

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	22 November 2019
Title of Report:	Park Activity to November 2019
Lead Member:	Councillor Peter Smith (Deputy Leader)
Lead Strategic Director:	Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place)
Author:	Chris Burton (Park Manager)
Contact Email:	chris.burton@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	n/a
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The report provides an update on activities in the park in the 2018/19 financial year to the end of November 2019.

Recommendations and Reasons

The Joint Committee will be asked to note the update.

Alternative options considered and rejected

n/a

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

In line with the Council's priorities, the Park provides a vibrant cultural offer.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

n/a

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

n/a

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

n/a

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
		If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
	If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Draffan											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Anthony Payne Date agreed: 14/11/2019											
Cabinet Member approval: [electronic signature (or typed name and statement of 'approved by email/verbally')] Councillor Peter Smith Date approved: 07/11/2019											

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report informs members of the works and activities carried out since July 2019.

2.0 Park Matters

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Cremyll Lodge and Horseshoe Cottage are our oldest holiday lets and will receive a makeover this winter as part of the continuing maintenance regime of the property portfolio.
- 2.6 The new and exciting holiday let development of The Coastguard Lookout at Rame Head has gone out to tender and work will commence before the new-year. This will be a fully accessible property. New fully accessible public toilets will be completed first before the old block is converted into a stunning one bedroom let with amazing views out onto St Michaels Chapel and the English Channel.
- 2.7 Initial design concepts for the Tree House are being drawn-up to be put forward to Planning at Cornwall Council with the hope of starting construction next autumn.
- 2.8 An interpretation board is completed on Lawrence of Arabia telling of his involvement with Air Sea Rescue at RAF Mount Batten and his visits to the Park.
- 2.9 Funds are being sought for the repair of the access road to the Barrow Centre, which has become very uneven and subject to flash flooding and dust storms in the summer (not very pleasant when you are having lunch at the Stables). The cost of these repairs however is likely to be around £25,000 and beyond the Park's routine maintenance budget. A business case will be prepared.

- 2.10 The Park had taken delivery of a triple mower and a Suzuki ride-on mower from Plymouth City Council and the gardeners are very happy with their new equipment. These are the first new big pieces of machinery for some considerable time.
- 2.11 The Park's trees feature in the Corporate Risk Management Strategy. The Rangers are continuing to carry out the work involved with the 'Quantifiable Tree Safety Risk Assessment' (QTRA) and are now able to follow national best practice in assessing tree safety in the Park. The Park now has a Tree Safety Management Plan in place. A temporary Ranger has been hired to deal with the huge backlog of work and is working on the digitisation of the Parks tree records and reports.
- 2.12 The Park welcomes eight Austrian volunteers on ten month placements through the KONA European Programme. This is a fantastic scheme that enables us to manage the Gardens and wider Park with only three Gardeners and three Rangers, long may it continue.
- 2.13 The clearing of fallen trees after storms and the number of times the Park is closed due to high winds is on the increase. It is interesting to note that this is a symptom perhaps of the effects of global warming and is likely to have a greater impact on the Park in the future. Certainly all our rangers spend more time than they used to, clearing up and making safe after storms, this continues to put pressure on capacity.
- 2.14 A new addition to the relic garden has been created by the gardeners utilising some of the interesting stone work uncovered by the creation of the Black Bee Reserve.
- 2.15 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 are being spread around the Rame Peninsula and we have had our first real harvest of honey. Through the 'Polinize' project the Mount Edgcombe apiary has been able to supply colonies of Black Bees to The Box and Theatre Royal - all good news for biodiversity.
- 2.16 The Park continues to play a full role in the planning for Mayflower 400 and will participate in the opening and closing of the light festival Illuminate.

3.0 Buildings and Park Infrastructure

- 3.1 The English Garden House has been regraded to Grade 2* by Historic England and as such will be eligible for grants to restore it. In the first instance this will involve securing emergency funding to replace the roof and protect the assets from further deterioration due to weather ingress something that has been a problem since the lead was stolen some time ago. The building featured in the launch of Historic England's 'Buildings at Risk Register', on BBC Spotlight.
- 3.2 Lighting connections and supply have been replaced and updated at the Folly, Orangery and the French Garden as part of the legacy of 'Illuminate' and 'Mayflower 2020' funding. This will mean that not only will part of the Park be illuminated this year from the 28th November - 1st December but an infrastructure legacy will enable the Park to consider future lighting of the Folly.
- 3.3 New steps have been installed from the Barrow car park and associated landscaping has helped separate people from traffic and helped to mitigate the wash out of the footpath during storm periods.

