

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	19 November 2021
Title of Report:	Park Activity to November 2021
Lead Member:	Councillor Mark Deacon
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 2021 till November 2021.

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:

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

Financial Risks:

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

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) <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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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
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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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) <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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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

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: 02/11/2021											
Cabinet Member approval: Approved by Councillor Deacon (via email) Date approved: 10 November 2021											

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report informs members of the works and activities carried out since July 2021.

2.0 Park Matters

- 2.1 I am writing this report as we begin to stabilise after various lockdowns, this time for good one hopes. The measures that were in place in the first lockdown were repeated in second lockdown, with the exception of the closure of the lower formal gardens and Cremyll toilets. The Park has been fully open since July.
- 2.2 The last year or so has 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 proud that we have been able to stay open to walkers, locals, and visitors. This has only been possible by working in partnership with our tenant businesses, who have been under significant stress during the pandemic. Despite the challenges, most of our businesses have been able to survive a couple left but have since been replaced. Rebecca Day 360 works at providing humanitarian business solutions around the world is now at the Barrow Centre, and Enigma Solicitors have also taken an office in the main building. This was made possible by offering rent payment holidays, working with our tenants to offer the best service we could and also looking at new ways of doing our core business.
- 3.0 Now for some great news! The Park will be the recipient of just under £1 Million for the development Maritime Heritage Centre at the Garden Battery. Fundamentally, this project is about delivering one of 5 proposed 'NMP Gateways' – major physical access points and centres for engagement of the public in the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park - featured in the City's £9.58m funding award (2021) under the Heritage Lottery Fund's Heritage Horizon programme.
- 3.1 The last twelve months have seen a 'boom and bust' scenario with holiday lets. When we have been open, we have had a surge of bookings and almost full occupancy across the portfolio. However, our accommodation has been closed for $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time they should have been open during this reporting period. We have had to adapt our cleaning regimes which has inevitably increased costs, but this is more than compensated for by high levels of occupancy.
- 3.2 Rame Head Lookout <https://www.classic.co.uk/holiday-cottage/desc-4634.html> was completed in May. Equipping the holiday let proved challenging, with large delays on items such as beds and kitchens. However, there has been very positive feedback from guests, who can now enjoy watching sunsets from a hot-tub in a building that was once a disused toilet block.
- 3.3 Cremyll car park has remained open throughout the pandemic, although the Parks' other carparks have closed during lockdowns. Obviously, this has impacted on what is our third largest income stream. There is also a need to have a look at replacing the coin only machines with contactless-enabled ones.

- 3.4 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 park's wider maintenance issues. This can at times be challenging as guests quite rightly wish things to be fixed quickly during their stay. We are investigating how additional resources can be secured.
- 3.5 The Tree House Project (to develop a tree house in woodland adjacent to Lady Emma's cottage as part of our holiday let portfolio) is under review, after initial feedback from both CC Planning and also Historic England that they would be likely to object to this proposal. The Park Manager is investigating an alternative project: a Wild Breeds Centre based in Barrow Field. Initial planning enquiries have been favourable about this and it could provide both something to do for our younger family visitors and a potential income generator for the Park. The Park Manager is drawing up a business case for this, for future exploration with the Committee and other stakeholders.
- 3.6 The first section of deer fencing of almost 1.8km has been completed. The total perimeter is 4.6km. The material for the first section of fencing has been kindly paid for by a donation from the Friends. A new group, the 'Rame Deer Working Party', has been formed comprising of the Park, land owners and deer specialists. A deer census has taken place this winter, in order to assess population and inform management. There has been a deer herd at the Park since 1515 and it is an integral part of the landscape.
- 3.7 Llama and alpaca trekking is also likely to be in place early next year as potentially highly lucrative business that the Park will take on in partnership with the Farriers Café. You could soon be able to take an alpaca for a walk and have a cream tea in the deer park.
- 3.8 Funds will need to be 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 (likely to be around £50,000) are beyond the Park's routine maintenance budget. The increased income from Trenninow chalets is being allocated to this project along with other infrastructure priorities.
- 3.9 The Park continues to have issues with its ageing vehicle fleet. The Friends kindly replaced the Gator vehicle for us this year, allowing the gardeners to carry on after the existing 25 year old vehicle became uneconomical to repair. It is hoped to phase in vehicle replacement over the next four years as we are now in a situation where we spend more on 20 year old vehicles than they are worth. Again this is being considered in the new budget.
- 3.10 Tamar Powersland, one of our Park Rangers, 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 PCC and CC employees. The Park now has a 'Tree Safety Management Plan' in place, with surveys taking place on a rolling programme.
- 3.11 The Park's Austrian volunteers were repatriated due to c19 regulations 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 (the Austrian parent organisation for the Project) as soon as C19 allows, with a view to having them back for the winter season.

