

EASTFIELD PARK NORTHAMPTON

STATE OF THE PARK

(Footpaths, Facilities & Ground Conditions)

January, 2018



Booth Lane Entrance to Eastfield Park – January, 2018

Eastfield Park Management Committee

Friends of Eastfield Park

V G F SMITH (February, 2018)

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Preface

This is the third *State of the Park* report produced since the formation of the Eastfield Park Management Committee in June 2014. Previous reports were written in February 2016 and February 2017, following inspections carried out in January/February each year. This 2018 report is based on an inspection carried out in January 2018 by Dr Vic Smith, Chair of the Eastfield Park Management Committee and the Friends of Eastfield Park, and Dean Byrne, the Park Ranger employed by Northampton Borough Council.

The earlier reports attempted to cover all aspects of the Park. This report, however, 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.

In 2017, the Park Action Plan's 'Urgent Planning Objectives' were replaced with 'On-going Planning/Management Objectives' and this *State of the Park* report now links closely to the last two of these new objectives:

- 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 in as much as it may damage footpaths and other structures, restrict access or provide cover to vandals (who are responsible for most 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 reports written later in the year.

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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 a detailed inspection of the facilities in Eastfield Park, Northampton, on 24th and 25th January, 2018, accompanied on the 24th by FoEP Committee Member, Chris Freeman. 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 2018. The inspection followed the same procedures as those carried out in January and February, 2016 and January 2017. Unless otherwise stated, the photographs illustrating this report were taken immediately after the inspection on 25th January.

Ground Conditions

Previous ‘State of the Park’ reports have drawn attention to the waterlogged nature of large sections of the Park in winter. At the time of the 2018 inspection conditions were even worse than in 2016 and 2017. In addition to the usual flooded areas, there were pools of water across informal pathways and large puddles in the Junior Play Area (Figs. 1 & 2). Boggy areas were more extensive than usual. These extreme conditions were undoubtedly caused by heavy precipitation on the first morning of the inspection, falling on soil that was already saturated as a result of high levels of rainfall in December, 2017 (Table 1).



Fig. 1: Standing water and muddy ground across the path to the north-east of the Lake.



Fig. 2: Large puddle in the new Junior Play Area.

Table 1: Monthly rainfall statistics for Pitsford Weather Station, 5 km from the Park.

Year	December	January
2015/16	67.7 mm	78.7 mm
2016/17	23.0 mm	48.0 mm
2017/18	73.8 mm	52.2 mm

(The average monthly rainfall at Pitsford for both December and January is just over 55 mm.)

Although the total rainfall for January 2018 was slightly below average, 9.8 mm fell on 21st January and 6.6 mm on 24th January (the day of the inspection) with a very high maximum rate of 25.2 mm per hour on the 24th. With the Park so wet, vehicles driven across the grass easily damage the ground and may become stuck in mud. The area just inside the Booth Lane entrance is particularly prone to this kind of damage (Fig. 4) and a vehicle driven illegally onto the Park and then set alight did considerable damage to the area north-east of the Lake (Fig. 5). The Skiddaw Grassland area was exceptionally wet (Fig. 6).



Fig. 3: Tracks across Skiddaw Walk field caused by an official vehicle.



Fig. 4: Surface damage between the Booth Lane entrance and the football pitches.



Fig. 5: Damage to the Park's surface caused by a vehicle that was burnt on the Park.



Fig. 6: Waterlogged ground in the Skiddaw Grassland area of the Park.

Pathways

Eastfield Park has few formal all-weather surfaced pathways. Greenside runs along the southern boundary of the Park and is considered part of the Eastfield Housing Estate rather than the Park; it has a short spur to the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA). Apple Tree Walk links the Kettering Road to the north-west corner of the Park's open space and extends through the western margin of the Park to the Greenview Avenue entrance. (This southern part of the Walk has no apple trees but is bordered by cedar trees and is therefore better referred to as 'Cedar Walk'.) There is also a surfaced path along the northern edge of the Park between Windermere Way and the Skiddaw Walk entrance ('Lakeview Spinney Walk'), considered as part of the Lakeview Housing Estate rather than the Park. These surfaced pathways are all paved with slabs or tarred. They suffer from cracks, uneven surfaces and potholes to varying degrees. Ideally, they require remedial action in the near future.

