

Senior Ranger's report

March 2017 – September 2017

Staffing

Over the summer months, existing part-time members of staff Amrita and Jayne filled the ranger position. A full time ranger has recently been appointed to a permanent position.

Senior Ranger, Jim Milligan left at the end of September and for the short term, Judith Arnold, (Countryside Services Manager) and Matt Hall (Ranger at Paxton Pits) will fill the responsibilities and Jane will again offer some additional cover.

This temporary division of labour is due to external consultants being brought in to take a look at Countryside Services, with any outcomes potentially impacting current staffing levels/positions.

Their remit is to consider;

- the future of Paxton and to advise whether this should go out to a Trust
- investment in Hinchingsbrooke Country Park with regards to becoming more commercial
- to take account of all the other sites around the district
- to acknowledge the services the countryside team provide to the local community.

Volunteers

Regular Existing volunteers

Currently HCP staff work with the following regular volunteers each week;

- 6 days' worth of SEND (Special Educational Need and Disability) placements, funded by CCC.
- Regular practical work parties on Wednesdays and Thursdays, averaging 12 volunteers a week. This is a roughly equal mix of retirees, and those working part-time or looking for employment.
- 2 days a week of a supervised 1:1 placement.
- Between 01/03/2017 and 30/09/2017 a total of 530 volunteer days have been worked based on this site alone

Along with practical tasks around the park, many of these volunteers also lead sessions for visiting school groups, and we would not be able to run a number of events throughout the year without their help.

We also host the Green Team twice a week, a SEND group of 10 adults and 2 supervisors from Cambridge Regional College (Huntingdon Campus), who work around the district on countryside management and horticultural projects. Their work is invaluable and to a very high standard.

Over the summer term we hosted 6 work experience pupils as rangers.

On Sundays, we host groups from the YMCA, with supervisors (who have had tool training at HCP) working with young offenders on tasks allotted to them by the ranger on site – usually 2 supervisors and up to 6 young people.

<http://theymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Youth-Justice-Service-Reparation-Booklet.pdf>

In the café we took were asked to take a pupil who had been excluded from mainstream schooling due to disruptive behaviour. She has proved to be a hard worker and were pleased to offer her a second day. Once we have a full quota of regular Rangers, she will be working one day outside too.

Community impact

Following his attendance at our tree planting event in April, a local retiree has been a regular weekly volunteer ever since. However, we have also had to turn down a number of potential volunteers over the summer as we have not had the staff levels necessary to train and supervise any new people.

We have also had 2 requests for references for previous volunteers;

- A retired volunteer moved away to be nearer his family and applied to be a support driver for those with mobility issues in his new locale.
- A seventeen year old completed a work experience placement at the park and subsequently volunteered with us during the summer holidays, recently applied successfully for a job with a local grounds work/horticultural firm.

An informal BBQ evening was organised in August as a thank you for all the efforts of the various volunteers who contribute to the park. Giant games were on hand, with volleyball proving to be the preferred form of entertainment on the night!

In October a formal thank you for ALL countryside volunteers is being held at Hinchingsbrooke and we are expecting to cater for at least 100 people

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park (FHCP)

The Friends have worked on a number of key aspects of their function in the past six months. This includes amendments and upgrades to the constitution, the first in over 10 years, that reflect the current role of the charity, as well as coming in line with many modern day requirements for applying for charitable grants and donations.

Funding

Over the last six months, the Friends have funded;

- £470 for a new gazebo, used at events by the Countryside team and associated Friends' groups
- £690 for repairs to the outdoor shelter in the HCP play area
- £960 to replace three fixed-stand stainless steel barbecues.

For the second time, they have also successfully applied for a tree pack from the Woodland Trust, allowing staff and volunteers to continue to improve the biodiversity of the park (in this case improvements to the area surrounding one of our recently revamped 'newt' ponds)

FHCP has also agreed;

- £2050 for repairs to the cableway (zip wire) in the HCP play area.
- £2,000 to improve fencing and wildlife monitoring
- £318 for ragwort forks

FHCP is currently looking into the logistics of running a JustGiving page, making it easier for people to donate to FHCP in general, raising the profile of the park and FHCP, as well as allowing targeted fundraising campaigns in the future. Below is how it appears for Milton Country Park;

<https://www.justgiving.com/CambridgeSportLakesTrust>

AGM

At the AGM in May, most members of the current committee agreed to stay on for another year. However, they also agreed that recruiting and retaining committee members was proving difficult, and extra focus would be put on this in the coming months including the development of information leaflets and recruitment forms..

A letter, penned by Councillor West on behalf of the Liaison Committee, was read out, with the Chairman and committee of FHCP expressing gratitude for the words of support it contained.

Finally, a talk was given by Roger Wood, publicity officer for Huntingdonshire Beekeepers Association (HBKA), which included a new promotional video showing the work of local beekeepers, including the importance of the apiary at HCP.

