

SIR GEORGE STAUNTON COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MONDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2011.

PARK MANAGER'S REPORT.

Contact: Gordon Gardner (Telephone: 023 9245 3405).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The following report updates members of the Joint Management Committee on developments at the Park since the previous report presented in November 2010.
- 1.2 Visitor numbers are down on last year (-9.4%) This can be accounted for by the 'free' entry into the pay zone at the Water Festival in 2009. This year however, we charged half price entry. There also seems to be a considerable difference between the under 3's - we are 26% down compared with last year.
- 1.3 Costs are behind last year. Staunton would have been in a better financial position had we not received another large utility bill (£6,000 of back dated gas bills), on top of the waste water payment of £9,000. This has made it difficult to control budgets and in order to avoid this happening again, we have done a survey of all utilities and are pretty confident that there will not be another discrepancy.
- 1.4 To break even and make a small surplus, we need to make £150,000 by the end of the financial year. This goal can be achieved, as this is the average income generated over the last five years. To do this, we have put a number of revenue generating ventures in place to give us the best chance of achieving this. We had expected to be in a better position, but with poor weather between October and December and the lacklustre performance of the membership database offer, we have some work still to do in order to realise this.

2 Marketing

- 2.1 With our Marketing Manager, Sam Holly, on maternity leave we have support from Gemma Court, Marketing Assistant from Manor Farm for two days a week. In Sam Holly's absence, I am taking a proactive role in marketing.
- 2.2 To help meet these challenging revenue targets, Staunton will be offering 25% off membership to all members that need to renew by the end of June 2011. Members will need to take the offer up by the end of March 2011.

- 2.3 We are pushing out a number of day ticket offers. These will be competitively priced. Rather than one child free per adult, we will market these new vouchers as one adult two children free. This offer is still slightly less than the normal adult two for one but will seem a lot more generous than other visitor attraction offers.
- 2.4 The joint ticket offer that we are doing with four other HCC visitor attractions is due late February to start on the 1st of March. I have managed to get Sir Harold Hillier Gardens to join in - this will add real strength to this offer.
- 2.5 Whilst the offers are competitive, Staunton will also be seeking free publicity wherever possible, whether that be on the back of paid for offers, or via Facebook and Twitter. Alex Hansler is now managing our social media content, so rather than the scatter gun approach we have used up until now, we will be able to take advantage of this important marketing tool and really target our customers.
- 2.6 To help promote us online we will be sending out offers through Facebook, Twitter, Hantsnet and other websites. Marwell Zoo have tested 'pushing' offers, meaning not only will the recipient get the offer, but they are also able to pass it across to their friends.
- 2.7 Keeping it local. We will be doing advertising in the Leigh Park news. If these offers work, Staunton will circulate advertising around other local papers.
- 2.8 I have made contact with the Head of Culture and Communities at HBC. There is so much scope for mutually working together. Staunton already does some great work in the community and could do more, for example Havant also has access to the area. This goal could be realised either through direct local advertising or pinning our name to worthy projects.
- 2.9 The new dedicated Staunton events leaflet will be out this week. The message is concentrating on getting the public to use the pay zone to take part in a range children's low cost activities. The garden team have a number of workshops.
- 2.10 The Country Christmas Event did well. We generated over £13,000 in revenue excluding secondary spend. We sold just under 700 tickets in total. Although the event worked well, it was difficult to manage and due to the cold was uncomfortable for the team. We had a few issues with pricing but these have been taken into account for next year.