Mallard Walk is the only all-weather cross-park pathway. It was constructed in 2014 and is surfaced with self-binding gravel. Last year it was reported as being “in fair condition apart from where it passes close to the Lake.” The section by the Lake was not constructed to the same high standard as the rest of the path (because it was considered to be across high ground that was well drained) and is still in poor condition (Fig. 7). It is also of some concern that the bank of the lake is eroding towards the path (Fig. 8). The footpath is constructed across the top of a low earth embankment that holds back the lake water. If the embankment was ever breached water would flow across the Park towards the Eastfield Estate. It is therefore essential that the bank should be well maintained. Contractors’ vehicles often follow Mallard Walk and this is part of the reason for damage to the path. Consideration should be given to banning vehicles from crossing the embankment.



Fig. 7: Unacceptable condition of Mallard Walk as it passes by the Lake.



Fig. 8: Badly eroded Lake Embankment.

The southern part of Mallard Walk now has some deep potholes along it (Fig. 10). It is believed that these are the result of illegal motorcycles doing ‘wheelies’ along the path. Also, the spur from Mallard Walk to the new Junior Play Area is badly worn close to the gate to the play area (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Worn area of pathway at the gate to the Junior Play Area.



Fig. 10: Potholes at the southern end of Mallard Walk.

In addition to the all-weather pathways already mentioned, there is a play trail in Lakeview Spinney with a similar surface to Mallard Walk. It was constructed in 2009 but has much less use than Mallard Walk. To some extent it is protected from the weather by the trees and the main cause of deterioration is encroaching vegetation. This has occasionally been cut back by contractors but is more usually cleared by volunteers working with the FoEP. The edges of the play trail would benefit from being sprayed with a systemic herbicide.

There are numerous informal unsurfaced paths running through the wooded areas of the Park including Squire's Spinney (or Western Spinney), Lakeview Spinney, Booth Lane Spinney, the Buttermere Scrub and the Pond Area. The Friends of Eastfield Park have taken the responsibility for keeping the most important of these open to the public. During 2017, the main pathways running through Lakeview Spinney, the Buttermere Scrub and the Pond Area were cleared of overhanging branches and other encroaching vegetation. Buttermere Scrub and the Pond Area required little effort but the eastern end of the pathway through Lakeview Spinney had become completely blocked by brambles, nettles and dumped garden refuse and took a great deal of work to clear. Now it is opened, it is hoped that pedestrian traffic will help to sustain it and it will require little work to keep it open. The paths through Booth Lane Spinney now require urgent attention but those through Squire's Spinney are reasonably clear.

During 2017 volunteers, including Parklands cub scouts with their parents, spread wood chippings on some of the muddy patches of footpaths through the wooded area north of the ponds. Although this helped to improve conditions, the excessive winter rain has again resulted in unsurfaced paths through wooded areas becoming exceptionally muddy in several places and further attention is needed.

The situation on the open grassy areas of the Park is very variable and it can be difficult to find a route across the Park without sinking into wet ground (Fig. 6). It is because of the sodden nature of much of the ground, particularly (but not exclusively) in winter, that some residents have called for better drainage of the Park. Some years ago, NBC considered that improved drainage would not bring sufficient benefit for the cost involved. At the time the FoEP disagreed with this conclusion but it was later pointed out in a report produced for the Management Committee by the FoEP Chair that the Park is actually providing a significant environmental benefit by holding back water that could otherwise increase the risk of flooding further down the Walbeck Brook catchment. Rather than attempting to increase the rate of drainage from the Park, NBC should seek to improve water retention by appropriate management of the Lake and ponds. Access to the waterlogged Park should be improved by the provision of four additional all-weather surfaced footpaths. This has been accepted in principle by NBC and three such pathways have now been costed. Currently, funding is not available for the construction of these paths and securing such funding should be a priority for the Management Committee and the FoEP.

Additional survey work is required before the fourth pathway can be costed but this would pass around the Lake and would consist largely of a board walk crossing some of the wettest areas of the Park (including the areas shown in Figs. 1 and 5).

During winter it is not unusual for trees or branches to fall, blocking some of Park's pathways, particularly Apple Tree Walk and the informal woodland routes. At the time of the inspection a number of pathways, including one in Lakeview Spinney, were partially blocked by fallen trees or branches. It is sometimes possible for the FoEP to deal with fallen branches but larger trees need to be dealt with professionally.

The FoEP has received a number of critical comments about the state of trees in Apple Tree Walk. The Chair of the FoEP met with the Ben Lloyd (Amey's Tree and Woodland Officer¹) in Apple Tree Walk on 23rd January to discuss a programme of work designed to improve both the safety and the appearance of the Walk.

