

6. Landscape Management Contracts – Annual Report for 2017

REPORT OF: Assistant Chief Executive
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services and Service Delivery
13th March 2018

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the Landscape Grounds Maintenance Contract and the Arboriculture Contract that are undertaken by:
 - (a) IDVerde for the Grounds Maintenance Contract and;
 - (b) County Tree Surgeons for the Arboriculture Contract.

Recommendation

2. **The Committee are recommended to note the contents of this report.**
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Background

Grounds Maintenance Contract

3. Following a tendering process, IDVerde (The Landscape Group) was awarded a 14 year contract to operate the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract commencing on 1st January 2015. This contract covers all aspects of routine grounds maintenance across the Council's 350 parks, open spaces and sports grounds, including:
 - Grass management and vegetation control
 - Outdoor sports facility maintenance
 - Litter collection and litter bin emptying
 - Border maintenance
 - Hedge cutting
 - Maintenance of streams and watercourses
 - Maintenance of hard surfaces
4. In line with good practice this contract is kept under review to ensure it is delivering the expected outcomes, as follows;
 - (a) Year one – work with the Contractor to gain mutual understanding of the new specifications
 - (b) Year two – work through any errors and omissions for the specifications
 - (c) Year three – identify and address potential deficiencies within the specifications.

Arboriculture Contract

5. The Arboriculture Contract was let in partnership with Crawley BC (CBC), Horsham DC (HDC) and Mid Sussex DC. HDC became the lead authority for the procurement process with CBC and MSDC being co-partners in the process.
6. The Contract documents were drafted by mutual agreement between the three authorities and the procurement exercise was shared between the partners.
7. A ten year contract was agreed with County Tree Surgeons for CBC and MSDC, whilst HDC elected to retain their incumbent contractor, but on the new contract documents. The contract start date was 1st April 2012.
8. The Contract has a five year review clause to enable the Council and/or Contractor to negotiate revisions or terminate the Contract. As with all contracts this contract has been kept under review. During the first 5 years it was agreed that some revisions were required to streamline the documentation to improve monitoring. These revisions endeavour to bring together a variety of separate documents into a meaningful format that will be easier for the Arboriculture Officer and Contractor to work with.
9. The review has also identified a need to revise the Schedule of Rates to include rates for maintenance tasks that have been specified, but not priced.

Conservation Land

10. MSDC has five Designated Local Nature Reserves (LNR's) and a further 10 locations that are conservation managed. Management of these land assets is based on enhancing habitats for wild flora and fauna native to the District. The maintenance of these areas is not included in the Contract as the nature of the work is transient and programmed around the habitat creation of a location.
11. The five LNR's have active Friends Groups who assist with the implementation of the site management plan. Tasks identified for the LNR are scheduled for delivery by MSDC's Contractor or by the Friends Groups.
12. Management of Conservation sites is aided with the input of a Steering Group that meets twice per year. The Steering Groups meetings are chaired by the Cabinet Member for Service Delivery.
13. A formal meeting takes place during the winter months and a walk around the site meeting during the summer.
14. The maintenance of large area mowing, tree works, fences and footpaths required for these sites is carried out by contractors. The Friends Groups are involved with coppicing, scrub clearance, species surveys and litter clearance. The Landscapes Team arrange to aid litter clearance with input from the Grounds Maintenance Contractor.

Monitoring Regime

15. Both the Grounds Maintenance and Arboriculture Contractors attend monthly meetings to discuss the previous period and items required during the coming month. Quarterly meetings are attended by senior officers from both the Council and IDVerde and MSDC's Cabinet Member for Service Delivery. These meetings review performance over each three month period with the information provided in the presentations showing trends and general direction of travel of the service.

