

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

FRIDAY 29TH JANUARY 2010.

PARK MANAGER'S REPORT.

Contact: Lewis Paterson (Telephone: 023 9245 3405).

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The following report updates members of the Joint Management Committee on developments at Staunton since the previous update presented on 30th July 2009.
- 1.2. Staunton continues to see steady growth in visitor numbers and community involvement at or exceeding the levels set within the outline ten year plan. Pressures, which not least include the current financial climate, have however led to reduced visitor spend in some key business areas.
- 1.3. Once again the high standards of service and quality of place have been recognised by external organisations through a number of prestigious awards.

2. Business

- 2.1. Due to uncertainty within visitor spend patterns and other budget pressures a number of vacancies are being held at Staunton. It is intended that only critical posts will be filled as required. Options to recruit to other posts are currently being considered which will improve efficiencies within Staunton.
- 2.2. Initial areas being considered, which will both enhance training opportunities and create a progression from volunteer or placement through to full time staff, are the introduction of Apprenticeship posts. These will be within the Farm, Gardens and Ranger Teams and will be funded through the conversion of two currently vacant Grade D posts to create three Grade A Apprentice posts. Some refocusing of the visitor services elements of Staunton are also being considered.
- 2.3. This has been a particularly successful year for Staunton with a number of accolades and accreditations being received. To date these include;
 - The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Standard (VAQAS) accreditation;
 - Green Flag Award;
 - Green Heritage Site Award; and
 - Britain in Bloom South & South East regional accreditation.

- 2.4. In addition the Staunton Education service has recently been inspected and we are confident that we will receive the coveted Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge in December.
- 2.5. Visitor numbers to the farm and gardens have shown a steady increase on last (financial) year with numbers up 7%, equating to an additional 6,065 visitors (Chart 2.1, below). When compared to the Hampshire Tourism Trends Survey figures for the first half of the calendar year are also promising with Staunton showing an increase of 8% on 2008 (7% on 2007; 20% on 2006; 37% on 2005) outperforming other charging attractions, which showed an average increase of 6%.

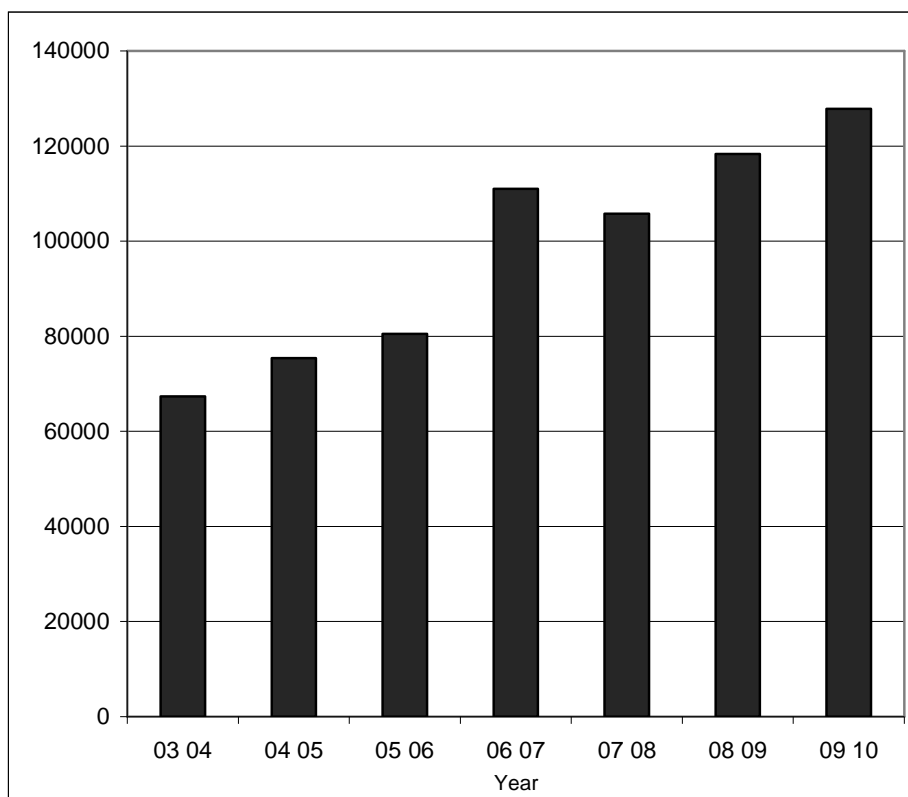


Chart 2.1: Visitor Numbers to Farm & Gardens (excluding Education)

- 2.6. Financial turnover has had mixed fortunes during the first half of the financial year. Tolls and retail spend have performed to, or better than, the anticipated targets however membership sales and catering spend have not met their targets.
- 2.7. Two meetings of the JMC Catering sub-group that is specifically working with the Park Team to address catering issues have taken place and menu offerings are being revised accordingly.

