

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	27 August 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Removal of No Ball Games Signs
REPORT NUMBER:	CHI/15/126
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To outline a proposal for the removal of all 'No Ball Games' signs from Aberdeen's green space.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- (i) Agrees that all 'No Ball Games' signs throughout the city on green space owned or managed by Aberdeen City Council be removed.
- (ii) Agrees that no further 'No Ball Games' or similar signs will be erected on Aberdeen green space.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are several hundred signs spread throughout the city. The location of the signs is known and a planned programme of removal will take place. The removal of the signs will be undertaken within existing service budgets.

There will be some small savings to maintenance budgets as there will be no ongoing maintenance or replacement costs of signs, no spraying around signs and easier access for grass cutting. These savings will be used to help pay for the removal of the signs but also

additional planting and screening where required as an alternative to signs.

Aberdeen City Council will work in partnership with Aberdeen Greenspace, Aberdeen Play Forum and local community groups to raise sponsorship funds and use volunteer labour when available to help remove signs.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are positive implications of this proposal against the International, National and Local Children's' Play Policy:

United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31 of the Convention states:

“Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”

The Scottish Governments, Play Strategy for Scotland 21st June 2013 states:

“Children’s play is crucial to Scotland’s well being; socially, economically and environmentally. Our people are our greatest resource and the early years of life set the pattern for children’s future development.

‘The experiences children have in early life – and the environments in which they have them – shape their developing brain architecture and strongly affect whether they grow up to be healthy, productive members of society’ (Harvard University, 2007).

Play is an essential part of a happy, healthy childhood and ‘when children play their brains do two things: they grow and they become organised and usable’ (Hughes, 2013). By investing in all our children and young people now we can strengthen their ability to achieve their full potential.”

Aberdeen City Council upholds children's rights to play in the City's Play Policy. Some of the key action points contained within this policy are to:

- *Monitor the city’s network of fixed play equipment to ensure that they are safe, well lit and maintained to a high standard.*
- *Provide play opportunities within the city that are of high quality, challenging and safe.*
- *Promote the importance of play within the lives of ‘Aberdeen’s Children’ so that they are active and healthy.*

Nurtured Outcome Group have identified in their 'Early Years Framework Implementation Plan 2014-15' that:

“Increasingly and consistently, evidence shows that giving children the best start in life offering the highest quality of health, learning and play experiences, improves outcomes for children that will have a life long impact for them as adults. These experiences enable children to become active citizens who can make significant contributions to society and participate fully in their own lives and those of their communities.”

There will be a need to create and adopt a mechanism for dealing with residents' complaints. This will be based on a successful model developed in Hartlepool Borough Council. (Appendix A).

There are no other direct implications arising from this report in terms of any legal, resource, personnel, property, equipment, and sustainability and environmental, health and safety and/or policy issues.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 Background

The signs have been erected over a number of years on a piecemeal basis at the request of local residents to deter what is deemed anti-social behaviour. Most of the signs are in poor repair and unsightly.

It is understood that the signs have no legal status.

A previous motion was raised 2002 by Aberdeen City Council to remove 'No Ball Games' signs but this was not implemented fully. In recent times Environmental Services staff has been removing old and damaged signs as part of the everyday management of sites. These signs have not been replaced and no issues have been raised or complaints made.

There will be residents who will want to retain the 'No Ball Games' signs and it is important that the mechanism for complaints relating to all aspects of anti-social behaviour, including ball games, is addressed and meets the needs of the local community.

5.2 Removal of No Ball Game Signs

There will be a positive visual impact of the removal of the signs on greenspace.

There will be savings in terms of the maintenance required of greenspace with signs through no requirement for replacement signs (many are in poor condition), no requirement to weed spray around signs. Grass cutting will be easier and will improve.

It will remove barriers to outdoor play for children and adults, which may lead to increased physical activity.

Different greenspace management/planting will need to be considered in areas that are wholly unsuitable for ball play and Environmental Services will work closely with partners to look at options once these areas have been identified.

The Housing service will be the main ACC land owner impacted by the removal of the signs and the service has been consulted on the report. The service is very supportive of the proposal and welcomes the steps to remove the signs.

A scheme will be put in place to ensure that all instances of anti-social behaviour are dealt with through a different mechanism. (See Appendix A).

The following organisations support the removal of the 'No Ball Games' signs:

Aberdeen Greenspace
Aberdeen Play Forum
Aberlour Futures
ACVO TSI (Aberdeen Council of Volunteer Organisations, Third Sector Interface)
Creative STAR Learning Company
Mud Pies
Play Scotland
Early Years Scotland

The removal of the signs will be a first for Scotland leading to positive publicity for the city. To ensure this it is important to set a target date for the removal of all signs to show that the objective has been achieved.

With this in mind the removal of the signs will be completed by UK's National Play Day on 3rd August 2016.

An event is proposed with Aberdeen Play Forum on this date to celebrate what has been achieved.

6. IMPACT

Removal of No Ball Games signs will contribute to the delivery of the five year plan “Aberdeen the Smarter City” commitments to:-

“promote and improve opportunities for physical activity and sport to enable Aberdeen's citizens to lead more active, healthier lives.”