Huntingdonshire Beekeepers Association

HBKA lead elements of many school visits for pupils studying pollination and insects.

They provide honey from the 12 hives for sale in the café

Each year HBKA hire the Countryside Centre to run a successful course for new beekeepers

Each Sunday in the summer, at least 2 beekeepers attend the apiary and talk to visitors showing them the inside of hives and answering questions.

Park Run

Each Saturday between 9 and 10 am approximately 350 runners enjoy a 5km run. The café benefits from some buying additional drinks and the car park is filled with those paying to park (the overflow goes to the Hospital car park)

They have successfully fund raised to install a defibrillator outside the building, a bench at the top of the field and recently a group of members spent a day pulling ragwort. Following the success of this, they are keen to offer more practical support.

Park Management

Most of the work during this period has been maintaining and improving the park for all the visitors we get during the warmer months - cutting the grassy path and access points, cleaning all the signs, cleaning and treating the picnic benches and seating, and so on.

Other things of note included;

- Launching of the tern raft (funded by FHCP). Due to the unavailability of a boat and qualified helm, this did not occur until later in the breeding season. As such, we were not expecting any activity this year but within a few weeks of the launch, a pair of terns had made use of the raft

and successfully raised at least 2 youngsters (We will look into the possibility of tracking common terns in the future, as they migrate thousands of miles to the west coast of Africa each year).

- Repairs to both outdoor shelters, which were vandalised earlier in the year. This included getting custom made brackets built, to strengthen the side walls that were damaged.
- Installing new fixed stand barbecues (replacing the old), which are very popular with families and large social groups.
- Moving/improving the Public Rescue Equipment (life buoys and warning signs) around our waterways, in accordance with the district-wide water safety review that was carried out last year.

Wider District

- Weekly work parties were also organised to maintain various other sites around the district, such as Spring Common, Views Common and Stukeley Meadows in Huntingdon, with the main emphasis on keeping these sites to as a high a standard as possible over the summer months.
- The Huntingdon Freeman (who own the land on Spring Common) paid for contractors to do some clearance work around the spring head and old well, exposing the old (capped) well for the first time in a number of years.
- Quotes have also been sought, to replace the wooden footbridge on Views Common (between the hospital and police HQ) with an easier-to-maintain culvert.
- Also on Views Common, CCC and HDC continue to liaise over permanently replacing the kissing gates there (as it is a public Right of Way). This followed on from an incident in July of a calf becoming stuck (linked below is the press release – if you don't like puns, look away now). <http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/holy-cow-how-stuck-up-13386784>
- Finally, we are delighted to have been recognised in the recent Anglia in Bloom awards, as well as contributing to the success of Huntingdon. Huntingdon was upgraded to a gold award in the Large Town category, with special recognition of its floral displays, and alongside that, HCP was again recognised as one of four nominees for the best open public space award.

Countryside Centre

Work continues to promote the use of the Countryside Centre. This year has seen the continued diversification of the venue, which has included;

- A funeral ceremony for someone who was a regular dog walker at the park
- A charity fashion show
- Regular Friday morning bookings for a children's dance and play group

Advertising the CC

A decision was made to increase hard copy advertising – HCP and Countryside Centre will be included in two editions of Simply Huntingdon (18000 circulation). In September - an article to promote the Countryside Centre plus an advert to promote upcoming events and café. In November - an advert to advertise the forthcoming craft fair and santa events.

- Twitter account for Countryside Centre. A Twitter advertising campaign was run for 1 week to get more followers.
- Promotion on Facebook has increased significantly.
- Feather flags, table cloth, banners: On Weds 18th October, we will be exhibiting at Peterborough Chamber of Commerce B2B exhibition to sell the venue as a meeting place and as a corporate away day venue.

News

- As a trial, five children's craft workshops for just 1.5 hours were run over the summer holidays and generated the same income per session as hiring out the building. More will be held in half term when the building is traditionally underused.

Countryside Centre financial predictions

- Total income for room hire for 2017-2018, including confirmed room bookings, currently stands at £16,013.78. This is virtually the same income for room hire as the whole of 2016-17. There is still 6 months left of this financial year to hit the target.
- 75% of the target for room hire income has been achieved. With 73% of target for refreshments and 74% for buffets.
- Number of users of the building as increased over the 3 years but it does not necessarily mean an increase in revenue.
- Revenue for buffets has increased the most dramatically with 2017-18 buffets already exceeding previous year's whole revenue.

