

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee

Friday 22 November 2019

PRESENT:

Councillor Trubody, in the Chair.

Councillor Vincent, Vice Chair.

Councillors Bridgeman Mrs Johnson, Mavin, Mrs Pengelly, Rennie, P Smith, Burden, Pugh, Lennox-Boyd

Co-opted Representatives: Mr D L Richards and Mr Rugg.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Beer (Councillor Bridgeman Substituting), Councillor Corvid (Councillor Rennie Substituting), Councillor Foot, Councillor Nolan and Sir Richard Carew-Poole OBE.

Also in attendance: Nicola Moyle, Beverly Gardener, Chris Burton, David Marshall, Catherine Thompson and Jamie Sheldon

The meeting started at 10:00 and finished at 12:10.

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.

10. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

11. **Minutes**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting 19 July 2019.

Proposed - Councillor Pengelly

Seconded - Councillor Vincent

12. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

13. **Revenue Budget Monitoring 2019/20**

Nicola Moyle (Head of Art, Heritage and Film) and Beverly Gardiner (Senior Technical Officer) presented the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2019/20 report to the Committee –

- (a) The report provided an update of the financial position for the Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee for financial year 2019/20.

Key variations to budget were:

- £13k Additional staffing
- (£16k) Additional Parking income
- £2.8k Utilities pressure Lady Emma's Cottage

(b) Budgets were a work in progress due to joint authority subsidy yet to be finalised and review carried-out of commercial project delivery timetable. Budgets would progress savings targets, future income streams (includes parking and events) and revenue implications of capital projects proposed.

The key areas of discussion were –

- Whether there was a phased pay back on Vat;
- Queried if the lease holders of the Quay were making any contribution;
- Whether there was a policy for visitors wanting to charge their electric cars at holiday lets.

The Committee:

1. Noted the financial position contained in the report along with the risks, issues and any mitigating actions;
2. Noted the capital programme and proposals to be presented to Plymouth City Council's Investment Board.

14. **Park Activity (to November 2019)**

Chris Burton (Mount Edgcumbe Manager) presented the Park Activity (to November 2019) update to the Committee -

- (a) Lady Emma's Cottage was purchased from the owner in September 2018 and since then has been fully booked, justifying its purchase as a Park asset. The cost of this sale was covered by a donation from the Oak Foundation.
- (b) The Orangery Gatehouse holiday let has been completed and is very busy, aimed at the wedding market this is a one bedroom property adjacent to the Orangery with fantastic views across the Sound.
- (c) Captain Blake's Retreat has been fully booked since it was launched on the 1 June 2019. November 2019 has been the first opportunity to get into the building and snag it since it was opened all seems to be going well and it has very positive feedback despite the trek involved getting to it.
- (d) Work on Cremyll car park has been completed with the car park resurfaced and parking bays delineated. Parking as a whole contributes around £90,000 for the Park. Early indications show that we are likely to receive in excess of £2,000 per month

more in the summer months from this car park. A balance will have to be sought between local car parking permits and pay as you park customers in the summer. The price of the annual car parking permits have not risen since April 2011.

- (e) Cremyll Lodge and Horseshoe Cottage are our oldest holiday lets and would receive a makeover this winter as part of the continuing maintenance regime of the property portfolio.
- (f) The new holiday let development of The Coastguard Lookout at Rame Head had gone out to tender and work would commence before the new-year.
- (g) Initial design concepts for the Tree House were being drawn-up to be put forward to Planning at Cornwall Council with the hope of starting construction next autumn.
- (h) An interpretation board was completed on Lawrence of Arabia telling of his involvement with Air Sea Rescue at RAF Mount Batten and his visits to the Park.
- (i) Funds were being sought for the repair of the access road to the Barrow Centre, which had become very uneven and subject to flash flooding and dust storms in the summer. The cost of these repairs however was likely to be around £25,000 and beyond the Park's routine maintenance budget. A business case would be prepared.
- (j) The Park had taken delivery of a triple mower and a Suzuki ride-on mower from Plymouth City Council.
- (k) The Park's trees featured in the Corporate Risk Management Strategy. The Rangers were continuing to carry out the work involved with the 'Quantifiable Tree Safety Risk Assessment'
- (l) The Park welcomed eight Austrian volunteers on ten month placements through the KONA European Programme.
- (m) The clearing of fallen trees after storms and the number of times the Park was closed due to high winds was on the increase. This was a symptom perhaps of the effects of global warming and was likely to have a greater impact on the Park in the future.
- (n) A new addition to the relic garden had been created by the gardeners utilising some of the interesting stone work uncovered by the creation of the Black Bee Reserve.
- (o) The Black Bee Reserve had a very good year this year, only three years ago the group had just one colony, this year there were close to 50. Black Bee colonies were being spread around the Rame Peninsula and we have had our first real harvest of honey.
- (p) Through the 'Polinize' project the Mount Edgcumbe apiary had been able to supply colonies of Black Bees to The Box and Theatre Royal.
- (q) The Park continued to play a full role in the planning for Mayflower 400 and will participate in the opening and closing of the light festival Illuminate.

