

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	19 August 2022
Title of Report:	Park Activity to August 2022
Lead Member:	Councillor Pat Patel (Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Culture, Leisure & Sport)
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 November 2021 to August 2022

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.

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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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

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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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 Date agreed: 03/08/2022											
Cabinet Member approval: <i>Approved via email</i> Date approved: 09 August 2022											

1.0 Introduction

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

2.0 Park Matters

- 2.1 The Park has settled into a 'new normal' and has been working without restriction for some six months now. I am writing this report at the start of one of our busiest event seasons, the public certainly has an appetite for events once more despite the cost of living challenges. The Park has a real sense of direction at the moment with many visual improvements, such as new signage, restoration of the seats, and the Barrow Centre roadway.
- 2.2 The Park today is very different to how it was a few years ago, we now have a thriving holiday let portfolio and we are home to some 23 different businesses, employing well over 60 people making us a medium employer in the Rame peninsular. We have perhaps just as importantly reduced the tax payer burden through our various commercial activities to zero this year, a major undertaking that I and my staff are very proud of. I believe the Park looks better, feels more welcoming and is well on the way to developing its full potential.
- 2.3 The Park as outlined at the last meeting 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. This will involve the development of the Garden Battery a building previously not open to the public into a Heritage Centre telling the story of the development of Plymouth Sound and acting as a hub for all things heritage in the area. Tenders have been completed for the design work and initial start-up meetings are taking place.
- 2.4 The Park is many things to many people, it's a place full of designations and historic buildings but also a place to kick a ball around and relax on a summers evening. Balancing the various needs and interests of its community and ensuring its continuation as an area of free greenspace, is key to future development. Having achieved zero budget, and financial security, we will be looking at developing over next 18 months a costed 10 year plan to address the infrastructure needs. This is a second phase of planning and investment as opposed to financial fire-fighting, whilst the Park Management must still retain its ability to be able to respond to and try out business development activities, this commercial freedom has got us to where we are today.
- 2.5 The Park has struggled by with only one maintenance operative for the last few years despite the addition of ten more holiday lets that demand quick and efficient repairs often at out of hours times. This year we have a new three day a week maintenance position that starts in August. This will enable us to start on the backlog of maintenance issues and service the holiday let portfolio.
- 2.6 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 might 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.

- 2.7 The first sections of deer fencing of almost 2.8km has been completed. The total perimeter is 4.6km. It is hoped to have completed this fencing work by next summer, a major undertaking by the Ranger force. 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. The existing deer fence was in a very poor state.
- 2.8 The Park will negotiate a new Stewardship agreement as land owner at Rame Head with Natural England this year as the old one ends.
- 2.9 A major infrastructure work replacing the dirt path into the Barrow Centre has been completed to time and budget, and has been a real success with both the general public and the businesses there. It has also gone a long way to mitigating the flash flooding events that often took place effecting businesses in the Barrow square.
- 2.10 The Park continues to replace its aging vehicle fleet, the latest addition of which is a new Landover Defender this has replaced the aging Ford Ranger which has gone to see its days out on gardening duties within the Park. It is planned 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.
- 2.11 We have a new Ranger replacing one that has left, this is a new additional post that was started some three years ago. The new Ranger comes to us with a good deal of experience and we welcome her to the Team. The Park continues with its 'Tree Safety Management Plan' to which is now added the spectre of Ash Dieback, with surveys taking place on a rolling programme and removal as necessary this may represent a pressure on existing budgets as this national issue is dealt with. There is no doubt that this will have 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.
- 2.12 The Park's Austrian volunteers have returned and have worked a six month placement that has been a great help and we hope to continue with this arrangement in the foreseeable future. The scheme is run through European funding through a partner CUBIC and essentially supplies two people one gardener and one ranger for the Park.
- 2.13 A new Education Centre is being developed with the FOMCP (Friends of Mount Edgcumbe) in what was the old fire station, the owner of the fire engines decided to sell them, this was opportune as we were trying to decide on locations for an education centre. Children from across the peninsular have created a series of frescos that will adorn the walls based on a time line of Mount Edgcumbe, in a partnership project with the local schools and Awenek Studio CIC.
- 2.14 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.

