

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	20 November 2020
Title of Report:	Park Activity to November 2020
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 from July 2020 till Nov 2020

Recommendations and Reasons

The Joint Committee will be asked to note the update and approve the recommendation that officers undertake an appropriate inspection and report back to the next Joint Committee.

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:

The financial implications are set out in the revenue monitoring report which is included as a separate agenda item.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None.

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) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
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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 Strategic Director for Place Date agreed: 12/11/2020											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Peter Smith (via email) Date approved: 12/11/2020											

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report informs members of the works and activities carried out since July 2020.

2.0 Park Matters

- 2.1 I am writing this report at the time of our second national lock down. The measures that were in place in the last lockdown are repeated in this lockdown, with the exception of the closure of the lower formal gardens and Cremyll toilets.
- 2.2 The last six months have seen challenging times for the Park and the whole country. The Park has remained open throughout the pandemic. Although some services have been limited in line with government guidelines. We are justifiably proud that we have been able to stay open to walkers throughout the pandemic.
- 2.3 A surge of bookings post lockdown saw almost full bookings for the holiday let portfolio, prior to the present lock down. Despite this the holiday let portfolio has been effected greatly by the lockdown, managing expectations and bookings has been a hard job both for the team at Mount Edgcumbe and Classic Cottages.
- 2.4 Building work is nearing completion at Rame Head 'Coast Guard Lookout' and will be completed in November. Equipping the holiday let is proving more difficult however with large delays on items such as beds and kitchens. It is likely that this property will not open until the New Year now, due to the difficulties in acquiring second fix items.
- 2.5 Cremyll car park has remained open throughout the pandemic although the Parks other carparks have not and were reopened in July. The new carpark has been a great success and is able to achieve more income when full. Obviously the pandemic has had an effect on carpark income as well, policing and ticketing services were also not available during lockdown. This will have a detrimental effect on our third largest income stream.
- 2.6 Orangery Lodge and Lady Emma's Cottage have received a makeover this winter as part of the continuing maintenance regime of the property portfolio. We now have ten properties but only one maintenance man who also serves the parks wider maintenance issues. This can at time be challenging as guests quite rightly wish things to be fixed quickly during their stay.
- 2.7 The Tree House Project is having a 'Historic Landscape Impact Assessment' written, and will be designed with a view to construction next summer, Covid permitting. Consultation with Cornwall Council planners and Historic England is under way. The working budget for this Treehouse is around £230,000, so it will be an eye catching piece of architecture, but sympathetic to its surroundings.
- 2.8 Deer surveys have been carried out and initial population numbers estimated. The material for the first section of fencing has been kindly paid for by a donation from the 'Friend's', and will be installed in the early winter. A new Group the 'Rame Deer Working Party' has been formed comprising of the Park, land owners and deer specialists, a deer census will take place this winter in order to asses population and inform management. There has been a deer herd at the Park since 1515 and it is an integral part of the landscape.

- 2.9 A general Park (you are here) map and interpretation board is under way and will replace the ageing boards that are in the formal gardens and car parks.
- 2.10 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 Farriers). The cost of these repairs however is likely to be around £25,000 and beyond the Park's routine maintenance budget, this is unlikely this year as Covid-19 income loss has weighed heavily on the budget.
- 2.11 The Park continues to have issues with its ageing vehicle fleet. There is a desperate need for a replacement vehicle for the 'gator' which is no longer safe to use, this is likely to be in the £14,000 bracket. This is the most critical transport requirement at the moment. The 'Santana' Land Rover is now beyond economic repair.
- 2.12 Tamar Powersland a Park Ranger has completed her QTRA tree survey course and is now a fully qualified in tree safety assessment. The Park has hosted a tree training course based around 'Quantifiable Tree Safety Risk Assessment' (QTRA) promoting national best practice and training a number of Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council employees. The Park now has a 'Tree Safety Management Plan' in place, with surveys taking place on a rolling programme.
- 2.13 The Park's Austrian volunteers were repatriated in March and have not been replaced, this is a sad loss for the Park as it had come to rely on these essentially, full time, free staff. It is hoped to start new negotiations with KONA as soon as Covid-19 allows, with a view to having them back for the spring season.
- 2.14 The spectre of Ash dieback, that will have a huge impact on the woodland ecology of this country, has reached the Park. Following the identification of a number of trees with this disease the Park has started a survey and assessment programme. There is no doubt that this will have major implications for the work stream and funding of the Park. This is a national problem however and contingency funding is being put in place.
- 2.15 A new camellia garden has been planted behind the saw mill and is part of a funding agreement with Cornwall Hospice Care marking their 40th anniversary. This will be a worthy addition to the National camellia collection that is based at the Park.
- 2.16 The Black Bee Reserve has been managed by staff and volunteers with around a dozen new colonies distributed around the South West. This is a great step forward in terms of supporting the reintroduction of this native species, Mount Edgcombe is really on the biodiversity map for its ground breaking work with this project. The focus of the reserve is very much on distributing new colonies throughout the South West at the moment.
- 2.17 The Gardeners have created a special NHS flower bed as part of the lower garden display this year, and visitors were able to experience the gardens in all their splendour, visitor numbers in winter periods will allow the gardens to remain open in this present lockdown

