

Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee

Friday 8 August 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Briars-Delve, in the Chair.

Councillor Candy, Co-Chair.

Councillors Parsonage, Rich, Dennis, German, Gibbons, Ewert, Blight, Gilmour, Allison, Morton and Wood.

Co-opted Representatives:

Mr Ben Church (Friends of Mount Edgcumbe) and Rebecca Linguard (Maker with Rame Parish Council).

Apologies for absence: Councillors S.Nicholson.

Also in attendance: Chris Burton (Park Manager), David Marshall (Business Development Manager), Tamsin Daniel (Protected & Historic Landscapes Manager), Jozef Lewis (Lead Accountant), Victoria Pomery (CEO, the Box) and Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 1.10 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 made:

Item	Member	Interest	Description
6, 'Questions from members of the public'	Rebecca Linguard (Maker with Rame Parish Council, Coopted Member)	Pecuniary	Family member owned property at Sandways Campsite.

2. Appointment of Co-Chairs for the 2025-26 Municipal Year

The Joint Committee agreed:

1. To note the appointment of Councillor Tom Briars-Delve as Plymouth's Co-chair for the 2025–26 Municipal Year;
2. To appoint Councillor Jim Candy as Cornwall's Co-Chair for the 2025–26 Municipal Year.

3. **Chair's Urgent Business**

The Chair thanked Councillor Kate Ewert for her work as previous Cornwall Co-Chair.

4. **Minutes**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2024 as a true and correct record, subject to the following addition:

Minute 22. Finance Report

- f) Potential financial implications of the recent National Insurance increase. It was unclear if the financial settlement would be increased, or if other funding streams would be put in place by Government to compensate for this, which was predicted to cause a £multi-thousand pressure;

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

There were seven questions from members of the public:

Question 1	The MEJC has acknowledged the need for a review of governance. Given that the review and a Conservation Management Plan for the Mount Edgcumbe Country Park are different topics and separate workstreams, they do not need to be linked. Therefore, I ask that the review of governance starts immediately.
Answer 1	Thank you for your question. In November 2023, the Joint Committee recognised the need for a review of the Mount Edgcumbe Terms of Reference (ToR) to reflect pertinent changes since its agreement in 2010. To avoid duplication, this review was put on hold as it was intended to include a review of governance and Terms of Reference within the brief for the Conservation Management Plan. To provide clarity for committee members and the public in the interim period, the Joint Committee will commence a review of its Terms of Reference. A draft updated ToR will be brought to a future Joint Committee meeting for review and endorsement, before submission to Plymouth and Cornwall Cabinets for formal ratification.
Question 2	2012 planning consent for a 'temporary' marquee included taking it down between October and March: this never happened. Planning consent expired in 2016 and has never been revisited. The marquee has been ILLEGAL ever since. What message does this send to the public about planning consent and who is accountable?
Answer 2	Thank you for your question. We have referred the matter to the planning team at Cornwall Council, and work is ongoing with stakeholders to find a permanent solution.

