

EASTFIELD PARK NORTHAMPTON

STATE OF THE PARK

January, 2017



Mordred Castle – New Junior Play Area

Eastfield Park Management Committee
Friends of Eastfield Park

V G F SMITH (February, 2017)

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Introduction

Dr Vic Smith (Chair of the Friends of Eastfield Park and the Eastfield Park Management Committee) and Dean Byrne (NBC Park Ranger for Eastfield Park) carried out detailed inspections of the facilities in Eastfield Park on 11th and 17th January, 2017. Urgent issues were noted by Dean for immediate action; less important issues and general information collected are included in this report about the state of the Park at the beginning of 2017. A few further observations were made by Vic Smith at the beginning of February. The inspection followed the same procedures as that carried out by Vic Smith and Park Ranger, Kevin Skerry, in January and February, 2016.

State of the ground

As usual for the time of year, much of the park was waterlogged in January and February with some puddles of standing water especially around the eastern end of the Lake. However, the situation was not as bad as in January 2016, probably because much less rain had fallen in the weeks preceding the inspection. (Statistics from the Pitsford Weather Centre, 5km from the Park, show 67.7mm and 78.7mm of rain as monthly totals for December, 2015, and January, 2016, respectively, compared to only 23.0mm and 48.0mm for the corresponding months a year later.)

Similarly, informal pathways are in a better condition than they were a year ago. Nevertheless, there are muddy areas along some unsurfaced footpaths and the state of Mallard Walk as it passes close to the Lake is again unacceptable.

Vegetation

Although grass cutting got off to a slow start in 2016, the general standard of mowing throughout the year was good and, despite favourable growing conditions extending into autumn and even winter, the grass is still at an acceptable level.

Early in the year, one area in the species-rich grassland was 'set aside' and deliberately left uncut until August when it was surveyed by members of the local Wildlife Trust. It was found to include 19 species of wildflowers and 8 species of grass. Full details of this successful experiment have been reported elsewhere¹ and it has already been agreed to repeat the practice in 2017 in two areas, one overlapping the 2016 set-aside area and another smaller area closer to the centre of the parkland zone.

During 2016, a considerable amount of work was carried out on the parkland trees by tree surgeons from the Acorn Environmental Management Group (subcontracted by Amey plc).

¹ Smith, VGF (2016) *EASTFIELD PARK MEADOWS including a Report on the 2016 'Set-aside' Area*. Unpublished report submitted to FoEP & EPMC. Available from FoEP website: www.foep.eastfieldpark.com

Many dead or hazardous branches were removed, some trees were pollarded and diseased and/or dangerous trees were felled (Fig. 1). The tree surgeons worked in an environmentally sensitive way and did not disturb trees with nesting birds in them.

The tree work included areas within the spinneys but these still contain several trees with rotten trunks that are potentially dangerous (Fig. 2). It is not advisable to walk through the spinneys in windy weather.



Figure 1: Tree surgeons from the Acorn Environmental Management Group removing dangerous branches in Apple Tree Walk.



Figure 2: Rotten tree in the Pond Area of Eastfield Park. The trunk snapped during a storm in December, 2016.

A considerable amount of work has been done on the slope leading up to Eastfield Park Lake (e.g. Figs 3 & 4). The majority of ‘weed trees’ and bushes have been cut down and the stumps are being poisoned with salt to prevent regrowth. Brambles will soon be removed and the area will be sprayed in spring to reduce weed growth. It is hoped to plant this area with clumps of dwarf daffodils, native bluebells and primroses during the autumn of 2017.



Figure 3: The area at the northern end of the slope leading up to Eastfield Park Lake before work started removing weed trees.



Figure 4: The same area as in Figure 3 with most of the weed trees removed. Much of the undergrowth will be removed in 2017.

Many of the tree trunks and branches cut down in this area have been chipped with the help of NBC Neighbourhood Wardens (Fig 5). Piles of chippings remain (Fig 6) and we intend to use these for improving the muddy parts of footpaths in the spinneys.



Figure 5: Members of the NBC Wardens and Park Rangers Team shredding branches removed by FoEP volunteers.



Figure 6: Pile of shreds on the slope leading up to Eastfield Park Lake (now with weed trees removed).

The insect-friendly herbaceous border along the fence separating Eleonore House from the Park was replanted in 2016 and weeded and tidied in the autumn. It is looking much better than it did a year ago. Little was done to the wildflower border in 2016 other than cutting back the perennial plants, particularly Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) that did well in 2016. Additional species may be added to the border during 2017.

A semi-circular area in front of the wildflower border was sprayed with a garden herbicide in the autumn and most of the grass in the area is now dead (Fig 7). It will be sprayed again in early spring and, after the remaining grass and weeds have died, raked over and sowed with a mix of wildflower and meadow grasses including yellow rattle. Additionally, some wildflowers may be planted as plugs. The intention is to create an artificial meadow habitat that can be viewed from Eleonore House. Half of the Crescent Rock Garden was also replanted and weeded in 2016. Crocus and daffodils are already beginning to show through and snowdrops are beginning to bloom.

Figure 7: Area to north of Eleonore House sprayed with weed killer in preparation for creating an artificial meadow habitat.



