

# Mount Edgumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	12 July 2024
Title of Report:	<b>Park Activity to July 2024</b>
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader of Plymouth City Council, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place)
Author:	Chris Burton (Park Manager)
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Your Reference:	N/A
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

## Purpose of Report

The report provides an update on activities in the Mount Edgumbe Country Park from November 2023 to July 2024.

## 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, as well as 'green investment, jobs, skills, and better education'.

## Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

N/A

## Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

N/A

## Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

N/A

**Appendices**

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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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

**Background papers:**

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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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: 02/07/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Jemima Laing, approved via email. Date approved: 04/07/2024											

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report informs members of the works and activities conducted since Nov 2023.

## 2.0 Park Matters

- 2.1 **The grants are rolling in...** This year, the Park has generated almost £1.4 million of fundraised income. This is an amazingly successful achievement by any standards and my thanks goes out to the team here who have helped deliver this. The above amount includes £942,000 for the Garden Battery, £330,000 for the English Garden House an expected £50,000 for the PAI Countryside Stewardship plan for the Deer Park and £60,000 from the Friends of Mount Edgcombe Country Park (FOMECP) for the Orangery toilets.

This has all been achieved through working with our partners at Historic England, Natural England and our supporting charity FOMECP. The fundraising environment is particularly challenging given the competition for funds and demonstrates that we have significant in-house skills in bid writing and delivery. We are now moving from a phase of financial resilience, gained by developing commercially but sensitively with our statutory partners to one of planning for the future. To this end, a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is being developed in two phases and Phase I has now been commissioned (see separate slides on CMP). The overarching document will provide strategic direction and incorporate elements of the many other management plans the Park has. A consultant, Land Use Consultancy, has now been appointed and will work on Phase I of the plan over the forthcoming months. They will ensure that the relevant statutory bodies and the public are involved in the consultation process.

- 2.2 The Park will continue to be free to enter as it is obliged to be under its designation as a Country Park. It will continue to offer a vibrant offer to visitors including health & well-being activities e.g. kicking a ball around to the study of 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings. We are a Park for all to enjoy. Trip Advisor is a great system for finding out what visitors actually think and value. In the past two years, we have been awarded one of the top 10% of venues in the world, this is a major achievement.
- 2.3 The Park is committed to building in climate resilience and this will form part of the Conservation Management Plan. We will be looking at how we provide services such as water and heating as well as how we 'future proof' our gardens and landscape. This may involve projects such as looking at the reinstallation of the water storage system in the formal gardens and investigating alternative energy provision for the House and Barrow Centre. Climate resilience also plays a role in how we adapt planting regimes and manage future landscapes. The Park Management has been working with the Net Zero Delivery Team at PCC to explore options for the future.
- 2.4 The Park has been working closely with Natural England and Historic England in producing an application for Higher Level Stewardship that will go forward this year. This will provide a ten-year plan for the historic grade one listed landscape, taking note of both the nature conservation and importance of the historic buildings in the Park and providing funding on an annual basis for the management of this asset.
- 2.5 Work has been completed on the internal refurbishment of the Orangery WCs, this has provided modern WCs which are easy to maintain and can be divided when the Orangery restaurant holds wedding receptions. WCs are an important part of the visitor experience. We are very grateful to the FOMECP for funding 50% of this refurbishment.
- 2.6 The Park has had over 500 volunteer days in this reporting period. We value the role that volunteers play in the life of The Park. They support work in a range of activities from working at events, working with the Rangers, working with the Gardeners and driving the buggy.

