

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee

Friday 20 November 2020

PRESENT:

Councillor Trubody, in the Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Burden, Corvid, Michael Leaves, Nolan, Mrs Pengelly, Pugh, Peter Smith and Councillor Vincent (Joint Chair).

Co-opted Representative: Nicola Cull (Chair of the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park).

Apologies for absence: Councillors Crago, Foot, Lennox-Boyd and Rennie.

Also in attendance: Chris Burton (Plymouth City Council), Kate Farmery (Plymouth City Council), Beverley Gardiner (Plymouth City Council), Peter Marsh (Cornwall Council), David Marshall (Plymouth City Council), Nicola Moyle (Plymouth City Council) and Helen Prendergast (Plymouth City Council).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.45 am.

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.

12. **Declarations of Interest**

In accordance with the code of conduct, Councillor Mrs Pengelly declared a disclosable in relation to minute 21 (renewal of Trenninow and Wiggle Cliff ground leases – update and next steps).

13. **Minutes**

The Joint Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2020 subject to the following amendment –

- (1) funds had been set aside for projects such as new toilets and a children's 'shelter' (minute 9(h) refers).

14. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

15. **Presentation on Blitz 80 Display**

David Marshall (Business Development Manager) advised that an exhibition would be held in 2021, to mark the Blitz 80. In the Second World War, the Mount Edgcumbe house had been destroyed by German bombers during the 1941, Blitz on Plymouth. A number of draft display panels had been produced which included the following information (these were shared at the virtual meeting) -

- Dunkirk 1940;
- Plymouth Blitz: Why Plymouth;
- Plymouth Blitz: the First Night;
- Plymouth Blitz: the Second Night;

David Marshall (Business Development Manager) further advised that the upstairs rooms in the house would be re-positioned with the creation of a blackout room and a 1939 kitchen dinner. Items, exhibits and artefacts from this period would also be included within the exhibition. There would be 14 information display panels (and leaflets) which would also include information on woman at war, the impact of the Blitz on both the police and fire services, the rebuilding of the house and Plymouth's Abercrombie Plan. Information packs for school visits would also be available.

A question was raised by the Joint Committee as to whether members of the public could contribute artefacts and stories and whether the exhibition would have an audio component.

Councillor Peter Smith advised that the City Council would also be marking the 80th anniversary of the Plymouth Blitz and requested that officers worked jointly on this event.

16. **Revenue Monitoring 2020/21**

Nicola Moyle (Head of Heritage, Art and Film) presented the Mount Edgumbe revenue monitoring 2020/21 report which detailed the quarter two position and outlined progress to confirm the 2021/22 budget.

The report highlighted -

- (a) that Covid had a significant impact on the 2020/21 budget from the start of the new financial year to date which could continue to March 2021; management had been responding to managing and mitigating the financial impact on operations, in line with central Government's guidelines;
- (b) the amalgamated outstanding principal on capital borrowing terms had been extended to 25 years which had provided an in-year saving; however additional costs had been incurred within the House which related to lift repairs, removal of asbestos and fire extinguisher testing;
- (c) savings had been achieved on garden supplies and services; there was a shortfall within the rent budget due to vacant properties and electricity costs.

The main area of questioning related to whether –

- (d) any members of staff had been furloughed;
- (e) comparison figures over the last three years could be provided (including, income, costs, savings, etc), as this would enable the Joint Committee to identify any trends

The Joint Committee agreed to note –

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

The Joint Committee took this opportunity to congratulate officers and staff for operating the Mount Edgcombe estate during this difficult period.

17. **Park Activity Report (to November 2020)**

Chris Burton (Park Manager) presented the Park activity report that highlighted the works and activities carried out in the Park which included the following –

- Park matters;
- buildings and Park infrastructure;
- events;
- business development;
- weddings.

The report highlighted that –

- (a) it was important to recognise the continued commitment and hard work of staff in adapting to the new challenges encountered this year;
- (b) the overall situation of expanding income streams and a drive to reduce local authority contributions had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the current economic downturn; it was considered that successful negotiations of the Trenninow Chalets ground leases would put the Park in a much better financial position;
- (c) due to the Covid-19 restrictions a park inspection would not be taking place this year; as there was a constitutional requirement for an annual inspection to take place, the Joint Committee had authority delegated to it by each constituent authority and could recommend that an appropriate inspection was undertaken by officers.