Equipment & Facilities

Vic Smith and Dean Byrne assessed the state of equipment and facilities in the Park (Fig 8) employing the same six point scale used the previous year. The limits of each category are rather arbitrary and assessments were often recorded as falling somewhere in a range between codes, e.g. '3/4'. The results of the assessments for last year and this year are compared in Table 2 where unsatisfactory situations are shown in red, brown or orange.

Anomalies in the results may stem from the subjective nature of the assessment or the way recordings were made. For example, the bollards at the Greenfield Avenue entrance are generally in excellent condition but one is badly damaged. In 2016 the condition was recorded as '4' – i.e. 'good' but in 2017 the assessment was '4/5*' – i.e. 'almost pristine' but a note was added about the one damaged bollard. A difference of just one point in the scores could simply result from the subjective nature of the judgements.

In January 2017, five new litter bins were installed in Eastfield Park in the locations indicated by red stars in Figure 8. These bins were not included in the assessment but, being new, their condition may be assumed to be 'pristine'.

The new Junior Play Area was installed in the Park in July 2016 and its various items of equipment, including two seats, a litter bin and the fence, were included in the assessment (though they are not shown in Fig. 8).



Table 1: Criteria used for assessing equipment & facilities in Eastfield Park – 2016 & 2017.

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, 2017, showing change from January, 2016. (2016 assessment > 2017 assessment). An asterisk (*) indicated further comment in text.

Item ²	Condition		Item ²	Condition
Litter Bins:			Dog Bins:	
L1	4/5 > 4		D1	3/4 > 4
L2	4 > 4		D2	3/4 > 4
L3	4G > 3G		D3	4 > 3
L4	0 (in lake!) > 0 (removed)		D4	3G > 3G
L5	3/4 > 3/4		D5	3/4G > 3G
L6	4/5 > 4/5		D6	4 > 4
			D7	2 > 2 (still no lid)
Seats:			D8	2 > 2 (still no bottom)
S1	4/5 > 3G		D9	3/4 > 3/4
S2	3GG > 3GG		D10	3 > 3*
S3	4 > 0 (burnt & removed)		D11	3 > 4
S4	3/4		D12	4 > 4
S5	4 > 3G		D13	3 > 3
			D14	3/4 > 0
Entrances:	Boards:	Bollards:		
A	4G	4 > 4	MONSTER: Wood	3/4 > 0-4*
B	4G	3 > 3	Grass	3 > 3/4*
C	4G	4 > 4	MUGA: Fences	4 > 3/4G
D	4G	4 > 4/5*	Surfaces	4 > 3
E	4 > 4G	4 > 4	Electric Box	4 > 4/5
OLD SNR PLAY AREA:			NEW JNR PLAY AREA:	
Zip Wire	3G > 3/4		Mordred Castle	3*
Rocker	3G > 3*		Buddy Board	4G*
Climbing Pyramid	3G > 2*		Viking Swing	4*
Mini Trail	3 > 3*		Swirl	4*
			Little Miss Muffet	3/4G*
PATHS:			Alpine Crossing / Switchback Run	4
Greenside	2*		Litter Bin	4/5
Mallard Walk	3/4*		Seat 1	4/5
Apple Tree Walk	2		Seat 2	4/5
Path to MUGA	2/3*		Fence	4/5*
			Notices	5

² Item codes as in Figure 8.

It was pointed out last year that most damage to structures in the Park is caused by deliberate acts of vandalism, ranging from minor incidents of scrawls and scribbles on equipment to the deliberate destruction of facilities such as dog and litter bins. This remains true. The only large negative differences between the 2017 and 2016 observations all result from criminal activity.

Last March, the seat that was near the lake outfall (S2) had a stolen motorbike placed on it and both seat and bike were set fire to (Fig. 9). The litter bin that had been by the seat (L4) and was in the Lake last year has been removed and is now in store. The other seat near the lake (S1) (which had been described in 2016 as ‘almost pristine’) has also been damaged by fire but, since it is an all-metal seat, the damage is minimal. The missing dog bin (D14) was missing because it had been damaged by vandals and removed.

More seriously, the Mordred Castle in the new Junior Play Area had received minor fire damage before the play area was officially opened to the public. An umbrella had been placed on the top platform and set fire to. The resulting damage to the metal structure was minimal but the paintwork is charred and has foreign material fused to it. Fortunately, this is not obvious as the damage is above eye level.

The same tower suffered further vandalism in November. First, insulation material from nearby building work was attached to the ‘rope’ ladder on the tower and an attempt made to burn it. The material, however, was fire resistant and only melted causing very little damage. An attempt was then made to cut through the ‘rope’. This was unsuccessful because the ‘rope’ has a steel core. Finally the attachments of the ladder to the ground were cut through (Fig. 10). This required considerable effort and was unlikely to have been carried out by a child. The damage was rapidly repaired and has not been repeated.



Figure 9: Burnt-out motorbike on seat by Lake - March, 2016.



