

The Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park

Report to the Joint Committee, 20 July 2018

Membership

Membership is open to all who wish to support and assist the Park in preserving, maintaining and enhancing the amenities available for the benefit of all users.

The number of members currently stands at 595. The increase in membership fees in January, for the first time since 1998, resulted in a slight drop, however new members continue to join, particularly through having a presence at events. While the total constitutes a minor percentage of those visiting the Park the input from the members in financial and practical terms is significant.

Financial Support

In the first six months of 2018 The Friends have donated over £28,000 to fund projects within the Park. These include purchases of a replacement shuttle bus and repairs to the second shuttle bus, portable saw bench, blinds for the Chapel within the House, temporary trackway to enable events to take place in wet weather and a replacement cover for the polytunnel; funding for preparatory work for a grant application towards repairs to the English Garden House and a donation towards the construction costs of the external miniature railway, the purchase of costumes and memorabilia pertaining to the events surrounding Mayflower 400 and the Spring bedding plants for the Formal Gardens.

Practical Support

People join The Friends because they care about the Park and our aim is to persuade more of the members to join the ranks of those who volunteer to help in a practical way. The majority of volunteers are members of The Friends and they drive the buggies, act as house stewards, assist the gardeners and rangers, make the costumes for the 'dressing up' room in the House, provide traffic management advice and have assisted in the newly created apiary.

Since the last meeting The Friends provided volunteers to assist in the running of the Christmas Fayre and the Green Man weekend.

Social Events

The Friends aim to provide an annual programme of social events catering for a wide range of tastes and ages. Since November 2017 we have organised a concert in the House and an Easter Egg trail which attracted 774 child entrants plus family members, giving a total of around 2000 visitors to the Park. This was followed by a trip to the Houses of Parliament and the Jewel Tower, a boat trip to the Breakwater and a Vintage afternoon tea in the marquee.

Following discussion with the Local Area Safety Group a new traffic arrangement has been agreed for the Summer Fayre in August. The price of car parking has been raised from £5 to £10 (the first increase for 14 years) and it is hoped that this will encourage car sharing. Four boats will be in service between Plymouth and the Park on that day to cater for visitors from Plymouth.

Friends Lodge

The Friends have vacated the Orangery Lodge to facilitate its conversion to a holiday let. We are currently seeking an alternative location that will satisfy Historic England whilst also be adjacent to the main pedestrian activity so as to be able to provide a centre for information about the Park and provide an income to be recycled into Park funds.

Concerns over Park funding

Despite making representations to Cornwall Council, The Friends were unable to persuade it to reverse its proposal to delete £65,000 in the draft 2018 Budget and set that budget line to £0. We find it alarming that while the Council is 'obliged' to provide funding in line with the budget prediction presented to the Joint Committee there is no specific commitment identified in their own expenditure plan. We would hope that this is corrected in the 2019 Cornwall Council budget.

The Friends are becoming increasingly aware of the apparent reduction in care being shown towards the valuable artefacts contained within the House. For several years now there appears to have been no support given by the Museum service, paintings are deteriorating, dehumidifiers are no longer in place and curtains are falling apart. We do not consider that this can be tackled by moving expenditure from other services within the Park that are already operating under stress but by recognising that the overall operational budget, circa £834,000, is set too low being based on a figure set several years ago that had remained stagnant and not allowed for inflation and other increasing costs.

Miscellaneous

General, Financial, Reserves and Data Protection policy documents, demonstrating that the organisation and activities of The Friends comply with the updated requirements of the Charity Commission, were approved by members at our AGM in March.