



West Lothian
Council



CITIZEN LED INSPECTION

'LOOK SEE'

FEEDBACK REPORT

NETs, Land & Countryside

Country Parks

October 2015

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REPORT SUBMITTED TO:

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Introduction

The 'Look See' customer experience inspection is designed to bring a depth of insight through a "lighter" version of the council's Citizen Led Inspection. The inspection forms a short, concentrated, specific activity to allow customer inspectors to bring their training and knowledge to bear on a focused area of service provision.

Inspectors score the service based on the set criteria established prior to the inspection and use a rating scale of Excellent, Good, Adequate, Poor and Very Poor.

This is designed to involve customers in reviewing and making changes to services. It is a particularly valuable during periods of change to ensure that service standards and performance is maintained.

Background to the Inspection

West Lothian's 3 country parks were put forward by the service manager, Andy Johnston, to take part in the Pilot of the new 'Look See' CLI programme being offered by the council. The country parks at Almondell & Calderwood, Beecraigs and Polkemmett provide West Lothian's citizens and visitors with a variety of outdoor spaces and activities as well as hosting partner and franchise organisations.

The 3 Inspectors met with the service manager prior to undertaking their visits to the parks to allow them to find out more information about the parks and if there were any particular issues the manager wanted them to concentrate on. In this instance the inspectors were asked to carry out a general review of all aspects of the parks. The inspection team were also made aware of the planned changes to the visitor centre and fishery at Beecraigs Country Park.

Inspectors were asked to review the 3 parks, on a one park each basis, using set guidance and criteria but with scope to expand on this as they saw fit depending on their findings. The inspectors agreed to carry out their inspection throughout the month of September and were free to make as many visits as they saw fit to their assigned park in order to allow them to complete the inspection.

The staff within the country parks were unaware of the inspection activity going on and inspectors were asked not to identify themselves as inspectors during their visits but were free to interact and engage with staff and other visitors as they deemed appropriate.

The inspection team comprised of:

Alastair Slater	Liz Liddell	John McCulloch
Almondell & Calderwood (AC)	Beecraigs (BC)	Polkemmet (PK)

Summary of Findings

The Inspectors rated the service as follows:

Category		Almondell & Calderwood	Beebraigs	Polkemmet
1	Web Information available prior to inspection	Excellent	Good	Adequate
2	Information available during visit	Adequate	Good	Good
3	Staff Interaction	Excellent	Excellent	Poor
4	On Site Facilities	Good	Excellent	Poor
5	Overall Findings	Good	Excellent	Adequate

Full Findings of Inspection

The table below highlights the key findings, areas of good practice and recommendations for areas for improvement (**AC** = Almondell and Calderwood, **BC** = Beecraigs, **PK** = Polkemmet)

Category	Sub Categories of Inspection	Park	Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
1.Web Information available prior to inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Location ▪ Opening times ▪ On-site facilities ▪ Available parking 	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available on the council website in relation to the location, opening times, on-site facilities and parking at Almondell & Calderwood, was considered to be good. 	No areas for improvement were identified by the inspector.	Excellent
		BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available on the council website in relation to the location, opening times and parking at Beecraigs, was considered to be good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available on the council website, in relation to the on-site facilities at Beecraigs, was considered to be only adequate. 	Good
		PK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available on the council website in relation to opening times and on-site facilities at Polkemmet, was considered to be good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available on the council website, in relation to the location and parking available at Polkemmet, was considered to be only adequate. ▪ The inspector identified that there was a lack of information available about 'What's On' at the park and the website lacked pictures to inspire people to visit. 	Adequate
Recommendation(s)		1.1	Review the website content, pictures and the information which is made available to customers		

