

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

Committee:	SIR GEORGE STAUNTON COUNTRY PARK JMC
Date:	MONDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2011
Title:	PARK MANAGER'S REPORT
Reference:	
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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 16th May 2011.
- 1.2. An excellent 1st third both in terms of visitor numbers and income generation. With 9.3% above budget and just under 15% over last year's visitor numbers Staunton has had a great start to the year.
- 1.3. The team at Staunton are performing well under very busy conditions with many staff having to work across different departments to plug important gaps.

2. Business

- 2.1. Tighter controls have been put in place centrally regarding the recruitment of staff. We have not managed to secure any new casuals but have managed to resolve this through carefully filling the gaps with our current casuals from education and our cleaning team.
- 2.2. We have managed to secure the continued services of Janet Chapman (Visitor Services). Janet has been doing a superb role in managing the membership which has seen vast improvements. The rangers team have a new assistant ranger on a 6 month contract to support Dave Paterson while he recovers from his operation.
- 2.3. All managers have been requested to review teams for possible re-organisation to see whether we have the right structure for Staunton.
- 2.4. So far this financial year 56,518 visitors entered the Ornamental Farm and Gardens (including educational visits). As outlined above this represents

a good increase in visitor numbers when compared with last year (an increase of 7342 visitors). (See Appendix 1 for more detailed information)

- 2.5. Although the figures are currently looking very good, June didn't perform well over all - some very busy days but poor weather ruined what could have been a good month. The rain continued into July, making it difficult to achieve targets, but improved at the end of the month with some good numbers.
- 2.6. Staunton has continued to control costs rigorously; we currently have a substantial surplus. This is partly due to utility costs from 2010/11 not appearing in this year and the catering tender agreement.
- 2.7. Staunton currently has 3771 active Members. This is worth around £106,000. (See Appendix 2 for a break down of figures) Numbers have risen but revenue took a slight dip from April; this is all connected to visitors not renewing their Culture All membership. Staunton membership sales are steadily back-filling this loss.
- 2.8. Staunton has had a fantastic start to the new financial year - we have already made over £207,446 in the first third of the year. Helped by the great weather in April and May, the real growth came from membership. Coming in at just under £20,000, there has been a very healthy 37% increase on April 2010, May at nearly £9,000 which is a 33% increase, but June with the lower visitor turn-out and pressure on Culture-all fell by around 30%. July saw a return to form with a 24% increase - £7,600.

3. Gardens

- 3.1. The new historically relevant Bow wall border inside the Walled Garden is looking stunning. We have had many admiring visitors commenting on the great improvements.
- 3.2 This season's Victoria `Longwood Hybrid` (Amazon water Lily) has had some first blooms. We have started to fix 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 The partnership agreement between Staunton/Havant Day Services and Highbury College is developing plans to move on to the next phase. The main aim is to greatly increase the availability of student places whilst improving life chances. An emphasis on producing products from Staunton's natural resources is at the heart of their plans.
- 3.5. 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 have more plants on display than ever before, with a wide range of varieties.

- 3.6. The polythene tunnel construction is underway and will be completed soon. All the initial work has been completed so we aren't expecting any further delays.
- 3.7 The business case for the project to convert the Dutch gardens to a Chinese garden is being looked at again, and if other alternatives are available then the plan would need to be rethought.

4. Farm

- 4.1. New goats are still being born and we have just had a baby Llama (girl) Mum and baby doing well.
- 4.2. Overall the farm performed well financially last year, with a 5% increase on the previous year. The front desk team maximised sales of animal feed and changes in the volume per bag has seen a 30% increase in revenue. Pork, lamb and beef are selling well at the shop with the new gift shop signs.
- 4.3. Rose the Shire horse is doing well . The team are training her up to be careful around children. Costing at just under £3000 and in foal Rose will be a great investment.
- 4.4. We have a new ram and bull arriving soon. The bull will be a replacement for the one we lost last year through a TB test.
- 4.5. We are finding sales of rabbits slow this year. This is probably a reaction to the current financial climate and also, as our members are the main purchasers, we have maybe reached saturation point.
- 4.6. Volunteers have been recruited who will be based in the Children's Paddock and offer small animal encounters for visitors. This role should improve opportunities for visitors to ask questions as well as supervising animal contact.