Figure 10: Damage done to Mordred Castle in the new Junior Play Area – November, 2016

The safety surface under the swing suffered slight but deliberate damage reportedly performed by a child. The damage was at the edge of the area and was repaired successfully with a small piece of turf from elsewhere in the Park. Elsewhere safety surfaces have been stained by unknown substances. At the time of the inspection, one bolt was missing from the fence.

The Buddy Board and the Little Miss Muffet structure have graffiti on them and the surface around the Swirl is somewhat eroded (despite having been reseeded by the Contractor) but the general condition of the rest of the equipment is good to pristine. Apart from the criminal damage, this is very satisfactory especially considering the intense use of the equipment during the summer.

The condition of equipment in the Senior Play Area near the Lakeview Spinney is much the same as last year (Figs 11 to 14). The condition of the Climbing Pyramid was deemed satisfactory in 2016 but a note was made about the hazardous condition of the exposed metal plates where the pyramid is anchored to the ground. This year, the condition has been recorded as unsatisfactory for the same reason. The mini trail through the Lakeview Spinney is in a satisfactory condition but could be better maintained.



Figure 11: Wear & tear on the Multi-pondo Rocker in the Senior Play Area – January, 2016.



Figure 12: Wear & tear on the Multi-pondo Rocker in the Senior Play Area – January, 2017.



Figure 13: Exposed ground fixings for the climbing pyramid – January, 2016.



Figure 14: Exposed ground fixings for the climbing pyramid – January, 2017.

The 'Eastfield Monster' play mound is satisfactory although more of the logs have been removed, some by vandals but mostly because they were seriously decayed. The holes left by removed posts have all been filled and the top of the mound was restored (soil added and then seeded) by volunteers from Lloyds Bank (Figs. 15 & 16).

The MUGA is in reasonably good condition but the tarred pathway to it continues to deteriorate.



Figure 15: Top of the 'Eastfield Monster' in need of repair – September, 2016.



Figure 16: Top of 'Eastfield Monster' after repair and reseeded – January, 2017.

During 2016, Greenside suffered serious damage from contractors' vehicles using the footpath as a road. The most serious damage has been repaired but parts of the path remain unsatisfactory. Parts of Apple Tree Walk are also becoming unsatisfactory. Mallard Walk is in fair condition apart from where it passes close to the Lake. Contractors' vehicles often follow Mallard Walk (particularly the northern end) and this is beginning to result in damage to the path and the area adjacent to it.



Figure 17: Damage caused to Greenside by Contractor's vehicles – October, 2016.



Figure 18: The same area of Greenside following repairs - January, 2017.

The park benches continue to attract considerable amounts of graffiti and two (S2 & S5) still have muddy depressions which require attention in front of them.

Most of the Park entrances remain in good condition. One of the wooden bollards at the Greenfield Avenue entrance is badly damaged and needs replacing. The bollards at the Booth Lane remain dented but functional.

A number of contractors' vehicles have been entering the Park via Tarn Croft, particularly those associated with work on the NPH houses in the area. The bollards protecting this entrance are missing or in poor condition. When work has finished on the houses it is important that this entrance is made secure. Also, the Tarn Croft grassed area (not part of Eastfield Park) has suffered considerable damage from contractors' vehicles. As requested by some local residents, consideration should be given to making a large part of this area a surfaced car park. This could benefit local residents and other park users.

Conclusion

Eastfield Park saw a number of major improvements during 2016, including the construction of the Junior Play Area, the provision of five new litter bins (actually installed early in January, 2017) and major work on the trees, particularly in the parkland area. Volunteers from the Friends of Eastfield Park have maintained the Eleonore House Insect-friendly Border and the Crescent Rock Garden and have also cleared most of the bushes and weed trees from the slope leading up to the Lake. The shredding of trunks and branches by NBC Neighbourhood Wardens during this clearance signifies a major area of co-operation between NBC and the FoEP.

Vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour (including litter and failing to pick up dogs' mess) remain a major hindrance to progress. Where damage is caused by normal wear and tear, there has been little deterioration during the past year, but vandalism has resulted in the loss of one bench, a litter bin and a dog bin, and the need for repairs to a new piece of equipment in the Junior Play Area, not to mention numerous incidents of minor damage and graffiti. However, much of the serious damage has been localised in certain areas, particularly where Mallard Walk passes near the lake outfall, at the top of the slope leading up to the Lake (presumably the earthwork that was constructed to create the Lake early in the 20th Century).

This is the main reason for clearing the slope of weed trees and bushy undergrowth. Although this results in some loss of habitat for wildlife, it opens up the area to a clearer view from the Eastfield Estate and, hopefully, will reduce anti-social activity in that area. Already, a number of people have said that they feel more secure walking along the path by the lake, particularly in the evenings when the path is now much lighter with less cover for potential lawbreakers. Work on this area is expected to continue throughout 2017 eventually replacing bushes and brambles with low flowering plants such as daffodils, native bluebells and primroses.

Other priorities for 2017 include extending the 'set-aside' project to form two areas of natural meadowland within the parkland area, the creation of an artificial meadow near Eleonore House, investigating the feasibility and costs of dredging the ponds, and securing funding for Phase 2 of the Junior Play Area and at least some of the proposed additional pathways, and as well as the provision of information boards and additional seating.

