

Senior Ranger's report

February 2018 – September 2018

STAFFING

There have been further (temporary) reductions in staffing at the park. One of the Rangers resigned from both posts in August, leaving Hinchbrook in September.

There continues to be an Acting Senior Ranger three days a week.

Another Ranger, whose main role is at Godmanchester Nursery, has been on long term sick leave since May. Fortunately, a volunteer, has taken responsibility for the day-to-day running of the site, leaving the Rangers to support bigger jobs such as mowing, log splitting and event preparation.

The staffing structure within Countryside Services is now at an all-time low. The effects of this are starting to show and the extra pressure that the Rangers are under is taking its toll.

VOLUNTEERS

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

- 6 days' worth of SEND (Special Educational Need and Disability) placements, funded by CCC.
- The Wednesday and Thursday work parties have steadily increased in numbers, now averaging nearly 20 per week. Volunteer motivation and retention is currently very good, helped by increased efficiencies in the Ranger's organisational skills.
- The SEN volunteer who was with us on a two days a week of supervised 1:1 placement finished in early summer to pursue other opportunities. This placement could carry on if someone expresses an interest.

Many of these volunteers have continued to support the Rangers by leading school groups and helping with event organisation, most recently, and notably, the Emergency Services Day.

The Green Team continue to work to a very high standard and are still invaluable to the site.

The YMCA continue to use the park as a site from which to run reparation sessions for young people.

The park had 5 different work experience placements towards the end of last school term. They all worked well with all the staff and volunteers, showing initiative and enthusiasm.

WIDER DISTRICT

Godmanchester Nursery had a very successful open day in June. The day featured the sale of some of the Nursery's products taking over £1000, with local stallholders and charities also on site. The Apple Day is on 20th October, and is again going to need additional support from HCP rangers due to Brian's absence.

A member of staff from HCP spends part of their week managing other sites in Huntingdon, including Stukeley Meadows, Spring Common and Views Common. They are now spending some

of that time working with a supervised SEND group from HRC, completing management tasks on Spring Common. Spring Common has recently received a grant from the Co-Op Funeral in Huntingdon for £1000. This money has been spent on 2 new benches which will be installed within the next month.

PARK MANAGEMENT

- Grass cutting throughout the summer was minimised by the hot weather. This was a huge relief to staff and volunteers on site!
- Maintained the general appearance of the park which contributed towards the award of a Green Flag award in July 2018. Hinchingbrooke also now has a Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence (for the consistent achievement of high ratings from visitors). The park also hosted the judging day for the 'In Bloom' competition, for which Huntingdon was awarded gold.
- Continued processing timber for wood products such as charcoal and log sales. Charcoal sales over the summer have been steady. The Rangers hope to increase revenue from sales of these products in the next year.
- Continued to improve the infrastructure of the park including the replacement of fencing in several locations.
- Two regular volunteers have spent some time making items such as picture frames and shelves for the café.

FRIENDS OF HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK

- The Friends funded 6 new sunshade umbrellas for the benches around the café and the fencing around the newt pond near the café.
- Several committee members resigned at the AGM, so a new committee has been formed with a new chairman and 2 new members. They have identified some projects and continue to seek funding.
- The Friends have agreed to act as receiver of money donated by other groups. Parkrun has successfully received £1200 to replace some bins and the canoe club has applied for money to make repairs to their porta cabin. These groups continue to help with practical tasks too

CAFÉ

The café income is currently about £5,000 down over the 2 quarters. This is entirely due to the weather differences in April and May. This year was very wet compared to 2017/2018. (Note these are figures over the counter and do not account for staff time or food costs etc).

The Café Supervisor resigned in May and despite external advertisements neither round of applications lead to a new one being appointed. This meant over the summer months the Countryside Coordinator was again covering weekends, staff management and financial aspect of the role. An existing staff member has now formally accepted the post and started on 10th September.

COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Occupancy and users

Comparing occupancy rates between 2017 and 2018 over the same period of March and September, in 2017 there were 171 bookings and 2018, 257. This is a 50% increase in the number of bookings made. In a similar way, numbers of users have also increased with 6842 users recorded in 2018, compared to 5037 for the same period last year. The number of users of the building has increased by 36%.

