

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee/Panel:	SIR GEORGE STAUNTON COUNTRY PARK JMC
Date:	23 September 2013
Title:	Park Manager's Report
Reference:	5170
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1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to inform members of the Joint Management Committee on performance and activities at Staunton since the previous meeting on 15 July 2013.
- 1.2. In addition this is an opportunity to agree future meeting agendas, dates and review need for key themes for reports or sub-committees.

2. Contextual Information

2.1. Team Updates

The following are summaries provided by each Team Leader.

2.2. Administration Team (Sarah Hardy)

The response and action plan has been sent back to Auditors. Several actions have already been implemented across the Park and have already improved security, accuracy and are now adhering to legal requirements.

2.3. Ranger Team (Adam Maskill)

The Ranger Team are extremely happy that the Park has been awarded Green Flag after two failed attempts. Preparation from all was superb and it is expected that the Park will now continue to achieve this.

Tree safety inspections were carried out across the entire estate and completed by 30 August 2013. . Interim inspections were carried out on tree species around the lawns that are most associated with the phenomena known as 'sudden branch

drop'. Oak, ash and horse chestnut are most susceptible, in fact you can see the evidence of past branch failures in the lower crown of some of the more mature trees. This is part of the reason why the grass is left to grow beneath several of trees so that people are discouraged from sitting beneath. Shedding branches is a perfectly natural process and often the trees will show no warning signs prior to this, which makes it almost impossible to predict. A large proportion of the Park's trees are mature/over mature and are undergoing various degrees of veteranisation. This gives trees additional, unique character, as well as providing niche habitat for specialist wildlife therefore it is essential to not make rash decisions to carry out works on every single tree that shows any sort of defect. The SCP Veteran Tree Management Plan provides guidance relating to specific trees across the site including how to balance risk management with biodiversity.

Many trees are now being tagged, particularly boundary and roadside trees. This does not mean they are considered dangerous or that they are due any works, it enables the team to record inspections more efficiently for enquiries from the public to be addressed easier. There will be tree planting carried out this year as part of the Big Tree Plant. This will commence in October/November and will be assisted by an assortment of volunteers.

Water levels in the Lake have dropped significantly this year and there has been concern that there may be low dissolved oxygen levels, especially overnight. The Environment Agency loaned the Park four water pumps to oxygenate the water. There have been no signs of the blue-green algae associated with fish kills.

After almost six years, Adam Maskill has left the team to work at Hart District Council as Tree and Woodland Ranger.

2.4. Operations Team (Steve Jenner)

Health & Safety Audit

The departmental H&S audit recently took place which focussed on the management of health and safety, people, activity and building related risks. The audit was completed by talking with various members of staff, a review of training records, risk assessments and maintenance logs followed by a tour of the site. The audit highlighted where some good work was already taking place and also where some improvements could be made. The performance level has been indicated as yellow (60 -79%)

The actions are divided into priorities 1, 2 or 3's and are given timescales for completion. A group of team leaders and or competent individuals are being put together to sign off priority 1 actions for the beginning of November.

Accidents and Incidents

The busy summer holiday brought with it everything to be expected and more. Accident rates have risen in line with visitor numbers and 2 ambulances have been called to site. Neither of these accidents has been reportable to the HSE as they were pre existing injuries / illnesses and not caused by any activity at the Park. Notably 3 incidents of abusive / aggressive behaviour have been logged

within the last month with one of them being reported to the police. One involved a member of staff and two were customer v customer.

Supported Volunteer Scheme

The SITA grant project is now up and running and the group have began work on paths around the car park. The busy holidays proved challenging for the group, all with learning difficulties or disabilities, but they persevered and the paths are already taking shape. The project is due to run until early 2014.

Policies and procedures

An induction process has been created including a new staff handbook and this will be followed by operational procedures, including duty manager's role procedures. The aim is to re-induct all staff by December 2013.

2.5. Education & Community Team (Gemma Summerfield)

Formal Education

Education Visits

The 2012 -13 academic year has seen an increase in visits by 15% with an increase of 200 children. Guided visits have increased by 28%. Education looks to continue this trend into the new academic year.

Windows into the Past

Children from Barncroft Primary School attended an Opening Ceremony of the Gothic Library Windows in July. Councillors Fairhurst and Weeks attended the presentation made by the children and looked at the windows that the children have been inspired to design. A journalist from the Portsmouth News attended and the Park had a nice article put in the paper. The aim is to seek more funding to replace the temporary windows in the future, perhaps encouraging more school or even corporate sponsorship.

TPS Animal Care Course

The 2nd Year Course group has completed their City and Guilds Level 1 Animal Care Course. All 8 students passed, with four achieving a merit and four achieving distinctions. A new group of 1st years will be starting in September 2013.

Portsmouth Water

Gemma Summerfield is working with Sue Allery (PW) to draw up a new Portsmouth Water Partnership Agreement which outlines objectives for both Partners over the next three years.

Informal Education

Summer holidays have proved to be busy and the crafts/facepainting popular. Education aim to make a profit from these activities, something that has always been achieved.

