

# Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee



Date of meeting:	15 November 2024
Title of Report:	<b>Park Activity to November 2024</b>
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	Karime Hassan (Interim Strategic Director for Growth)
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 park from July 2024 to Nov 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.

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

None. 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**

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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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

**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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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	N/A	Leg	LS/0 0001 966/ 2/AC /5/11 /24.	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Asset s	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Draffan											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes, Karime Hassan Date agreed: 06/11/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) Date approved: 05/11/2024											

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 This report informs members of the major new works and activities conducted since July 2023.

## **2.0 Park Matters**

- 2.1 The Park has seen a busy summer season with over sixteen events. Sadly, it has not been the best of summers weather wise, and this always impacts on visitor numbers at the Park. This has been reflected nationally with a downturn of around 20% in visitor numbers and holiday let stays within the Southwest region. This combined with the cost of living crisis has meant a challenging summer season for the Park and its business partners.
- 2.2 The Park won the Trip Advisor 'Peoples Choice' award for the third year running which put us in the top 10% of attractions in the world.
- 2.3 The Park has completed a major refit of the Orangery toilets, which allows them to remain open to the public and event guests during private functions, and has provided a much-needed face lift after 30 odd years. The build was a challenging one but was delivered on time before the wedding season. The Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park (FOMECP) contributed to almost half of the costs, and it would not have been possible without their financial assistance. The space is now welcoming, bright and easier to clean being fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- 2.4 Work on the English Garden House (a Grade II\* Listed Georgian 'Pleasure House') has commenced thanks to funding from DEFRA, Historic England and FOMECP. Initially works will focus on roof repairs and will run into the New Year, during which the building will be scaffolded and covered. Bat mitigation works are also in place along with guidelines from Natural England for the works. The building will be sympathetically restored in partnership with Historic England appointed Conservation Architects.
- 2.5 The Park has appointed consultants, funded through Natural England, to produce an application for Higher Level Stewardship (now known as the Environmental Stewardship Scheme) that will go forward for consideration this spring. This will provide a ten-year plan for the historic Grade I Listed landscape, taking note of both nature conservation and the importance of the historic structures in the Parkland, and providing funding on an annual basis for the management of those assets. The Ranger Team and Management Team have been working closely with the consultants LUC, on what is a key bit of work for the Park over the next few months.
- 2.6 The Park will take over the countryside stewardship scheme payments of the Deer Park with a new scheme from next year and will work with the existing grazier to keep this site in favourable condition. This will form part of the deer park Stewardship application that will involve capital investment on non-roofed structures and revenue for maintaining the woodland pasture landscape. Sadly, stewardship money does not pay for roofed structures and formal gardens and funding for those will need to be sourced elsewhere.
- 2.7 The Ranger Team has almost completed the 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 end of the calendar year. A deer census took place in the winter of 2023, 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.
- 2.8 Drainage work has been completed on the Garden Battery and despite predictions against it ever working again, the drains have been cleared and probably work for the first time in 50 years! The Garden Battery is a National Lottery Heritage Fund project; It was awarded £942,000 this year as part of the National Marine Park New Horizons gateway site to Plymouth's National Marine Park and will act as a 'Heritage Hub' for the whole Marine Park.

Public consultation will take place in the New Year about what stories the Garden Battery can tell.

