

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Sir George Staunton Country Park Joint Management Committee
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Title:	Park Manager's Report
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1. Summary

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to inform members of the Joint Management Committee on the performance and activities at Staunton since the previous meeting on 17 October 2014.

2. Contextual information

2.1. The following are unedited summaries provided by each Team Leader.

2.2. Gardens (Chris Bailey)

It has been a good season in the Walled Gardens with the new cut-flower bed and the rose bed now well established. In addition, a Chinese medicine bed has been planted and will become the space to watch in future years.

Just outside the walled garden, along the 'wavy wall' a new border will be planted in the spring. This will be dedicated to Robert Fortune the 19th century botanist, plant hunter and traveller who as well as being the person credited with introducing tea plants from China to India, was also a friend of Sir George Staunton.

Plant sales have been going well with a wide range on offer, together with fruit and vegetables from the Beacon Partnership. Sales continue with bulbs and ornamental shrubs through the winter.

The Amazon water-lily pond has been emptied, cleaned out, and is ready for next season. New opportunities are being considered for using the pond for the half of the year when the plant itself is not present and growing.

An Archaeological Geophysics student from Southampton University has completed a resistivity survey of the old 18th century mansion located to the south west of the Gothic Library. This has highlighted the outline of the old building, which was demolished many years ago, and will help with future interpretation.

The annual butterfly exhibition will take place in the Tropical Glasshouse and run from the 2nd February through to the 1st March. There will be exotic species such as tree nymphs from India, blue morphos from Mexico or owl butterflies from Colombia. These are big, bright and active and visitors can walk among them and get a feel for jungle life.

Ryan Bodsworth left Staunton this January after two years working in the gardens team, on reception and with the Beacon team. He will be starting work as a horticulturalist on the 'trials section' at RHS Wisley.

2.3. Education & Community Team (Gemma Summerfield)

Formal Education

Education Visits

The number of education visits for the September to December is up from 65 last year to 70 this year; however the number of students is down from 1800 to 1600 this year. This is due to a decrease in school group sizes as schools prefer to use minibuses instead of coaches to keep travel costs down.

Overall the numbers are great considering there hasn't been any marketing in the past 6 months while the Education Team restructuring is under review.

Education Restructure

Gemma Summerfield's role as acting Education and Community Manager has been extended for another 6 months.

The restructuring of the Education Team across the Staunton and Queen Elizabeth Country Park has continues with the recruitment of two new part- time C grade Education Assistants to back fill the full time D grade Education Officer post. This will allow for more flexibility of covering the delivering the Education Programme across the sites.

Jo Edney's role is to be made into an Education Farm Ranger which will cover the Animal Care delivery for the 14 – 16 programme, plus liaising with Highbury College with their Animal Care Courses and helping out on the Farm. The role is fully funded by income from The Petersfield School and Highbury College.

Informal Education

Halloween and Christmas

It was a busy Halloween half-term at the Park for the crafts and face painting, bringing in £1500 over the week.

The Christmas event went very well, with 90% of places booked, which is good considering there was an extra day this year. It was noticeable that there were several bookings on the days of the event which filled up the spaces.

Maurie Leppard, our volunteer Santa, is to retire from Santa duties this year. We thank Maurie for all his time and dedication he gives to being Santa. A replacement will need to be found for next year.

Volunteer Scheme

We have had three new volunteers start with the Farm and Education Team since September. The plan is to have a volunteer recruitment drive in the New Year.

Sadly Jim Edwards, Great copse volunteer and Leigh Park Resident's Representative passed away suddenly in December last year.

2.4. Farm update (Adrian McKay)

Adrian McKay will be leaving the farm for New Zealand at the end of February. He started at Staunton in 2006 and has brought in many effective farming systems. The Senior Farm Ranger role is currently being advertised via a number of farming editorials, interviews are scheduled for early February. The person specification stresses the need for Farm Attraction experience, as this will be the key focus for the team as well as ensuring the animal husbandry we provide is an exemplar model.

Some of the longhorn herd has now been sold with heifers, steers and cows all going for good proceeds. A total of £21,000 has been raised. Options are being investigated for the remainder of the herd and the possibility of grazing tenancy. A number of the sheep flock have also been sold at £100 each. The purpose of reducing the livestock is to relieve pressure on the farm team and to enable them to concentrate on improving the farm attraction.

