

**Public  
Key Decision – No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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

**Meeting/Date:** Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 21st April 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene

**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, financial year on year comparisons have fluctuated dramatically, but the site has remained open for public access. Usage is up and positive feedback continues to show how much visitors value the site

### **Recommendation:**

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

## **1. SENIOR RANGERS REPORT**

### **1.1 STAFFING**

- One Senior Ranger, one Ranger and one Assistant Ranger 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 has now concluded. Unlike last year, split shifts over the summer will not be possible without this additional workforce. So far unsuccessfully, attempts to start a “volunteer duty ranger” scheme are underway.

### **1.2 VOLUNTEERS**

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteers have returned to pre-covid levels.
- We hosted a corporate work-party from the Environment Agency who performed extremely well and installed a new path in Pine Avenue.
- We continue to build on volunteer wildlife surveys with a number of promotional days planned for the spring and summer.

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

The park’s management was all completed on time over winter.

- Woodland work in new plantation has continued and been completed in good time and to a high standard.
- Creation of a new glade in Bobs wood completed. This has also been planted up with native tree species to speed up succession as identified in the management plan and the need supported within the reports of the MKA biodiversity surveys.
- Creation of a large hibernacula and seasonally wet area in new glade completed.
- A total 700 trees have been planted including the glade, open spaces in the New Plantation, within the flood plain and around the Main Field. 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.
- Installation of the new path in Pine Avenue which will reduce footpath erosion and protect wildflowers from trampling.
- Hedge laying at the Christie Drive Balancing Pond, two thirds of which is now complete, the last third will be completed next winter. This creates habitat for insects and birds and is visually attractive for the local residents

- 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, including a new stretch of woodland flowers besides the new path in Pine Avenue.
- Spring maintenance of park furniture such as benches, way-markers and fences.
- Continued Installation of new way-markers. These were started last year and were very well received.

## **1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS**

- Established groups are all running well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain biking training, and Huntingdon Canoe Club.
- Fireflies, our resident forest school are investing in improving their area and have begun to take on more sessions.
- Service level agreements will be renewed in May for approximately 12 community groups

## **1.5 SATELLITE SITES**

### **Views Common**

- Cutting back around the edge of the site to ensure clear views of road signs took place before bird nesting season.
- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.
- Areas beside the path have been planted with trees as part of the A14 works.

### **Stukeley Meadows**

- Bee orchids are present again and will be surveyed this spring.
- Following our review of the way that we collaborate with other services, to provide the best management possible for the satellite sites, Grounds Maintenance have now taken on the management of this site except for the conservation of the Bee Orchids.

### **Spring Common**

- A more detailed management plan is being created.
- We have created links with Wild About Huntingdon and Huntingdon Town Council to involve more residents in the conservation work with the hope of creating work parties and potentially a Friends group.
- Further work to cut back and willow again to keep combatting the regrowth. This aims to recover the wet grassland. Last year's work seems to have improved the area, so we hope to build on this.
- Littering and anti-social behaviour both remain commonplace.

## 1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects a change in habits, people are using the café more and more. Some people found us in covid and haven't left, some people use us because we offer value for money.
- The price increase which was implemented in February for Q4 to stay in line with supplier prices.
- Employing a contracted team leader in August has proven an asset to the park, ensuring more consistency with the service and products.
- Increasing the menu to sit down hot dinners has again been welcomed, with people choosing the café as a destination for a treat under £10 during the cost-of-living crisis.
- Two coffee machines have been leased selling lattes, cappuccinos etc, this has proven very popular. Filter coffee remains available as a budget option
- People have returned to socialising indoors again, so increasing the capacity in the new café will be popular.
- The gift shop has proven popular taking £8253.32 this year, of which we retain 10%. This is providing a source of interest for users who now recognise the standards of gifts and come to site specifically to buy presents. The café benefits from people buying refreshments

### 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	63,015.85
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	77,723.12
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	50,612.89
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	20439 (to 27/02/22)	56,047.55
<b>Total</b>	<b>£169,896</b>	<b>£179,612</b>	<b>£172,683</b>	<b>£118,582</b>	<b>£151,476</b>	<b>£247,399.41</b>

## 1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

Events rely on the involvement of volunteers; we were lucky enough to have 36 Volunteers at Christmas including 5 Santa's which helped us achieve even more slots.

The events now sell out quite quickly as we have built a reputation with visitors knowing that we deliver a great event which is always customer focused.

Event	Card Payment taken	Cash sales	Outgoings	Profit
Bouncy Castles	£ 400.00	£ 600.00	£ -	£ 1,000.00
Easter	£ 600.00	£ 1,066.00	£ 50.00	£ 1,616.00
Robin Hood	£ 525.00		£ 50.00	£ 475.00
Den Building	£ 140.00		£ 4.00	£ 136.00
Pond dipping	£ 120.00		£ -	£ 120.00
Afternoon tea	£ 225.00		£ 80.00	£ 145.00
Halloween trail	£ 590.00		£ 50.00	£ 540.00
Nature walk	£ 96.00		£ 12.00	£ 84.00
Bonfire	£ 100.00		£ 15.00	£ 85.00
Santa Paws	£ 1,650.00		£ 30.00	£ 1,620.00
Santa	£ 12,920.00		£ 3,055.00	£ 9,865.00
Elf workshop	£ 320.00		£ 270.00	£ 50.00
	£ 17,830.00	£ 1,666.00	£ 3,616.00	£ 15,880.00

Based on the trial of some new events and the success of others, together with the growing team of reliable volunteers, some activities in 2023 will be accommodate more attendees.

Facebook continues to be the main media source used for advertising. Last week 8 posts reached 28,900 readers. There are 10,800 followers.

## 1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre, until it closes for the refurbishment. It will be managed then by the intended newly appointed commercial manager.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2033
Bookings	408	412	42	124	199
Users	12965	12931	1033	3473	6160
income	£27,769	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721

Figures are difficult to compare as there were 2 rooms and now only one, however income is approximately back to pre covid levels. Some groups are still asking about Covid precautions so it is right to keep the space to a maximum and minimise cancellations.

Prices were not increased in 2021/2022 or 2022/2023 to encourage people back. The main repeat users include police, NHS, and Cambridgeshire County Council. The Dogs Trust alone has generated an income to HDC of £4500

71 confirmed bookings with potential room hire of £11,060 have been taken so far for 2023/2024. It is likely the countryside centre will remain fully open for this financial year, with construction of the car park prioritised and footpath and countryside centre refurbishment following on.

## 2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Work continues to progress the development project, aiming to submit the full planning application late spring 2023. This is later than hoped with external contractors undertaking surveys and initial feedback from planning slower than anticipated.

Having reviewed the pre-planning comments, obtained surveys and recommendations from numerous external bodies such as the Environment Agency it is hoped the application will be a smooth process.

- Public displays were held in October, and plans were positively received. Suggestions and comments have been included in the revised plans
- External communications company has been engaged to ensure stakeholders are updated once planning approval has been received and construction begins
- Contractors will be prioritising the creation of the car park, before progressing to the café and pathway
- The park will remain open as much as possible with signed diversions in place where appropriate.
- A food trailer has been acquired so that for events, and if the café has to close, will still be able to purchase refreshments from an alternative source. This should increase income over the summer months as some people don't like to queue to long
- It will be necessary to purchase / hire a storage cabin whilst the countryside centre is out of use.

	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Estimated Completion Date</b>
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Pre application	completed
	Play installation	completed
	Planning application	Late spring 2023
	Tender process	Sept- November 2023
	Appointment of contractors	Dec 2023
	Construction phases	2024
	Full completion including spring planting	Spring 2025