

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

FRIDAY 10TH NOVEMBER 2010.

PARK MANAGER'S REPORT.

Contact: Gordon Gardner (Telephone: 023 9245 3405).

1. Introduction

- The following report updates members of the Joint Management Committee on developments at the Park since the previous report presented in July 2010.
- Staunton has once again been successful in achieving a Green Flag Award for Leigh Park Gardens. We have also been successful in achieving the VisitBritain Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) accreditation for the third time.
- Visitor numbers are slightly down on last year (-6.1%) This can be accounted for by the 'free' entry into the pay zone at the Water Festival in 2009. This year, however, we charged half price entry. It is difficult, with the current counting system for visitor numbers, to get a true figure. Once the new EPOS system has some historical data we should be able to obtain a clearer picture.
- Overall revenue numbers have been good with strong growth from membership seeing 19.6% increase, the gift shop 8.4% increase, the Culture-all passport 270% increase. Day visitor revenue was down by 6.9%, mainly due to poor weather over August.
- Costs are on target with Staunton at 7.4% behind last year. There are still some savings to be made so we are expecting this to improve.

2. Marketing & Events

- Total Income generated from advertising for the summer is £6900.60 (figures based on admission price of £6.20).
- Total spend on advertising for the summer is £734.
- Response rate is due to the success of two paid adverts - one in Families Solent East and the other in Portsmouth News.
- Gardeners' World and the Gardens to Visit Guide have generated a response rate of 173 vouchers redeemed, which in turn has contributed to £1072.60 of the total income generated.

- Tesco Club Card deals campaign is still going strong following its 3rd year at the Park. It has generated £4,255 in vouchers redeemed, which equals approximately 686 adult visitors.
- Following the launch of the new membership package at the Water Festival, we have seen an increase in income of £7,626 compared with the same period last year. We are currently in the process of mailing out to over 10,000 old members that are inactive on the database and hope to generate a 10% return of new sign ups.
- We have had some successful summer events at Leigh Park Gardens. Staunton Live Country Music – Sunday 18th July received 3,500 visitors, Hampshire Water Festival – Saturday 24th & Sunday 25th July received 12,000 and Staunton Live Tribute – Sunday 22nd August received 3,500. This last event saw a drop on last year but this was due to torrential rain on the day.
- The Country Christmas Event is selling well with over 200 tickets already sold. Advertising is set to go out at the end of the month. We have 960 tickets in total to sell. We are hoping to generate a £13,000 profit from this Christmas promotion excluding secondary spend.

3. Farm

- To help with paddock rotation on the farm we regularly re-seed the small fields. You can see our Kune Kune pigs in action turning up the soil in preparation.
- Simple is sometimes best – we are adding small features to the farm. With advice from New Forest Wildlife sanctuary we now have a field mouse display. Also on the theme of small animals the visitor can now see the life cycle of a chicken.
- All farm products are selling well. Eggs, meat, straw and animal feed have seen increases. Once we have completed the project to cleaned up the membership database it is planned to sell Staunton produce direct to our members. Our Long Horn calves have gone to market. We expected to get over £4,200 but due to feed costs have had to take £3,700.

4. Gardens and Glasshouses

- Positive feed back received throughout the season concerning the colour and standard of maintenance. Credit must be given to the garden team as this has been achieved with effectively a 25% drop in their staffing.
- Various refurbishments have been undertaken over the last 6 months. Notably the bow wall in the walled garden. This, however, impeded the summer planting programme.

- The collapse of the Hartley Glasshouse brought about lots of management issues. The gardens team still maintained a smooth operation over this period. After a considerable input into a viable alternative, a twin span poly-tunnel is now going through the final planning process.
- Gardens team are working on a workshops programme for inclusion in the revamped events offering for the 2010/2011 season. These will include: "An Introduction to Propagation"
"Introduction to Pruning Shrubs and Trees"
"The Container Garden or Hanging Baskets"
- The Giant Amazon Water Lily has been successfully cultivated and also plants from Staunton were given to Ventnor Botanic Garden and the Living Rainforest. Next year the Gardens team are looking to introduce butterflies to the Water Lily house.
- Plant and vegetable sales have been strong this year already achieving £8,400. With a budget of £8,600 we are looking to be well over £10,000 by the end of the financial year.
- To help improve the attraction of the Walled Garden we have taken steps to change from solely planting annuals to including perennials. This is to extend the flowering season and in the present financial climate, to reduce costs and garden maintenance. There will be the additional impact of planting bulbs and climbers.
- We are looking at the current memorial trees and benches scheme. It needs to be streamlined and formalised. Staunton has a mishmash of different benches, placards and random trees. The goal would be to have a standard bench in two sizes, be able to sponsor current trees and to purchase trees from a predetermined list complete with a standardised plaque.
- The gardens team are fully committed to working with the Highbury College and Havant Day Services. The students will work Tuesday to Thursdays. The goal is to help them with their communication and life skills with the aim to using this opportunity as a introduction to work. The team will be primarily supporting plant production for plant sales. They will also be involved with supporting operational needs throughout the gardens.
- Valuable assistance to the Gardens work schedule has also been provided by volunteers and Future Job Fund supported employment.