Category	Sub Categories of Inspection	Park	Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
2.Information available during visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opening times ▪ On-site facilities ▪ Available Parking 	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only the information on parking was considered by the inspector to be of a good standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information on opening times and on site facilities within the country park was felt to be only adequate. 	Adequate
		BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available within the country park in relation to the opening times and parking at Beecraigs was considered to be good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available within the country park, in relation to the on-site facilities at Beecraigs, was considered to be only adequate. ▪ The inspector highlighted that there was no obvious signposting of available walking routes with the country park. ▪ The inspector suggested that maps displayed in the park should highlight “you are here” to allow better navigation for users ▪ Sign posting at junctions within the park was also not obvious to the inspector. 	Good
		PK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available within the country park in relation to the opening times and parking at Polkemmet was considered to be good along with the sign posts and the site map. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information that is available within the country park, in relation to the parking was considered to be only adequate. ▪ The inspector also pointed out that there was a lack of information regarding walking routes –times, distance etc., the location of the first aid, where to parks bikes and information relating to the nature and wildlife within the park. ▪ It was also identified by the inspector that there was a lack of information on disabled parking and access within the country park. The Inspector also highlighted a lack of disabled parking spaces (only 2 spaces were visible) 	Good
Recommendation(s)		2.1	Review the information, within the park, that is made available to visitors to Almondell & Calderwood of the opening times and on-site facilities.		
		2.2	Review the information, within the park, that is made available to visitors to Beecraigs of on-site facilities.		
		2.3	Review the information, within the park, that is made available to visitors to Polkemmet of parking facilities.		
		2.4	Review the signposting, within all the parks, of walking routes including direction, walking times and informational sign posting at junctions.		

Category	Sub Categories of Inspection	Park	Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
		2.5	Review the number of disabled parking spaces for visitors, the information made available on disabled parking and the overall access for disabled visitors at Polkemmet.		
		2.6	Maps within the parks should include a “you are here” marker for visitors.		
3. Staff Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge ▪ Polite & Friendly ▪ Helpful ▪ Recognisable 	AC	The inspector found staff to be polite and friendly and acknowledged them as they used the park and staff were also easily recognisable .	No areas for improvement were identified by the inspector.	Excellent
		BC	The inspector found staff to be polite and friendly and acknowledged them as they used the park and staff were also easily recognisable .	No areas for improvement were identified by the inspector.	Excellent
		PK	Staff that the inspector interacted with were polite and friendly .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country park staff were not visible or easily identifiable to the inspector on their 3 visits. ▪ The lack of information on the park ranger office made it difficult for the inspector to know where to find the rangers to approach them for information. ▪ Coffee Shop Staff (not WLC) lacked knowledge on aspects of the park. See Appendix 1 for additional detail. 	Poor
Recommendation(s)		3.1	Review the uniform for staff or identify a means of making staff more recognisable to visitors and sign post the ranger office better at Polkemmet		
4. On Site Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clean & Tidy ▪ Accessibility ▪ User- 	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The inspector found on-site facilities to be clean and tidy and also accessible. ▪ The play area was considered by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The user friendliness of some facilities was found not be of a good standard, in particular the toilets which were lacking in ventilation and on one occasion were locked. Additionally the gallery was also locked and unavailable for the public during the inspectors visit. ▪ The lack of a coffee shop or café on site was a disappointment to the 	Good

Category	Sub Categories of Inspection	Park	Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
	Friendliness		<p>the inspector to be excellent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inspector welcomed the ability to provide feedback to the service on site. 	<p>inspector.</p>	
		BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The on-site facilities, including toilets, were found to be of a good standard, accessible, user friendly and clean and tidy The inspector thought that the play area looked very good and was being well used and enjoyed by children. The number of waste bins available in the park was considered to be good and accessible. The Caravan Site was noted as being well looked after and very inviting for visitors with a first class setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspector found the onsite shop and visitors centre to be dull, although they did note and welcome the plans to re-locate the visitors centre and shop along with opening a new café. The lack and the capacity of dog waste bins were found by to an issue by the inspector. It was felt by the inspector that more benches and seating throughout the park would be beneficial. 	Excellent
		PK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In general the inspector considered the park to be clean and tidy, although there were some areas of untidiness. The Play Area was considered by the inspector to be the “jewel in the crown” of the park. Both the golf course and range were good facilities but the inspector left with the impression that the park is dependent on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The general accessibility and user friendliness of some of the on-site facilities could be improved. The inspector commented that the locomotive has been displayed as an attraction but there is not much to attract the visitor and it looks abandoned. A lack of dog waste bins was highlighted as an issue by the inspector. 	Poor

