake outfall).



Figure 10: Dog bin near lake outfall suffering from deliberate act of vandalism (fire).



Figure 11: New sign near lake outfall vandalised with one week of being erected by NBC.

Eastfield Lake is surely the 'jewel in the crown' of Eastfield Park; the trouble with crown jewels is that they can attract undesirable attention! An NBC officer has already suggested that when the litter bin is recovered from the lake it should not be returned to its original site, yet the FoEP wants every seat in the Park to have a litter bin alongside it. The Park Ranger has commented that almost all the trouble in Eastfield Park occurs close to the seat by the lake outfall. Perhaps the best solution is to move both seat and litter bin elsewhere. The 'No boating / No swimming' sign has already been removed and will be relocated by the path between the lake and the new play area.

The park benches attract considerable amounts of graffiti (Fig 12). They are generally in satisfactory condition but the metal one on the north side of the lake (S1) is almost pristine suggesting that this is a good design for the Park. (The metal litter bin next to it is also

almost pristine.) Two of the benches (S2 & S5, Figs 12 & 13) also have muddy depressions in front of them. These need to be filled in with a suitable material.



Figure 12: Seat near football pitches (S2) with graffiti, litter and muddy depression in front.



Figure 13: Seat near bottom pond (S5) with slight graffiti and muddy depression in front.

Most of the Park entrances are in good condition. The notice boards also attract graffiti and the bollards at the Booth Lane entrance are dented but functional

The 'Eastfield Monster' play mound (Fig. 14) is satisfactory although the ground is badly eroded at the top of the mound (Fig. 15) and some logs have been removed. (Some were deliberately damaged but mostly they seemed to suffer from natural decay.)



Figure 14: The 'Eastfield Monster' play mound is reasonably sound but repairs are needed.



Figure 15: The top of the 'Eastfield Monster' play mound is badly eroded.



Figure 16: Some posts are missing from the 'Eastfield Monster' play mound.



Figure 17: The MUGA is in reasonably good condition.

The MUGA (Fig. 17) is in reasonably good condition. The play equipment in the ‘senior play area’ is mostly in a good or satisfactory condition but there are signs of wear to less durable structures (Fig 18). Two of the ground fixings for the climbing pyramid have been exposed and one in particular (Fig. 19) may present a trip hazard especially to children using the apparatus. The mini trail through the Lakeview Spinney is also in satisfactory condition but urgently needs weeding. This is one situation where it would be sensible to use a chemical herbicide since mechanical weeding is likely to damage the path.



Figure 18: Less durable surfaces on the senior play equipment are showing signs of wear.



Figure 19: Exposed ground fixings for the climbing pyramid may represent a hazard.

Other surfaced pathways in the Park are generally satisfactory. Mallard Walk (Fig. 20) is in good condition apart from where it passes close to the Lake (already referred to) and some slight damage at its southern end. The tarmac on older pathways is beginning to break up in places (Fig. 21) and this requires monitoring and remedial action if it becomes a hazard.



Figure 20: Most of Mallard Walk is in good condition and well used.



Figure 21: The tarmac on some older paths is showing signs of deterioration.

Conclusion

The most crucial major work required in the Park concerns tree maintenance; property and safety are at risk if this is not carried out soon. There are a number of small but important improvements needed to equipment and facilities, some of which are already being addressed. Replacement dog bins and additional litter bins should be installed in the near future. The provision of all-weather paths would improve access to and through the Park, particularly in winter, and securing funding for these should be a top priority for the EPMC.