- 2.8. A review of the Staunton Membership package in light of dropping sales and increasing competition from the Culture All Pass is being undertaken. It is intended that a promotional drive will be undertaken during the first quarter of 2010.
- 2.9. Retail operations have shown particular resilience during the recession. This is in part due to improved buying, investment in new retail space and increasing popularity and demand for Estate produce (in particular meat and fire wood).
- 2.10. Following the previous Committee, and in consultation with Members, promotional signage aimed at improving awareness of, amongst others, our retail operations is now in place.

3. Recreation

- 3.1. This summer saw a successful series of events held at Staunton including three Staunton Live! music events; the Havant Borough Council Play Day event; and the Hampshire Water Partnership's Water Festival Event. The combined attendance to these events was approaching 30,000.
- 3.2. Staunton has been working in close partnership with Havant Borough Council to deliver Angling & Orienteering (including Geo-caching) courses. Sport Unlimited grant funding of £7,000 enabled us to develop bespoke and free ten week after school courses for teenagers.
- 3.3. We continue to see growing recreational use of Leigh Park Gardens with visitor counters recording an increase of 45% (over 28,000 visitors) for the period April to September on 2008.

4. Heritage

- 4.1. The vinery section of glasshouse in the walled garden has now been restored and Hampshire architects are currently in the process of bidding for capital monies to restore the Arid House section during 2010. This will complete the restoration of this glasshouse.
- 4.2. With the establishment of temporary accommodation on the Leigh Park Nursery Site, partnership working between Staunton, Havant Day Services and Highbury College has moved into a new phase. With an established working base the partnership will soon be positively impacting on the heritage landscape of Staunton. This Project aims to create a fully accessible service to the community which provides learning, vocational and life skills opportunities to adults with learning difficulties in partnership with Havant Day Services and Highbury College.
- 4.3. As a spin off from the new partnership with Highbury College, Staunton is also working with PBR and the College multi craft students to take on other restoration projects in the near future.

- 4.4. The lily house water treatment system has now been upgraded to incorporate commercial UV filters. This will lead to a better quality environment for aquatic species as well as better viewing opportunities for the visiting public.

5. Environment

- 5.1. Following a programme of pathway improvements our woodland management regime continues with timber extraction, hazardous tree surveys and remedial works. Surplus timber from these operations are proving popular as firewood which is now sold by trailer load or individual bag through our retail operations.
- 5.2. The ranger and farm teams have been working to clear scrub vegetation in line with our conservation management plan. Key areas being addressed in this phase are Thicket and High Lawn. The clearance will not only enhance the Parkland Landscape but provide additional grazing for our livestock.
- 5.3. This winter the farm team will be providing a number of cattle to Hampshire County Council countryside teams in order to assist with conservation grazing schemes.
- 5.4. This year has seen, for the first time at Staunton, confirmed sightings of Nightjars within Leigh Park Gardens, testament to the quality of environmental management undertaken by the Team.

6. Education & Our Community

6.1. Educational visits to Staunton continue to rise with 2009 being the busiest year to date. Group visit figures to the Park are the highest yet with over 7,000 education visits in the last academic year. There has been a rapid growth in school visits across the Key Stages. Our education programme has increased and we can now offer curriculum linked sessions from Foundation Level through to Further Education.

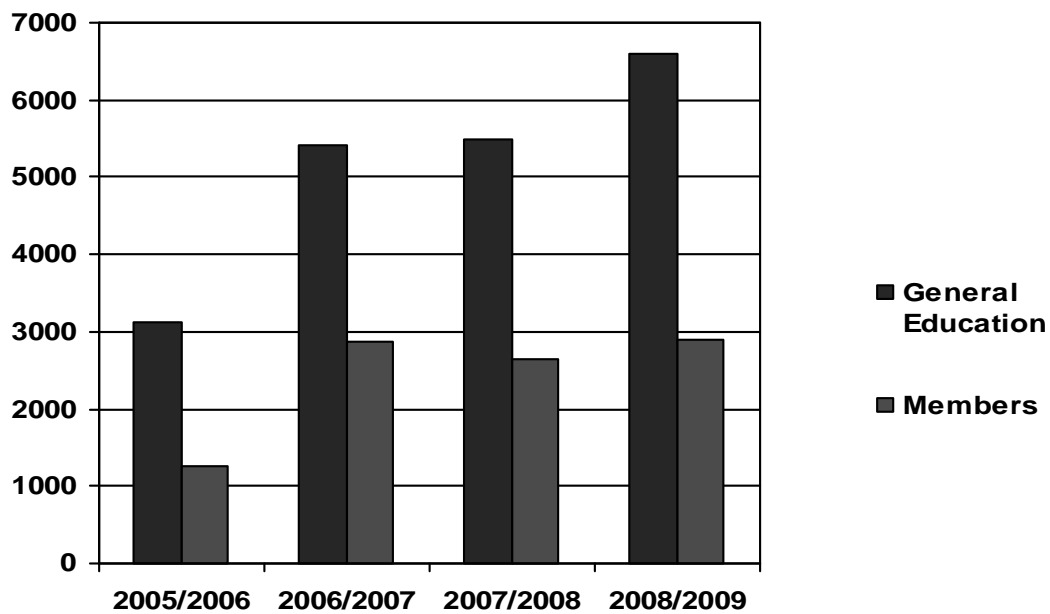


Chart 6.1: Educational Visits

6.2. Our volunteering, work experience and placement programme continues to be a success and continues to be over subscribed. Comparable numbers can be seen in Chart 6.2 (overleaf).