16. A revised suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) has recently been drafted for both Contracts. These are being trialled. The trial is expected to complete on 31st March and the new KPI's embedded into the contracts from 1st April.
17. MSDC officers carry out a number of ad-hoc inspections throughout the month to assess whether the contract standards are being met. Records of such inspections are limited to exception reporting of issues noted during the visit. Follow-up inspections are scheduled for all areas that are found to have a maintenance issue.
18. The Contractor manages their own Performance Quality Management System (PQMS) and the results of their quality inspections are shared with the Council on a monthly basis.
19. The Contract is a partnership agreement that requires the Contractor to be equal partners, with a shared responsibility for ensuring the standards of the parks. This relationship has been successfully negotiated and operated. Under the partnership the Contractor have responded to customers on behalf of the Council when delivering the service. Similarly, they are reporting on park refurbishments and/or repairs whilst undertaking routine maintenance.
20. IDVerde installed and maintained the carpet bedding border in Victoria Park at their own expense as a demonstration of their commitment to the Contract and the Mid Sussex Area.

Contract Developments

21. The Council is keen to work with our contractors to constantly improve the management of the contract and how we monitor performance. We are mapping features of the park and allocating unique site numbers to each feature. This will create a record for each hedge, shrub border, bin, bench and grass cut area within individual parks. The project has started with locating and measuring hedges and locating the park litter bins on Ordnance Survey Plans. An example of this can be seen in Appendix 1.

Digitisation

22. The Council is also planning to purchase Arbortrack; an arboriculture database for managing the health of trees. This will keep a computerised log of each tree and its location and will enable the Council to improve the management of trees.
23. Contract Management is being migrated onto the Council's new Technology Forge Data Base. This will improve contract monitoring, by enabling real-time communication from site between Council officers and the contractor, and by providing the ability to create and generate regular performance reports, to identify trends and therefore take a more proactive approach. .

Customer Satisfaction Levels

24. IDVerde carry out customer satisfaction surveys of park users. They provide a minimum of 400 completed surveys per year. The most recent survey results can be viewed in Appendix 2.

25. Mid Sussex has held a Green Flag on Beech Hurst Gardens for 11 consecutive years. The standards of the Green Flag Criteria are being achieved in other high profile parks and a programme is in place to make applications to achieve the award in these parks. An application for St Johns Park, Burgess Hill has been submitted in partnership with ID Verde for judging in this year's cycle of applications.

Summary of 2017

26. Both Contracts are delivering good quality services. However, there is a need to constantly improve.
27. Current trends in the weather patterns over the last two years suggest warmer, wetter periods in Spring and Autumn that will encourage exceptional plant growth. It is expected that this will continue for the foreseeable future. To address this, the Council has agreed variations to the contract to maintain standards.
28. The changes in the weather have also brought about a change in how people tend to use their leisure time, and with increasing numbers of flatted development, more people are using parks. There is a marked trend for families to visit parks in the evenings and weekends and spend holidays at home. It is encouraging that the perception of parks is that these are places of choice for recreation and the challenge is to ensure the facilities are of suitable standards.
29. The Council, in partnership with IDVerde, is reviewing the specification, focusing on grass cutting, hedge cutting and litter clearing, to ensure the contract is keeping pace with changes in residents' expectations without the need to agree ad hoc contract variations.

Investment Programme

30. To accompany the existing hard landscaping and playground refurbishment works already identified within the capital programme officers are developing a rolling programme of Park refurbishments that will seek to revitalise the parks throughout the district. It is intended that a master landscaping plan will be produced for individual parks where appropriate.
31. Funding for these plans will be sought from a variety of sources including Lottery Funds, sponsorship, potential crowd funding, capital programme and Section 106.
32. Members will be aware that the Commercial Services and Contracts Division has recently been restructured to reflect the maturity of the contracts, bring all frontline contracted services together to benefit from synergies and create a more focussed and commercial approach to service delivery. We anticipate the new structure will be in place in the coming months.
33. IDVerde have already made an impact on this with their sponsorship of a bedding border in Victoria Park. They are seeking to attract other businesses to sponsor the planting of this border for future years. The success of this model will be the basis for developing further schemes in parks.