5. Education

- 5.1. In the first quarter just under 5500 children visited the Park. Although this is less than last year, we have had more schools visit, just with smaller classes. These same reductions in school numbers have also been noticed across all other country parks.
- 5.2. Portsmouth Water – The first major target, the creation of 'The World of Water', a water zone in the sink shelter of the courtyard has been completed. It has been designed to have the Wow factor to attract children and visitors to take a look and bring home the message of water conservation. It will be launched officially in the Autumn once the interactive exhibit piece, designed by Intech, has been installed. The next projects are to create a toddler-friendly trail using Precious, the water droplet, and to make a significant increase in the number of 'Water is Life' sessions delivered to schools.

- 5.3. The Education Team are currently looking into becoming a registered Centre in order to deliver Animal Management courses to students from The Petersfield School in September.
- 5.4 Animal Care Diploma - a first for us, we will be fully responsible for delivering an entire 2 year course in Animal Care to 10 Year 10 students. The group, from The Petersfield School (TPS), will undertake practical tasks and collect evidence for their assessment every Tuesday. This is generating income to provide an additional member of staff to deliver and prep the course as well. We aim to deliver to more schools from September 2012 and employ a full time education officer committed to teaching the course for a maximum of 3 days each school week, but available for general education work the remainder of the time.
- 5.5 STAG (Gifted & Talented programme) – the format has been amended so that we now run sessions for each year group every half-term. This has meant it is linked more to topics they will be learning at school and is an opportunity for all of our primary members to visit.
- 5.6 Education Membership Update - Following our fee increase to £200 we saw a drop from 40 to 21 member groups. It has generated the same income and a total of 117 visits (children). We are hoping some previous members will rejoin by adding an additional incentive. A new community membership for family centres and local charity groups will be created, due to demand for a more bespoke group pass. There has been an increase in the range of organisations wanting to visit on a regular basis and the existing education membership is not quite suitable, for example some need a higher ratio of adults.
- 5.7 Holiday Activities – It has been a successful summer break for our turn up & take part activities, delivered by our team of casual staff. These are a great way to provide a changing programme of things for visitors of all ages to do. These have covered costs and generated a profit.
- 5.8 Events – we successfully engaged with schools and visitors in the lead up to the Water Festival, as well as leading the pond-dipping and craft activities at the event. We are working with MADD Productions for our Halloween event, Fright Night, as well as performing arts students who will provide daily workshops and a parade.
- 5.9 'Inspiring You' sessions - as a result of our successful event, Happy Birthday, for children with a disability and their families, we now run exclusive workshops every Tuesday in the holidays for this group. The feedback we received was that the activities we offer are ideal for children of any ability, but sometimes the parents feel uncomfortable if they are in a mainstream group who are unaware of their child's specific needs.
- 5.10 Story Trail - we have submitted our Inspirational Play Trail to HCC as an ideal setting for one of the story trails.

- 5.11 Staunton will be writing a business case to secure a part-time volunteer post . With these extra hours we would be aiming to increase our volunteers to 150 people.
- 5.12 We are having a catch up with all our volunteers, for a refresher session, walk & talk with the staff and BBQ on 28th September.
- 5.13 We can now be precise regarding the hours our mainstream volunteers undertake, thanks to a volunteer creating and updating our database. From January to July our small team of dedicated volunteers achieved 2,561 (366 days). This does not include those hours provided by Supported Volunteers (15 volunteer days every week), Beacon Community Partnership or work placements.
- 5.14 The Beacon Community Partnership is progressing well, with an impressive impact on plant sales. The on-site developments include raised beds, more productive areas and a pond area. I would highly recommend a presentation at future JMC regarding the progress of this project (formerly the Nursery Site Project).
- 5.15 We are now up to our full quota for casual activity leaders who are being trained to provide encounters and work in Visitor Centre.
- 5.16 Currently we have one young person on a minimum 12 month internship (plus another with the ranger team). We created Visitor Services and Education Support Assistant (combined) roles in order to develop all-rounders and this should provide them with a wealth of experience.

6. Visitor Services and Gift Shop

- 6.1. The new Visitor Services layout is working well. When time allows we will begin work on improvements to the Farm Shop. New Farm Shop black boards have now arrived.
- 6.2. 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.