3.1 Buildings and Park Infrastructure

- 3.1 The English Garden House, will receive remedial treatment to prevent water ingress this year in the first of a series of works to stabilise and make good this important building, the building was re designated to Grade 2* and put on the risk register 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.
- 3.2 This Main House has had remedial works to the roofs of two turret rooms and has had an improved roof drainage system installed that allows for sudden downpours. These weather events are all the more likely in the future and were not envisaged when the house was built, so far they have been tested a couple of times and worked well.
- 3.3 The Main House is being run on a guided tour system this and is working well, reducing staff overheads with visitor numbers remaining much the same since the Blitz display was installed. The Blitz display has received very favourable comments and is accompanied this year by a display of Japanese porcelain loaned by Dr Tim Foster.
- 3.4 There has been a planning application for a high ropes course by Blue Dot Adventures (an existing business partner on the Park) in the woodland above the dripping well. This ambition has been discussed at previous JC and the Park Management support this application dependent on final design works. After meetings with Historic England it was decided that the inclusion of zip wires across the Amphitheatre would however be too intrusive and would not be compatible with the Parks landscape and for those seeking to enjoy the area quietly. The Park Management continue to support the high ropes course which would be non-invasive to the trees and have a lot less impact on the Park attracting younger age groups with an exciting offer.
- 3.5 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 atmosphere to the Park.
- 3.6 Students from the Arts University of Plymouth, Formerly Plymouth College of Arts, are displaying several art installations throughout the Park as part of their 2021 season and these are well worth a look.
- 3.7 Both play areas were closed over the winter for extensive refurbishment the lower area will open this summer, the top Barrow Centre play area will take longer due to supply chain issues.
- 3.8 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.

4.1 Events

- 4.1 The Park has a full summer programme of events and has seen the return of its core events such as Christmas Fayre, The Green man, and the Classic Car Show. This year will also see the

thriving partnership with Miss Ivy Events continue with events such as Caribbean Family Fun Day, Ice Cream Festival and Summer Fete.

- 4.2 The Christmas Fayre took place despite Covid restrictions and was a great success. We attracted high levels of attendance. The Fairy Festival, Green Man along with the Caribbean Family Festival also took place prior to this meeting.
- 4.3 The Fairy Festival also returned this year as will the Armchair Adventure Festival which proved a great success last year and we hope to grow this event as time goes on. The Park will continue to develop third parties events for a ground rent or % of turnover.

5.0 Business Development

- 5.1 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 perhaps developing current Gardeners accommodation and relocating them. Currently building costs are prohibitive and supply chain is at best creaking so no further builds are planned in the next year or so. A pricing review took place this summer with Classic Cottages, which resulted in small income increases and some re-banding.
- 5.2 The holiday let portfolio saw the introduction of Rame Head Lookout <https://www.classic.co.uk/holiday-cottage/desc-4634.html> in May. The Holiday lets continue to perform with high levels of occupancy, post Covid. The impact of the cost of living crisis will have has yet to be seen but the market for holiday lets at least at the moment seems buoyant. Building them and securing the supply of materials is another issue however. Orangery Lodge and Lady Emma's Cottage, and Cremyll Cottage have received a makeover this winter as part of the continuing maintenance regime of the property portfolio.
- 5.3 All our car parks now use a 'RingGo' system that enables telephone (none cash) parking payments. Cremyll car park will receive a chip and pin machine this summer and will be the first of a phased replacement of the old machines that are now some 20 years old, in most cases and reaching the end of their operational life.
- 5.4 Alpaca trekking is now in place and is proving to be very popular. This initiative in itself has provided two new local part time jobs.
- 5.5 The development of the Heritage Centre will allow some funding for business development that will include a new survey to ascertain up to date visitor figures, demographics and usage identifying current trends and (perhaps more importantly) any gaps in who is not coming to the Park. This will enable us to target the hard to reach groups highlighted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and develop a marketing strategy.
- 5.6 The opening of the 'Farriers' in last July breathed a new lease of life to our catering offer in the Barrow Centre and was very well received by the public and staff! It has provided a consistently good level of service, and the difference is plain to see.
- 5.7 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.

5.8

6.0 Weddings

- 6.1 A very full wedding season is upon us as we play catch up with those weddings that were not able to take place over the last couple of years due to the pandemic. We have 10 marquee weddings and a total of 38 weddings in the House this year. A good season by any measure.

7.0 Summary

- 7.1 The Park has moved in recent years from having a subsidy approaching £450,000 to one of zero per Council, a significant success that we should all be proud of. The Park now has 23 businesses employing around 60 people.
- 7.2 The Park still faces several infrastructure and repair bills that will need to be addressed in the future, A properly costed plan once likely budgets are known will help with the prioritisation of this work through a 10 year development plan.
- 7.3 The Park looks forward to the gradual return of its volunteers, on whom it relies for ongoing delivery of service excellence. The Park also acknowledges the generous help of the Friends throughout this year.
- 7.4 We look forward to working with the Committee and other stakeholders on the next phase of the Park's development.