

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee

Friday 12 July 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Briars-Delve in the Chair.
Councillor Ewert, Co-Chair.
Councillors Alvey, Worth, Blight, Allison, Morton, Ms Watkin and Wood.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Lennox-Boyd, Pascoe, Tivnan, Gilmour and Seeva.
Mr D L Richards and Mr Alan Drummond.

Also in attendance: Iozef Lewis (Lead Accountant), Sharon Mercer (Head of Strategic Development Projects), Ben Church (Chair, Friends of Mount Edgcumbe), David Marshall (Business Development Manager), Dan Cooke (Head of Protected Landscapes), Chris Burton (Park Manager), Victoria Pomery (CEO, The Box), Rosie Brookshaw Williams (Democratic Advisor), and Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 10.01 am and finished at 12.26 pm.

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.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There was one declaration of interest in respect of items on this agenda:

Councillor	Interest Type	Description
Tom Briars-Delve	Personal (Registered)	Member of the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, Horizons Board

2. **Appointment of a Chair and Vice-Chair for the Municipal Year 2024/25**

The Joint Committee agreed to note the appointment of Councillor Tom Briars-Delve as Plymouth's Co-Chair for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

The Joint Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Kate Ewert as Cornwall's Co-Chair for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

(Proposed by Councillor Alvey, Seconded by Councillor Worth, and agreed unanimously)

3. **Committee Membership** (Verbal Report)

Councillor Briars-Delve (Co-Chair) welcomed Councillors Seeva, Allison, Morton, Wood and Watkin as new members of the Joint Committee.

4. **Chair's Urgent Business**

Councillor Ewert (Co-Chair) congratulated Rame Riders, a business situated within the park, on their attainment of a significant grant through Community Levelling-Up Funding. The funding would allow the development of an electric bike and scooter hire scheme which would be rolled out across South East Cornwall.

5. **Minutes**

Subject to the correction of Councillor Daw's attendance, the Joint Committee agreed the minutes of 10 November 2023 as a correct record.

(Councillors Allison, Morton, Wood and Watkin abstained from this vote as they were not present for the meeting held on 10 November 2023.)

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

There were four questions from members of the public:

Question (D. Hoskin):	I thank the Joint Committee for their forward thinking, through the Dartmoor ponies being at Rame Head (for generations now!), for their breeds preservation, and the thriving of natural growth of wild flowers, increasing wildlife, through grazing. They've been a treasured part of the enriched landscape. When will they return?
Response:	<p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>The Mount Edgcumbe Country Park team and Joint Committee believe that grazing ponies at Rame Head is the most appropriate form of conservation for the important Rame Head SSSI. The responsibility for the management of the SSSI habitat at Rame Head rests with any occupier (tenant) of the land. MECP has requested the restoration of appropriate grazing at the site as soon as possible to ensure appropriate long-term habitat management, and will continue to negotiate for this.</p> <p>Natural England has been made aware of the removal of the ponies. As the body responsible for designating and monitoring SSSIs, they can be contacted at: 'DevonCornwallandIslesofScilly@naturalengland.org.uk'</p>
Question (L. Reid):	Considering Mount Edgcumbe Country Park is a Grade I Park and Garden (the highest possible protection for heritage assets and outstanding significance), is owned by public bodies, was purchased using public monies, and is accessible to the public, what are the ME Joint Committee's routes of accountability to the public?
Response:	Thank you for your question.

