

APPENDIX A –Officer Response to ‘Parks for the People Petition Explanation’

The park is for the people: Commercial entertainment events disrupt normal use of the park: limit the days on which they are held to 5 in a 30-day period and 20 per year.

OFFICER RESPONSE-Ryelands Park has a long standing tradition of hosting events like circuses and funfairs. In 2015 there were a total of 7 events held in the park, 5 of which were commercial. This covered a total of 26 days in the year, with no less than a month between each event. In 2016, there will be a total of 4 events, only 2 of which are commercial. This will cover a total of 11 days. The planned Lancaster Mega Value Fun Park event was cancelled in April 2016 due to poor ground conditions after the heavy rain earlier in the year. This highlights the responsiveness of our event procedures and the close working relationship with event organisers, who were involved with us in the making the decision to cancel the event.

These events attract thousands of visitors (7300 people on Facebook alone said they visited the Lancaster Mega Value Fun Park in 2015). As far as the District’s parks go the topography of Ryelands park is unique in the fact that it offers a large flat open space, has good access and egress for emergency services and public, and is able to offer good car parking and public transport links including bus, cycling and pedestrian routes. It should be noted that Morecambe Promenade is also used for events like this.

The space in the park allocated for funfairs, etc, does not significantly conflict with any other activities that take place on the park. The space has been selected to be as far as away from properties on Torrisholme Road as is practically possible. Furthermore, the allocated area was approved by Cabinet as part of the Ryelands Park masterplan.

Keep our park green: Stop for-profit vandalism of Ryelands Park: ban vendors using heavy equipment and HGVs that damage park vegetation. *(Note: We do not seek to ban circuses and fairs, only to ensure that they are an appropriate size and weight for the park.)*

OFFICER RESPONSE-Ongoing management and maintenance of the park is an important factor in deciding whether to allow a commercial event to take place. On acceptance of the event a bond is taken (in the region of £1000) and held to cover any that damage occurs or waste management plans have not been adhered to.

In 2015, some damage to the grounds was caused by vehicles following a particular wet period of weather. Following this, reinstatement work was undertaken, using the bond, and within a number of weeks the parks grounds were again at the standard expected. Afterwards, it was decided that the event operator would not be granted permission for an event again in the park unless the organiser used different vehicles in the future. Since then, the City Council has also invested in the region of £10,000 in drainage of the area which is allocated to these event. Officers closely monitor factors such as inclement weather which could contribute to the land being unsuitable at certain times of the year, and as stated above reserve the right to cancel events if ground conditions are unsuitable.

It should be noted that tyre tracks left by vehicles can usually be easily repaired by rolling and seeding funded by the bond.

Keep our park peaceful: Make park vendors keep the laws you require citizens and local businesses to keep. Where sound from events can be heard throughout the park or beyond park borders, put sound limiters on PA systems that conform to government decibel levels for residential areas. Enforce the law; staff events with officers authorized to enforce it.

OFFICER RESPONSE- HSE guidelines apply to volume levels in the workplace and there are guidelines for events like concerts but not events where music is incidental. Clearly however there is a need for organisers to act in a reasonable way.

The most straightforward way to deal with this issue is for the Council to check that event providers are complying with the requirement to monitor noise and where the Council considers that noise is excessive then they should be able to demand that it is reduced.

As part of the booking system for events in Ryelands Park, it is now a condition of acceptance that organisers submit a noise management plan. Furthermore organisers are required to monitor and test noise levels between their event and the closest noise sensitive property on the boundary of the site.

The introduction of a noise management plan was introduced following the feedback which we received from the Petition organiser back in 2015.

In relation to noise at the time of writing this report the Council received only 2 x complaints about noise on 24.07.15 and 24.08.15, both from residents on St Georges Quay. The first was contacted for further information, however the complainant never returned the call. The second resident complained after the event had ceased and therefore was de-prioritised due to there being no current/on-going issues.

It is important to note that the complaint on the 24.07.15 was during the Mega Value Fun Park Event. The complaint a month later did not coincide with any event at the time at Ryelands Park.

