

Public  
Key Decision - No

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**Meeting/Date:** Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group –  
21st July 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 spring months, the progress and issues over the period and provides a summary of the future months

### **Recommendation:**

The 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 Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties are run regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff

### **1.2 VOLUNTEERS**

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteers are consistent numbers. Some volunteers are trying different activities to increase their range of skills
- We hosted a corporate work party from Dovista of some 80 employees who performed extremely well. They installed more of this year's fence replacement, brought in the wood from the New Plantation, and installed some invertebrate habitat in the Wildlife Area.

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

The weather has played a significant part in the work undertaken this spring, with the very hot weather of June

- Meadows have grown well; end of summer cut is being planned.
- Park furniture such as benches have been refurbished in accordance with the management plan.
- Some potholes in the path around the Main Lake have been filled.
- Work is ongoing to create more waymarkers.
- Replacement of old fences, which are falling into disrepair, with new post and rail fences.
- Due to dry and hot weather watering of many of the new trees planted this winter has been necessary. This has been a significant amount of work.

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

- Meadow cutting should begin from Mid/Late July weather dependent and will continue slowly over the late summer and autumn, this will give flowers time to recover in areas cut before we cut the next area, providing a constant nectar source.
- New waymarkers will be installed.
- Further work will take place to replace more old fences.
- Damaged underline roof of the shelter by the café will be replaced as there is a possibility of installing a “dog-wash”. Negotiations are ongoing

## **1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS**

- Established groups are all operating well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain bike training, and Huntingdon Canoe Club.
- A group of local scouts held a weekend camp in our fire-pit area over the first weekend in July.

## **1.5 SATELLITE SITES**

### **Views Common**

- Cutting back along the path took place at the end of June
- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.

### **Stukeley Meadows**

- Bee orchids are present again and 33 individual flowering plants were counted in April.
- Grounds Maintenance have continued to carry out management of this site except for the conservation of the Bee Orchids.

### **Spring Common**

- We are making progress with the new management plan.
- We are looking into opportunities to improve interpretation on the site and encourage more community ownership.
- Groundworks are helping us with a project to restore the pond area.
- Littering and anti-social behaviour both remain commonplace.

## 1.6 CAFÉ

- The income across the café counter 2022/2023 was the highest ever year. Significantly there was a massive rise on usual quieter days and double income on some bank holidays etc
- Q1 of 2023/24 has seen an increase of just under £20,000 on the same period last year
- Leasing 2 new coffee machines has proved very popular and we now compete with the costa coffee that we use to miss out to.
- Re-introducing hot meals and listening to the customer needs has ensured that we are maximising our customer base during the cost-of-living crisis. We have become peoples treat, offering a plentiful meal at an affordable price.
- Recruiting a full-time café team leader has given the consistency that the café was lacking.
- Increasing dietary items such as Vegan, Gluten Free and Vegetarian has proven a success - again increasing our client base.

### Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103	63,015	82,592
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	77,723.	
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	50,612	
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	35,366	56,047	
<b>Total</b>	<b>£169,896</b>	<b>£179,612</b>	<b>£172,683</b>	<b>£118,582</b>	<b>£166,403</b>	<b>£247,399</b>	<b>£82,592</b>

## 1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

Interactive trails encourage exploration of the site and are different to guided walks so more appealing to families Easter trail was very popular an operated almost entirely with volunteers on the day  
Robin Hood is July 9<sup>th</sup> and Halloween trail will be in October

Indoor boot sales were tried this year and the first 2 in the wet and cold weather were much more successful, but the drier weather saw a fall in attendance. We will reintroduce them in the winter months- avoiding the very successful grotto which this year we hope to have more sessions available.

Trialling the inclusion of the pop- up café to keep people within the same building as the boot sale. This seemed to work well and did not take custom from the café- rather it gave an opportunity for impulse purchases

Event	Event Income	cost	Event profit	Pop up café (income over counter)
Easter trail	650	130	£420	
Indoor boot sale	132		£132	82
Dog show	551	65.00	£486	300

### Coming up...

Robin Hood Interactive Trail	July 9 <sup>th</sup>
Mini ranger days	Various dates throughout August
Tag archery with 1642	Various dates throughout August
Halloween Interactive trail day time	29/10
Guy Fawkes event – making guys, fire lighting	5/11
Santa's Grotto	Dec 2023
Santa Paws doggy grotto	Dec 2023

## 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	2022/2023	2023/2024
<b>Bookings</b>	408	412	42	124	199	43
<b>Users</b>	12965	12931	1033	3473	6160	1602
<b>Income</b>	£27,769	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721	£7470

Bookings with potential room hire of £10,265 are currently on the spread sheet with plenty of vacancies yet to fill in Q3 and Q4 of 023/2024. 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

Unfortunately, the actual application has yet to be submitted. The consultants struggled to get final survey reports from their subcontractors, however we do believe everything is now received

Communication plan has been produced and an external organisation engaged to work alongside the internal team to ensure timely engagement with all stakeholders

	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Estimated Completion Date</b>
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Pre application	Feb March 2022
	Play installation	March/April 2022
	Planning application	July 2023
	Tender process	Oct 2023 2022
	Appointment of contractors	Dec 2023
	Construction phases	2024
	Completion date including spring planting	Spring 2025

**HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2022/23 OUTTURN AND 2023/24 BUDGET AND FORECAST**

	2022/23 Outturn			2023/24 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Management</b>						
Staff	108	111	3	112	113	1
Running Costs	23	47	24	34	33	-1
Income	-15	-32	-17	-15	-11	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Countryside Centre</b>						
Staff	28	19	-9	29	5	-24
Running Costs	18	12	-6	31	26	-5
Income	-22	-59	-37	-11	-47	-36
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>-16</b>	<b>-65</b>
<b>Café</b>						
Staff	57	74	17	65	121	56
Running Costs	65	106	41	90	106	16
Income	-155	-200	-45	-170	-200	-30
<b>Total</b>	<b>-33</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Total Hinchingsbrooke Country Park</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>-29</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>-19</b>

**Comments on Variances**

**2022/23**

General increase in running costs for the HCP management. Increased sales from the gift shop contributed to the increase in income.

Countryside centre room hire income has recovered to outpace pre-covid levels. Income from various events run throughout the year. Countryside support worker role was vacant during 22/23 which saw a large drop in employee costs. Low running costs.

Café income budget was increased in 22/23. There was an increase in the café income which was offset by increase in catering supplies cost. This extra footfall also saw an increase in employee costs.

**2023/24**

Budgets we realigned for 23/24, so the expectation is that the HCP management unit will be around net zero.

We are forecasting that the room hire income will continue to be strong in 23/24 as it was in 22/23. Countryside support worker role is expected to remain vacant during 23/24 which will see a large drop in employee costs.

The new café staffing structure has been put in place which has increased the employee costs in 23/24. Currently forecasting that the income/expenditure trend will be match 22/23's outturn.