### 3.0 Natural Infrastructure

- 3.1 The Park now has a fully trained forestry horse called Duchy she will be working with the Ranger Team to extract wood and help manage the woodlands according to the woodland management plan. She is able to sensitively manage woodlands for amenity rather than commercial forestry by getting into places where otherwise clear fell would be needed to get a tractor or machine in. The rangers have completed a weeklong training course on basic operations and will undertake more training as their skills develop. Horses would have been a very active part of this Estate in the past and it is a real pleasure to see them working in the landscape again.
- 3.2 The Park has been a venue for training courses hosted by Natural England looking at our world class assemblage of Wax Cap fungi. To put this into context to be internationally important a site has to have 22 species we have 28 so far identified in the Park. We have a species which is on the IUCN red list and another that is threatened with global extinction. A species-specific management plan is underway to help the Park manage this very important habitat.
- 3.3 The Woodland Management Plan has recommended in many instances the thinning out and opening up of woodland areas in order to improve floral diversity. This work has already started and will be aided by the addition of the forestry trained horse that will be able to help with selective felling a removal of timber.
- 3.4 New technology plays an increasing role in land management. As a daily part of their work the rangers continue to use 'iNaturalist' to record species/observations on the Park along with portable devices through the Alloy System that record tree health, fence conditions, landslips and all matter of other issues in a 865 acre Park. One of our rangers is completing a Civil Aviation Authority registered training course in drone flying and will be able to use this tool to cover a large park more effectively and also areas such as cliffs that may not be safe to visit on foot.
- 3.5 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 Autumn 2024. A deer census took 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 for many years. A further kilometre over very difficult ground has been completed since the last report.
- 3.6 The meadow area that was subject to a fire two years ago has now fully recovered and has been seeded with a wildflower mix (kindly sponsored by the Bee Group) it is now home to a much more diverse range of species. We continue to harvest and seed Yellow Rattle expanding their area from the East meadow by the main house.
- 3.7 Wildflower seeds and plugs have also been planted along the Great Hedge bank and the west side of the main avenue, in an effort to increase diversity and wildlife were practical in a formal park setting. This has meant changing the mowing regimes to show that sites are being deliberately left as part of a wildlife area and not just left uncut.
- 3.8 Ash Die Back surveys will be completed again this summer with a view to directing future woodland work in the winter season, trees that need to be felled will be removed and those that are infected monitored for the level of infection. It is a sad fact that we will lose many of the ash trees, but these will be replaced where possible with other species. All the major Estates are struggling with this at the moment.
- 3.9 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.

- 3.10 Watch house field continues to be grazed over the winter by Dartmoor ponies a process that has been going on for many years now, this helps maintain floral diversity and keep back the scrub. The Park is also building a conservation grazing herd of Jacobs sheep that will graze throughout the wider estate.
- 3.11 Rhododendron removal continues to take place throughout the Park, with a particular focus on the Penlee area over this winter.

#### **4.0 Heritage Infrastructure,**

- 4.1 We have received a grant from DEFRA under the (FIPL) Farming in Protected Landscapes grant, and match funding from the English Heritage and the FOMECP that will allow us to restore the roof on English Garden House. This will protect the building and allow future works to preserve and repair the inside of the building. English Garden House a Grade 2 listed 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bath house is one of the most important buildings in the Park and this grant of £320,000 will go a long way to helping preserve this building for future generations.
- 4.2 The Garden Battery has been formally awarded £942,000 this year as part of the National Marine Park New Horizons lottery funding. Initial surveys are taking place and work will commence in 2025 following consultation with statutory bodies and the public. This is a fantastic opportunity to protect and enhance a building that has not had any use since WW2 and has fallen into disrepair. It will be used to tell the story of Mount Edgcumbe and its role in defending Plymouth Sound as well as many other stories. It will also provide the Park with another free to enter interpretive space as well as a venue.
- 4.3 New planting on the East lawn formal beds has taken place using species that are both drought and pest tolerant in order to have a formal garden that will be climate and pest resilient for years to come. We shall be investigating the Victorian/Edwardian water infrastructure with a view to updating it and reusing it to capture water and supply the gardens once more. Obviously over the years its lead piping infrastructure has disappeared, but its water tanks remain in situ.
- 4.4 The National Camellia Collection is 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 somewhat out of date.
- 4.5 The forthcoming Countryside Stewardship application will further develop an asset register and a list of priorities for the non roofed heritage assets (such as seats and follies) in and around the Deer Park and allow further funding to be accessed for maintenance and repair, this review of heritage assets will form the backbone of the work carried out by the newly appointed consultants over the next few months. The forthcoming Conservation Management Plan will prioritise and direct work for the remaining roofed structures.
- 4.6 Work on the main House has included roof restoration work on all four turrets along with drainage improvements to help cope with sudden large downpours that are now an all too regular occurrence as the climate changes.
- 4.7 The maintenance team have carried out minor repair works to Stone Seat and Red Seat as well as repairs to the Shell Seat in the Earl's Garden.

## 5.0 The Main House

- 5.1 The Main House has a good start to the 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. This year we have had a single steward with supplementary help from the head of team for cruise parties and pre booked tours.
- 5.2 The ever popular 'Dressing up room' has several new costumes that will further encourage people to dress up and have fun based around the Tudor period.
- 5.3 The Blitz exhibition has proved very popular this year. We have made a few minor changes to the layout and included new artefacts. The recent 'bomb' incident in Plymouth played a role in highlighting this interesting part of Plymouth's history. The Ginger beer display has also received a favourable response.

