

Senior Ranger's report

September 2017 to March 2018

Staffing

The temporary staffing structure at HCP has been working well over the winter months. The way in which the Rangers work has been changed to give them a lot more structure and firm leadership throughout each month. They have responded well to the changes by improved communication and closer team work leading to greater efficiency. As a result, a successful amount of winter work has been achieved under Matt Hall's guidance (2 days a week)

Judi Arnold is still filling the other part of the senior rangers role. Sam James and David Robinson are both full time with Jane Moore providing an additional 2 days a week support

Brian Gardner from Godmanchester Nursery has been off work sick since December and this has stretched the team even further to supply cover to the nursery 2 days a week (forcing us to close the rest of the week)

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

Many of the regular volunteers have stayed the same since the last report and are broken down as follows:

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.
- Efforts have been made to increase the numbers of volunteers on Wednesday and Thursday work parties - now have up to 9 on a Wednesday and 7 on a Thursday. Once these "new recruits" have settled in, another recruitment tranche will be encouraged to help us manage the increased workload throughout the summer months.

We still 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. By giving them stand alone projects for which they are entirely responsible they have managed their time and workload well.

2 Duke of Edinburgh Award students have started at weekends helping with daily tasks which counts towards the voluntary aspect of their award.

On Sundays, 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>

The café continues to employ a number of staff and volunteers who keep the café open every day.

Community impact

An increased amount of requests for wood products (logs and materials) from local schools has been received in the last few months – including logs to Ermine Street Academy in Alconbury Weald.

Willow wands needed to build a tunnel for the miniature railway in St Neots Riverside Park have been cut from a sustainable plantation on the country park. These stumps will regrow and produce a good source every couple of years.

In October a formal thank you for ALL countryside volunteers was held at Hinchingsbrooke. over 100 hungry volunteers enjoyed a fish and chip supper

We had 3 small work parties from Huntingdon Job Centre throughout October. One team came along to HCP on a Wednesday and spent the day tidying up the verges around the ornamental lake.

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park (FHCP)

Whilst still enthusiastic the chairman and one of the committee members will be resigning at the AGM in May for personal reasons

A recruitment campaign has been made through leaflets in the café and personal approach to regular users to encourage new committee members to join. This has had a slow response so far!

Huntingdonshire Beekeepers Association

HBKA lead elements of many school visits for pupils studying pollination and insects in the summer months and 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. This has sold out. And this year for the first time a “beekeepers experience day” will be offered

In February 2018 the beekeepers officially opened the ramp into the apiary’s viewing room, enabling all visitors to get in and view the hives.

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)

Park Management

The first half of the winter was spent getting many of the annual management jobs done and back on track including cutting back willow regrowth, path sides and managing a few patches of neglect.

In addition to the annual jobs, we have also:

- Cut and processed at least 2 years' worth of logs from the new plantation
- cutting back vegetation and removing fallen trees and rubbish from the north shore of the ornamental lake. This has really opened up the shoreline and made it a much more appealing path to walk.
- Updated the hazel coppices back into a rotation
- Begun to lay the hedge around the Orchard- but did it as a training session for volunteers who now have the skills to do this to a few other hedges around the park.
- FHCP have agreed to fund the replacement fencing around the newt pond near the café and a new hedge will be planted to increase the habitat value for the Great Crested Newts
- Both Sam and Matt attended Shuttleworth College as students. Recently a work visited to gain some experience in park management. The plan is to do this on a regular basis and emphasise how students can progress their careers.

Wider District

- The Commons have been managed on an 'as and when' basis over the winter because of staffing pressures. We have a large work party planned in for W/C 5th March to clear up around the spring head and down to the pond at spring common.
- The bridge at Views common has been replaced and is now safe again.
- The kissing gates on Views common still haven't been replaced.
- HCP, as well as other HDC countryside sites have applied for the status of a Green Flag Award. This status is viewed as a positive accreditation by visitors and will add to the local and wider reputation.

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 rolling weekly booking for the Dog's Trust every Wednesday night with additional dates for other sessions they want to run
- A term time weekly booking for Hunts Youth Theatre every Tuesday night with additional dates for performances
- Catering events: The Countryside Centre now works more closely with the café staff to create events for the public. Following the success of New Year's Breakfast Buffets, a monthly breakfast buffet is now taking place. In addition to that there is Mother's Day Roast Dinner and a Father's Day Barbeque. The implementation of being able to sell tickets online and advertise the link via Facebook has enabled a whole new market to be explored.

Advertising the CC

- Promotion on Facebook has increased significantly adding 100 more followers over the past month and a total of about 4500.
- Instagram is now also being used for the park. A children's competition was launched via Instagram as a method of increasing followers which was successful.

News

- Using the online booking system Ticketsource has enabled sales and more targeted marketing. We are more able to closely track our advertising identify when more publicity needs to be done in the run up to an event. We have had three events sold out so far.
- There is much more focus on using the Countryside Centre in school holiday times with Children's craft events proving to be popular. Feedback has been extremely positive. Four events were held over February half term which generated an income of £529.25. There are more sessions planned throughout the year to maximise revenue and provide useful and relevant services/activities for visitors during this time.

Countryside Centre financial predictions

- Rolling booking of Dog's Trust every Wednesday evening will generate an income of £3750.00
- Huntingdon Youth Theatre group is looking to move their rehearsal and performances space to the Countryside Centre permanently. They will use the space every Tuesday evening in term times and then have performances throughout the year. This will generate around £2500.00 revenue not including part of the performance income.
- New Year's Breakfast Buffets at the Countryside Centre were successful and generated £1100.00 of profit. The feedback was very positive and these are now being rolled out monthly on Saturday mornings. A conservative estimate suggests that £4300.00 revenue can be made over the year in addition to café sales.
- Christmas Craft Fair made £1174.00 for stalls, café sales and Green team reindeer sales so this event will be organised again

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);

- Buffet Breakfast event over New Year's Day and New Year's Eve. This was set up in the Countryside Centre and run with volunteers and staff. Over the two days 242 breakfasts were sold.
- Breakfast with Santa – this was sold out and we took a few drops-ins on the day which took numbers to 58 people. Volunteers and staff made the day successful with very positive feedback.
- Seasonal Halloween and Christmas Children's Craft sessions also took place with both proving popular. We also ran a Pokemon one in an endeavour to make activities relevant to what young children are interested in to maximise footfall.
- Hunts Youth Theatre staged a play 'Beauty and the Beast' at the Countryside Centre over four days for their Christmas event.
- A recent article launching the new ramp in the Apiary. The Huntingdon Mayor and Councillors were invited along and it will be in the Hunts Post this week.

<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	93	-9
Running Costs	20	27	7	21	29	8
Income	-54	-27	27	-53	-19	34
Total	95	110	15	70	103	33
Countryside Centre						
Staff	70	65	-5	43	31	-12
Running Costs	16	15	-1	17	19	2
Income	-37	-34	3	-41	-37	4
Total	49	46	-3	19	13	-6
Café						
Staff	45	65	20	57	68	11
Running Costs	51	54	3	60	63	3
Income	-133	-140	-7	-143	-152	-9
Total	-37	-21	16	-26	-21	5
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	107	135	28	63	95	32

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 £1,000. However, currently only £4,000 and not £32,000 is expected to be drawn from reserves.