The partnership with Highbury has settled in with a range of snakes, lizards and other exotics now kept on site.

The Shire horse will not have a foal this year due to health problems earlier in 2014. She will be available for service in April 2015. The decision has been made to re-home Bluebell, who requires 'breaking'. This skilled task would cost in excess of £4,000 over the next two years and in the meantime she is becoming very difficult for the farm team to manage, especially students & volunteers who are no longer allowed in with her.

Baby llamas, alpacas and pigs are all due before the February half term.

2.5. Operations (Steve Jenner)

Risk Improvement Plan

The Countryside Service has put together a group to work on Health and Safety Policy & Procedure which three members of the Staunton team have been

selected for. The members will start attending meetings in the 2015 and begin work on their designated areas.

Steve Peach & Chris Bailey – Pesticides
Steve Jenner - Vehicles

Accident & Incident Statistics

A very quiet quarter with only 8 accidents reported - mostly normal slips, trips and falls. One injury to a volunteer and one member of staff with an existing illness resulted in an ambulance being called and another member of staff injured whilst chain sawing resulting in a few days off due to muscle strain. A third member of staff also tripped from the same level causing one day away from work.

Maintenance Projects

Three quotes have been obtained to install a soak away drain the main car park in the area that regularly floods. Poulson's have been selected and will begin the work towards the end of January. The same company have been heavily involved with the re-designing of car parks across the forestry commission, so will be asked to provide advice on making the best use of existing space in the main car park to accommodate more cars.

The Staunton staff are all set to complete re-grading of the path area outside of the Visitor Centre, another area which regularly collects rainwater. Materials have been ordered, plant will be hired and the team are set to complete the works 16/01/14. Slight adjustments will need to be made to the way customers access the Park for that week through the side gate.

Staunton has been selected to receive £10,000 worth of capital investment to improve the efficiency of lighting at the Park. Lots of areas are due to have the lights and fittings changed for newer more efficient models. Passive infra-red sensors will be fitted to all the main toilet areas and LED's will be fitted throughout. The changes should significantly reduce the cost of electric and replacement lamps for the future.

The Play Barn has just received its annual ROPSA safety inspection. The result was an overall low risk with a handful of recommendations for improvement.

Reactive Maintenance

A large leak has been repaired in the caretaker's roof above the tearooms; the scaffolding is set to be removed in early January. Many of the courtyard drains have been unclogged and jetted after spells of rainy weather. New historic lights are about to be fitted in the downstairs tearooms and extra plug sockets have been installed to cope with the scanner and photocopier requirements.

2.6. Visitor Services (Laura Laming)

Staffing

A new Visitor Services Supervisor has been appointed. This full time post will be responsible for line managing the VS team together with on-line sales and booking, procurement and membership. Following the interviews in December

Kerry McGuire from Waterlooville will start in February. Kerry has wide experience in retail management and educational administration.

On-line sales/bookings

During 2014 both on-line bookings for the bbq sites, and on-line sales for memberships and Santa tickets, have been successfully trialled. Regular meetings take place with other Country Park's VS staff (minutes available).

Membership

As the result of a thorough review of the Culture-all Passport scheme it has been agreed that the Passport will be discontinued.

With effect from 9th January 2015, Culture-all Passport and Hillers Plus memberships will no longer be sold via HCC sites or online. Existing Passports bought up to 9th January 2015 will be honoured by all sites until the expiry date of the Passport. This means that the last Passport should expire on 9th April 2016.

A communications plan has been agreed and will be put in place in the next few weeks in order to keep to a minimum the number of queries that might be raised at venues by customers. This includes communicating with existing and potential customers via the Culture-all website, Facebook and Twitter as well as emailing existing Passport holders.

2.7. Café (Nick Atkinson)

The café has been experimenting with outdoor BBQ's on busy days as an option to avoid the regular queues. It has also been involved in a number of promotions over Halloween and in the run up to Christmas, including a raffle for a hamper and new for 2015 a range of 'monthly offers'. These will include 'winter warmer' specials in January, 'sausage, bacon or egg baps with tea/coffee for £4 in February and so on.

