

# Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	10 November 2023
Title of Report:	<b>Park Manager's Report - Park Activity to November 2023</b>
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 July 2023 to Nov 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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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. 23.2 4.13 9	Leg	IW 01.11. 23 2572	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Draffan (Service Director, Economic Development)											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Anthony Payne Date agreed: 30/10/2023											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications). <i>Approved by email</i>  Date approved: 01/11/2023											

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 This report informs members of the works and activities carried out since July 2023.

## **2.0 Park Matters**

- 2.1 The Park has had a very busy and successful summer season with well over twenty-five major events, visitor numbers are more or less stabilised at pre covid numbers, and I am glad to say that volunteering has returned to the Park with nearly 650 volunteer days having taken place this year. Volunteers have always played a large role in the Park whether they are local residents or with groups such as the Land Registry and Tax office. At its height Mount Edgcumbe Estate employed around 30 gardeners but now we have only three! This large volunteer workforce plays a key role in maintaining the Grade I listed landscape.
- 2.2 The Park looks to be delivering a near balanced budget through its entrepreneurial efforts. The provision of an extra maintenance post has meant that the public toilets within the park have received a welcome make over. This will be combined with a major refit of the toilets at 'The Orangery' this year. Clean and well-appointed WCs are an important part of the visitor experience of any venue and should not be underestimated. These and quality catering provision are key to a good visitor experience.
- 2.3 The Park has again won the Trip Advisor Travellers Choice award 2023 the second year in a row, making it in the top 10% of venues in the world!
- 2.4 The Garden Battery is part of a very exciting National Lottery bid through the National Marine Park and has now been granted planning permission by Cornwall Council. We await confirmation of the lottery funding expected around December 2023.
- 2.5 The Park has been developing a number of management plans over the last few years and the Woodland Management Plan has now been approved by the Forestry Commission, along with the Tree Safety Plan, the new 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.
- 2.6 A major undertaking for the Ranger team has been deer fencing of the Deer Park. This has included the building of several new gates and deer leaps. This work has been boosted by help from Royal Navy recruits through a partnership with Secure Forests and HMS Raleigh. The fence is heading towards completion now with an aim to complete by the spring. Another deer census will take place this winter, in order to assess population levels and inform the management approach. A Management Plan will be published early next 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.
- 2.7 The Ranger Team have been training in the use of the digital based ALLOY system that will enable us to digitally map trees and other infrastructure items and record safety checks and management activities. This is a major undertaking and will involve the transferring of years of paper-based data to a digital pad system, this will enable instant access to tree reports etc.

- 2.8 Replacement lime trees have been planted along the West Lodge entrance of the Park and will replace those trees lost through storm damage and disease from the formal avenue.
- 2.9 Ash Die Back surveys have been 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. Ash die back is an issue throughout Europe, and the disease that kills Ash trees is highly contagious. The national policy is to manage those trees that are infected by it.
- 2.10 The Bee Apiary has had an update on the viewing area completed, with some fascinating close ups of bee structures added in the information section, along with further improvements to the work area for the beekeepers. New interpretation panels are under way. This work was funded through the National Lottery. The primary function of the Apiary is to provide queens and further increase the native Black Bee population. Honey is a tasty by product but we are not set up to produce large volumes suitable for public consumption
- 2.11 The Country Park has received a gift from a wedding party of £2500 that the gardeners are spending on flowering trees for the formal Garden areas. Garden volunteers through The EE Group (telecommunications company) have also been on hand with volunteer days, to help with the formal beds and regular individual volunteers are starting to reemerge after covid.
- 2.12 The Park Manager will be negotiating new stewardship agreements with Natural England as the existing ones cease in 2024.
- 2.13 The new play area 'Ant Hill Climber' at the Barrow Centre has been very popular this year and has received much positive feedback from the public and sits very well in the landscape. We are very grateful that this was part funded by the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park (FOMECP).
- 2.14 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, a business case for an element of this, has been approved by PCC.
- 2.15 The Winter period will see further tree surveys as part of the Tree Safety Plan and this work will be incorporated into the new ALLOY asset management system. This will enable data on individual trees to be bought up or logged in the field by means of a tablet system.
- 2.16 The winter period will see the National Camellia Collection receiving some maintenance work along with creation of a new trail and supporting guide as part of a project with a student placement. The existing trail has many defunct pathways and new plantings since its original inception. The interpretation will also need replacing as it is out of date.

