

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	14 July 2023
Title of Report:	Park Activity to July 2023
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications).
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 Nov 2022 to July 2023

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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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

Fin	DJN. 23.24. 65	Leg	LS/0 0001 312/ AC/5 /7/23	Mon Off	n/a	HR	n/a	Assets	n/a	Strat Proc	n/a
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Draffan											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Anthony Payne Date agreed: 05/07/2023											
Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) Agreed 05/07/2023											

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report informs members of the works and activities carried out since November 2022.

2.0 Park Matters

- 2.1 The Park has had a relatively major storm free winter season although flash flood events have increased year on year, and this has caused some issues with flooding in the Park. The Garden and maintenance team are putting in place processes and infrastructure that will help deal with more severe weather events. This has included clearing of drainage culverts and the provision of better soakaway and Cess pit measures along with the fitting of storm shutters. We have an 18th century drainage system that at times struggles to cope with 21st century weather.
- 2.2 The Park continues to thrive and balances reducing its tax payer burden (Zero Budget) with improving its infrastructure both in terms of nature conservation and addressing the conservation needs of its heritage asset. The provision of an extra maintenance post has meant that a long list of buildings works is being dealt with and an exciting partnership with Secure Forests CIC and the Royal Navy is helping provide a workforce for the wider countryside holding.
- 2.3 In relation to the Garden Battery a very exciting National Lottery project has gone to CC planning and has received a very favourable response and support from Historic England. Initial design works are now well advanced and once planning is forthcoming we will start to consult with various bodies and the public about what stories this very important heritage asset tells. A time line of works should be available for the next JC.
- 2.4 The Park has been developing a number of management plans over the last year or so and the Woodland Management Plan has now been approved by the Forestry Commission, along with the Tree Safety Plan, Deer Park Management Plan (and various other Countryside Stewardship and Buildings Conservation plans) this will form part of the overarching Development Plan that will be worked on in 2024.
- 2.5 A major undertaking for the Ranger team has been fencing of the Deer Park. This has included the building of several new gates and deer leaps. The fence is well over two thirds completed now with an aim to complete by the spring. Another deer census will take place this winter, in order to assess population and inform management. A management Plan will be drafted this year. 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 for many years.
- 2.6 The Ranger Team have also been planting a number of lime trees along the various formal avenues within the lower Park as replacements for those that have over the years died or been storm damaged. This is part of a formal planting plan and was gifted by a member of the public.
- 2.7 A small area of mixed broadleaf woodland has been planted at the bottom of folly slope with the able help of a Millbrook youth group.
- 2.8 Ash Die Back surveys are being completed again this summer with a view to directing future woodland work in the winter season, those trees that need to be felled will be and those that are infected monitored for the level of infection. It is a sad fact that we will lose many of our

ash trees, but these will be replaced where possible with other species. All the major Estates are struggling with this at the moment.

- 2.9 In the Lower gardens further development of the Bee Apiary has been undertaken with an update on the viewing area and also further improvements to the work area for the Bee Keepers, this now has a much better changing-area. New interpretation panels are under way. This work was funded through the National Lottery.
- 2.10 Last August we had a fire on the East Meadow and rather like the phoenix rising from the flame we have been able to sew this with a pollinator rich mix that will hopefully provide a nearby source of nectar for our Black Bees as well as a wealth of other wildlife. This work was funded by the Bee Group through the National Lottery.
- 2.11 Formal flower beds in the lower gardens have again been planted, generously funded by the 'Friends' (FOMECP). This is a major undertaking by the garden team and their volunteers each spring and is much appreciated by the public and other Park users.
- 2.12 The Park Manager is still developing the Wild Breeds Centre concept 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 discussion with the Committee and other stakeholders.
- 2.13 A new play area is to be installed in July at the Barrow Centre adjacent to the new decking area completed by the maintenance team. This follows consultation with the local school and the selection of an 'Ant Hill Climber' supported by the financial help of the Friends (FOMECP). This new installation will we hope prove very popular and is simple to maintain. It is hoped to have installation completed by the school holidays.
- 2.14 The Park will negotiate a new Stewardship agreement as land-owner at Rame Head with Natural England this year (as the old one ends). At the time of writing however there is some confusion as to the future of the scheme and what (if any) extensions will be given.
- 2.15 Work has been completed on two of the Park's statues Diana and Athena funded by the Friends (FOMECP) with a third (Mars) to be completed in the near future we hope. Mars sadly has lost most of his appendages!
- 2.16 The Park has purchased a new mower and also has a new (to us) Land Rover in the fleet. The Park continues to replace its ageing vehicle fleet, it is planned to phase in vehicle replacement over the next three years.
- 2.17 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. The Park Rangers will be looking at adopting the PCC Alloy system to augment the QTRA system in the Park.