Category	Sub Categories of Inspection	Park	Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
			these facilities for visitors, along with the play park.		
Recommendation(s)			4.1	Review the ventilation of the toilets in Almondell & Calderwood and consider solutions to rectify any issues.	
			4.2	Continue with the proposed plans to relocate the Beecraigs visitors centre and shop to make them more welcoming and user friendly for customers.	
			4.3	Review the availability of benches and seats for visitors and walkers to use throughout Beecraigs	
			4.4	Review the number and location of the dog waste bins throughout the 3 country park as well as the emptying frequency of those bins currently made available for visitors	
			4.5	Consider how the locomotive based at Polkemmet could be made more of an attraction within the park	
5.Overall Findings		AC	On their visit to Almondell and Calderwood the inspector found staff within the county park to be of a high standard. Additionally the information which is available prior to making a visit is also good.	The main area for improvement identified by the inspector was the accessibility and user friendliness of some of the facilities with the park, in particular the toilets. The availability of information within the park, regarding on site facilities and some of the features of the park, was highlighted as being a potential area for improvement that the service should address.	Good
		BC	The inspector found Beecraigs to be very enjoyable especially for walking. Beecraigs was considered to be an amazing facility for West Lothian. Particular praise was give on the availability and variety of information on what is currently happening with the woods and the information on the tree felling was identified as being excellent.	The main area for improvement identified by the inspector was the information made available on walking routes throughout the park. Whilst surfaced paths and non-surfaced paths are shown on the maps consideration should be given to providing information on walks available, the distance of the walk, whether the walk is hard or easy; suitable for wheelchairs or push buggies etc. It was felt that this would be of particular benefit to visitors that do not know the area. Using a similar system as the mountain bike trails could be an option e.g. colours, animals or symbols for the walking routes would be helpful. Information could also be made available on longer walks, taking in perhaps the Korean War Memorial or Cockleroy. As well as this the inspector noted	Excellent

Category	Sub Categories of Inspection	Park	Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
				<p>that on the way to the fish farm, there are lots of paths leading off the main route but visitors have no idea where they lead.</p> <p>One further suggestion put forward by the inspector was for more information points informing visitors of the type of animals they may see or birds that are common in the woods or on the loch.</p>	
		PK	<p>The Play Area within Polkemmet was highlighted by the inspector to be excellent.</p> <p>The inspector also highlighted the nice quiet areas within the park to sit and enjoy the surroundings.</p>	<p>The inspector felt that better usage could be made of both the bowling green & driving range and suggested that perhaps the service liaise with local clubs & WLC Sports to increase usage and participation.</p> <p>The service should try to create a better feature of the old steam locomotive with historic, social and scientific links to turn this into more of an attraction for visitors.</p> <p>The inspector felt that an increase and an improvement on the information made available to visitors on the nature, trees and wildlife around the park would be beneficial for all visitors.</p>	Adequate

Customers Observed	Almondell & Calderwood	During the visit to Almondell & Calderwood the inspector observed only a few visitors to the park including walkers, runners and a cyclist. Visitors were men, women and children using the play area.
	Beebraigs	During the visit to Beebraigs the inspector observed a range of customers using the facilities, including men, women and children. The visitors to the park were involved in a range of activities – walking, running, cycling, dog walking, using the play areas, orienteering and horse riding.
	Polkemmet	During their visits to Polkemmet the inspector identified three main groups of visitors - golfers, families using the play park and dog walkers.

Conclusions & Next Steps

The inspections carried out by the team highlighted a number of positive aspects of the 3 country parks within West Lothian and the services they offer to residents and visitors. The range and accessibility of activities and facilities were considered to be of a high standard and staff on site were praised for their polite and friendly approach to customers.

Areas for improvement and recommendations have been identified, by the inspection team, across the 3 country parks. The main area for improvement identified across the 3 parks was to review the information made available for visitors on walking routes within the parks and information on the wildlife, nature and other features of the parks.

The service should now review the findings of the inspectors; take note of the recommendations made and devise an improvement plan to action these. Planned improvements will then be fed back to the inspectors and followed up with the service by the Business Improvement Officers.

Appendix 1: Polkemmet Inspector's Additional Feedback

For further information please contact Katherine McLaughlin or Daniel Matonti, Performance and Improvement Service.

Date: 26/10/2015

Appendix 1.

CITIZEN LED INSPECTION – ‘LOOK SEE’ POLKEMMET COUNTRY PARK

Preamble

In fairness, I feel that I must preface all my remarks by stating that I am neither a dog owner/lover nor do I currently make recreational visits to any park. That said, I like nature and take a keen interest in the history, geography and culture of my neighbourhood and country.

As I approached the country park for the first time ever I was surprised at how close it was to residential housing and it led me to consider what different criteria might be applied to a country park as compared to an urban park. West Lothian Council must have a formula which no doubt includes geography and park content because WLC parks are included in two distinctive and separate management lines. Also, I was surprised that the park was managed by West Lothian Council's NETs team when I felt that there must be more ideal 'bed fellows' within WLC's organisational structure.