A complaint from Torrisholme Road about the noise from a funfair on 10-11Sept 2016 has also been received and is being investigated.

Whilst the requirement to provide a noise management plan is positive it is only of use if the organiser sticks to it. The petitioner suggests that an officer should be on site to ensure this. At this point based on the number of reports and the mitigations in place this would seem be a disproportionate response. However, Elected Members may wish to instruct Officers to look at whether, if this became an ongoing problem, there may be a means of achieving this, at the cost of the organiser.

We have received no information or reports of either violence or anti-social behaviour in relation to this event booking. Officers contacted the Police, who also have no record of reported incidents.

Keep our park safe and nuisance free: Provide staff to ensure safe parking, monitor decibel levels, and enforce end times for all events attracting 250+ attendees. Circuses, fairs, and other vendors do not provide staff to monitor these issues, and have no reason to keep the terms of their contracts without enforcement if they can profit by breaking them. Ban vendors who break their contracts or local laws from future use of the park.

OFFICER RESPONSE- In planning events on the public land the Council has ongoing dialogue with event organisers, from the point they show an interest in booking land. Similarly other agencies such as County Council, Police, Fire and Rescue also need to be satisfied that the organiser can manage the event safely, otherwise it will not be allowed to go ahead.

There has been a close working relationship between the authority and the repeat event owners to ensure that professional standards and terms of acceptance are met. There is no evidence to demonstrate that terms of condition are not met and that further intervention from the authority is warranted. Aside from what is referred to in the petition as the land owner, we have received no complaints, accidents or incidents in relation to the health and safety of such events or matters surrounding them e.g. car parking.

There has been occasions in the past where, if an event owner does not comply with documentation or terms of contract, that they are refused permission to use Council land in future years. The organiser of the event that sparked this petition would not be granted access again, unless significant changes were made to the delivery and management of the event, particularly in relation to size of vehicles.

Make our park equal: Give the same care to Ryelands Park and its neighbourhood that you give to award-winning parks in wealthier neighbourhoods. End class discrimination in our parks.

OFFICER RESPONSE- Within the District there are a number of parks that all have diverse characteristics. The fact is that all the parks in the District can be enjoyed by whoever chooses to use them.

The assertion that parks in 'wealthier' neighbourhoods are somehow favoured is not the case. It is a fact that Williamson park and Happy Mount park are green flag award winning parks but that is something that the District as a whole can be proud of. In actual fact work is taking place to gain green flag status for Ryelands Park.

All of our parks are for the whole community, no matter where in the district people may live. Each has certain characteristics that means they are more suitable for particular uses.

As has already been stated the range of events that take place in Ryelands Park would simply not be possible on any other piece of council land within Lancaster and we know that they are enjoyed by very many people.

It is however recognised that we need to be a 'good neighbour' to those living nearby and take all possible steps to reduce the level of disruption that may occur. The information already provided demonstrates this.

Throughout the year Officers work closely with the Friends of Ryelands Park to identify where further improvements can be made and this has led to the creation of a masterplan to ensure future development of the park takes place in a planned way.

Council staff have worked extremely closely with the community surrounding Ryelands Park, and especially the Friends group, to ensure the park is very much at the heart of the community. Over the last twelve months this has seen a fantastic amount of joint working with the Council and other partners such as the Probation Service to improve the facilities and grounds.

Play provision has been improved and the demolition of the old derelict Pavilion has improved the area and offered less space for unwanted gatherings and anti-social behaviour.

The Friends group continue to make improvements by attending events to raise awareness of their work and also by investing time in monthly work days. The Council is continuing to support the Friends group in the aim of achieving Green Flag status for Ryelands Park for 2017. A sub group has been set up and are well on the way to outlining the positive work which has been undertaken to achieve this goal.