Vegetation

This was a heading in both the 2016 and 2017 *State of the Park* reports. However, as explained in the Preface, vegetation will only be discussed in this report in as much as it affects pathways and equipment. From now on, vegetation will be discussed in reports written later in the year.

Facilities & Equipment

Assessment Procedure

Vic Smith and Dean Byrne assessed the state of equipment and facilities in the Park (Fig 11) using the same six point scale as employed in previous years (Table 2). 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 3. Unsatisfactory scores are shown in red, brown or orange.

Care needs to be taken when interpreting the scores. Anomalies may stem from the subjective nature of the assessment or the way in which observations are recorded. An apparent improvement over the year could be the result of repairs or cleaning but may simply result from observer bias.

Since the 2017 inspection, three new pieces of play equipment have been installed in the Junior Play Area and are now included in Table 3. The five new waste bins installed in January 2017 and referred to in the 2017 report but not formally assessed are now also included in the Table. However, footpaths have been removed as they have already been discussed in some detail and a better way of assessing and recording these linear features is required.

¹ Amey currently holds the contract with NBC for providing Environmental Services.

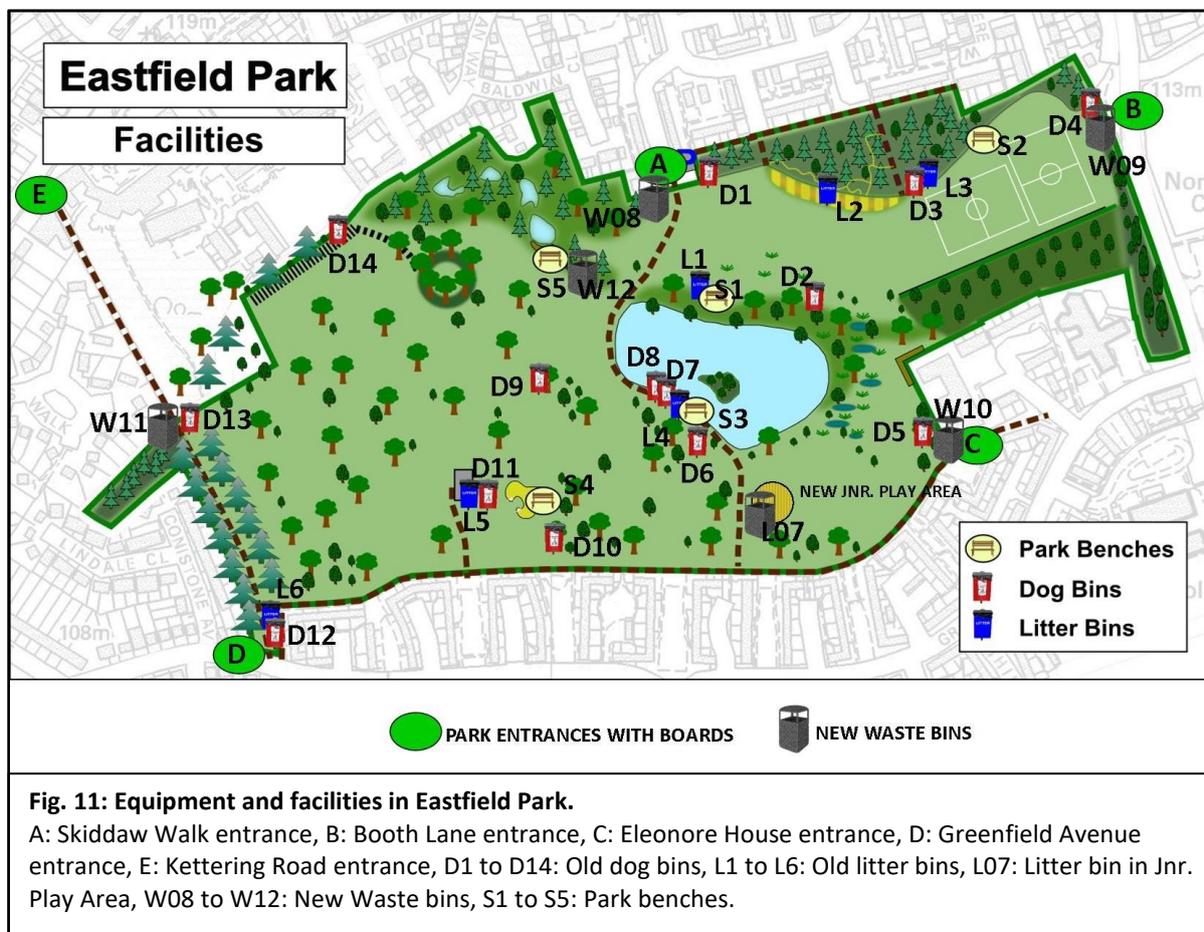


Table 2: Criteria used for assessing equipment & facilities in Eastfield Park – 2016 to 2018.

