

# Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee

Friday 15 November 2024

## PRESENT:

Councillor Ewert, in the Chair.

Councillor Briars-Delve, Co-Chair.

Councillors Lennox-Boyd, Pascoe, Tivnan, Worth, Allison, Morton, Ms Watkin, Wood and Penrose (Substitute for Councillor Blight).

Co-opted Representatives: Mr D L Richards and Mr Ben Church.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Blight, Alvey, Gilmour and Seeva.

Also in attendance: Chris Burton (Park Manager), David Marshall (Business Development Manager), Victoria Pomery (CEO, The Box), Jozef Lewis (Lead Accountant), Sharon Mercer (Head of Strategic Programmes), Tamsin Daniel (Heritage Services Manager), Michaela Barwell (Natural England), Coralie Barrow (Cornwall National Landscape), Councillor Rebecca Lingard (Maker with Rame Parish Council).

The meeting started at 10.04 am and finished at 12.23 pm.

*Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

## 18. Declarations of Interest

There were two declarations of interest:

Member	Interest	Description
Councillor Briars-Delve	Private (Registered)	Member of the National Marine Park Horizons Board
Councillor Tivnan	Other-Registerable Interest	Member of the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe

## 19. Minutes

The Joint Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2024 as a correct record.

## 20. Chair's Urgent Business

The Chair advised the Committee that due to a technical error, 'Questions from Members of the Public' had been omitted from the agenda. Four Public Questions had been received for today's meeting.

The Joint Committee agreed to respond to these questions under Chairs Urgent Business.

<b>Question 1</b>	As mentioned in the minutes of the July 2024 meeting, trees in the Park are under significant pressure of disease. Is replanting with more resilient species underway or planned? If so, what is the time-frame for replanting? Which species are being used and in what quantities?
<b>Answer 1</b>	Thank you for your question Adapting to climate change and diseases presents a considerable financial and labour challenge for the Park, and has been particularly prominent in the past few years. As a result, the Park has undertaken significant work to replant effected areas, and begun a transition to planting climate resilient species. Over the past 3 years, around 2,000 trees have been planted across several areas of woodland in the Park, including two plantations in the Deer Park, an area in Picklecombe Valley, and the replanting of avenue trees and felled trees in the lower park. The species planted have been Beech, Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Hornbeam, Wild Cherry, Limes, Birch, Field Maple, Rowan, and Holly. We, along with the rest of the country, are suffering from Ash Die Back. The Park undertakes a yearly Ash Die Back survey in the months of June and July, before removing or pollarding infected trees where they may be at high risk of causing injury or damage to property. Those of low risk are left in the hope that they maybe resilient or become resilient to the disease. Some areas of ash will be left to naturally regenerate, while others will be re-planted with the above mentioned species. Unfortunately, it is anticipated that this will be an ongoing project as climate change and disease continually adapt, presenting new challenges.
<b>Question 2</b>	What is the current status of the draft Conservation Management Plan for Mount Edgcumbe Country Park?
<b>Answer 2</b>	Thank you for your question. Phase one surveys conducted by LandUse Consultants are underway and are nearing completion. These will form part of the PAI application for Countryside Stewardship as well as informing the CMP. With regards to the over-arching Conservation Management Plan (Phase 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· An Expression of Interest was submitted by Cornwall Council on behalf of the Joint Committee to the NLHF in April 2024 and we received permission to submit an application within 12 months;</li> <li>· A draft application has been developed by the officer working group which has been informed by the preparation of a brief for the CMP and two estimates received;</li> <li>· Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council will now be taking the decision to apply to the NLHF through their respective approval processes, including the requirement for both councils to provide a minimum of 10% match funding;</li> <li>· Our ambition is that we will have all the necessary approvals and match funding in place by January 2025, allowing us to submit the application to the NLHF;</li> <li>· The NLHF decision will be 3 months after the submission of the application and if we are successful, we will then go out to tender for the CMP in April/May 2025 for the work to commence in the summer;</li> <li>· We anticipate that the CMP may require 9-12 months to complete to allow sufficient time for public consultation.</li> </ul>