3. Countryside

- 3.1 Since the last JMC we have purchased a SCAG mower for £4,000. Over the life of this piece of machinery, Staunton will save a great deal on costs - £5,000 per year. We have also secured a short term 3-6 month lease on a Ford ranger pickup. As it had finished its lease with another team, this enabled us to try it at less than the full rate in order for us to see how we get on with a single Cab version before we place an order.
- 3.2 There has been little progress on the restructuring plan for the ranger team. Authority to recruit forms and a business case has been submitted but (understandably) there has been a recruitment freeze. At the moment we are still covering with casuals but this is not ideal for either us or them.
- 3.3 HLS: Natural England are confident that we will receive an offer of an HLS contract within the next few weeks for a 1/4/11 start date. This is slightly reduced due to the current economic situation, which means the grant funding is for less than we had planned for with around £12,500 per year for 10 yrs and £11,000 of capital projects funding over the next 3 years. In some way, with the current uncertainties and staffing levels, it is not a bad thing as I have already over-committed my team by 25%.
- 3.4 The Rangers team have finally had IT installed. The Ranger team reduced the initial costs by digging and laying the communication cable - a saving of £2,000.
- 3.5 Our volunteer contributions are still high with two full time volunteers both from disadvantaged backgrounds. Both are performing well and developing work based skills as well as social and inter-social skills. We also have our regular dog walker's volunteers who come in every other Wednesday and help with our tasks and also undertake jobs they would like to see done themselves.
- 3.6 English Woodland Grant Scheme: Contracts are now signed which will bring us £2,000 a year for general management of our site (things we do anyway) and between £1,000-£3,000 a year for works for the next 5 years.

4. Operations and Facility Management

- 4.1 The tender process for the visitor centre upgrade and installation of new hand wash areas has now finished and Hi-tec property services of Fareham have been selected to carry out the work. We have had initial site visits with them and they are booked to begin work on the toilets straight after the February half term and then install the hand wash areas on the back of the visitor centre and in the children's paddock. The builders will be on site for 3 weeks and have assured us they will be as unobtrusive as possible. Once completed we will have brand new toilets in the visitor centre and

more importantly will meet the criteria of the E-coli audit recommendations.

- 4.2 Another recommendation from the HCC Health & Safety Risk Manager is to move the storage of hay / straw from the current location of the cow byres to the muck heap area. This will involve getting a new pitched roof on the concrete bayed area already in the muck heap. This will enable us to keep the fire risk from the straw / hay away from areas that customers will use and also away from animals. It will also provide the farm team with another centre barn to house animals for the public to see. We are hoping to get the HCC implementation manager to draw the specs for this project before he retires this year allowing us to keep the cost as low as possible.
- 4.3 The farm team have painted the rabbit barn which now looks much improved and the shop staff have also painted the cabin area. We are still looking to get the tearooms done as soon as possible. I myself have been assisting the gardens team with the decoration of more cast iron urns ready to be displayed in the walled garden this year.
- 4.4 We have been subjected to some vandalism of late with the large stone balls constantly being pulled from the gates of the park. The contractor has been asked to replace them by the historic buildings surveyor and hopefully they will remain in place.
- 4.5 We have received a number of new signs for the farm. These include information on how to feed animals, which ones cannot be fed and also general safety information including first aid and information about washing hands regularly. These replace the paper signs we have had around the park in the past and are more stable but have also been designed to be able to be moved depending on the movements of the animals.
- 4.6 All smart meters have now been fitted and we are waiting for property services to train us on how to get the information. They have been fitted to gas and electric meters.
- 4.7 We coped very well with the snow this year and did not have to shut the doors to visitors. We purchased 5 tonnes of rock salt in preparation and that along with great team spirit, allowed us to keep both the car park clear and most of the main paths and tracks around the farm. We have also had a number of burst pipes with the cold that have on occasions had water shooting across the courtyard, but thanks to Kier they have been repaired very quickly. We have also replaced small water heaters in the gardens yard and lagged a number of taps and pipes in that area also.
- 4.8 HCC access team have continued to support Staunton this year and have re-graded and re-surfaced one of the paths on the farm. They are also just

about to change the doors on the tea rooms to make the rooms more accessible for disabled people.

- 4.9 We have only had a few reported accidents of late. No major accidents and none reportable to the HSE. A number of staff have qualified or re-qualified for their first aid at work certificate this year improving the ratio of qualified staff on site with members of the public. The audit continues to be worked on constantly and is currently on 92% and progressing slowly but surely.

