

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Senior Ranger's Report
Meeting/Date:	Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 14th October 2022
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene – Councillor S L Taylor
Report by:	Senior Ranger
Ward(s) affected:	All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the summer months and provides an update on the investment progress. It covers the period March to October 2022.

The dry and hot summer had a significant impact on the site being cracked and dry and with no water in many areas, as well as some work parties being cancelled due to the extreme heat. However, the park has remained popular and fortunately no major fire incidents occurred.

Recommendation:

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

1. SENIOR RANGERS REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- The Park remains significantly busier since the Covid lockdowns this additional workload should now be accepted as a new normal for the site – and will probably increase further with the ongoing investment.
- The Assistant Ranger, has successfully moved on to a higher-grade position in HDC. This added pressure on the two remaining rangers
- A replacement Assistant Ranger started in mid September
- The Kickstart programme has finished so only one Kickstarter on site this summer limiting the evening hours available
- The extreme drought and heat this summer meant some work parties were cancelled and staff were careful to select tasks in the shade where possible
- Without the full-time support worker, a slight increase of workload for both rangers and countryside manager continues, but this was eased slightly with a college placement.
- A full time café team leader was appointed in August, to build up the team, to raise the standards and to ensure consistency of service ready for the new café.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work parties are at full strength and both Wednesday and Thursday have waiting lists.
- The Green Team volunteers continue, and this term are gearing up ready for Santa's Grotto. Over the spring they helped with a willow project to support the Godmanchester Mill Steps development and during the summer continued with footpath clearance and litter collection
- We held a volunteer social on 21st of May 2022- much appreciated after the covid hiatus

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

- Continued to install new fishing platforms, supplied by the Environment Agency (EA) and Brampton Angling Society. The approaches are still under construction. More are expected in due course.
- New way-marker signs have been installed using wood sourced as a by-product of the habitat conservation work carried out over winter. These have been very well received! The equipment was purchased by the Friends
- Wood sourced as a by-product of the winter habitat conservation works has also been used to replace gateposts and planks on a troll's bridge - saving a significant budget spend.
- Cutting back hedges after bird nesting season has started.
- Enforcing "No Swimming" rules, and the temporary "No BBQs" policy during the drought conditions this summer has taken a considerable amount of staff time.

And Looking Forward...

- Hopefully cutting the final bits of meadow if the tractor can be available and in safe working order
- Planting trees to replace those that died in the drought and to improve diversity in the glades and coppice plots.
- Planting more mature trees to provide shade in areas used for picnicking – these have been provided via our Friends group with a donation from a Islamic Community Group from Huntingdon.
- Winter felling works in the glade
- Helping with the set up and running of our successful Santa's Grotto event.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

Segway Events – £1000 for using the site. Good feedback from participants

We are currently looking into possibilities of a new joint venture with CCC water sports centre (based at Grafham Water) to provide boating and wild swimming in the Main Lake over the summer holidays and weekends in 2023.

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

Staff time on these sites has been put under pressure with the change in staff. Going forward the Countryside Ranger will take a more active role in Spring Common to try to drive this site forward.

Views Common

- Litter picking has continued
- We plan to cut back along pathways this Autumn/Winter

Stukeley Meadows

- Litter picking has continued.
- Grounds Maintenance have taken over the day-to-day practical works
- We have mown the Bee Orchid area this autumn in accordance with management for this species.

Spring Common

- Litter picking has continued.
- The Countryside Ranger will take a lead with this site, improving interpretation and community involvement, and undertaking more significant maintenance.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects the weather with a busy spring and summer- although with very high temperatures people wisely stayed away. We do not have staff to cover evenings which could have been profitable. The investment allows for longer opening hours
- Maintaining the “grab & go” system is more cost effective since the number of staff required is less, however people's expectations have changed and now we are reintroducing hot lunch options again.

- A new Lazzarro coffee machine has been installed. With quality coffee and hot food and mini café events, and deals, we hope this will encourage people to visit just for food throughout the winter.

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103	53,374
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	65,136
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	23,848	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£154,885	£118,510

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTIONS

	Comment	Profit
Easter trail	Interactive trail with “farmers and rabbits to find! £700 taken	£650
Robin Hood	Interactive trail through the woods £625 taken	£580
Den building	Family event, appeared on ITV news very popular with limited costs	£140
Minibeast and pond dipping	Sold out... weather dependant... very hot one day... raining another!	
Halloween	Halloween evening guided nature walk with rangers and soup in café afterwards Interactive trail. Pilot event. That is now sold out. Very popular and capable of growing – once we have done this trial	Nearly sold out £700 taken
Guy Fawkes	Family event fire lighting and guy making	Sold out £200 taken
Grotto	Tickets available 672 tickets sold so far 210 Last year 500 children over 6 days. This year we can expand the number of sessions if needs be	
Santa paws....	We are going to try a session for dogs and their owners!!	
New Years Eve party	Family event £25.00 per adult £18.00 under 16s Please join us!	

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Business is now back to and possibly greater than pre covid- although with only one room.

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre
- Advance 33 confirmed bookings with confirmed room hire of £3740 for the remainder of the year. Other dates are available which will be booked over the coming months

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
	2 rooms	2 rooms	2 rooms	2 rooms	1 room	1 room	1 room
bookings	204	339	408	412	42	148	91
users	7253	11404	12965	12931	1033	3951	2924
income					£4572	£18,035	£14,010

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Work continues to progress the development project

- Pre app was submitted in May as per schedule, but at the time of writing had not had formal written advice due to the issues within the planning service
- CIL application was successful so it is now a £3million project due to rising costs (there may still need to be more compromises on the proposed plan and we are actively seeking other funds)
- Meetings with informal cabinet, overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet have been held and cabinet formally gave the agreement to progress through the development stages on 21st September
- Communication plan has been followed through the installation of the play equipment (2 phases- one in July and one in September) and enabled collection of positive feedback and constructive comments
- Exhibition of proposed plans began 3rd October
- Submission of full application will be November
- Propose to go out to tender at the same time as a “stacked” procurement process to try to keep on track with timescales

Elements	Estimated Completion Date	Updated timeline
Pre application	Feb March 2022	Submitted May awaiting written feedback
Play installation	March/April 2022	Phase 1 completed July Phase 2 completed September
Planning application	May 2022	November 2022
Tender process	Sept 2022	Jan 2023
Appointment of contractors	Dec 2022	March 2023
Construction phases	Jan to Aug 2023	Summer 2023 to Spring 2024
Completion date	Autumn 2023	Spring 2024

PowerPoint presentation to show the progress so far will follow.