

**HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.  
SIR GEORGE STAUNTON COUNTRY PARK.  
JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE.**

**Monday 16<sup>TH</sup> May 2011.**

**Item 7**

**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 Park Manager's Report presented on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011
- 1.2. Despite the difficult challenge to claw back a significant shortfall in the last three months of the year, Staunton managed to end up with a small profit. Although some budget figures in retrospect were difficult to achieve, the ground work is now in place to achieve excellent growth.
- 1.3. The team at Staunton have continued to develop further and maintain the standard of the attraction. 2010 saw a new membership package, the return of a proper border in the walled garden, an upgraded EPOS system and improvements made to fencing around the pleasure garden.

**2. Business**

- 2.1. Understandably there is a staff freeze across the HCC. I have been very pleased with how all the teams have performed with limited resources. As the visitor numbers increase and new attractions are installed, we will have to be very careful with how we manage the increased footfall.
- 2.2. During the 2010/11 financial year 119,424 visitors entered the Ornamental Farm and Gardens (including educational visits). This represents a slight increase in visitor numbers when compared with 2009/10 (increase of 200 visitors ). Comparison of past years in appendix 1.
- 2.3. Staunton needs to achieve much higher visitor numbers to meet our financial aims. When it was recognised that Staunton could be heading for the same issues as 2009/10, the management team took serious action to give Staunton a fighting chance to break even. Rigorous control over costs, a massive advertising and PR campaign, an invigorated education department, strong late sales from membership and a little luck – great weather in late February and March – all contributed to our success.

2.4. The principal reasons for the failure to achieve visitor targets are thought to be:

- A cold April and a wet August;
- Early resistance to the new membership package;
- The continued national financial situation
- Severe weather conditions from November to January.

2.5. Staunton currently has 3814 active Members. This is worth over £108,000. Check appendix 2 for a break down of figures. Although we did not achieve the membership target we still saw a 33% increase on 2009/10. I may have been overly optimistic about how fast Staunton could turnaround its membership fortunes.

From April 2011 Staunton will keep a monthly record of how many members we have. Not only will this help for better financial budgeting but also encourage the front desk team. I will present these figures to the JMC at each meeting.

2.6 Compare membership income against the previous years in appendix 3.

2.7 With better visitor number data from the new EPOS system, it will now be easier to produce budgets. This should bring into sharp focus estimations that could have been too difficult to achieve.

2.8 The new EPOS system was installed with little fuss – it has already saved time and helped reduce and in some cases completely remove some tasks. We are still learning so it will be a few months before we will see its full potential.

2.9 Staunton has had a fantastic start to the new financial year - we are on target to reach £110,000 in one month. Helped by the great weather but the real growth came from membership. Coming in at just under £20,000, there is a very healthy 37% increase on April 2010. Visitor numbers are looking good too, 23% increase on 2010. Check appendix 4 for the monthly visitor numbers – I'll present these to the management team at each meeting.

### **3. Gardens**

3.1 The new historically relevant Bow wall border inside the Walled Garden planted in Oct/Nov 2010 is now providing seasonal interest and colour. A wide range of bulbs have also been planted to add floristic interest and increase the longevity of colour.

- 3.2 This seasons Victoria `Longwood Hybrid` (Amazon water Lily) was planted on Good Friday. We are currently investigating methods of fixing the Amazon Lily interpretation boards to the inside frame of the Lily House.
- 3.3 Re-planting plans for the Regency Oval Garden are already in place for the autumnal planting in 2011.
- 3.4 Following a consultation with the much respected and prominent Garden Historian Susan Campbell, a new border reflecting the plant collecting of Robert Fortune will be realised for the autumn 2011 planting.
- 3.5 Various Garden/Horticultural Workshops are being advertised on leaflets throughout this season.
- 3.6 The partnership agreement between Staunton/Havant Day Services and Highbury College, under the guidance and instruction of the Horticultural Team, is progressing well and is on-going.
- 3.7 Plant Sales are displaying strong growth compared with the previous financial year total at £10,118. This is a great start to the new financial year with April achieving £1,491. We are expecting a delivery of new sales display stands soon.
- 3.8 The polythene tunnel planning application proposal has been granted permission from the Government of the West Midlands Office and liaison with colleagues in CCBS will define the current Hartley Glasshouse as closing on June 20 2011. As could be expected, there has been a slight increase in the cost since the first quotation in March 2010.
- 3.9 The Arid House refurbishment is well under way with the intention of using this space as a new attraction for visitors primarily as a Butterfly House.

#### **4. Farm**

- 4.1 Lambing has gone well, as planned the staggered approach to the births has extended our baby animal season. The Farm is also in the middle of calving the longhorns. With the age of the pure breed Longhorn cows we are in the process of breeding our own replacements.
- 4.2 Over all the farm performed well financially last year with a 5% increase on last year. The front desk team maximised sales of animal feed and changes to volume per bag has seen a 30% increase in revenue.

- 4.2 We are looking to replace Jess the shire horse as soon as possible. There are a number of options. One is to purchase at the Isle of Wight shire horse sale, the other is to purchase a mare in foal. There is one available in Yorkshire now for £2500.

## **5. Education**

- 5.1 School Stats - This month we've had over 900 children visit the Park, most of which have been doing "The Caring for Animals" topic and looking at the signs of Spring.
- 5.2 The Gifted and Talented Group (STAG) are learning about where food comes from with our Field to Fork session. (30 children from 6 schools in Leigh Park)
- 5.3 The Easter Holidays have been successful with crafts and activities. Over 1,400 people took part in face painting, crafts and Easter activities – 128% increase on last year. Next Easter we will be looking to enhance this further with a possible "free" Easter egg and with heavily promoting the Easter bunny angle.
- 5.4 A bid is being put into the Heritage Lottery Fund to work with school children to design stain glass windows for the Gothic Library - with a professional stain glass designer creating a window for the Gothic Library. The bid will also include a new interpretation for the Gothic Library.
- 5.5 Work is underway with designers to create a Water Zone in the sink shelter of the courtyard. Working with Portsmouth Water, it is designed to have the Wow factor to attract children and visitors to take a look and bring home the message of water conservation.
- 5.6 The Education Team are currently looking into becoming a registered Centre in order to deliver Animal Management courses to students from TPS (The Petersfield School) in September.

## **6. Visitor Services and Gift shop**

- 6.1 To help with visitor flow and improve shop sales, we have changed the Visitor Services area layout. Once this is completed we will begin work on improvements to the Farm Shop.

- 6.2 Due to limited staffing, the front desk team have had to become even more efficient at managing the visitor services. We've had to put different measures into place including prepping for the next day's visitors at the end of each day. Other staff have been on-hand to help where needed but most of the work has been carried out by the team.
- 6.3 Excellent work has been achieved in completely sorting out the membership database. In spite of the higher visitor numbers, the team has managed to keep up with the huge demand for membership. The front desk team take real pleasure in meeting sales targets and will not let an opportunity pass to sell a membership.