

# Senior Ranger's Report

September 2019 – March 2020

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## STAFFING

Staffing levels have remained constant with one day a week covering the Nursery. This has put pressure on the workload particularly noticeable with chainsaw work – which is more common over the winter and has been needed in response to the recent storms. Chainsaws cannot be operated alone so some safety work has had to wait for enough staff and volunteers to be in. Some hazardous trees have been cordoned off with barrier tape to reduce the risk to the public.

The nursery is formerly being transferred to Godmanchester Town Council from 31/03/2020.

## VOLUNTEERS

The two weekly work-parties have continued and numbers are buoyant with an average of 86 volunteer days per month. The Green Team volunteers attend site regularly during term times.

## HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

Since the September meeting, Rangers and Volunteers have been making good progress on several jobs. In addition to the park management we've been very involved in assisting with the Halloween and Christmas Events.

The following tasks have been completed:

- Finish cutting the wildflower meadows and creating habitat piles
- Installing a Forest Schools area at Brampton Village School
- Assisting with fruit tree pruning at the Community Nursery
- Cutting back around the balancing ponds on Dartmoor Drive and Christie Drive
- Assisting with the Halloween Event
- Decorating the countryside centre for the grotto and New Year's Eve Party
- Assisting with the Christmas Grotto
- Winter orchard pruning work at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park
- Hedge-laying around the orchard
- Refurbishing the Apiary area with new fence and roofing
- Replace damaged signs on life buoys around the Main Lake
- Tree safety works

We have not processed felled wood as we have more than we were able to sell and use in the Countryside Centre this year. We already have a split and seasoned supply for next year, and a felled but not split supply for future use.

We have now been granted a felling licence so will be able to hit the ground running next year, making an early start to accommodate work needed for the Christmas events.

Looking forward we intend to carry out the following tasks before the next Senior Ranger's Report is written.

- Finish hedge-laying
- Replace the bridge in View's Common with a culvert (as it's showing signs of damage and may soon become unsafe)
- Resurface worn areas of path – particularly around the Main Lake, near zebra crossing and south of countryside centre
- Refurbish and repair park furniture in accordance with the refurbishment plan
- Begin mowing amenity grassland areas and grass paths
- Assist with preparation for and running of Spring and Summer Events
- Plan and lead 6 ranger guided walks.

### **COMMUNITY GROUPS**

We have continued to work closely with a number of community groups:

- **Fireflies Forest School** have continued to be very popular despite the wintery weather. We are currently exploring opportunities to work together to provide some shelter for them that is in keeping with the forest schools ethos.
- **Park Run** has had to cancel a couple of days due to the very wet weather, but attendance has been high despite the weather when the event has run.
- **Huntingdonshire Beekeeper's Association** have been very busy during the apiary's closed season with refurbishments. The planned grand opening date is 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

### **SATELLITE SITES**

Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Spring Common have been regularly litter picked. We spent some time cutting back willow in Spring Common to keep compliant with our Stewardship obligations. We also visited Stukeley Meadows to cut back some Cherry trees that were blocking a pathway. This is mown by Grounds Maintenance team, so this is ready for them to start the annual mowing regime in spring.

### **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE**

A positive year with some new users and a predicted total income approximately £4,000 over budget.

12 room bookings to the value of £4,756 have been paid in advance for 2020/2021. This money will be carried into next financial year.

There are 184 bookings already for the next financial year with a revenue of £12,685.00.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>Countryside centre bookings</b>	204	339	408	412
<b>Countryside centre number of users</b>	7253	11404	12965	12931

## CAFÉ

We reported that Q1 and Q2 were extremely successful however Q3 and Q4 have been badly affected by the weather. Significantly long periods of wet or windy weather have reduced footfall and therefore café customers. Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February – Storm Ciara – and took only £42.20 and Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February – storm Dennis only £163.00. Income generated during half term was lower than that.

	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 2020	% of last year
Quarter 1 April - June	£55,681	£45,005	£53,687	+ 8,682
Quarter 2 July – September	£52,600	£51,962	£64,650	+12,688
Quarter 3 October – December	£33,364	£38,896	£29,348	--9,548
Quarter 4 January - March	£28,249	£43,749	£18,676 to 23/02/2020	
<b>Total</b>	<b>£169,896</b>	<b>£179,612</b>	So far <b>£166,361</b> (budget is £155,000)	

To address this, work is progressing to increase income in winter in a variety of ways by having OAP days and introducing Friendship café. Whilst initiatives like this can't change the weather, on days of generally low customer numbers such as Mondays this may create a small but regular group of customers.

Looking ahead for the summer, we are aware that we lose custom as service is slow with only one till. We are currently looking at a transformation bid of £10-£15K to change the flow of the café and increase the self-serve layout. The business case suggests we could bring in an additional £3,000 to £5,000 over the summer holidays by adding one extra till. We are intending to change the type of food served with a new fast cook oven (similar to those used in Greggs) so we can reduce staff numbers but continue to meet customer requests. This is all relevant, even with the plans to redevelop the countryside centre into a larger purpose-built cafe as it will be at least 2023 before the building work is completed.

## Events

The café supervisor formerly took responsibility for events in November and has certainly made a positive impact. In December there was Santa's Grotto and Breakfast / Hot chocolate with Santa events.

Over the 4 days of the grotto some 468 children attended including 2 specific sessions for children with additional needs. It takes a significant amount of work to build the grotto and set the scene, so in 2020 we will host the grotto every weekend in December extending the number of sessions. There will also be an evening for just adults with mulled wine and choirs singing and an evening for babies under 12 months who only need the photo opportunity.

New Year's Eve party was fully subscribed and well received by everyone as a family event - people have already tried to book for 2020!

These December events saw a profit of £7,000.

Looking ahead, Ranger led guided walks, Easter activities, a Robin Hood event in June, Emergency Services Day in July and a Food and Drink festival in September are all being organised together with a Mothering Day lunch and Big Sunday Brunch on Father's Day.