<b>Question 3</b>	In 2023/24 'rents' produced 18 per cent of net trading income. In the interest of transparency, can the Joint Committee provide a breakdown of this figure (e.g. catering, office accommodation, shops, grazing, Cremyll ferry etc.)?
<b>Answer 3</b>	Thank you for your question. These figures requested are commercially sensitive information, and are restricted under Section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act – 'information whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any legal person (an individual, a company, the public authority itself or any other legal entity'.
<b>Question 4</b>	In light of the obligations and responsibilities under the 'Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023)', how has the MEJC/MECP/PCC been- and/or is CURRENTLY making progress in securing the protected SSSI status at Rame Head, 'in a proactive, methodical manner, and as a priority for MECP and the wider community'?
<b>Answer 4</b>	Thank you for your question. The conservation and appropriate management of the SSSI at Rame Head is of utmost priority to both Park management and the Joint Committee. Since the removal of the grazing ponies earlier this year, we are aware of a number of complaints raised by members of the public and ongoing concerns towards the condition of the site. Mount Edgcumbe Country Park (MECP) has acted proactively to arrange meetings with the relevant parties, and remains in contact with both Natural England and the tenant farmer. The responsibility for the management of the SSSI habitat at Rame Head rests with any occupier (tenant) of the land, and its designation and monitoring is the responsibility of Natural England. MECP has requested the restoration of appropriate grazing at the site to ensure appropriate long-term habitat management, and will continue to negotiate for this. Natural England are aware of the removal of the ponies and concerns regarding degradation to the site. As the body responsible for designating and monitoring SSSIs, they can be contacted at <a href="mailto:DevonCornwallandIslesofScilly@naturalengland.org.uk">DevonCornwallandIslesofScilly@naturalengland.org.uk</a> .

## 21. **Co-opted Membership**

Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor) delivered the Co-opted Membership Update to the Joint Committee, and discussed:

- a) At the last meeting in July 2024, the Joint Committee agreed to extend invitations to relevant organisations and bodies, to nominate individuals for co-opted membership to the Joint Committee;
- b) Co-opted members were appointed for four year periods, reviewed annually;
- c) Co-opted members were treated as non-voting members in accordance with Section 13 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989;

- d) Invitations had been sent to Natural England, Historic England, Cornwall National Landscape, Maker With Rame Parish Council, and Millbrook Parish Council;
- e) Organisations were able to nominate more than one representative for co-option however, only one member was eligible to attend per meeting;
- f) The following nominations had been received:

Natural England	Michaela Barwell
Historic England	Declined
Cornwall National Landscape	Emma Browning & Coralie Barrow
Maker With Rame Parish Council	Rebecca Lingard & Lin Stewart Birch
Millbrook Parish Council	Awaiting Response

Following introductory presentations from the nominees, the Joint Committee agreed to co-opt the following members to the Joint Committee:

Michaela Barwell	Natural England
Emma Browning & Coralie Barrow	Cornwall National Landscape
Rebecca Lingard & Lin Stewart Birch	Maker With Rame Parish Council

The Joint Committee agreed to request that a training and introductory session was arranged for the newly co-opted members.

## 22. Finance Report

Jozef Lewis (Lead Accountant) delivered the Mount Edgumbe Budget Monitoring Report for 2024/25, and discussed:

- a) An adverse quarterly position of £80,000 was reported, forecast to be funded equally between Plymouth and Cornwall Councils;
- b) The adverse variation was primarily attributed to energy price pressures, reduced holiday let income, and parking pressures. Over the past three years, salary costs had increased £90,000, and energy costs had increased by £40,000;
- c) There remained a cost neutral budget expectation for Mount Edgumbe Country Park. As annual cost pressures increased, the Park was expected to match these pressures with additional revenue generation or cost savings;
- d) Collaborative work was ongoing in relation to Capital Programme projects. Work had been completed on the Orangery toilets, and the English Garden House project was in progress;
- e) The primary ongoing risk to the 24/25 budget was a further increase in the adverse variation. As of Q2, the repairs and maintenance budget had been exhausted, resulting in six months of risk for further expenditure.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- f) Potential financial implications of the recent National Insurance increase. It was unclear if the financial settlement would be increased, or if other funding streams would be put in place by Government to compensate for this increase;
- g) The harsh financial impact of the Covid Pandemic and Cost of Living for the Park, particularly for its Holiday Lets;
- h) Concerns around the future trajectory of finances, the importance of financial planning and strategy, and the need for investment to enhance income generation within the Park;
- i) The submission of the Conservation Management Plan bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which would include a business plan for the park, helping to identify long term investment and risks.

The Joint Committee agreed:

- 1. To note the financial position contained in the report along with the risks, issues and any mitigating actions;
- 2. To note the Capital Programme.

### 23. **Park Manager's Report**

Chris Burton (Park Manager) delivered the Park Manager's Report to the Joint Committee, and discussed:

- a) An overview of the park, including its natural, historical and environmental significance, as well as its free entry for the public;
- b) Around £1.4 MM of grants had been attained by the park this year. The Garden Battery initial scoping works had taken place and the drainage system had been restored, the Orangery toilets refurbishment had been completed, and work on the English Garden House had commenced. Other maintenance works had included holiday lets, formal benches, fencing, Barrow Centre windows, and the Gardeners Lodge roof work;
- c) Phase One of the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) would assess non-roof heritage and landscape assets, and a new stewardship application would provide a steady revenue income;
- d) Volunteering remained a strong asset in the Park, with various businesses providing a voluntary workforce, including the Royal Navy, EE, and the Department for Work and Pensions;

