

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Report

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| <b>Committee:</b>   | <b>SIR GEORGE STAUNTON COUNTRY PARK JMC</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>        | <b>MONDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2011</b>            |
| <b>Title:</b>       | <b>PARK MANAGER'S REPORT</b>                |
| <b>Reference:</b>   | <b>3479</b>                                 |
| <b>Report From:</b> | <b>GORDON GARDNER</b>                       |

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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 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011.
- 1.2. Staunton is still performing strongly both in terms of visitor numbers and income generation. With 7% above budget and just under 13% over last year's visitor numbers Staunton is in far better shape than last year.
- 1.3. The team at Staunton are working very hard to keep up the momentum.

### 2. Business

- 2.1 Staffing still remains difficult, but Staunton has managed with 'work-around' to continue to give the best possible service. Our intern, Visitor Services and Education Assistant, has settled in very well. As a result we have agreed to consider another intern for the New Year.
- 2.2 The ranger team have a full team temporarily with the recent return of the casual ranger back from sick leave.
- 2.3 So far this financial year 96,209 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 10,986 visitors). (See Appendix 1 for more detailed information)

- 2.4 Staunton currently has 3,797 active Members. So far this year membership has taken around £69,000. (See Appendix 2 for a break down of figures) To date we are running at 24.5% above last year. October performed very well for membership sales, growing by 26%. The Park is in the process of setting up a membership gift promotion for December and have high expectations.
- 2.5 Due to some “members” abusing the direct debit system we had to put in place a more draconian system for taking membership payments. To save money and resources we gave new members their membership cards before the money had been direct debited from their account; this is the same model used by the National Trust and Hilliers. A few members have cancelled their payments before the money comes out of their account.
- 2.6 The car park charging has proved successful; we have sold 5828 tickets so far making £11,657 gross. Most of the public have been understanding about our circumstances.

| Tickets sold | Gross income | Net Income | % paying |
|--------------|--------------|------------|----------|
| 5828         | £11,657      | £6,927     | 59%      |

### 3 Gardens

- 3.1. Plant Sales have done very well this year, budgeted to reach around £12000. We have had lots of good comments about the quality and range and have extended the selling area in reaction to the improved performance.
- 3.2. The polythene tunnel has now been completed. We also have benches coming funded by Havant Day Services.
- 3.3 Some visitors are secretly taking advantage of the fish in the lily pond; the beauty craze for fish pedicures has arrived at Staunton. The garden team are monitoring the glasshouses.
- 3.4 Shrub and scrub vegetation clearance from the original "Pine Pits" enclosures has given greater space for plant sales.
- 3.5 There has been excellent feedback from customer satisfaction survey cards concerning the presentation and maintenance of the gardens and glasshouses.
- 3.6 At one year old, the "new" perennial border (Walled garden) of historically accurate period plantings has established very well and has been a resounding success.

## **4 Farm**

- 4.1 New piglets were born recently from the sow, Guinness and has been given publicity.
- 4.2 We have tested selling lamb direct to our members with some good responses. The goal is to sell most of our produce direct to members. So far it has only been promoted through their e-mail, but we intend to include a leaflet in an up-coming mail-out to all members.
- 4.3 Although it is a slow process the "Thursday Group" are painting the historic railing around the park. Where the job has been completed there has been a vast improvement.

## **5 Education**

- 5.1 Up to the end of October 7,400 children visited the Park. Although this is fewer than last year, more schools have visited, just with smaller classes. These same reductions have been noticed across all other country parks. We hope to boost this by offering a special offer through the Times Education Supplement and the ukschooltrips website.
- 5.2 Holiday activities were very successful over the summer months and the October school break, especially with the good weather at the beginning of the October week. The 'turn up & take part' activities are delivered by our team of casual staff. Crafts and face-painting alone in the Ghostly Gothic Library raised £500 profit. Storytelling and encounters proved especially popular and were often attended by up to 40 children plus their families, demonstrating a need to increase these activities throughout the year
- 5.3 We had a successful Halloween with our Fright Night event being a sell out. Working with MADD Productions we set up scary trails around the park. It is likely to be extended next year to accommodate more visitors and provide profit to be shared between MADD and Staunton.
- 5.4 We had a catch up with all our volunteers for a refresher session, walk and talk with the staff and a BBQ on 28<sup>th</sup> September; this went really well.
- 5.5 We have continued to deliver the Environmental Land Based Diploma to students from Fareham and Gosport schools, who are now in their second and final year of the course. Delivery of an Animal Care NVQ Diploma course to 10 students from The Petersfield School has started. As this is being led by a casual Course Tutor employed by Staunton it has not impacted on the Education Service workload; however, several enquiries to deliver this course from 2012 have been received.
- 5.6 The STAG (Gifted & Talented programme) all day Caring for Animals session was attended by 28 reception children from Leigh Park Schools. The new format is proving to be popular.