- (r) The English Garden House had been regraded to Grade 2* by Historic England and as such would be eligible for grants to restore it. In the first instance this would involve securing emergency funding to replace the roof and protect the assets from further deterioration due to weather.
- (s) Lighting connections and supply had been replaced and updated at the Folly, Orangery and the French Garden as part of the legacy of 'Illuminate' and 'Mayflower 2020' funding.
- (t) The Barrow Centre was looking tired and had received a makeover.
- (u) Wifi had been installed in the bottom of the Park and the holiday-lets at Cremyll and Orangery Lodge now have internet access.
- (v) The 4 August 2019 saw the return of the annual Mount Edgumbe Classic and American Car Rally run jointly by Friends of Mount Edgumbe Country Park and Cornwall Hospice Care (supported by Park staff). Attendance was estimated to be around the 10,000 mark.
- (w) Miss Ivy Events hosted two successful events in August – Jazz and Gin and a Summer Fete.
- (x) September 2019 hosted our first Street Food Festival with a mixture of music and food on offer held in the early evening which again struck a chord with the public and was well attended.
- (y) On 15 September saw the return of the 'Doggy Day Out' which suits the Park very well and provided lots of fun for the canine friendly attendees.
- (z) In October 2019 the Park hosted the annual return of the Land Rover Discovery event (the Land Rover Discovery was launched at Mount Edgumbe in October 1989).
- (aa) On 27 October 2019 the Friends of Mount Edgumbe Country Park Halloween Hunt was incredibly well received with 425 families taking part (in excess of 1,500 people).
- (bb) Throughout the summer holidays and into September Mount Edgumbe Country Park hosted a major part of St Luke's Hospice 'Elmer's Trail' (Plymouth). This took two years of planning to deliver but proved its worth as many thousands of people followed the trail over the period,
- (cc) The Park continues to develop its holiday let portfolio, it has eight holiday lets at the moment and will have 10 by 2022. Those coming on line now are likely to have higher profit margins as they are predominantly higher end properties, service costs for lower grades are more or less the same as higher grades.
- (dd) The Park Manager and Business Development Manager attended the 'Old Houses New Tech' Symposium based at Antony House and are pursuing ways of enhancing the

collection through digital media. This would be launched with the forthcoming Blitz display but would have longer term legacy.

- (ee) Holiday let occupancy strategies for summer periods and peak periods were being reviewed this year in partnership with Classic cottages. Short term lets maybe replaced with week only bookings.
- (ff) Initial Planning for the 'Blitz 80' exhibition is taking place. Designs had been drawn up and rooms allocated to the display, the Metta Catrina will be decanted next winter and the display launched on the anniversary of the bombing of the House during the Plymouth blitz on 21 March 1941.
- (gg) Initial discussions are taking place along with valuation reports in preparation of the lease renewal at Treninnow Chalets. This has the potential to considerably raise revenue income for the Park and is critical in terms of driving towards a zero budget for the Park.
- (hh) Bookable guided house tours had provided a significant income this year and will be continued throughout the year.
- (ii) recently received revised advice in relation to the VAT status of weddings which changed the VAT status for our venues. In 2008 and 2012 Park staff checked and recorded the VAT advice which (at that time) confirmed weddings as zero rated. The HMRC's policy on wedding venue income was clarified in 2016 as the result of a series of tribunals on the interpretation of VAT legislation. The new advice (received at the end of August 2019) was very clear in stating that weddings need to pay VAT and that this should be retrospectively backdated over the past three years.
- (jj) This will have a budgetary impact on the Park. Weddings are sold at least two years in advance and those weddings that already have contracts signed in good faith (without VAT applied) will now take place with little or no profit for the Park. This will mean that although bookings have gone up after considerable work by the staff this will be cancelled out in the short term by the new interpretation. VAT was added to the price for all weddings sold from the moment this information was received. The Park has commissioned an independent review of the pricing structure of this business stream with the help of PCC, this looked at comparative markets and prices have been adjusted accordingly. A presentation to the Joint Committee on this topic was given at the last meeting.

The key areas of discussion were -

- Whether there was any resistance from residents regarding price increases of local car parking permits and what the implications would be;
- Discussed whether there had been an impact of wedding bookings following the VAT legislation ruling;

- Discussed the positive work that had been taking place regarding the water transport strategy and Catherine Thomson from Cornwall Council gave an update on the discussions that had been taking place. Catherine would continue discussions with Plymouth City Council;
- What the timeline for the water transport strategy was.

The Committee noted the update.

Proposed - Councillor Bridgeman

Seconded - Councillor Lennox Boyde

15. **Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park Update**

Neil Rug presented the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park Update to the Committee –

- (a) The Charity Commission had provided new guidance for charities with a connection to a non-charity and The Friends were in the process of revising its General Policy to take this guidance into account in their association with the Park Management.
- (b) The guidance also provided greater clarity on where The Friends were 'permitted' to provide financial support and was likely to mean that while we may be sympathetic to requests for funding of certain items they will fall into the category of those that have to remain the ultimate responsibility of the Joint Committee.
- (c) Quarterly meetings with the Park Management would result in a mutual prioritisation of projects.
- (d) The Friends were in the process of investigating a significant improvement to the toilet provision at the Orangery and the creation of a shelter structure for use by school groups in inclement weather.
- (e) Members wished to thank the Friends of the Park and all their volunteers for the hard work they do.

The Committee noted the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park Update.

Proposed by Councillor Smith

Seconded by Councillor Mavin