- e) Secure Forests had conducted two dry stone walling courses for ex-service and Blue Light men and women, delivering re-training and mental wellbeing, while providing the Park with a high quality, repaired dry-stone wall;
- f) The East Garden Lawn had been replanted with climate and deer resilient plants, with grant support received from the Friends;
- g) As part of a future project to improve climate resilience, the team were looking to improve the water transport infrastructure across the park, This would require replacement of the Victorian led pipes;
- h) The 12 Cornish Black Bee colonies continued to remain strong, despite a Bee warning being issued due to the wet summer;
- i) A Willow hedge had been planted in the play area, and the formal planted beds would be planted in a new floral theme;
- j) Work was ongoing to maintain the heritage infrastructure, including 56 listed buildings:
  - I. £1 MM of Heritage Lottery funding had been received for the Garden Battery, and initial works had started;
  - II. £300,000 of funding had been attained to replace the roof of the English Garden House. Once complete, the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) would help identify potential funding sources to help transform the rest of the building;
  - III. Plans were in place next year to repair the French Garden House;
  - IV. The Main House roof had been repaired;
  - V. Additional office spaces had been created, which could present an additional income source;
  - VI. The Orangery Toilets had been refurbished;
  - VII. Work was ongoing to refresh the Wedding Marquee. Meetings had been conducted with the architects and Historic England to ensure an appropriate planning submission later this year. This long term investment was vital to maximise income for the park, provide an appropriate standard for weddings, while maintaining a design sympathetic to the park and historic landscape;
- k) Pressures affecting the Park remained largely unchanged, including Ash Die-Back (approx. £10,000 PY), storms and tree safety works, utility bills, wage bills, cost of living, inflation and local authority funding;
- l) Feedback for the Park remained positive, with the Park featuring in Trip Advisor's Travellers Choice Award for the third consecutive year;
- m) The working horses were training to provide carriage rides next year as part of a business partnership, while also conducting winter woodland work;
- n) Holiday Lets were performing well in comparison to national averages however, the market remained down overall.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- o) The operation of the working horses, including their potential to feature in wedding ceremonies;
- p) Operational issues of the current wedding marquee, which was 13 years old and required frequent and repeated repairs. The marquee was also utilised for events, and helped support commercial tenancies;
- q) Incorporating Natural England's comments, an estimated cost of a new wedding marquee was £450,000, which it was hoped would be funded from capital receipts;
- r) The Mount Edgumbe Country Park was covenanted land, purchased for the purpose of a country park. Country Parks were enshrined in the 1968 Countryside Act as having to provide free public access;
- s) Plymouth City Council operated a 'Memorial Bench' scheme, enabling members of the public to commission benches around the City, including the Mount Edgumbe Country Park.

The Joint Committee agreed to:

- 1. Thank the Park management and team for their continued efforts and successes within the Park;
- 2. Note the report.

#### 24. **Car Parking Briefing Paper**

David Marshall (Business Development Manager) delivered the Car Parking and Enforcement Briefing Paper to the Joint Committee, and discussed:

- a) While access to the Mount Edgumbe Country Park remained free, the Park operated four separate carparks which were subject to parking tariffs;
- b) It was important that parking tariffs were updated periodically to ensure they aligned with inflationary and CPI increases;
- c) By law, all parking signage must be updated when new tariffs were introduced, and all parking machines required reprogramming. Furthermore, updating the Off-street Parking Order incurred considerable costs and time, making it impractical to update charges yearly. Therefore, the Park updated parking tariffs approximately every five years to account for inflation and CPI;
- d) Parking charges underwent a public consultation process, and were tailored with consideration for the local population and commuters, with an annual parking pass available.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- e) The possibility and potential benefits of introducing donation points around the park, to enable the public to contribute to the Park's upkeep;
- f) The financial cost of implementing the new tariffs was estimated at around £4,500. This was expected to produce an annual increase of around £6,000 for the Park and therefore, the cost should be self-funded after the first 10 months of operation;
- g) There was a need to maximise compliance with Parking charges, which was achieved through enforcement;
- h) This cycle of the parking tariff review had incurred additional costs due to the requirement to re-line and sign some of the parking bays due to wear and tear;
- i) A consultation process had been undertaken, with feedback suggesting that many considered the parking fees to be reasonable, particularly given that the Park offered free access;
- j) The park was also accessible by foot, bike and the Cremyll Ferry. The Park featured a cycle hire facility, and options had been explored to introduce Beryl bikes, and EV charging points;
- k) While parking presented a considerable logistical challenge, particularly during major events, the Park worked with the bus and ferry companies to ensure extra services were delivered during peak demand;
- l) The Park's parking tariffs remained low in comparison to many other car parks and attractions.

The Joint Committee agreed to note the report.