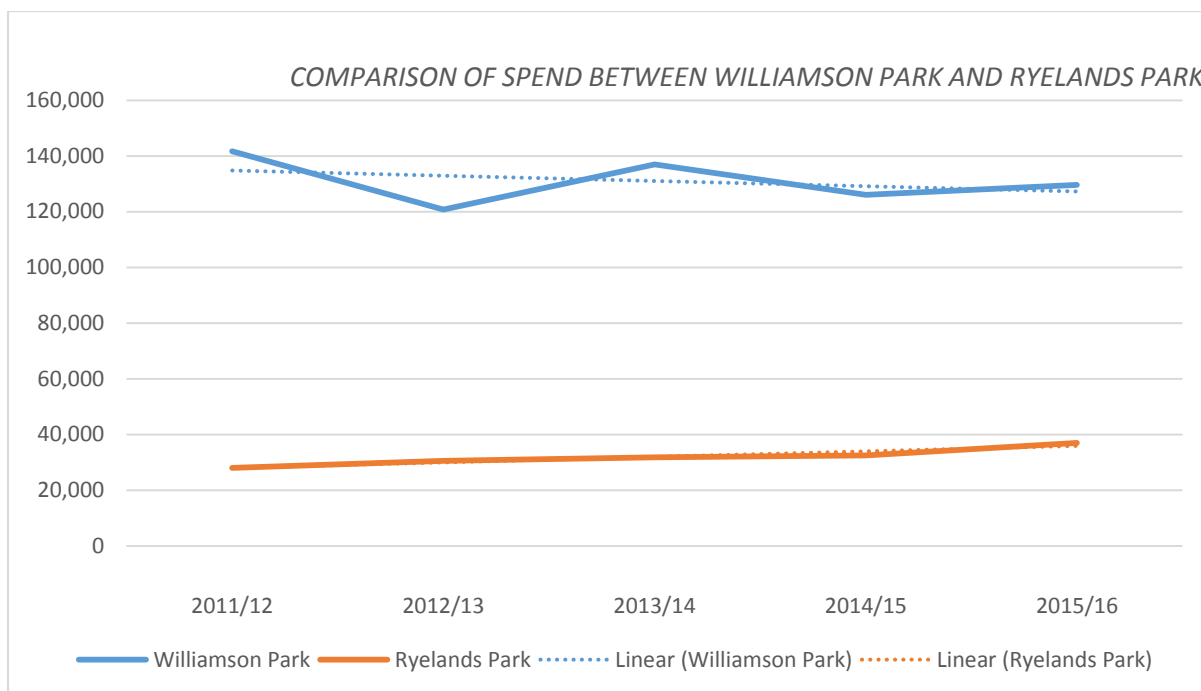
As with all parks in the district, it important to understand the unique selling points each one has and move away from a one size fits all approach. Making direct comparisons between Williamson Park, Happy Mount Park and Ryelands Park is like comparing apples, pears and oranges.

Other council facilities such as Williamson and Happy Mount parks are unable to offer certain activities such as football provision which is important to the community's health and wellbeing. In essence, Ryelands Park is special for its own reasons. It should not be competing with, or compared to, other parks in the district.

Expenditure increases in other facilities are not evidence of permanent increases but reflect one off investments e.g. drainage at Ryelands Park, lake at Williamson Park. Taking this out of the equation, there has been little to no increase, other than inflation, across any Park or Open Space.

The chart below highlights that approximate spend in Williamson Park compared with Ryelands Park.

Clearly it shows that more is spent in Williamson Park. But Williamson Park is much bigger and has a different range of facilities. The main point of the graph though is to demonstrate that over the years the spend in both parks has neither significantly increased or decreased. Levels of maintenance have not decreased in the last few years.



The petitioner also highlighted the number of bins available in different parks. It is again important to highlight that further bins will not necessarily result in less litter. Each space is allocated bins on a need basis. Ryelands Park is currently not in a position to require more bins or more schedules of collection. Following a review of bins, we believe the issue to be the volume of litter dropped and not the number of bins. This is an educational issue which will not be solved by adding additional bins.

The petitioner highlights that Ryelands Park doesn't benefit from a Café, toilets or a play area for older children. The petition organiser is aware of the approval masterplan for Ryelands Park which highlights these areas and the future plans for such facilities should funding become available. The play area at Ryelands was completed in 2013/14 at a project cost of over £100,000.