	<p>The Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee is a Joint Committee of the Cabinets of Plymouth and Cornwall Councils. The Joint Committee operates under the regulations of the 1972 and 1985 Local Government Acts, as amended by Localism Act 2011. As such, every committee meeting is open to the public, and receives published agendas and minutes (except for a minority of confidential items of business). Members of the public are also able to submit public questions to the Joint Committee and receive an answer at public meetings.</p> <p>Under this structure, the Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee is directly accountable to the Cabinets of each Council (Plymouth and Cornwall). The Joint Committee is also overseen by the relevant Cabinet member from each Council, who holds portfolio responsibility for Mount Edgcumbe. Members of the public are able to engage with these cabinet members directly, and ask public questions at Cabinet, and Council meetings. Councillors and the Executive (Cabinet) are accountable to their electorate, and are held to account through voting in elections. Other routes of accountability across the Councils include direct contact with Councillors/Officers, petitions, and pressure groups.</p> <p>As agreed at the last meeting, the Terms of Reference for the Joint Committee are currently being updated to enhance governance and accountability. The inclusion of the Conservation Management Plan will enable the Joint Committee to better scrutinise and assess the performance of the Park, and will require the Cabinets of Plymouth and Cornwall to consider and approve the plan in 5 yearly review cycles. The plans are also undergoing a robust period of public consultation prior to implementation.</p> <p>The Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee is proud that the Mount Edgcumbe Country Park is a Grade I Park and Garden, offering free public entry to around 250,000 visitors per year, including 8,000 school children. The Park has attained the Trip Advisors 'Travellers Choice award for three consecutive years, placing it in the top 10% of the world's attractions.</p>
Question (M. Cross):	Has the Joint Committee considered how the recommendations of the Conservation Management Plan now being prepared will be funded?
Response:	Thank you for your question. The Strategic Management and Development Plan (Conservation Management Plan) will enable the Joint Committee and operational team to better analyse and assess the Park's varying needs and demands in terms of maintaining and enhancing the historic and environmental assets of this important listed landscape, against

	<p>available funding streams. This will enhance the prioritisation of works and projects, as well as long-term planning and monitoring of performance.</p> <p>As the plan is still in development and public consultation is currently underway, the Joint Committee is unable to assess the full extent of needs and funding (both revenue and capital) required at this time. However, costs will be met through the standard budget procedure for MECP: The Park is expected to operate a Net-Zero, self-sufficient budget (on current annual operating costs of c.£1m), and any remaining 'overspend' is split equally between Plymouth and Cornwall Councils. The Joint Committee must ensure that value for money is achieved with public funds.</p> <p>Over recent years, the Park management team has achieved great successes at attracting and maximising income streams to meet Park revenue and capital demands. However, the Committee recognises that not all items highlighted on the management/conservation plans will be achievable in the short term, unless additional funding becomes available. Sourcing additional external funding continues to be a high priority for the Park, with approximately £1.4 million secured this year alone, and the Joint Committee will assess available resources against Park needs once the new plan is agreed.</p>
<p>Question (T. Steenhagen)</p>	<p>According to its own constitution the Joint Committee is responsible to “carry out an appropriate inspection of the house and country park on an annual basis”. Where can I find the annual reports that cover these inspections for the last 5 years, including its conclusions and recommendations?</p>
<p>Response:</p>	<p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>The Joint Committee does indeed conduct an annual inspection of the Park, as per its Terms of Reference. This is usually conducted on the first meeting of each Municipal Year. The annual inspection for the municipal year 2024/25 will be conducted after the meeting today.</p> <p>The only exception to this was the inspection scheduled for 20 November 2020. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, a park inspection by Committee members was not possible. As there was a constitutional requirement for an annual inspection to take place, the Joint Committee delegated the undertaking of an appropriate inspection to officers.</p> <p>During the annual inspection, Joint Committee members are invited</p>

	<p>to view the latest developments within the park, such as new house displays, renovations, and developments. At the annual inspection 2023/24, members were invited to view new displays within the House, as well as the Garden Battery developments due to its successful Heritage Lottery Funding.</p> <p>As the inspection takes place following the close of a meeting, there are no documents available detailing the Committee's inspection, nor is there a requirement for this stated within the Terms of Reference. Any observations from this inspection are brought back to the next meeting verbally, or communicated to officers for further action.</p>
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7. **Co-opted Member Review** (Verbal Report)

Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor) provided the following updates to the Joint Committee:

- a) The Joint Committee was required to review its Co-opted membership annually. Currently, there were two Co-opted members; Mr D L Richards and Mr Alan Drummond;
- b) Mr Alan Drummond had recently resigned as Chair of the Friends of Mount Edgumbe Committee due to personal reasons. Mr Ben Church had now been appointed to the Chairman role.

The Joint Committee agreed to:

1. Provide their thanks to Mr Alan Drummond for his service as Chair of the Friends of Mount Edgumbe and for his support to the Joint Committee;
2. Remove Alan Drummond as a Co-opted Member of the Joint Committee;
3. Co-opt Mr Ben Church to the Joint Committee, in the capacity of Chair of the Friends Committee;
4. Note that Mr D L Richards remained a Co-Opted member.