- 5.7 We aim to regain our Education Members by attending staff meetings at all Leigh Park schools. All current Education members and those who rejoin by January will be given passes to be used as raffle prizes and pupil rewards.
- 5.8 There was a successful launch of the World of Water (WOW) which was attended by 90 pupils from Park Community and Warren Park Primary Schools, guests from Portsmouth Water and the local press. As well as celebrating the new area the children also evaluated the interactive features with positive results for us.
- 5.9 We have submitted a bid for one 'Inspiring You' event in February 2012, and a separate bid for an additional 7 – 8 themed family fun days from April 2012 to Feb 2013. This funding is available to provide activities and services for children with a disability or additional needs and their families, but will also enhance the experience of our general visitors.
- 5.10 We also have funds to provide staff training to advise us on methods of communication with adults with learning difficulties.
- 5.11 The Education and Community Manager attended the Association Heritage Interpretation conference in York; this provided a good start for the Interpretation Plan that the site needs.
- 5.12 With the desire to recruit more volunteers, the need for a Volunteer Coordinator is even greater. Education are seeking suitable funding streams for this post, even if only for 1 day a week, and suggestions from Members would be gratefully received.
- 5.13 Park at the Park – Education have been attending Landscape meetings for Park Community School and sit on the advisory workshop. This should be an exciting opportunity for local residents and a ideal time to link further with the school and encourage more local visitors to Staunton. This also links with a potential Big Lottery project led by Learning Through Landscapes who are keen for us to support home by encouraging more Leigh Park residents to venture outdoors after dark!

## **6 Countryside**

- 6.1 The ranger team have come up with a inspirational way of selling firewood. We have purchased four cages, each with a combination lock attached. The customer takes a note of the number on the cage, purchases it from visitor services and loads their car up. It has been selling very well and it has also reduced our staff and fuel costs. It has not really been promoted strongly yet, but as the wood is on show it has been selling.

- 6.2 The ranger team is back up to strength with Toby Olway having recovered to 90% fit after his accident; we are looking to get Toby onto a 6 month contract, like Paul, to see us through the winter, Higher Level Stewardship and English Woodland Grant Scheme plans.
- 6.3 With our Internship post starting on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011 we will be up to a five man team which will help us push forward and achieve our objectives. The internship post for the ranger team has been slow to get organised due to delays in the paperwork.
- 6.4 The first half of the £12,000 annual payment under Higher Level Stewardship management options has come in and we have started £5,000's worth of capital works; these works would have been funded from our expenditure budgets anyway, but can be delivered for much less than the £5,000 grant funding, so we hope to make a profit and saving at the same time.
- 6.5 With the English Woodland Grant Scheme the works will commence after Christmas. More copse (0.5ha plots within woods) will be thinned than ever before, which will build up our firewood and milling supplies.
- 6.6 The Ranger team will be working with Portsmouth Water Company on the boundary fencing around their landholding, of which we lease some. This joint initiative will see Staunton rangers carry out vegetation and tree works over two miles of the boundary to clear the way for new fencing to be installed. We are also working with Portsmouth Water Company and local users to put access gates in to allow permissive access through certain areas.
- 6.7 We have liaised with Havant Borough Council about the bollarding or restricting of the road verges to stop illegal parking; the planning office have no objections so we are now working with landscape/open spaces and highways teams to find an aesthetically appropriate method to stop the parking.
- 6.8 We are liaising with Havant Borough Council parking services with a view to them taking on the policing and enforcement of the operation at the Park; this way we can steer their coverage to fit our requirements.

## **7 Marketing and Events**

- 7.1 Sam Holly, the Marketing Manager, will be returning from maternity leave in December.
- 7.2 We have started work on our new events leaflet. The current leaflet worked well encouraging visitors to take part in our free activities.
- 7.3 A new welcome leaflet should be completed soon. We have moved away from having events on the reverse side of the pay-zone map to

having an updated map of our country park; the idea of this is to help visitors discover more of the park.

- 7.4. Social media, in conjunction with our website, plays an important part in raising the profile of the Park; Twitter has 2,908 followers and Facebook close to 1,000.

## **8. Projects**

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 Work on the Wildlife Zone began in August and is progressing well. The rangers have undertaken most of the practical work. The education team will coordinate the interpretation and renovation of the building. The opening is expected in February.
- 8.3 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, 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 aim to present the business case by January 2012.
- 8.4 The Indoor Play Area is expected to be installed in late December; the final delay is with Heritage Lottery Fund as the Lottery funded the restoration of the roof over the barn.
- 8.5 Within the next 8 weeks a funding bid will be submitted to restore and refurbish/renovate the "old Lean-to" historic glasshouse within the Gardens Yard to enable a greater circulatory route for visitors to experience "heritage and horticulture". This may also, if successful, allow the relocation of the current Propagation House in the West Wing to the 'Lean-to', therefore allowing visitors access to a new display glasshouse and a new through route to the West Garden.

## **9. Recommendation**

That the JMC notes the content of this report.

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

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

7.4

**8 Impact on Crime and Disorder:**

8.1

**9 Climate Change:**

9.1.1 How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

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