## 25. **Friends Of Mount Edgcumbe Report**

Ben Church (Chair, Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Committee) delivered the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Report and discussed:

- a) The sad passing of the previous Chair, Mr Alan Drummond, on 29 September 2024. Alan had played an integral part in leadership, volunteering, and fundraising for both the Park and the Friends Committee;
- b) Membership of the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe currently stood at 850-900 members. Following an EGM, membership would now be taken online, enabling greater access for members of the public to join and donate;
- c) The friends had contributed significant financial investment in the Park this year, with projects including:
  - I. Bedding plants;
  - II. Remedial statue work;



- III. Deer Park fencing;
- IV. The Children's Play Module;
- V. The dry-stone wall;
- VI. The Orangery Toilets;
- VII. The English Garden House

- d) It had been another successful year for events organised by the Friends, with over 400 children and parents attending the Easter Egg Hunt, and the annual Classic Car Show and Summer Fayre achieving record visitor numbers, with over 800 show cars. Significant positive feedback had been received, as well as valuable funding for the Friends;
- e) Next year would mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friends of Mount Edgumbe, and the committee were planning to host a celebratory event;
- f) The Friends Lodge was run by volunteers, and acted as both an information point for the park, as well as a bookshop.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- g) Gratitude for the Friends of Mount Edgumbe Committee, and the importance of their voluntary and fundraising work for the Park.

The Joint Committee agreed:

- 1. To thank the Friends of Mount Edgumbe for their ongoing hard work and support to the Park this year;
- 2. To note the report.

## 26. **National Marine Park Update**

Sharon Mercer (Head of Strategic Programmes) delivered the National Marine Park Update, and discussed:

- a) The purpose of the project was to develop the entity of the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, by the end of the programme;
- b) Considerable progress had already been made, with the National Marine Park working to establish a company. A CIO had been created, and a memorandum of understanding was in progress;
- c) Tinside was the first 'gateway' project due for completion next year, having been prioritised due to funding deadlines from the Youth Investment Fund. Works at Mount Batten would begin shortly, with a contract award expected today for the Mount Batten Centre, Public Realm and tower works;
- d) Re-consultation was underway with the public regarding 'community access points' to ensure plans created during the development phase were still appropriate;

- e) The project would look to drive environmental, habitat and species appreciation and behavioural change through a series of nature projects. Options for a blue finance model and carbon credits was being explored;
- f) A digital project was being developed to enhance engagement with the marine environment. A funding bid had been submitted to the Arts Council;
- g) A host of activities had been conducted over the summer, The team would now be reviewing current progress and future direction as part of 'evaluation week';
- h) In collaboration with the Plymouth Waterfront Partnership, the Marine Park had funded free and reduced activity sessions across the marine park, with over 1,700 sessions booked at Mount Edgcumbe, Tinside and Mount Batten. Mount Edgcumbe had hosted House Tours and Alpaca experiences;
- i) The purpose of the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park project was to increase engagement with the heritage of the marine park, enabling the public to discover new activities, gain appreciation of the park, and reduce barriers to access;
- j) At Mount Edgcumbe, drainage surveys had been completed of the Garden Battery, and meetings were ongoing to finalise the design. A letter of comfort had been signed during the bid, and would be superseded by the development of a collaboration agreement, enabling the National Marine Park to undertake work on the Park's asset;
- k) A National Marine Park ranger was based at Mount Edgcumbe several days per week. As part of the schools programme, 15 schools would be engaged over the next five years, including Four Lanes End school in Cornwall;
- l) Mount Edgcumbe would facilitate heritage events and digs next year as part of Marine Park engagement, as well as providing voluntary opportunities.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- m) The need to ensure a coordinated approach across Cornwall and Plymouth, particularly relating to transport and access to attractions across the Marine Park;
- n) Seagrass collection and development of seagrass meadows;
- o) The need to tackle waste water and sewage in the National Marine Park. While it was not within the remit of the Marine Park itself, a memorandum of understanding had recently been signed between South West Water, the Environment Agency and Plymouth City Council, and works were ongoing to develop sustainable water storage solutions across Plymouth, with investment in sustainable urban drainage systems.

The Joint Committee agreed to note the report.

Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor) delivered an overview of the Tracking Decision Log, and highlighted:

- a) All of the actions and decisions within the log had been completed;
- b) Consideration of co-opted membership for Millbrook Parish Council would take place at the next available Joint Committee meeting.

The Joint Committee agreed to note the report.

28. **Exempt Business**

The Joint Committee agreed pass a resolution under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1,2&3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

29. **Part II Minutes**

The Joint Committee agreed the Part Two minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2024 as a correct record.

30. **Mount Edgcumbe Tenancy and Landholding Update**

This item was considered under Part Two.

*(Please note, there is a confidential part to this minute)*