(These recommendations were proposed by Councillor Briars-Delve, seconded by Councillor Ewert, and agreed unanimously.)

Councillor Briars-Delve (Co-Chair) proposed an additional recommendation:

5. To extend invitations to appropriate organisations and bodies, to put forward nominations for Co-option to the Joint Committee, in order to provide appropriate advice, specialist expertise and enhance democratic engagement. These bodies would include organisations such as Natural England, Parish Councils & Protected Landscapes.

(This recommendation was proposed by Councillor Briars-Delve, seconded by Councillor Ewert, and agreed by the Joint Committee with two abstentions; Cllrs Wood and Watkin.)

8. Mount Edgcombe Revenue Outturn 2023/24

Jozef Lewis (Lead Accountant) delivered the Mount Edgcombe Revenue Outturn Report 2023/24 and discussed:

- a) Section one of the report highlighted an adverse variation of £90,000 in the budget for the Park in 2023/24, of which costs were split equally between Plymouth and Cornwall Councils;
- b) The adverse variation had been primarily caused by high energy costs, increased staff costs, reduced holiday let income, and unavoidable one-off repair and maintenance cost pressures;
- c) Unexpected repair and maintenance costs had included sewage repair works and replacement of play equipment due to health and safety concerns;
- d) The Joint Authority Subsidy had been removed in 2023 and a net-zero budget position would remain an ongoing target. This would rely on maximising opportunities for existing and future income streams;
- e) Work was ongoing between the Mount Edgcombe Team and Plymouth City Council Finance Team regarding approved and pipeline capital projects. These included works to refurbish the Orangery toilets as well as market development plans;
- f) Section four of the report identified risks to the 2024/25 revenue budget; these were largely based on previous year's outturn performance. An updated financial position would be provided at the next Joint Committee meeting in November 2024.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- g) For 2023/24 there had been approximately 8 Wedding Marquee Receptions and 25 Wedding Ceremonies held within the House. Prices had been benchmarked against comparable market rates and limited by the services the Park could offer;
- h) There was a small income from TV and Film however, this was sporadic and unpredictable;
- i) The £38,000 adverse variation for Holiday Let income was reflective of national trends, with the sector struggling due to cost of living pressures and poor weather. The Parks occupancy levels performed well in comparison to national averages.

The Committee agreed to:

- I. Note the financial position contained within the report along with the risks, issues and mitigating actions;

2. Note the Capital Programme.

9. **Strategic Management and Development Plan (CMP) for Mount Edgumbe Country Park**

Dan Cooke (Head of Protected Landscapes) delivered the Strategic Management and Development Plan (CMP) for Mount Edgumbe Country Park and discussed:

- a) Following the challenge of being set a net-zero budget, Park management had delivered brilliant work under a series of business and development plans. Building on this work, the Joint Committee had recently requested the development of a formal Conservation Management Plan (CMP);
- b) Through engagement with Historic England, the Management Plan would have a particular focus on inclusivity, and target engagement with underserved audiences. The CMP would cover a 10 year period from 2025-2035;
- c) Phase One of the CMP had been commissioned and would shortly begin, including surveys of 'non-formal' landscapes and 'roofless historic built assets' in the Park. The outcome of Phase One would be a full report detailing recommended priorities for the ongoing management of these assets;
- d) The completion of Phase One would help Mount Edgumbe secure Countryside Stewardship Funding, among other sources, for the financing of the required work;
- e) LandUse Consultants were the successful tenderer, and were therefore chosen as the delivery partner. This would enable the creation of a high tier Countryside Stewardship Agreement for funding via natural England. The cost of Phase One of the CMP was £50,000, with funding secured from National England and the Rural Payments agency;
- f) Phase One was anticipated to commence around the 01 August 2024;
- g) Phase Two of the CMP would be commissioned in around autumn 2024, with approximately £50,000 funding required. This phase would see surveys undertaken of everything not examined in Phase One, including the formal gardens, historic buildings and assets, and a documentation review including governance and future priorities;
- h) At the end of Phase Two, a full CMP would be complete, which would hopefully return to the Joint Committee in Summer 2025;
- i) Early consultation had already been undertaken including a survey hosted on 'Let's Talk Cornwall' and engagement with Parish Councils;
- j) An application for £50,000 to facilitate the commencement of Phase Two of the CMP was under development with the National Lottery.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- k) Early survey responses from public engagement had identified three clear priorities for the Park, and consultation would be ongoing;
- l) Engagement with underserved audiences would include communicating with veterans groups, school groups, disability groups, and community groups who were unable to access transport to the park.