Question 3	Have the committee been approached by Plymouth or Cornwall councils for their input into renewing of the lease and what are the views of the committee on the situation?
Answer 3	Thank you for your question. Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have released a Joint Statement concerning the Sandways Campsite, which is attached to this response. Decisions relating to leases and property are delegated to relevant officers within Plymouth and Cornwall Council, and are guided by appropriate legal and stakeholder advice. The decision to not renew the Sandways lease was supported by the relevant cabinet members from each council. The Joint Committee have received a briefing on the Sandways campsite, and recognise the important cultural and heritage significance of the campsite. It would not be appropriate to comment further on this matter at this time due to the ongoing pre-action stage of litigation.
Question 4	Considering the historical significance and importance of the site, and according to joint committee meeting minutes, why was the decision not to renew the Sandway Campsite lease never discussed before 2/7/24, when initial notice was given?
Answer 4	Thank you for your question. Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have released a Joint Statement concerning the Sandways Campsite which is attached to this response. While the Joint Committee are responsible for providing oversight of the strategic functions, finances and performance of the MECP, operational decisions, such as those relating to leases and property, are delegated to relevant officers within Plymouth and Cornwall Council, and are guided by appropriate legal and stakeholder advice. The Joint Committee have received a briefing on the Sandways campsite, and recognise the important cultural and heritage significance of the campsite. It would not be appropriate to comment further on this matter at this time due to the ongoing pre-action stage of litigation.
Question 5	From information from Plymouth City Council it appears a member of MEJC, through designated powers made the decision to terminate the leases held by Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council on behalf of Mount Edgcumbe. Is this correct and who has the delegated power to make that decision?
Answer 5	Thank you for your question. Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have released a Joint Statement concerning the Sandways Campsite which is attached to this response. While the Joint Committee are responsible for providing oversight of the strategic functions, finances and performance of the MECP, operational decisions, such as those relating to leases and property, are delegated to relevant officers within Plymouth and Cornwall Council and are guided

	by appropriate legal and stakeholder advice. The decision to not renew the Sandways lease was supported by the relevant cabinet members from each council. As per the Joint Statement, the “lease expired on 24 March 2024”, and “the Councils have decided not to offer or negotiate a new lease as the combined risks of flooding and cliff instability cannot be mitigated to an acceptable level.
Question 6	Would it be possible for a representative of the Chalet Owners Association to attend future joint meetings Plymouth and Cornwall Council in relation to the running of Mount Edgcumbe Estate. Could there also be implementation of fire safety signs on the cliff, banning the use of open barbeques.
Answer 6	Thank you for your question. Meetings of the Mount Edgcumbe Joint Committee are open to the public, and representatives of the Chalet Owners Association are welcome to attend. Letters were written pre-season to all chalet holders reminding them of the risk of fires on this landscape, and installing signs will be explored this year. A further letter explaining the risk of outdoor bbqs will be sent this summer.
Question 7	CC state Sandway campers require Geotechnical engineer present to access site yet area remains open to members of the public and holiday makers. What are future plans for area, which according to the land plan map produced by PCC and CC, covers a far greater area than tent platforms
Answer 7	Thank you for your question. Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have released a Joint Statement concerning the Sandways Campsite which is attached to this response. The Joint Committee understands that the Councils have offered to provide a geotechnical engineer for the period of the removal of the tents to aid safety however, this it is not a requirement. The Joint Committee also understands that the Public Right of Way leading down to the land was closed in February 2024 in response to the number of landslips in the area. While the Joint Committee are responsible for providing oversight of the strategic functions, finances and performance of the MECP, operational decisions, such as those relating to leases and property, are delegated to relevant officers within Plymouth and Cornwall Council. Our current priority for the future of this site remains the safety of its users.
Question 8	CC keep referring to ‘expert / professional reports’ yet no technical surveys involving geotechnical investigations have been completed. Only inspections & emails. Sandway, however, have assigned a technical flood risk report & have commissioned a geotechnical survey for next 5 years. CC have stated these will not be regarded. Why?

Answer 8	Thank you for our question. Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have released a Joint Statement concerning the Sandways Campsite which is attached to this response. While the Joint Committee are responsible for providing oversight of the strategic functions, finances and performance of the MECF, operational decisions, such as those relating to leases and property, are delegated to relevant officers and cabinet members within Plymouth and Cornwall Council. It would therefore not be within the gift or expertise of the Joint Committee to comment further on this issue.
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6. **Co-opted Member Update**

Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor) introduced the item and discussed:

- a) The Natural England representative had changed from Michaela Barwell to Owen Standen;
- b) Councillor Don Wood (Millbrook Parish Council) was unable to attend today's meeting, and it was therefore recommended to defer co-option to the next meeting;
- c) The current co-opted membership was comprised of:
 - i. Mr D L Richards
 - ii. Ben Church (Chair, Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park);
 - iii. Michaela Barwell/Owen Standen (Natural England);
 - iv. Emma Browning and Coraline Barrow (Cornwall National Landscape);
 - v. Rebecca Linguard and Lynn Stewart-Birch (Maker with Rame Parish Council);

The Joint Committee agreed:

1. To note the change of Natural England representative to Owen Standen;
2. To defer the co-option of Councillor Don Wood (Millbrook Parish Council) to the next meeting;
3. To note the current co-opted membership.