The main area of questioning related to whether –

- (d) any of the businesses in the Park were currently open and if any offered a click and collect service;
- (e) the feasibility of operating electric vehicles in the Park had been explored;

- (f) consideration had been given to asking school children to plant trees in the Park which could compensate for those trees lost due to ash dieback;
- (g) in order to make it more convenient for people to pay the car parking charges the installation of the 'ring and go' app had been considered.

The Joint Committee noted the report.

The Joint Committee agreed that officers together with the Co-Chairs undertake an appropriate inspection of the Park and report back to the next Joint Committee.

18. **Friends of Mount Edgumbe Country Park Update**

Nicola Cull, Chair of the Friends of Mount Edgumbe presented the update report from the Friends of Mount Edgumbe which highlighted the following key areas –

- (a) progress to date -
 - the cancellation of events had impacted the charity's funding streams, although legacy donations had been received and membership levels had been maintained;
 - the committee had been improving its ways of working (systems, policies and processes), so that the charity was ready for the future, in order for it to be able to deliver on its purpose;
 - due to the Covid restrictions, approximately £100k had been set aside for projects which would now be carried forward to 2021 (the Friends would be happy to reconsider priorities within the Park, if necessary); currently, the charity's funds were £135k;
- (b) summer 2020 Survey Results -
 - over 100 surveys had been completed; the themes emerging from the surveys included keeping the Park as a beautiful, natural space and enjoying the gardens, woodlands and nature;
 - over 50% of visitors surveyed were local to the area (Plymouth and Cornwall) and of those 43% visited the Park more than once a month (some as many as a few times a week); 45% of people arrived by car, approximately 30% by ferry and a few by walking; those arriving by ferry from Stonehouse, had asked for the City Council to consider providing an 'all day' charge for the car park in order to facilitate days in the Park;

- although the Park was much loved, visitors were keen to see improvements made to areas which were deteriorating, these included the restoration of closed/derelict buildings, statues, follies, local focal points and improvements to the existing toilet facilities and the provision of additional toilet facilities;
- two thirds of visitors surveyed would be happy to pay a nominal fee to have more/improved toilets; only half of the visitors were aware how the Park was funded and many assumed that there was sufficient funding to manage and maintain the Park;
- there had been little interest in visiting the house (however, this could have been due to the Covid restrictions as the house had been closed to the public);

(c) funding issues and deterioration of the Park and its assets -

- the survey had highlighted to the Friends that any further reduction in funding from the local government could cause further deterioration of the assets of the Park;
- the Friends considered that funding was critical at this time, as without sufficient funding the Park assets could suffer further deterioration which may be impossible to recover from; it was recognised that the Park staff did an amazing job with only a 'skeleton' staff and an unrealistic annual funding budget;
- whilst the Friends could support some areas with funding, the charity could not make up for the shortfalls of past years; it would fund on a year by year basis, based on funds built over the previous year;
- the Friends fully supported the future vision for the Park and would continue to work with Park management to make it a success but it considered that a stable and improved funding position for two to three years was critical; the Joint Committee was asked to consider this feedback when agreeing future funding for the Park;
- some particular areas of concern included the management of the woodland canopy, planting of new trees and removal of fallen trees, the poor condition of the toilets and the repair of the road around the Barrow Centre;

(d) 2021 plan included -

- a campaign for donations and legacies (to replace lost event income);

- encouraging local visitors to become active volunteers and join the Friends;
- the launch in 2021 of an online payment facility for donations and membership.

Peter Marsh (Cornwall Council) took this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the great work being done by the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park and also appreciate the work that had been undertaken in conducting the survey which had provided some really useful data. This was a really important partnership and it was hoped that by working together areas highlighted within the report could be prioritised. It was hoped that the outcome of the negotiations on the chalet ground leases could enable decisions to be made which would accelerate those areas of concern. It was however, the right decision for the Park to become cost neutral.

The Joint Committee thanked the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park for the comprehensive report and took the opportunity to thank them for their continued support of the Park.

19. **Exempt Business**

Agreed that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

20. **Renewal of Trenninow and Wiggle Cliff Ground Leases: Update and Next Steps**

Nicola Moyle (Plymouth City Council) and Peter Marsh (Cornwall Council) presented the update report on renewal of Trenninow and Wiggle Cliff ground leases and the next steps. These properties formed part of the wider Mount Edgcumbe Country Park estate.

Following discussions, the Joint Committee agreed the recommendations contained within the confidential report).

(Councillor Mrs Pengelly was not present for this item).