Councillor Briars-Delve (Co-Chair) added:

- m) While it was essential that work on the CMP was prioritised, there was an acute need to ensure the work was of quality, that there was adequate public engagement, and that funding challenges were overcome. At the last meeting, the Joint Committee had set a provisional target of completion by November 2024 however, with the required steps identified, this target no longer looked feasible. As a result, there was a requirement for flexibility, with potential to hold an extraordinary meeting next spring/summer to scrutinise the development.

The Committee agreed:

- 1. To note the update;
- 2. To extend initial timescales for production of the full CMP to allow for necessary public engagement, attainment of funding, and required process to be undertaken;
- 3. To hold an extraordinary meeting in/around March 2025 (as required), to examine draft reports of the full CMP.

(These recommendations were proposed by Councillor Briars-Delve, seconded by Councillor Ewert, and agreed unanimously.)

10. **Park Manager's Report**

Chris Burton (Park Manager) delivered the Park Manager's report to the Committee and discussed:

- a) The size, assets, and protected status of the Park;
- b) Public engagement with the Park and visitor numbers, which would be re-surveyed through National Marine Park funding;
- c) The attainment of £1.4 Million in grants for the Park in the 2023/24 financial year alone, including £942,000 confirmed for repair of the Garden Battery, £320,000 for repair of the English Garden House, £50,000 for Phase One of the CMP, and £60,000 for repair of the Orangery toilets;
- d) Operational Park costs were around £1 Million per annum. While this had originally cost both constituent councils around £300,000-£500,000 per year, the Park was now largely self-funding;

- e) The Park had attained TripAdvisor's Travelers Choice of the Year Award for the third consecutive year;
- f) 734 voluntary days had been contributed since Christmas 2023, including significant partnerships with the Royal Navy (HMS Raleigh), Secure Forests CIC, and other corporate organisations;
- g) Replacement of the deer fencing was ongoing and would be completed by around Summer 2024, creating a Deer Park;
- h) The Woodland Management Plan had influenced planting and management within the Park, including grass cutting cycles, tree canopy thinning, and animal grazing;
- i) Stewardship negotiations were ongoing, and following completion of Phase Two of the CMP, would hopefully result in an income from DEFRA;
- j) The use of drones was being explored within the park for efficiently surveying the gardens and deer populations, as well as monitoring and cliff erosion. Staff were currently being trained on their use;
- k) Climate resilience was an emerging priority for the park. The East Lawn had recently been replanted with pest and drought resilient plants. Climate changes presented many challenges for the park, leading to extra works and expenses;
- l) The Cornish Black Bee project was performing well, and was popular amongst volunteers;
- m) Heritage Lottery funding had been secured to renovate the Garden Battery. Once finished, the battery would offer free public entry, detailing the history of Mount Edgumbe, Cornwall and the Plymouth Sound;
- n) Funding from DEFRA, Historic England and the Friends of Mount Edgumbe had been secured to facilitate restoration of the English Garden House. Repairs to the French Garden House would also be undertaken this year, and extensive repairs had been completed on the Main House roof;
- o) Weddings generated an important income for the park to help fund maintenance of the historic assets. It was recognised that the current marquee was nearing the end of its usability, and options were being explored for its replacement. Consultation was ongoing with Historic England to ensure designs were appropriate for the location;
- p) Around 20 events had been held this year including the Triathlon, Arm Chair Adventure Festival, Night Run, Caribbean Weekend and Doggy Days Out;
- q) Pressures for the park included Ash Dieback, storms and heavy wet weather;
- r) A working horse 'Duchess' had been introduced to the park in partnership with Deerfield carriages, who assisted with woodland management and tree removal. Another horse was expected shortly.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- s) Car parking charges had been reviewed and agreed by the Joint Committee in November last year. The new charges were not yet implemented due to the length and complexity of the process however, a 30 day period of consultation would shortly begin;
- t) As part of a review, Cornwall had recently handed over responsibility for cleaning/operation of the Cremyll toilets to the park. Options were being explored to transfer complete ownership of the block however, some maintenance was first required.