- 3.12 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 national contingency funding is being put in place. The Park is in the process of removing the worst of the infected trees with some 30 having been removed so far. The issue of Ash Dieback has been raised on the corporate risk register.
- 3.13 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.
- 3.14 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 Edgcumbe is really on the biodiversity map for its ground breaking work with this project.
- 3.15 The gardeners have created a special sunrise flower bed as part of the lower garden display this year.

4.0 Buildings and Park Infrastructure

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 This Blitz Display was launched in June with free entrance for schools throughout that month. The take up and the feedback was fantastic. 15 Schools and over 800 children have visited the display during the month.
- 4.3 Over a hundred specimen trees have been planted and protected in the amphitheatre, thanks to funding from the Friends. 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.
- 4.4 Plymouth College of Art are displaying several art installations throughout the Park as part of their 2021 season and these are well worth a look
- 4.5 The Tudor Block House has had iron railings and a gate fitted to prevent access to the upper storey replacing the rather unsightly marine-ply board. Power has been reinstated to the Garden Battery to help future proof the building.
- 4.6 Repairs to the South East turret have been undertaken in the main house and have made that office space available for rent.

5.0 Events

- 5.1 C19 has had a huge impact on events, all of which were cancelled during the spring/summer period.
- 5.2 The Armchair Adventure festival was a welcome relief and a great return back for the Park to major events with over 4000 tickets being sold. The event was a huge success and will be repeated next year, music and adventure where the focus, with key speakers who had travelled all over the world. The organisers travelled around the world by scooter and had received their training at Survival Wisdom based at the Park.
- 5.3 The 'Summer Fete' and 'Doggy Day Outs' organised by Miss Ivy Events saw the welcome return to events this autumn and were well attended. The decision to cancel the Car Rally this year was made by the Car Rally committee in July it will take place next year. The Christmas Fayre will be going ahead this year.

6.0 Business Development

- 6.1 The Park continues to develop its holiday let portfolio, with Rame Head now completed. We now have nine holiday lets and hope to add more. Those coming on line recently have a higher profit margins as they are predominantly higher end properties, but with the same service costs. A pricing review took place this summer with Classic Cottages, which resulted in small income raises and some re-banding.
- 6.2 There has been a significant reduction in income during lockdown periods in terms of the holiday let portfolio, despite an exceptional summer season with unrepresented levels of occupancy. The Park was able to offer a long term let for some properties and even had at one point the de facto Kenyan Embassy here!
- 6.3 Business Tenants of the Park were given a three month rent holiday during the pandemic. This will be paid back incrementally.
- 6.4 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. 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 we are working closely with all business partners to help each other through these trying times.
- 6.5 The Park will be implementing previously agreed changes to the Lease agreement at Trenninow Chalets this autumn, which once fully delivered will have a significant impact on the Park's financial wellbeing.

7.0 Weddings

- 7.1 A limited number of C19 compliant weddings took place this September and again in the early summer, but 85% of weddings were cancelled or postponed during the C19 restrictions. This has of course had an impact on this year's income. Since weddings rely on a two year booking rota, the effect of C19 on the wedding market will be felt for some time to come.

8.0 Summary

- 8.1 The Park has moved in recent years from having a subsidy approaching £450,000 to one of £45,000 per Council, a significant success that we should all be proud of. The Park now has 20 businesses employing around 45 people. This will allow the focusing on infrastructure improvements that have been highlighted earlier.
- 8.2 The overall trajectory of expanding income streams and reducing LA contributions has been undermined by the C19 pandemic. However, successful renegotiations of the Leases on Trenninow Chalets should see the Park on a more secure fiscal footing from 2021 onwards.
- 8.3 The Park faces several infrastructure and repair bills that will need to be addressed in the future, these are being collated and addressed by the Park manger and his line manager, with a view to a phased approach over the forthcoming years focussing on immediate priorities first.
- 8.4 The Park looks forward to the return of its volunteers, on whom it relies for ongoing delivery of service excellence. The Park also acknowledges the help of the Friends throughout this year.
- 8.5 We look forward to working with the Committee and other stakeholders on the next phase of the Park's development.