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

Antisocial Behaviour

It was pointed out in the two previous reports that most damage to structures in the Park is caused by deliberate acts of vandalism, ranging from minor cases of graffiti on equipment to the deliberate destruction of facilities such as dog and litter bins. Whilst graffiti continues to be an annoying antisocial practice, relatively little deliberate damage seems to have been done to park structures during 2017. It has already been noted that the illegal riding of motorcycles on the Park has damaged Mallard Walk and the Park surface and that in January there was, what I believe to be, the first case of a burnt-out car on the Park for over ten years (though there have been incidents of burnt-out motorcycles during that period).

Table 3: Results of the January 2018 assessments showing change from January 2017 (2017 > 2018). Item codes as in Fig. 11; condition codes and colours as in Table 2. An asterisk (*) indicates there are further comments in text or figures. Items marked 'New' were not included in the 2017 inspection.

ITEM	CONDITION	ITEM	CONDITION
LITTER/WASTE BINS*:		DOG BINS*:	
L1	4 > 4	D1	4 > 3
L2*	4 > 4	D2	4 > 4
L3	3G > 3	D3	3 > 3
L4	0 > 0	D4	3G > 3
L5	3/4 > 3	D5	3G > 2/3G
L6	4/5	D6	4 > 3
Play Area Litter Bin L07	4/5 > 5	D7	2 > 0
W08 (New)	5G	D8*	2 > 3G
W09 (New)	5	D9	3/4 > 3
W10* (New)	4	D10	3 > 0
W11 (New)	5	D11	3/4
W12 (New)	5	D12	4 > 3
		D13*	3 > 2/3
BENCHES*:		D14	0 > 0
S1	3G > 3G		
S2*	3GG > 3GG	JUNIOR PLAY AREA*:	
S3*	0 > 0	See-saw (New)	4/5
S4*	3/4 > 4	Mordred Castle*	3 > 3/4
S5*	3G > 4G	Buddy Board	4G > 4G
Jnr Play Area Bench S6*	4/5 > 4/5	Viking Swings	4 > 4
Jnr Play Area Bench S7	4/5 > 4/5	Swirl	4 > 4
		Alpine Crossing	4 > 4
SENIOR PLAY AREA*:		Switchback Run	4 > 4
Zip Wire	3/4 > 3/4	Cockerel 3-way (New)	5
Rocker*	3 > 3	Little Miss Muffet	3/4G > 4G
Climbing Pyramid*	2 > 2	Rock 'N' Bowl* (New)	3/4
		Fence	4/5 > 4/5
'EASTFIELD MONSTER@ (Play Mound)*:		Notices on Fence	5 > 5
Wooden posts*	0-4 > 4		
Earth/Grass*	3/4 > 4	ENTRANCES*:	
		A*	4G > 3/4
MUGA*:		B*	4G > 3/4
Fences	3/4G > 3/4G	C	4G > 4
Surfaces	3 > 3	D*	4G > 4
Electric Box	4/5 > 4	E	4G > 3/4
			4 > 4

Waste Bins

Over the last three years, one litter bin and three dog bins have been removed from the Park because they were damaged by deliberate acts of vandalism or through ordinary wear and tear. In the same period, six new waste bins have been provided. The condition of the remaining bins ranges from satisfactory to pristine (Table 3) with all but one of the ‘new’ bins (now one year old) being in a pristine or near pristine condition (although they may be muddy or contaminated with bird droppings). The exception is Waste Bin W10, which may look pristine in the photograph (Fig. 12) but has the gold strip damaged on the side facing away from the camera. It is pleasing that some of the older litter bins such as L2 (Fig. 13) are also in very good condition.



Fig. 12: New Waste Bin W10, overflowing with rubbish



Fig. 13: Litter Bin L2, old but in good condition and empty.



Fig. 14: Dog Bin D8, damaged but still functional.

Most of the dog bins are showing signs of their age but all were deemed to be ‘satisfactory’ or better². The foot pedal on Dog Bin D8, for example, no longer works, the lid is stiff to open and the bin itself is beginning to corrode and has graffiti scrawled on it (Fig. 14) but it is still functional and scored a ‘satisfactory’ rating (3G). This particular bin is located on the Lake embankment and last year there were two bins (D7 and D8) mounted on the same post in this position. Both were assessed as ‘unsatisfactory’ (2). D7 was later removed and D8 was replaced with a bin from elsewhere.