The last two weeks of September 2018 have been particularly busy. We have had 20 different groups, 7 of which have been over 60 attendees, visit over the 14 days with only Sundays remaining unused. The total number of people visiting over this timeframe is 1180. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays it is now a regular occurrence for the building to be occupied from 8.30am to 10.00pm.

From October to December, we have 82 confirmed bookings over 54 days.

Income for Mar to Sept

	Room hire
Mar – Sept 2017	11928.33
Mar – Sept 2018	14928.50

Bookings

This financial year, our revenue for confirmed bookings currently stands at £20,696.00. This is 90% of the target of £23,000. For the 2019-2020 financial year, revenue for confirmed bookings is currently £3657.50.

These figures have been achieved by a number of factors: quick response to enquiries; friendly customer interaction; building up relationships with repeat users; free onsite parking and positively managing customer requests.

Parking Services have implemented significant changes to car parking so all users will have to pay and display from October 2018. This may have an impact on bookings and it is to be expected that the revenue for the Countryside Centre and the number of users will decrease, while the parking revenue, will increase.

User demographic

The corporate bookings are still mostly public sector, with the NHS and Cambridgeshire County Council being our biggest users. The key here has been the variety of departments within these agencies that use us for block bookings every year. Recommendations from staff internally for hiring the Countryside Centre have also been instrumental in increasing bookings.

Moreover, we have a consistent number of groups who rebook every year: Probation Service; Alzheimer's Society; Parkinson's Society; HBKA; BRJ Run & Tri; Carer's Trust to name a few. The Dog's Trust hold dog training sessions every Wednesday evening throughout the year which brings in a revenue of £300.00 per month. Similarly Huntingdonshire Youth Theatre also use the building every Tuesday evening in term time and generates a yearly revenue of £2000.00.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

Emergency Services Day

On Sunday 17 August 2018 we held a large event at the park. With around 3000-4000 visitors, it was a great success. Police, police dogs, Fire services and fire dogs and about 20 other emergency services charities were in attendance. We also had fairground activities for children, Zorb balls, food stands and gift stalls. The Countryside Centre was multifunctional, with half the building as a café and the other half serving afternoon tea. Revenue from stalls etc was around £750.00, with café sales of about £2300.00



HDC hosting an emergency services event helped maintain HDC's reputation with the public and the positive feedback only improves the park's standing within the community.

The Countryside Support Worker and Café Assistant organised the event with the Rangers and 15 volunteers helping out on the day. It was a really good example of effective collaboration to deliver a high quality event with minimal resources. Holding events that create large revenue is something to be explored in the future, however, there is not the capacity with regard to staffing to manage more than one large event per year. The event was also important in establishing to the public that HCP can put on large events and manage parking. Building up its reputation is vital to ensuring that stallholders will pay a premium for a stall because they know that footfall will be significant.



It was also worthwhile as we have now built up partnerships with our neighbour school and hospital. [Comments on Facebook about the day:](#)

“Was a brilliant day, my son loved it! Thanks for organising.”

“Great turn out and the parking control worked”

“Great day! Very well organised!”

“It was a great event...the whole family enjoyed it. Thank you to all that gave up their time to make such a fun afternoon out for us all.”

Food events

New initiatives of Breakfast Buffets on the last Saturday of the month, Mother's Day Roast (sold out) and Father's Day Barbecue (68 tickets sold) have been very successful. Being able to hold events managed by the café but run in the Countryside Centre has meant we are able to increase café revenue.

Children's activities

Pond dipping and Mini beast hunting days were run over the holidays. Usually very popular, the extreme heat, meant that numbers overall were slightly down. However, six summer craft sessions held indoors were arranged. 'Make your own' workshops proved popular with two Fairy Garden workshops selling out, as well as Dragon and Medieval Castle workshop. A Pirates Treasure Hunt saw 125 children taking part with volunteers enjoying the day dressed as very convincing pirates!

An external supplier organised multi-sport sessions and Zorb sessions for children held.

Facebook

Our Facebook page continues to be a great resource for promoting the park, as well as all the events and activities that take place. We currently over 5000 followers.

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