

# Mount Edgcombe Joint Committee

Friday 18 November 2022

## PRESENT:

Councillor Ewert, in the Chair.

Councillor Shayer, Co- Chair.

Councillors Carlyle, McDonald, Salmon, Lennox-Boyd, Pascoe, Worth and Briars-Delve.

Co-opted Representatives: Sir Richard Carew Pole, Mr Ged Edgcombe, and Mr D L Richards.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Alvey, Tivnan, Daw and Rennie.

Also in attendance: Chris Burton (Manager, Mount Edgcombe), David Marshall (Business Development Manager), Bryan Skinner (Head of Transport, Cornwall), Sharon Gillett (Lead Accountancy Manager, PCC), Jozef Lewis (Technical Accounting Officer, PCC), Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor) and Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.27 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.*

## 22. Declarations of Interest

There was one Declaration of Interest:

Member	Interest	Description
Sir Richard Carew Pole	Personal	Family owned property (Chalet) at Whitsand Bay

## 23. Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of 19 August 2022 as a correct record.

## 24. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chairs Urgent Business.

## 25. Action Log (To Follow)

Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor) presented an update on the Joint Committee 'Tracking Log', and highlighted that-

- a) The Monitoring Officer had advised that councillors on the Mount Edgcombe Joint Committee should follow the 'Councillors Code of Conduct' of their respective councils, as both Plymouth and Cornwall had varying policies;

- b) While declarations of interest were ultimately councillors' responsibility, it was advisable to list membership of the 'Friends of Mount Edgcumbe' on councillors published register of interests although it was unlikely this interest would become prejudicial within these Joint Committee meetings;
- c) Mr Pete Smith had advised that while he was not able to attend this meeting, he would be grateful to become a co-opted member at a future meeting.

26. **Remembering Tony Hutchings**

The Joint Committee gave their thanks to Tony Hutchings, and highlighted that-

Tony had sat on the Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee for over 15 years, and had been a lifelong member of the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe, serving as treasurer, membership secretary, and author of the journal. Tony had been instrumental within the management of Mount Edgcumbe, and had sadly passed away in October;

The Committee also recoded their thanks and sympathies for Kate Gason, a valuable member within the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe, who had also sadly passed away recently.

27. **Co-opted member update**

Kate Ewert introduced the Co-opted member update and highlighted that-

- a) Sir Richard Carew Pole was resigning from the Committee, having been involved with the Mount Edgcumbe Country Park for over 50 years;

The Joint Committee gave their thanks to Sir Richard Carew Pole for his service and dedication to preserving the park for future generations.

The Committee agreed-

1. To defer the Co-option of Mr Pete Smith to the next meeting of this Committee.

28. **Questions from Members of the Public**

There were no questions received from the public in accordance with the Constitution.

The Committee agreed-

1. To forward questions that were not received in line with the rules set out in the Constitution, to relevant officers for consideration;
2. To request that these responses were also circulated to the Committee.

29. **Mount Edgcumbe Financial Monitoring report**

Sharon Gillett (Lead Accountancy Manager) introduced the 2022-23 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report and highlighted that-

- a) As of Quarter 2, there was a nil variation within the budget, showing that the £1 Million estimated gross costs of Mount Edgcumbe would be matched by £1 Million of gross income;
- b) There were outstanding cost pressures from rising utility prices and inflation however, this was forecast to be contained within budget, therefore preventing any financial pressures on Cornwall or Plymouth as local authorities. It was expected that in forthcoming years, this balanced budget would be an ongoing target;
- c) The Capital programme contained an expectation of future commercial opportunities, which would be worked on in future years between the finance team and Mount Edgcumbe management.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was reported that-

- d) The increase in borrowing rates would not affect any historic projects already underway and agreed however, future project proposals would be subject to new interest rates, and this reflected in future budgets;

The Committee agreed to-

1. Note the financial position contained within the report along with the risks, issues and any mitigating actions;
2. Note the capital programme.

### 30. **Park Managers Report**

Chris Burton (Manager, Mount Edgcumbe) introduced the Park Manager's Report to the Committee, and highlighted that-

- a) The park received around 250,000 visitors per year. While the last visitor survey was conducted in 2014, there were plans to re-evaluate these numbers as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project. Although car parking figures could show some indication of these numbers, it was aspirational to determine the demographic trends of visitors, as well as distance travelled and method of transport;
- b) Park management were working with the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe group through a new partnership to cooperatively develop the park and access wider funds;
- c) Mount Edgcumbe Country Park (MECP) management worked with the ferry providers to ensure forward planning was undertaken for key park events, to increase capacity and extend operational hours. It was aspirational to have a new ferry access point from Torpoint to Mount Edgcumbe, which would both enhance visitors experiences, and reduce strain on parking demand at Mount Edgcumbe, which was limited;

