

The Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park
Report to the Joint Committee, 23 November 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 616. 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

Since the last meeting of this committee the Friends have provided a second payment of £12,000 towards the preparatory work for a grant application towards repairs to the English Garden House. The Friends have expressed their concern (to the Joint Chairs) at being requested to provide funding when the allocations from the two councils shown in the budget papers have not been fully utilised.

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, and providing traffic management advice. The Friends provided volunteers to enable parking to take place at Maker for the Plymouth Fireworks Competition and provided highway signing for the Military Vehicles Event. The Friends also provided 29 volunteers for the sea training evacuation exercise with the Dutch Navy. In return for this and for using the Park for their training exercise the marines undertook works within and for the Park.

Social and Other Events

The Friends aim to provide an annual programme of social events catering for a wide range of tastes and ages. Since July 2018 we have held an Antiques Valuation Event, a Curry Lunch and a Halloween Trail attended by 300 children. The Annual Summer Fayre in August, organised jointly with Cornwall Hospice Care, was our most successful event ever being fortunate in having the only fine weather Sunday in July/August. The increase in car parking charge achieved its aim in reducing the number of visitor cars and increasing the numbers travelling to the event by boat. Despite poor performance by the third party traffic management company the revised access/egress arrangement was considered to be worth repeating next year.

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 being 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. A revised application was submitted at the end of July in an attempt to overcome objections from Historic England and Cornwall Council. At the time of writing this report a decision is still awaited.

Concerns over Park funding

The Friends wish to continue to alert the Joint Committee over their concerns on 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. The Friends note that the anticipated 'shortfall' between income and expenditure that the councils have budgeted for has fallen from £224,000 in 2017/18 to £190,000 in 2018/19. The Friends would expect and hope that, should the actual shortfall be less, the balance would be fully used to start tackling the maintenance backlog. Indeed, The Friends would like to see the results of a comprehensive audit of the condition of the Park, its buildings and contents to be used to provide a realistic guide as to how fast the aim of reducing the support budget to zero could be achieved.

Miscellaneous

Revisions to the General and Financial policy documents, resulting from a review of our activities and changes to guidance provided by the Charity Commission, will be presented to our members at the AGM in March 2019.