Given the proximity of both residential and industrial buildings to Polkemmet it would be ideal if the public could gain easy access by foot or bicycle from the more populated areas of Whitburn. Also, nearby workers should be encouraged to use the park for exercise. How that fits in with distinctive criteria might be problematic. After my visits my view was that Polkemmet is a hybrid of the two types of park.

Pre-visit and post visit search of internet

Prior to making the first of my visits I investigated appropriate websites and found that the principal site is included under West Lothian Council. In some ways it makes sense that WLC includes all of its activities under the one heading but how the general public views its offerings could be very different to how WLC presents its services. For instance, the public will consider bin collection or education entirely differently from sport or recreation. The former will be considered as an essential service while the latter will be equated with fun and enjoyment, despite WLC's involvement (meant as factual rather than critical).

As such, there must be an argument that these non essential services should be presented, and even marketed, differently. In the instance of recreational activity it is probably not particularly important that WLC branding is carried while lifestyle, enjoyment and wellbeing should be the factors being highlighted. Howden Park Centre now has its own website and there is no reason why the country parks (and similar) cannot be similarly represented. In fact, there is a strong argument for a comprehensive 'WHAT'S ON' website – inclusive of park activities, theatre shows, sports events (amateur & professional) and local public events. WLC's eBulletin could be separated into those two distinct headings.

Entrance and Parking

Entry, even by pedestrians, is by road but from initially displaying many deep potholes which had the possibility of WLC incurring losses through claims, remedial works were carried out subsequently. On my first two visits only the 'train car park' was open despite the fact that the second car park was really needed, especially on the first visit. At no point was there signage providing directions to either the disabled bays or the cycle stands. In fact, the two disabled parking bays are probably far too few and are very poorly marked. Disappointingly, I witnessed the bay nearest the courtyard being taken by a young fit golfer, with definitely no sign of a blue badge being displayed. The car remained there unchallenged and without threat of a penalty.

Information Board and Signposts

At first glance the information board adjacent to the train appears to provide all the information a visitor should require. However, it would be helpful if each of the walks was given an indication of length and suggested walking times. Also, some areas of the map are numbered but there is no indication to what the number refers. Given my vintage, my first thought was that perhaps an information map could be sold at reception. However, the best approach would be to put it on the internet for reference on smart phones.

Programme

Besides the one off posters and signs there is a nicely printed glossy leaflet entitled "Events & Activities" which covers all three country parks. A cursory read of the leaflet suggests that if it were not for the golfing activities Polkemmet would very rarely feature. I have no knowledge of how much use of the Ranger service is attributable to the leaflets (and separate posters referred to) but in this digital age there is probably a more effective method of attracting interest and, hopefully, income.

Locomotive

I found this feature an enormous disappointment, which does not start to fulfil its potential. It looks abandoned on an area which could be better drained but most of all it lacked any information. My guess is that the locomotive will have been built near Glasgow (Andrew Barclay was established along the A71 in Kilmarnock) subsequent to the invention of the steam engine by James Watt (Greenock), friend of James Young (West Lothian), and this locomotive would appear to have been used to transport coal from the Polkemmet mine, only one of the many mines for which West Lothian was and is renowned.

There is an exciting opportunity to provide some social history allied to scientific background and perhaps a discussion could be held with the Scottish Railway Preservation Society and West Lothian History and Amenity Society with a view to making the locomotive more of an informative and interactive visitor attraction.

The Courtyard

The exterior looks attractive with its flower beds and manicured grass. By comparison the yard looks drab. Despite the fact that the 'Owl and the Pussycat' has closed there is still some signage bearing its name, not to mention internet presence. I had intended eating at the Courtyard on my second visit but it was closed because the owner/keyholder had been involved in an accident that very morning. As a result there was at least one other party of four who also did an 'about turn' when I was there. I did eventually use the cafeteria which I found in keeping with its surroundings.

The public toilets seem functional, at best, but do not merit further praise. While disabled parking bays are few and far between, disabled toilets and targeted amenities are not signposted. Neither is there a first aid post (possibly deliberately ignored).

Childrens Play Area

In short, this is the 'jewel in the crown' and is by far the most popular area. It is used principally by family units at weekends and grandparents with toddlers during the week. The play equipment is rustic in style and designed to encourage cooperation with others in order to function at maximum advantage. At the time of my visits one piece of apparatus was out of use. The only thing missing was an overhead shelter for use should there be short showers.