7. **Park Report**

Chris Burton (Park Manager) introduced the Park Manager's Report and discussed:

- a) Mount Edgcumbe was a Grade I listed landscape, a rare heritage designation, with nearly 17 kilometres of coastal strip including iconic areas such as Rame Head;
- b) The park comprised 865 acres of country park and 7.5 acres of formal gardens, maintained by only three gardeners, relying heavily on volunteers and local goodwill;
- c) There were 56 listed buildings and five ancient monuments, with 36 kilometres of footpaths including the South West Coast Path;

- d) The park was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and served as a vital green lung for both Cornwall and Plymouth;
- e) Visitor numbers were last counted at 250,000 annually, with plans to recount in the next financial year;
- f) The park was free to enter and served a wide range of users including academics, dog walkers, families, and heritage enthusiasts;
- g) The English Garden House restoration was a major success, completed on time and within budget, with over £300,000 in grant aid;
- h) The Garden Battery redevelopment had begun, supported by nearly £1 million in National Lottery funding, forming part of the National Marine Park's heritage hub;
- i) Phase One Habitat surveys had been completed to support a stewardship bid for the deer park, encouraged by Natural England, with potential for capital and revenue funding. The park was recognised for waxcap fungi and ancient parkland assemblages, and a consultant was working on the grant application;
- j) Volunteer contributions totalled 770 days, with support from community groups, companies, and a new partnership with the Royal Navy;
- k) Volunteers had helped complete over 14 kilometres of deer fencing, now enclosing the deer stock for the first time since before World War Two. A deer management plan had been developed with support from previous managers and local experts;
- l) Four new formal bed layouts had been installed on the East Lawn, funded by the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe, with planting designed to deter deer;
- m) Tree surveys had been completed, with all trees now assessed for safety. Ash dieback remained a concern, but signs of genetic resistance offered hope;
- n) Conservation grazing had expanded, with Jacob lambs bred on-site and used for grazing smaller areas. Lambing had become a popular public event;
- o) The English Garden House, a Grade II* listed building, had undergone a full restoration following lead theft and water damage, with £280,000 from DEFRA, £50,000 from Historic England, and £20,000 from the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe. The building's future use would be explored in Phase Two, potentially using crowdfunding and room-by-room restoration;
- p) The park had developed a veterans' garden in partnership with Secure Forest, supporting PTSD recovery;
- q) A major fire at the Barrow Centre in February 2025 had damaged ranger accommodation and holiday lets, with over 45 firefighters attending. A scaffold shelter would be installed in September, with rebuild planning led by Cornwall Council;

- r) The park's events calendar was near capacity, with successful third-party events generating income and positive feedback;
- s) The Classic Car Show was cancelled due to staffing issues, but would return next year;
- t) Two new major events were planned for 2026 but were currently subject to commercial sensitivity;
- u) Financial pressures included ash dieback, fire recovery, rising utility bills, and stretched local authority funding. Despite this, the park raised approximately £900,000 annually;
- v) The wedding marquee was a key income stream and also served as backup accommodation for events;
- w) Visitor feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with the park winning TripAdvisor's Travellers' Choice Award for 2025, placing it in the top 10% globally;
- x) Holiday lets were performing well despite regional booking declines;
- y) The park maintained strong partnerships with schools, offering enrichment weeks, archaeology projects, and outdoor workshops;
- z) The Garden Battery would be restored with interpretation, bat mitigation, and public access, supported by £942,000 in capital funding and ongoing revenue contributions;
- aa) The park's conservation management plan would guide future priorities, including restoration of the French Conservatory and non-roof structures;
- bb) The park's cruise tourism potential was discussed, with links to Captain Cook's voyages and global sites named after Mount Edgcumbe.