- 2.18 The Education Centre (ex-Fire Station) is proving very popular giving us a versatile covered space for environmental education and also as an overspill for the Farriers restaurant. It has hosted several school groups and National Marine Park tide-pool groups. It is a popular bad-weather alternative for school groups.
- 2.19 The Plymouth Schools Sports Partnership brought outdoor activities to the Park for well over 1000 children in July in what is an annual event providing an outdoor space for sports and activities to schools that may not have that availability with their own grounds. Proving once again that kicking a ball around is very much what this free to enter Park is all about.
- 2.20 Secure Forests CIC Ltd with funding from the Oak Foundation are delivering a Veterans and Blue Light Services Land Management and Wildlife Conservation Course starting in the spring of 2023 based at Mount Edgumbe. In partnership with Duchy College this will help provide the Park with added capacity in terms of workforce, as well as recognising us as a training location.

3.1 House, Buildings and Park Infrastructure

- 3.1 The Main House has had a further turret room converted and let to a local photographer who will be using it as a studio /office. This was a rather run down storage area, it will provide further income for the House.
- 3.2 The House now has a new exhibition in the 'Maker' room entitled 'Ginger Beer' it holds over 250 Ginger Beer bottles from Plymouth manufacturers, and tell the story of this delicious and refreshing beverage through time and culture.
- 3.3 The Main House is being run on a guided tour system and this has worked well, reducing staff overheads with visitor numbers remaining much the same since the Blitz display was installed. The Blitz display, now in its third full year, continues to have favourable reports. Each year we will tweak the story to highlight a particular year of the war.
- 3.4 Students from the Arts University of Plymouth, formerly Plymouth College of Arts, displayed several art installations throughout the Park as part of their 2023 season and these generated a lot of interest.
- 3.5 Work on the Orangery building has been completed after storm damage to the glass and doors, but the restaurant has managed to stay open throughout this work. We (as everyone else) are experiencing more and more storm damage, the Orangery is particularly susceptible being a largely glass building. We are awaiting an insurance refund for this work.
- 3.6 The East Lawn Summer House has received some maintenance work as has the Shell Seat in the House Gardens.
- 3.7 Formal park benches throughout the Park have been taken in and repaired in rotation and most have now been repaired and painted. We have received three rather grand Victorian seats from Plymouth that will appear in the Park soon once they have been restored.

- 3.8 The Park has two new interpretation boards on the Alpacas and Jacob Sheep that now graze the area next to the Alpacas. It is hoped to install a new board on Henry Fox Talbot in the summer.
- 3.9 The Park is in discussion with Historic England about the best way forward for repairs and renovation of English Garden House and it is hoped to have a plan in place by the end of the year.
- 3.10 As part of our cyclical holiday-let management Lady Emma's Cottage and the Orangery Lodge saw a major overhaul this winter.

4.1 Events

- 4.1 The Events calendar is now well underway after the winter break and this year will see over 25 major events in the Park. Apart from our core events we will be delivering many of these with our resident events partner Miss Ivy Events. This partnership is now in its sixth year and enables the Park to deliver events it would not be able to staff for a percentages of the event profits.
- 4.2 The Green Man event was a success this year despite some issues with the Torpoint Ferry on the Saturday, seeing an increase in visit numbers and a slightly different lay out to enable better traffic management. This is one of our core events along with the Christmas Fayre, that we offer free entry to.
- 4.3 Events will be further discussed in greater detail after the season in the November JC meeting.

5.0 Business Development

- 5.1 The Park has individual Business Plans for each of its individual business streams that are approved as part of the capital loans programme by PCC. The main income streams will form part of a larger development plan that will be worked on in 2024.
- 5.2 The Park continues to benefit from its holiday-let portfolio which at present seems to be bucking the national trend. 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 the 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-branding.
- 5.3 The Park is not immune to the energy crisis but had moved over to LED with the 'salix' grants some time ago. Nonetheless, this has resulted in a budgetary pressure this year. There is also a question of making sure we are energy and water use resilient for the future.
- 5.4 Alpaca trekking is now in place and is proving to be very popular. Some of our best Trip Advisor reviews centre on this activity. One real pleasure has been the partnership with the 'Wilder Me' TIC an autism charity who have used our alpacas as therapy animals on a number of occasions.
- 5.5 The development of the Heritage Centre in the Garden Battery 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 that will be incorporated into the Development Plan.

6.0 Weddings

- 6.1 This year's wedding season is now well underway and will be reported on at the end of the season in the November JC.

7.0 Summary

- 7.1 The Park has reached the end of a financial consolidation era and is now in a 'planning for the future' stage. This will involve the creation of a 10 year development plan that will help shape the future direction and work programme.
- 7.2 The Park needs to develop a resilience package to cope with energy and water usage changes. This will form part of the development plan.
- 7.3 The Park still has a backlog of infrastructure works to complete and maintenance issues that will need to be dealt with, these will impact on zero budget lines and we will therefore need help from both CC and PCC and/or fundraised income in future years. Having said that the Park will strive towards zero budget each year through further commercial development opportunities that remain sympathetic to the Park's status as a grade one listed landscape.