Events, activities and promotions

Events and activities

The number and type of events held at HCP continues to expand. As well as many groups making regular use of the park, such as parkrun and St Ives Cycling Club, we have also expanded on the number and type of other events (some of which are included in the section relating to the Countryside Centre);

- Between Easter and the summer holidays, we hosted 20 different schools at the park, who took part in activities ranging from pond dipping, fire lighting, orienteering and meet the bees, as well as a number of activities tailored to suit particular curriculum needs.
- Our summer holiday sessions of pond dipping and mini-beast hunting (run almost completely by volunteers) were kept to 4 half day sessions, and they proved as popular as ever, although numbers were down due to the inclement weather affecting 3 of those sessions.
- A number of adult workshops have been held in the Countryside Centre, including textile workshops and willow weaving
- Bark in the Park – a successful event, in partnership with Cromwell Vets and St Ives Dog Training, that debuted in May and contained a 'best of' show, dog agility, and many dog

themed stalls and information points. Due to its success, the partnership between Cromwell and St Ives will be repeated next year.

Active Lifestyles

The work we do in partnership has continued to expand. We hosted the Health and Wellbeing festival (rebranded from Sports festival) at the end of July, which had just over 500 people take part in a range of sporting and outdoor activities. This number is down on the previous year, with the rebranding (due to grant money requirements) and subsequent later-than-planned promotion, and fewer sports clubs taking part having an effect. However, this was an ideal number in terms of park infrastructure – last year nearly 1000 people took part and the café, car park, and toilet facilities struggled to cope.

One Leisure Active Lifestyles (OLAL) organised;

1. Regular PEDALS adaptive cycling sessions. April 2017 to DATE – 79 attendances. April 2016 to March 2017 – 221 attendances. A significant drop in attendances since the £3 per person charge was introduced. (NB adapted cycling usually closes for the winter, except for special one-off requests)
2. 4 activity roadshows averaging 10 children per session. These were beneficial as HCP gained lots of interest from users of the park and in some cases gained a few bookings on the day.
3. 12 private PEDALS for Spring Common School on a Wednesday afternoon where they
4. Used of the adaptive cycles for bigger events such as the Carers Trust picnic and Leonard Cheshire's corporate day with Barclays Bank. Other activities took place such as Battle Zone Archery to help with promotion of these activities at One Leisure facilities.
5. OLAL have also ran Bubble Football and Battle Zone Archery in conjunction with Alex's NHS corporate day booking (Alex West, Countryside Centre Administration Officer). 37 NHS employees took part in the activities led by OLAL staff, Volleyball and Football was even organised at the end of the day as an additional activity.

One of the best reasons for running activities at HCP, especially during the warmer months & school holidays, is the amount of interest we gain from members of the public who are already utilising/enjoying/visiting the park. This has helped to further promote OLAL regular sessions and/or promote other activities, such as; One Leisure Xtreme Parties, activities in the Summer Fun Brochure etc.

<http://www.oneleisure.net/SiteCollectionDocuments/Summer%20Fun%202017%20web.pdf> “

Promotions

Our Facebook page continues to be a great promotional tool, as well as allowing people to be kept up-to-date with the goings on around the park, and any upcoming events. Since the start of March, the number of people signing up to the site has increased 15% – we now have over 4300 likes.

The statistics gathered can also be used for future marketing campaigns – for example 56% of all followers are females in the 25 – 44 age bracket.

<https://www.facebook.com/hinchingbrookecountrypark>

Along with samples elsewhere in this report, we have received positive press releases for a number of other activities, such as;

- A tree planting day in April, combining trees obtained by FHCP with volunteer efforts from local scout groups and HCP's Wildlife Watch group;

<http://www.huntspost.co.uk/news/volunteers-plant-hundreds-of-new-trees-in-country-park-1-4962852>

- A recent article promoting the honey produced by HBKA here at the park;

<http://www.huntspost.co.uk/news/the-huntingdon-made-honey-that-s-starting-to-create-a-real-buzz-about-town-1-5185602>

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2016/17 OUTTURN AND 2017/18 BUDGET AND FORECAST
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	2016/17 Outturn			2017/18 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	129	110	-19	102	108	6
Running Costs	20	27	7	21	23	2
Income	-54	-27	27	-53	-16	37
Total	95	110	15	70	115	45
Countryside Centre						
Staff	70	65	-5	43	47	4
Running Costs	16	15	-1	17	16	-1
Income	-37	-34	3	-41	-42	-1
Total	49	46	-3	19	21	2
Café						
Staff	45	65	20	57	60	3
Running Costs	51	54	3	60	67	7
Income	-133	-140	-7	-143	-161	-18
Total	-37	-21	16	-26	-34	-8
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	107	135	28	63	102	39

Comments on Variances

The 2016/17 actual variance is mainly due to the commuted sums income not reaching the expected budgeted level.

The 2017/18 forecast variation is again mainly due to Commuted Sums income. This year the forecast is being shown differently (we are reporting gross income and expenditure so this income, which is just a transfer from a reserve, is excluded) if the budgeted commuted sums income is transferred from the reserve the net variance will reduce to £7,000. However, currently only £4,000 and not £32,000 is expected to be drawn from reserves.