Financial Implications

34. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Equality and customer impact implications

35. There is no direct Equality or Customer Impacts as a result of this report.

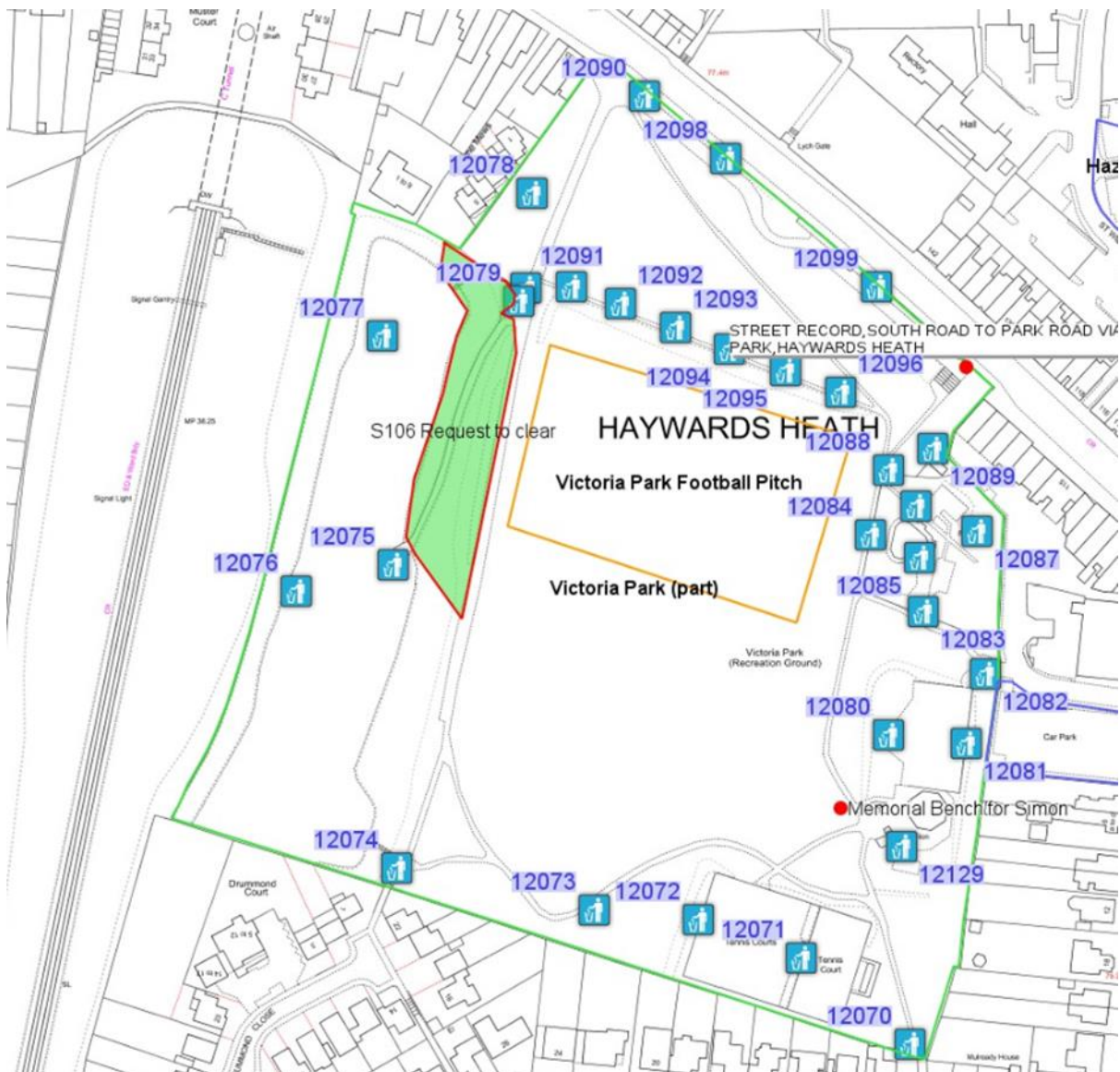
Background papers

Appendix 1 – Example of feature mapping

Appendix 2 – Current Park Survey Data

Appendix 1

Example of the feature mapping exercise showing the location of litter bins and an area of grass cutting in Victoria Park.



Example of the Park Satisfaction Surveys collated by IDVerde

Park Surveys

Month	Survey Responses	% Good or Very Good
1	98	100%
2	36	94%
3	29	98%
4	32	97%
5	43	93%
6	44	99%
7	44	99%
8	26	99%
9	35	99%
10	55	92%
11		
12		

