

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT
A presentation from the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period April 2024 to June 2024

Meeting: Hinchingsbrooke Liaison group
Date: 12th July 2024

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene

Report by: Senior Ranger

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

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.

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 occur regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff.
- We are now hosting a summer intern Conservation Ranger Student Intern post who started working with us on 19th June.
- The restructure to merge Open Spaces and Countryside teams is progressing.
- In the bid to become a sustainable and service. There are no mandatory redundancies.
- The Countryside Manager will retire in August.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteers are consistent numbers.
- Weekend Volunteering is continuing- with opportunities for others to help.
- There are regular expressions of interest from potential new volunteers. These are being managed by our newly appointed Volunteer Coordinator.
- We hosted a corporate work party from the Environment Agency who helped repairing the parts of the path around the Main Lake that have been worst affected by the floods earlier in the year.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

We have had a successful year for winter works which started the spring work in good position

- Mowing and strimming of paths and amenity grassland areas.
- Surveys are ongoing including: bioblitz, reptile, butterfly and orchid. Orchid data is in and shows noteworthy increases and decreases in different species of wild orchid – these may be linked to weather.
- New fences have been installed around the carpark to replace old ones that were falling into disrepair.
- New interpretation panels have been installed including new signs in the fire pit and to interpret the work done to preserve Wild Service Trees.
- Work is ongoing to create the new waymarkers.
- Maintenance of park furniture is ongoing.

Looking Forward...

- Continue to mow paths and amenity grassland areas.
- Completion wildlife surveys and park furniture maintenance.
- Cutting wildflower meadows from 15th August.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all operating well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain bike training, BRJ junior runners and Huntingdon Canoe Club which all address the needs of physical and mental wellbeing.

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

Views Common Footpath

- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.

Stukeley Meadows

- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.
- Grounds Maintenance continue to carry out management of this site except for the conservation of the Bee Orchids.

Spring Common

- Regular mowing of paths and litter picking are ongoing.
- Work continues in accordance with the new management plan.

1.6 CAFÉ

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103	63,015	82,592	90,307 (to 26 th June)
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	77,723	92,307	
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	50,612	61,852	
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	35,366	56,047	48,476	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£166,403	£247,399	£285,227	£90,307

- The café income figures have seen an increase again.
- Regular liaison with company reps, and negotiation over prices ensure we get the best value for the products bought in.
- Mobile Pizza van, (initially purchased to be used when café is out of commission during the construction works) is being trialled as a semi-regular feature. This offers a second outlet for drinks and ice creams – reducing café queues in busy times - but also offering an alternative choice.

In June the café and pizza van combined, achieved its highest ever daily take of £3021. Some 330 sales transactions occurred compared to the

previous maximum of 286 Sales will continue to be monitored looking at trends and impact.

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

HCP prides itself on hosting activities that are inclusive for all and have a great community outlook. Whilst there is often a seasonal theme, the activities change. For example the last few Easters have had an interactive experience with volunteers playing the role of characters. This year was a paper-based trail looking for clues

This year so far, organised events have included;

- Bushcraft, Pizza masterclass, Cupcake decorating;
- Inflatable days throughout the summer adds a different dimension for children;
- Unlimited Crafts – offering indoor activities on wet Bank holidays;
- Bark in the Park –focused on dogs, arranged in collaboration with Cromwell Vets.

All these events received positive feedback throughout.

These events are led by the events manager but supported by an amazing group of volunteers.

Coming up...

Mini explorers	July and August
Wild about Nature tots	August
Wild About Huntingdonshire Festival	September
Halloween Trail	October
Guy Fawkes and Fire lighting	November

Wildabout Huntingdonshire (28th and 29th September) is a very large collaborative event with local residents community groups and businesses. Activities and displays will be throughout the Country Park and it is focusing on the corporate objectives

- Improving quality of life for local people
- Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations

The main aim is to highlight everyone can make a change and make a difference in their own lives and to the local environment.

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- Business support officer arranges the administration of the countryside centre. The countryside manager continues to oversee the day-to-day usage with support from onsite staff.
- The organisation of the countryside centre is likely to fall under a hospitality manager and commercial manager within the new structure.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Bookings	408	412	42	124	199	118	28
Users	12965	12931	1033	3473	6160	3559	952
Roomhire	£27,769	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721	£26,500	£7370

1.9 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The planning application will be resubmitted in summer 2024 when the BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) reports are completed, and the new submission will address the concerns raised in 2023. BNG is raising the needs for project reviews and some adjustment to original plans to minimise wildlife disturbance.

Key Project Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Research for business case by PSC including stakeholder consultation	Completed Winter 2018
Public consultation	Completed 2018 to 2019
99-year lease agreed with CCC to 2121	Completed Summer 2021
NCS property consultants appointed. Project manager appointed	Completed Summer 2021
CIL funding agreed	Completed Spring 2022
Pre-Application	Submitted Spring 2022
Biodiversity Audit	Completed Spring 2022
Play Installation	Completed Autumn 2022
EPC	Completed Autumn 2022
Topographical Survey	Completed Autumn 2022
Stakeholder and public consultation	Completed Autumn 2022
Pre-application feedback	Completed Winter 2022
Building Condition Survey	Completed Spring 2023
UKPN Electrical Survey	Completed Spring 2023
Tree Survey	Completed Summer 2023
Ground Condition Survey	Completed Summer 2023
Planning application submission	Completed Summer 2023

Stakeholder and public consultation	Completed 2023	Autumn
Application withdrawn	Completed 2023	Autumn
Address comments and objections	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake desktop archaeology investigation	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake bat surveys	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake newt, water vole, otter surveys	Completed	Spring 2024
Engage with UKPN to process electrical upgrade due to their 12-month lead in time	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake flora and vegetation surveys	Expected	summer 2024
BNG report	Expected 2024	Summer
Planning Application re-submission	Expected 2024	Summer
Tender Process	September- 2024	November
Appoint Contractors	Expected 2024	December
Construction Phases	2025	
Full Completion, including Spring Planting	Expected	Spring 2026