In response to questions, the Committee discussed:

- cc) Filming enquiries were unpredictable, ranging from small adverts to major productions, with income varying accordingly;
- dd) The deer park's carrying capacity was approximately 200 deer, with current numbers at 150. Deer culling would be necessary for biodiversity and food chain integration;
- ee) Venison from culled deer could be used in the Orangery café, with conservation rather than farming as the guiding principle;
- ff) The Sandways site posed safety risks due to cliff instability and flooding. Signage and restoration to a natural state were being considered. Plymouth and Cornwall Councils had committed to exploring alternative campsite locations in consultation with the Camping Association, subject to planning and environmental constraints;

- gg) Volunteer demographics had broadened, with younger participants and partnerships with the MOD and Secure Forest supporting veterans;
- hh) School partnerships included enrichment weeks, archaeology projects, and outdoor learning, with over 1,800 pupils participating annually;
- ii) A memorial bench system was in place enabling members of the public to fund benches across the park;
- jj) Cruise tourism links to Mount Edgcumbe, Plymouth and other global sites named 'Mount Edgcumbe' such as in Alaska, were discussed.

Action: Staff to investigate potential for bench installations between the Cairns and Milton Temple.

The Committee agreed:

- I. To note the Park Manager's Report.

8. **Development Manager's Report**

Chris Burton (Park Manager) and David Marshall (Business Development Manager) introduced the Development Manager's Report and discussed:

- a) A business development plan was being created to accompany the Conservation Management Plan, ensuring all commercial initiatives were properly explored, assessed and authorised;
- b) The park's income sources were presented via a pie chart, showing residential tenancies and land rents as the largest contributors, totalling approximately £402,000;
- c) The Committee had previously supported difficult decisions, including increasing chalet rents, which helped bring the park closer to a zero-subsidy budget;
- d) Holiday accommodation income had grown significantly, from one let to a portfolio generating £174,000 annually;
- e) Visitor income, particularly car parking, was a major revenue stream but remained fragile due to weather dependency and the cost of increasing charges;
- f) Car parking increases required a formal process through the councils, costing around £3,000 per adjustment, making incremental changes impractical;
- g) Commercial rents from microbusinesses were another key income source;
- h) A chart was presented showing income and expenditure trends. In 2021–22, the park had nearly achieved a balanced budget however, cost-of-living pressures had since increased wages and bills;

- i) The park's subsidy had decreased significantly since 2010–11, reflecting improved financial performance and reduced reliance on council funding;
- j) The park aimed to focus on low-effort, high-reward commercial opportunities, and avoid resource-intensive events that strained ranger capacity;
- k) Third-party events were preferred due to their high yield and minimal operational burden;
- l) Officers planned to engage with the Ministry of Defence regarding underpriced leases. The MOD currently paid £25 annually for ten buildings, compared to £23,000 paid by Cremyll Ferry for three buildings. Officers acknowledged that MOD leases might be tightly bound by legal agreements, but intended to explore renegotiation opportunities to reflect the value of the facilities used;
- m) The park was regularly used by the military, including the Royal Marines and Navy, and had always supported their activities;
- n) Officers believed the MOD should contribute appropriately to the park's upkeep, reflecting the value of the facilities used.

In response to questions, the Committee discussed:

- o) Challenges with commercial sensitivities due to the removal of the Joint Subsidy which required the park to maximise business development opportunities;
- p) The importance of aligning commercial strategy with conservation goals and operational capacity.

The Committee agreed:

- I. To note the Development Manager's Report.