The Joint Committee agreed to-

- 1. Note the report;
- 2. Request a briefing paper on parking charges and enforcement.

11. **Friend's Of Mount Edgumbe Report** (Verbal Report)

Ben Church (Chair, Friend of Mount Edgumbe) delivered the Friend's Of Mount Edgumbe Report, and discussed:

- a) The vision of the Friends was to work in partnership with park management to fund joint or independent projects within the park and to support the park for the benefit of the public;
- b) At the AGM in April, Alan Drummond stood down as Chair due to ill health however, remained on the committee;
- c) During 2023, the Friends supported six projects, with a financial commitment of over £85,000. This included funding for bedding plants, statue repairs, the children's play module, deer park fencing, the formal gardens entrance, refurbishment of the Orangery toilets, and restoration of the English Garden House;
- d) Membership of the Friends continued to grow, standing at 800+ members;
- e) The Easter Egg Trail had proved a success, with over 400 children + parents attending. Plans were in place for the Annual Classic Car Show and Summer Fayre;
- f) The Friends continued to promote recruitment and voluntary activities, and a new membership enrolment system was being developed.

The Joint Committee agreed to note the report.

12. **National Marine Park Update** (Verbal Report)

(Councillor Briars-Delve declared a personal (registered) interest as a member of the National Marine Park Horizons Board)

Sharon Mercer (Head of Strategic Programmes) delivered the National Marine Park Update to the Joint Committee, and discussed:

- a) The purpose of the project was to create the UK's first National Marine Park. As part of the project there were three largescale gateways: Tinside Lido, Mount Batten and Mount Edgcumbe (Garden Battery);
- b) The project featured two Community Access Points: Ernesettle Creek and Firestone Bay. Engagement and work with communities was ongoing;
- c) As part of the nature boost programme, the Marine Park would host Species, Habitat and Carbon Credit programmes, as well as a Community Grass Programme;
- d) The National Marine Park would have a heritage and education focus, including a digital element to promote accessibility;
- e) The scheme also featured a large activity programme, promoting engagement and conservation of nature and the environment. As part of the Schools programme, 15 schools would be engaged with every year, and the Inspire programme would promote careers within the National Marine Park;
- f) Three rangers had recently been recruited, one of which would be predominantly based at Mount Edgcumbe;
- g) As part of the governance of the Marine Park, a collaboration agreement would be drawn up for Mount Edgcumbe;
- h) In each of the five years, a thorough evaluation would be undertaken to analyse successes and areas for improvement to engage further populations;
- i) Work at Mount Edgcumbe would begin in around May 2025. These delays were largely due to the Bat hibernation period. Prior to work commencing, it was necessary to complete engagement with design teams, conduct drainage survey and attain a Bat license;
- j) Children from South East Cornwall schools were currently conducting an archaeology camp at the park;
- k) The Marine Park would also facilitate an updated survey of visitor numbers;
- l) Engagement would be undertaken with the public to shape the nature and content of displays within the Garden Battery.

In response to questions, the Joint Committee discussed:

- m) The importance of multi-organisation engagement and collaboration in the National Marine Park to maximise opportunities.

The Joint Committee agreed to note the report.

13. **MEJC Tracking Decisions Log**

Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor) delivered an update on the Tracking Decisions log and discussed:

- a) A draft update to the Terms of Reference for this Committee had been completed, but would be subject to review and likely amendment during production of the Conservation Management Plan. As a result, the new Terms of Reference would be introduced following completion of the CMP;
- b) The new Off-street Parking Order was undergoing formal consultation before final approval;
- c) The remainder of tracking decisions could be marked complete.

The Joint Committee agreed to note the progress of the Tracking Decisions.

14. **Exempt Business**

The Joint Committee agreed to pass a resolution under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1,2&3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

15. **Part II Minutes from November 2023**

The Joint Committee agreed the minutes of 10 November 2023 as a true and accurate record, subject to the amendment of one grammatical error.

(Councillors Allison, Morton, Wood and Watkin abstained from this vote, as they were not present for the meeting held on 10 November 2023.)

16. **Land and Tenancy Update** (Verbal Report)

This item was discussed under Part 2.

(Please note, there is a sensitive part to this minute.)

17. **Mount Edgcumbe Country Park Annual Inspection**

(Please note: the annual Mount Edgcumbe Country Park Inspection took place after this meeting.)