- 2.17 Secure Forests CIC Ltd with funding from the Oak Foundation are delivering a Veterans and Blue Light Services Land Management and Wildlife Conservation Course of 2023 based at Mount Edgcombe. One noticeable bit of work is the 'Cornish Hedge' dry stone wall replacement near to the Artists Platz. Again, part funded by the FOMECP.

### **3.1 House, Buildings and Park Infrastructure**

- 3.1 The Main House has a good season and has had positive Trip Advisor reviews since we adopted a guided tour approach to House visits. This also allows us to have the minimum of staff doing the tours as there are no unaccompanied visitors to 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 also now home to an author of women's travel books and a local artist both of whom live and work in the local area and have office spaces here in the building.
- 3.4 Students from the Arts University of Plymouth, Formerly Plymouth College of Arts, will be planning their exhibits for the 2024 season as we see the ones of 2023 replaced over the winter season. This is and always has been a fantastic training in what works and what sometimes does not in public art installations.
- 3.5 A new decking area has been installed next to the play area at the Barrow Centre as the old one had become rotten over time. This new decking will allow parents to have refreshments and keep an eye on their children on the 'Ant Hill' climber that has just been installed.
- 3.6 Various buildings and windows within the Barrow Centre have had a face lift as extra capacity from the maintenance staff is exploited. The new ranger has taken up residence in the flat which enables us to spread out of hours cover in the Park more evenly.
- 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 are now installed around the Park after refurbishment, The grandest of which now sits in the Earl's Garden.
- 3.8 There has had to be several new safety updates and fixes to the disabled lifts within the Park along with alarm system upgrades that will be seen as a budget pressure this year.
- 3.9 The Park has a new updated general Parks information leaflet.
- 3.10 The Park is involved with the TITAN cycling initiative that is part of an e bike initiative to improve sustainable transport throughout the Rame Peninsula based around a series of Hubs in different locations.

### **4.1 Events**

- 4.1 The Events calendar is coming to an end and will see some 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. The Park held a British Triathlon Association event this year an event that was very well received by the triathlon community and will be repeated next year. One of the outstanding features of this event was the children's triathlon held within the Parks boundaries.
- 4.2 The Classic Car show event was a success this year, seeing an increase in visitor numbers and a slightly different lay out to enable better traffic management. The Car show raises money for the FOMECP and the Cornwall Hospice Care, and has been a feature of the events calendar for many years.
- 4.3 The Armchair Adventure Festival was also a great success building on its numbers and scale from past shows. The event has something of a cult following within the adventure travel community and had many well-known guest speakers and international travellers. Feedback was very positive, and this event is already booked in again as AAF4 next year.
- 4.4 Parking for events is always an issue as we don't have one large manageable carpark, but many small ones scattered throughout the site, this make separating people and vehicles quite difficult, and to that end we have been renting the 'Chapel Lands' field from the local farmer for the larger events to achieve safe traffic management. This system, which is quite weather dependent, has worked well so far.

## **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 and funding opportunities will form part of a larger Management and 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.
- 5.3 We are currently looking at a major refurbishment of the toilets at the Orangery (the largest in the Park) that will take place in January to avoid the wedding season.
- 5.4 The Park has submitted capital bids for the development of the wedding marquee and the refurbishment of the Orangery toilets this year. The Park is in discussions with Historic England about possible designs for the new marquee.
- 5.5 Alpaca trekking 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 several times. This rather unusual way to see the Park and hear its stories is proving successful at engaging new audiences who have never visited the Park before.
- 5.6 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 and/or

underserved groups highlighted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and develop a marketing strategy that will be incorporated into the Management and Development Plan.

## **6.0 Weddings**

- 6.1 This year's wedding season saw 7 marquee receptions and 33 house ceremonies proving to be a successful year despite the challenges faced with a degraded marquee, and the cost of living crisis.

## **7.0 Summary**

- 7.1 As the Park moves into a more proactive management and development stage, now it is more financially stable, it is right that we concentrate on what the Park will be doing over the next decade, and to that end we will be developing a Management and Development Plan that will encompass in an overarching strategy and vision. The draft of which will be written by the end of 2024.
- 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. One area of concern is climate resilience both in terms of weather events and water usage. The Park has number of water containers that are at present defunct that did in past times supply water to the garden area, we will be looking at possible upgrading of these systems.
- 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 will therefore need help from both CC and PCC in future years. Having said that the Park will strive towards zero budget each year through further commercial development and external funding opportunities that remain sympathetic to the Parks status as a grade on listed landscape.