9. **Mount Edgcumbe Fire Damage Options Appraisal**

Chris Burton (Park Manager) introduced the Fire Damage Options Appraisal and discussed:

- a) The fire at the Barrow Centre in February 2025 had been a tragic and unexpected event, affecting residents, businesses, and visitors to the Country Park;
- b) Over 40 fire officers had attended the incident, and the community response had been exceptional, with support coordinated by Councillor Kate Ewert;
- c) The incident had diverted capacity from other projects due to its urgency and had financial implications, including insurance considerations;
- d) The report presented to the Committee included an options appraisal for the refurbishment of the Barrow Centre, with four options considered and a recommended approach from officers;

- e) Members were invited to review the detailed documentation and consider the officer recommendation.

Tamsin Daniel (Protected and Historic Landscapes Manager, Cornwall Council) added:

- f) Arcadis and Bailey's Partnership had been engaged to conduct the options appraisal and condition survey;
- g) Four options were considered, with Option 2 recommended: a sympathetic restoration that met current building regulations and improved commercial potential;
- h) A like-for-like restoration (Option 1) was not feasible due to regulatory constraints;
- i) Option 2 allowed for internal layout improvements, fire regulation compliance, and enhanced functionality;
- j) Decarbonisation measures were included where feasible, such as high-efficiency heating systems and LED lighting;
- k) The building's Grade II listing and location within a Grade I park imposed planning constraints;
- l) Insurance requirements mandated completion within two years, limiting the scope for extended funding exploration;
- m) The restoration would not preclude future enhancements, including further decarbonisation measures;
- n) A heritage impact assessment would be undertaken, and planning applications submitted;
- o) Bailey's Partnership would manage the project through tender preparation, building consent, and delivery.

In response to questions, the Committee discussed:

- p) The future use of the restored accommodation, with officers confirming it would be reinstated for residential use, subject to a future business case;
- q) The importance of keeping divisional members informed, particularly where cross-boundary governance was involved;
- r) A commitment was made to engage local councillors following the next working group meeting;
- s) The need to ensure planning and communications were coordinated to avoid community confusion;

- t) The structural integrity of the roof trusses was discussed, with officers confirming that new trusses would meet modern standards and accommodate future infrastructure;
- u) The restoration would use slate roofing and robust materials, with flexibility for future decarbonisation;
- v) The project would include energy efficiency upgrades, such as LED lighting, and would improve upon the previous building's standards;
- w) The impact on businesses during construction was considered, with scaffolding delayed until September to avoid disruption during peak season;
- x) Officers confirmed that scaffolding would be self-supporting and erected by mid-October, with winter works planned to minimise business impact;
- y) The restoration process could serve as a public engagement opportunity, showcasing traditional building techniques and attracting interest during the low season;
- z) A technical question was raised regarding the use of the SCAPE framework and subcontracting to Arcadis. Officers confirmed that Arcadis held the overarching contract and subcontracted to Bailey's Partnership for delivery, with no additional cost to the councils.

Action: Officers to provide a written response regarding the SCAPE framework and subcontracting arrangements with Arcadis.

The Committee agreed:

1. To endorse Option 2 – a sympathetic restoration of the fire-damaged areas of the Grade II listed Barrow Centre, incorporating necessary regulatory upgrades for compliance with current building regulations;
2. To note that the recommendation would be referred to the relevant Cabinet Members of Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council for formal approval;
3. To request that local Councillors and Co-chairs were engaged following the next working group meeting.

