

Response to the proposal to stop the Urban Ranger Service

The following report outlines the feelings and concerns of the Urban Rangers regarding the proposed closure of their service in June 2013. This document has been drawn up with full consultation with each ranger and is their agreed response.

It is an ill conceived 'knee jerk' reaction to budgetary pressures.

It would appear that the proposal has been made purely on a financial basis. The rangers are not a statutory service *'they cost us X, there for cutting the service saves X'* As outlined further in this document we do not believe adequate consideration has been given to the additional expense incurred by the removal of the service.

Further to this, as no requests were made for any information regarding the Ranger Service prior to this decision it must be concluded that this decision was made blindly with out any understanding of what the service currently provide for the council.

It provides minimal saving £88,000.

Although it has been made very clear the reasons why financial saving must be made we consider the cost to the council of £88,000 is only a very small percentage of what is required especially when the council may need to make redundancy payouts of £35,500.

As a service we have been aware of the financial situation the council is under and for some time now have operated the service in a stream line fashion ensuring costs are minimised and value for money emphasised.

It short circuits the lean review process.

Over the last 12 month we have been increasingly aware of the likelihood of coming into lean review. A process which the council have invested heavily both financially and in work hours devoted to it. We have endeavoured to make appropriate actions to best serve this process. This involved a considerable amount of work collecting and collating information regarding the activities of the service so that when the review came we would already be up and running with data required for the review process. We had been told quite clearly that the review would mean a change in the service. As previously stated the service has been running with an eye on its expenditure and we were unsure what savings or efficiencies could be made but we welcomed the input of other parties. Cutting us out of this process is a case of 'throwing out the baby with the bath water,' valuable skills and resources will be lost.

It is short sighted?

What, if any, consideration has been made to address the likely impact of removal of the service?

Although the service has a very wide remit one of our key roles is to "Reduce crime and the fear of crime through education and enforcement" If this is removed it can be expected to see a rise in many unwelcome areas such as:

Damage to open spaces
Antisocial behaviour
Fly tipping
Motorcycles in the parks

Littering
Graffiti
Dog fouling
Drug and Alcohol abuse

This by far not an exhaustive list, but an increase in such activity will at the very least incur an increase of council expenditure. The impact to the public will be immeasurable.

It could be argued that some of these areas may be enforced by the police. This is in fact very unlikely as they are overstretched and underfunded themselves. In our experience the police are too stretched to attend incidents in the parks let alone regularly and proactively patrol them. To date the Police often call upon the assistance of the URS for problems in the parks of Lincoln. They then know that if the URS call for Police attendance, the matter does

require attention. This subsequently eliminates the element of wasting Police time and facilitates a one stop solution.

There will be no civil enforcement of bylaws.

The council have in place bylaws laid out for the vast majority of its parks and green spaces. These were put in place for valid reason and should be enforced. They are complicated and not always straight forward. The service has been enforcing these bylaws for the past 13 years, educating the public and where necessary taking legal action against perpetrators. The belief the commons are "Common land I can do what I want" is still widely held. Once the Rangers are no longer around to educate and enforce the bylaws what will stop anybody "Doing what they want"? What ever that may be, Raves, Bottle digging with Mini Diggers or illegal traveller encampments all of which have happened in the recent past.

There will be further additional costs.

As part of the daily patrols we undertake many minor tasks, clearing broken glass, picking up litter, locking up gates left open by others, untangling swings to name but a few, all of these are necessary and will still need to be carried out. In the absence of Rangers, who will do this and who will pay for it?

Rangers see and report a great deal; the regular monitoring of sites enables us to see quickly any new issues within a site and can report it to the correct member of the council or appropriate agency ensuring efficient rectification. We can also monitor the progress of any rectification required and highlight any areas of concern. This is a necessary task which will have to be undertaken by others increasing their work loads or council expenditure.

There appears to have been little consideration for the affect on the public.

The removal of the service will see a decrease of public safety, both actual and perceived. It is believed that people do not commit crime for the fear of being caught. Remove the deterrent of the Rangers patrolling and there will be nothing to deter the undesirable elements of society in our parks. This is what people think and may well prove to be true.

We predict a decrease in use and ownership of the parks and green spaces this in itself will lead to and increase in unwanted behaviour
There is already a loss of good will towards the council from the general public, the public the council exist to serve.

There will be no more Education.

The Ranger Service, from its onset has a remit to provide education to the general public. We visit the majority of Infant and Primary Schools and many Senior and Special Needs schools teaching the students about the role of the Rangers and of the City Of Lincoln Council, how to stay safe, how to protect the environment and even basic drug waste safety. This service is not restricted to schools, but also includes local groups such as Scouts, St John's Ambulance and groups for the elderly.

To our knowledge if we stop going into schools there will be no council presence in local education.

Education is also a daily and ongoing process. Each and every day the public are educated as to what can and can't be done. Where they can go and what restrictions apply. What the Councils' stance is on various issues and how to contact the Council or their local Councillors.

No out of hour's presence or support for open spaces.

We currently provide a highly visible presence which is not restricted to office hours Monday to Friday. We are a high profile service well known by the public and other agencies and are often the first point of contact for many issues, for example animal welfare, horses in

particular. We are city wide key holders for quick fixes of open gates, alleviating traveller threats by locking up vulnerable areas. The URS has on occasion persuaded many travelling groups to move on to other pastures. We also have a working relationship with resident travellers in Lincoln. Who will realistically liaise in the future?

Lessons should be learnt from past incidents and events.

There are many people who have been in the council since before the existence of the Ranger Service and these people paint a very bleak picture of how things used to be. For example The Arboretum was a no go area for the general public, rife with all kinds of substance abuse and so called undesirables, The Hartsholme Country Park was terrorised by large groups of youth causing damage, leaving litter, starting fires, intimidating visitors even going on to the camp site and rocking caravans with the occupants petrified inside who would leave as soon as possible demanding their money back and bad mouthing Lincoln to everyone they met. This is how things were according to people who were in the council at the time. How long will it take to return to this or worse?

The cost to reinstate the service or similar.

If this proposal goes ahead we believe it may well be in hindsight that it is deemed in error. There may well come a time when it is necessary to reinstate the ranger service or something very similar. This would not be straight forward and would be extremely expensive.

There would be costs incurred for all new kit of all staff and equipment required. This is a very long list but just to clothe a ranger cost in the region of £2000. To supply and kit out a motorcycle would cost in the region of £7000. Each member of the rangers has received extensive training including First Aid, Legal training, Enforcement training, Child protection training, all of which would need provided.

Then there are the un-measurable costs;

- The loss of the relationships and networking links established over years

- The loss of local knowledge

- Current rangers will be reemployed leaving nobody to train up new employees

It is not supported.

In all our many conversations with the public, bar two exceptions, there is no support for this proposal. Even councillors who have been critical of the service in the past have stated that they think this decision is in error. Council employees have said "It is a return to the Dark Ages."

To generalise the public attitude in to one word would be disbelief. Nobody can see any wisdom in this suggestion, and it is our opinion that there is none.

Finally.

The nature of the service, to daily patrol the sites managed by the council allows for both reactive and proactive protection and care of the sites themselves, the service users, local or visiting.

Who will be there when a parent loses sight of their child, in a park that takes over an hour to walk around?

Who will CCTV contact for assistance for eyes on the ground for many incidents including finding suicidal and vulnerable missing persons?

Who will, just by their very presence deter the potential sex offenders?

This may be seen as sensationalist but these are real incidents the URS has been involved with. These are questions being asked by the people we come into contact with.

Questions we have no answers to.