“provide a clean, safe and attractive streetscape and promote biodiversity and nature conservation. We will encourage wider access to green space in our streets, parks and countryside. “

It will also assist the Council in delivering the Single Outcome Agreement's National Outcome 12 “We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and enhance it for future generations” and will contribute to several other outcomes including No.6 “We live longer, healthier lives”, No. 7 “Tackling inequalities” and No. 10 “We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need”.

The report will also deliver the vision, aims and objectives of the Aberdeen Open Space Strategy 2011-2016 and contribute towards the actions highlighted in the Strategy.

The report will deliver two of the objectives of the Aberdeen City Play Policy:

Promote positive attitudes towards outdoor play in both adults and children.

Promote use of indoor and outdoor play areas, parks and open spaces.

The report meets the following assessment criteria of the Britain in Bloom judging:

B Environmental Responsibility

B4 Local Environmental Quality – Vacant premises and plots, litter, graffiti, fly posting, dog fouling, water features/courses, litter picks etc.

B5 Pride of Place – Management of street furniture, signage, art in the landscape, fences, way-marking, interpretation, hard landscaping etc.

Play is an essential part of everyone's life and is fundamental to human development and is freely chosen and self directed. Children engage in play as a mechanism to explore the world around them, for enjoyment and creative expression and as the medium through which skills are learned and developed. Play is the stimulus for physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. *The removal of the sign will aim to help encourage and develop this.*

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

This report is seen as a benefit to all, the assessment of risk associated with this report is very low.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Hartlepool Ball Games Advice

http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/a_to_z/service/1358/ball_games_advice

Aberdeen City Play Policy adopted 2013

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=50820&slD=616>

Aberdeen Open Space Strategy 2011-2016

Wee Green Spaces - Early Years Pilot Project Report, August 2014

<http://creativestartlearning.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Wee-Green-Space-Report-Aug-2014.pdf>

Living Streets No Ball Games Here

<http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/library/no-ball-games.pdf>

Play Strategy for Scotland: our vision

www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00425722.pdf

Play Strategy for Scotland: our action plan

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00437132.pdf>

Playday Scotland <http://playscotland.org/who-we-are/playday/>

RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM UK JUDGING GUIDELINES

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/communities/pdf/bloom/Britain-in-Bloom-2014/rhs-britain-in-bloom-uk-judging-guidelines>

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Appendix A

Aberdeen City Council

Ball Games Advice: Outline

This guide aims to provide advice about what to do over concerns about ball games.

1. Speak to those involved

First, we would ask that you speak to the people involved (and their parents if a young person) and in a polite and non-confrontational way discuss any concerns you may have.

2. Aberdeen City Council Tenant

If you are an Aberdeen City Council tenant you can contact the Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team for advice and assistance on 08456 066 548 or by e-mail ASBIT@aberdeencity.gov.uk

3. SACRO Aberdeen Community Mediation

After speaking to the people involved, should you be unable to reach a mutually acceptable agreement regarding the playing of ball games in your area you can contact SACRO Community Mediation for assistance.

This is a free service which uses independent, trained, local mediators to help people involved in a neighbour dispute to discuss the situation with each other, find common ground and to hopefully come to a voluntary agreement about how to resolve the problems that lie at the heart of their dispute.

The service is open to Aberdeen residents and has been set up to deal with low-level, non-criminal and non-violent incidents, community nuisance problems and neighbour disagreements.

The mediation service will try and broker a voluntary Neighbourhood Ball Games Agreement between everyone involved which would set out where, when, for how long, the type of ball, and the numbers of people who would play ball games in the local area.

Mediation has an excellent track record of resolving neighbourhood/community disputes and I would encourage you to consider this service. SACRO Aberdeen, 110 Crown Street, Aberdeen can be contacted on Tel: 01224 560 550 or by e email on infoaberdeen@sacro.org.uk.

4. City Warden Team

You can contact the City Wardens for advice and assistance.

City Wardens

Archibald Simpson House

Aberdeen – 01224 626 800

Central – 01224 627 000

North – 01224 814 524

South – 01224 871 953

5. Police Scotland

Police Scotland can be contacted on Tel: 101. (Non-emergency)

Where large groups of young people are gathering in an area, and the Neighbourhood Police Team considers it appropriate, they may request that the Council's Streetwork Project visit the area. This is a team of youth workers who engage with young people, challenge any inappropriate behaviour they witness and highlight to young people any positive activities in their area.

Further Information

(a) No Ball Games Signs

Residents often request that a 'No Ball Games' sign is put up in an area where ball games are occurring.

Aberdeen City Council does not use such signs as they are of an advisory nature only and cannot be enforced.

(b) Anti-social Behaviour Complaints regarding Ball Games

Residents often make anti-social behaviour complaints about ball games to City Wardens.

Aberdeen City Council has a responsibility to balance the right of residents to the peaceful enjoyment of their homes against the equal rights of children and adults to use public open space to have fun and engage in sport and for parents to be able to have their children playing safely within their sight.

Aberdeen City Council takes the view that children and adults **only and simply playing ball games in a reasonable manner** should not be classed as anti-social behaviour.

However while the playing of ball games is permitted, any other behaviour in addition to this which may be occurring which causes harassment, alarm or distress to residents is not acceptable. For example; verbal abuse, threats, deliberate damage to property or repeated incidents of accidental damage. In these circumstances you should contact the Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team for advice and assistance on 08456 066 548 or by e-mail ASBIT@aberdeencity.gov.uk