Sports & Recreational Areas

Golf Course – while not overly busy there were usually golfers on the course. There is a good view from the first tee, adjacent to the courtyard, spoiled by wind turbine generators. Again, though, there is the opportunity to provide some educational information.

Driving Range – during my visits this facility was underused but I have seen it lit up at night with reasonable numbers

Bowling Green - not easily seen, really not used and must be a drain on human and financial resources. A re-think is probably required. Two activities which come to mind that require level surfaces are roller skating and ice skating but the lack of a 'clubhouse' might again be a problem. The external area has been improved by repainting the benches.

Orienteering – noticed a couple of markers but no sign of a participant or a jogger. Curiously, neither was there mention anywhere on how to take up this sport.

Overall these sporting facilities are crying out for greater public use and perhaps contact should be made with WLC Sports & Recreation and/or School ASCs with a view to encouraging better public usage. Without a clubhouse, the bowling green might no longer find patronage in which case the area could be put to better use.

A report on 'Open Space' suggested that cycling was a very popular pastime at Polkemmet. It states that this information was gleaned from "user-led responses to questions" rather than on site evidence. In fact, on three separate visits of two hours each I saw only two bicycles, parked in the courtyard while their owners drank coffee/tea purchased from the café.

Being so close to residential areas there will no doubt always be a requirement for sporting and recreational areas and perhaps it is time for some thought on what other sports/events Polkemmet can offer. With no financial outlay the setting is ideal for an annual cross country race (local athletic club) while some initial funding (WLC) could establish an annual 'Enchanted Forest' at Halloween.

There must be scope for 'quick wins' which will increase revenue flows while simultaneously retaining the countryside environment. All too often we read of funding gaps in the public sector to the extent that it probably behoves the authorities to consider income streams but, in this instance, hopefully without losing the integrity of the facility.

Country Walks & surrounding areas

Ideally there would be signage advising length of walks with an idea of time required. The walk down the side of the driving range is not particularly scenic and while wooded areas are natural, there is also the appearance of neglect/untidiness. As it passes alongside the River Almond there are benches on the other side of the water but no easy way to reach them.

Most walkers were accompanied by a dog but the paths did display what looked like dog fouling but there was not one depository in sight. While doing research on the internet there were some negative comments about dogs 'off the lead'. Taking advantage of the opportunity to express a pet hate, I do not understand why local bylaws can 'victimise' dog owners and allow horses to foul pavements and cats to similarly treat gardens!

For my part, I would have liked to see information notices beside different species of trees and at appropriate points on the walks some information on the wildlife that live in the general area. Those walking tended to be adults but with educational information being provided on the way there would be encouragement for kids to 'tag along' too. It might also assist the park rangers when dealing with organised groups.

Organised Groups & Family Groups

During my visits I did not come across any organised groups although I was informed that a Primary School group was visiting the Owl Centre on my last visit. I was keen to watch them at play/lunch and speak with them to obtain some feedback but despite waiting a while in the cafeteria did not see them leave. Such is the society we have now created (an

age thing) that I did not feel comfortable taking notes or approaching family units for comment. However, first hand knowledge is required if correct marketing strategies are to be put in place.

Polkemmet Ranger Staff & Office

Disappointingly, I did not see/recognise one park ranger during my first two visits. By chance I did meet one at Reception on my final visit and immediately realised by the black fleece that I could quite easily have missed them on previous visits.

Even now, I have no knowledge of where the Ranger Office is despite the fact that leaflets refer to it as a meeting place. None of the signs point there and when I requested this information from Reception and Cafeteria my responses were “at the front of this building” and “don’t know” respectively. No visible sign was apparent.

I have no knowledge of the relative Job Description or expectation but I would have thought of the Park Ranger as a key employee who should be readily identifiable, easily found besides being a frontline host, educator and guide. It may be argued that I should have sought one out but my view is that the Ranger is employed to maximise the visitor experience.

In short, a more proactive approach could be designed. That said, the staff I spoke with were very friendly. Also, there is need of a readily recognisable Ranger Office where rangers are based while not involved in specific organised tasks but, just as importantly, where leaflets and information are readily available.

Reception

This should have been my first port of call because here I found many of the answers and much of the information I had been seeking previously. There was a display on a notice board adjacent to where the golf rounds etc. were booked. It would have been preferable if I could have read the information material in a more private separate area so as not to distract the reception staff.

John R McCulloch
CLI Inspector
30th September 2015