At the time of the inspection, several waste bins had not been emptied for some considerable time and were overflowing with waste, especially bagged dog mess (Fig. 12). This unacceptable situation did indicate two positive aspects: first that the vast majority of dog walkers are picking up and bagging dog faeces, and secondly that they are now aware they can utilise ordinary waste bins to dispose of the bagged mess (but unfortunately sometimes choosing a clogged waste bin where there is an almost empty dog bin nearby.)

² Dog Bin D13, located at the point where Apple Tree Walk joins the open space, was deemed ‘barely satisfactory’ (2/3) but it is opposite one of the new waste bins and does not need replacing.

Benches

The situation with regard to benches has changed little in the past year. The bench by the Lake (S3) was vandalised more than a year ago and, in accordance with EPMC policy, has not been replaced. The remaining older benches (Figs. 15-17) are in ‘good’ or ‘satisfactory’ condition and new benches in the Junior Play Area are almost as good as new (Fig. 16).



Fig. 15: Bench S2 – Only superficial damage but badly eroded ground in front.



Fig. 16: Bench S5 – Mainly cosmetic damage but badly eroded ground in front.



Fig. 17: Bench S4 – Wooden bench in good condition but eroded ground on both sides.



Fig. 18: Bench S6 in Junior Play Area – Excellent condition but large puddle in front.

However all of the benches (old and new) suffer from badly eroded ground in front of them, producing muddy or water-filled depressions (Fig. 15 to 18). This indicates just how much these benches are used and highlights the importance of remedial action. It is worth noting that Bench S4 (Fig. 17) is made of wood. While it is NBC policy not to install any more wooden benches, this does perhaps indicate that vandalism in the Park is not as great as sometimes perceived.

Play Equipment – Junior Play Area

The Junior Play Area was completed last March with the addition of three more pieces of equipment. All the equipment in the Area, including the fence and notices on the fence, were judged to be in ‘good’ or ‘almost pristine’ condition. The Mordred Castle, judged last year to be only ‘satisfactory’ was given a slightly higher score this year because the fire

damage it suffered from vandals when it was first installed is now much less obvious. The ‘new’ Rock ‘n’ Bowl Roundabout was given a relatively low score (3/4) because paint on the rim is chipped and there is some minor corrosion. This roundabout is, however, perfectly functional and a favourite with children (which may explain the higher than usual wear).

Play Equipment – Senior Play Area



Fig. 19: Wear & tear on the Multi-pondo Rocker in the Senior Play Area – January, 2018.



Fig. 20: Wear & tear on the Multi-pondo Rocker in the Senior Play Area – January, 2016.



Fig. 21: Exposed ground fixings for the climbing pyramid – January, 2018.



Fig. 22: Exposed ground fixings for the climbing pyramid – January, 2016.

Condition of equipment in the Senior Play Area has remained almost unchanged over the last two years. A picture of damage to the rubber covering on one of the foot-bars of the Multi-pondo Rocker taken in 2018 (Fig. 19) shows very little difference to a picture of the same bar taken in 2016 (Fig. 20). Similarly, a photograph taken in 2018 showing one of the ground fixings for the climbing pyramid (Fig. 21) reveals little difference compared to a picture of the same fixing taken in 2016 (Fig. 22). Grass has covered some of the exposed matting under the cables but the metal plate over the fixing is still exposed. This metal plate has been regarded as an unacceptable hazard by a number of Park users but apparently has not been considered unacceptable by those responsible for risk assessing the apparatus. The cables on the climbing pyramid are also somewhat damaged but this was not considered dangerous at the time of the inspection. However, they are rather loose and should be tightened before the summer season begins.

Play Equipment – The ‘Eastfield Monster’ Play Mound

The top of the play mound (the monster’s ‘head’) was in very poor condition two years ago (Fig. 23) but was restored by volunteers in autumn, 2016. The repaired area has sunken slightly but now has a good growth of grass on it (Fig. 24).



Fig. 23: The top of the ‘Eastfield Monster’ was in need of repair – September, 2016.



Fig. 24: The top of the ‘Eastfield Monster’ in January, 2018.

