

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	HEAD RANGER'S REPORT A presentation from the Head Ranger on park activities for the period November 2024 to April 2025
Meeting/Date: DATE.	Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group 25th April 2025
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Councillor Simone Taylor
Report by:	Head Ranger
Ward(s) affected:	All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the winter months, the progress and issues over the period and provides a summary of the future months.

Recommendation:

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

HEAD RANGER'S REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- Two Rangers and one Assistant Ranger are based at Hinchingsbrooke typically working Mon to Fri.
- Weekends are covered by Weekend Wardens. The site is covered every weekend.
- 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 volunteer numbers are consistent.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

Winter works have been carried out successfully, despite another mild and wet season, we have been able to complete all the planned works in good time. This has included the thinning of oaks in the Oak Plantation which will increase light to the woodland floor and help develop a more complex woodland structure, benefiting wildlife and visitors.

- Meadows were cut over Autumn and Winter.
- The tern raft has been covered over to prevent Black Headed Gulls colonising it before the Terns arrive.
- Trees identified as hazardous by the Arboricultural Team have been felled and the wood used to create habitat piles.
- Support has been given to the events team in constructing and tidying up after the Christmas events.
- A coppice plot in the New Plantation has been cut and a dead hedge constructed to protect coppice stools from deer damage.
- The hazel triangle has been coppiced and the stakes used for hedge laying.
- The winter pruning of the community orchard has been virtually completed and reduced to an appropriate height and shape. Some large walnut trees still need attention. Going forwards, it should be possible to have more community volunteers involved in the maintenance.
- Snowberry – a non-native invasive species has been removed from the site again and regrowth will be tackled after bird nesting season.
- Thinning works have been carried out in the Oak Plantation.

Looking Forward...

- Installation of interpretation features such as waymarkers.
- Continuing to install more, new and improved, post and rail fencing to replace the old design which is starting to fail.
- Maintenance of park furniture such as picnic benches
- Supporting the events team with the Preparing and running of easter holiday events.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

Established groups are all operating well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain bike training, and Huntingdon Canoe Club.

1.5 CAFÉ

	2023/24 Outturn			2024/25 Provisional Outturn		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actuals	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Staff	65	114	17	163	139	-24
Running Costs	90	131	41	123	159	36
Income	-170	-228	-45	-191	-296	-105
Total	-15	17	32	95	2	-93

HDC has continued to see strong growth in the café income which has led it to outperform the budget again in 24/25. We have seen inflationary increase in the operational expenditure but due to the increase in income it is likely that the café will be a small cost to the council in 24/25.

1.6 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

November 2024 to April 2025

Guy Fawkes Making	Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd November
Grotto	Saturday 30th November to Monday 23rd December
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 9th January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 16th January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 23rd January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 30th January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 6th February
Frostbite Races (HBK)	Sunday 9th February
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 13th February
Easter Trail & Crafts	Friday 18th April

Event Overview and Purpose

Between November 2024 and April 2025, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park offered a rich and varied programme of events, continuing its role as a hub for community wellbeing, seasonal celebration, and environmental learning. These events were designed to cater to a range of age groups, with a strong emphasis

on family-friendly engagement and nature-based experiences. Highlights from this period include:

1. **Guy Fawkes Making (2nd & 3rd November):**
 - a. *Purpose:* A creative hands-on activity allowing families to mark Bonfire Night by crafting traditional effigies, encouraging intergenerational participation and cultural learning.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* Engaging, family-friendly craft activities in a safe and welcoming setting.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Informal feedback suggested high levels of enjoyment and repeat interest in seasonal craft activities.
2. **Grotto (30th November to 23rd December):**
 - a. *Purpose:* Delivered throughout the festive season, the Grotto experience invited families to take part in storytelling, craft, and meet Santa, all within a magical natural setting.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* A festive and memorable experience for children, with attention to detail and friendly staff.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Strong bookings and positive social media engagement highlighted this as a core seasonal offer with consistent local support.
3. **Wellies in the Woods (January – February):**
 - a. *Purpose:* This programme encouraged young children and their carers to explore the woodland environment in winter, developing confidence, social skills, and a connection to nature.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* Safe, developmentally appropriate outdoor sessions led by engaging facilitators.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Listed on external event platforms and supported by ongoing participation, this series remained popular and aligned well with early years outdoor learning priorities.
4. **Frostbite Races (9th February):**
 - a. *Purpose:* Part of the regional Frostbite League, this event was intended to welcome runners of all abilities to participate in a winter cross-country challenge. Unfortunately, the original date for the run was in January which was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions and unsafe ground.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* A well-managed, scenic route with a community-friendly atmosphere.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Park's selection as a host site reinforces its ongoing reputation as a valued venue for outdoor sport.
5. **Easter Trail & Crafts (18th April):**
 - a. *Purpose:* A celebration of spring designed to engage children through interactive trails and creative crafts in a woodland setting.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* Affordable, accessible activities suitable for young children and families.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Widely promoted via social media and community pages, the event drew a good number of visitors, contributing to increased footfall during the Easter period.

1.7 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- The business support officer continues to manage the booking process for the countryside centre.
- No bookings are being taken from September in readiness for the expected development works.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/25
Bookings	412	42	124	199	118	104
Users	12931	1033	3473	6160	3559	4173
Income	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721	£26,500	£35,413.80