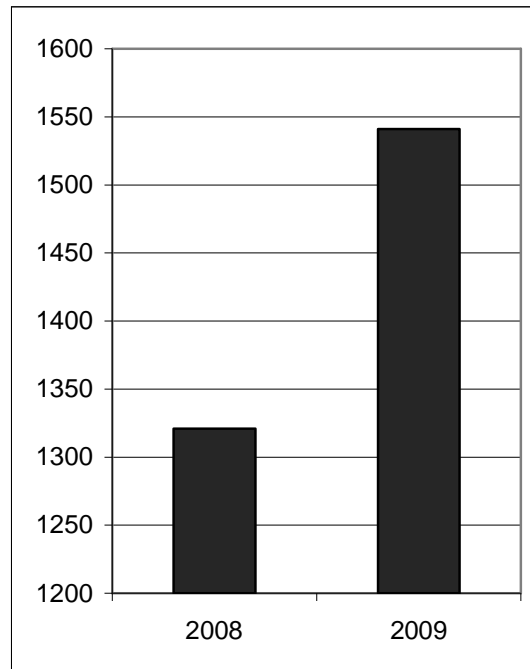


Chart 6.2: Volunteer & Placement Days

- 6.3. Our supported volunteer scheme has now been established. This partnership project enables adults with learning difficulties to volunteer at Staunton each week on a range of tasks. As a result of receiving funding from the Learning Disabilities and Development Fund a part-time Supported Volunteer Coordinator has been recruited. This post will provide training for staff and volunteers, develop individual progression plans and coordinate the Partnership between Staunton, Havant Day Services, Connexions and You.
- 6.4. The Education Team is currently preparing an Access to Nature Bid which aims to provide a fully inclusive volunteer scheme for the local and wider community. The scheme will have a multi faceted approach and in addition to providing the positive aspects of the voluntary experience to individuals it will also benefit Staunton's immediate community through the extended service we will offer as a key outcome of the scheme. The aim is that under the umbrella of the Staunton Community Volunteer Scheme the following groups will be created and developed;
- Mainstream Volunteers;
 - Supported Volunteers;
 - Youth Rangers; and
 - a formalised 'Friends of' group.
- 6.5. In addition a series of events will be planned which will include regular community volunteer days, and family / parent & toddler / dads & lads type events.
- 6.6. The desired outcomes of this project for users participating in it are initially seen to include;

- Training & employment opportunities;
 - Work experience / vocational opportunities;
 - Community service;
 - Community ownership; and
 - Health, exercise and opportunity for access to the countryside.
- 6.7. During November Staunton's Educational Team were assessed for the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge. This informs users that they will receive high quality learning experiences in a safe and well managed environment. Following a very thorough and positive assessment Staunton hopes to be among the first to obtain this accreditation.
- 6.8. During October Staunton hosted a very successful circus event in partnership with Cirque de Normandy, our extended services coordinators and Hermitage Housing. Over 1,200 children participated in workshops over five days with public performances at the weekend attracting a further 1,800 local people.
- 6.9. As a result of positive feedback from all staff and children involved an initial follow up meeting with the owners of the Cirque de Normandy has been undertaken. The possibility of having an extended residency was discussed which would enable them to operate the first circus school available to all schools in Hampshire. In addition the circus tent could be linked in with many Staunton events, hired out and essentially become a valuable addition to our facilities.
- 6.10. It is recommended that at this stage the Joint Management Committee confirm and minute its support for this project. This will enable the circus to investigate funding and for Staunton to develop a more detailed business plan with the aim of the residency commencing in 2011.
- 6.11. Funding from Hampshire Learning has been utilised to refit a number of our meetings rooms and provide equipment for use in delivering a range of sessions for adult and family learning. This will include an IT suite, for people seeking Employment, to use to create CV's, complete job applications and gain new skills.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1. That the Joint Management Committee note the content of this report and support;
- (a) The completion and submission of an Access to Nature bid;
 - (b) The creation of a dedicated Friends of Staunton Group which will have representation at the Stakeholder Forum;
 - (c) The realignment of staff structure to include a layer of Apprenticeship posts within Farm, Gardens and Ranger sections.
 - (d) The principal of a Cirque de Normandy circus school residency to commence from 2011.

Section 100 D – Local Government Act 1972 – background papers

The following documents disclose facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. NB this list excluded:

1. Published works.
2. Documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>FILE</u>
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