5. Farm

- 5.1 Sadly, Jess the Shire Horse has passed away. We knew there was an emotional attachment to Jess, but we were not expecting the wave of e-mails and letters expressing visitor's sadness. Facebook and Twitter led the way in allowing our visitors to share their memories of Jess. Staunton will be planting a tree to commemorate her and will be inviting members to come along.
- 5.2 There is to be a new courtyard pen and goat shelter/ climbing frame completed as a new feature and as an extra hard standing pen for use in winter.
- 5.3 Another project to draw the public in is a giant rabbit warren. This will be positioned in the children's paddock. Will be completed in time for February half term. This has been designed so as to allow our visitors to get closer to the rabbits.
- 5.4 After the rabbit warren, we intend to realign Jess's old paddock and renew all the fencing. The overall shape is not too different but we aim to remove the corner design to work with the American grounds proposals when we do that.
- 5.5 Work will soon start on the north paddocks - the proposed position of the new wallaby enclosure.

6. Education

- 6.1 The joint partnership with Havant and Highbury is progressing well. All the partners are now aware of their roles and are taking responsibility for make things happen. Education and the garden team have taken a key role in making progress. It has helped having the operations manager on the ground getting the issues dealt with.
- 6.2 We have just completed our first term of teaching the level 2 ELB diploma. Six students come to the Park most Thursdays and have been learning how best to manage a Country Park, working alongside the outdoor teams on practical tasks and developing skills to prepare them for work in a real job.

- 6.3 The students, all from various Fareham & Gosport schools, are part of a two year programme which will cover horticulture, forestry, animal husbandry and other environmental land-based enterprises.
- 6.4 Unfortunately we were unsuccessful with our application for Access to Nature. We were told that it was a very hard decision for the panel to make and we were a strong contender, but there was simply not enough money left to fund all the worthwhile projects. We are still looking for alternative grants and plan to continue with the Nature on Your Doorstep project, which seeks to fund staff to provide outdoor education for our 16 local schools.
- 6.5 During February half-term, Staunton, with funding from Aiming High, is putting on FREE events for disabled children and their families. Happy Bird-Day takes place on Wednesday 23rd February and will have lots of hands-on activities for children to turn up and take part in. There will be a storyteller, plus nest-box and bird feeder making workshops. This event has already been a real success – 50 families have booked.
- 6.6 Kerry Bailey has started work on a joint project to improve the windows in the Gothic Library. This will be done with local schools and a stained glass artist.

7. Gardens

- 7.1 There have been significant time delays in finalising the twin span poly tunnel. We have been waiting for the Secretary of State to sign. Plant sales have had a good year, but not having the new tunnel in place has put this income at risk. Although other work can be found, the partnership group (Havant and Highbury) may not be able to take part in managing plants for sale as there will not be adequate space.
- 7.2 In the Walled Garden, the new herbaceous border has been all planted up in October and November. We are just starting to see the first signs of growth coming through.
- 7.3 The garden team has been busy replacing some of the damaged edging board throughout the walled garden.
- 7.4 The outside border near the Gothic Library is going to be restored to the plants collected by Robert Fortune. A lot of work is still needed to eradicate tenacious weeds, so planting is expected to start next October.
- 7.5 Numerous improvements have been made to the Sensory gardens. These include replanting with herbaceous perennials, bulbs and shrubs. The improved space will also include art by local schools supported by 'Making Space'.

8. Retail

- 8.1 We have carried out an internal review of the gift shops. Although countryside products have performed well, gift lines have under-performed.
- 8.2 We have established that the current financial situation has had an effect but not all the downturn can be attributed to this.
- 8.3 Key points that were raised:
- Not opened consistently.
 - Lack of advertising and poor presentation of the outside of the gift shop.
 - A need to re-establish what the cabin/gift-shop stands for – Farm shop, countryside products, local crafts and selling products that have relevance to this property.
- 8.4 The shop team have already visited a number of high-quality gift shops with an aim to improving presentation and gift-lines.
- 8.5 Based on these visits the team have already carried out remedial work internally on the cabin. This has included painting and bringing in country style units.
- 8.6 As the farm and country products are an important revenue streams we have visited a number of local farm-shops and garden centres to find out where Staunton best fits.
- 8.7 The National Trust gift-shops have consistently performed well. I have invited their retail specialist to advise Staunton on whether we are focusing in the right direction.