## 6.0 Formal Gardens and Lower Park

- 6.1 Maintaining the Formal Gardens with only three Gardeners is always a challenge as there are over 90 acres to deal with. Much of the work is day to day maintenance and runs on a seasonal rotation of preparation, manuring, planting and cutting (over 4km of hedges!) The FOMECP help with the display of bedding in both the Italian and French Gardens through funding the bedding plants each year. Volunteers have played a key role in maintaining the gardens particularly since covid as groups based around work such as EE and Department of Pensions have spent many volunteer days helping the Gardeners.
- 6.2 Students from Arts University Plymouth, formerly Plymouth College of Arts, have added their exhibits for the 2024 season in and around the formal gardens, this long-term partnership is valuable both for the Park as it adds to the offer but also for the students who learn what does and does not work in the public art sphere.
- 6.3 The Winter season was very mild and wet and has caused a particular problem with 'Box Blight' a fungal disease that kills box hedges of which there are a number in the Park these hedges form part of the formal garden architecture. The Gardeners have been treating for this serious condition and early signs show that the treatment has been successful. This issue shows however how important climate resilience is to future maintenance and planting regimes.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 The Bee apiary continues to flourish and has seen the addition of extra facilities for the bee keepers as well as improved interpretation we have around 10 hives that produce queens that we then relocate to hives within Cornwall and Devon to spread the Cornish Black Bee populations.

## 7.0 Events

- 7.1 The Events calendar is just starting and will be reported on at the next meeting please see below the list of events.
- 16 December 2023 (Saturday) – **Wild Running** – Night Run – evening event - operator led (Lower Park)
  - 25 and 26 May (Saturday and Sunday) – **Green Man** (Chapel Lands and Lower Park – 9th year)

- Sat/Sun 1 and 2 June – **Caribbean Weekend** – Barrow Field - Ms Ivy Events (Sat 12.00 – 22:30 music, food and bar – Sun 10.30 – 16.00)
- 7th July (Sunday) – **Mount Edgcumbe Triathlon** – 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- 08– 11 July (Monday – Thursday) **Plymouth School Sports Partnership**
- 20 and 21 July (Saturday and Sunday) – 20<sup>th</sup> July **Street Food Festival** 12:00 – 20:00 / 21<sup>st</sup> July **Bubbles Festival**
- 20 – 28<sup>th</sup> July – **Armchair Adventure Festival**
- 4 – 8 August – Motor Caravanners Club South West Peninsula Group – camping in the Deer Park around Maker
- 4 August (Sunday) – **Classic Car Rally**(FOMECP and CHC - 27<sup>th</sup> year)
- 14 and 15 August **Plymouth Fireworks Display**
- 24 and 25 August – Ms Ivy events – **Folk Festival**
- 8 September (Sunday) – **Sept Doggy Summer Fete** – Miss Ivy
- 7 and 8 September (Saturday and Sunday) – **Sealed Knot**
- 29 September (Thursday) - House closed (open every Sunday throughout the winter season)
- 27 October (Sunday) – Ms Ivy Events: **Halloween Hunt** (Barrow Centre to Orangery 20<sup>th</sup> year)
- PRE-LIGHT – Folly every evening 4<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> December

## 8.0 Business Development

- 8.1 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 the Conservation Management Plan that will be worked on in 2024.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 The Park has submitted capital bids for the development of the wedding marquee and has received capital funding through the sale of a chalet. The Park is in discussions with Historic England about possible designs for the new marquee.
- 8.4 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 occasions. 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.
- 8.5 Car parking will be reviewed this year with view to increasing hourly rates. We do this on a five yearly basis rather than yearly because the process is slow and onerous and take up to 6 months to complete as well as attracting costs.
- 8.6 There will be a review of rents this year in partnership with Land and Properties Team of PCC.
- 8.7 This year's wedding season will see 8 marquee receptions and 25 house ceremonies proving to be a successful year despite the challenges faced with a degraded marquee, and the cost-of-living crisis. All told that is a similar year to last year.

## 9.0 Summary

- 9.1 The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) will be a big bit of work this year and will encompass and update the many management plans that we have at present. It will provide direction and set priorities for the next ten years. The draft of Phase 1 we anticipate will be ready at the end of the financial year, March 2025, with Phase 2 completing by the summer of

2025 (subject to funding). It is important to note that a CMP needs to be robust and comprehensive document and takes time and money to deliver well.

- 9.2 The Park still has a backlog of infrastructure works to complete and maintenance issues that will need to be dealt with, these may impact on the budget and the Park will require additional funds from fundraised and earned income alongside the support of CC and PCC in future years. Any commercial development opportunities must be sympathetic to the Park's status as a grade one listed landscape.