3.0 Buildings and Park Infrastructure

- 3.1 The English garden house has been awarded funding of £20,000 to carry out a development management plan by historic England. The English Garden House had been regraded to Grade 2* by Historic England and as such will be eligible for grants to restore it. This development grant is the first step towards the restoration of this nationally important building.

In the first instance this will involve securing emergency funding to replace the roof and protect the assets from further deterioration due weather ingress something that has been a problem since the lead was stolen some time ago.

- 3.2 This second lockdown period has given us a breathing space to do some much needed renovations in the house. The house has not been redecorated for some years and was looking rather tired in places, the maintenance team have been busy decorating, fixing doors that no longer shut, plastering and gilding, as well as preparation of the Blitz Display.
- 3.3 Over one hundred specimen trees have been planted and protected in the amphitheatre, thanks to funding from the 'Friends of Mount Edgcumbe' this area has long been associated with planted specimen trees and will in time return to its former glory. The Trees are all labelled and will add an arboretum like display to the Park.
- 3.4 A memorial plantation has also been created in the Deer Park, in total nearly a thousand trees have been planted over this period, in various places throughout the Park, as 'Ash dieback' marches across the South West then the Park will need to be prepared to lose many of its ash trees, this will also present a further strain on resources.
- 3.5 The entrance to Dry Walk now has a repaired cattle grid and a new gate of a more formal style in keeping with the rest of the Park. The gate was copied from existing old estate gates by the Park's blacksmith.

4.0 Events

- 4.1 Covid-19 has of course had a huge impact on events with the cancelling of all of our spring and summer events. The situation is being reviewed as part of the Plymouth City Council wide events committee and a view will taken soon as to what events will be possible. The Park as ever has public safety as its chief concern.

5.0 Business Development

- 5.1 The Park continues to develop its holiday let portfolio, with Rame Head now under way and the Tree House into the planning system. It has 8 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 end ones. A pricing review took place this summer with Classic Cottages.
- 5.2 There is no doubt that there has been a severe loss of income during the spring early summer period in terms of the holiday let portfolio, and this will be repeated in the present lockdown two. There was however to counter this an exceptional summer season with unrepresented levels of occupancy. The Park has again been able to offer a long term let for Horseshoe Cottage over the winter thus providing at least some income in those months.

- 5.3 Business Tenants of the Park were given a three month rent holiday during the pandemic. This will be paid back incrementally to the Park. All the Parks businesses have found this a very challenging time.
- 5.4 The opening of the farriers in July breathed a new lease of life to our catering scene in the Barrow centre and was very well received by the public and staff! It has provided a consistently good level of service, and received very favourable reports. The new owners are keen to be involved in all aspects of the Parks offer. It has been a difficult time of course for all retailers in this current pandemic and Mount Edgcombe is working closely with its business partners to help each other through these trying times.
- 5.5 Preparations, collections, and display plans for the 'Blitz 80' exhibition are well underway. Interpretation panels have been drawn up and rooms allocated to the display, the Metta Catrina will be decanted this December and the display launched on the anniversary of the bombing of the House during the Plymouth blitz on 21st March 1941.
- 5.6 The Park will be entering discussions this autumn about the Lease agreement at Trenninow chalets and this will have a significant impact on the Parks financial wellbeing.

6.0 Weddings

- 6.1 A limited number of Covid-19 compliant weddings took place this September, but most weddings were cancelled during the Covid-19 restrictions and we are currently working towards having a limited offer commensurate with Government guidelines from April onwards. This has of course had an impact on this year's income, some 85% of weddings have been rebooked for next year or later.

7.0 Summary

- 7.1 As the Park moves towards ever increased reliance on business streams it is worth reflecting on the impacts that global economic conditions can have on this Grade One listed landscape. The Park continues to grow its revenue streams, holiday lets and car parking continue to provide increasing levels of income. The Park and its workforce continue to meet these new challenges in the way we work, and those challenges of Covid-19, along with 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, chiefly the Covid-19 pandemic. A successful negotiation of Trenninow Chalets could see the Park on a more secure fiscal footing from 2021 onwards.
- 7.3 Please note that due to Covid-19 restrictions a 'Park Inspection' will not be taking place this year. As there is a constitutional requirement for an annual inspection to take place, the Joint Committee has authority delegated to it by each constituent authority and can recommend that an appropriate inspection is undertaken by officers.