- d) A balanced budget was a major achievement for the park, demonstrating the determination and hard work of Mount Edgcombe staff, although it did not isolate the park from support from the local authorities where required or deemed beneficial;
- e) Storms, heavy rainfall, Sudden Oak Death and Ash Dieback were considerable pressures on the park, leading to significant costs for woodland management such as inspections, clearance, and tree felling. MECP was now in a partnership with Lumberjills, who assisted with tree felling;
- f) The park had hired 3 new staff, acquired 5 new vehicles, 9 new holiday-lets, and had received £4 Million in grant aid since 2010. The park was also home to 24 business, employing over 70 staff, and had held a record number of events this year, becoming Trip Advisors Travellers Choice for 2022;
- g) In April 2018, Lady Emma's Cottage was placed on the market, with the leaseholder providing MECP the opportunity to purchase the property before it was released on the open market. The Oak Foundation had indicated that they might be willing to purchase the lease-hold for the property, on behalf of MECP. In May 2018 a business case was submitted to the capital programme, and in July, PCC surveyors started the purchasing project, which was completed in October. In January 2019, the application was completed by the Friends, and in March 2019, the approval for funds was provided by the Oak Foundation. These repayments had been made back to the Oak Foundation, demonstrating a strong partnership;
- h) There had been a deer park at Mount Edgcombe since Tudor times however, the fence had been broken for approximately 30 years. Work was underway to repair the fencing, and by December 2022, two thirds would have been completed, with the full park fence in place by summer 2023. A deer management plan would need to be designed, and there were opportunities to make this project commercial;
- i) A week's archaeology camp had been held this year with Pupil Premium children from Plymouth and Cornwall, funded through HLF. Due to its success, this was planned to be repeated next year, and bidding had started to secure funding for a series of community archeology digs;
- j) A new stewarding scheme had been introduced at Mount Edgcombe House, based around set time tours. New staff had been recruited and positive reviews had been made, leading to a 19% increase in ticket sales and 30% reduction in staff costs;
- k) There had been a post-Covid boom for weddings at MECP, with 36 ceremonies, and 9 marquee receptions held this year, above average. The marquee was now 10 years old and rapidly needed replacement however, due to the frequency of weddings, it had been difficult to select an appropriate period to complete this work. Holiday lets had also seen a boom post pandemic although there had now been a slight drop off, and trends would be monitored;
- l) It had been a successful year for events at MECP, with 15 major events including the 'Green Man', 'Christmas Classic Car Show, and the Armchair Adventure Festival which had doubled in capacity;

- m) A phased approach had been introduced for increasing business tenants' utility bills to account for national rises. There were also increased staffing and building costs for the park, which had also lost its two international volunteer staff placements due to new visa policies. A new proposal had been developed with Secure Forrest to run an apprenticeship scheme for veterans at the park;

In response to questions from the Committee, it was reported that-

- n) Due to changes in weather patterns there had been an increased risk of wild-fires, and a small fire had previously broken out near the house. There were plans to purchase a water bowser/tower, and park management had adapted to seasonal conditions;
- o) There were two options for the replacement of the wedding marquee; a direct replacement, or the creation of a more permanent hardstanding. This would offer greater weather protection, as well as greater flexibility of use however, a business case would need to be undertaken;
- p) The Garden Battery remained in the ownership of MECP, but had received funding for its refurbishment through the National Marine Park project. Once completed, this would allow free public access.

The Committee thanked Chris Burton, David Marshall and the staff at MECP for their hard work, dedication and success, and agreed to note the report.

### 31. **Friends of Mount Edgumbe Country Park Update**

Mr Ged Edgumbe delivered the 'Friends of Mount Edgumbe Country Park Update' to the Committee, and highlighted the following points-

- a) The purpose of the Friends was to preserve and enhance MECP for the benefit of the public. Friends' membership currently stood at 697 members, close to record membership, having rebounded from approximately 550 members during the pandemic. Governed by the Charity Commission, the Friends ran numerous fundraising events to raise capital for public improvements across the park, and had approximately £74,000 to be spent on projects this year, following accumulation during the pandemic. A large portion of this had been set aside for renovations to the public toilets, near the Orangery, as well as the Education Centre, and numerous statues;
- b) While the Friends had a large membership, there was a need to recruit a younger demographic of volunteers to help staff events. Incentive schemes were being analysed to help attract younger generations;
- c) The Friends staffed 3 of the MECP major events per year: The Easter Egg Hunt, Classic Car Rally, and Halloween. Regrettably, due to staffing issues, the Halloween event had to be cancelled this year;
- d) Objectives for 2023 included working more collaboratively with the park, supporting traders, filling vacancies on the Friends Committee, attracting more of the younger

volunteer demographic, and attracting technical skills to promote the Friends through social media platforms.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was reported that-

- e) Members of the military and cadet forces, as well as other youth groups had previously volunteered at Friends led events. These groups would be approached again for support as part of their community engagement programmes.

The Committee thanked Ged and the Friends for their dedication to the park and the public, and agreed to note the report.

### **Presentation by Sir Richard Carew Pole**

Sir Richard Carew Pole presented a painting of the 'Italian Garden' to the Committee.

The Committee gratefully accepted the gift, and thanked Sir Richard for his 50 years' service to the park.

### 32. **Exempt Business**

There were no items of Exempt Business.