Short Breaks Days

There have been three Short Break Events, for children with disabilities and their families, over the summer holiday. All have been well attended. Gemma Summerfield is submitting an application for £5,000 to continue the events for next year.

Volunteers and Community

Volunteer Scheme

Gemma Summerfield and Jo Edney are continuing to develop the Volunteer Scheme at Staunton. This includes bringing together the teams of volunteers already helping at the Park and looking at tasks and areas they work in. Although volunteer duties have significantly increased in recent years due to developments for supported volunteering, there has been a general recruitment freeze but the Education Team are now aiming to increase the number of mainstream volunteers.

2.6. Farm Team (Adrian McKay)

Beef and lamb are being sold in the shop and at QECP for the first time too. Small animal sales have been good and generated £600.

Donkey rides were trialled over the summer holidays and have proved very popular with visitors. The Park receives 10% and so far over £400 has been raised.

2.7. Visitor Services (Tim Speller)

Staunton Access Meeting

Key initiatives include; the continued development of cycling initiatives in the local area with support from the Cyclists Touring Club, good progress with the Police and Forestry Commission against anti-social behaviour and a new access to Bitterne Park in a project lead by Cllrs Weeks and Cousins.

Staunton/Southmoor Anglers

The recent hot weather and leakage has caused problems with the water levels in the main and upper lakes. The new Staunton Angling Club is finding its way with support from Staunton staff and the Southmoor club.

2.8. Garden Team (Chris Bailey)

Sales

There have been encouraging plant sales income and vegetables grown in the Beacon Community Garden (formally Nursery Site) have been regularly available and selling well. All profit from these sales come directly to the Park so the aim is to offer high quality fresh produce at affordable prices to our Visitors.

The garden team are working with Beacon Community Partnership to produce a business case for the plant sales.

Planting

The new shrub plantings in the Walled Garden are establishing well.

An extensive re-juvenation pruning/thinning out through car parks to farm has been achieved.

The current *Victoria cruziana* has received especially good visitor feedback this year. Some of the lilies grown at Staunton were donated to Ventnor Botanic Garden, to enable potential crossing with *Victoria amazonica* to create the spectacular *Victoria* 'Longwood Hybrid'. Staunton will have first call on any seeds arising.

Events and Sponsorship

The garden team have been leading on raising awareness about the significant link between Sir George Staunton and tea. Meetings have taken place to plan a Tea Event and a mature tea plant has been purchased with the intention of creating a small plantation.

There is a meeting with Fyffes Bananas in October regarding Butterfly House sponsorship and the cultivation of Fyffes Bananas in the Stove House.

A sponsored commemorative period metal Gothic style bench has been installed in the Oval Garden.

Garden Team Developments

Three tender quotes have been received for the removal of glass panes from the historic, old lean-to glasshouse within the Garden's Yard. This will be a significant project and the team are investigating new approaches to raise awareness and funds.

The Walled Garden is to have a new planting scheme with plans to plant desert vines, top fruit, Cob/Filbert nuts and create additional ornamental decorative beds within the kitchen garden quadrants. This will provide added interest, increased visual impact, additional structure and require less water usage.

3. Staff

3.1. There are three members of the team leaving us in September, having made the choice to stay until after the school holidays.

- Becky Day (Visitor Services Team) is off to university to train as a teacher.
- Adam Maskill (Ranger) is heading to Hart District Council as their new Tree Warden.

- Jenny Chivers (Visitor Services Team) has retired after more than 25 years devoted to Staunton. Jenny has managed the Visitor Centre, including reception, retail, admission and membership relentlessly and successfully and will be greatly missed by the team and visitors alike.

3.2. As a result of several existing and these new vacancies this is an opportunity to review how we operate in certain areas, including opening hours and work patterns, as well as implementing a robust and efficient structure that enables progression and utilises trainees, apprenticeships and those undertaking lower grade roles .

3.3. The on-going plan is to generate a more effective staff structure across the entire team specifically linked to roles that are able to be utilised at both Staunton and Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

4. Finance

4.1. Separate report attached. Generally the finances are positive as a result of good weather resulting in high visitor figures, a significant increase in Membership sales and the opportunity to save on several staff vacancies.

5. Performance

5.1. Visitor Figures

See Appendix 2. Visitor figures have increased on last year's record numbers for the same period.

This is consistent across the entire Park with more visitors using the Country Park alone or the entire site.

5.2. Membership

See Appendix 1. Membership has seen a significant increase from 2067 (April to July 2012) to 3040 for the same period (April to July 2013). Although currently there is not any evidence to suggest why this is the case it could be as a result of a mail out in April, increased visitors generally and the price remaining the same.

During October the Park Manager will be working with Liz Collins, who administers the Scheme, and the Visitor Services Manager to capture a true cost of membership, as well as obtain data on why people subscribe. In addition, methods will be implemented, to monitor and record secondary spend directly linked to Members, for example by offering a small discount in the shop and tearooms it will show what Members spend in addition to the annual fee.

5.3. Green Flag

After two unsuccessful years the site has been awarded a Green Flag and received a very positive judge's report. Founded in 1996 this annual scheme

recognises and rewards the best green spaces in the Country with over 1,400 sites currently on board. Green Flag is licensed to the Tidy Britain Group which runs the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign, Eco Schools and the Blue Flag beach scheme. The report is attached as Appendix 3.

