

# **Senior Ranger's Report; March – August 2016**

## **STAFFING**

The new staffing structure for Countryside Services has been operational since the last committee meeting, with the Hospitality Supervisor position the last to be filled at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park (HCP).

Currently there are 3 Rangers based at the Park covering 7 days a week, 364 days a year (with 1 weekend a month covered by the Ranger based at the community nursery). One of these has a contract finishing in September 2017. However other Rangers will have duties reduced if the OVV responsibility reverts to County Council and grounds maintenance undertake more grass cutting.

The Hospitality Supervisor (Ian Jackson) covers the running of both the Countryside Centre – assisted by a part-time administrator - and the café. The café has welcomed many new casual staff during the year as others have gone on to university/college. Currently there is just one full time member of café staff.

In conjunction with Ian, the Countryside Centre is now looked after on a day-to-day basis by a part-time administrator, who also does much of the paperwork/finances for the park and admin assistance for the whole of Countryside. A new cleaning contract means we now have 2 hours of cleaning on weekday evenings. At quieter times they assist with cleaning the visitors centre but Rangers continue to help clean the centres after weekend use.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

March 2016 – August 2016

On average each week staff work alongside 6 days' worth of special needs adult placements, funded by CCC, as well as organising work for a 1:1 supervised placement (on Mondays & Tuesdays) and the Hunts. Regional College Green Team (10 special educational needs adults, with at least 2 supervisors, also on Tuesdays)

Approximately 12 fully independent volunteers on Wednesdays and Thursdays (including someone registered as blind), who contribute a significant proportion of the practical management of the site.

We welcomed 6 work experience placements over the summer months (from 6 different schools), giving them the chance to get their hands dirty and gain an insight into countryside management.

Finally, we hosted 3 volunteers who are looking to gain more experience – 2 were previous work experience placements, and one currently studying ecology at university.

## **WIDER DISTRICT**

Rangers from HCP continue to manage other sites, with several work parties organised for Spring Common, Stukeley Meadows, and Views Common. With U&C withdrawing their funding for staff, more input from staff and volunteers will occasionally be needed at Godmanchester nursery.

Countryside Services is also working to encourage local community groups and parish councils to manage pockets of land that previously involved staff time (Rangers will help produce risk assessments and safe working practices, provide training, as well as access to tools). Initially this

will include a community pond clearance in Fenstanton with the parish council, and in Godmanchester with the local In Bloom group.

Huntingdon In Bloom entered Hinchingsbrooke and they awarded the park a certificate of recognition to acknowledge the different volunteer groups and individuals. It is hoped the park can enter as an individual site again in the future.

## **PARK MANAGEMENT**

Over the spring and summer the wide ranging role of the Rangers focusses on the visitors from litter picking and emptying bins, interacting with park visitors – answering queries, dealing with first aid incidents, training people to use the electric wheelchairs and even organising ‘lost child’ searches. This year we have struggled to keep up with the rate of vegetation growth but the main practical tasks were mowing, strimming and hedge-cutting.

Unfortunately, we have also suffered small scale acts of vandalism, in particular to the fence around the play area and one of the new outdoor shelters. Several unauthorised camping groups have been moved on and with the excessive heat many swimmers were informed of the dangers from Weil’s Disease as they exited the water! We also discovered and removed (in conjunction with the police) 2 cannabis plants found growing in our woodlands.

With help from other Rangers a small outdoor shelter next to the café was created for use as a second serving area over the summer. It will provide a focus for events in the future, such as our Santa’s Grotto.

Huntingdon Parkrun have organised a successful fundraising campaign, to provide an external defibrillator– the unit will be ordered and installed in the coming weeks.

We provided training for 6 regular volunteers on the use of strimmer/brush-cutters, which will significantly increase the vegetation management capacity of the team.

## **CAFÉ**

The café has been very busy over the summer months. At the time of writing (10 weeks into Q2) the café’s income over the counter is up £10,000 in comparison to the corresponding period from the last financial year.

There was also a record day for the café on 24<sup>th</sup> July when we took £2,400 (over £600 up on the previous one-day record.) Both of these were in conjunction with Active Lifestyles sports taster day and this year was also the hottest Sunday of the year!

Ian removed some internal seating, introduced a simplified summer menu and contactless card payment option to speed up the serving customers.

Analysis of food and drink profit margins has occurred and a trial of selling bottled drinks is currently underway. Long term we will be considering different coffee and food items to appeal to a different market and potentially reduce staff costs

## **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE**

The activity levels and income have remained much the same over this period compared to corresponding years.

August is traditionally quiet so again held the art exhibition which was tailored more to the needs of our users this year. Again volunteers and Friends supervised the event.

Three adult workshops, including photography and basket weaving have proved both popular and another basket making course is organised for December.

Following a complete review use the pricing structure was reviewed and work is now starting in earnest to increase the occupancy rates.

## **EVENTS and ACTIVITIES**

17 school groups to the park, totalling 751 children visited but this is down by about 30% however a number of schools are visiting this term which is up on previous years. There were 3 pre-school Bear Hunts, with 50 individual children overall in attendance and again we hosted the Pre-School Learning Alliance – 3 Rangers leading many of the activities, with about 500 children taking part throughout the day.

3 family events over the summer holidays proved extremely popular – our 2 mini-beast days were attended by 250 children, plus about 200 adults, and a Pirates day nearly 300 children plus 250 adults. Facebook was shown to be the main source of information.

Froglife held 2 events at the park, looking to encourage adults and families to create more environmentally friendly gardens.

The new events policy is now in place and in future the events and promotions officer will be coordinating events across the district. This has provided a clear structure for pricing events and covers health and safety issues to ensure external organisers recognise their responsibilities.

## **FRIENDS of HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK**

The Friends funded footpath improvement works from the Christie Drive and gained some successful media promotion of the work.

The committee have also attended some events and activities promoting the work of the Friends and trying to gain new members

The Friends secured some financial contributions to fund the 'rewards' that were handed out to the successful navigators on our family Pirates Day.

Looking forward, the Friends are currently looking into establishing a bird box sponsor scheme to provide much needed nest sites raise some extra income. They have recently agreed to provide a new tern raft (similar to the very successful ones at Paxton Pits), and are considering other priorities for future funding bids.

## FINANCIAL POSITION

### HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK BUDGET AND FORECAST 2016/17

	Budget	Forecast	Variation
	2016-17	2016-17	
	£000s	£000s	£000s
<b>Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management</b>			
Staff	129	122	(7)
Running Costs	20	19	(1)
Income	(54)	(56)	(2)
<b>Total Country Park and Management</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>(10)</b>
<b>Countryside Centre</b>			
Staff	70	69	(1)
Running Costs	16	16	0
Income	(37)	(37)	0
<b>Total Countryside Centre</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>(1)</b>
<b>Cafe</b>			
Staff	45	55	10
Running Costs	51	52	1
Income	(133)	(138)	(5)
<b>Total Cafe</b>	<b>(37)</b>	<b>(31)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>(5)</b>