Monthly meetings take place with the QECP Café Manager, Area Manager and Staunton staff.

2.8. Marketing (Sam Holly)

Staunton What's-On 2015

The new events leaflet has been printed and will cover the period from January through to December 2015.

Social Media

January will see the first of what will be regular newsletters which will be sent out to all membership holders.

Signage

An audit with photo-record of all site signage has been completed. A replacement/maintenance plan will now be produced.

2.9. Rangers (Steve Peach)

Olympic Legacy funding

The Community Payback team has completed the installation of approximately 40 oak posts which will carry the waymarkers for the three re-vamped walking trails, one new walking trail and one new cycling trail. The trails cover Leigh Park Gardens and Havant Thicket in a partnership project with the Forestry Commission.

The new map of Leigh Park Gardens is at a final draft stage and this will then be available to visitors in hard copy format and as a map board at key entrance points to the area.

Angling

The Leigh Park Club has just celebrated its first birthday. Work continues in improving the fishery and its environs with propagation and planting of native aquatic plants, and in protective measures against excessive predation by cormorants.

Unfortunately Alan Shons, the chairman of the Southmoor Angling Club, died in November last year. A new chair' has yet to be announced.

2.10. Beacon Community Partnership (Debbie Lyall, Right To Work Director)

The winter period should be a reasonably quiet time for the Beacon Partnership team, but this never appears to happen. The teams have been busy keeping the payzone and Leigh Park Gardens looking as good as possible despite the rain and winds; litter picking remains a priority as does leaf racking and clearing general debris off the paths throughout the public areas. Our dedicated team continue this work throughout the Christmas holiday period in order that the park looks great at all times for our discerning visitors.

The teams have been preparing the Beacon site, ensuring the beds and ground are ready for planting. We aim to increase the growing area in 2015; this should enable us to offer a more consistent supply of vegetables to the Cabin shop and allow us to complete more successional planting to prolong the supply of the most popular produce. Our aim continues to be to offer a consistent supply of high quality, locally grown vegetables to local people at reasonable prices.

The Garden team will cease to grow any vegetables in 2015; however they will continue to offer support and guidance to the Beacon team who will supply all future produce sold on site.

The Beacon team have also taken over the bulb growing from the Garden team; building up to Christmas we have supplied the Cabin shop with some wonderful festive plants and bulb arrangement. This will be continued throughout the winter and spring, giving our customers the opportunity to purchase locally grown plants at Staunton whilst supporting people with learning disabilities.

3. Transforming Parks

Visitor surveys were completed at all Parks (excluding Lepe which is at the next stage) from the October half term until the 10 January 2015. Approximately 500 surveys were completed for Staunton.

Planning Solutions Ltd (PS) will be producing a series of reports on their findings from the visitor surveys and market analysis. This will lead onto the evaluation, which will start w/c 23rd March with a series of workshops on each Park. This will include Park Managers. PS will be contacting all staff and stakeholders throughout January to formalise their input. Focus groups may then be set up. It is aimed to have the analysis completed by the end of July 2015.

The current target for producing a draft master plan for the site is June 2015. A Change Team will be set-up in the New Year to include a representative from each site.

Property Services will be responsible for the design process from the Master Plan stage. The procurement/construction stages would likely take place from 2016 onwards (Lepe from 2015). No order of priority at present as all the other Parks are at the same stage. This would become clearer after the evaluation stage.

Funding- £5.7 million is in the corporate pot, with £3million from Countryside (subject to sales of assets) and partner funding yet to be determined.

4. Finance

4.1. Separate report as item 5. The Park Team are pleased that the finances are performing so well, this will enable much needed maintenance works to be undertaken before the start of the high season.

5. Performance

5.1. See Appendix 1 for Visitor Figures April for April to December 2014

5.2. Appendix 2 provides Membership data.

6. Recommendation

6.1. That the Committee approves the content of the 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. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This is a regular update report and therefore does not have any direct equalities impact implications. The Country Park complies with all equality legislation.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. This is a regular update report and therefore does not have any direct crime and disorder impact implications

3. Climate Change:

The Country Park supports the natural environment, by the use of recycling where possible and supports the use of natural materials to adapt to climate change.