5. Operations

- Since June this year we have reviewed the fire management plan, emergency evacuation plan and fire risk assessments. We are currently in the process of training all staff on the fire procedure whilst carrying out daily, weekly and monthly checks on things such as fire alarms, fire fighting equipment, fire doors and emergency lighting.

- We have been working on the Hampshire County Council health and safety audit. Since June this year, our results have improved and are currently at 90%.
- We are seeking quotes for the installation of numerous hand wash areas along with the refurbishment of the visitor centre toilets and a roof for the muck heap. Regarding the muck heap, we are moving the hay stored in the lower barn to the new roofed building. This will give us more space to show animals during the winter months. Also, with a possible new attraction using part of the gothic barn, we will need more room for the ewes to lamb.
- HCC's head of risk management has visited Staunton on several occasions within the last 4 months and is pleased with the progress we are making in terms of health and safety. Chris Czarkowski is also keen to support us financially with the improvements we are planning to meet the objectives of the ECOLI audit.
- Steve Jenner is assisting Kerry with the coordination of volunteers and working closely with the supported volunteer scheme since the departure of Jayne McSwayne at the end of the summer. Steve will also be helping the gardens team in the planning of their work programme in regards to the Havant and Highbury joint project.
- Plans for the winter period are to complete glazing risk assessments and work on COSHH assessments and complete any general maintenance work whilst we are in the quiet period.
- We are also monitoring utility usage more closely with a view to reducing costs. Smart metres are due to be fitted in the new year. There is a cost, but we will be much better informed about where the wastage is occurring. This will allow us to reduce further our energy costs. The smart metres take a reading every half an hour and feed them back to a website which will allow us to see exactly how much we are using and more importantly where, when and who is using it.
- We are in the process of building a maintenance programme with the goal to pass most of the physical work to the volunteer teams. As the daily and weekly tasks reduce there will be more opportunities to take on other projects such as painting the rabbit barn and redecoration work in the tearooms.

6. Country Park

- We are in the process of changing the structure of the ranger team from one E grade post (senior) and three D grade posts (rangers) to a new set up of one E (senior), one D (ranger) one C (assistant ranger) and one apprentice ranger on the minimum wage. The training provider is Sparsholt College and the apprentice will most likely be on a conservation land management course or recreation and access course. This will save a considerable amount, provide a

feeder route into the industry for young enthusiastic people and still maintain a four person team. Naturally down skilling will put more pressure on the E and D posts but hopefully this will be partially offset by the fresh ideas new people bring to the team. Apprentice posts will be on a 14 month contract and will run as part of the HCC apprentice initiative.

- We are now only awaiting a Rural Land Registry amendment to give us a national field number for the ornamental landscaped parkland (LPG) before finalising the HLS (Higher Level Stewardship) contract that will bring us up to £14,000 a year in management payments and up to £21,000 each year for three years for capital works. This in turn will enable us to restore much of the natural and historical aspects of the park and put in special project requests for up to 90% funding for one-off projects.
- We have reviewed the vehicle set up and made savings by cutting one vehicle completely with the view to purchase our own mower next spring rather than just lease. Lease terms are for twelve months but the mower is only needed for eight. Dave Paterson will be attending a meeting with the Hampshire Transport Management to discuss ways forward with other vehicles.
- The Police operation throughout the summer to deal with anti social behaviour was successful on the whole, although we did have the Land Rover stolen and a case of arson on the nursery site. The Probation service are going to be clearing scrub and areas affected by fly tipping to reopen a path on the western fringe of the estate. This should start in November.
- We are working with the local Youth offender team and social services key workers to provide opportunities for youth offenders in the area to come and work with us and hopefully learn some life skills.
- The park is looking to increase income from angling, fire wood and round timber (for construction). With reference to angling, we will be changing the membership to start on any date rather than the set date of the 1st April. This is currently linked to the rod licence. As for the firewood supply, the ranger team are working on building a stock pile so that Staunton can meet demand. The team will be a lot more proactive with the bagged wood sales from the gift shop as well, constantly replenishing so that they never run too low. The park will continue to try to maximise these incomes without detriment to the biodiversity of the estate.
- We have saved Staunton over £2,000 by chipping our own timber for the play area.