Only one of the posts, originally on the ‘claws’ of the monster, is still present; the others were removed, either by vandals or by officials because they were badly decayed (Fig. 25). However, the holes left by the posts were filled in by the Park Ranger and volunteers and are now covered with grass. In contrast, only one of the posts on the ‘spine’ of the monster is missing and the remaining posts are all in good condition (Fig. 27). The wooden structures added to the ‘tail’ of the monster in 2015 are still in good condition (Fig. 26).



Fig. 25: One of the Monster’s claws with only one post left – January, 2018.



Fig. 26: Wooden structures added to the Monster’s tail in 2015 – January, 2018.



Fig. 27: The spine of the Monster with most posts still present – January, 2018.

Overall, the play mound is in better condition than it was two years ago and its play value is probably as good as it was when it was first constructed.

Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)

The MUGA has hardly changed in the past year: it is in reasonably good condition although the tarred pathway to it continues to deteriorate.

Entrances

The five main entrances to Eastfield Park (A to E in Fig. 11) were remodelled in 2011 with welcoming information boards, hard surfaces appropriate to the location, and bollards to prevent the entry of unauthorised cars. Three of the entrances had padlocked metal bollards to allow the entry of official vehicles. These entrances are all in a satisfactory condition or better. However, the welcome boards are beginning to show signs of deterioration with the two layers becoming separated (Fig. 28). The information on these boards is becoming out-of-date and, ideally, the boards should be replaced in the next two to three years. One of the wooden bollards at the Greenfield Avenue entrance is damaged and will need replacing soon. The metal bollards at the Booth Lane entrance are dented but functional.

Of greater concern are the wooden bollards ('dragon's teeth') that protect areas with open access from the Eastfield and Lakeview Estates. Most of these bollards are not on the Park itself but on the green areas that extend between the Eastfield courts. Many of these bollards were missing in 2017, allowing

unauthorised vehicles to drive directly onto the Park. Some of the bollards were replaced during the year (including those protecting Tarn Croft, referred to specifically in last year's report) but it is imperative that all possible access points to the Park are fully protected.

Conclusion

Five new litter bins were installed on the Park in January 2017. Phase 2 of the Junior Play Area was completed with the installation of three more pieces of play equipment in March. Vandalism targeting park equipment seems to have decreased but motorcycle activity on the Park remains a major problem. For the first time in many years a car was burnt out on the Park in January 2018.



Fig. 28: Welcome Board at the Skiddaw Walk Entrance to the Park. As with most of the Welcome Boards, the two layers are coming apart.

Deterioration of footpaths and equipment due to normal wear and tear has been minimal but both authorised and illegal vehicles have damaged footpaths and the the surface of the Park. In particular, vehicles have continued to damage Mallard Walk where it passes by the Lake and motorcycles have caused potholes in the southern part of the Walk. Damage to the ground just inside the Booth Lane entrance is also significant (Fig 4 & title page).

The replacement of missing bollards in the areas immediately surrounding the Park would help prevent unauthorised vehicles being driven onto the Park but it is difficult to stop motorcycles gaining access. Once on the Park, motorcycles are often ridden in ways that are dangerous and threatening to park users. Hopefully, the Police, assisted by Wardens, Rangers and the general public, will be able to do more to prevent this antisocial and hazardous behaviour, often perpetrated by individuals who are known to their neighbours.

Securing funds for the creation of all-weather footpaths around the Park (as described in detail elsewhere) is a high priority for 2018. These footpaths are urgently needed to improve access to the Park particularly for those with limited mobility.

Funding has already been agreed in principle for the installation of a bench and waste bin close to the ha-ha on the north side of the Park. The possibility of adding two interpretation boards describing the history of the Park is being considered. Additionally, two old waste bins are being renovated and will hopefully be installed on the Park this year to replace dog bins that have been lost in the last three years.

The depressions in front of existing benches need to be filled and, ideally, paving stones placed over areas most subject to wear. The exposed metal plates on the climbing pyramid need to be covered with protective matting and the cables tightened.

The FoEP will continue to work to open up and improve informal pathways through the wooded parts of the Park. They will also continue to remove low vegetation from the lake embankment (previously called the 'lake slope'). This seems to be having the desired effect of reducing antisocial activity in the area.

The Friends will also continue with their work on the Crescent Rock Garden, the Eleonore House Insect-friendly Herbaceous Border, the planted meadow, the set-aside projects and pruning epicormic growth. They also intend to plan, cost, and possibly implement, improvements to the ponds during 2018. However, wider environmental concerns including the state and management of the Park's gardens, lakes, ponds, meadows, trees and woodlands will be considered in other reports throughout the year (see Preface).

