

Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Senior Ranger's Report

Meeting/Date: Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group –
21st October 2021

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Operations &
Environment – Councillor Mrs M L Beuttell

Report by: Senior Ranger

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the spring and summer 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:

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 and 2 Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties have been able to continue working without interruption from lockdown restrictions.
- Kickstart Scheme 2 young people have benefitted from this with one going on to gain full time employment within HDC
- Additional hours covered in recognition of increased usage ensuring a ranger has been present on site from 8:30 to 19:30 during the summer holidays and at weekends in the summer time.
- The Café Supervisor has continued to work flexibly helping with ranger tasks and practical work where possible.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are now working at full strength
- Some of the SEN volunteers have returned.
- First volunteer social event since the lockdowns occurred on the 2nd of September
- 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 but as yet, no action has been taken

With the return of the volunteers and two extra Kickstart personnel we have been able to begin catching up on things that were difficult to do during lockdown and catch up on jobs that were overdue.

- Replace out of date fences in various locations
- Mowing amenity grass areas and grass paths (in a very fast growing season).
- Assist the Huntingdon Bee-Keepers Association with refurbishing and reopening the Apiary
- Installing and maintaining various sports pitches on the amenity part of the Main Field.
- Installing additional benches around the café to facilitate well spaced and well ventilated seating for our growing number of visitors.
- Repairing and maintaining one third of all benches and park furniture on the site (all furniture is maintained every third year as a minimum).
- Repairing and maintaining paths
- Constructing new log stores.
- Embellishing the new Forest Schools Area

And Looking Forward...

- Complete the cutting of wild-flower meadows and creation of habitat piles
- Completion of new fishing platforms on the Main Lake
- Begin the winter tree works in the New Plantation, Bob's Wood, and the Hazel Triangle
- Lay part of the hedge around the Christie Drive Balancing Pond
- Plant more wetland trees around the Main Lake

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all running well with increased membership reported
- Zigzag runners have booked the countryside centre on a monthly basis for the next 12 months
- Love to Swim have put in a proposal to regular sessions of supervised open water swimming

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

All sites continue to experience increased usage and littering

- **Views Common**
Increased cutting back on the underpass along this path and have been supported by a community volunteer who has carried out some litter picking
- **Stukeley Meadows**
 - Significant increase in littering
 - Wildflower Meadows managed to encourage the return of bee orchids
- **Spring Common**
 - Littering and other forms of anti-social behaviour remain commonplace at this site.
 - The Meadow has been cut for hay, under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.
 - This winter we will again cut back and plug the willow to continue to recover the grassland.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects the weather with a better spring and a wetter summer
- The dip in sales in Q2 may also be related to the number of other establishments reopening after lockdown.
- Maintaining the "grab & go" system is popular reducing queues and is more cost effective since the number of staff required is halved.
- The gift shop has proven popular. Local amateur crafters are being encouraged to develop their skills and business acumen.

- Seating inside will be available for the winter, however people are still being cautious and it is used as previously.

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Quarter 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103
Quarter 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350
Quarter 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	
Quarter 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£98,453

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTIONS

- Events have been arranged within COVID guidelines and numbers been restricted accordingly, relying mainly on the involvement of volunteers.
 - **Outdoor cinema** was not profitable this year. The weather forced cancellation of 2 events and ticket sales were significantly down on last year, when we were the only site organising events. A loss of £964 was recorded
 - **Robin Hood interactive trail** - 84 participants
 - **Den Building Competition** spontaneous trial event 5 teams (30 people)
 - **Halloween interactive trail**, sold out within two weeks - 95 tickets sold
 - **Santas Grotto** – a changed format to remain Covid secure still with the key features of festive fun in a theatrical and magical way
There are 84 slots advertised over 4 days @ £20 per ticket with a potential £6720, If they fill we will increase the number of days
 - **New Year's Eve party** family event with maximum 80 people

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Through 2020/2021 Centre income rooms and the budget was £23,000 so income was 20%

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre to maximise income and minimise costs in the uncertain times
- There is still a nervousness amongst some organisations about indoor meetings
- The user demographic is changing
- 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	87
Users	7253	11404	12965	12931	1033	1607
Income					£4572	£6,900

Advance 92 confirmed bookings with potential room hire of £9446 for the remainder of the year.

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Covid has had knock on delays in unexpected ways. Timber is a premium item so the play equipment that was expected in autumn, will not now be installed until spring

NCS property consultants were appointed in June and a Project support Officer appointed in August.

The project outlines are currently being clarified and specialists engaged to ensure fluidity in the project.

Site visits have been made by:

- landscape architect
- engineers
- planning consultants
- Service consultants
- Surveyors undertaking topographical surveys

The detailed design work for on-site options is well underway with an outline timescale in progress, due for finalisation shortly.

Some dates have been amended due to challenges presented by current economic and global issues resulting in materials delay in manufacture

Enhancement of play offering has progressed well with installation agreed for Spring of 2022.

Communication strategy will be live and activated Spring 2022.

	Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Signage and Interpretation	Spring 2022
	Destination Play Areas	Spring 2022
	Pathway Improvements	Summer 2023
	Sculpture Trail	Spring 2022
	Cycle Route improvements	Summer 2023
	Car Park Improvements	Spring 2023
	Countryside Centre Alterations	Autumn 2023