10. **Finance Monitoring Report**

Jozef Lewis (Lead Accountant) introduced the report and discussed:

- a) The 2024/25 revenue outturn showed a £138,000 adverse variation to budget, which was equally funded by Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council;
- b) The main areas of overspend were energy costs, holiday let and wedding income shortfalls, parking income pressures, and grounds maintenance costs, including ash dieback management;

- c) The 2025/26 approved budget targeted a net zero position, with £1.1 million of income set against £1.1 million of expenditure;
- d) The removal of the joint authority subsidy in 2022/23 made achieving a net zero budget an ongoing challenge;
- e) Salary costs had increased by £106,000 over the past three years, driven by national wage increases and employer contributions. A further £12,593 was projected in 2025/26 due to increased National Insurance contributions;
- f) The report included three key tables: the 2024/25 outturn, the 2025/26 revenue budget, and the capital programme;
- g) The capital programme included approved and pipeline projects, such as the Garden Battery and English Garden House, which had been discussed earlier in the meeting;
- h) Section 4 of the report highlighted risks to achieving the 2025/26 net zero target, with similar pressures to the previous year, including energy costs and income volatility.

In response to questions, the Committee discussed:

- i) The breakdown of staffing and operations income, which included donations and Natural England grant funding. It was suggested that future reports separate out donations revenue into a separate stream;
- j) The cost of staffing for weddings and events. It was confirmed that agency staff were vetted and sourced locally through approved networks;
- k) Potential for improving energy efficiency in the main building, particularly in light of planned works on the Barrow Centre. Officers confirmed that a decarbonisation strategy was being developed in partnership with Cornwall Council and would be presented at a future meeting;
- l) The Conservation Management Plan would help identify opportunities for decarbonisation, including potential funding sources such as the National Lottery and council decarbonisation funds;
- m) The importance of balancing heritage considerations with energy efficiency improvements, including the use of low-profile windows and other sympathetic interventions;
- n) A suggestion was made to quantify the value of volunteer contributions using social value metrics, such as assigning a per-day value to volunteer hours. Officers agreed that this could be explored in future reports to better reflect the park's wider impact on health, wellbeing, and community engagement.

Action: Future finance outturn reports to include a separate stream for donation revenue;

Action: Future reports to consider quantifying the value of volunteer contributions using social value metrics.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the financial position contained in the report;
2. To note the capital programme as outlined.

11. **Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Report**

Ben Church (Chair, Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park) introduced the report and discussed:

- a) The Friends group worked closely with park management to jointly and independently fund projects each year;
- b) Membership had increased from 730 to 780 in the past six weeks, supported by a new online platform and card payment system that made joining easier;
- c) In 2025, the Friends contributed:
 - i. £20,000 towards the restoration of the English Garden House, helping to initiate the project;
 - ii. £4,000 for annual garden planting;
 - iii. £4,000 to support an archaeological dig involving two local schools, which had received positive feedback from pupils and parents;
 - iv. £4,000 committed to statues and interpretation boards, alongside the garden planting contribution;
 - v. £6,000 to support the Camellia Trail, including interpretation boards and signage to enhance visitor understanding of the park's botanical history.
- d) The Easter Egg Hunt was a successful event, attracting over 400 children and raising funds for the park;
- e) The cancellation of the Classic Car Show was a disappointment, following a year of planning. The Friends hoped to bring the event back in 2025;
- f) The Friends Lodge continued to operate successfully as an information point and shop, staffed by volunteers and serving as a key visitor hub near the ferry landing;
- g) The Friends group remained committed to supporting the park and encouraging members to take on more proactive roles, with the new online platform improving communication and engagement.

In response to questions, the Committee discussed:

- h) The significant contribution of the Friends group to nature, heritage, and community engagement projects;

- i) The challenge of coordinating over 700 volunteers and the value of their ongoing support.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Report;
2. To formally record thanks to the Friends group for their continued contributions to the park.

12. **Action Log**

The Committee agreed to note the action log.

13. **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 paragraph(s) 1, 2 & 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

14. **Part II Minutes**

The Committee agreed the Part II minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2024 as a correct record.

15. **Tenancy Update**

This item was considered in Part 2

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the Tenancy update.

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

16. **Business Planning**

This item was considered under Part 2.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the Business Planning update;
2. To receive a full business planning paper at the November 2025 meeting.

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

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