- 2.9 The Park will shortly be submitting a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) which if successful, will commence in Summer 2025 and likely take 9-12 months. This will allow time to undertake a programme of public consultation to inform the 10 year plan. The CMP will consider the historic significance of MECP and provide an integrated approach, including other park management objectives such nature recovery and opportunities for more people to enjoy the Park. It will guide day-to-day management, maintenance, conservation and restoration, visitor access and facilities, business planning and a longer-term vision. This will guide the management of this important Grade I Registered Park & Garden with Grade II\*/II Listed buildings landscape for the next decade, and will help set priorities for both the built and natural landscape. The CMP will consider the historic significance and provide an integrated approach, including other land management objectives such as the interests of wildlife, habitats, environmental gain and opportunities for people to enjoy the Park. We will undertake a programme of public consultation to inform a 10-year plan for the whole of MECP to guide day-to-day management, maintenance, conservation and restoration, visitor access and facilities, business planning and longer-term vision.
- 2.10 The Garden Team have planted new formal beds on the east lawn; these will be both drought and deer resistant. The new beds reflect the sea with silver and blues and will be fully established over the next couple of seasons. They have been planted to also extend the blooming season and provide some colour all year round.
- 2.11 The Park now has a fully trained forestry horse called Duchy who is 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.
- 2.12 The Park has been recording 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 International Union for Conservation of Nature (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.
- 2.13 The Park has 8 new Jacobs lambs born this spring and will be using those as a conservation grazing flock throughout the Park. The Park now has pigs, alpacas and horses all performing services to and for the Park. They are always a very popular attraction to the Park's visitors, and this is reflected in Trip Advisor reviews.
- 2.14 A major section of Drystone wall or 'Cornish Hedge' has been completed in partnership with Secure Forests by the Artists Platz. This is part of the old wall line that framed the lower gardens, and has been a great partnership and an opportunity for local ex-servicemen and Park Rangers to learn new skills. This is one of a number of small-scale projects in which the Park has been able to utilise a workforce from Secure Forest training courses and students.
- 2.15 We have completed 3,750 volunteer hours over the last reporting period. This demonstrates the huge value of volunteers to the Park as well as the importance the Park has for people's wellbeing, whether they are part of a city business on an away day, an individual volunteering, or a group undertaking an arranged activity. We have had particular success with local businesses having team building and away days such as EE, DWP, Babcock and the Land Registry.
- 2.16 Ash Die Back surveys were completed again this summer with work already taking place on many trees around the Park. 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 of the major Estates are struggling with this at the moment.

- 2.17 Rhododendron removal continues to take place throughout the Park, with a particular focus on the Penlee area over this winter. This has proved a popular task with our Royal Navy Volunteers, and young fit bodies are a big help to us in this regard.
- 2.18 The National Camellia Collection has received some new planting of some particularly rare cultivars and will be the subject of a major overhaul next year.
- 2.19 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.
- 2.20 The maintenance team have carried out a series of major repairs to the upper floor windows of the Barrow Centre this has involved scaffolding, removing the windows and replacing frames. This window work has been the large part of their work in this reporting period along with the phased replacement of benches and upper turret room revamps in the main house.
- 2.21 The House has now closed for the season with visitor numbers slightly up on last year but more importantly, we have been able to run on a guided tour system negating the need to pay two stewards. This has been challenging once or twice due to staff illness but on the whole has worked.
- 2.22 It has been a poor year in terms of weather, and this has impacted on the Parks 'Events Programme' quite considerably. Some events had to be cancelled, and many were poorly attended due to weather. This does demonstrate the validity of passing on the 'risk' of events to an events organiser though. A shining success however was the Armchair Adventure Festival which blessed with better weather, saw larger numbers than ever over 4,000 tickets sold and was able to generate a bigger income for the Park.
- 2.23 Car parking was reviewed last year with a view to increasing hourly rates. This is undertaken on a five yearly basis rather than yearly because the process is slow and onerous. Following complications with the governance and legal approval process to approve the new charges, the process is expected to be completed on 3 December 2024, following public consultation.
- 2.24 This year's wedding season will see 8 marque 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. Next year is looking very challenging however and the whole wedding market has seen a reduction across the South West.

### **3.0 Summary**

- 3.1 The Park has had a good year in terms of fundraising and addressing some of the buildings, and built heritage issues, notably the Garden Battery, English Garden House, and Orangery toilets. The CMP will be a significant piece of work during 2025 but 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.
- 3.2 The Park has been impacted by the cost of living crisis, through energy bills and wage rises. Business has been difficult with such a poor summer impacting on holiday let and parking revenue. However, we are still very close to achieving the ambition of the Park being substantially self-sufficient and have raised nearly £1.4 million in grants this year alone and there are opportunities next year to attract funding from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme grant from next year onwards will help bring in extra revenue as well as potential capital receipts from chalet sales.