- 3.4 The Barrow Centre was looking rather tired and has received a makeover.
- 3.5 Wifi has been installed in the bottom of the Park and the holiday-lets at Cremyll and Orangery Lodge now have internet access.

4.0 Events

- 4.1 On 13 July we hosted a Proms event in the Park hosted by a third party organiser which was well received by the audience – the feedback via social media was incredibly positive.
- 4.2 We also hosted a very well attended Ice Cream Festival on 21 July which greatly benefitted from some fine weather. Attendance was estimated at around five thousand people.
- 4.3 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) which was blessed with good weather after a couple of showers early in the day. Attendance was estimated to be around the 10,000 mark. For the first time this year the Police and the Fire Brigade attended as part of the show.
- 4.4 Miss Ivy Events hosted two successful events in August – Jazz and Gin and a Summer Fete – both proved popular with our car parks over-run and overflow parking put in place.
- 4.5 On 7 and 8 September 2019 saw the Sealed Knot using the Lower Park for their displays and plans are afoot for a possible expansion of the event in 2020.
- 4.6 September 2019 also saw us hosting 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.
- 4.7 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.
- 4.8 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).
- 4.9 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). Our thanks to Ged Edgumbe and Jacquie Maynard for a year’s worth of organising and making to create such a wonderfully funny (and scary) trail.
- 4.10 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 with the focal point of the trail bringing visitors into the Barrow Centre.

5.0 Business Development

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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. This could take the form for instance of allowing the characters in the paintings of the house to come alive and tell their stories on peoples phones. It is hoped that this will draw in a new tech savvy younger audience to the House.
- 5.3 Holiday let occupancy strategies for summer periods and peak periods are being reviewed this year in partnership with Classic cottages. Short term lets maybe replaced with week only bookings.
- 5.4 Initial Planning for the 'Blitz 80' exhibition is taking place. Designs have 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.
- 5.5 The Park has a propeller from the Lancaster Bomber that crashed on the Breakwater during the Second World War and hopes to turn into a memorial to those aircrew that were killed in and around the Park. The propeller has now completed its desalination period.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 Bookable guided house tours have provided a significant income this year and will be continued throughout the year. As a 'bookable product' along with Plymouth hotels, boat operator and other attractions such as Elizabethan House and 'The Box' we are amongst a very few attractions that have been focused on because we are offering a Mayflower Tour of the House – the House was 73 years old when the Mayflower sailed past on her way to the American continent.
- 5.8 The Park has had a poor year in terms of conferencing perhaps due to market uncertainty. Despite its best efforts the Park (certainly in the field of large conferences) remains too difficult to get to. Bespoke small events are the way forward and we have seen a number of away-day packages and small third sector conferences.
- 5.9 The house shop made a small but notable profit this year after an investment in some stock.

6.0 Weddings

- 6.1 We have recently received revised advice in relation to the VAT status of weddings which changes 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) is very clear in stating that weddings need to pay VAT and that this should be retrospectively backdated over the past three years.

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.

7.0 Summary

- 7.1 The Park continues to grow its revenue stream and holiday lets and car parking continues to provide increasing levels of income. The Park and its workforce continue to meet these new challenges in the way we work, and how we generate income so that the Park can remain a first class Country Park for the people of Plymouth and Cornwall to enjoy free of charge.
- 7.2 The overall picture of expanding income streams and a drive to reduce LA contributions has taken a couple of unforeseen hits this year. The decision to implement VAT advice and back date it along with several building infrastructure costs, in order to meet legislative requirements, has counteracted what has been a good year for several business streams in terms of income.
- 7.3 Quick win days are over in terms of increasing income streams and negotiations such as Treninnow chalet leases are still the most likely way of establishing a firm sustainable growth platform for the Park.