5.4. Country Parks Accreditation Scheme

Staunton has just received its first accreditation under the CPA scheme. Launched in 2009 the CPA aims to identify and recognise sites that deliver the core facilities and services first set out in the 1968 Countryside Act (which originally established country parks). The accreditation runs for three years and is led by Natural England.

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g186298-d216062-r175687263-Staunton_Park-Portsmouth_Hampshire_England.html

5.5. Visitor Feedback and Reviews

There have been significant feedback forms returned from visitors at the time of their visit as well as on Facebook. The majority score the Park highly, with some including suggestions. All are responded to as appropriate.

On Trip Advisor the Park has received 92 independent reviews, 75 of which rate the Park as 'Very Good' or 'Excellent'. There will be a campaign to encourage visitors to add their reviews to this site in order to improve our overall ranking for Portsmouth attractions, the Park is currently ranked 16 out of an overall 41.

6. Marketing

6.1. There are currently strong discount campaigns in several publications in the way of vouchers. These are effective as a method of measuring which advertising campaigns are successful as well as providing a better understating of our visitors.

6.2. Interviews have taken place for Sam Holly's maternity cover. This role is based within the central, service marketing team and I have regular meetings with the recently appointed Manager of this team, Mary Stone and her staff. I am confident that we will see an improvement in basic marketing provision as well as a strong direction and plan looking ahead.

6.3. Press Coverage

The Park has received exceptionally high coverage from the local press, specifically The Portsmouth News. This has directly led to increased visitors as many have reported this as the reason they visited.

7. Development

- 7.1. The 'New' Barn has been officially handed over to site. The official launch of this high quality undercover facility will take place in December and link in with a campaign to significantly increase visitors during the Christmas school holiday period.

A project team will implement a plan to fully utilise this resource, possibly as a newborn show area, hard-standing for hoofed stock to be treated, a demonstration area for visitors to observe students learning, indoor BBQ/events area, as well as the original planned use at lambing time.

The team will also look at visitor flow in this area of the Park and it is proposed that the deer paddock becomes a walk through enclosure leading to the barn. Landscaping will also be improved and enable a large part of the site to be accessible for the first time in over a decade.

- 7.2. The site is currently reviewing many of the policies and procedures and implementing new ones as required. Members are asked to consider whether they feel it would be appropriate to sign off these documents as a committee, whether the Chair would be acceptable or if policies can be adopted by the Manager and management team.

8. Other Key Matters

8.1. Waste Management

The site has started a waste management project in conjunction with DEFRA's Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative, supported by the Environment Agency, and in the local area by Portsmouth Water, the aim being to ensure that all relevant areas registered with the Rural Payments Agency are cross-compliant, that best practice is spread across the site, and finally that the public areas are looking their best. The scope of the project includes the management of animal and green waste together with those areas affected by waterlogging and compaction.

8.2. Beacon Community Partnership (update provided by Debbie Lyall – non-staff member)

Mission Statement:

The Beacon Community Partnership is committed to providing a land-based facility that will provide opportunities to improve life and work chances for individuals from the LDD (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities) Community. The Partnership aims to promote the health & well-being of the LDD Community by offering access to a range of experiences including Farming, Horticulture, Retail and Customer Service that will enhance employability and social integration.

Partners:

SGSCP, Highbury College (HCP), Havant Day Services (HDS) and The Right to Work (RTW)

The past 3 months has been encouraging with far greater cross partnership collaboration and joint working resulting in greater contributions within the Park:

- Commencement of tree nursery within the Beacon Garden Site
- Aquatic planting project to enhance the vegetation and oxygenation of the lake
- Regular supply of vegetables to the farm shop
- Harvesting produce from within the walled garden
- Twice daily litter picking throughout the summer holiday period
- Site maintenance including cutting the perimeter hedge
- Litter picking throughout the Festival Weekend
- Plant and vegetables sales for Staunton during the festival
- The number of supported volunteers continues to grow.
- HDS have an average of 8 service users attending daily throughout the year
- HCP have an average of 12 students attending most days throughout the College year

RTW has grown from 5 people attending daily (October 2012) 7 daily (February 2013) to 10 daily (May 2013) to 16 daily (September 2013)

Increased numbers allows greater flexibility and accountability for set tasks/duties within SGSCP. It allows a greater opportunity for Supported Volunteers to become trained and confident in their specific work area. This in turn develops independence and peer working, skills that are often difficult to develop within LDD community.

The partnership has provided employment for a young man with LDD throughout the summer – watering all plants within the BGP polytunnel and site at weekends.

RTW has continued to work to its objective of having a minimum of 60% of the workforce recruited from those with LDD. RTW initially employed 2 people with LDD and now has 7 people with LDD from a total work team of 11.

9. Recommendation(s)

- That the Committee approve the content of the report.
- That the Committee discuss, and if possible agree, future meeting format and contents, including presentations, representatives, agenda items and information required.

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

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

NB: If the 'Other significant links' section below is not applicable, please delete it.

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	

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.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
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?