

**Public**  
**Key Decision - No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Senior Ranger's Report.

**Meeting/Date:** Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 18th March 2022.

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment – Councillor M L Beuttell.

**Report by:** Senior Ranger.

**Ward(s) affected:** All Wards.

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### **Executive Summary:**

This report summarises the winter months, the progress and issues over the period and provides a summary of the future months

As a result of Covid year on year comparisons have fluctuated dramatically, but the site has remained open for public access and staff have worked on site at all times. The ways of working have changed according to government guidelines; however, much has nevertheless been accomplished.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Committee is asked to review and comment upon the report and progress made to date.

## **SENIOR RANGERS REPORT**

### **1.1 STAFFING**

- One senior Ranger and 2 Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties are run regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff.
- Kickstart Scheme: Both former kick-starters are now in full time employment in a field relevant to the work carried out with Countryside Services.
- Two new Kick-starters from October 2021 have required significantly more support so have been an additional pressure on existing workload.

### **1.2 VOLUNTEERS**

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- Some of the SEN volunteers have returned. And we have received one new SEN placement.
- Our next volunteer social event is being planned for May-not possible due to covid concerns in January.
- New volunteers trained to carry out a range of wildlife surveys.

### **1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT**

A small number of young people have caused issues and damage over recent months. The police are aware. One young person mistakenly left their wallet at the site of one incident and received a visit from the police. The identity of other offenders is not known.

Work continues to catch up on practical tasks that were impossible in lockdowns.

- Woodland work in new plantation has continued and been completed in good time and to a high standard.
- Significant issues have been caused with the rest of the planned woodland work due to HDC's tree officer informing us that the work could not take place as it conflicted with the Tree Strategy, despite being identified within the management plan. Having studied the Tree Strategy we have been unable to find any conflict so are working towards overcoming this misunderstanding. Some work has therefore been delayed by one year.
- Approximately 300 trees having been planted within the flood plain. Besides capturing carbon and producing oxygen these species will also help combat flooding and erosion.

- Repairing and maintaining paths affected by water damage over the winter.
- Hedge laying at the Christie Drive Balancing Pond.
- Continued winter bird surveys to build a solid set of baseline data. This will inform future site management.

### **And Looking Forward...**

- Installing new pictorial meadows
- Spring maintenance of park furniture such as benches, way-markers and fences.
- Continue with installation of additional way-markers and temporary interpretation.
- Installation of play equipment- delayed due to shortage of materials and then ground conditions.
- Planning application to be submitted for investment project in late spring 2022.

## **1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS**

- Established groups are all running well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners.
- Negotiations continue with the opportunity to offer supervised open – water swimming through Love to Swim.
- Agreed a new service level agreement to host a company providing Segway Experience Days.
- Service level agreements will be renewed by 12 groups in the spring.

## **1.5 SATELITE SITES**

All sites continue to experience increased usage and littering. We are planning to review the way that we collaborate with other services to provide the best management possible for the satellite sites.

### **Views Common**

- Some damage was caused to trees near the footpath, from the storms this winter, but safety works have now been carried out.

### **Stukeley Meadows**

- Bee orchids have returned! 39 plants have been found in the orchid area this year as part of a new survey we will carry out year after year from now on.

- We are planning to review the way that we collaborate with other services to provide the best management possible for the satellite sites.

### Spring Common

- Littering remains commonplace
- Willow regrowth on the wet meadow has been cut back and treated impede regrowth. This aims to recover the wet grassland.

## 1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects the weather Q2 was particularly wet for the summer.
- The dip in sales in Q2 may also be related to the number of other establishments reopening after lockdown.
- Inside seating still isn't being used very much due to people's cautious approach to covid recovery.
- Maintaining the "grab & go" system is more cost effective since the number of staff required is less than half.
- Massive increase in sale of hot drinks and crisps compared to other years, but the number of cakes has reduced which reflects the grab & go model.
- The gift shop has proven popular. Local amateur crafters donate 10% of their sales and so far, this has been £416 profit. Some customers are coming specifically for purchases, and it keeps people within the centre leading to additional coffees after they have looked at the selection.

### Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	20439 (to 27/02/22)
<b>Total</b>	<b>£169,896</b>	<b>£179,612</b>	<b>£172,683</b>	<b>£118,582</b>	<b>£151476</b>

## 1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTIONS

Events rely on the involvement of volunteers have been arranged according to demand and covid restrictions

- **Halloween interactive trail**, sold out within two weeks - 95 tickets sold
- **Santa's Grotto** – a Covid secure format permitted this to go ahead  
**531 Children (together with their parents/ carers / family - total 1400 others) all met Santa** via the magic tunnel to the north pole (see attached)
- **New Year's Eve party** – cancelled due to covid.

	Comment	Profit
Robin Hood	Interactive trail Restrictions only just lifted so hesitancy to book Poor weather	£385
Flix & Picnics	Poor weather (thunder) cinemas reopening Pubs etc reopened	- £501
Halloween	Interactive trail. Pilot event. Very popular and capable of growing	£445
Den building	Spontaneous family event	£100
Grotto	Extremely popular and very positive feedback (see attached)	£8900

### Coming up...

Laser rumble	Feb half term Easter holidays Summer holidays
Community Tree planting 400 Trees ordered	26 <sup>th</sup> March ???
Den building family rivalry	22/05 25 /09
Easter Sunday Funday	17/04
Robin Hood Interactive trail	12/06
Afternoon tea in the orchard	22/08
Halloween Interactive trail day-time	30/10
Halloween Night time nature walk Story telling- linked to Halloween	31/10
Guy Fawkes make the guys, Fire lighting	5/11
Grotto	Dec 2022
New Year's Eve Party	31/12/2022
Additional educational walks with experts	TBA

## 1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Through 2021/2022 Covid restrictions have again affected bookings. The room-hire budget was set as £11000. Income to date is £14,150.

- The Countryside Manager continues to organise the usage of the centre.
- Some reluctance to meet indoors has continued throughout the year.
- The type of meetings is variable with no real pattern emerging yet.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Bookings	204	339	408	412	42	124
Users	7253	11404	12965	12931	1033	3473
Income					£4572	£14150 (15/02/2022)

Advance 33 confirmed bookings with potential room hire of £3740 for the remainder of the year.

## 2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Work continues to progress the development project, aiming for preapplication advice with full planning permission being sought in May.

- Concept plans were received.
- High level costs revealed the impact of Covid, Brexit and the building of H2 have all contributed to increase in costs.
- CIL application has been made to mitigate these unforeseen increases
- Required surveys have been undertaken.
- Communication plan has been produced and an external organisation. engaged to work alongside the internal team to ensure timely engagement with all stakeholders.

	Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Pre application	Feb March 2022
	Play installation	March/April 2022
	Planning application	May 2022
	Tender process	Sept 2022
	Appointment of contractors	Dec 2022
	Construction phases	Jan to Aug 2023
	Completion date	Autumn 2023