7. Countryside

- 7.1. Some farm related projects are being looked at that could be submitted to win money held by Countryside (15% held back from Single Farm Payment Scheme). One possible project would be the path network on the farm side which is now badly in need of maintenance.
- 7.2. Three car parking machines have been installed, including signage and safety fencing. Early indications are good, with £129 return after farm entry voucher deductions - this was on a moderate Friday. Visitors seem

to be accepting the change and are understanding to the needs/benefits of the introduction of charges.

- 7.3. Storey Gardens is being used as overflow car parking for pay zone visitors and as primary parking for the country park side of the site. In line with developments of the northern paddocks of the farm this is necessary as the current grass overflow paddock adjoining the existing car park will become further animal display/visitor access areas. Rangers are looking into options to improve drainage/surface options and costs within Storey Gardens to enable it to support traffic for more of the year. This also links into the possibility of off peak use for car boot sales, car shows etc to boost income further.
- 7.4. Rangers will be managing the collections from the car parking machines for the time being with the administration team managing the cashing up and processing of the cash whilst we look into the pros and cons of outsourcing such operations. With cash profits going direct to ranger income and the boost to memberships going against the bottom line it will benefit all areas of Staunton.
- 7.5. Project work has been slow over the summer due to limited Rangers on the ground. With key staff members back from injuries we hope to make up for lost time this autumn. We have given Paul (who joined us through future job fund a year ago) a six month contract to help see us through the winter works.
- 7.6. The delivery of a new pickup truck and tractor are awaited. Although the tractor costs more we are expecting more income generated as the new machine is more capable and appropriate than the current one.
- 7.7. We joined forces with the Police again to run evening patrols throughout the summer holidays. This has worked well, reducing anti-social behaviour, as well as building positive relationships with local user groups and bolstering people's confidence to use the site both in the day and evening.
- 7.9 With Higher Level Stewardship funded plans, English Woodland grant scheme funded plans and our own maintenance and development plans we are going to be busier than ever and will have to adapt the way we operate to deliver this ambitious work schedule. It will mean investing in staff and machinery to develop a highly-skilled and well-resourced implementation team.

8. Marketing and Events

- 8.1. Interpretation Plan - following several comments from visitors, assessors and staff we have started work on the Park's interpretation plan. This document will outline methods, timescales and costs in order to develop onsite interpretation.
- 8.2. Staunton Live – the event was well attended, with over 4,500 visitors at the peak enjoying the music and the fine weather. Nearly £800 was taken in car parking.

Operations

- 9.1 With the help of volunteers the task of re-painting the estate railings has begun on the duck enclosure. This will continue well into next year. Once all areas are complete a schedule for re-painting will be put in place to ensure all areas of estate railings receive regular checks.
- 9.2 Gas, water and electric bills are at an all time low for this time of the year. This is down to the careful monitoring of usage and also working closely with the term contractor to use best practice systems.
- 9.3 We are confident that refuse costs will show a significant reduction. The promotion of people taking rubbish home with them, the use of the tractor to compact litter and also the close monitoring of the amounts of rubbish has allowed us to change the frequency of collections from the regular weekly collection to a when needed service throughout the quieter periods and we have even managed to stay fortnightly so far during the summer holidays.
- 9.4 Health and Safety - HCC trading standards have completed an audit on the farm and were very satisfied with what they found. There was some work to complete which only mirrors the Health and Safety audit completed earlier in the year, so work on these things is well under way.

10. Projects

- 10.1 We have submitted a lottery bid to create two stained glass windows as well as artwork on existing windows. If successful the work will be designed by eight local schools during Spring 2012.
- 10.2 Wildlife Zone - work began in August on developing the American Grounds area as a result of HATS (Hampshire Action Team) funding. The rangers will undertake all practical work in September and the education team will coordinate the interpretation and renovation of the building. We hope to have open days during Tree Week with the official opening during February half-term 2012 as part of our Bird event.
- 10.3 The Senior Education Manager and the Senior Ranger are collating information to ascertain business options for the development of the coach house complex. The mandate is to generate income and provide much needed facilities, and lead to an expanded use of the Country Park. We will be inviting stakeholders to input into the process and present the business case by January 2012.

10.4 Options have been discussed with the garden team regarding renovating the lean-to glasshouse and making this area accessible to visitors. The education team are creating a proposal for County architects, who have secured some funding for this project, and will also submit a heritage lottery application to provide match funding. The proposal will be completed by October with the lottery bid ready to submit in January 2012.

11. Recommendation

That the JMC notes the content of this report.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

1.1.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1.

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?